

4-15-2006

Hermeticism and the Metaphysics of Goodness in the Novels of Charles Williams

Scott McLaren
York University, Ontario

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore>



Part of the [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McLaren, Scott (2006) "Hermeticism and the Metaphysics of Goodness in the Novels of Charles Williams," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 24: No. 3, Article 2.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol24/iss3/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>



Online MidSummer Seminar 2025

More Perilous and Fair: Women and Gender in Mythopoeic Fantasy

August 2-5, 2024

Via Zoom and Discord

<https://www.mythsoc.org/oms/oms-04.htm>



Hermeticism and the Metaphysics of Goodness in the Novels of Charles Williams

Abstract

Examines metaphysical symbols in three novels by Charles Williams: the Holy Grail in *War in Heaven*, the Stone of King Solomon in *Many Dimensions*, and the Tarot deck in *The Greater Trumps*.

Additional Keywords

Grail as symbol in literature; Stone of King Solomon; Tarot in literature; Williams, Charles—Symbolism; Williams, Charles. *The Greater Trumps*—Symbolism; Williams, Charles. *Many Dimensions*—Symbolism; Williams, Charles. *War in Heaven*—Symbolism

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Hermeticism and the Metaphysics of Goodness in the Novels of Charles Williams

Scott McLaren

Many readers have found Charles Williams's sustained use of hermetic themes and images too great for a full acceptance of his work. One of Williams's earliest formative encounters with these themes came sometime between 1912 and 1914 when he read A.E. Waite's *The Hidden Church of the Holy Graal* (1909). He was so favorably impressed by its consideration of this Christian symbol from within the hermetic tradition that he wrote Waite to tell him so. This initial contact led Williams in 1917 to join Waite's own hermetic order *The Fellowship of the Rosy Cross*. And while his reasons for ceasing to attend in 1927 and officially withdrawing from the *Fellowship* in 1928 remain unknown, his friendship with Waite continued through an amicable correspondence at least until 1931. Waite's influence and Williams's interest in hermeticism are, moreover, now widely acknowledged to have been lifelong (Ashenden 52, Brewer 54, King 165, Willard 270).¹

Sometime in the mid-1920s, when Williams's involvement in the *Fellowship* was at its height, he began to write novels.² The first to be published, *War in Heaven* (1930), relies on Waite's hermetic study for both the inspiration and spelling of its central image: the Holy Graal. By 1933 Williams had published four other novels that, like his first, all freely employ themes and symbols drawn from Waite's work and from the wider hermetic tradition. Williams's second and fourth published novels, in particular, also have in common with *War in Heaven* narratives that are constructed around single hermetic objects of apparent magical power (Urang 51, 53). In *Many Dimensions* (1931) Williams sets before his reader the mysterious Stone of King Solomon, an image he probably drew from a brief description in Waite's *The Holy Kabbalah* (1929) of a supernatural cubic stone on which was inscribed "the Divine Name" (229).³ Finally, in *The Greater Trumps* (1932) Williams uses as his central image the Tarot deck, a system of "high symbolism" that Waite in *The*

Pictorial Key to the Tarot (1910) argues should be interpreted according to “[...] the Laws of Grace rather than the pretexts and intuitions of that which passes for divination” (xx).

It is generally understood that what Williams encountered of the hermetic tradition through Waite had already been Christianized: “Waite’s order was mystical rather than magical; its membership was open to those desiring ‘knowledge of Divine Things and union with God in Christ’” (King 165; see also Brewer 54 and Ashenden 52, 55). The distinction between magic and mysticism, on which Williams’s critics have relied in coming to grips with these themes in his work, is commented on at some length by Evelyn Underhill, a notable Christian mystic who belonged with Waite to the original *Order of the Golden Dawn* (Ridler xxiv, Hadfield 29) and whose letters Williams edited in 1943. She writes:

The fundamental difference between the two is this: magic wants to get, mysticism wants to give [...] In mysticism the will is united with the emotions in an impassioned desire to transcend the sense-world in order that the self may be joined by love to the one eternal and ultimate Object of love [...] In magic, the will unites with the intellect in an impassioned desire for supersensible knowledge. This is the intellectual, aggressive, and scientific temperament trying to extend its field of consciousness [...] (Underhill 84; see also 178ff.)

