

# CANADIAN THESES ON MICROFICHE

## THÈSES CANADIENNES SUR MICROFICHE



National Library of Canada  
Collections Development Branch

Canadian Theses on  
Microfiche Service

Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada  
Direction du développement des collections

Service des thèses canadiennes  
sur microfiche

### NOTICE

The quality of this microfiche is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Previously copyrighted materials (journal articles, published tests, etc.) are not filmed.

Reproduction in full or in part of this film is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30. Please read the authorization forms which accompany this thesis.

THIS DISSERTATION  
HAS BEEN MICROFILMED  
EXACTLY AS RECEIVED

### AVIS

La qualité de cette microfiche dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

Les documents qui font déjà l'objet d'un droit d'auteur (articles de revue, examens publiés, etc.) ne sont pas microfilmés.

La reproduction, même partielle, de ce microfilm est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30. Veuillez prendre connaissance des formules d'autorisation qui accompagnent cette thèse.

LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ  
MICROFILMÉE TELLE QUE  
NOUS L'AVONS REÇUE

CHARLES WILLIAMS' RELIGIOUS DRAMA AND NOVELS:  
A KIERKEGAARDIAN ANALYSIS

by Stephen M. Dunning

Thesis presented to the School of  
Graduate Studies as partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of M.A. in English Literature

University of Ottawa  
Ottawa, Canada, 1984



UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA  
UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Dr. D. L. Jeffrey for agreeing to direct this thesis and for his insightful comments and encouragement. I wish also to thank Sylvie Mercier for her dedication at the keyboard. Last but not least I would like to express my gratitude to Paula without whom none of this would have been possible.

## Key Concepts

The following definitions of these key concepts employed in this thesis reflect Kierkegaard's understanding and usage of these same terms:

center of gravity: Any philosophically coherent world view underlying and organizing a text.

concretize: • Best understood in the sense of 'actualize.' Essentially this concept involves the enactment (or realization) of possibilities which previously existed only in the abstract.

soteriological dialectic: By this phrase I intend 'dialectic' in the Kierkegaardian (which is to say Socratic) sense. Soteriology is simply the study of modes or models for physical, psychical, or spiritual salvation.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: General Introduction.....	1
Chapter Two: Williams' Religious Drama: Kierkegaard's Soteriological Dialectic Brought to Life .....	13
Chapter Three: Williams' Novels: Encounters with the Infinite .....	53
Chapter Four: <u>Shadows of Ecstasy: An Infinity</u> Void of Content .....	84
Chapter Five: <u>Descent into Hell: to Act or</u> Not to Act .....	97
Notes .....	111
Works Consulted .....	122

### General Introduction

Alice Mary Hadfield records that when Charles Williams first encountered the works of Soren Kierkegaard in 1935 he recognized that Kierkegaard spoke directly to a problem which preoccupied Williams both in his life and writings:

Kierkegaard gave Charles's mind a new stimulus which brought with it the strength of recognizing a truth basic to himself. He read that God is love and therefore man lives in terror and anguish. 'God is perfect love just the same, nothing is more certain to him.... But he must put up with suffering. Then in the course of time, when he becomes more concrete in the actuality of life, comes more and more to himself as a temporal being, when time and its succession exercises its power over him, when in spite of all his effort it becomes so difficult to live on with the assistance of only the eternal', — every word described Charles's own life to himself — 'I said to God:...allow me to withdraw myself. Thou art love; and when I perceive that a near relationship to thee (in the pain of that unlikeness of mine) will continue to be sheer suffering, thou wilt in "grace" permit me, yea, thou wilt aid me to slip away a little further from thee; for this I understand, that the nearer one comes to thee, the more suffering there is in this life.... So I thought to myself. And yet it did not come to pass.'

Broadly defined, this train of thought verges on the age-old problem of theodicy. Yet in Williams, as the passage indicates, its focus is less on the notion that a suffering world seems inconceivable in a universe governed by an omnipotent God of love (although Williams recognized this as a serious problem for theists) but rather that man's existential search for God necessitates the progressive experience of suffering in any approach to God.

Williams immediately recognized Kierkegaard's insight in these matters as corresponding to a truth of his own experience which, in turn, he had attempted to convey in his writings.

Kierkegaard's continuing influence on Williams is best indicated by the fact that from 1935 until the end of his life Williams encouraged his friends to read Kierkegaard's writings; that he himself lectured on Kierkegaard's ideas and did everything in his power as a reader at Oxford University Press to encourage English publication of this provocative Danish thinker.<sup>2</sup> In turn, examination of Williams' philosophical and theological convictions as manifested in his writing indicates that a rudimentary knowledge of Kierkegaard's thought can prove invaluable as a point of entry into Williams' complex and often confusing texts. In this thesis I propose first to delineate in general terms the areas of theological and philosophical agreement between Williams and Kierkegaard,<sup>3</sup> then from this introduction to commence an investigation of several of Williams' plays (which bear the unmistakable earmarks of Kierkegaard's thought) and all of his novels in order to indicate the manner in which Kierkegaard's existentialist theories find expression in this selection of Williams' writings.

Thomas Howard, in his preface to The Novels of Charles Williams,<sup>4</sup> argues that all of Williams' novels demonstrate a preoccupation with both the principles governing human salvation and damnation, and the study of human behaviour as man dynamically experiences the existential traumas encountered in his inevitable collision with this soteriological dialectic. These same concerns are equally evident in Williams' religious drama.



Williams' soteriological dogma hangs on three interrelated concepts: substitution (or exchange), co-inherence, and romantic theology. No statement captures the essence of Williams' soteriology more precisely than "others He saved; Himself He cannot save."<sup>5</sup> Every creature, according to Williams, is absolutely helpless to effect its own salvation. Redemption of any sort can be accomplished only through the exchange or substitution of one individual for another. In Williams' essay "The Way of Exchange," he grounds this doctrine in the fact of "co-inherence," which he describes as "inhering in each other."<sup>6</sup> Humphrey Carpenter defines co-inherence as the doctrine that ". . . all human beings are totally dependent on each other, that indeed 'no man is an Island,' and that each thought or action has a bearing on other people."<sup>7</sup> Williams elsewhere explicitly states that this "bearing on" is essential rather than accidental, for he employs the term co-inherence to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son. Williams proceeds to assert that ". . . this same preposition (in) was used to define our Lord's relations with His Church: 'we in him and he in us.' It was in that sense that the Church itself in-lived its children: 'we are members one of another.'<sup>8</sup> Substitutions and exchanges are efficacious only because of the fundamental fact of co-inherence. This fact allows the redemptive acts of God's creatures to participate co-inherently in the archetypal substitution of the Creator.

Williams' well-known doctrine of "Romantic Theology" is likewise grounded in the more basic principle of co-inherence. Christ's substitution, according to Williams, was motivated solely by that love which constitutes the essential nature of Deity. This entails that all of creation co-inheres (or participates) in God's substitutionary love. Williams' doctrine of

Romantic Theology teaches that, in the beloved, the lover may catch a glimpse of this central truth. The lover, more than any other creature, can say of the world revealed through the beloved: "This also is Thou [God]."

Although a superficial analysis of Williams' principal theological concepts would seem to place him at some distance from Kierkegaard's radically subjective existentialist theology, a deeper penetration into the underlying assumptions governing both writers' theological orientations reveals a remarkable homogeneity of thought. To begin with we may consider Williams' notion of Romantic Theology. According to Williams, the lover's apprehension of the beloved's participation in and embodiment of the Divine ("This also is Thou") also includes the disturbing perception of the corollary ("Neither is this Thou"). Williams thus insists on a fundamental division in man which roughly corresponds to Kierkegaard's model of man as a synthesis of infinite and finite selves. Apprehension of this division in the beloved, for Williams, always entails the concomitant and traumatic recognition of the lover's own essential division. Both Kierkegaard and Williams therefore affirm the universality of this fundamental fissure in human nature, despite the fact that the agenda of discovery of this division varies significantly between the two writers. For Kierkegaard the division is discovered when the individual turns his focus inward and discovers the ethical requirements and unrealized possibilities of the infinite self;<sup>9</sup> for Williams this awareness arises when an individual apprehends the division in an external object of passionate interest.<sup>10</sup>

A cursory analysis of the doctrine of co-inherence might likewise appear to place Williams in direct opposition to Kierkegaard, for Kierkegaard

constantly emphasizes the necessity of complete individuation wherever man seeks a meaningful approach to God. But this is not the case. The apparent opposition arises from Kierkegaard's and Williams' tendencies to approach a comprehensive doctrine of man from the opposing dialectical positions of individual and collective humanity respectively. Williams, however, also recognizes that co-inherence presupposes the more fundamental fact of true individuation,<sup>11</sup> while Kierkegaard, on his part, expounds a doctrine closely related to co-inherence when he states that "at every moment the individual is both himself and the race ...." "Perfection in oneself," he continues, "is therefore the perfect participation in the whole."<sup>12</sup>

Examination of the doctrine of substitution likewise reveals Williams' essential agreement with Kierkegaard. Both writers ground the possibility of salvation in the historicity of Christ's Atonement. Both men are convinced that without the fact of Christ's historical redeeming activity, individual man would be denied contemporaneity with Christ. According to their reasoning, an individual's salvation depends upon participation in Christ's earthly ministry, which provides the dynamic pattern for all redemption. Without doubt, however, Williams departs from Kierkegaard in his analysis of how this contemporaneity is apprehended and experienced. Williams maintains that it is in our relationships with others (the co-inherent pattern of glory)<sup>13</sup> that Christ's redemptive presence is concretized. Williams' assertion that human beings are able to bear one another's burdens (thereby functioning as little Christs) follows from his doctrine of co-inherent contemporaneity. Although Kierkegaard never approaches such a full-blown doctrine of substitution between human persons, he does intimate that seeking help from "others" often functions as a necessary first step in finding one's

ultimate remedy in the Absolute Other.<sup>14</sup>

A Kierkegaardian analysis of Williams' soteriology becomes extremely useful when one turns from an investigation of the principles themselves to a psychological study of man's existential collision with these principles. Both Williams and Kierkegaard as "Christian existentialists" stress that the free individual is totally helpless to meet the existential demands of an absolute transcendent ethic which an individual discovers when such a person encounters the inner self. For both writers, this is discovery of that part of human nature which communicates directly with and has intuitive knowledge of the transcendent Deity. This discovery usually co-incides with an individual's encounter with his boundary situations. This experience of limit arises, in Williams' analysis, when an individual's fortune conflicts with his nature, or, in Kierkegaard's terms, where phenomenological reality conflicts with the individual's awareness of his essential reality.

The proper response to this experience of limit constitutes the first of what both Kierkegaard and Williams dub the "double movement of infinity," namely resignation. Here, the individual in awareness of the absolute demands of the infinite self abandons all "finite goals."<sup>15</sup> The attempt to concretize the demands of the infinite self constitutes the second part of this double movement, but before an individual is capable of moving beyond resignation in an effective "leap" of concrete faith he must confront the either/or of individual guilt. Confrontation of this absolute either/or is essential, for according to both Kierkegaard and Williams effective faith proceeds from the individual's awareness that before God man is always in the wrong.

This double movement, furthermore, is not exhausted in one complete cycle. Kierkegaard and Williams both insist that the task is infinite. Resignation involves a continuing consciousness of the ever new possibility of greater and greater sacrifices of finite to infinite ends, while faith demands the ongoing and painful attempts to concretize the possibilities conceived by the infinite self. The end of this process inevitably involves personal destruction of some kind. These considerations help to illuminate both writers' affirmation of the necessity of suffering. As the demands of the infinite self increase and are concretized the temporally defined individual finds himself on a progressively narrower way to God. Until the individual is absolutely lost to finite ends such a person cannot discover himself in God.

Williams' religious drama provides one of the most fruitful genres of which to offer a Kierkegaardian reading. In these plays Williams evinces an agenda which closely approximates Kierkegaard's declared intention in the composition of For Self-Examination, where Kierkegaard writes: "I have worked to awaken disquietude with the aim of effecting inward change."<sup>16</sup> Technically Williams' plays are well suited to his agenda in that they suspend normal spatio-temporal relations, thereby dramatizing the collision of the finite and the Infinite. As in mediaeval morality plays, man occupies a common stage with transcendent beings and reified principles. The moral and intellectual significance of action is thus immediately dramatized rather than explained. Williams' plays graphically demonstrate the infinite repercussions of even the most insignificant finite gestures.

The prevalence of irony (also extensively explored by Kierkegaard) and scepticism evident in these plays is also completely compatible with Kierkegaard's notion of the ultimate dilemma of a finite rational dialectic. Into several of these plays Williams introduces characters which function as devil's advocates within the sphere of the self: The Skeleton, The Accuser and The Flame. According to Professor Glen Cavaliero the emergence of these characters reflects Williams' growing interest in Kierkegaard's writings.<sup>17</sup>

What they reveal to the characters (and indirectly to the audience) is how God's agency must necessarily appear to fallen man who is naturally offended by, and fleeing from, "the God's offer." Williams' sense of man's powerful and threatening experience of God corresponds with Kierkegaard's assertion that only through the embracing of suffering can one approach the God of love.

The scepticism evident in these plays likewise accords with Kierkegaard's conviction that intellectual doubt and profound rational insecurity are necessary prerequisites for a true leap of faith. In keeping with Williams' acute historical consciousness, the presence of scepticism also reflects Williams' conviction that scepticism functions as a healthy deterrent to those over-zealous weaker brethren who in both ignorance and pride have perpetrated numerous atrocities on behalf of the omnipotent God. Williams, like Kierkegaard, did not hesitate to remonstrate against the Church, where he felt it was necessary. Williams' plays, therefore, above all else remonstrate God's directive activity, which forces the seeking individual to a crisis of faith, while at the same time they dramatize and affirm the redemptive activity which provides the individual with a transcendent, if not altogether attractive, resolution to the crisis of faith in the "offensive"

person of Christ. Christ's offense for both Williams and Kierkegaard resides in his paradoxical and hence rationally inconceivable nature, which challenges man to abandon confidence in human ability to anticipate rationally the solution to his dilemma. As many of Williams' works demonstrate, God's redemptive activity is not only humanly inconceivable, it is hardly to be desired. As Williams writes at the conclusion of both The Descent of the Dove and He Came Down From Heaven, man's blessing lies in not being offended with God's offer when it is made manifest.<sup>18</sup>

Williams' novels manifest what Kierkegaard terms a "center of gravity" testifying to the philosophic coherence of the author's world view. This center, in Kierkegaard's analysis, functions as Providence within the work. A common center of gravity shared by all the novels (with the exception of Shadows of Ecstasy) can be demonstrated by investigating the soteriological dialectic within each work. In keeping with Kierkegaard's model this dialectic involves both the concretizing of individual characters as they progress towards salvation or damnation through the enactment of their will in fundamental choices, and the activity of the "Impossible" (Absolute Paradox of the Incarnate God) as Grace effects the "impossible" reconciliation necessary for these individuals.

x

In the earlier novels Williams often introduces the "eternal absolute ethic"<sup>19</sup> into a realistically depicted, finite temporal realm, in a mechanistic and less successful manner than is the case in his more mature works. Thus one finds the Graal, Solomon's Stone, Tarot cards and Platonic ideals invading ordinary reality in such a way as to destroy not only the characters' facile complacency with phenomenological reality but also to

strain the reader's credulity. In the later novels, such as Descent into Hell and All Hallow's Eve, these machinations of magic are either missing or are less pronounced, having been replaced by more subtle and psychologically convincing interpenetrations of the supernatural and the natural. The existential impact of this invasion of the supernatural into the natural, however, is similar in all of the novels. In the face of the eternal possibilities of the supernatural, Williams' characters find themselves threatened and isolated from temporal preoccupations and supports. In one way or another each is brought to the crisis of faith where the individual must either embrace God's offer of life in another or perish in everlasting self-enclosure. The openness of this model to Kierkegaard's psychology, as in The Sickness Unto Death, For Self-Examination and The Concept of Anxiety, invites commentary.

My thesis will also address the anomaly of Shadows of Ecstasy which represents a significant eccentric to Williams' later center of gravity. (One could even argue that the eccentricity of this novel proceeds from the fact that it evinces no definite center of gravity.) The novel's eccentricity can be demonstrated by examining both the soteriological dialectic in the work and the confusing and confused authorial voice. Williams, for example, clearly divides the characters in the novel into two camps: those for and those against Considine (the apparent antagonist of the work) only to confuse the moral texture of the novel by indiscriminately dividing the articulation of Williams' fundamental doctrines between members of both opposing camps.

Here the stage of existential development closely approximates that



attributed by Kierkegaard to the German Romantics (especially Fichte), where the center of gravity has moved entirely towards individual consciousness. But here, as demonstrated by Considine, the individual experiences only a negative freedom, for the self acknowledges no transcendent ethic requiring of the individual that he actualize himself in concrete activity. According to Kierkegaard, the individual must become concrete, but to do so requires self-limitation in respect of another being. The self, in other words, cannot escape disaster if it insists on remaining self-referential. The most surprising thing about this novel is that Considine, supposedly morally villainous, is portrayed quite sympathetically. I want to suggest, by way of explanation, that Williams' theological position moved decisively towards orthodoxy after he had written Shadows of Ecstasy.

The concluding chapter of my thesis will center on the novel Descent into Hell, which I take to be Williams' most significant literary achievement. From the point of view of a genre study it is fascinating, for it encloses a play within the controlling framework of a novel. Thus it not only provides additional insight into Williams' activity within each of these genres but also embodies Williams' notion of the relationship between the two genres. On a very basic level, therefore, it explores the relationship of dramatic art to existential reality manifested as psychological realism in the novel. This allows the reader insight into what Williams perceived as the existential significance of his writings in general. Essentially the novel demonstrates that drama, like ceremony, allows the participant to break out of self-enclosure by permitting him to assume a role in a larger drama. The play in the novel mediates between, and engages characters within, both the finite world of normal psychological reality and the infinite world

beyond this reality where the significance of the soteriological drama is revealed. Thus at some level the division in the work between the novel and the play corresponds to the fundamental division in man between his finite and infinite selves. In addition to the novel's generic intricacies, Descent, like the majority of Williams' plays and novels, lends itself to a Kierkegaardian analysis of character development within the larger soteriological dialectic of the work. Examination of this novel should therefore provide both a focus and conclusion for the entire thesis.

Williams' Religious Drama: Kierkegaard's  
Soteriological Dialectic Brought to Life

I have worked to awaken disquietude with the aim of effecting inward change.

Williams' religious drama offers perhaps the most rewarding genre in which to investigate his theological ideas, for in these plays Williams demonstrates his remarkable ability to weave numerous thematic threads into an incredibly rich and complex dramatic tapestry. In my analysis I will neither attempt to unravel each thread nor to suggest how these threads combine to produce a collective theological and dramatic statement. Rather I have elected to limit my discussion to six plays -- Seed of Adam, Terror of Light, The Three Temptations, Judgement at Chelmsford, The House of the Octopus and Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury -- each of which demonstrates certain aspects of Williams' thought in their most Kierkegaardian form. Thus in my analysis of an individual play many significant dimensions of the work are passed over simply to avoid redundancy. While no play is treated exhaustively, taken as a group the six plays under consideration provide both a comprehensive survey of the range of Williams' theological concerns as expressed in his drama, and a strong indication of the pervasive influence which Kierkegaard's thought had on many facets of Williams' intellect.

John Heath-Stubbs aptly describes Seed of Adam as a "play of ideas."<sup>2</sup>

The ideas in this play, as in mediaeval drama, take the form of reified persons who, according to Williams, "besides being dramatic characters, stand for some capacity or activity of man."<sup>3</sup> Heath-Stubbs continues to observe that "[t]he ideas are not so much to be expounded dialectically in the dialogue as immediately incarnated in the action."<sup>4</sup> Williams clearly "incarnated" three distinct yet interrelated ideas in the action of this play — ideas which, although they find their most distinct expression in Seed of Adam, reappear in some form in nearly all of the plays to be considered. Each of these ideas also displays Williams' interest in and agreement with Kierkegaard. I refer specifically to Williams' insistence on the historical actuality of the Incarnation, his dramatic depiction of Romantic Theology against the larger background of a historical Incarnation, and his analysis of the human condition of post-lapsarian despair which can be remedied only by a radical invasion of the eternal and infinite God into a world of futile finite possibilities.

For both Williams and Kierkegaard the Incarnation must be a historical fact if the individual is to participate efficaciously in Christ's redemptive activity. Kierkegaard denominates this concept "contemporaneity"; Williams usually refers to it as "simultaneity." The idea in both instances remains the same. Kierkegaard describes three possible forms that contemporaneity may assume. The first of these is simply direct and immediate contemporaneity with a historical event or person. The second is

contemporaneity with God, experienced through an individual's consciousness of "being before the God who is always present." Gregor Malantschuk describes Kierkegaard's final sense of contemporaneity as follows:

The third form of contemporaneity is faith's contemporaneity with "the God" in "the autopsy of faith." This last contemporaneity is paradoxical in nature since it contains two qualitative opposites: the eternal revealed at a specific point of time within history, where one cannot become contemporaneous with the eternal without the historical as the intermediary.

