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Abstract

Focuses on the theme of community versus isolation. Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Self Reliance" is used as a key to understanding Lawrence Wentworth's increasing withdrawal from reality and "the city" of his fellow human beings, in contrast with the workings of coinherence personified in the interactions of other characters.

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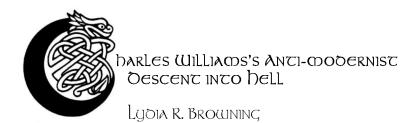# Charles Williams's Anti-Modernist Descent into Hell

Lydia R. Browning

In the nineteenth century essay "Self Reliance," Ralph Waldo Emerson exhorts his audience, "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. […] Do not spill thy soul: do not all descend; keep thy state; stay at home in thine own heaven" (1164, 1173). Today's reader could interpret this statement as the summation of modernism's idealized individualism; and interestingly, Christian author Charles Williams created an ill-fated character in his novel, *Descent into Hell,* who may have regretted such advice.

That character is Lawrence Wentworth, a scholarly historian and staunch individualist, who prefers isolation as a way of life. Wentworth takes great pains to avoid his neighbors and colleagues on Battle Hill, but his individualism truly culminates in the creation of an imaginary succubus: unable to form a material relationship with the young Adela Hunt, he defies all realistic and relational demands by forging his own illusory one. Through his rejection of human solidarity, Wentworth not only begins preferring the ghostly to the corporeal, but also the false to the factual; and like liars who tell so many falsehoods they can no longer distinguish truth from fiction, Wentworth summons Adela's phantasmal image so many times, fabricates historical knowledge to compete with his academic peers so often, that reality finally abandons him to illusion. Because of this, Emerson's domestic "heaven" inverts into an inescapable hell for Wentworth, confirming the tradition of modernist individualism as the stuff of damnation for Williams. So while Emerson may have maintained that humans could overcome a sort of "descent" by relying on themselves, Williams may have retorted that such self-reliance weaves the very "moon-bright rope" to hell (*Descent into Hell* [DIH] 51).

In *DIH*, it is the spiritual dimension of Battle Hill which makes Wentworth's earthly damnation possible. However, Williams departs from the typical fantasy mode of his Inklings colleagues; by bordering on a genre that smacks more of magical realism, he makes his "other world" indistinct from earth as we know it. In line with his theological and metaphysical leanings, Williams creates a fantasy world which blurs the distinctions between mystical activity and reality, where the spiritual planes of one world furtively intersect with our own material one. This literary move dissolves the divide between the magical and the physical, forcing spirit and matter to converge in an ambiguous

way. Choosing such a literary setting may have been clever on Williams's part since, like smearing an artist's palate so that the different elements irreversibly mix, this world-blending ultimately frustrates any modernist impulse to compartmentalize and discard whatever aspects of the novel might transcend the material world.

The theological notion which compels Williams to merge his worlds, and the metaphysical realities within them, is his conception of a doctrine termed "Coinherence." This universal theorem promotes something Williams considered an inescapable aspect of reality: the solidarity of all existence. This concept ties into his principle of "Substituted Love," which calls humans to literally carry one another's burdens. Williams explains both the practical expression and the spiritual underpinnings of this principle in his 1941 essay "The Way of Exchange":

> The Christian idea [of substitution] was expressed in the phrase 'bear ye one another's burdens'. It encouraged, indeed it demanded, a continual attention to the needs of one's neighbour, to his distresses and his delights. It defined 'neighbour' as meaning anyone with whom one was, by holy Luck, brought into contact. It required, then, an active 'sympathy', and it spoke of something still higher, of an active and non-selfish love. It went even farther. It declared a union of existences […] [Indeed,] the mystery of the Christian religion is a doctrine of co-inherence and substitution. The Divine Word co-inheres in God the Father […] but also He has substituted His Manhood for ours in the secrets of Incarnation and Atonement. The principle of the Passion is that He gave His life 'for'—that is, instead of and on behalf of—ours. In that sense He lives in us and we in Him, He and we co-inhere. (*Image* 148,152)

The doctrines of Coinherence and Substituted Love explain how the lay theologian Williams thought metaphysics should operate at large: every aspect of reality, from the macroscopic universe to the microscopic individual, should interrelate and "coinhere." But Williams not only promulgated metaphysical theories with this expressed belief in coinherence, he also leveled social and philosophical critiques with them as well. The ways in which Williams demonstrates these theological concepts in the plot of his novel, and in the actions of his characters, display an anti-modernist worldview which rejects the centuries-old materialism[1] and individualism of a rational Enlightenment.