While mysticism seeks union with God, Underhill frames her concept of magic around the magician’s fierce hunger for hidden knowledge through whatever supernatural means present themselves. King calls this magic black and writes that it “[...] is performed perversely in order to grasp powers and to control them. Its consummate evil is that it violates Coinherence” (172). Underhill’s description of mysticism complements this assessment in its foreshadowing of Williams’s own doctrine of Coinherence: “Mysticism [...] is non-individualistic. It implies, indeed, the abolition of individuality; of that hard separateness, that ‘I, Me, Mine’ which makes of man a finite isolated thing” (Underhill 85). Importantly, however, the distinction between magic and mysticism is not everywhere unblurred. Mysticism itself can be corrupted and “all formal religion is saturated with magic” (Underhill 182). Though wholly different in their aims and

ultimately incompatible, Underhill suggests that they seem to share a common "starting-point" (Underhill 180).

There is an interesting passage in Williams's book *Witchcraft* (1941) where he also addresses some of the same themes, though he does so with explicit reference only to the word magic. He proposes, in particular, two distinct psychological states that might create in someone a predisposition towards the idea of magic. They are: (i) a perverse fear that objects and people might transform themselves irrationally so that a "door, untouched, might close" or more malevolently that a "hand will become a different and terrifying thing, moving in one's own like a malicious intruder, too real for anything but fear" (*Witchcraft* 77), and (ii) a singular moment when a body becomes suddenly laden with universal meaning: "A hand lighting a cigarette is the explanation of everything; a foot stepping from a train is the rock of all existence" (*Witchcraft* 78). Like Underhill, Williams writes that both, though wholly different, are "[...] as valid or invalid as each other; any distinction must be a matter of choice. And they justify each other [because] they both at first overthrow a simple trust that phenomena are what phenomena seem" (*Witchcraft* 78). In the former the observer's fear is rooted in an apprehension that he or she might be threatened or harmed by a seemingly random change; in the latter, the observer is not harmed but enlightened because, Williams suggests, "the Mercy of God [...] has not left us without a cloud of witnesses" (*Witchcraft* 78). The most important feature of these definitions, something the former lacks completely and the latter possesses in superabundance, is rationality.

By investing the hermetic objects in *War in Heaven*, *Many Dimensions*, and *The Greater Trumps* with the qualities of both, Williams also seems to support in these fictional narratives the notion of a common starting-point. While these objects aid some characters in the attainment of mystical epiphanies and union with the Divine, they are also capable of being used selfishly to induce fear and maliciously inflict harm on others through supernatural agency.⁴ This admixture of magic and mysticism in these early novels has led some critics to advance the notion of a somewhat inorganic "hinge" between Williams's first five and final two novels (Ashenden 64, Medcalf 29-31). This view is based in part on the suggestion that Williams adopted the hermetic tradition "uncritically" in his early novels which "concern themselves [...] overtly

with the practice of magic power" (Ashenden 64) and that only in his later work did he modify and use "its conceptual framework to strengthen and support traditional Christian teaching" (Ashenden 58). This may also help to explain why Williams's later work has attracted most of the critical attention in relation to this problem: Williams's use of images drawn from the hermetic tradition seems less contradictory in his later work because his understanding of that tradition as well as his skill as a writer show evidence of having become more sophisticated and more subtle.

The distinction between magic and mysticism can also be expressed, however, in metaphysical terms: "[...] we are likely to fall victims to some kind of magic the moment that the declaration 'I want to know' ousts the declaration 'I want to be'" (Underhill 181). When asked by Gerard Hopkins about his novels, "Do you ever wonder suddenly what the whole damn book is *about*?" Williams, writing to Phyllis Jones, answered, "No [...] I always know—it's about the Holy Grail or the Stone of Suleiman or attacks by negroes. 'Back to Matter'! is my cry,—certain types of matter, *bien entendu*" (Hadfield 97). And in a later letter to Jones, Williams writes "it is quite clear [...] what matter ought to be. It ought to be the *significant* presence of God" (Hadfield 107). Unlike Waite, Williams is not attempting a prose analysis of these objects from a Christian perspective. Instead, like Dante setting forth an image of Christian soteriology in his beloved Beatrice (*Figure of Beatrice* 7), Williams attempts to set before his readers hermetic 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. With reference to both Dante's and Williams's use of images, Dorothy Sayers notes that, "there is simply a showing of a picture, or the telling of a story, in which the truth is shown in action, and the universal structure of reality is laid bare. Because it is an image, and not an argument, it speaks directly to the senses and the intuition of those to whom it is shown" (193).