The challenge to faith presented by the possibility of Christ's historical Incarnation is twofold. The first involves believing that this particular event (and this applies to all historical claims) was actualized among an almost infinite number of possible events. The second risk stems from the unique nature of the event in question, for the Incarnation involves both an ontological and a logical contradiction. Given the absurdity of Christianity's central dogma, Kierkegaard argues that belief in the Incarnation raises the risk of belief to a qualitatively higher level than is the case with ordinary historical claims. Man experiences contemporaneity with the "Absolute Paradox," in Kierkegaard's analysis, by passionately risking faith in an absurdity.<sup>6</sup>

Williams, in He Came Down From Heaven, likewise argues that contemporaneity with God is possible only if Christian dogma is grounded in historical actuality:

It is true that all that did happen is a presentation of what is happening all the historical events; especially of this category, are a pageant of the events of the human soul. But it is also true that Christendom has always held that the two are indissolubly connected; that the events in the human soul could not exist unless the historical events had existed . . . . The union of history and the individual

is, like that of so many opposites, in the coming of the kingdom of heaven, historic and contemporary at once. It was historic in order that it might always be contemporary; it is contemporary because it was certainly historic.<sup>7</sup>

While Williams does not differentiate between various forms of contemporaneity, his discussion suggests a conception of contemporaneity which includes both Kierkegaard's second and third forms. Where Williams speaks of the "pageant of the events of the human soul," he refers, among other things, to participation in the Rituals of the Church. Needless to say, whether the second, third or any form of contemporaneity is experienced by the participating individual depends entirely on such a person's stance before God.

The Seed of Adam is well-suited to the dramatization of a concept as difficult to grasp intellectually as contemporaneity. Williams describing this play notes: "I had, in my usual way, abolished Time and Space. I was prepared to bring in anyone. After all the Nativity was a local event besides being universal."<sup>8</sup> Adam's presence in the play effectively conveys both the local and universal dimensions of the Nativity, for Adam at once represents both individual and collective humanity. As an individual character Adam experiences immediate contemporaneity with Christ's Incarnation, and as the father of the human race he represents the indirect experience of contemporaneity with God which the historical Incarnation opens to all mankind as a possibility.

Thus Kierkegaard's three forms of contemporaneity are dramatized in the single figure of Adam. Adam evinces the second form of contemporaneity (arising from an individual's consciousness of existing before the God who is

always present) in his futile attempts to respond to the demands of this God. Adam's efforts presuppose this awareness. That Adam finally experiences the third form of contemporaneity (faith's contemporaneity with the God in the autopsy of faith) is clearly indicated by his decision to enter the stable to adore the Christ child:

JOSEPH. Father Adam, come in; here is your child,  
here is the Son of Man, here is Paradise.  
To-day everything begins again.

[Adam goes down to the door of the stable

MARY [meeting him and genuflecting]. Bless me, father: see how  
to-morrow is also now.

ADAM [making the sign of the Cross]. Under the Protection!  
peace to you, and to all; goodwill to men.

[They go into the stable<sup>9</sup>

In Seed of Adam Williams also explicitly weds the doctrine of Romantic Theology to the Incarnation. Williams ingeniously achieves this union by casting Joseph and Mary as romantic lovers. In Mary (and through her) Joseph perceives a world saturated with God's presence:

Do not with descent, O altitude, even of mercy,  
sweeten the enhanced glance of those still eyes  
which to my lord's house, and to me the least,  
illumine earth with heaven, our only mortal  
imagination of eternity .... (p. 157)

Joseph's perception closely corresponds to Kierkegaard's second form of contemporaneity with God. Yet, as was suggested in the introductory chapter, for Kierkegaard the consciousness of God's presence arises when an individual turns inward and subjectively encounters the infinite self, whereas for Williams this awareness arises from an encounter with an external object of passionate interest. In Williams' analysis the lover's experience of the heightened romantic state (commonly known as "being in love") allows him to

apprehend God's essential Being — Love. Mary explains this principle to Joseph:

MARY. Dearest, you did not hear: we said in love.  
Why must, how can, one be in love with someone?

JOSEPH. Because . . . but that is what in love means;  
one is, and can only be, in love with someone.

MARY. Dearest, to be in love is to be in love,  
no more, no less. Love is only itself,  
everywhere, at all times, and to all objects.  
My soul has magnified that lord; my spirit  
rejoiced in God my saviour; he has regarded  
the nothingness of his handmaid. He has thrust  
into this matter his pattern of bones....(p. 159)

Although Mary expresses on one level a single pattern of the eternal glory which is perceivable in all those who are loved, Mary's situation is unique. In her, Love itself "shall make his flesh as one in time and place" (p. 160). Mary explicitly declares that the apparition of Love, which appears in each and every beloved, in her will coincide with Love's actual presence:

Joseph, come, take me to Bethlehem;  
there the apparition and the presence are one,  
and Adam's children are one in them;  
there is the way of Paradise begun. (p. 160)

The Incarnation, in other words, authenticates man's perception of God's apparition in man, by allowing Mary to bear One in whom the apparition is a real presence. As Mary suggests, it is only because she bears the Incarnate Love that all of Adam's children co-inherently participate in the Divine Nature.

These considerations help to explain why Williams insists that even if the Incarnation had not yet occurred the event is still inevitable,<sup>10</sup> for



the "events of the soul" include man's profound experience of the division in both the beloved and the self -- "this also is Thou; neither is this Thou" (p. 161). This experience of division, for Williams, prefigures the appearance of One in whom man's division is remedied through the incarnated union of God's apparition and real presence. Here, in keeping with Kierkegaard's model, the remedy presents itself in the form of an Absolute Paradox, for Christ at once offers himself to faith as both complete man and complete God.

The character of the Third King introduces other unmistakably Kierkegaardian elements into Seed of Adam. Williams describes this character as representing "the experience of man when man thinks he has gone beyond all hope of restoration to joy"<sup>11</sup> -- a condition closely corresponding to Kierkegaard's description of despair. The Third King identifies himself as "the core of the fruit" which Adam ate, and ominously informs Adam that he has "travelled to get back to[him]ever since" (p. 165). Williams thus employs the King to represent the inescapable spectre of personal and hereditary sin which haunts each man and mocks every human effort to circumvent the dreadful consequences introduced into human experience by the fall into sin.

The King thus functions primarily as an impediment to the realization of Adam's quest which is to discover a way of return to Paradise. The King's ability to frustrate Adam's desire graphically conveys man's total helplessness in the face of sin, for Adam among other things represents the sum total of human achievement in both knowledge and government. Adam's attempt to exercise his authority over the King (and the King's mother, Hell) elicits sardonic contempt for Adam's folly which testifies to both the King's

superior spiritual insight and his resignation in despair:

ADAM [to the SOLDIERS]: Seize her.

They rush forward. She laughs at them, and they fall  
back on their knees

THIRD KING:

Whom are you seeking?

Are you come out with swords and staves to take us?

We were often with you in your temples: now —

Father Adam, you were always a fool,

and it seems at the top of your Roman school

no better; will you arrest the itch

with your great hands? will your bands pitch

their javelins against the diabetes of the damned?

The belly is empty in hell though the mouth is crammed:

a monotonous place! (p. 166)

Here Adam's frustrated attempts to regain Paradise illustrate Kierkegaard's contention that the finite self remains helpless before the demands of the infinite self. In Adam these demands manifest themselves in the form of desires inspired by the recollection of his former paradisaical existence and complicity with God. His finite resources are simply inadequate to concretize these desires.

But if the King represents man's despairing knowledge of limitation he also represents the increased spiritual awareness which accompanies such knowledge, and with this negative awareness comes positive hope. Despair, in Kierkegaard's analysis, negatively forces man to the threshold of human capacity, but as is the case for all negative movements, despair carries a positive movement within it in the form of a possibility.<sup>12</sup> It is for this reason that the King, rather than Adam, heralds the infant Christ as the remedy to man's spiritual malaise: "Blessed be he who is the only Necessity and his necessity in himself alone" (p. 171).

## II

Although the events immediately preceding and including Pentecost form the dramatic background for Terror of Light, Williams in this play evinces little concern for theological issues normally associated with the advent of the Holy Spirit. Instead this play contains Williams' most extensive dramatic exploration of the relationship between scepticism and faith. It is likewise surprising that Williams elects to use Pentecost rather than the Nativity as the background to his dramatic depiction of the fundamental differences separating paganism, Judaism and Christianity. While Williams' decision to explore these ideas may appear strange within the historical context evoked by the play, his development of the ideas in Terror of Light illustrates further instances of preoccupations in Williams' thought which reflect Kierkegaard's profound influence on his intellect.

Williams' assertion that scepticism performs a vital function in the service of faith stems from more than Williams' natural disposition towards all epistemological issues, which Anne Ridler alludes to when she claims that "... Williams would certainly have expected to find doubt growing at the foot of truth."<sup>13</sup> Williams' own assertion that "[t]he Church owes more to heretics than she is ever likely (on this earth) to admit..."<sup>14</sup> proceeds from Williams' unique theological and psychological insight, rather than from mere perversity. In the first place Williams, like Kierkegaard, insists that faith lies well beyond the proper sphere of reason. Second, in Williams' analysis, a healthy scepticism functions as a limitation and a corrective to

the Church's tendency to distrust the omnipotent God's ability to orchestrate the events of human history, preferring rather to take matters into its own hands -- often with disastrous results for both the Church and victims of the Church.

Two characters in Terror of Light manifest what Williams must have considered to be a healthy dose of scepticism: Thomas the doubting Apostle and Mary the mother of Jesus. Williams' affection for Thomas is best illustrated by the fact that he once composed an "office hymn" in honour of this Apostle to whose sodality he considered himself to belong. The hymn concludes:

Lord God, confess we never<sup>15</sup>  
Knowing not, swore we knew.

Thomas, in the play, demonstrates Williams' conviction that scepticism is a divine gift. Thomas, for example, claims that Christ approved of his initial hesitation to believe the Resurrection (p. 329). At another point in the drama Thomas does battle with Saul on behalf of "the scepticism of the Holy Ghost" (p. 363). Mary likewise identifies herself with Thomas' sceptical spirit: "You and I have been twins in the Spirit, Thomas. I asked a question of the archangel, and you would not believe for the mere noise of many voices" (p. 372). Mary's claim may surprise those who traditionally identify her as a pillar of faith, but in Williams' and Kierkegaard's analysis, faith must encounter and respond to doubt. Kierkegaard describes the dialectical relationship established between knowledge and scepticism as follows:

For dialectic is in its truth a benevolent helper which discovers and assists in finding where the absolute object of faith and worship is -- there, namely, where the

difference between knowledge and ignorance collapses in absolute worship with a consciousness of ignorance, there where the resistance of an objective uncertainty tortures forth the passionate certainty of faith, there when the conflict of right and wrong collapses in absolute worship with absolute subjection. Dialectic itself does not see the absolute, but it leads, as it were, the individual up to it, and says: 'Here it must be, that I guarantee; when you worship here, you worship God.'<sup>16</sup>

In order to appreciate Kierkegaard's position one must recognize that faith, in his view, is not another (albeit higher) form of reason. Kierkegaard describes faith as a separate "organ" which passionately moves the individual beyond the domain of thought.<sup>17</sup> Scepticism functions within the sphere of thought by contributing to the collapse of a finite rational dialectic. Only faith can move the individual beyond the threshold. Kierkegaard argues that when the spheres of reason and faith are not kept discrete from one another, and man attempts rationally to provide an objectively secure foundation for faith, further doubt is generated.<sup>18</sup>

Williams in The Descent of the Dove approvingly describes Kierkegaard as a man who "lived under a sense of judgement, of contrition, of asceticism; but also (and equally) of revolt, of refusal, of unbelief."<sup>19</sup> Williams' commendation of Kierkegaard's strange mixture of affirmation and scepticism is hardly unexpected given Williams' similar inner tension. Both men recognize that reason could no more provide security for faith than doubt could cripple faith. Both men also recognize the terrible risks which attend the "leap" into faith. Kierkegaard, according to Gregor Malantschuk, held that "[o]nly faith, which knows uncertainty and the possibilities of doubt, can at its own risk grasp the historical [claims of Christianity]."<sup>20</sup> Williams, in a similar vein, comments on Pascal's Wager:

He disliked Montaigne's levity as much as his thought. He demanded that all men should choose. Mathematician that he was, he knew infinity; Jansenist that he was, he felt the dangers of infinity — felt and feared them for others. "The finite to stake . . . the infinite to gain." Could anyone consent to doubt? He conceded his imagined opponent a feeble if intelligent murmur: "The true course is not to wager at all," and crushed himself with the awful answer: "Yes, but you must wager. It is not optional."<sup>21</sup>

In The Figure of Beatrice Williams again alludes to the risk of belief, but here within a context which reveals his further affinity with Kierkegaard:

In this [the question of whether our perception of the Divine in the beloved is genuine], as in so much, we have on inadequate evidence to make up our<sup>22</sup> minds on the principles of things; it is the old gamble.

As this passage suggests, belief cannot be arrived at through an unbroken succession of reasoning. It is achieved only through a passionate leap rife with uncertainties, and becomes meaningful only where faith grapples with issues of intensely subjective interest. Beatrice Williams' argument suggests, was for Dante much more than a tactic in his poetics.

Terror of Light also incorporates Williams' second major defense of scepticism, which arises from psychological rather than purely theological principles. Williams' grave suspicions regarding unbridled and misdirected religious fervour find effective dramatic expression in the play's treatment of the character Saul. Saul's appeal to John: "[H]elp me, help us, help our God!" (p. 338) carries ominous overtones when one recalls Saul's subsequent relentless persecution of the young Church. Williams sets Thomas' divinely sanctioned scepticism in direct opposition to Saul's self-righteous fervour. An amusing and instructive confrontation between Saul and Thomas culminates

in a sword fight in which Thomas gains the upper hand. Williams includes the following verbal exchange:

SAUL. It is easy to sneer at what you do not believe!

THOMAS. Sneer is a harsh word. It is not so easy to be hot and cold at once, to be devoted and intelligent, to trust God and keep your mind dry. But we do what we can. Please God the Holy Ghost will always let people like me hover between the dogmatists and their victims. Faith is a great danger and a great temptation; one can be more wholly oneself in the name of faith than in the name of anything else. (pp.362-63)

In the chapter of The Descent of the Dove entitled "The Quality of Disbelief" Williams proposes an evaluation of Montaigne which is no less radical than his presentation of Thomas in Terror of Light. Williams writes: "Our Lord the Spirit, having permitted contrition to exist, permitted sheer intelligence to exist; he inspired -- one may say so -- Montaigne."<sup>23</sup> Montaigne, like the Thomas of Williams' play, recognized the dangers of unrestrained belief:

He [Montaigne] recalled men to the recollection that they began with a hypothesis; that faith -- the kind of faith he beheld active round him, which had (it was estimated) killed 800,000 human beings and wrecked nine towns and two hundred and fifty villages -- that faith had first been a hypothesis and had been generally translated into <sup>24</sup>the realms of certitude by anger and obstinacy and egotism.

In Terror of Light Williams employs Mary to admonish the Church to strike a balance between scepticism and faith -- a balance similar to that attributed to Montaigne in The Descent. Addressing Thomas and John (depicted in the play as a mystic possessing both profound spiritual insight and faith in God) she proclaims:

I do not know where you [Thomas] will go, when the Companions begin their journeys. India, perhaps -- you will have enough work there, my brother in scepticism. But

the school of your followers will have even harder work within the Church. You and John. Love each other; love each other: when Thomas and John are divided, the Church wanders. (pp. 372-73)

Kierkegaard's assertion that "[i]n Christianity everything has dropped to a lower level because a higher factor has entered in,"<sup>25</sup> could well serve as an epigraph for Williams' evaluation of the fundamental qualifications of paganism, Judaism and Christianity which finds dramatic expression in Terror of Light. Williams achieves this dramatic expression by setting the representatives of paganism and Judaism (Simon Magus and Saul respectively) against the Christian backdrop established by the bulk of the other characters of the play. In this manner the essential qualifications of each position come to the fore, revealing a basis for discrimination between these three major religious orientations, which testifies to Williams' fundamental agreement with Kierkegaard on these matters.

Kierkegaard differentiates between these religions on the basis of the individual's relationship to eternity and the concomitant impact this relationship has on the individual's decisions in time. In paganism the temporal has little meaning, for eternity is conceived "as an abstraction, an analogue to philosophy's achievement in the field of ontology."<sup>26</sup> In paganism the individual relates to the Eternal as fate, and because fate includes contingency, the individual can never be brought to acknowledge his responsibility in the face of the Eternal.<sup>27</sup>

Simon Magus, in the play, represents the pagan consciousness. Instead of acknowledging his status as a limited temporal being in the face of the Eternal, he posits himself as "the Standing Pillar between all the worlds" (p.



348) — a stance Kierkegaard describes as typical of paganism which holds that "der Mensch ist Gott."<sup>28</sup> Simon represents the highest and most dangerous form of paganism, for instead of cowering before the vicissitudes of Fate, he seeks mastery through the practice of occult knowledge. Simon, of course, fails. Judas places Simon's attempt to manipulate the Eternal in its true light:

SIMON. By the names written on this staff, by the pronunciation of the titles of the Emanations, by the Mother of all the Aeons, go back.

JUDAS [breathing on the staff]. When the light began to move it put an end to this. [Simon drops his staff.] We both wanted to use the light, Simon. Now we shall have it. (p. 349)

Kierkegaard, according to Gregor Malantschuk, holds that in the shift from paganism to Judaism "temporality is demarcated by the recognition of a transcendence which lies above and beyond the temporal."<sup>29</sup> Kierkegaard goes on to suggest that "...this partially abstract perception of eternity still does not have a decisive influence upon an accentuation of the meaning of time."<sup>30</sup> Judaism fails to enter into an absolute relationship with eternity because it never meets God face to face. It is only in Christianity that man is directly confronted with the incarnate eternal truth, thereby allowing a person to find "his way to an eternal decision" in his own interior being. This means that, face to face with God, he must go through the absolute movement of repentance and come totally under guilt."<sup>31</sup>

John's confrontation with Saul highlights several of these important differences between Christianity and Judaism:

JOHN. . . . You need a new vocabulary.

SAUL. I need nothing of the sort. The old names are good enough for me — the Law, sin, repentance, pardon.

JOHN. I know, I know. But you hear them and you feel them, and yet they don't kill you! You don't die into them. Nowadays I don't know if I am dead or alive.

SAUL. Emotional nonsense! You can obey the Law.

JOHN. I can not obey the Law. Can you?

SAUL. I can try.

JOHN. And if you saw the Law moving and walking and talking in front of you . . . (p. 336)

Saul demonstrates Judaism's ability to come under a sense of guilt, yet it remains qualified, unlike John's absolute guilt. Thomas and Peter both reveal that they have shared John's experience. Thomas declares that encountering Christ is "perfectly appalling — it [is] like being put completely into one's own identity at that moment . . ." (p. 329). Peter, referring to his betrayal of Christ, insists that he, like Judas, would have destroyed himself had Christ spoken to him (p. 328). Thomas' observation precisely concurs with Kierkegaard's analysis of Christianity's impact on man's relationship to time:

Not until the coming of Christianity does something totally new appear in its fullness; and then time and decisions in time<sup>32</sup> also acquire infinite weight for the single individual.

Peter's proclamation to Judas graphically underscores the new terror which, in Christianity, attends man's temporal decisions: "[I]n the name of the Church we assent to your own volition; we lay upon you the compulsion of your own act. Go" (p. 351). Neither Simon nor Saul are capable of perceiving the truth that Christianity destroys the possibility of human dignity before God. Man, in Christianity, is required to know himself as his actions have made him. Judas, unlike Simon or Saul, recognizes his absolute guilt, and so for

him redemption is a real possibility. Williams makes one of his most daring theological speculations when he insists, in the play, that Judas experiences redemption through Matthias' substitution (p. 369). Such a move would appear perfectly natural to Williams, who often employs Judas as an Everyman figure. Williams would also probably insist that every man lacks self-knowledge to the degree that he fails to identify himself with Judas.

### III

The Three Temptations is unique among Williams' plays in several ways. It was composed as a radio play and, therefore, unlike all of Williams' other religious plays, its intended audience is not strictly Christian. It is also a play which scathingly exposes characters without leading them beyond self-knowledge to repentance. Williams also selects Herod, one of the morally villainous characters of the play, to function as a normative voice within the work. Herod in this capacity reveals what Kierkegaard would describe as acute demonic insight into the nature of the Kingdom of God. These factors combine to make The Three Temptations one of the most interesting and disturbing plays in Williams' dramatic repertoire.

Each of the three temptations presented to Christ by the "Evil One" finds itself represented in one of the characters in the play: Herod, for the comforts of the flesh; Pilate, for the comforts of reputation; Caiaphas, for the comforts of safe religion. These temptations may also be interpreted as tactics employed by the finite self to avoid the demands of the infinite self. Judas, in the play, functions as an Everyman figure who betrays the Kingdom of God at every opportunity. Judas' experience of terror in his

confrontation with the Kingdom is fully justified, for The Three Temptations, in true Kierkegaardian fashion, insists that the call to follow Christ amounts to nothing less than the call to a painful but unqualified surrender of the self.

In The Three Temptations, Herod, Pilate and Caiaphas conspire to destroy Christ. Herod, who possesses an unrelenting candour, reveals that he and his fellow conspirators, who represent various forms of finite comfort, are motivated to oppose Christ out of fear:

Pooh, you [Caiaphas] are as much afraid as we;  
only you were so made as to take refuge  
in religion, as we do in money or fame. (p. 381)

Williams structures the play so that Christ's triumph over the Evil One corresponds to Christ's rejection of all that Herod, Pilate and Caiaphas have to offer. The Evil One describes the temptations embodied in Herod and Pilate as "[c]omfort of flesh and comfort of grand spirit" (p. 389). The third temptation he holds out to Christ he terms "the comfort of safe religion" (p. 389). Christ refuses each of these in turn. Christ's Kingdom, as Herod astutely observes, threatens the individual with the loss of all forms of personal comfort:

CALAPHAS. This is a worse prophet than John.

HEROD.

Much worse.