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[1] This is not the materialism we associate with monetary or material gain, but the modernist view that "all facts (including facts about the human mind and will and the course of human history) are causally dependent upon physical processes, or even reducible to them" (Britannica Online).

True to the metaphysical arguments of his doctrines, Williams does more than verbally advocate his coinherent views. Rather, he literally enacts coinherence by making it a multi-functioning force in *DIH*. His literature is actually cohesive in three noteworthy ways: in its genre, in its theological arguments, and in its stylistic form. The fantasy genre he employs creates a metaphysical coinherence of the physical and the supernatural; the theological themes of the novel provide various levels in which this sort of coinherence can operate; and the stylistic density of Williams's prose and the intentional repetition of his diction enable the poet in Williams to demonstrate his themes at the same time he explains them. The composite picture which the genre, content, and style develop creates a unified reality (which I term a "holistic coinherence") in his novel which is analogous to the sort of overarching coinherent universe that Williams advocates. In other words, like the Christian Trinity which first practices solidarity amongst the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at the same time it urges humans to emulate it, this novel also demonstrates universal coinherence while it explicates its meaning.

Williams demonstrates coinherence, and begins kicking against the modernist goads of his time in the process, by choosing the fantasy genre as his mode of literary and theological expression. While this genre allows Williams to present a supernatural universe, he takes the fantasy genre a step further in a powerful way; by blurring the distinctions between the physical and supernatural worlds in his novel, Williams implies that the known world is not only mystical, but that the mystical is indistinguishable from the ordinary. This metaphysical anti-dualism suggests a universal coinherence which disrupts the established conceptions of modernist philosophy and boldly calls the "fundamental duality of the real and the fantastic" into question (Aichele 323). For modernists who respond to the fantastic by relegating "[it to] the realm of the non-real, to which non-belief is the appropriate response" (Aichele 323), Williams's world-blending creates a formidable obstacle. Critic John Heath-Stubbs comments that, for Williams, "the supernatural is being taken seriously, and is being brought disconcertingly close to our own experience. Magic is seen, not as something which may provide a fanciful escape from a dull reality, but, at least, as the image of something of the world as we know it" (7-8). In *DIH*, Williams dissolves the dualistic categories that "make modernist truth possible" (Aichele 323), refusing to let his supernatural world be compartmentalized and set aside as unreal.

It is in this way that Williams's literary behavior is distinctive in its anti-modernist approach. Because of modernism's strict materialism, Williams's "other world" might pose more of a threat to modernist dualism than J.R.R.

Tolkien's Middle-earth or C.S. Lewis's Narnia.[2] While Middle-earth functions as a world completely removed from its reader's environment and Narnia operates as a land parallel to the universe as we know it (only making contact to borrow select members for periodic adventures), the spiritual activity of Williams's Battle Hill invades the physical realm in an ambiguous and unsettling way. To prove how Williams has done something distinct in this regard, one could imagine these three authors spanning a fantasy spectrum. While Middle-earth sits on one extreme end of the pole (where fantasy is entirely set apart from our earth), in the center could lie Narnia (where a wardrobe allows characters to traverse a parallel realm). But Williams's world occupies the other polar extremity, where real and fantastical planes blend together in disturbingly seamless unity. In his world, ghostly figures trespass the characters' plane of reality, causing them and Williams's readers to question what is supernatural and what is not (*DIH* 22).

This fantasy juxtaposition demonstrates how Williams took his anti-modernist views to a powerfully innovative level. It is worth noting that other scholars have distinguished Williams as the risk-taking, forerunning rebel among his Inklings cohorts. Diana Pavlac Glyer observes in her comparison piece on the Inklings that while the group was "nonhierarchical" and "shared responsibility and shifting roles," Williams still acted as "the dynamic, charismatic leader who led the group into the more productive, powerful, and effective rebellion stage" (Glyer 34, 35n7). What specific acts of rebellion Williams spearheaded are not explored in Glyer's piece, but the arguments made here contend that his anti-modernist world-blending was one way that he upped literary "ante" (Glyer 35). Williams, in a manner beyond that yet attempted by his Inklings allies during his lifetime, successfully creates a realm where rational certainty, metaphysical duality, and modernist materialism cannot exist.