In fact, an examination of Williams's use of hermetic objects from an expressly metaphysical perspective allows for the discernment of a less punctuated maturation of Williams's use of those images than critics have heretofore proposed. The metaphysical system Williams finds in Christian theology, moreover, provides him with a methodical way of

depicting the power of these objects as a force that is both rational and predictable. The objects become visible expressions of those metaphysical principles and yield narrative images that in their turn help characters to perceive “universal meaning in the particular” and advance toward a direct apprehension through “the senses and the intuition” of theological tenets that could otherwise be expressed only as abstractions. Those characters who attempt to turn the objects into magical tools to achieve selfish ends simultaneously violate the principles of that metaphysical system and consistently bring about their own downfall. On the other hand, those who surrender to the objects “for no personal gain, to satisfy no transcendental curiosity, to obtain no other-worldly joys, but purely from an instinct of love” (Underhill 85) are given glimpses of the universe’s inherent metaphysical consistency and interconnectedness in a way that anticipates what Williams would later define more formally as the doctrine of Coinherence. Fear of these objects, of the irrationality that Williams describes as potentially terrifying and malicious, is eliminated for those who achieve this mystical insight because they come to perceive the underlying and inviolable metaphysical laws to which these objects so strikingly and predictably conform (cf. Spencer 71). Williams observes the same principle when writing about the figure of Merlin in his poem *Taliessin Through Logres*: “the rod of a magician is not a toy. It is energy and direction [...] everywhere an instrument of order and measurement. It correspond[s] to the arm and to prosody, to anatomy and to law, to all roads and rules” (“The Making of *Taliessin*” 182). As this paper will attempt to show, the “roads and rules” upon which Williams builds his hermetic images are consistently, and in an increasingly sophisticated way in each subsequent novel, drawn from the systematic philosophy articulated by Platonist and Christian metaphysicians. “‘God always geometrizes’ said Plato, and the Hebrew prophets thought no less” (*He Came Down* 34).

Before exploring the novels themselves it will be helpful to briefly review the development of metaphysics—the study of the nature of being itself—from within the Christian tradition. For many, St. Augustine’s formulation of evil as a privation of good marks the beginning of a specifically Christian approach to metaphysics. Augustine writes as a reformed Manichaean. The central doctrine of

Manichaeism rests on a cosmological dualism: evil and good operate as equally potent forces and the universe serves as a backdrop for the great battle between them. Manichaean belief also holds that evil manifests itself as matter so that the chief desire of its followers is to free themselves from the prison of the body. Augustine's rejection of this dualism flows primarily from his belief in an omnipotent and benevolent Creator. Augustine's theodicy, moreover, relies heavily on the Platonic doctrine that all being emanates from idealized Forms. Plato explains this doctrine in *The Republic* by arguing that the highest Form, what he calls the Form of the Good, occupies the center of reality and that all things are dependant on that one Form for their being. Inasmuch as they all derive their being and emanate from that one Form, they are also good through their participation in that Form's inherent goodness (*Republic* 508e). In place of the Form of the Good, Augustine substitutes the Christian God, writing that all things "are because they come from you" (*Confessions* vii.12.17). Since all things come from God, and since evil cannot emanate from a being like the Form of the Good or God, evil cannot then be regarded as an entity or a substance in its own right. Augustine describes evil, therefore, as the derogation or corruption of an existing being that, inasmuch as it must flow from God, is otherwise good. Consequently, "all things that are corrupted suffer privation of some good" (vii.12.18). Absolute corruption, a complete overthrow by evil, Augustine characterizes thus: "If [beings] were to be deprived of all good, they would not exist at all" (vii.12.18).