John taught share and share alike,  
a just price and equality of sacrifice;  
made our thrones brittle, but he was little  
to this man, who will not spare us even with a share  
of our hearts' comfortable loves; this man talks  
of himself and complete surrender and total loss,  
of the cross for all men and all men on the cross.  
(p.391)

Each of these temptations resembles attempts by an individual to compromise the demands of the infinite self by offering finite substitution. The Evil One, in this manner, attempts to truncate the first movement of what Kierkegaard denominates "the double movement of infinity" -- a resignation which relinquishes all finite objectives.<sup>33</sup> Christ makes it clear that these ersatz remedies must fail in the light of eternity: "This is your [Satan's] hour; whatever you think is yours propose and proffer, if you choose, while it endures. Afterwards I will deal with the offer as I choose" (p. 388).

Each of the temptations (to some degree) and certainly the temptation of safe religion, may be reduced to the Evil One's suggestion that Christ "[t]ake that trick of comfort now, in God's name" (p. 390; emphasis my own). But Christ refuses to compromise the Divine schedule. Man is in no position to dictate to God what he deems necessary for salvation at that moment, and a "trick of comfort" is simply that -- a trick. In Kierkegaard's analysis, man's instinct to provide immediate comfort for a sufferer often betrays the sufferer's highest spiritual need:

I have seen a man sink almost into despair, I have also heard him cry out, 'Bring me life, life, this is worse than death which puts an end to life, whereas I am as dead and yet not dead!' I am not a severe man; if I knew any assuaging word, I should be very willing to comfort and cheer the man. And yet, and yet, it is perfectly possible that what the sufferer had need of was really something else, that he needed harder sufferings. Harder sufferings! Who is the cruel one who ventures to say such a thing? My hearer, it is Christianity, the teaching which is offered at a selling-out price under the name of gentle comfort, whereas it -- yes, verily, it is the comfort of eternity and for ever, but indeed it must take a rather hard hold.<sup>34</sup>

In the face of the terror of the Kingdom (the demands of the infinite

self) most men prove only too happy to sell out, in Herod's words, for "[f]ear — and greed" (p. 391). In the play this universal tendency is embodied in Judas Iscariot whom Herod dubs "Everyman":

He is the one centre we all work on —  
 Everyman hoping that God will leave him alone  
 with Caiaphas, and that either Pilate or I will lean  
 down from a throne to give him some security.  
 Everyman hurrying to betray the voice he heard. (p. 392)

Given a Kierkegaardian reading, the voice we all hurry to betray is the voice of the infinite self which articulates man's experience of his complicity with God.

But complicity with God, according to Herod, demands immediate action with no regard for temporal comfort (p. 382). The Kingdom of God presents such an unattractive face that to most men damnation appears more immediately desirable. Herod, however, recognizes human choice for what it is:

My dear Caiaphas,  
 we all depend on Everyman. Why shouldn't Everyman  
 have his place in damnation as well as we?  
 If you think it damnation. I do,  
 and prefer it. You do — and pretend it's faith.  
 Pilate does, and he pretends it's duty.  
 Judas Iscariot is of the same flesh as we,  
 and prefers the quiet temporary comfort of damnation  
 to the crucifixion of glory: don't you, Judas? (p. 393)

While Herod, Pilate and Caiaphas deny themselves the possibility of salvation by refusing resignation, Judas by the end of the play clearly indicates that he is both conscious of his guilt and absolutely beyond the reach of all finite comforts:

HEROD. . . . What more do you want?

JUDAS. Only to be

free, as I was before, from innocent blood. (p. 400)

Judas' desire, in Kierkegaardian terms, amounts to the desire for "repetition" — or the desire to return to "the first immediacy."<sup>35</sup> Two things are necessary if the individual is to move beyond this stage. The first is the recognition that guilt prevents one from retracing his steps. Judas recognizes this. The second step towards salvation requires "concrete actual repentance" leading to the resolution of the problem of guilt on a higher level through the individual's leap of faith in which he embraces the God's offer of salvation in Christ.<sup>36</sup> Whether or not Judas undertakes these last steps is debatable. His suicide suggest that he succumbs to despair.

Although The Three Temptations exhibits a preoccupation with the process of damnation, it does hold out an alternative in the character of Claudia. She, like Herod, recognizes the demands of the Kingdom, but unlike Herod she demonstrates a willingness to participate in the demands of what Herod deems "[t]his inconvenient uncomfortable union of friends," and it is precisely through her participation in this union that Claudia experiences contemporaneity with Christ (p. 397). Claudia's final speech ends the play on a note of ominous warning. Here with the clarity of one who knows the temptations of damnation she depicts the end of those who prefer comfort to glory:

Now all we,

all we who are here, have what we chose.  
 . . . Once there was a voice crying  
 in the wilderness, now there is only dark in the wilderness  
 and a dying everlastingly, a slow perishing  
 and less and less cherishing of comfort; at last  
 the stress of the glory is past; this is hell.  
 I am sent to say softly to anyone who hears --

you would have it; have it then; hell  
 is always there for the craving, and the having is easy.  
 For me, the peace of the sword in the heart drives me  
 out among other lives. (pp. 400-01)

## IV

Judgement at Chelmsford written as "A Pageant Play in Celebration of the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Diocese of Chelmsford" (p. 61) initially strikes the reader as being anything but celebratory in tone, for it unstintingly and systematically exposes both the contemporary and historical vices and failures of the Church in that diocese. The "synopsis" of the play offers an explanation by indicating that "... the complete pageant offers a representation not only of the history of the diocese, but of the movement of the soul of man in its journey from the things of this world to the heavenly city of Almighty God" (p. 63). If this movement is to be successful the "soul" must, in Kierkegaardian terms, "in its relation to guilt, first go through a dialectical and existential clarification."<sup>37</sup> To this end Williams employs the character of The Accuser whose declared function is to reveal to men "what they have made of their lives" (p. 72). Thus The Accuser brings Chelmsford to own her own guilt by citing contemporary and historical instances of her utter failure to concretize the demands which Christ places on the Church. At the conclusion of the play Chelmsford admits her failure, repents and learns to embrace God's offer of salvation symbolized by the Cross.

Judgement differs from many of Williams' other accusatory dramatic efforts in that the object under scrutiny functions both as an individual and as the Church. Williams' critique of the Church tends to be tempered by his



recognition that the Church ~~is~~ at once a temporal failure and eternally acceptable to God in Christ. Canterbury encourages Chelmsford to brave the accusations levelled against her, with this knowledge in mind: "[E]ven truth," he informs her, "has always two sides" (p. 75).

Thus, unlike Williams' other plays which take an individual to task, Chelmsford is indicted only indirectly. Given that Williams wishes to depict not only the history of the Church but the "movement of the soul," it must be kept in mind that where Chelmsford represents an individual under God's scrutiny, no distance between the sin and the sinner is possible. When Williams' focus moves from Chelmsford as the Church to Chelmsford as an individual, The Accuser's function likewise shifts from one resembling the "accuser of the brethren" or Satan in Job, to what Glen Cavaliero describes as the role of "a devil's advocate within the self, a conception less mythical than existential."<sup>38</sup> In this latter capacity The Accuser forces the individual to acknowledge the unmitigated truth of his accusations. The following analysis concerns itself primarily with the thrust of the play, which concerns the individual rather than the Church.

The first major charge which The Accuser brings against Chelmsford is directed against individuals within the contemporary Church who attempt to make the gospel attractive by pandering to public tastes. These individuals forward various suggestions: brighter tunes, dog races, more candles, no sermons and less dogma. The priest who chairs this "suggestion committee" sums up the ethos of this attenuated gospel in his appeal to a young girl:

The kind of life you want is the quiet life that is found in the peaceful heart -- and how do we find that? That is what the Church can tell you. A little self-denial, a

little attention to — (p. 78)

His talk of a "little self-denial" smacks of Caiaphas' "reasonable piety" from The Three Temptations. The Accuser confronts Chelmsford with this question: "Sweet, was Christ crucified to create this chat? some other, less notable, sacrifice might have served" (p. 82). The Accuser points out that at one time Christians were "dead to earth" (p. 82). Here The Accuser echoes Kierkegaard's sentiments, but Kierkegaard employs an expression which stigmatizes more extensively than "chat":

Christianity waits before applying its remedy, . . . it heals by means of eternity and for ever when the sickness is such that eternity can be applied — that is to say, to this end thou must first die. Hence the severity of Christianity, in order that it may not itself become twaddle (into which we men are so prone to transform it), and in order that it may not confirm thee in twaddle.

The second major accusation levelled against Chelmsford concerns the atrocities committed by "Christians" during the English witch-hunts. In this episode Williams exposes a terribly destructive tendency within the Church which he merely alludes to in Terror of Light. Saul's apparently innocuous desire to "help God" here comes to its fruition in Matthew Hopkins' reprehensible jihad against God's enemies. Hopkins is the same noble fellow who falls under Williams' lash in Witchcraft.<sup>40</sup> Hopkins, in the play, inadvertently reveals the sine qua non of that spirit in man which gives rise to such malevolent folly: "... I hope," he remarks, "I can recognise evil when other people commit it" (p. 86). What the Church lacks in its opposition to such persons is a little humbling self-knowledge and a sufficient dose of scepticism to call the assumptions generating such drastic action into question. Hopkins would find a formidable opponent in the Thomas of Terror of Light who "hover[s] between the dogmatists and their victims"

(p. 363).

Williams' portrayal of the problem of witchcraft in Judgement displays the same objectivity and restraint evident in his major work Witchcraft — a work which Glen Cavaliero suggests should be entitled "The Quality of Disbelief."<sup>41</sup> Williams, in Witchcraft, argues that the Church encouraged the practice of witchcraft by opposing it so vehemently. He suggests that this opposition bespeaks a disturbing fissure between the Church's dogma and practice, for its dogma declares that evil was defeated once and for all in Christ, whereas the strident desperation behind the persecution of the witches reveals the degree to which the Church suspects its own dogma. Thus through lack of faith and/or failure to understand its own dogma the Church has weakened its own position while it strengthened that of its enemies.<sup>42</sup>

Williams' dispassionate discussion of goetia does not occlude the obvious fact that he found witchcraft an obscenity — the play bears this out — but Williams would also be the first to insist that strong evidence be presented before the charge of witchcraft is credited. He would also most forcefully oppose all measures taken to "defend" the Church of the omnipotent God from its enemies which demand that the Church behave like the enemies it seeks to defend against. The Accuser makes it clear that while the Church is not responsible for hell, she is absolutely responsible "for how [she] help[s] high heaven to deal with hell whether in a hellish way or in a heavenly" (p. 89). The Hopkins' episode in Judgement bears out The Accuser's observations that when the Church "abandon[s] God's heart for the philosophical art of argument, and outrage[s] men's bodies to save their souls, lacking love's decencies" (p. 91), then the Church, with the witch-hunters, "[runs] with the

witches through the ditches of the soul" (p. 84).

The Accuser's third major complaint against Chelmsford is that she has failed to meet the physical needs of the poor. Chelmsford, with some passion, counters that she has tried to feed the poor, but has encountered political obstructions in the attempt. The Accuser's response to Chelmsford reveals the degree to which Judgement subscribes to a Kierkegaardian model of soteriology:

I do not say you are wrong, sister; your task is hard. Heaven may ask for impossibilities, but it rarely gets them. That perhaps is as much its own fault as yours; I may say so -- but you, rue and repent: that is what you have to do. (p. 121)<sup>43</sup>

Thomas Ken's sermon in episode VIII describes the empress Helena's arduous quest for the Cross as an analogue to the soul's slow and tortuous journey to God. Ken then draws the distinction between finding an external Cross and discovering the Cross within (p. 143). With this interior discovery comes the realization that to discover the Cross is to discover Christ himself "so sweet, so fragrant a Cross that you shall laugh to find how you have mistook him" (p. 143). Following Ken's sermon, Chelmsford, who has by now gone through an existential clarification with respect to her absolute guilt, embraces Christ as the solution to her "impossible" guilt. Leaning on the Cross she exclaims with insight, "O Grief, I take the Joy your grief brings; Joy, what is Grief while that Joy lives?" To this The Accuser replies, "Sweet lady, this is the answer to all" (p. 146).

Williams' decision to make the missionary priest (Anthony) the villain

of The House of the Octopus may seem surprising in light of the fact that the play was commissioned by the United Council for Missionary Education. Glen Cavaliero suggests an explanation where he notes that, "[t]his play represents the full maturity of [Williams'] thought on the question of human integrity and its relation to the Providence of God."<sup>44</sup> Evidently Williams was extremely dubious about the ultimate value of human integrity.

The play moves with great rapidity and clarity, driven by the impetus generated by the dialectic established between man's sense of his own integrity and God's providence which functions to correct man's misconceptions. Anthony is thus hounded by God's agency through a Kierkegaardian process of existential clarification until he is forced to acknowledge his absolute nothingness before God. At the same time, The Flame (the reification of God's agency within the play) demonstrates God's redemptive activity which provides an ultimate resting place from existential terror and guilt — a resolution which in The Flame's own words is "heaven's kind of salvation, not at all to the mind of any except the redeemed, and to theirs hardly" (p. 250).

The House is set on an island in the "Outer Seas" where a new congregation of Christians awaits the imminent invasion of the evil empire "P'o-l'u". Anthony, who has converted and now shepherds his little flock, is initially loath to abandon his young church to the fate of P'o-l'u until finally persuaded by the church to flee to the hills to live and to continue his ministry in the islands. While Anthony's reticence appears noble, his hesitation to leave proceeds from subtler and less sanctified springs of action. The Marshal of P'o-l'u sees through Anthony immediately:

But I have studied  
 all my life, my dear Prefect, the religious mind.  
 Every pious man — and, of course, woman —  
 has one — just one — surface where religion and he  
 are so delicately mixed in his soul as to be  
 indistinguishable; he is never quite sure —  
 and does not (believe me!) ever want to be sure —  
 whether his religion or he is being soothed  
 into a lascivious spiritual delight.  
 All of them, Prefect, are at bottom religious lechers,  
 fornicating with their fancies. (pp. 276-77)

The surface in Anthony where "religion and he are so delicately mixed" is formed by Anthony's evaluation of his status in God's economy. Simply put, he uses Christianity's talk of the necessity of personal sacrifice to disguise his own overweening sense of self-importance. He believes that the Church will fail without him. When Anthony expresses this belief to his flock they respond, "Do you doubt, father, that you leave us, everywhere and always, with God Almighty?" to which The Flame adds, "And they say his fatherhood is more efficient than yours" (p. 261).

The Flame's ironic voice here is typical of the dramatic effect generated by The Flame throughout the play, who consistently underscores the gap between Anthony's perception of himself and God's perception of Anthony. Williams employs this irony to demonstrate the priest's total lack of self-knowledge — the painful self-knowledge necessary to salvation. It is The Flame's task to bring Anthony to himself.

The Marshal, playing on the priest's self-deception, convinces Anthony to compromise the faith by swearing allegiance to the Emperor of P'o-l'u, whose name happens to be phonetically identical with the islanders' word for the Christian God. Anthony is encouraged by the Marshal to persuade the

Church to engage in this verbal sleight of hand in exchange for the Marshal's promise that Anthony would then be left free to "cherish and protect [his flock]" (p. 283). The subtlety of the Marshal's proposition lies in the nature of its appeal. Anthony is really being asked to mislead his church, but the Marshal formulates his proposal as a challenge to Anthony's willingness to engage in a form of self-sacrifice "more trying than martyrdom" (p. 282).

The priest's decision to concretize sin by compromising himself while enjoying a position of elevated spiritual consciousness is tantamount to what Kierkegaard describes as, "In Despair to Will to Be Oneself: Defiance":

This [the desire to prove himself right] eventually becomes such a fixation that for an extremely strange reason he is afraid of eternify, afraid that it will separate him from his, demonically understood, infinite superiority over other men, his justification, demonically understood, for being what he is.

Anthony bears other earmarks of this form of demonic self-deception, especially in his insistence on being helped only in ways in which he wants to be helped. In Kierkegaard's analysis, to accept unconditional help from a superior involves the humiliation of "becoming a nothing in the hand of the 'Helper',"<sup>46</sup> and this is precisely what Anthony refuses.

While Anthony reveals no obvious demonic spiritual pride during the scene with the Marshal, The Flame subsequently engineers a confrontation between the priest and the Church, in which Anthony's spiritual hubris is forced to declare itself. The confrontation arises from two sources: Anthony urges the Church to compromise with P'o-l'u, and he categorically condemns Alayu (a young convert who is martyred by P'o-l'u despite the fact

that she renounced Christianity) as an apostate. Anthony at one point invokes the Spirit to validate his position. Torna (one of the believers) takes up the gauntlet: "Let the Spirit judge between us" (p. 297). The Flame proves only too willing to comply.

Under the compulsion of The Flame, who describes himself as "of those who first came into being when the Holy Ghost measured within the waters the angle of creation" (p. 249), Anthony confesses that he wants to be "their father, their centre, almost their creator" (p. 297). When the priest still refuses to retract his condemnation of Alayu, preferring his own judgement to the collective judgement of the Church which he interprets as a form of spiritual rebellion against his authority, The Flame forces Assantu (a pagan magician) to expose secrets within Anthony that the priest is loath to reveal even to himself:

ASSANTU. . . . A fire consumes me;  
I must have you for my own, wholly my own, none  
shall have you but I. I am the Father, and hungry —

ANTHONY. Jesu God Almighty have mercy upon me!  
I do not — I will not — know what I am saying.

THE FLAME. You were praying to my lord the Spirit  
for exactly that.

ANTHONY. I never wanted that —

THE FLAME. O but you did.  
Rid yourself, my son, of all deceit. (p. 300)

Anthony must now face himself. He has arrived at what Kierkegaard would deem a state of true resignation, for in his guilt he is totally lost to his finite self and its desires. Only a leap of faith at this point will free him from the consuming self-consciousness of his own consciousness of sin. According to Glen Cavaliero the dilemma produced by self-consciousness and



man's revolt against his self-consciousness is one which Williams strove to resolve in all his writings.<sup>47</sup> Here is perhaps one of the best examples of the dilemma in any of these writings.

Anthony's crises with himself must be resolved within the context established by his fortune. He must actualize himself with respect to this context through concrete action. Two things in particular are required. He must actively reverse his decision to compromise with P'o-l'u; and second he must agree to be aided in his attempt. The Flame provides the logistics of this aid in the form of Alayu, who offers to bear Anthony's fear of his impending torture and martyrdom which will follow his decision to defy P'o-l'u. Alayu's "substitution" delivers Anthony from the burden of himself by virtue of its participation in Christ's archetypal Atonement — a principle fundamental to Williams' theological framework. Anthony accepts her offer.

In language which contains unmistakably Kierkegaardian echoes, Anthony shares his newfound spiritual insight with the Church. His exhortation touches on despair and that demonic refusal to recognize one's status before God which generates despair. He also holds out an alternative:

Beware

despair does not leave your own [bishopric] empty,  
because, thinking you are someone, you become someone  
to be caught by sin — and only someone so.  
A nothing in God cannot despair. I heard  
a voice cry when I saw the naughting of myself  
that the Faith was truer than I thought. O truer!  
A man is only himself to see himself  
in his own naughting. . . .(p. 317)

The Flame, at the conclusion of the play, demonstrates the

comprehensiveness of God's providential care for His Church. Not only does The Flame force the reluctant individual through the painful process of redemption, the needs of the Church as a whole are met as well. As if in response to Anthony's prayer for a new bishop, The Flame raises up Torna from the heap of martyred believers to carry on the evangelistic ministry Anthony had initiated. Thus if The House evinces one theological principle above all others it is perhaps one articulated by The Flame himself. To Oroyo's prayer: "God grant all go right," The Flame replies, "That, Oroyo, is the only thing past praying for. Prayer is only that you may enjoy things going all right. Allow that, and see how simple prayer is" (p. 268). The exhortation to pray that one might enjoy "things going all right" is terribly apposite given the providential agenda exhibited by The House, for though many pray for the coming of the Kingdom, few recognize with the elder Siru that "this is God's way -- to cause his day to dawn in sheer blood" (p. 299).

## VI

Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury, written for and first performed at the second anniversary of the Canterbury Festival, represents Williams' dramatic art at its finest. In many ways it explores themes which Williams later takes up in The House of the Octopus, but in Cranmer these themes are developed in their purest Kierkegaardian form. Unlike Anthony, Cranmer is depicted as a fundamentally innocuous man -- a conscientious protestant reformer who through the vicissitudes of unfavourable political fortune is martyred under Mary Queen of Scots. A. M. Hadfield astutely locates the thrust of the play when she describes Cranmer's history as that of a plain

man, haunted by his virtues and achievements, betrayed by himself and finally saved through faith and insight after "all is lost."<sup>48</sup>

Cranmer's development, as Hadfield suggests, is best understood in soteriological terms — in this instance distinctly Kierkegaardian soteriological terms. Cranmer is driven relentlessly towards the crushing spiritual awareness of his status before God. This play reflects Williams' deep appreciation of Kierkegaard's maxim that "before God man is always in the wrong."<sup>49</sup> As in The House, Williams employs a supernatural agent to drive Cranmer along the narrow way to God. In Cranmer, however, The Skeleton, who at various times describes himself as "the delator of all things to their truth" (p. 34), and "the Judas who betrays men to God" (p. 35), assumes a much more insidious form than did The Flame. Williams' decision to portray The Skeleton in this manner bears consideration, for Cranmer is truly far less villainous than Anthony. Williams appears intent on demonstrating that even (and perhaps especially) good men run the terrible risk of relying on their own integrity, and in so doing forfeit the saving knowledge of their absolute nothingness before God.