The second way Williams achieves "holistic coinherence" in *DIH* is with the theological concepts and plot points therein. Williams's universal laws demand more than heart-warming solidarity among humans or feel-good kindness. Rather, Williams adds multidimensionality to his coinherent theology by forcing it to operate in multiple areas of existence, thereby proving its all-encompassing nature. This originates with

> Williams's unique interpretation of Christian theology [which attempts] to
> reconcile his conflicting intuitions of reality as one and whole, although

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[2] It should be noted that in some of C.S. Lewis's works which were published several years after Williams's *DIH*, namely *The Great Divorce* and *That Hideous Strength,* Lewis does employ the sort of inter-realm world-blending in his own narratives which was so characteristic of Williams's fiction. This is perhaps a strong proof of the idea-sharing that occurred within the Inkings circle and of Williams's particular influence on Lewis, whom Gareth Knight states Lewis "in some ways idolised." (Knight 173)

experienced in fragmentation and contradiction. The basis of this interpretation is the concept of *coinherence*, the fundamental interrelatedness of all elements and aspects of existence. (Schneider 180-181)

When examples of such "fundamental interrelatedness" in *DIH* are explored on multiple levels we understand the wide-ranging nature of solidarity as Williams understands it. The order discussed will begin with universal coinherence, travel to interpersonal solidarity among humans, and conclude with the metaphysical unifications of the conceptual and physical, of life and death, and of heaven and hell. When observed en masse, it is clear that one can barely split atoms with Williams. His conception of coinherence is as ideologically holistic as it is literarily exhaustive, and it is this comprehensive and detail-oriented world-blending which gives Williams's anti-individualistic arguments their narrative punch.

When it comes to interacting with the universe, Margaret Anstruther is a coinherent success story. As this elderly member of Battle Hill nears death, she begins having visions of mystical proportions. These visions reveal her willingness to accept reality in full, despite its certain ugliness, and this spiritual maturity becomes a major linchpin in Williams's salvific coinherence. Of this triumph the narrator says, "Margaret Anstruther had, in a vision within a dream, decided upon death [...]. Her most interior heart had decided, and the choice was so profound that her past experiences and her present capacities could only obey. She had no work of union with herself to achieve; that was done" (*DIH* 117-8). Margaret accepts every fact surrounding her soul, her life, and her circumstances and, therefore, coinheres with the universe at large. When contrasted with the character Wentworth, who rejects realities of all dimensions, Margaret's ability to welcome an imminent death casts her in a remarkable light. While lying on her deathbed, she begins envisioning the approaching finale. Images of rocks, light, her life in Battle Hill and her granddaughter Pauline march across her imagination when finally

> She set herself to crawl out of [a] darkened corner towards the light. She turned from all the corner held—her home, her memories, Stanhope's plays, Pauline; with an effort she began her last journey. It might take hours, or days, or even years, but it was certain [...]. The moment of death was accepted and accomplished in her first outward movement; there remained only to die. (*DIH* 73)

Because of her ability to achieve what the text treats as near-heroism, Margaret is one of the few characters whom the novel rewards with peace. This suggests that coinherence involves more than just friendliness among humans; it implies that

there are also metaphysical rewards, on earth and postmortem, for cooperating with coinherent realities. And so, even though hell can occur on earth, there still exists a heavenly resolve for those who bend to the universe's laws as Williams (through Stanhope) understands them.

Williams demonstrates the interpersonal application of solidarity in the plot of *DIH* through the coinherence of two characters, Peter Stanhope and Pauline Anstruther. Stanhope, a successful local playwright, eventually leads his acquaintance, Pauline, in a didactic explanation of how loving people in a substitutionary way actuates coinherence. He then demonstrates the practical power of these ideals by literally absorbing her most debilitating fear. After learning the cause of her paranoia, which happens to be the supernatural haunting of a doppelganger, Stanhope explains that the solution lies in simply passing that fear on to him and then doing likewise for others. He makes it clear that this is not just an emotional effort, as though bearing one another's burdens were limited to its figurative sense; rather he argues that it is a literal choice that "needs only the act" (*DIH* 98). Stanhope explains the departure he is making from the conventional theological understanding of carrying burdens when he says,

> [Carrying burdens] means listening sympathetically, and thinking unselfishly, and being anxious about, and so on. Well I don't say a word against all that; no doubt it helps. But I think when Christ or St. Paul, or whoever said *bear*, or whatever he Aramaically said instead of *bear*, he meant something much more like carrying a parcel instead of someone else. To bear a burden is precisely to carry it instead of. If you're still carrying yours, I'm not carrying it for you—however sympathetic I may be. [...] [A]ll I'm asking you to do is to notice that blazing truth. It doesn't sound very difficult." (*DIH* 98)