Augustine's formulation of evil as privation implies an important corollary: that there is a relationship, if not an equivalency, between being itself and goodness. This implication is not fully articulated in the Christian tradition until Boethius's treatise *De Hebdomadibus* appears about a hundred years later.⁵ Boethius writes, "[...] because he who willed those things to be good was good, they are good in virtue of the fact that they have being" (*De Hebdomadibus* I.155, trans. MacDonald 303). Boethius's work is the focus of a major and important mediaeval commentary tradition on this topic. Using a few key biblical texts (cf. Gn 1.31, Tm 4.4) Aquinas and others incorporate this thesis into their own more exhaustive theologies. Chesterton provides a succinct summary in his biography *Thomas Aquinas*:

That "God looked on all things and saw that they were good" [Gn 1.31] contains a subtlety which the popular pessimist cannot follow; or is too hasty to notice. It is the thesis that there are no bad things; but only bad uses of things [...] But it is possible to have bad intentions about good things; and good things, like the world and the flesh, have been twisted by a bad intention called the devil. But he cannot make things bad; they remain as on the first day of creation. The work of heaven alone was material; the making of a material world. The work of hell is entirely spiritual. (Chesterton 125)

It must be admitted that Williams may have assented to these principles as dogma rather than self-evident and compelling truths. C.S. Lewis observes that "[Williams] maintained that the prayer in which we give thanks 'for our creation' could be joined in only by an act of wholly supernatural faith. 'Thanks!' he would say, and then followed an eloquent pause. He was ready to accept as a revealed doctrine the proposition that existence is good: but added that it would never have occurred to him, unaided, to suspect this" (xii). In spite of this caution, Williams's awareness of the larger theological background (cf. Scheper 135-6), and his assent to "the good of mere being in itself" (*Witchcraft* 155), is nothing short of engulfing in its ubiquity throughout his fiction and especially those parts of it infused with a supernatural dimension. In the Christian tradition these metaphysical principles are most visible in the doctrines of the Creation, its derogation in the Fall, as well as its eventual affirmation in the Incarnation. These same themes are commented on and recur continually throughout the corpus of Williams's own work including *War in Heaven*, *Many Dimensions*, and *The Greater Trumps*. A brief consideration of Williams's own particular theology around these themes will help further our understanding of the way in which he incorporates them into his novels.

Williams writes that God's words to Moses constitute "the first grand metaphysical phrase: the 'I am that I am' [Ex 3.14]. [...] God is no longer only creative but self-existent. It is this utter self-existence the sound of which is prolonged now through the whole book; 'I am the Lord' rings everywhere like the refrain of the heavens" (*He Came Down* 27).⁶ Like Augustine, Williams's theodicy is founded on the "utter self-existence" and goodness of God and his creation. He quotes Aquinas who in turn quotes Augustine, "[...] since evil is not of itself knowable,

forasmuch as 'evil is the privation of good', as Augustine says (*Confess.* iii, 7), therefore evil can neither be defined nor known except by good" (*He Came Down* 20). Adam and Eve are left as good creatures within a good universe. Because this universe is absolutely preclusive of evil as a substance in its own right, Williams argues that Adam and Eve can fall only by assuming a stance of opposition to the good: "They knew good; they wished to know good and evil. Since there was not—since there never has been and never will be—anything else than the good to know, they knew good as antagonism" (*He Came Down* 21). He elaborates the concept in metaphysical terms by writing that the slow erosion of good in Adam and Eve tends not merely to corruption, but also to "the slow destruction of the good, and of themselves with the good" (*He Came Down* 20). In this way Williams depicts the Fall as a derogation of being. Its ultimate result is an engulfing nihilism where "life is no good and death is no good, and the most fortunate are those who have not been" (*He Came Down* 44). As Augustine writes, once creatures are fully deprived of good, "they [cease to] exist at all" (*Confessions* vii.12.18).