Williams' use of irony and humour in this play corresponds closely to Kierkegaard's analysis of these states as transitional stages in man's existential development. Irony is generated in Cranmer through the dialectic established between Cranmer's misguided interpretation of events and The Skeleton's divine and hence normative point of view. What The Skeleton points to is the essential misrelation (or division) between Cranmer's nature (or essence) and his phenomenological reality (or fortune). This is precisely Kierkegaard's definition of irony.<sup>50</sup> Cranmer's only hope of

salvation lies in his being brought to an awareness of this misrelation, for without self-knowledge man perishes in delusion. Fortune, which also functions as God's Providence (here reified in The Skeleton) acts on Cranmer, in Cavaliero's words, as "[the scourge of] the Holy Ghost."<sup>51</sup> But The Skeleton represents more than impossible fortune; he also reveals himself at the end of the play as a Christ figure -- the impossible resolution to Cranmer's impossible plight. (

Cranmer's confession in his opening speech of the play that he "would let go a heresy or so for love of a lordly style" (p. 4), locates his principle failing. He is an idolater of words. The Skeleton suggests that Cranmer's idolatry points to an ironic division between his mind and his soul (p. 5). Cranmer indeed does exhibit a lawyer's ability to compromise himself while hiding behind a deceptive veil of language. His confrontation with Henry over the King's desire to wed Anne Boleyn provides a fine example. Cranmer is all too readily persuaded by the King to occupy the archbishopric, and to function there as little more than a pawn in the employ of Henry's desires. Cranmer's rationalizations do not effectively obscure the underlying motivations for his acquiescence. Cranmer parenthetically admits that he is a coward whose "thought is slow, uncertain of itself, willing to serve God and its friends and peace" (p. 9). Cranmer's excuses will not save him. The Skeleton replies that "[e]ven a shy man must make up his mind" (p. 9).

The Skeleton's pronouncement that he must "divide [Cranmer's] life to the last crack and pull his soul -- if it lives -- through the cracks" (p. 22)," indicates just how closely Williams subscribes to a Kierkegaardian model in

this play. Kierkegaard distinguishes between irony and humour by noting that while irony consists in a misrelation between "essence and phenomenon" (or "internal and external actuality"), "in humor, on the other hand, a person discovers the disparity between the eternal qualifications of his essence and his phenomenological actuality, and this misrelation is deepened further when he sees the difficulty of fulfilling the ethical requirement."<sup>52</sup> Cranmer, in other words, must encounter his helplessness in the face of the ethical demands of his infinite self if he is to move from irony to humour. Cranmer's tendency to speak, and by speaking, to pledge himself ethically beyond his capacity for action, is reflected in his writing The Book of Common Prayer. To Cranmer's "It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times and in all places, give thanks . . .," The Skeleton retorts, "Ah how the sweet words ring their beauty. it is meet, right, and our bounden duty. but will you sing it with unchanged faces when God shall change the times and the places?" (p. 32). Cranmer, as Kierkegaard would insist, will have to "render account for every careless word he has uttered."<sup>53</sup>

Fortune graciously ensures that Cranmer will render account, but as The Skeleton wryly notes, while "Heaven is gracious . . . few can draw safe deductions on its method" (p. 14). After Henry's death, Cranmer begins to realize the precariousness of his situation, and with this realization comes his first encounter with The Skeleton. Cranmer begs him: "Christ or devil, "leave me to lie in peace." But The Skeleton refuses: "Stop me loving, would you? stop me proving the perfect end in the diagram of bones?" (p. 35). There is little doubt that Cranmer at this point suspects what that "perfect end" will entail. His state of mind is perhaps best described in the words

of a Christian whom Williams cites in He Came Down From Heaven:

Jesus Christ is our Redeemer  
And we wish to God he weren't. 54

With Mary's ascension to the throne, Cranmer's days are numbered. The Skeleton declares that Cranmer will now be forced to confront the division within himself: "Your mind and your world make nonsense of your life. She [Mary] is here; my hour is at hand; now I am yours" (p. 45). The Skeleton's observation signals the advent of a crisis in which Cranmer will be forced to define himself, for Williams derives from Kierkegaard the notion that "...men and women can only truly act when their fortunes conflict with their natures, so that they are compelled to deny their self-sufficiency."<sup>55</sup>

Cranmer indicates that he is moving towards a denial of his self-sufficiency (which is at the same time a movement from irony to humour) when he cries out in fear: "I live askance in a jest, the puppet of the prince of the air, long since damned, I damned long since" (p. 46). But to complete this movement he must recognize his true status before God. Cranmer asks, "Have I erred? let them show me then where I have erred," to which The Skeleton replies, "In thinking, though it was important for you to be right, it mattered at all in the end whether you were right" (p. 47). Cranmer will now answer for this presumption.

Long before Cranmer had protested that all he desired was justice. At that time The Skeleton promised him just that: "trap for trap, honour for honour, prison for prison; love, in the end, for love. We will play fair" (p. 17). Mary proves to be Cranmer's nemesis. His heart which was "double with God and the Devil must be choked by a heart double with the Devil and

God" (p. 48). Under the threat of death Cranmer retracts his anti-papal doctrines, and although he betrays what he believes to be the truth, he gains invaluable insight. "Christ my God," exclaims Cranmer, "I am utterly lost and damned. I sin whatever I do" (p. 51).

The Skeleton, however, is not yet through with Cranmer. Mary has a little more justice up her sleeve. Cranmer will burn despite his retraction. Cranmer had desperately hoped that his God would spare him this torment, but, as The Skeleton remarks, he must lose even his concept of God to "come into God" (p. 52). It is once Cranmer begins to accept the necessity of his death that he experiences a moment of illumination -- a moment, in Kierkegaard's words, when "...life is understood backwards through the idea"<sup>56</sup>: "Can life itself be redemption? all grace but grace? all this terror the agonizing glory of grace?" (p. 54). Now that Cranmer has arrived at this stage of existential development, The Skeleton urges him to find freedom from necessity in necessity itself. In words which call to mind the Third King in Seed of Adam, The Skeleton declares: "I am the only thing that outruns necessity, I am necessary Love where necessity is not" (p. 56).

Cranmer's movement from irony to humour is complete, which in Kierkegaard's analysis implies that a previous stage of existential development has been destroyed in preparation for a new existential movement. Although Cranmer now "experiences 'himself in his nothingness' and inadequacy,"<sup>57</sup> he runs the risk of continuing his development into what Kierkegaard would term a negative or demonic form of humour. This would occur if Christianity became an offense to him.<sup>58</sup> Cranmer, however, refuses to go this route. Instead he acknowledges his own offense in the

eyes of God, and from this position of absolute humiliation, embraces the God's offer:

Blessed Omnipotence, in whom is heaven,  
 heaven and earth are alike offended at me!  
 I can reach from heaven no succour, nor earth to me.  
 What shall I then? despair? thou art not despair.  
 Into thee now do I run, into thy love,  
 that which is all the cause thou wert man for us,  
 and we are nothing but that for which thou wert man . . .  
 (p. 57)

Cranmer's resolve must be accompanied by concrete action, and only "feeling and passion" in Kierkegaard's opinion can "prompt and carry through a new existential movement."<sup>59</sup> The authenticity of Cranmer's movement is signalled by his passionate performance on the day of his execution:

Therefore I draw to the thing that troubles me  
 more than all else I ever did -- the writings  
 I let abroad against my heart's belief  
 to keep my life . . . if that might be . . . that I signed  
 with this hand, after I was degraded: this hand,  
 which wrote the contrary of God's will in me,  
 since it offended most, shall suffer first;  
 it shall burn ere I burn, now I go to the fire,  
 and the writings, all writings wherein I denied God's will,  
 or made God's will but the method of my life,  
 I altogether reject them. (p. 58)

The Skeleton, however, does not allow Cranmer's drama to conclude on a note of such tragic grandeur. He will extort one last confession from the mouth of the reluctant martyr:

THE SKELETON. But I know all.  
 Friend, let us say one thing more before the world --  
 I for you, you for me: let us say all:  
 if the Pope had bid you live, you would have served him.

CRANMER. If the Pope had bid me live, I should have served him.  
 (pp. 58-59)

Cranmer's admission effectively robs him of the dignity usually accorded a martyr's death. All of his tortuous spiritual odyssey appears to have



been in vain, but appearances deceive. Cranmer's confession represents Williams' master stroke. The terrible irony of this last exchange arises from other sources than a misrelation between Cranmer's essential and phenomenological realities. Pretension and specious dignity no longer concern a man who rests transparently in God as a nothing. The irony, where it is perceived, perhaps testifies to a misrelation (or lack of self-knowledge) in the reader, for Cranmer's confession may be seen ironically only if human dignity before God is posited as a possibility. This possibility the play most strenuously denies. Cranmer is no longer the object of irony, for he recognizes his nothingness before God. Whether or not the reader remains an object of irony is another question.

## VII

The preceding analysis of Williams' religious drama indicates both the range of Williams' theological preoccupations, and the remarkable degree to which these preoccupations reflect Williams' interest in and subscription to Kierkegaard's thought. Williams' drama, which was composed almost exclusively for a Christian audience, particularly evinces Williams' conviction that Christian believers need to be shocked into an awareness of the terrible demands which God places on members of the Church. Williams' drama, in true Kierkegaardian fashion, confronts the believer with these demands and dramatizes the individual's total helplessness to satisfy God through finite human efforts. Each of the plays considered systematically forces its characters to define themselves in the face of these eternal requirements. Those who ultimately refuse to acknowledge their absolute

guilt and nothingness before God flounder forever in a hell of their own making. Those who come to true self-knowledge discover to their terror both the magnitude and exigencies of Grace. Christianity in both Williams' and Kierkegaard's analysis proffers little finite comfort. Their point is that God's offer of salvation in Christ ought not to be taken lightly. It cost God the absolute degradation of the Crucifixion. In their view man too must experience degradation and total loss if he is to find himself in God.

## Williams' Novels:

## Encounters with the Infinite

One day perhaps it will indeed break through; it will undo our solidity, which belongs to earth and heaven, and all of us who are then alive will find ourselves in it and alone till we win through it to our own place.

The present analysis of five of Williams' seven novels attempts to do two things. First, it attempts to demonstrate that all five of the novels share what Kierkegaard denominates a common "center of gravity." Kierkegaard explains:

Essentially a life-view plays the part of providence in the novel; it is the novel's deeper unity which provides it with an interior center of gravity; it frees the novel from becoming arbitrary or pointless, because the purpose is immanently present everywhere in the work of art.

Prior to this Kierkegaard stresses that the "life-view" must be a coherent philosophical world view through which the author has experienced "the transubstantiation of experience."<sup>3</sup> These five novels and Descent into Hell, unlike Shadows of Ecstasy, possess a distinctly orthodox Christian center of gravity which can be demonstrated by examining the nature of the symbols of the Infinite which crop up in four of the five novels and/or by disclosing the soteriological dialectic of each work. "Symbol of the Infinite" refers to the substantial manifestations of the Infinite (or Eternal) in the novels, specifically the Graal, Solomon's Stone, Neo-Platonic

Archetypes and the Tarot. In order to disclose the soteriological dialectic generated by the characters' confrontation with the Infinite, one (or at the most two or three characters' existential developments will be considered in each work. No more than this is necessary, for none of these novels contains characters who deviate from Williams' basic soteriological pattern.

Second, this analysis attempts to locate Kierkegaardian elements in each novel. Given that the first four novels discussed in this chapter were written prior to Williams' encounter with Kierkegaard's writings in 1935, there is no question of referring to Kierkegaard's "influence" on these novels. Even so, these novels manifest numerous Kierkegaardian elements both in their soteriological orientation and in the numerous asides which embellish the theological texture of the works. Williams' immediate recognition that Kierkegaard was a writer "who spoke to his condition"<sup>4</sup> suggests where these elements may have originated, for one might expect the existential condition of an author, in some form or another, to leak into his writings. No attempt, however, will be made to provide a systematic and comprehensive explication de texte, or to demonstrate how these elements contribute to the thematic and structural totality of the text. The elements will simply be cited at the conclusion of the discussion on each novel. In fact, the same Kierkegaardian elements reappear in several novels.

The final section of this chapter will deal with All Hallows' Eve, Williams' last novel, written ten years after his first exposure to Kierkegaard's writings. Here, of course, one may speak meaningfully of Kierkegaard's influence, and such influence is evident. Particularly noticable by its absence from All Hallows' Eve is any symbol of the Infinite.

Instead Williams employs the structure of the novel itself to function in the role previously assigned to the symbol. The structure is predicated upon two worlds: the finite temporal world of the living and the infinite eternal world of the dead. This bipartite structure allows Williams to formulate a model of human nature which closely resembles Kierkegaard's division between the finite and infinite selves, by having the "same" characters function in both worlds. Williams is thus able to explore the human encounter with the Infinite in a far more naturalistic and credible manner than in his earlier novels, for while few people are likely to run into the archetypal Lion of Strength, nothing is more certain in an individual's life, as Kierkegaard notes, than the encounter with death.<sup>5</sup>

By depicting a universe in which life and death (the finite and the Infinite) interpenetrate, Williams powerfully underscores Kierkegaard's notion that for man to encounter the Infinite he need only turn his attention inward and discover his eternal self. But as All Hallows' Eve demonstrates, this encounter with the eternal self forces man through the painful and humiliating process of recognizing his inability to concretize the ethical demands of that self. Only when self-sufficiency is denied by actively accepting help from "another" can the individual find the liberty which comes through belief in the forgiveness of sins. Then and only then can one rest transparently before God in the true human condition of ordained dependence.

## I

Thomas Howard notes that the Graal is "[t]he thing that controls everything" in War in Heaven (1930).<sup>6</sup> Williams' decision to employ the Graal as a concrete symbol of the Infinite clearly indicates that he is working with an orthodox Christian center of gravity. Howard writes:

It is an obvious image for Williams to use, since it is always attached in our imagination to that Supper, the whole point of which was what Williams would call Exchange, or Substitution, that is, someone's giving up his life for the sake of others, which is the simple and fathomless principle of love.

While this may be its obvious symbolic significance, its function within the novel as a manifestation of the Infinite often generates human activities which are hardly eucharistic. But this behaviour is typical of the effect which an encounter with the Infinite has on characters in Williams' novels. The Graal here, like the Stone in Many Dimensions, the Neo-Platonic Archetypes in The Place of the Lion and the Tarot in The Greater Trumps, serves as a touchstone with respect to the characters in the novels. These touchstones reveal characters for what they are and/or force the characters to define themselves. What Prester John, the Keeper of the Graal, indicates about the relationship between the Graal and the characters in War in Heaven generally holds true for the relationship between the symbols of the Infinite and the characters in all of Williams' novels:

"I am John," a voice sounded, "and I am the prophecy of the things that are to be and are. You who have sought the centre of the Graal, behold through me that which you

seek, receive from me that which you are. He that is righteous, let him be righteous still; he that is filthy, let him be filthy still. I am rejection to him that hath sought rejection; I am destruction to him that hath wrought destruction; I am sacrifice to him that hath offered sacrifice. Friend to my friends and lover to my lovers, I will quit all things, for I am myself and I am He that sent me. (p. 245-46)

In War in Heaven three distinct categories of characters reveal themselves in the action generated by the invasion of the Infinite -- here the discovery of the Graal: the saved, those who may be saved and the damned. The Archdeacon who falls into this first category occupies the unique position of being the only saintly male character in all of Williams' novels (with the possible exception of Peter Stanhope in Descent into Hell). One of the signs of the Archdeacon's advancement on the Way lies in his ability to commune with and act in accordance with the dictates of his eternal self:

By long practice he had accustomed himself in any circumstances -- in company or alone, at work or at rest, in speech or in silence -- to withdraw into that place where action is created.: The cause of all action there disposed itself according to that Will which was its nature, and, so disposing itself, moved him easily as a part of its own accommodation to the changing wills of men, so that at any time and at all times its own perfection was maintained, now known in endurance, now in beauty, now in wisdom, now in joy. (p. 118)

The Archdeacon's ability to concretize the demands of the infinite self (however unrealistic such a prospect may seem to the reader) stems from his acceptance of his ordained dependence on God. When Gregory Persimmons, ostensibly one of the villains of the novel, argues that man "can choose his destiny . . . [and] decide what star or what god he will follow," the Archdeacon counters:

"If you spell destiny and god with capital letters — no," the Archdeacon said. "All destinies and all gods bring him to One, but he chooses how to know Him."

"He may defy and deny him for ever," Gregory said, with a gesture.

"You can defy and deny the air you breathe or the water you drink," the Archdeacon answered comfortably. "But if you do you die." (p. 85)

What we have in the Archdeacon is a character who has long ago made the "leap" of faith and who is now so concretized in that faith that he is all but entirely delivered from the spectre of self-consciousness. This freedom from self-consciousness allows the Archdeacon to affirm God's absolute sovereignty without worrying about whether his conception of God is adequate to the task that his faith assigns God. He believes outside himself (p. 70).

At the opposite end of the soteriological dialectic in War in Heaven we find "the Greek." In Kierkegaardian terms he is a character totally concretized in demonic despair. He represents absolute rejection of everything, including himself, and yet he cannot rid himself of the self he rejects.<sup>9</sup> The narrator's description of the Greek's face could serve well as an epigraph for Kierkegaard's The Sickness Unto Death:

The Greek had thrust his face out, and as the Duke saw it in the full light he gave a little gasp of dismay. For the face that he saw looked at him from a great distance and yet was itself that distance. It was white and staring and sick with a horrible sickness . . . . (p. 216)

Between these two extremes one finds the majority of the characters — the existentially undefined. Although Williams does not detail the existential progress of these characters very extensively, one may nonetheless detect aspects of Kierkegaard's soteriological dialectic in their development. Barbara Rackstraw, for example, is described as a woman "who



probably drifted through the world like most people, 'neither for God nor for his enemies'" (p. 160). As result of this initial lack of definition, Barbara's encounter with the Infinite, occasioned when Gregory Persimmons smears occult ointment on her wound, forces her into a humanly irremediable crisis with herself:

[I]t [the ointment] was more likely simply to define and energize the one [evil] side, without giving it entire separation and control. All with which he had felt himself one would be to Barbara an invader, a conquerer, perhaps even an infernal lover; she would feel it in her body, her blood, her mind, her soul. Unless indeed she also became that, though since without her definite intention, so without her definite control. (pp. 160-61)

Though Barbara does find her body "helpless to the driving energy of the Adversary," her memory is free enough to cry out for help "to her lover and to her God" (p. 161). This cry will never go unanswered in any of Williams' writings. Here the Infinite which generated the crisis comes to her aid in the form of Prester John — another version of the Impossible resolution to man's impossible plight (p. 206). Barbara's terrifying experience of limit allows her to escape the damnation accompanying the desire for self-sufficiency by graciously "encouraging" her to seek help from another. Salvation, as Prester John declares, is not carried in oneself but in the heart of the universe (p. 203).

Gregory Persimmons, unlike Barbara who has drifted through life, reveals himself as a character who is totally committed to the power of spiritual possession. He is both a murderer and a satanist, and yet in many ways he is closer to salvation than any other character in the novel, with the exception of the Archdeacon. The narrator describes the qualities in Persimmons which contribute to his "naturally religious spirit":

He beyond any of them demanded a response from the darkness; a rush of ardent faith believed that it came; and in full dependence on that faith acted and influenced his circumstances. Prayer was natural to him as it was not to Sir Giles or Lionel, or, indeed, to Barbara, and to the mind of the devotee the god graciously assented. Conversion was natural to him, and propaganda, and the sacrifice both of himself and others, if that god demanded it. (p. 174)

This passage provides good evidence that Williams, like Kierkegaard, recognizes the supreme religious value of passionate, single-minded belief translated into action. The key to Persimmons' salvation lies in the fact that his loyalty lies outside of himself in "the god" — and his loyalty is absolute. At the conclusion of the novel *Prester John*, as we have seen, reveals that all of Persimmons' service to his dark lord can be counted as service to God, but to accept the God's offer of salvation he must "[d]ie, then, as this other [the murdered man] has died, and there shall be agreement with [him] also in the end . . ." (p. 246). This Persimmons effectively does when he gives himself up to the law. Persimmons' action becomes a type of substitutionary gesture which allows him to participate in the archetypal Substitution of Christ.

In addition to the "Kierkegaardian" elements evident in the soteriological dialectic employed in War in Heaven, the novel contains asides which indicate further affinities between Williams and Kierkegaard. The Archdeacon, for example, when confronted with the difficulty of interpreting inconclusive evidence, glancingly comments: "No-one can possibly do more than decide what to believe" (p. 113) — a comment in fundamental agreement with Kierkegaard's notion that belief lies beyond the sphere of a purely finite rational dialectic. Another unmistakably Kierkegaardian moment in the novel

occurs when the harassed and pessimistic Lionel Rackstraw is informed by Prester John that ruin may be "happy" and despair "fortunate" (p. 250). Kierkegaard would find no objection to this claim, for times of absolute crisis, in his analysis; grace persons with the capacity to act meaningfully, and meaningful action is one of the necessary conditions of salvation.

## II

Many Dimensions (1931)<sup>10</sup> manifests a center of gravity which, on a cursory analysis, might appear compatible with all three of the great monotheistic faiths. In this novel the symbol of the Infinite takes the form of Solomon's Stone. Within this Stone, which we learn is the "First Matter" of creation, appear the four letters of the Tetragrammaton — the unutterable name of the One God. With the possession of this Stone comes great power: the ability to move instantly through time and space, the ability to enter another's thoughts and the ability to heal the sick. The Stone proves to be limited only by the capacities of the individual who wields it (p. 58). Like the Graal, the Stone guarantees that all who come into contact with it receive their desires, hence its name "the End of Desire" (p. 43), but because man's desires are not formulated in a moral vacuum the Stone also judges those desires just by Being what it is.