Stanhope, while proposing this metaphysically innovative concept in a casual and matter-of-fact way, insists that this is not an arbitrary approach to human solidarity when he argues, "I haven't made the universe and it isn't my fault. But I'm sure that this is a law of the universe" (*DIH* 99). After this conversation, Pauline goes home to find herself liberated in the course of a few epiphanic hours. By the sheer force of their wills, Stanhope and Pauline are able to coinhere and actualize the substitutionary power of universal laws. Williams's narrative discourse suggests the universal conception of coinherence and the plot of the text confirms its. In this basic sense, Williams proves a sort of coinherence in which "human beings, endowed with free will [...] affirm their mutual interdependence, freely engaging in exchange with one another" (Schneider 181), directly opposing the modernist individualism of Williams's day.

The relational success of Stanhope and Pauline also demonstrates a finer point of Williams's metaphysical blending. What makes Pauline's emotional and spiritual deliverance possible is Williams's coinherent conception of the figurative and the literal; in other words, it is only because Williams regards the carrying of burdens as a physical, proactive choice, or a willful "compact of substitution between friends," that Pauline finally conquers her fears (*Image* 151, 154). Indeed, in true "holistic coinherent" fashion, the very coalescence of her two selves (Pauline's physical self and her ghostly counterpart) into a singular "union of existences" renders her conversion to the "vicarious life" a literal, as well as a spiritual, triumph. This physical merger mirrors her transition from errant individualism to the saving graces of coinherent wholeness, both with herself and with others. And so for Williams, the figurative and the literal continuously converge and become acceptable approaches to realistic behavior; this convergence also implies a mystical reality (in which spiritual concepts affect physical actions) which pushes against modernist anti-supernaturalism.

This Williams novel also contains numerous suggestions that life and death are coinherent realities; in fact, the book's plot would not be able to operate under any other metaphysics. In *DIH*, there is principally the land "of the living, the ordinary world of daily activity. [Yet], lying beside it, sometimes interpenetrating it, is the world of the dead. Here in Battle Hill, which was often the site of combat and mass slaughter, the dead lie so thick that breakthroughs are more common than elsewhere" (Spencer 69). For Williams, the polar extreme of his fantasy world must be a point of convergence for the living and the dead, as this not only amplifies his coinherent themes but enables him to creatively discipline his individualistic characters.

Williams's most effective demonstration of this metaphysic occurs through an obscure character: an unnamed dead man who hangs himself at the construction site that becomes Wentworth's home. This character enters the plot in the chapter "Via Mortis" (Latin for "Deadly Road"), which tells the story of the "unskilled assistant [who] had been carelessly taken on [for the construction of new estates]" (*DIH* 26). A sickly, hen-pecked, and overlooked citizen of Battle Hill, the dead man decides to hang himself one evening after work and goes off in pursuit of "what had suddenly become a resolve" (*DIH* 27). After stealing into one of the unfinished houses, he mounts a ladder and knots a rope, dropping his body over the landing in the hopes "to go no farther, to hear no more, to be done" (*DIH* 31). Yet, after he leaps, sways, and yelps, the lights do not go out. The dead man neither ceases to exist nor enters an ethereal city of gold. Contrarily, he stands at the base of the ladder, unable to make sense of the moment. When he mounts the ladder for a second try, he finds that the rope has disappeared, taking any further suicide attempts with it. As the scene progresses, it becomes clear that he has entered a world that resembles the one he had just

tried to leave, yet proves eerily different. It eventually lights on the reader that the dead man has only entered another plane of existence that nevertheless interacts with the living one of Battle Hill. Instances of supernatural contact occur when characters like Wentworth and Margaret hear the dead man's footsteps or note his presence in their respective visions (*DIH* 50, 123). This dead man's "failed" suicide and his participation in the mystical experiences of other characters demonstrate that Williams advocates a coinherent reality which defies the grave. It stands then that individualism cannot even occur in death. Although death tends to be the one event that everyone must experience alone, Williams argues that characters, like the dead man, cannot escape societal existence no matter what maneuvers they try.