Williams elsewhere discusses Satan's fall in terms that are compatible with Augustine's doctrine of evil as privation. Like humans, Satan too must know evil as opposition to good and, more directly, as opposition to God. In *Paradise Lost*, after being overwhelmed by God, Satan cries out "Evil, be thou my Good" (iv.110); Williams adds, "his defeat shall be his life. If he must know himself so, he will 'enjoy' that sole method of knowing himself" (*English Poetic Mind* 146). Like humans, Satan will continue to exist in his fallen state: "He cannot get rid of the good, he cannot destroy it. He can only know, and refuse, and hate it, and be equivalent to it. So Satan accepts the contradiction within him, with no hope of its resolution and no fear of its agony" (*English Poetic Mind* 123-124).

In his book length study *Witchcraft* Williams quotes a lengthy passage from the *Malleus Maleficarum* that outlines Satan's motives in terms that are expressly linked to Plato's notion that goodness and being emanate from God as the single "self-existing" centre of all:

It was not that the Devil wished generally to be equal with God. He desired it in a particular way. 'He wished and asked that the blessedness and goodness of all the inferior creatures should be

derived from him. And he sought this in his own natural capacity, that just as he was the first to be endowed in nature with those qualities, so the other creatures should receive them from the nobility of his nature. And he sought this of God, in perfect willingness to remain subject to God so long as he had that power granted to him.' This, and only this, was his error and his sin; he desired to be, to those related to him by a certain dependence, the only source of good. (*Witchcraft* 126)

This image seems to have resonated with Williams: two years later, in 1943, he quotes from this passage again in a book review and adds the gloss, "From some such wish all evils rose, and rise" ("Image of Man" 145). Unlike Milton's Satan, the *Malleus* does not describe an attempt to overthrow God directly, but to usurp his place as the source and centre of being and goodness for all other created things, to become a divine surrogate by functioning as Plato's Form of the Good. It is an image not of moral impropriety but of an unjustifiable metaphysical arrogation of the universe.⁷

Turning to a consideration of the hermetic objects at the centre of Williams's earlier novels, one can observe in them an elaboration of these metaphysical principles. Though sometimes used as tools to achieve selfish ends, the objects themselves remain inherently good in keeping with the metaphysic that Satan "cannot make things bad [so] they remain as on the first day of creation" (Chesterton 125). Williams constructs the plot of his first published novel, *War in Heaven* (WH), around an object he elsewhere describes as an image that "No invention can come near [...] no fabulous imagination excel" ("The Figure of Arthur" 13): the Holy Graal. It is generally understood that Williams drew on Waite's study for his initial inspiration. Indeed, he readily acknowledged that the Graal likely had many hermetic antecedents in the form of "[...] cauldrons of plenty and vessels of magic" ("The Figure of Arthur" 13, 23). But the "point is not where [it] came from" ("Malory on the Grail Legend" 187) but what Williams does with it in his narrative as an image of the "roads and rules" of Christian metaphysics.

The potency of the Graal is traditionally understood to flow from its unique provenance as the cup used by Christ at the Last Supper. Provenance as a theme in its own right appears not only in the myth of the Graal, but is also deeply embedded in the wider Christian tradition.

That objects can become supernaturally efficacious as a result of contact with holy people or sacred events is consistently advanced from the *Acts of the Apostles* (cf. Acts 19.11-12) to Aquinas (iii.38.6). Williams takes this a step further by intimately connecting the Graal's provenance to the Platonic doctrine of emanation; it is, in fact, only in the twining of the two that the ultimate explanation of its power emerges.

Shortly after the novel opens we learn that a cynical scholar named Sir Giles Tumulty has deduced that the Holy Graal is among the property of a small and obscure parish church in Fardles. The church's vicar, a diminutive Archdeacon reminiscent of Chesterton's Father Brown, nevertheless believes that the chalice is nothing out of the ordinary. In spite of the Archdeacon's skepticism, however, Tumulty's deduction does not fail to ignite the acquisitive interest of Gregory Persimmons, an antiquarian and collector of esoteric rarities. Unlike many collectors, Persimmons revels not in the chase, but in the metaphysic of having and holding precious objects. Not surprisingly Persimmons attempts to purchase and, when that fails, to steal the Graal. The Archdeacon, though seemingly detached even when he becomes convinced of the Graal's authenticity, nevertheless does share Persimmons's fascination with objects and with their provenance. While visiting Persimmons at his home, for example, the Archdeacon becomes fascinated by a copy of *King Lear* that seems to have been owned by both Shakespeare and Milton:

The Archdeacon took it carefully. It was a copy of the old pre-Shakespearean *King Leir*, stained and frayed. But on the front was scrawled towards the top and just against the title the two letters "W.S." and just under them in a precise careful hand "J.M."