While all three of the major monotheistic religions could claim that the Stone "belonged" to their faith, the soteriological dialectic generated by the Stone leaves little doubt that Christian rather than Jewish or Muslim

doctrine lies at the center of the work. Although the principles governing the soteriological dialectic of Many Dimensions remain similar to those of War in Heaven, Williams provides a much more detailed account of that dialectic in Many Dimensions by carefully tracing Chloe Burnett's existential development towards salvation. Chloe quickly emerges in the novel as a marked character. The Persian, the Hajji Ibrahim, makes the following portentous announcement at their first meeting: "[Y]ou have a hint of the holy letters on your forehead, and Allah shall bring you to the Resignation" (p. 45). The Hajji's reference to the Resignation (which he later informs her is "within") immediately calls to mind Kierkegaard's belief that "resignation" constitutes the first movement of the double movement of infinity. For Kierkegaard, resignation:

. . . is named as the first condition for this transformation of the individual by pathos. Through resignation the single individual liberates himself from finite goals; these must take second place, and the eternal comes to the foreground.

Chloe is brought to an awareness of the Eternal when she turns her gaze inwards and contemplates the nature of her being. The language used to describe her reaction to her interview with the Hajji contains some remarkably Kierkegaardian echoes:

[S]he hated the old man who had come to her and talked of kings and prophets and heroes till she was dizzy with happiness and dread. Most of all she hated herself. The dark mystery of being that possessed her held no promise of light, but she turned to it and sank into it, content so to avoid the world. (p. 51)

We may compare this passage to one in Kierkegaard's The Concept of Anxiety:

Anxiety may be compared with dizziness. He whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But what is the reason for this? It is just as much in his own eye as in the abyss, for suppose he had not looked down. Hence anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself. Freedom succumbs in this dizziness. Further than this, psychology cannot and will not go. In that very moment everything is changed,<sup>12</sup> and freedom, when it again rises, sees that it is guilty.

Although Williams had not read Kierkegaard this passage suggests that his understanding of the nature of the psychological mechanism of sin is remarkably similar to Kierkegaard's. Thus in Chloe's first encounter with herself she reenacts the Fall,<sup>13</sup> moving from a state of innocence and ignorance to guilt.<sup>14</sup> From this starting point of guilt she must proceed.

Chloe's natural reverence (or fear) of the Stone tends to discourage her from using the Stone to gain her own finite desires. It is as if she suspects from the beginning that "the End of Desire" means liberation from all finite desires men attempt to achieve through the Stone. Her natural distaste for trafficking through the Stone, however, is not enough to deliver her from her newly formed self-consciousness. She must first make a clear decision as to whether she believes the Stone to be, in Lord Arglay's words, a "fable" or "something extreme and terrible": "romance or truth" (pp. 128-29). Williams, like Kierkegaard, insists that this decision be based on an absolute either/or. Arglay's formulation of the either/or proposition, significantly, is prefaced by his admission that "I don't see a little bit how we can decide. It's a question -- let's be perfectly frank -- of what we want to believe" (p. 128). Here we find the rational insecurity preceding the "leap" once more.

Following Chloe's and Arglay's decision to believe in the Stone, they concretize themselves in their new faith by attempting to liberate the "lab" assistant who has been trapped in time. During this attempt they undergo certain experiences which reveal further Kierkegaardian elements in the novel's soteriological dialectic. Before Arglay labours through the Stone to free the lab assistant, he raises within himself the terrible problem of self-consciousness and its relationship to the object of belief:

But I have promised to believe in God, and here is a temptation to infidelity already, since I know that any god in whom I can believe will be consonant with my mind. So if I believe it must be in a god consonant with me. This would seem to limit God very considerably. (p. 135)

Arglay, true to Williams' and Kierkegaard's belief that the self holds no solution to the problem of self-consciousness, finds deliverance from himself through the person of Chloe:

Also that if I choose to attribute such an admirable creation to God I am thereby enlarging my own ideas of Him, which by themselves would never have reached it. So that in some sense I do believe outside myself. (p. 135)

Although Chloe's crisis assumes a different form, the decision she finds herself forced to make boils down to whether she will be centered in herself or in another. Her decision-making process involves two distinct stages. First she must choose between Arglay as he exists outside of her in his "intimate but austere government" (p. 138), and an image of Arglay shaped after her own desire. Eventually she recognizes the hollowness of her own creation and elects to serve the "intimate but austere government." The next stage of her crisis authenticates her first decision. As soon as she has

rejected the false Arglay she experiences absolute loneliness, desolation, pain and loss. To all appearances she has been abandoned to the vacuity of her own consciousness. When she has reached the stage where she lays "stupified in anguish," she receives a summons from outside herself: "Chloe! Chloe, child!" In the attempt to respond to this summons she is delivered. Before the "outer world" reappears, however, she experiences a vision of the Stone which reveals that her loyalties have moved beyond Arglay to the Stone itself: "Away where the apparition of Lord Arglay had seemed to be, it [the Stone] shone, white interspersed with gold, dilating and lucid from within" (p. 140). Here, Williams, in imagistic terms, conveys the Kierkegaardian principle that seeking help from others often constitutes the first step in finding help in God. It is only when Chloe's loyalty is completely centered in the Stone that the lab assistant gains his liberty; for she no longer works through the Stone, the Stone works through her.

From this point on Chloe's existential development is rapid. The next major crisis she undergoes is the temptation to use the Stone to protect herself from bodily harm, but here, as in The House of the Octopus, the temptation presents itself in disguise. She will not use the Stone to save herself — No. She will use the Stone to save the Stone. In a typical Williamsesque aside the narrator comments on the temptation:

She was doing for it what it could not do for itself. She was protecting it. Not being a reader of religious history Chloe was ignorant what things have been done in the strength of that plea, or with what passionate anxiety men have struggled to protect the subordination of Omnipotence. But in her despair she rejected what churches and kings and prelates have not rejected; she refused to be deceived, she refused to attempt to be helpful to the God....(pp. 217-18)

Chloe's desperate prayer: "Thy will,...do...do if Thou wilt; or ...

not" (p. 218) signals her arrival at the Resignation. Now comes the second movement of infinity, the concretizing of the demands of the eternal self -- and God demands that she make herself "the Path for the Stone," the medium through which the Stone may regain its unity. The narrator's description of this event clearly indicates that the center of gravity of the novel is Christian. The Incarnational allusions are unmistakable:

Through the clothes that veiled it he saw that body receiving the likeness of the Stone. Translucency entered it, and through and in the limbs the darkness which was the Tetragrammaton moved and hid and revealed. He saw the Mystery upon her hands melting into them; it was flowing away, gently but very surely; it lessened in size and intensity as he watched. And as there it grew less, so more and more exquisitely and finally it took its place within her -- what the Stone had been she now was. (p. 261)

As if to hammer the point home Williams concludes Chloe's drama by relating that from the moment that "...her inner being had been caught with the Stone into the Unity" (p. 267), she passes into a coma until she dies nine months later.

In addition to this markedly Kierkegaardian soteriological dialectic, Many Dimensions boasts other Kierkegaardian elements. As has been noted, Arglay underscores the rational risk involved in a leap of faith. In another passage, which recalls Thomas in Terror of Light, the narrator comments on the nature and value of Arglay's disposition:

But Lord Arglay, at once in contact and detached, at once faithless and believing, beheld all these things in the light of that fastidious and ironical goodwill which, outside mystical experience, is the finest and noblest capacity man has developed in and against the universe. (p. 194)

It is extremely interesting that Kierkegaard regards irony as the highest



form of strictly human consciousness (excluding the religious or "mystical") available to man.<sup>15</sup>

### III

The Place of the Lion (1931)<sup>16</sup> is Williams' most sensational and apocalyptic version of the invasion of the Infinite. Here the Infinite assumes the form of Neo-Platonic Archetypes or "Divine Universals." Although one of the characters of the novel (the highly suspect Foster) expresses doubt as to whether these universals correspond to "the angels and archangels of which the Christian Church talks". (p. 53), the novel employs an extra-textual authority (Marcellus Victorinus of Bologna's work De Angelis) to establish the fact that these nine orders of "Divine Celestials" correspond to the "original Dionysian nine" (p. 91). Williams, as if to allay suspicions that the novel contains other than a Christian center of gravity, has one of the characters (Richardson, a highly credible mystic) reprimand Foster's desire to "make a sacrifice": "'Fool,' he cried out, 'there's only one sacrifice, and the God of gods makes it, not you'" (p. 145).

The Place of the Lion, like all of Williams' pre-Kierkegaardian novels, exhibits a fascination with the manifestations of the Infinite, but like Many Dimensions, this novel continues Williams' movement in the direction of more dominant existential concerns. One could argue, for example, that Williams' interest in Damaris Tighe's existential development structures the novel more extensively than his interest in the global crisis generated by the Archetypes themselves. Once again the soteriological dialectic evidenced in Damaris' development displays many Kierkegaardian elements.

The basic situation portrayed in The Place of the Lion, if seen from Damaris' perspective, could only be described as "ironical" in Kierkegaard's sense of the word. For Kierkegaard, one recalls, irony represents a misrelation between an individual's essential and phenomenological realities. Damaris is writing a thesis entitled Pythagorean Influences on Abelard. When word of her "expertise" is circulated she finds herself pressured to stand in for Berringer (the comatose leader of a local study group). Damaris agrees to deliver her paper, The Eidola and the Angeli, hoping that she in turn will be able to use contacts in the group to get the paper into print. The thesis of the paper concerns "a correspondence between the development of the formative Ideas of Hellenic philosophy and the hierarchic angelicals of Christian mythology" (p. 24). During her delivery of the paper at the meeting one of these "angelicals" turns up in the form of a huge crowned snake. Dora Wilmot one of the members of the study group, sees it and points to the floor. The narrator takes pains to record that Damaris looks and sees nothing.

The terrible irony of the situation testifies to the misrelation within Damaris — a misrelation which prohibits her from recognizing her "subject" come to life. The misrelation can be formulated as follows. Her essential reality resides in what Anthony (her lover) refers to as "something that loved truth" within her (p. 136). Her phenomenological reality resides in the love of Damaris Tighe for Damaris Tighe's pictures and diagrams of the truth. In Williams' estimation this ironic misrelation bespeaks an intellectual corruption which literally stinks (p. 30).

As was the case for Cranmer, Damaris must be brought to the place where she becomes aware both of this misrelation and of her inability to remedy it. Williams brings the crisis to her in the form of a large stinking pterodactyl, the antithesis of the Eagle of Wisdom, for this is what Damaris has made of herself — a reified corruption of wisdom. Confronted with this hideous nightmare she attempts to flee. Here too the initial shape of "the God's offer" offends and terrifies. Flight is useless. She finds herself floundering and trapped in the "bog" of her intellect, confronted with a "hideous and vile corruption" (p. 133). She surrenders herself and makes "one last and feeble and continuous effort to call Anthony" (p. 133). Anthony, of course, comes to the rescue and what follows between them is nothing less than Damaris' encounter with mercy in its sternest form:

[H]is voice convinced her of what he said, and the authority that was in it directed and encouraged even while it awed and warned her. He neither doubted nor permitted her to doubt; the whole gospel — morals and mythology at once — entered into and possessed her. When he came to speak of Quentin's flight she trembled a little as she sat and tried to move her hand away. But Anthony, standing above her and looking out towards the darkening eastern sky, did not release it; half a chain and half a caress, his own retained hers by the same compulsion that she heard in his voice, and he exposed her to the knowledge of what she had done. Merciless and merciful, he held her; pitiful and unpitying, he subordinated her to the complete realization of herself and her past. (pp. 136-37)

Damaris—both acknowledges her guilt and accepts the forgiveness of sins. She is encouraged by Anthony to follow the dictates of her conscience (eternal self) and to attempt to help Quentin whom she had previously spurned. Anthony's reflections on Damaris' desire to help Quentin display great similarity to Kierkegaard's notions on the importance of immediate action<sup>17</sup>:

57

These cries of the soul produced their own capacities, and though too often the capacity faded as the crisis passed, it was better to make use of it at once than to find reasons for neglecting it. (p. 156)

In addition to the distinctly Kierkegaardian soteriological orientation of the novel as evidenced in Damaris' existential development, The Place of the Lion contains other Kierkegaardian elements. Following Anthony's encounter with and reconciliation to himself (described in the chapter "The Pit in the House"), he finds that he has lost "the little goblin of self-consciousness which always, deride it as he would, and derision in fact only nourished and magnified it, danced a saraband in his mind -- that goblin had faded and was gone" (pp. 119-20). In a similar vein Damaris, following her conversion, discovers that she has lost her self-preoccupation, for "...she herself didn't -- for the moment -- exist for herself" (p. 167). Here, once more, self-consciousness is cast as a trap from which "another" must deliver the self.

The very existential nature of Williams' understanding of the relationship between being and choice<sup>18</sup> is conveyed in another passage:

How could there be choice, unless there was preference, and if there was preference there was no choice, for it was not possible to choose against that preferring nature which was his being; yet being consisted in choice, for only by taking and doing this and not that could being know itself, could it indeed be; to be then consisted precisely in making an inevitable choice, and all that was left was to know the choice, yet even then was the chosen thing the same as the nature that chose. . . . (p. 114)

Another unmistakably Kierkegaardian element in the novel concerns the "terror and anguish" which accompany man's experience of the Infinite. Williams' description of Quentin's terror is clearly directed as a critique

against those proponents of "safe" religion who subscribe to "a pious hope, a devout ejaculation, a general sympathetic sense of a kindly universe -- but nothing upsetting or bewildering, no agony, no darkness, no uncreated light" (pp. 74-75). Quentin possesses a far more accurate grasp of Williams' and Kierkegaard's version of the Divine Nature. Quentin understandably flees from God; for in Kierkegaard's analysis, when a man is called by God he has reason to be "pierced through and through by a mortal dread; for he understands that this sort of endowment is usually certain destruction."<sup>19</sup> Quentin's "destruction" takes the form of his progressive reduction to gibbering insanity as he attempts to avoid the Archetypal Lion. When he is finally driven beyond hope he finds deliverance in Damaris and Anthony. That Damaris and Quentin seek refuge from Foster at the feet of the Lamb locates the ultimate source of salvation. It is in Christ alone that man discovers the solution to his existential crisis.

## IV

The Greater Trumps (1932),<sup>20</sup> with the exception of Shadows of Ecstasy, represents Williams' furthest fictional departure from an orthodox Christian ontology,<sup>21</sup> yet even given the explicitly occult nature of the symbol Williams employs to represent the Infinite, both Williams' thematic development of the symbol and the soteriological dialectic within the work provide good evidence that this departure touches accidentals rather than essentials. The key to Williams' development rests in the disclosure of the central figure of the Fool. The Fool, though an enigma to occult science, presents no enigma whatsoever to Sybil, the protagonist's aunt. Whereas all the other characters in the novel perceive the Fool to be stationary among

the other moving figures of the Dance of the images corresponding to the Tarot deck, Sybil alone recognizes that the Fool is moving and acting so quickly that, in effect, He is omnipresent.

Sybil's perception carries ontological significance when one recalls that she is both the principal redeemer in the work and an advocate of the theology of Love:

She [Sybil] was doubtful also about God: Love would have been sufficient by itself...

...more and more securely the working of that Fate which was Love possessed her.

...it wasn't really she who was walking, it was Love, and naturally Love would be safe in his own storm.

...and the delight of creation answered the delight of the Creator, joy triumphing in joy. (pp. 125-26; italics mine)

In another passage Sybil explicitly links the Fool to the "mystery of Love" (p. 139). Given also that Williams grounds his doctrine of Romantic Theology in the person of Christ there can be little doubt that the Fool functions as a Christ figure.<sup>22</sup>

More than any other symbol in Williams' novels the Tarot takes over The Greater Trumps. As a result the novel offers little in the way of a detailed presentation of the existential development of most of the characters. Henry Aaron, however, proves to be a notable exception to this observation. Although Henry's existential progress is not detailed nearly as comprehensively as is the case for Chloe in Many Dimensions or Damaris in The Place of the Lion, Williams' imagistic presentation of his experience

limit is one of the finest and most instructive passages in Williams' fiction.

Henry faces his encounter with the Infinite while still hopelessly naive about his limitations. When Nancy, his lover, asks him what he wishes to do with the Tarot, his unsupportable hubris reveals itself: "'Who knows?' he answered, rising on the wings of his own terrific dream. 'Create.'" (p. 51). In order to realize his "terrific dream," Henry is not unwilling to resort to the murder of Lothair, Nancy's father. This he attempts by unleashing the elemental powers of the Tarot against Lothair. Nancy thwarts Henry's designs and in the process unwittingly frees the elementals from the control of the Tarot. In order to regain control of the elementals Nancy and Henry enter the Dance of the Tarots, jointly wielding the Greater Trumps. Although they enter the golden mist of the Dance united, Henry soon finds himself separated from Nancy and isolated in the mist — an imagistic statement in keeping with Kierkegaard's notion<sup>6</sup> that each one encounters the eternal absolutely alone.<sup>23</sup> Soon after Henry is separated from Nancy, numerous irresistible "hands" reach out of the mist and encase Henry. He is not permitted to move, and as he struggles the grip becomes more absolute. Williams writes:

The hours grew into days, into years. Imperceptibly the grasp had tightened; that round his ankles had drawn them together, and that also round his wrists. He was still incapable of movement, but his incapacity was more closely constrained; he was forced more tightly into the mere straight shape of his enclosed body, for the mist closed again round him and moulded itself to his form. He was defined as himself....(p. 166)

Henry's definition takes the form of the Falling Tower or the Tower of Babel (one of the Tarot): a great tower and a gigantic image of himself which, though "petrified from loins to head," leaves him, meaning to "lift a

great marble arm and reach up and pick the stars from heaven and tangle them into a crown — a hard sharp golden crown — for a head such as Nimrod's, perhaps his own" (p. 168). Every time he makes the attempt, however, the tower falls and then continues to build itself only to fall again. Finally after countless centuries and cycles of construction and collapse "...his heart failed within him and he assented to the impossibility of success. The stars were beyond his reach; Babel was for ever doomed to fall..." (p. 168). The image of the tower beautifully captures Kierkegaard's notion of the experience of limit. Until Henry is absolutely conscious of his limitations, his helplessness, his status as a creature before God, he will never be free from this false image of himself. He must realize, with Sybil, that God gave man the burden of choice and responsibility, "that burden which is only given in order to be relinquished, that task put into the hands of man in order that his own choice may render it back to its creator, that yoke which, once wholly lifted and put on, is immediately no longer to be worn" (pp. 52-53).

Henry is delivered from this nightmare of self-awareness through his recollection of Nancy's instructions to him that "...in case we are divided, remember that I always wanted to love" (p. 162).

But now, each time that he felt the dreadful ruin go falling through him, he heard also one voice rising among that strange and shattering chorus and saying: "Remember I wanted to love." Out of each overthrow it sounded, and at every overthrow more clearly. This alone of all his past was urgent; this alone had meaning in the void to which his purposed crashed. (pp. 168-69)

It is when he strives to answer this call "with some single willingness of intention" (p. 169) that he finds himself delivered. Thus Henry's experience of limit follows the typical Kierkegaardian pattern. The resolution of his



crisis arrives from outside himself and derives from Nancy's love for him. His willingness to rest transparently before God is subsequently indicated by his ready confession to Lothair that he had attempted to murder him. He can no longer despair because a nothing before God cannot despair. Henry has discovered himself.

## V

Thirteen years pass between the writing of The Greater Trumps in 1932 and the writing of All Hallows' Eve<sup>24</sup> in 1945. During that interim Williams became acquainted with Kierkegaard's writings. While it is impossible to locate the precise nature of Kierkegaard's influence on Williams as manifested in the novel, there are several major differences between this novel and all the pre-Kierkegaardian novels which may be accounted for reasonably with reference to Kierkegaard's thought.

All Hallows' Eve, for example, is conspicuous for its lack of a substantial symbol of the Infinite. Instead man's encounter with the Infinite occurs in the realm of death — an encounter which necessarily involves (or will involve) every human being. Few people will share Quentin's experience in The Place of the Lion, but all, like Lester Furnival, will face death. Williams, therefore, by replacing the machinery of the Infinite, which crops up in the early novels, with a more psychologically convincing exploration of man's relationship to the Eternal as it inevitably makes its presence felt to every human being, removes fictive constructs which are apt to allow the reader to distance himself from the material.

Given that the novel has no symbol of the Infinite, the center of gravity of the work is not as immediately obvious. Instead of focusing narrative interest on the symbol and referring the characters' existential developments to that visible presence, All Hallows' Eve reveals the Infinite through the characters' existential developments. That the Infinite is thus disclosed can readily be accounted for on the basis of Kierkegaard's influence, for Kierkegaard insists that man's encounter with his inner self awakens his awareness of the Eternal. Whereas the pre-Kierkegaardian novels are about both the symbol and the soteriological dialectic, All Hallows' Eve is strictly about the soteriological dialectic generated by man's encounter with himself.

Given that Williams does not resort to a symbol to provide a visible center of gravity for the novel, he elects to achieve living unity in the novel by orchestrating the existential developments of the characters in such a manner as to suggest that an infinite and providential force lurks within and behind the action. In some way, then, the actions of each character must suggest Providence or the Acts of the City (the novel's term). Thus the largest technical challenge facing Williams in All Hallows' Eve is how to demonstrate organically a coherence, whereas before he could simply point to a symbol. It is Williams' grasp of a distinctly Kierkegaardian soteriological dialectic which allows him to meet this challenge.