Yet, even though life and death are convergent realities in Williams's world, that doesn't exclude the possibility of an experiential heaven and hell. Contrary to the conventional orthodoxy of his religion, Williams seems to question the locality of these afterlife destinations. Rather than limiting hell to a postmortem realm distinct from earth as we know it, Williams suggests that his characters can experience something of hell on earth for violating coinherent laws. Wentworth is one such character; he is a coinherent demonstration in the negative and a self-damned example of what not to do in a cohesive universe. He persistently fails in the areas that Margaret, Stanhope, and Pauline excel until he actually "desire[s] hell" (*DIH* 50). In the events of the narrative, Wentworth's sins are doubly heinous: he not only rejects human solidarity but also refuses to accept reality. This, to Williams, is the surest path to hell, who finds "[co-inherence] at work also in the ethical realm [where] moral choice may resolve, finally, to a decision whether to embrace one's role as a participant in the web or to reject it: whether to belong to what Williams called 'The City' or to prefer aloneness, which is tantamount to destruction" (Huttar 15-16). Characters like Wentworth demonstrate how Williams posits his characters before moral "junctions" in order to test their mettle and determine whether they are worthy of praise or damnation (*DIH* 50).

Wentworth falls into the latter category and his iniquities only multiply throughout the events of the novel. Like most vices, his sins start out small. He embarks on his descent by rejecting and warping minor realities to suit his ambitions. Despite his position as one of the town's most noted historians, Wentworth sustains an academic rivalry with the town's other distinguished historian: Aston Moffat. By the time the novel introduces this contentious pair, Wentworth and Moffat have been locking their academic horns over the particulars of one of Battle Hill's historic skirmishes. Their intellectual duels take place through published letters, and as Wentworth labors over the formation of his next counterargument, he begins distorting historical truth in order to trounce his opponent. One night in his study, as Wentworth

> was finding the answer to Aston Moffat's last published letter difficult […] he was [still] determined that Moffat 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 […]. (*DIH* 39)

Here Wentworth develops the habit of exalting his own self-interests over the demands of reality. Later, when his rival succeeds in gaining the academic honor of "Knighthood for Historian," Wentworth willfully indulges an unbridled jealousy. While crumpling the local newspaper that made the announcement known, the text offers Wentworth the chance to nobly rejoice in his competitor's achievements. Instead, the "possibility—of joy in [the] present fact—receded […] [and Wentworth] had determined, then and forever, for ever, for ever, that he would hate the fact, and therefore facts" (*DIH* 81). These events prove that Williams will not stage Wentworth as a victim. Not only is this character morally twisted and individualistically obsessed, but he is willfully so.[3]

Immediately following this event, the imaginary Adela (the recurrent succubus complicit in Wentworth's psychological and emotional ruin) makes her debut. The segue (going from Wentworth's willful rejection of facts to the quick arrival of the apparition at his window), illustrates how Wentworth's fact-twisting becomes his gateway lie. By rejecting small realities, Wentworth crosses the threshold into irremediable falsehood. While never a gregarious personality in *DIH*, Wentworth's seclusion and individualism still take on whole new proportions as his relationship with the un-Adela progresses. Wentworth's ego eventually inflates to cosmic proportions as he makes himself the god of his own reclusive imaginings; the king of his own mental hills. Williams best demonstrates this self-exaltation during Wentworth's fantasies, where the latter sees himself as a "god […] [who] sank into oblivion; [who] died to things other than himself; [who] woke to himself" (*DIH* 87). Once privy to incriminating confessions like these, the reader may conclude that Wentworth is the kind of coinherent rebel that Stanhope alludes to during his didactic explanation of coinherence in "The Doctrine of Substituted Love." When talking to Pauline on this very subject, Stanhope explains the dangers of rejecting this principle. Stanhope censures those who would "make a universe for [themselves]" and who must "go clean against the nature of things […] [and] refuse the

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[3] This idea of agency is consistently supported by the presence of a white rope (aforementioned in this paper) which Wentworth not only dreams about, but also envisions during the morally defining moments of his waking hours. The rope becomes Wentworth's link to hell, as he further descends its length with each act of determined individualism.

Omnipotence in order to respect [themselves]" (*DIH* 99). Of this noncompliance Williams himself confirms the consequences. "It is not for us to make a division; that power our Lord explicitly reserved for Himself. If we insist on it, we can, in His final judgment, *be* separated. That is hell. But only our selves can put us there" (*Image* 153). If these sorts of anti-coinherent behaviors, according to Williams, are the hallmarks of damnation, then it appears that Wentworth is nothing short of hell-bound.