"Good heavens!" the Archdeacon exclaimed. "Do you mean—?"

"Ah, that's the point," Gregory said. "Is it or isn't it? There's very little doubt of the J.M. I've compared it with the King's College MS., and it's exact. But the W.S. is another matter. One daren't believe it! Alone—perhaps, but both together! And yet, why not? After all, it's very likely Shakespeare didn't take all his books back to Stratford, especially when he's written a better play himself. And he may have known Milton the scrivener. We don't know." (WH 86)

This dialogue exemplifies the importance of provenance in the novel: the book's real value flows entirely from the fact that both Shakespeare and Milton owned it. Similarly, Arthurian myth holds that the Graal is remarkable among all other chalices because of its unique provenance. Following this tradition, Williams initially offers this as the sole reason for Persimmons's passionate desire to acquire the Graal. In an attempt to purchase it from the Archdeacon, Persimmons feigns interest on behalf of a friend who he claims "hates new furniture for an altar. He has some kind of theory about stored power and concentrated sanctity which I, not being a theologian, don't profess to understand. But the result of it is that he infinitely prefers things that have been used for many years in the past" (WH 44). Not mere age, but the attribute of "use" that usually accompanies age, is the cause of this "stored power." Williams, however, soon abandons simple provenance as the solitary explanation of the Graal's appeal. In a much franker conversation with Tumulty, Persimmons explains that the true reason he wants to acquire the Graal is because "it's been as near the other centre as anything in this world can get [...] It's close to the place where all things meet [...]" (WH 89-90). Though Persimmons might be in some respects an unreliable witness, it is clear that his metaphysical orientation is not wholly disordered because, like the Archdeacon, he has a special appreciation for matter and provenance that his evil cohorts Dmitri and Manasseh simply do not. It seems clear, moreover, that in this particular passage Persimmons is speaking in confidence and describing what he actually believes to be the ultimate truth of the Graal. His descriptive use of the word "centre" signifies that the Graal shares an important metaphysical characteristic with Plato's Form of the Good. In fact, as the narrative progresses, Williams's narrator relies increasingly on the language of Platonic emanation to flesh out the Graal's ontological character and its relationship to the rest of creation.

After Persimmons finally steals the Graal, the Archdeacon ruminates that "Of all material things still discoverable in the world the Graal had been nearest to the Divine and Universal Heart. Sky and sea and land were moving, not towards that vessel, but towards all it symbolized and had held [and] opened upon the Centre of all. And through that gate, upon those tides of retirement, creation moved [...] so and not otherwise all things return to God" (WH 137). Being at the

"Centre of all" and somehow the thing, or even the unique symbol of the thing, through which "creation moves" shifts the Graal's traditional association away from the Crucifixion and toward the Creation. Like Plato's Form of the Good and Augustine's creator God, it is at the "Centre of all." Prester John, a mysterious figure who identifies himself as both "the Graal and the Keeper of the Graal" (WH 189), uses similar language to describe himself: "[...] I am the precursor of the things that are to be. I am John and I am Galahad and I am Mary; I am the Bearer of the Holy One [...] All magic and all holiness is through me, and though men stole the Graal from me ages since I have been with it forever" (WH 204). His role, as the "precursor of things that are to be" is fundamentally metaphysical and his use of the words magic and holiness together suggest that they perhaps share some common "starting-point" (Underhill 180).⁸

After the Graal is rescued from Persimmons and his diabolical cohorts, Prester John uses it to say Mass that, significantly, takes place around the biblical creation narrative: "And God said: Let us make man, in Our image, after our likeness ... in the image of God created He him, male and female created He them" (WH 253, 255). As the liturgy unfolds the very being of Prester John seems to engulf those around him: "All sound ceased; all things entered into an intense suspension of being; nothing was anywhere at all but He" (WH 254; cf. *Descent of the Dove* 58). This conflation of being, united with the Graal and juxtaposed to the creation myth in the Mass, carries some of the novel's strongest overtones of Platonic emanation. As a single image Prester John and the Graal displace all lesser images and function in the role of the one from whom "the blessedness and goodness of all inferior creatures should [derive]" (*Witchcraft* 126) declaring "I am the prophecy of the things that are to be and are [...] behold through me that which you seek, receive from me that which you are" (WH 245-6). At the liturgy's conclusion the Graal, Prester John, and the Archdeacon vanish in a final metaphysical apotheosis (WH 255-6).⁹