Obviously there is no question here of examining each and every character's history. Perhaps it is sufficient to claim that there are no throwaway characters in the work. Each character ultimately achieves a

definition consonant with the internal requirements of, and choices made by, that character, as well as a definition of character in keeping with the larger soteriological principles which govern the individual soteriological dialectic undergone by each character. While an examination of any character's existential progress in All Hallows' Eve would reveal a clearly Kierkegaardian soteriological dialectic, examination of Lester's history suggests itself, for All Hallows' Eve concerns her story more than that of any other character.

Lester is perhaps the most unusual character in Williams' fiction in that she remains dead throughout the entire narrative. The novel opens with her standing on Westminster Bridge in a London devoid of humanity. We soon discover, with Lester, that she is dead, the victim of a freak plane crash. The London Lester finds herself in proves to be a London of her own making, the result of life choices which privileged things over people. Two people, however, seem to have mattered to her: Richard, her widowed husband with whom she had lived six months, and Evelyn, a friend who was killed with her in the accident.

The narrator informs us that never in Lester's life had real volition and initiative been required, for her "fortune" had never forced her to experience "death in life." Now she is unprepared for her experience of "life in death" (p. 8). This, once more, is a version of Kierkegaard's notion that individuals can only truly act when their phenomenological reality conflicts with their essential reality. Lester had never defined herself in life, so now she must choose herself in death. Evelyn's protestation, "I haven't done anything, anything. I haven't done anything

at all" (p. 19), strikes Lester as an all too terribly true indictment of both their lives. Here is revealed Lester's greatest virtue — her desire to face facts. Evelyn's chief characteristic, and ultimately damning flaw, on the other hand, resides in her refusal to acknowledge the truth of her situation.

Williams next introduces Betty (Lester's immediate saviour) into the narrative. Betty is the child and victim of the magician Clerk Simon who sends her spirit into the realm of death in order to gain information about the future. During one of her excursions into the City (the transtemporal and transspacial realm of death), the eternal glorious spirit-Betty, by moving back in time, encounters her finite self on her most recent train excursion:

"Be yourself, Betty," she said admonishingly, and saw herself on the platform outside a compartment. This, she knew at once, was her most recent journey.... And there by her mother was the other Betty, quiet, wan, unhappy.... There was herself, her sister, her twin. She laughed at her; she said, gaily and yet impatiently, "Oh don't worry! Isn't it all a game? Why can't you play it?"

She did not know why she was so sure of the game, nor how she knew that it was her mother's game, and only a courtesy, if she could, to play it well. She added, "It won't hurt you." The other Betty said, "It does hurt me." She answered, "Well, if you can't stand a pinch — Oh darling, laugh!" The other Betty stood wretched and mute.)  
(pp. 80-81)

By emphasizing a narrative form which traces a single character's movements within both the realm of the dead and the realm of the living, Williams is able graphically to portray the Kierkegaardian doctrine that man is comprised of an infinite and finite self. Betty is by no means unique in this regard. When Lester eventually witnesses Betty "shifting" between her finite and infinite selves, she recognizes the same division within

herself (p. 136). Betty thus functions as a visible paradigm of human nature. The key to salvation lies precisely in following the advice Betty gives Bettina, namely "Be Yourself." But the attempt to concretize the demands of the infinite self, as Bettina recognizes, involves the acceptance of pain, and what may be but a "pinch" to the Eternal, as both Kierkegaard and Williams are aware, often translates into time as an excruciating martyrdom.

Betty (to return to the narrative) performs her duties for Simon in the spirit world, but before returning to her body she proclaims the name of her beloved Jonathan throughout the City of the dead. Evelyn hears the cry, recognizes the source, and rushes off in the attempt to alleviate the ennui of her self-imposed damnation by tormenting her old acquaintance. Lester too recognizes the cry and, knowing Evelyn's intentions, hurries after her to prevent the torment. But between the time she hears the cry and the time she rushes off, she undergoes a crucial existential crisis.

Betty's cry recalls to Lester her loss of Richard and reveals to Lester her desire to have him with her, as her prisoner:

She saw all this in her mind for as long as it took that other voice to call once more. She saw it clearly — for an aeon; this was what she wanted; this was what she was. This was she, damned; yes, and she was damned; she, being that, was damned. There was no help, unless she could be something other, and there was no power in her to be anything other. As she stood in a trance of horror at herself or at hell, or at both, being one, a word pierced her brain. (p. 89)

Like Cranmer, Lester arrives at the state of total helplessness in self-damnation, which is compounded by the torturing knowledge that her condition is just. She is absolutely correct that there is no help within

her. Help comes when she realizes that she still recognizes the "calls of love" (p. 90). With this realization comes a voice which encourages her to recognize that the hell she contemplates is none other than her "extreme." If she remains true to those "calls of love" outside herself, the extreme can be avoided. Her attempt to aid Betty is her first movement towards salvation.

From this point her progress is rapid. When she enters Simon's house in order to help Betty, she is simultaneously accosted by visions of all her sins against Betty. Recognizing that only Betty can deliver her from these sins, Lester seeks out her friend to set things right. When she meets Betty she discovers an unexpected obstruction to her desire. Betty does not wish to recall the sins, but finally does so at Lester's insistence. Once all is recalled, all is forgiven. Lester's decision to approach Betty signals a major existential movement. Lester effectively places her fate in Betty's hands, for she recognizes that she cannot help herself -- a decision which Lester finds very difficult (p. 129).

The explicitly Christian center of gravity of All Hallows' Eve reveals itself shortly after Betty forgives Lester. Lester remains at Betty's bedside, disposing herself to whatever service she may be called to make on Betty's behalf. That intention of service is shortly called upon by the Acts of the City. Clerk Simon attempts to kill Betty using the "backward-intoned Terragrammaton." Lester, who remains in the room invisible to Simon, responds to Betty's appeal for friendship, and the laws of the City accept Lester's response as an offer of substitution. Simon's death-light is now directed against her and with the assault comes a terrible intensity of pain. But pain is not all Lester discovers:

Of one other thing she was conscious. She had been standing and now she was no longer standing. She was leaning back on something, some frame which from her buttocks to her head supported her; indeed she could have believed, but she was not sure, that her arms, flung out on each side, held on to a part of the frame, as along a beam of wood. (p. 159)

Here again, Williams imagistically grounds the doctrine of substitution in the archetypal substitution symbolized by the Cross.

Lester, from this point, on is basically concretized in her infinite self. She has gained self-knowledge predicated upon her recognition of her total helplessness in the face of sin, and found deliverance from that sin in "another" (in this instance, Betty). Having arrived at this stage of self-definition, Lester, through her actions, comprises part of the Acts of the City. Her infinite self moves in its own complicity with God as an agent of Providence. Her function at this stage of her development resembles Sybil's function throughout The Greater Trumps.

Other Kierkegaardian elements are also detectable in the novel. Richard, for example, ruminates on the spiritual dangers of providing instant anodynes or false panaceas to sufferers. Here again we find Kierkegaard's notion that suffering proves inescapable in any approach to God:

He would almost rather have remained unhealed; yes, but then he did not need healing. He thought uneasily of those who, themselves reasonably secure, urge the poor to prefer freedom rather than security. How could he have done it himself -- have lived in pain? have perished miserably? Yet the cost of avoiding that was to be lost in the hypnotic mystery of the creeping death: an intolerable, an unforgivable choice! (p. 215)

Richard's experience of "despair" at his own self-indulgence and

inability to love likewise carries Kierkegaardian echoes. Richard finds himself "refused" by the new birth, but the narrator comments: "He was as yet ignorant of the fact that this [refusal] was one method of [the new birth's] becoming actual. He despaired" (p. 238). In Kierkegaardian terms, Richard's despair is merely a negative spiritual component of the soteriological dialectic which testifies to his heightened spiritual consciousness, and every form of despair is, in principle, redeemable.<sup>25</sup>

The narrator's contention that "[i]llusion, to the magician as to the saint, is a great danger" (p. 240), touches on other Kierkegaardian elements in the novel.<sup>26</sup> The narrator proceeds to comment that "the master in Goetia has always at the center of his heart a single tiny everlasting illusion..." (pp. 240-41). Simon's illusion, and that of all the damned, resides in his belief in his absolute self-sufficiency, for according to Kierkegaard's and Williams' reasoning the facts of the universe are such that true human identity is achieved only by accepting ordained dependence on God. This is not to say that man must accept this position, but if he does not he must learn to live with the image (or images in Simon's case) which he has made of himself. The horror of such a prospect is starkly conveyed in Williams' description of the final tryst between Simon and his two magical duplicates:

He stared, as he sank and as that in which he was held moved in its own fashion, at the rain of swift-darting points between him and himself. The City, so, was visible to him. "If I go down into hell, thou art there"; but if I go down into thee --? If even yet he could attend to those points, he would escape hell; he would never have been in hell. If he could not, he had his changing and unchanging faces to study. He stared at them, imbecile; imbecile, they stared back -- farther and farther, deeper and deeper, through the rose and the burning and the blood. (p. 266)



Thus, while All Hallows' Eve demonstrates a more psychologically convincing and coherent version of man's encounter with the Infinite, which (with reasonable confidence) may be traced to Kierkegaard's direct influence on Williams, the basic soteriological dialectic generated by this encounter differs very little from that of the pre-Kierkegaardian novels. In addition to the common and markedly "Kierkegaardian" soteriological dialectic shared by all five novels, all of these novels also manifest several other comparably "Kierkegaardian" elements. As is to be expected, the common soteriological bias and the nature of the symbol of the Infinite found in the first four novels strongly indicate that all the novels share an orthodox Christian center of gravity similar to Kierkegaard's own formulations. It is not until we turn to Shadows of Ecstasy that we discover Williams' single fictive eccentric to his usual authorial life-view.

4

Shadows of Ecstasy:

An Infinity Void of Content

It was all such a mad mixture, purple rhetoric and precise realism, doctrines of transmutation and babble about African witch-doctors and airships and submarines.

Although Shadows of Ecstasy came to print in 1933 as the fifth in the series of Williams' novels, it was in fact written in 1925, or five years prior to War in Heaven. Originally entitled The Black Bastard, it was rejected by several publishers and finally accepted by Victor Gollancz only after it had been "much rewritten" and retitled Shadows of Ecstasy.<sup>2</sup> Despite this rewriting, which took place in 1932, Shadows of Ecstasy remains something of a puzzle. In Glen Cavaliero's words, "Shadows of Ecstasy stands apart from Williams' other novels."<sup>3</sup> Cavaliero continues to argue that "...it is in fact better read as a prelude, for it sets out the themes and treats of issues which the later books enact."<sup>4</sup>

While Cavaliero's observation that Shadows of Ecstasy should be read as a prelude is certainly apposite, an examination of the novel's center of gravity suggests that its eccentricity with respect to Williams' other novels runs far deeper than what would normally be expected in a propaedeutic text. It is also questionable whether its setting out of themes and treatment of issues is in keeping with the later novels' enactment of those themes and issues. Whereas the later novels manifest both a distinctly orthodox

Christian center of gravity and a clearly defined soteriological dialectic, Shadows of Ecstasy exhibits neither a Christian center of gravity nor any detectable soteriological dialectic such as is characteristic of Williams' fiction. Instead the center of gravity, insofar as one is suggested by the text, resembles what Kierkegaard describes as "[t]he Fichtian principle that subjectivity, the ego, has constitutive validity, that it alone is the almighty."<sup>5</sup> Shadows of Ecstasy, furthermore, demonstrates Kierkegaard's contention that when the center of gravity moves to man himself "without reference to the given actuality":

[It] opened the possibility for the infinity of the subject, but it was a "negative infinity, an infinity without finitude, an infinity void of all content." Fichte's thought became unreal; if it was to achieve actuality, "it had to become concrete."<sup>6</sup>

This is precisely the "problem" with Shadows of Ecstasy.<sup>7</sup> It holds open "the possibility for the infinity of the subject" by tantalizingly suggesting that man may conquer death on the strength of his own imagination; but when Considine (the proponent of this doctrine) is murdered judgement is suspended on the viability of this possibility by refusing to concretize Considine either as defeated by or triumphant over death. Because the novel self-consciously preoccupies itself with the opposition between Considine's anthropomorphic doctrine and Christian doctrine, this refusal to resolve Considine's fate means that the novel itself fails to achieve closure — a feature which clearly separates it from all of Williams' other novels. But this lack of closure is entirely appropriate to the speculative ethos evinced by the work. Shadows of Ecstasy, as it were, poses "the either/or" of Christianity's claim to truth, but refuses to take a final position. Insofar as any position is suggested by both the incipient tendencies within the text

and the text's refusal to take a firm position, it is one which reacts strongly against the "offense" embodied in Christian doctrine.

Perhaps one of the most disturbing aspects of Shadows of Ecstasy to those readers who are familiar with the ideas comprising Williams' theological "system," is the manner in which this novel establishes a distinct opposition between the camp of those characters who support Considine and the camp of those who oppose him, only to divide the proponents of these normally interrelated and mutually supportive theological ideas indiscriminately between the two opposing camps. Roger Ingram, for example, is a character modelled very closely on Williams himself, especially with respect to Ingram's passionate conviction that "all great literature is canonical...."<sup>8</sup> Ingram supports Considine, for Considine alone recognizes that poetry, as Thomas Howard phrases it, "reverberates with the sound of that which is infinitely bigger than itself."<sup>9</sup> Roger's wife, Isabel, a character mature in the practice of the theology of Romantic Love, supports Roger's decision to follow Considine. In the opposing camp we find Sir Bernard, an ironic humorist and sceptic who displays profound suspicions regarding what he interprets to be Considine's rejection of the intellect. Also within this camp are Philip (Sir Bernard's son) and Rosamond his beloved, but in both cases the integrity of their loyalties is suspect. Rosamond, for example, is both attracted to and repulsed by Considine, for she has the same reaction to those qualities in herself which Considine represents. It is on the basis of her pride in what she recognizes to be a false image of herself that she rejects Considine's appeal. Philip, on the other hand, experiences firsthand the truth of Considine's doctrine that in the "exchanged or unexchanged adoration of love" (p. 41) man experiences

foretastes of immortality. Williams identifies Philip's experience with that of Dante (p. 46), thereby linking Considine's doctrine to Romantic Theology. Philip opposes Considine, first because Rosamond does, and second because he does not possess the intellectual or theological capacity to distinguish between the truths and forces which the beloved releases and the beloved herself. The narrator clearly indicates that Philip's loyalty should lie beyond Rosamond, but Philip fails or is unwilling to recognize this (pp. 76-77).

This confusing division within the ranks of characters whom we would expect to find united may be traced to the enigmatic object of that divided opinion — Nigel Considine. Williams seems to delight in employing biblical allusions to compound the mystery of Considine rather than to dispel it. Early on in the novel the narrator alerts the reader to the host of biblical allusions which will follow by referring specifically to the fact that Considine's "Proclamation" sparks renewed interest in "[n]eglected expositors of the Apocalypse" (p. 51). As if to hammer the point home Williams also has Roger quote a few pregnant lines from Yeats' "The Second Coming"<sup>10</sup> (p. 45). Another passage which places the action of Shadows of Ecstasy within an Apocalyptic tradition occurs where Considine (also the executor of a vast fortune) informs the other characters that with his approval the legatees will spend the entire fortune rebuilding the Temple at Jerusalem, in preparation for the coming of Messiah (p. 69).

While there is little doubt that a reader should attend to the Apocalyptic context of the novel, attention to that context does little to remedy the reader's confusion over Considine. In many ways it aggravates the

problem, for Williams employs a series of biblical allusions in reference to Considine which unmistakably carry both Christological and Antichristological echoes. Sir Bernard, for example, draws attention to the fact that women comprise the bulk of Considine's closest followers, just as they formed the majority of the early Christian Church (p. 111). Another Christological allusion occurs where Roger recognizes that "[h]e would have to follow this man [Considine] -- as once, he had read, other men had thrown aside their work and their friends to follow another voice" (p. 129). Considine's speech is likewise rich with Christological echoes. The end of the "Proclamation" runs: "Come, ye blessed, inherit the things laid up for you from the foundations of the world" (p. 53). During a meal which recalls Christ's Last Supper, Considine offers himself to his guests as a living example of the principle that one must "Feed; feed and live..." on the passion of one's own imagination (p. 77).

Beyond these linguistic echoes and specific identifications of Considine with Christ, Considine's drama in many respects resembles Christ's story. In a chapter entitled "Passing through the Midst of Them," the narrator recounts the authorities' futile attempt to arrest Considine who, in escaping, reveals his god-like prowess. When Inkamasi (the Zulu king) attempts to kill Considine and is injured by one of Considine's disciples, Considine rebukes that disciple and has Inkamasi's wounds attended to. Considine is eventually betrayed and killed by one of his closest disciples for what the text specifically refers to as "[p]ieces of silver" (p. 155).

The Antichristological echoes are also present in the work, though not so numerous as the Christological ones. The lines cited from Yeats' "The

"Second Coming" raise the ominous question, "What rough beast, its hour come round at last, / Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?" Considine's fatal head wound and Roger's concluding speculations that Considine may raise himself from the dead and rise up from the sea "once more to threaten and deliver" the world (p. 224), correspond closely to the account of the Antichrist found in the Bible.<sup>11</sup> Caithness, the Anglican priest, refers to Considine as the Antichrist on two occasions, but on the one occasion that he confronts Considine with the allegation, Considine flatly denies it:

"Neither Christ nor Antichrist," the voice of the other answered him, "but I bring a gospel of redemption, and the ends of the world hear it: whom do men say that I, a son of man, am?"

He flung out a hand towards the group of his servants and disciples; he turned his eyes upon them and they answered, Arab and Egyptian, negro and white: "The end of mirage, the palm in the desert," "The last of the Imams, the Shadow of Allah," "The lord of sorcerers and kings," "The bearer of keys, the interpreter of tongues," and, as the mingled voices ceased, Considine's own answered them:

"I am all these and yet I am no more than any of you, for all of you shall be as I. That which I have known I have not known of myself. I am the child of the initiates; their servant and the servant of the mighty imagination which is in man. Any of you shall conclude his kingdom before me; purify yourselves, know, exult, and live. I call to you again, lords of the spirit, postulants of infinity, put away all desire but to be fulfilled in yourselves. (pp. 208-09)

Considine's attitude towards Christianity is much like Christianity's attitude towards Judaism: he sees himself as heralding both the fulfillment and supercedence of the old order. His "Proclamation" reveals what is basically a sympathetic if supercilious stance towards the Christian faith:

The High Executive permits itself to offer to the Christian Churches its congratulations on the courage and devotion of those their servants who have sustained death by martyrdom. Convinced as it is that the Churches have, almost from the beginning, been misled by an erring principle, it nevertheless honours those martyrs as sublime

if misguided instances of that imagination which it is its purpose to make known to mankind and which the rites and dogmas of the Christian religion dimly proclaim. (p. 42)

The crux of the issue between Considine and Christianity is cited in at least two places in the novel. Isabel first formulated the distinction:

But those that die may be lordlier than you: they are obedient to defeat. Can you live truly till you have been quite defeated? You talk of living by your hurts, but perhaps you avoid the utter hurt that's destruction. (p. 131)

Later Considine corroborates Isabel's observation:

It's more purely Christian than ever before ...its nature is in complete defeat; there and there only it thrives. Your wife was right, Ingram; that's the choice between defeat and victory. But I've chosen victory and I have it. (p. 173)

The credibility of Considine's claim that Christianity was heading in the right direction but became misguided hinges on his ability to demonstrate that he can succeed where, in his estimation, Christianity failed. One thing that the novel makes clear is that Considine has known remarkable success. He has succeeded in living two hundred years and, apart from accident or treachery, is immortal. He needs only the smallest amount of food, drink and sleep. The principle Considine functions on, significantly, is "substitution."<sup>12</sup> Inkamasi explains:

Men and animals, we live by destruction. But these diverse schools have asked themselves whether indeed this is the whole secret, or whether it is so far but a substitution — a lesser thing taking the place of a greater. If man can descend into death, may he not find that what awaits him is an incredible ecstasy of descent and return? Considine is seeking to find that way. To be the food on which one feeds, to be free from any accident of death, to know the ecstasy of being at once priest and victim — all these ends are in his search. (p. 109)



Although Inkamasi verbally opposes Considine's authority and affirms the truth of Christianity, he nowhere suggests that Considine will not succeed. Inkamasi's actions, contrary to his profession of faith, indicate that his commitment to what Considine represents could run deeper than his commitment to the Christian faith. Inkamasi's drama provides a lovely synecdoche for the entire action of Shadows of Ecstasy. It simply refuses to be univocally interpreted.

Inkamasi as a character embodies the tension in the novel between Considine's Africa and Christian Europe, for he is a Zulu king by descent and imagination, and a European Christian by education and faith. We learn that Considine "bound" Inkamasi's will as a small child, not to take away the king's freedom to choose his own destiny, but rather in case he should require Inkamasi's material presence for his future plans. Apparently he does, for he reduces the king to a hypnotic state and then forces him to accompany him. Caithness learns of this and also that Inkamasi is a Christian. Outraged, the priest rushes off to rescue the king, and, with the help of the Archbishop at the Mass at Lambeth, performs what the narrator refers to as Caithness' "pet miracle" (p. 196), and the king's will is restored.

As it turns out, however, Caithness' action does not resolve Inkamasi's tension. Instead it forces him to choose his destiny immediately rather than later. The King's dilemma proves to be both interesting and instructive. He is torn between his duty to his kingship and his duty as a Christian. Considine, as it turns out, is the only character in the novel who honours the exalted imagination associated with royalty. He therefore offers Inkamasi a

variety of options, but only one -- a royal suicide -- can satisfy the demands of Inkamasi's exalted imagination. Of course Inkamasi also recognizes that to commit suicide would be directly to contradict his Christian creed: "For though the man Inkamasi might not kill himself -- so his creed taught -- yet the king had a duty to his kingship" and "...his duty was to his own kingship first and always" (p. 184).