Yet if isolation, according to Williams, has the power to damn and destroy, what do we make of Emerson's optimistic individualism? In the aforementioned essay "Self Reliance," Emerson describes these ideals as the best of objectives when he says, "When good is near you, when you have life in yourself […] you shall not discern the footprints of any other; you shall not see the face of man; you shall not hear any name;—the way, the thought, the good, shall be wholly strange and new. It shall exclude all other being" (1172). According to Emerson, benefits should abound from Wentworth's willful exclusion of other beings. In fact, Wentworth should feel more alive than ever as he becomes blissfully insensible to invading footprints and faces. Yet, the more willful his isolation becomes, the more discernible the pattering of ghostly feet and the haunting faces of others become (*DIH* 50, 81). It appears that Emerson's individualistic ideals invert and fail in Williams's Battle Hill. Characters, like Adela, Mrs. Sammile (the aged-Lilith character in *DIH*), and Wentworth, who practice such self-reliance find themselves in a pre-death damnation, swept up into chaotic, hellish scenes of "meaningless horror" (*DIH* 202, 209, 220). It seems Williams indirectly defies Emerson's modernist assumptions by demonstrating the consequences and metaphysical terrors of rejecting the coinherent universe that he considers a brute fact of reality (much like salvation itself).

There is one last way that Williams makes coinherence a practical reality in his literature. While it would be one thing for this theological layman to talk about the aggregation of people and "all aspects of existence" (Schneider 180-181), it would be another entirely for him to actualize this coinherent vision with the diction and structure of his prose. After wading through a dense novel like *DIH*, the perceptive reader might notice that Williams does more than simply articulate the importance of coinherence; rather, he uses the repetition of his diction and the density of his prose to give his coinherent themes actualized substance.

Sources confirm that Williams used language in the interest of his themes; that he tried to make his mystics experiential as well as intellectual. Spencer points out that Williams's prose reflects the "mystical experience" to be shared. "Such […] language [needs to be] full of images, metaphors, and symbols" (37). It is in this way that Williams not only describes the mystical experience but also demonstrates it to the senses so that the reader can

experience it as well. According to Scott McLaren, "Williams attempts to set before his readers […] images that are not only metaphysically consistent with Christian theology, but serve to illustrate the abstract principles of that theology in concrete and tangible ways" (McLaren 8).

To do this, Williams uses a "'peculiar density' of style; [he] is writing prose like a poet. It is a style carefully crafted to reinforce his correspondingly 'dense' theological vision" (Huttar 23). This density of style enables Williams "to use rhetoric not only to present, but at the same time to embody that vision of coinherence which rhetoric in the conventional sense often threatens to violate" (Huttar 19). Scholars have discovered multiple instances when Williams has lent intrinsic meaning to language in general and to individual words in particular. Of this, Alice E. Davidson says,

> Williams's idiosyncratic style leads him to evoke two or three levels of meaning in a single word, and at times even to force words into new meanings, new roles. He breaks and reshapes them […] [and] thereby renders all his language more fluid and unstable, and full of sleeping potential. New slants of meaning can be evoked with minimum gesture. Any word may explode at any moment. (Davidson 50)

Critical observations of this nature prove that Williams has an established and observed habit of infusing language with mystical meaning and of using it to demonstrate his themes.

While many critics have explored Williams's intentions behind the imagery of a recurrent rope or his repeated use of the word "speed" in *DIH* (Davidson 48, 50), no scholars have noticed the curious way in which Williams employs the word "mass." And while there may be conspicuous sacramental overtones in his use of such word, he seems to employ it specifically in the sense of aggregation. Also, instead of appearing haphazardly throughout the text, as though Williams merely had a peculiar penchant for the word, "mass" appears in the novel's most spiritually relevant scenes and usually comes in pairs to highlight its presence. The word first appears early in the novel, during Adela's pretentious-sounding literary criticism, when she uses it in the way of interpreting symbols. She says that one can only interpret a symbol by massing it—that "it's all of a piece, and it's the total effect that creates the symbolic force" (*DIH* 14). At first this seems like inconsequential literary jargon or subtle parody of such on Williams's part, but the word's recurrence in the context of characters' confrontation with human solidarity seems to give it greater import than that. Rather, it is arguable that despite Adela's questionable use of the word, "mass" plays an active part in the overall message of coinherence in the novel. This is because its function and power appear in three relevant visionary scenes. To demonstrate the literary significance of this word, we must look at three separate

examples: the visions of the dead man, of Margaret, and of Wentworth. This section will also explore how Adela's concept of "mass" as a symbolic force can work toward the demonstrativeness of Williams's narrative objectives.