Many images in this scene combine to create an evocative picture of Christian metaphysical abstractions. The liturgy, as narrative context, is itself a form of "road and rule" that points, through its use of the Creation text, toward the goodness of "mere being in itself."¹⁰ Williams, moreover, anticipates his later doctrine of Coinherence in the Duke who

"[sees] certain of the faces which he knew in the great gallery of his ancestors in the Castle, and other faces more antique and foreign than these" (WH 252). As Williams writes himself many years later "The sacrifice was offered not only on earth but in the heights of the heavens [...] The Church gave itself, and Christ gave Himself, and the two were united" ("The Figure of Arthur" 14). In this way, the Graal serves as a link and central image of the Coinherence of both heaven and earth. In its conflation of being it is, along with Prester John who is priest, king, vicar, John, Mary and Galahad (WH 156, 204), an "explanation of everything" (*Witchcraft* 78; see also "The Figure of Arthur" 23). And, importantly, though the events and voices are "awful" (WH 253), fear is wholly absent from the experience of all present.

Williams constructs the narrative of his next novel, *Many Dimensions* (MD), around the mysterious Stone of King Solomon (or Suleiman). Verlyn Flieger writes that "Unlike the Grail [...] which [has] a known history and a context before and beyond his novels, the Stone of Suleiman is not an artifact immediately recognizable to most readers. Thus, not constrained by any known properties of the Stone, Williams is [...] freer to select his own rationale, his own consistent working principle" (79). Although it might be taken as a sign of Williams's growing confidence as a writer that the object he builds this narrative around is one not usually associated with the Christian tradition, there is evidence to suggest that he did not exercise quite so unfettered a freedom as Flieger proposes in its broad depiction or in constructing a "consistent working principle" to govern its behavior. In 1929, the same year that Williams began to write *Many Dimensions* (Hadfield 93), Waite published his study *The Holy Kabbalah* in which he summarizes a Zoharic text that describes a mysterious stone called Schethlyâ:

cast by [God] into the abyss, so to form the basis of the world and give birth thereto. [...] it was like a cubical stone or altar, for its extremity was concealed in the depth, while its surface or summit rose above the chaos. It was the central point in the immensity of the world, the corner-stone, the tried stone, the sure foundation, but also the stone which the builders rejected [...] It is like the *lapis exilis* of the German Graal legend, and of Alchemy according to the Second Raymund Lully, for it appears to be a slight stone; it is supposed to have been carried by Aaron when he entered the Holy Place, and it was held in

the hands of David when he desired to contemplate close at hand the glory of his Master. In a sense it fell from heaven, like the stone from the crown of Lucifer, and again it was overturned by the iniquity of man, until Jacob restored it to an upright position. Solomon was also one of those who restored it, and thereon he built the Sanctuary [...] the Zoharic myth of creation resides in the fact that this stone was inscribed with the Divine Name before it was cast into the abyss." (*Holy Kabbalah* 228-9)

The major mythological elements of the Stone as it appears in Williams's novel are present in this excerpt though Williams provides his reader with a lengthier provenance. Like Waite's Stone, Williams's is also cubic, small enough to carry, marked or imbued with the Divine Name or Tetragrammaton, and the thing from which "the universes arose and had being" (*MD* 44). And, although the Stone's "consistent working principle" may have been, as Flieger suggests, of Williams's own choosing, it does not seem to have been of his own making. As an image it serves the same purpose as the Graal: to illustrate a progressively wider set of Christian metaphysical abstractions in a way that "speaks directly to the senses and the intuition of those to whom it is shown" (Sayers 193; cf. Shideler 19).