Prior to this, when Inkamasi stridently affirmed his Christian faith, Considine replied in effect, "Believe what you will but tell me what you will do" (p. 182). The king commits suicide. More surprising still, the narrator's description of the king's state of mind contains distinct tones of approbation:

Peace entered in on him and he lay looking out of the window, watching the November twilight gather, and uniting within himself, not in such a twilight but in a more wonderful union of opposites, the day of his own individual being and the mysterious night of his holy and awful office. (p. 185)

While it is not surprising in a novel to have a character say one thing and do another, it is extremely unusual for a character in one of Williams' novels to do so without eliciting some narrative comment on the significance of the misrelation. But here the absence of narrative guidance is appropriate to the ethos of the novel as a whole. Inkamasi's failure to find a satisfactory resolution to his inner tension images the novel's inability to arrive at a satisfactory resolution to its similar inner tension, for the novel suspends judgement on the viability of Considine's doctrine.

The fundamental issue between Considine and Christianity turns on the necessity of experiencing absolute defeat. Considine, unlike the Christian,

argues that man's imagination can turn defeat into an ecstasy of victory. While Considine's longevity, power and relative freedom from material necessity indicate that his doctrine is undoubtedly true up to a point, the novel introduces triumph over death as the point beyond which Considine's doctrine is still tentative. As Considine puts it, "I am in obedience to all laws I have not yet mastered. . . I am in danger of death — until I have mastered it — and therefore in obedience to it..." (p. 130). If Considine can provide the key to human perfection and immortality here and now, Christianity's promise of a resurrection in another state and at some future date would carry little appeal. Obviously (and much more seriously) it would also have proven to be false.

Shadows of Ecstasy records an attempt by one of Considine's disciples to return from death and resurrect his body. The disturbing thing about the attempt of this "neophyte of death" is, as Roger recognizes, that "...it had come very near to succeeding" (p. 186). The movement of the corpse was in violation of all the laws which the "edifice of his mind" had constructed. When the master, Considine (not another neophyte), is finally murdered and his body disappears, Roger has good reason to dream at the conclusion of the novel that:

...he saw it floating alone in the middle of the sea, far away, far down, and he saw the eyes open and the hands move, and the whole body stir. Life was rushing back into it; power, spirit, imagination, whatever name sad incompetence found for it, was re-animating the willing flesh. He saw it walking in the waters and heard it calling through them. The creatures of the deep, octopus and shark, greed and ferocity, fled before it. Behind it, as it came, there was no more sea; in front of it the waters flowed into it and became the man who moved in them. Back from the shore they swept, out towards that advancing humanity, and all their mysteries were swallowed up in his shining lucidity. (p. 223)

Although Shadows of Ecstasy does not allow the reader confidently to close the text by subscribing to Roger's hope, the novel does suggest that if one were forced to choose an either/or interpretation, his is the most likely reading. Considine is consistently portrayed as an attractive figure, as are all the characters who support him. Those who adamantly oppose him are almost without exception unattractive. His most offensive opponent, surprisingly, is the Anglican priest Ian Caithness — a man who reduces the mysteries of theology to moral casuistry, prays to a god who has never been known to disagree with him (p. 90), and, finally, directly contributes to Considine's murder and indirectly to the murder of the innocent Rosenberg. Caithness, as the only visible representative of and spokesman for Christianity in the novel, explains why the case for Christianity does not come off very well; for Considine, the priest's opponent, represents the apotheosis of man without reference to any redeeming God:

It was Man that stood there, man conscious of himself and of his powers, man powerful and victorious, bold and serene, a culmination and a prophecy. Time and space hung behind him, his background and his possession, themselves no more separate but woven in a single vision, the colour of the living background to that living domination. (p. 81)

Shadows of Ecstasy thus poses the either/or of Christianity's claim on the individual, but refuses to take a definite position on this. What emerges powerfully, however, is the offense intrinsic to the Christian position. Caithness provides a visible symbol of this offensiveness; but the true nature of Christian offense in Shadows of Ecstasy lies in its insistence that man is incapable of experiencing victory without first experiencing an absolute defeat from which Christ alone is able to deliver. Considine stands directly opposed to this as a visible symbol of man's potential to

find absolute victory within himself and to actualize it through his own strength. Although the novel keeps this opposition in suspension by refusing to actualize Considine's fate, the narrative appears to be slightly biased towards Considine's point of view.

There are at least two ways then that one might evaluate Shadows of Ecstasy's center of gravity, and these depend on the criterion one brings to bear on the novel; for as Kierkegaard argues "...everything is qualitatively that by which it is measured."<sup>13</sup> If Shadows of Ecstasy is measured against itself it becomes apparent that it manifests no definite center of gravity. If, however, Shadows of Ecstasy is evaluated against Williams' other novels, one can employ Kierkegaard's notion of "offense" to argue that it has a strictly anthropomorphic (Considinian) center of gravity. Given that the other novels establish a normative Christian life-view, Shadows of Ecstasy's refusal to decide for or against Christianity would, in Kierkegaard's analysis, amount to a form of offense in which the novel ignores the Christian imperative: "You shall decide." The novel's suspension of a verdict ignores this imperative, and by ignoring it takes a definite position on Christianity. It is nothing less than human pretension and rebellion, in Kierkegaard's analysis, for man to attempt to remain neutral about Christ.<sup>14</sup> Shadows of Ecstasy's refusal to concretize itself is, therefore, anticipated by Kierkegaard's analysis of the Fichtian principle cited in the introduction to this chapter. Considine closely approximates a reification of this principle; ironically, so does the novel itself, by failing to pass judgement on Considine. Thus, when evaluated against the normative Christian world-view established by Williams' other novels, Shadows of Ecstasy reveals a distinctly anthropomorphic center of gravity, which in effect denies

that man must concretize and limit himself with respect to some external authority. Kierkegaard's observation that this type of center of gravity opens "the possibility for the infinity of the subject, but it [is] a negative infinity, an infinity without finitude, an infinity void of all content" seems entirely appropriate as a commentary on Shadows of Ecstasy's curious and unique achievement.

Descent into Hell:

to Act or Not to Act

All things at all times and everywhere, rehearsed; some great art was in practice and the only business anyone had was to see that his part was perfect. And this particular rehearsal mirrored the rest — only that this was<sup>1</sup> already perfected from within, and that other was not yet.

Descent into Hell (1937) suggests itself as an obvious work to examine in the attempt to close this analysis of Williams' religious drama and novels, for this novel is structured around the production of a play. More significantly, Peter Stanhope, the playwright in the novel, is also the pseudonym under which Williams wrote Judgement at Chelmsford. Cavaliero wryly remarks that Stanhope, "is given the status of T. S. Eliot and the consciousness of Charles Williams: he is more priest than playwright."<sup>2</sup> Setting aside speculations about what Cavaliero's comment may suggest about Williams' frustrations regarding his failure to find widespread critical acclaim, an examination of the significance of Stanhope's play to the novel should provide clues as to what Williams conceives of as the ideal significance of his writings<sup>3</sup> to his readership.

Like All Hallows' Eve, the action within Descent into Hell moves between two distinct and yet interpenetrating settings or modes of existence: the finite temporal realm of the living and the infinite eternal realm of the

dead. Stanhope's play mediates between the two realms by functioning as a metaphoric touchstone with respect to the characters in both realms. Like all of Williams' plays and all of his novels (with the exception of Shadows of Ecstasy), Descent into Hell, as its title suggests, preoccupies itself with the soteriological dialectic generated by man's collision with the Infinite, but here this dialectic is best analyzed within the dominant metaphor of drama itself. More specifically, Stanhope's play functions as a metaphor (or "dress rehearsal") for God's universal drama which reveals itself in the novel through the omnipotent orchestration of events in (and between) the finite and infinite realms. The key to the soteriological dialectic in this novel lies in the characters' willingness to assume and act out the roles "written" for them, for according to Williams it is only by submitting to the authority of God (as Author) that one can achieve true character identity.

According to the novel divine drama constitutes the facts of the universe, and the one fundamental principle supporting and generating this drama of facts is substitutionary Love. If a character refuses to face these facts and attempts to "write himself" (as is the case for Wentworth) he perishes in illusion and self-enclosure. "Gommorah" is the term the novel uses to describe this state of self-infatuation and spiritual masturbation. "Zion," conversely, describes co-inherent participation in the universal drama and City of God. Though Descent into Hell presents the either/or of Zion versus Gommorah within this unusual dramatic metaphor, the soteriological dialectic leading to either of these two "City-states" remains recognizably Kierkegaardian, as examination of several characters' existential developments suggests.



If one were to take the "matter" of Descent into Hell and translate it into a realistic novel, it would primarily concern the production of a play, and how this production impinges on the lives of the characters involved in the play. The central characters of this realistic novel would be Stanhope (the author), Mrs. Parry (the producer) and the members of the cast (principally Adela, Hugh and Pauline). On the periphery of the action would be Mrs. Anstruther (Pauline's grandmother), Wentworth (a local but eminent historian) and Lily Sammle (a rather eccentric but innocuous old woman who seems to wander about promising comfort and pleasure to everyone she meets).

But Descent into Hell is not a realistic novel, and although it includes this finite temporal level of action, the significance of this action is revealed against the backdrop of the eternal infinite realm of death. In this realm we find two more characters who play very important roles in the two-tiered levels of action which interact to produce Descent into Hell. The major character here is a nameless and harassed workman who commits suicide after having been fired from his employment working on the construction of Wentworth's house several years before the realistic action of the novel takes place. The second significant character in this second realm is John Struther, an ancestor of Pauline, who was martyred under Mary Tudor for having "grown obstinately metaphysical" (p. 25).

Perhaps the best way to suggest how these two levels of action interact to produce Descent into Hell would be to consider the existential development of Pauline Anstruther. In many respects she resembles Betty of

All Hallows' Eve, but whereas Betty moves between the two levels of action by consecutively alternating between her finite and infinite selves, Pauline operates simultaneously as both her finite self in the realm of the living and her infinite self in the realm of the dead. Her finite self, however, knows little of her infinite self's activities. Pauline's finite experience of her infinite self takes the form of visual encounters with her doppelganger. Anticipation of these encounters, which have been going on for most of her life, has become the dominant factor in her consciousness and a constant source of fear and anxiety.

Pauline's quest is thus a quest to find her identity. At one point she conspicuously says to Stanhope, "I want to know my name" (p. 63). Although she ostensibly refers to the name of the character she is to play in his play, her confession reverberates with intimations of the consuming desire of her life. The narrator indicates that her fear of encountering her doppelganger has crippled her: "[I]t was the latent fear in her life that paralysed initiative; she could respond but she could not act" (p. 52). Her condition corresponds closely to Kierkegaard's description of "Despair in Weakness" or "In Despair Not to Will to Be Oneself."<sup>4</sup> Kierkegaard significantly refers to this as a form of "feminine despair." Here the individual is aware that he/she is qualified as an eternal self but refuses through fear of the consequences to will to be that self.

Kierkegaard makes it clear that although it is a despair in weakness, the weakness has a strong element of pride which refuses to believe that the weakness can be remedied.<sup>5</sup> Stanhope recognizes Pauline's distress, encourages her to talk about it and, when she does, offers to bear her fear

of the encounter with her doppelgänger. Stanhope explains that this "Doctrine of Substituted Love" is grounded in the nature of the universe itself, and cites as his authority the text in Romans where Paul urges the brethren "to bear one another's burdens" (p. 98). Pauline at first refuses, asking indignantly, "Would I push my burden on to anybody else?" Stanhope replies:

"Not if you insist on making a universe for yourself," he answered. "If you want to disobey and refuse the laws that are common to us all, if you want to live in pride and division and anger, you can. But if you will be part of the best of us, and live and laugh and be ashamed with us, then you must be content to be helped. You must give your burden up to someone else, and you must carry someone else's burden. I haven't made the universe and it isn't my fault. But I'm sure that this is a law of the universe, and not to give up your parcel is as much to rebel as not to carry another's. You'll find it quite easy if you let yourself do it." (p. 99)

Here then we see the typical Kierkegaardian soteriological dialectic. Pauline must recognize her limitations and humble herself by being aided by "another." Despite the fact that Stanhope protests that there is no need to "introduce Christ" into these transactions (p. 98), the novel makes it clear that every act of exchange is grounded in the universal substitutionary Love of Christ<sup>6</sup>:

The groan was at once dereliction of power and creation of power. In it, far off, beyond vision in the depths of all the worlds, a god, unamenable to death, awhile endured and died. (p. 125)

Pauline's willingness to accept help from Stanhope, a man whom she recognizes as an authority in her life and (significantly) the author of the play in which she willingly participates, signals her willingness to assume her true identity in God's universal drama -- a drama which simultaneously

engages all the characters in both the finite and infinite realms. One way of viewing the distinction between Stanhope's play and God's play would be to note that Stanhope's play allows for the possibility of spectatorship; God's does not. From the point of view of God's drama, the characters in Descent into Hell assume a much different significance than they would have if considered from a "realistic" perspective. Margaret Anstruther (Pauline's grandmother) occupies perhaps the most central role in this universal drama, whereas from a realistic (finite) point of view she does very little. Her capacity to function significantly stems from the fact that she straddles both realms. She is alive but dying, and in this uniquely "amphibious" state she is conscious of activities in both realms. If Mrs. Parry functions as the "director" of Stanhope's play (however hopelessly efficient and artistically insensitive she may be), there is a sense in which Mrs. Anstruther functions as a director/actor in God's drama. In this capacity she plays an instrumental role in directing Pauline's activities towards the salvation of both the suicide and John Struther.

The narrator of the novel makes it clear that the suicide is not being given a "second chance" to accept salvation. Life offered him no chances:

But this man had died from and in the body only. Because he had had it all but forced on him, he had had opportunity to recover. His recovery had brought to him a chance of love. Because he had never chosen love, he did not choose it then. Because he had never had an opportunity to choose love, nor effectively heard the intolerable gospel proclaimed, he was to be offered it again, and now as salvation. (p. 118)

The suicide's "offer of salvation" proceeds from his visionary encounter with Margaret Anstruther. In her face and voice he experiences Love for the first time:

[To] the dead man it was felt as love, as love that loved him, as he longingly and unknowingly desired. This holy and happy thing was all that could be meant by God: it was love and power. Tender to the least of its creatures, it submitted itself to his need, but it is itself always that it submits, and as he received it from those eyes and the sound of that voice he knew that another thing awaited him — his wife, or the light, or some renewal of his earlier death. (p. 123)

She then informs him that, "It's done already; you've only got to look for it" (p. 123).

Before the suicide can play his part properly and learn of the Love which comes from surrender or death of the spiritual self, he must retrace his steps back to the place where he exited the universal drama through his premature act of suicide. Twice Williams specifically refers to the platform from which he fell when he hung himself as a "stage" (p. 33, p. 155).

Margaret Anstruther sees him return to this stage and in her vision also recognizes his need for direction to London (here a symbol for the Republic or Zion — the City of God).

Pauline, in obedience to her grandmother's last directive, goes out late at night to offer assistance to "someone" who will be near Wentworth's house. Pauline there discovers the suicide who needs directions to the City. She gives them and then watches him hurry off towards London. Before he disappears, however, he stops, apparently in great agony or fear. She hurries after him and as she approaches discovers not the suicide but her ancestor the martyr. The narrator makes it clear that the martyr has fallen into the "Christian trap," not unlike the situation Cranmer finds himself in:

He was afraid, this martyr of her house, and she knew what

to do. There was no doubt about it at all. She knew that the horror of the fire had overcome him. He was in the trap in which she had been but now; the universe had caught him. His teacher, his texts, his gospel had been its bars, and his judges and executioners were springing it; and the Lord God himself was, in that desperate hour, nothing but the spring that would press him into the torment. Once the Lord had been something else; perhaps still.... He was praying passionately: "Make me believe; make me believe." The choice was first in her; Omnipotence waited her decision. (p. 169)

Pauline offers to bear his fear of the fire, just as Stanhope offered to bear her fear of her doppelganger, but the martyr in his prison cell cannot hear her. Then from behind Pauline she hears her own voice: "Give it to me, John Struther" (p. 170). Struther hears, turns and obeys the reiterated command "Give": "He fell on his knees, and in a great roar of triumph he called out: 'I have seen the salvation of my God'" (p. 170). Pauline turns and faces her doppelganger, that "glorious creature," her eternal self. It is then that she realizes that the burden of fear she had borne all of her life was for this:

She had lived without joy that he might die in joy, but when she lived she had not known and when she offered she had not guessed that the sacrificial victim had died before the sacrificial act was accomplished; that now the act was for resurrection in death. (pp. 171-72)

What follows is an account of Struther's martyrdom, in images which blend Stanhope's play with the martyr's historical context. Just as the suicide had to return to his proper place on God's stage to find his salvation, here Pauline and the martyr find the resolution to their respective existential crises when they act out the roles written for them<sup>7</sup>:

He looked up through the smoke and flame that closed

upon him, and saw, after his manner, as she after hers, what might be monstrous shapes of cherubim and seraphim exchanging powers, and among them the face of his daughter's aeviternity. She only among all his children and descendants had run by a sacrifice of heart to ease and carry his agony. He blessed her, thinking her some angel, and in his blessing her aeviternity was released to her, and down his blessing beatitude ran to greet her, a terrible good. The ends of the world were on them. He dead and she living were made one with peace. Her way was haunted no more. (p. 173)

Stanhope's play is thus fulfilled as a metaphor for God's universal drama, and as such it functions as a touchstone with respect to each of the characters in the novel. In this capacity the play replaces the symbols of the Infinite which appear in the first four novels considered in this thesis. Pauline's attitude towards the play stands in direct opposition to that of Adela Hunt. Pauline reveals that she feels inadequate as the author of her own story (p. 60). As we have seen, she looks to her author to provide her with her identity. Rather than worrying about her "elocution" of verse, she allows the verse to "elocute" her. Adela, on the other hand, regards Stanhope's play as a new opportunity to actualize her agenda of the management of the people and things (one is not sure she makes an essential distinction here) which surround her. As is to be expected she is a master of elocution. One of the things she would like to "elocute" is the future productions of the play, but she does not possess the native honesty to admit to Pauline that it is for herself, rather than for the cast, that she would like Pauline to approach Stanhope for his permission in this regard. Adela's selfishness, however, does not prove to be her undoing; rather it is her dishonesty, which eventually leads to self-deception and corruption. When Hugh, her fiancé, becomes slightly imperious, she chooses herself:

She would neither revolt nor obey nor compromise; she would deceive. Her admission to the citizenship of Gomorrah

depended on the moment at which, of those four only possible alternatives for the human soul, she refused to know which she had chosen. "Tell me it's for yourself, only yourself...." No, no, it's not for myself, it's for the good of others, her good, his good, everybody's good: is it my fault if they don't see it? manage them, manage them, manage her, manage him, and them. (p. 185)

Adela's refusal to face facts renders her incapable of participating in God's drama. Williams underscores the fact that, although she knew her part in Stanhope's play "beautifully" (recalling her skills of elocution), she failed to learn her role in God's drama: "the part she was continually trying and continually failing to learn, the part that repeated to her a muddle of words about perception and love which she could never get in the right order" (p. 202).

Adela's refusal to face facts is typical of those characters in Descent into Hell who prefer Gomorrah<sup>8</sup> to Zion. Lawrence Wentworth's descent into himself is systematically traced in the novel and attributed to two external causes in his life: Hugh's frustration of his amorous intentions toward Adela and his rivalry with another eminent historian, Aston Moffatt. What characterizes Wentworth's reactions to these sources of irritation is his consistent rejection of the uncomfortable facts of his existence in favour of the comforts of illusion. He will not admit that Adela prefers Hugh to himself. He will be gratified in his every desire — and he is. He ends up with a succubus, a creature of "substantial illusion" created from his own desires and fashioned after the image of Adela. The account of this creation in the chapter "Return to Eden" makes it clear that Wentworth has fallen prey to the wiles of Lilith,<sup>9</sup> represented in the novel in the character of Lily Sammile who provides "pleasant dreams" as a panacea to the painful realities of existence.



Wentworth's descent is hastened by his betrayal of the demands of historical scholarship. Unlike Moffatt who loves truth for its own sake, Wentworth sees scholarship as an extension of himself, and he proves as willing to betray his profession as he does himself:

He was finding the answer to Aston Moffatt's last published letter difficult, yet he was determined that Moffatt could not be right. He was beginning to twist the intention of the sentences in his authorities, preferring strange meanings and awkward constructions, adjusting evidence, manipulating words. In defence of his conclusion he was willing to cheat in the evidence — a habit more usual to religious writers than to historical. (p. 39)

At each and every point in his descent down the rope in his dreams (which identifies him with the workman, except that here it is a spiritual as opposed to a physical suicide), he must reject facts. He drives the final nail in his spiritual coffin when he lies about the historical correctness of the uniforms used in Stanhope's play. "He desired hell" (p. 50), and he gets it. Wentworth thus powerfully dramatizes Williams' and Kierkegaard's claim that "Hell is always inaccurate."<sup>10</sup>

Thus Descent into Hell manifests the familiar Kierkegaardian soteriological dialectic, but the dramatic (aesthetic) metaphor Williams employs as symbol of the Infinite in the novel draws attention to some important differences between Williams and Kierkegaard. As was mentioned in the introductory chapter, while Kierkegaard tends to emphasize the single individual before God, Williams' focus most often falls on co-inherent humanity's experience of God. Because Kierkegaard focuses almost exclusively on the individual, his interests tend to be psychological-theological, whereas Williams' group interests lend themselves to aesthetic(ethical)-theological exploration.<sup>11</sup>

The generic duality of Descent into Hell allows a reader to glimpse what Williams considered to be the ideal theological significance of his aesthetic practice to his readership (or audience). Stanhope's play engages all of the characters in the novel, just as The Skeleton in Cranmer and The Flame in The House attempt to engage their audiences. A similar (though often unsuccessful) attempt is discernible in the novels where a visible symbol of the Infinite supposedly accounts for the actions of all of the characters in that novel. But Stanhope's play offers a much more palpable symbol of engagement, while it also clearly draws attention to Williams' writings (here plays and novels) as symbols of the Infinite themselves. One must not forget that Peter Stanhope was one of Williams' pseudonyms.