The first time the word "mass" appears after Adela's introduction of the word, it is used to describe the hellish circumstances of the dead man. Those reading about the aforementioned misery of his state can assume that a sense of isolation and rejection precipitates his suicide and causes the scene of his death to appear as a "mass of continuous tiny movement, a mass noisy with moans and screams" (*DIH* 24). This imagery describes the deadly road that the dead man would soon take; and the word "mass," as a darkening description of that scene, refers to the haunted nature of the hill in which "the different planes [of history and eternity] exist simultaneously" (Bruckner 27). Since the dead man feels ostracized from one mass of living people enough to kill himself, it seems as though he is now joining a mass of bloody history, a mass of the dead. Spencer affirms this supposition when she points out that "the [dead man] had been an outcast of the Republic, oppressed and abandoned by his fellows […] [and] because he has never in life been given the opportunity to choose love, it is given to him now, after death" (70). Williams, as previously established, rejects the idea that humans can live in isolation, and so this postmortem aggregation, or "mass" of the long-dead, is a natural extension of persistent solidarity. Because the dead man does not die in the conventional sense, the text denies him any final individualistic resolve. Despite his violent efforts to escape "The City," Williams nevertheless forces him to confront a community on the side of the dead, as at later points in the novel he is haunted by figures and faces, a "massed multitude," and offered a second chance to embrace them (*DIH* 119, 154). And so, in the context of the dead man's visionary death scene, this use of the word "mass" enforces the idea that solidarity surpasses time as well as the grave; it also gives interrelatedness its continuing transcendent power and universal force.

Later, in the chapter "Vision of Death," which concerns Margaret's mortally significant vision, the word "mass" is used twice to describe the slow revelation of her interrelatedness with other mountains, as well as with, it can be argued, other humans. The text explains that, "As the light grew the mountain that was she became aware again of its fellows, spread out around no longer in long range but in a great mass" (*DIH* 72). Margaret, who throughout the vision sees herself as a mountain of great significance, realizes that there are other mountains, or fellows, beside her.

> In the time of her novitiate it had seemed to her sometimes that, though her brains and emotions acted this way or that, yet all that activity went on along the sides of a slowly increasing mass of existence made from herself

and all others with whom she had to do, and that strong and separate happiness—for she felt it as happiness, though she herself might be sad […] was the life which she was utterly to become. Now she knew that only the smallest fragility of her being clung somewhere to the great height that was she and others and all the world under her separate kind, as she herself was part of all other peaks […]. (*DIH* 72)

It should not be ignored that, during the climax of Margaret's vision (which concerns her former life and abstract purpose), the idea that she is "part of all other peaks" appears with the repeated use of the word "mass." This suggests that she is submissively accepting this concept of solidarity as she looks at her life, through visionary eyes, one last time. The novel commends those who accept reality in full, and this is one fact of life that Margaret willingly embraces. As Spencer points out, "the dying Margaret Anstruther realizes the secret of happiness is to accept those joys the universe offers, rather than trying to compel the universe to offer you joys of your own definition" (68). Because of her compliance, Margaret attains the "secret of happiness" and the heavenly benefits of human connectedness (benefits which some of her peers forfeit); and it is this word "mass" which helps to describe the power and purpose of her mountainous achievement.

      The word also appears during one of Wentworth's aforementioned visions. In the chapter titled "Return to Eden," Wentworth imagines an inverted Edenic setting in which every form of creation depends on the exhalation of his physical breath and the exertion of his sovereign will (*DIH* 86). The text demonstrates how deep his desires for isolation run as he eventually wants to prevent Adela's existence and as he cries against the oncoming steps of the dead man into his realm (*DIH* 87). The projected Adela adds a spiritual dimension to this scene by inverting Creation Scripture for him, telling him that "it is good for man to be alone" (*DIH* 86). This vision creates a satanically autonomous world for Wentworth—a world which he creates for the self and rules by himself. It is within this context of anti-solidarity that "mass" appears twice. With the dead man meandering into Wentworth's world, the narrator relays that

The son of Adam waited. He felt, coming over the vast form, that Hill of the dead and of the living, but to him only the mass of matter from which his perfect satisfaction was to approach, a road, a road up which a shape, no longer vast, was now coming; a shape he distrusted before he discerned it. It was coming slowly, over the mass of the Adam, a man, a poor ragged sick man. (*DIH* 88)

In this vision, both the man and the landscape are referred to as masses, and it is arguable that Wentworth's rejection of the dead man and his fixation with

solitude contribute to this twice-used word. The significance of this word here is that it marks a critical transition for Wentworth as it does for Margaret: while Margaret's vision and her acceptance of mass lead her into glad solidarity and a serene death, Wentworth's vision works inversely to secure him in a defiant and destructive self-rule. The novel takes on horror-esque qualities for Wentworth after this pivotal moment. Rather than living in the liberty of Emersonian ideals, Wentworth suffers cruelly from anxieties which render all social interactions impossible (*DIH* 140-146). His hellish visions eventually reach such a pitch of chaos that all interpretations of reality become permanently obscured (*DIH* 199). And so this word "mass," and the way in which Williams uses it during this vision, heightens the contrast between Margaret's acquiescence and Wentworth's obstinacy, illustrating just how consequential individualism can be.

It also would not be out of character for Williams to give "mass" power as a literary device which its use in the beginning of "The Doctrine of Substituted Love" seems to suggest. In the opening of this chapter we see Adela rehearsing her lines in a way that remains consistent with her aforementioned philosophies. "Adela, true to her principles of massing and blocking, arranged whole groups of words in chunks, irrespective of line and meaning, but according to her own views of the emotional quality to be stressed" (*DIH* 92). This could be seen as little more than Adela's lofty view of drama, but this quote seems to point to Williams's own language during his characters' visions. The diction and sentence structure employed during one of Wentworth's visions, especially, seem to have those qualities mentioned in Adela's rehearsing techniques. After the un-Adela encourages Wentworth to think more about himself, Wentworth then goes into a confused mediation about his supposed ownership of her. An example of this complex structuring will be given in length because of its argumentative significance.

> [H]e turned and went by her side, silent when he heard the words. […] [T]hat was what he had said or she had said, whichever had said that the thing was to be found, as if Adela had said it, Adela in her real self, by no means the self that went with Hugh; no, but the true, the true Adela who was apart and his; for that was the difficulty all the while, that she was truly his, and wouldn't be, but if he thought more of her truly being, and not of her being untruly away, on whatever way, for the way that went away was not the way she truly went, but if they did away with the way she went away, then Hugh could be untrue and she true, then he would know themselves, two, true and two, on the way he was going, and the peace in himself, and the scent of her in him, and the her, meant for him, in him; that was the she he knew, and he must think the more of himself. (*DIH* 83)

This free indirect speech describes Wentworth's obsession in an almost incomprehensible language, in a rushed paragraph devoid of pauses and periods, and therefore smacks of Adela's massing concept. Williams's diction, via Wentworth, is repetitive, syntactically chaotic, and slammed together; the entire paragraph creates a mass of emotional distress and confusion. It seems as though Williams is intentionally disregarding "line and meaning" in the attempt to relay the "emotional quality to be stressed" (*DIH* 92). And so we must ask if Adela, for all her seeming pretension, is actually onto something. Heath-Stubbs affirms that "the underlying theme of all [Williams's] novels is the quest for some symbol of spiritual power" (28). Rather than remaining indifferent to Adela's commentary on symbols, perhaps Williams, as the author, is adopting these ideas in his own, subtle manner in order to relay the full force of an opaque and massed symbol— to discuss his themes of isolation and solidarity in a significant way. Adela argues that mass creates the total effect, and the dizzying language and conceptual confusion of Williams's prose, here and elsewhere throughout the novel, achieves just that: it demonstrates the chaos of isolation, the necessity of interrelatedness, and the aggregated power of those theological themes.

If a sweeping critique against modernist individualism is all Williams aimed to achieve, he certainly found an inventive way to do so. While Williams could have easily written a didactic essay on anti-individualism (similar to Emerson's concerning the opposite), this "holistically coinherent" novel has a persuasive potency that pedagogic efforts simply lack. By going a step further than his literary counterparts in the fantasy genre, by explicating multiple levels of coinherence through the characters and plot points of his narrative, and by demonstrating those themes through poetically significant language, Williams effectively models his mystical interpretations of coinherence at the same time he explains them. Williams is an author who practices what he preaches, for one can hardly explore the concept of coinherence without feeling its force from his novel first hand. It is in this way that Williams's literary approaches prove experiential as well as intellectual, making his anti-individualistic censures an anti-modernist success.

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