Descent into Hell suggests even more than this. Stanhope's play, and Williams' writings by implication, provide a reader with a model (or models) of the deeper aesthetic-theological structure of existence. Stanhope's play presents the characters in the novel with the either/or of playing their roles in God's drama, or refusing to play their roles, just as Williams' plays and novels present his readership with the same either/or; but here the suggestion is that it is not a fictional existence which presents this categorical imperative, but the reader's life.

The distinctly visual quality of Williams' aesthetic-theological imagination reveals itself in the powerful sense of closure which Williams achieves in his novels and plays. Descent into Hell's treatment of Stanhope's play can even be interpreted as a treatise on the type of aesthetic-theological attitude necessary to perceive closure in an aesthetic

object and to achieve it in one's own existential development. Mrs. Parry remarks that Stanhope's play, when viewed from the outside, appears "all higgledy-piggledy":

To begin with, it had no title beyond A Pastoral. That was unsatisfactory. Then the plot was incredibly loose. It was of no particular time and no particular place, and to any cultured listener it seemed to have little bits of everything and everybody put in at odd moments. (p. 12)

What the novel demonstrates however is that Stanhope's play functions as a miniature dress rehearsal for God's drama which is not yet closed, and will not close until the Day of Judgement. Faith, expressed as active participation in that drama, is what the novel suggests is necessary to closure in an individual's life. But the closed aesthetic-theological vision is denied the characters in the drama — that is reserved for the author. The most that a co-operative character can know, as Mrs. Anstruther observes, is that the drama one participates in means "more than [the] individual being knew" (p. 66). The unmistakable suggestion is that life, like Stanhope's play, is not meant to be observed, but passionately lived out until closure is experienced.

The tremendous weight of Williams' vision of impending aesthetic-theological closure clearly manifests itself in all of his religious plays and almost all his novels. The universe he depicts for man insists, in true Kierkegaardian fashion, that the individual decide whether life is ultimately "higgledy-piggledy" or coherently authored and meaningful. It also demands that the individual's choice be expressed in action. Although true action (or action affirming God's authority) in both Williams' and Kierkegaard's estimations leads to the painful loss of the self in order to discover

Christ's substitutionary Love and finally gain the self, this seems like a small price to pay. With both these writer it boils down to facing the facts — or else. The "or else" always reduces to Lilith and the void of Gomorrah:

Lilith for a name and Eden for a myth, and she a stirring more certain than name or myth, who in one of her shapes went hurrying about the refuge of that Hill of skulls, and pattered and chattered on the Hill, hurrying, hurrying, for fear of time growing together, and squeezing her out, out of the interstices, of time where she lived, locust in the rock; time growing together into one, and squeezing her out, squeezing her down, out of the pressure of the universal present, down into depth, down into the opposite of that end, down into the ever and ever of the void. (p. 89)

## Notes

## Notes to Chapter One

<sup>1</sup> Charles Williams: An Exploration of His Life and Work (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> Hadfield, Charles Williams: An Exploration, pp. 177, 196, 234; see also Hadfield, An Introduction to Charles Williams (London: Robert Hale, 1959), pp. 124-26; and Alexander Dru, trans. and ed., The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, by Soren Kierkegaard (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. xi. Here Dru "express[es] [his] gratitude to Mr. Charles Williams for all he has done to make possible an English edition of Kierkegaard."

<sup>3</sup> In this chapter the discussion of these theological and philosophical areas of agreement is intended simply as a general introduction. These concepts will be taken up and expanded in later chapters where they bear significantly on the individual texts under consideration.

<sup>4</sup> The Novels of Charles Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 7-8.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Williams, "The Cross," in The Image of the City, ed. Anne Ridler (London, 1958; rpt. Norwich: Fletcher and Son, 1970), p. 139.

<sup>6</sup> Williams, "The Way of Exchange," in The Image of the City, p. 151.

<sup>7</sup> Humphrey Carpenter, The Inklings (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), p. 103.

<sup>8</sup> Williams, "The Way of Exchange," in The Image of the City, p. 149.

<sup>9</sup> Gregor Malantschuk, Kierkegaard's Thought, trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Copenhagen, 1968; rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 269-70.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Williams, The English Poetic Mind (Oxford, 1932; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1968), pp. 57-63. cf. Charles Williams, Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), pp. 85-88.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Williams: Poet of Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Anxiety, trans. and ed. Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 28-29.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Williams, He Came Down From Heaven, I Believe, 5 (London: William Heinemann, 1938), p. 146.

<sup>14</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (1980; rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 77.

<sup>15</sup> Malantschuk, p. 293.

<sup>16</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, For Self-Examination and Judge For Yourselves! and Three Discourses, trans. Walter Lowrie, D.D. (1941; rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> Cavaliero, p. 41.

<sup>18</sup> He Came Down From Heaven, p. 147; see also The Descent of the Dove, A Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church (London, 1939; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 233.

<sup>19</sup> In Williams' earlier novels the "eternal absolute ethic" takes the form of some "symbol of the Infinite," and it is under this latter rubric that I examine the concept in Chapter Three.

Notes to Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, For Self-Examination, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> John Heath-Stubbs, ed., Collected Plays by Charles Williams, by Charles Williams (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. ix.

<sup>3</sup> Collected Plays, p. 173.

<sup>4</sup> Collected Plays, p. ix.

<sup>5</sup> Malantschuk, p. 251.

<sup>6</sup> Malantschuk, pp. 251-55.

<sup>7</sup> He Came Down From Heaven, pp. 6-7.

<sup>8</sup> Collected Plays, p. 175.

<sup>9</sup> Collected Plays, p. 171. All subsequent references to Williams' plays are to this text and will be in text page numbers within parentheses.

<sup>10</sup> He Came Down From Heaven, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Collected Plays, p. 174.

<sup>12</sup> Malantschuk, p. 198.

- 13 The Image of the City, p. xli.
  - 14 The Image of the City, p. 69.
  - 15 The Image of the City, p. xli.
  - 16 Malantschuk, pp. 307-08.
  - 17 Malantschuk, p. 250.
  - 18 For Self-Examination, p. 88.
  - 19 The Descent of the Dove, p. 212.
  - 20 Malantschuk, p. 255.
  - 21 The Descent of the Dove, p. 199.
  - 22 The Figure of Beatrice (1943; rpt. New York: Octagon, 1983), p.
- 36.
- 23 The Descent of the Dove, p. 191.
  - 24 The Descent of the Dove, pp. 192-93.
  - 25 Malantschuk, p. 99.
  - 26 Malantschuk, p. 265.
  - 27 Malantschuk, p. 289.
  - 28 Malantschuk, p. 94.
  - 29 Malantschuk, p. 265.
  - 30 Malantschuk, p. 265.
  - 31 Malantschuk, pp. 268-69.
  - 32 Malantschuk, p. 265.
  - 33 Malantschuk, p. 362.
  - 34 For Self-Examination, p. 99.
  - 35 Malantschuk, p. 225.
  - 36 Malantschuk, p. 226.
  - 37 Malantschuk, pp. 217-18.



38 Cavaliero, p. 48.

39 For Self-Examination, pp. 99-100.

40 Witchcraft (London: Faber and Faber, 1941), pp. 187-88, 286.

41 Cavaliero, p. 142.

42 This and what immediately follows constitute the central arguments of Witchcraft.

43 See also For Self-Examination, pp. 120 ff.

44 Cavaliero, p. 51.

45 The Sickness Unto Death, p. 72.

46 The Sickness Unto Death, p. 71.

47 Cavaliero, p. 32.

48 Charles Williams: An Exploration of His Life and Work, p. 136.

49 Cavaliero, p. 27.

50 The Sickness Unto Death, p. 34.

51 Cavaliero, p. 34.

52 Malantschuk, p. 202.

53 Malantschuk, p. 98.

54 He Came Down From Heaven, p. 135.

55 Cavaliero, p. 41.

56 Malantschuk, p. 185.

57 Malantschuk, p. 89.

58 Malantschuk, pp. 90-91.

59 Malantschuk, p. 230.

## Notes to Chapter Three

<sup>1</sup> Charles Williams, All Hallows' Eve (London, 1945; rpt. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> Malantschuk, p. 186.

<sup>3</sup> Malantschuk, p. 185.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Williams: An Exploration of His Life and Work, p. 124.

<sup>5</sup> For Self-Examination, p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> Howard, p. 51.

<sup>7</sup> Howard, p. 51.

<sup>8</sup> War in Heaven (London, 1930; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 245-46. All subsequent references to this text in this section will be in text notes within parentheses.

<sup>9</sup> See The Sickness Unto Death, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Williams, Many Dimensions (London, 1931; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978). All subsequent references to this text in this section will be in text notes within parentheses.

<sup>11</sup> Malantschuk, p. 293.

<sup>12</sup> The Concept of Anxiety, trans. and ed. Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> Chloe's attempt to deny that she is of "moment to the universe" (p. 51), amounts to "laying hold of finiteness to support itself."

<sup>14</sup> While Chloe might not label the problem within her "guilt," she is now clearly aware of the problem. There is, as it were, no possibility of return to innocence.

<sup>15</sup> Malantschuk, pp. 188-207.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Williams, The Place of the Lion (London, 1931; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978). All subsequent references to this text in this section will be in text notes within parentheses.

<sup>17</sup> The Sickness Unto Death, p. 52; see also For Self-Examination, p. 70.

<sup>18</sup> Compare Williams' passage to Kierkegaard's discussion in The Sickness Unto Death, p. 36.

<sup>19</sup> For Self-Examination, p. 80.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Williams, The Greater Trumps (London, 1932; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978). All subsequent references to this text in this section will be in text notes within parentheses.

<sup>21</sup> Carpenter, p. 96. It is significant that Carpenter lumps The Greater Trumps in with Shadows of Ecstasy to substantiate his claim that Williams was not concerned with moral issues in the novels.

<sup>22</sup> See Howard, p. 142, where he implicitly identifies the Fool with Christ.

<sup>23</sup> The Sickness Unto Death, p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> All Hallows' Eve. All subsequent references to this text in this section will be in text notes within parentheses.

<sup>25</sup> The Sickness Unto Death, p. 44.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Kierkegaard's definition of sin as "inconsistency," Malantschuk, p. 163.

## Notes for Chapter Four

<sup>1</sup> Charles Williams, Shadows of Ecstasy (London, 1933; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 191. All subsequent references to this text will appear as in text notes within parentheses.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Williams: An Exploration of his Life and Work, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> Cavaliero, p. 62.

<sup>4</sup> Cavaliero, p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> Malantschuk, p. 203.

<sup>6</sup> Malantschuk, p. 203.

<sup>7</sup> Shadows of Ecstasy, p. 209. Here Considine suggestively refers to his followers as "postulants of infinity."

<sup>8</sup> Cavaliero, p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Howard, p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> It is interesting in this connection that Yeats and Williams were both members of A. E. Waite's the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. See Hadfield, pp. 29-31.

<sup>11</sup> See in particular Revelation 13: 1-3.

<sup>12</sup> The narrator in another place refers to Considine as the "master of substitution" (p. 92). Those familiar with Williams' commitment to the principle of substitution must take Considine's claim to power seriously. It is even more interesting that Williams, in a letter to

Victor Gollancz, the publisher of Shadows of Ecstasy, indicates his belief that "...there isn't anything as obscure and supernatural in this [Shadows of Ecstasy] as might put them off. After all, it could be done."

Cited in Hadfield, Charles Williams, p. 92.

<sup>13</sup> The Sickness Unto Death, p. 79.

<sup>14</sup> The Sickness Unto Death, pp. 129-30.

#### Notes for Chapter Five

<sup>1</sup> Charles Williams, Descent into Hell (London, 1937; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 147. All subsequent references to this text will be in text notes within parentheses.

<sup>2</sup> Cavaliero, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> I use the general term "writings" here, for Stanhope's play is also described as "great verse." The ideal significance of Williams' "writings" would be thus be the significance of any of Williams' writings which achieve the status of "great verse." I will argue later in this chapter that Descent, by implication, suggests itself as great verse. For Williams' discussion on the qualities of great verse see The English Poetic Mind, pp. 1-8.

<sup>4</sup> Pauline's type of despair appears to fall under the second sub-species of this "feminine" despair: "DESPAIR OF THE ETERNAL OR OVER ONESELF." See The Sickness Unto Death, pp. 60-67.

<sup>5</sup> The Sickness Unto Death, p. 62.

<sup>6</sup> It is also significant that Battle Hill (the setting of the novel) is referred to as "the Hill of skulls" (p. 89). The allusion to Golgotha is unmistakable.

<sup>7</sup> This resolution is in some sense anticipated by Pauline when she wonders whether there is a "play" concerning doppelgangers which could give her tortured consciousness peace (p. 22).

<sup>8</sup> The image Williams repeatedly uses to convey his conception of Gommorah in the novel is that of self-reflection. The powerful sense of sterility, inactivity and futility attached to this notion of reflection in the novel is also the major theme of Kierkegaard's The Present Age, trans. Alexander Dru and Walter Lowrie (London: Oxford University Press, 1940). This similarity is not entirely coincidental, for Williams wrote the introduction to this 1940 edition of The Present Age.

<sup>9</sup> See A. E. Waite, The Secret Doctrine in Israel (New York: Occult Research Press, n.d.), pp. 86, 98, 102-04, 276, for further information on Lilith.

<sup>10</sup> "John Milton," in The Image of the City, p. 30. Kierkegaard's corresponding expression, as we have seen, is "sin is inconsistency." In both expressions the sense seems to be that sin necessarily entails or is essentially qualified by a defect in perception and/or reasoning.

<sup>11</sup> My claim here rests on a fairly involved argument. Kierkegaard distinguishes between two forms of ethics: a lower type predicated upon every person's relationship to society, and a higher type predicated upon the single individual's relationship to God. Kierkegaard treats the lower type as a fundamentally "aesthetic" discipline. The higher type, however, does not admit of aesthetic evaluation, for an individual, in Kierkegaard's analysis, may be required by God to act without regard for

the social ethic. Because Kierkegaard's interest lies with the soteriological dialectic generated by an individual's awareness of this higher ethic, his focus tends to be more purely psychological than Williams'. Williams adopts a fundamentally classical position which treats all form of ethics as aesthetic disciplines. It is Williams' concept of "co-inherence" (which links all persons with each other and with God) that allows him to extend "aesthetics" to include Kierkegaard's higher form of ethics. Ethics merely describes the dynamics of the co-inherent pattern of glory — and any pattern can be treated in aesthetic terms.

## Works Consulted

## Primary Sources

- Kierkegaard, Soren. Fear and Trembling and Repetition. Trans. and Ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- . For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself!  
Trans. Walter Lowrie. 1941; rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.
- . The Concept of Anxiety. Trans. and Ed. Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- . The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard. Trans. and Ed. Alexander Dru. London: Oxford University Press, 1938.
- . The Present Age. Trans. Alexander Dru and Walter Lowrie. London: Oxford University Press, 1940.
- . The Sickness Unto Death. Trans. and Ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. 1980; rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- Williams, Charles. All Hallows' Eve. London, 1945; rpt. United States: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979.
- . Collected Plays by Charles Williams. Ed. John Heath-Stubbs. London: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- . Descent into Hell. London, 1937; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977.



- . He Came Down From Heaven. I Believe, 5. London:  
William Heinemann, 1938.
- . Many Dimensions. London, 1931; rpt. Grand Rapids:  
Eerdmans, 1979.
- . Poetry at Present. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931.
- . Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind. Oxford: Clarendon  
Press, 1933.
- . Religion and Love in Dante, the Theology of Romantic Love.  
1941; rpt. Westminster: Dacre Press, 1980.
- . Shadows of Ecstasy. 1933; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978.
- . The Descent of the Dove. London, 1939; rpt. Grand Rapids:  
Eerdmans, 1979.
- . The English Poetic Mind. 1932; rpt. New York: Russell and  
Russell, 1963.
- . The Figure of Beatrice. 1943; rpt. New York: Octagon, 1983.
- . The Greater Trumps. London, 1932; rpt. Grand Rapids:  
Eerdmans, 1978.
- . The Image of the City. Ed. Anne Ridler. London, 1958;  
rpt. Norwich: Fletcher and Son, 1970.
- . The Place of the Lion. London, 1933; rpt. Grand Rapids:  
Eerdmans, 1978.
- . War in Heaven. London, 1930; rpt. Grand Rapids:  
Eerdmans, 1978.
- . Witchcraft. London: Faber and Faber, 1941.

## Secondary Sources

Auden, W. H. "The Martyr as Dramatic Hero." The Listener, 79 (January 4, 1968), 1-7.

Carpenter, Humphrey. The Inklings. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981.

Cavaliero, Glen. Charles Williams: Poet of Theology. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983.

Eliot, T. S. "A Lay Theologian." The New Statesman and Nation, 18 (December 9, 1939), 864-66.

———. intro. All Hallows' Eve. By Charles Williams. London, 1945; rpt. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979.

Hadfield, Alice Mary. An Introduction to Charles Williams. London: Robert Hale, 1959.

———. Charles Williams, An Exploration of His Life and Work. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.

———. "The Relationship of Charles Williams' Working Life to His Fiction." In Shadows of Imagination, The Fantasies of C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams. Ed. Mark R. Hillegas. 1969; rpt. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976, pp. 125-38.

Howard, Thomas. The Novels of Charles Williams. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Irwin, W. R. "Christian Doctrine and the Tactics of Romance, the Case of Charles Williams." In Shadows of Imagination, pp. 139-49.

Lewis, C. S. preface. Essays Presented to Charles Williams. Ed. C. S.

- Lewis. 1947; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978, pp. v-xiv.
- Malantschuk, Gregor. Kierkegaard's Thought. Trans. and Ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Copenhagen, 1968; rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.
- Ridler, Anne. intro. The Image of the City, pp. ix-lxxi.
- Sibley, Agnes. Charles Williams. Twayne's English Authors, 322. Boston: Twayne, 1982.
- Shideler, Mary McDermott. Charles Williams. Contemporary Writers in Christian Perspective. Ed. Rodderick Jellema. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966.
- Spacks, Patricia Meyer. "Charles Williams, The Fusions of Fiction." In Shadows of Imagination, pp. 150-59.
- Waite, A. E. The Secret Doctrine in Israel. New York: Occult Research Press, n.d.
- Winship, George P. Jr. "The Novels of Charles Williams." In Shadows of Imagination, pp. 111-24.

## ABSTRACT

### Charles Williams' Religious Drama and Novels: A Kierkegaardian Analysis

Alice Mary Hadfield, Charles Williams' biographer, records that when Williams encountered the works of Soren Kierkegaard in 1935 he acknowledged that Kierkegaard spoke directly to his existential condition. Williams immediately recognized Kierkegaard's insight that the human existential search for God necessitates the progressive experience of suffering in any approach to God, as corresponding to a truth of his own experience which, in turn, he had attempted to convey in his writing. Given that Kierkegaard both spoke to Williams' condition and continued to exercise an influence on him until his death in 1945, Kierkegaard's thought suggests itself as a viable point of entry into Williams' complex and often confusing texts.

This thesis first delineates in general terms the areas of theological and philosophical agreement between Williams and Kierkegaard, and from this introduction commences an investigation of six of Williams' religious dramas and all of Williams' novels in order to indicate the manner in which a rudimentary grasp of Kierkegaard's existentialist theories may contribute to an understanding of this selection of Williams' writings. Williams' dominant preoccupation in these writings appears to be the soteriological dialectic generated by the human encounter with the Infinite. Analysis of this dialectic in his work suggests substantial areas of agreement between Kierkegaard and Williams.

Both Williams and Kierkegaard as "Christian existentialists"

stress that the free individual is totally helpless to meet the existential demands of an absolute transcendent ethic which an individual discovers when such a person encounters the inner self. For ~~the~~ writers, this is discovery of that part of human nature which communicates directly with and has intuitive knowledge of the transcendent Deity. In the face of this crisis of encounter both Williams and Kierkegaard affirm the necessity of a new "organ" to liberate man from his consuming and incapacitating self-consciousness. This organ is "faith" which can only be effectively utilized by a courageous and passionate "leap," which ultimately forces individual nature back into concrete engagement with stressful and often impossible temporal situations. Each thinker likewise asserts that the necessary faith is grounded in and directed towards the Incarnate and historical Christ who provides in the Atonement the only means to liberate man from his total impotence before the evidence of sin and self-enclosure.

Williams' religious drama and all of his novels (with the exception of Shadows of Ecstasy) share what Kierkegaard denominates a common "center of gravity" which, in Kierkegaard's analysis, functions as Providence within the text and testifies to the philosophical coherence of the author's world view. Shadows of Ecstasy, Williams' first novel, represents a significant eccentric to Williams' subsequent center of gravity which moves towards orthodox Christianity. With the single exception of this novel, all of the writings considered in this thesis prove highly amenable to access through Kierkegaard's existentialist theories.