The Stone, like the Graal, is also discovered by the archaeologist Sir Giles Tumulty. After completing a somewhat suspect purchase of the artifact in Baghdad, Tumulty returns to England with his prize. The novel opens on a discussion about the Stone between Tumulty, his nephew Reginald Montague, and the Persian Prince Ali Mirza Khan. The Prince makes several attempts to convince Tumulty to return the Stone to its Islamic guardians only to be refused on the grounds that Tumulty wants to "experiment a bit" (*MD* 10). Throughout the course of the novel these experiments range from the invasive to the sadistic as Tumulty attempts to sate his "intellectual, aggressive, and scientific temperament" (Underhill 84) by testing the Stone's power over space (*MD* 20-1), time (*MD* 87), and life and death (*MD* 191). Reginald Montague, less imaginatively and perhaps less culpably, hopes to exploit the Stone's power to make money.

After the Prince returns to the Embassy, Montague and Tumulty agree to involve Montague's uncle Christopher Arglay, the Lord Chief Justice of England, both as a potential source of capital and as surety in

the event the Persian government attempts to repatriate the Stone through the channels of international law. In order to be sure of the Stone's power before proceeding, however, Tumulty undertakes an initial experiment whereby Montague, as human subject, is transported instantaneously through space (*MD* 20-1).

Later that same evening Tumulty, Montague, Arglay, and Arglay's personal secretary Chloe Burnett, convene around the Stone. Much to the Arglay's and Chloe's amazement the Stone inexplicably transports both Montague to Arglay's home and back (*MD* 27) and Arglay to Chloe's sitting-room and back (*MD* 30-1). Chloe finds the demonstration overwhelming and excuses herself before Tumulty can undertake his next experiment: an attempt to chip from the Stone a small fragment to determine if its magical properties will also inhere in the resulting piece. Tumulty is driven on by his aggressive intellect, Montague by the thought of "what any man with money would give to have a thing like that" (*MD* 22). But as Montague "struck the chisel with the hammer, [he] almost fell forward on to the table. For, unexpectedly, since the Stone had been hard enough to the touch, it yielded instantaneously to the blow, and, as [he] straightened himself with an oath, they saw, lying on the table by the side of the Crown, a second Stone apparently the same in all respects as the first" (*MD* 33-4). It is easy to underestimate the metaphysical significance of the fact that the Stone can perpetuate itself without diminishing the original: "[t]he division is accomplished yet the Stone is unchanged, and the virtues are neither here nor there but allwhere" (*MD* 33). In this the Stone appears to be, like the Form of the Good, a mysteriously inexhaustible wellspring of being.

Although Arglay continues to seek a scientific explanation, when Chloe learns the next day that the Stone can "multiply itself" in this fashion she becomes upset and refers to it as both "magical" and "unnatural" (*MD* 38). This multiplication, *prima facie*, overthrows Chloe's belief that "phenomena are what phenomena seem" (*Witchcraft* 78) in a way "too real for anything but fear" (*Witchcraft* 77). As time passes, however, Chloe comes to understand that the Stone's power is governed by rational "roads and rules" that are consistent with its metaphysical nature and inviolable unity, even in division. Indeed, its Islamic guardians refer to the Stone as "the Unity" (*MD* 63, 198) and

argue that its division is an offence against God himself. After its initial division the second Stone is referred to as a replica (*MD* 34) and then a copy (*MD* 35). Eventually, however, these terms are abandoned in favor of the word “Type” because it seems to suggest a tighter ontological bond, even a continued unity. Arglay first hears the word “Type” used in reference to the Stone by Hajji Ibrahim, a man with an acknowledged insight into the mythology and metaphysical power of the Stone (*MD* 44). Arglay adopts the term himself explaining, “I say Type because the Stones which exist—and there are several—are apparently derivations from one Original” (*MD* 95). In both philosophy and Islamic thought this radical unity is a characteristic attributed particularly to God (Qur’an 112.1; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII.8.1ff.).¹¹ Indeed, in addition to “the Unity” the Stone is also called the “First Matter [...] from which all things are made—spirits and material things” (*MD* 56). Its central role in the creation of the universe is further elaborated in the declaration that as “the Divine One whom the Jews call Shekinah [...] gazed upon it the universe arose and had being” (*MD* 44). Although the barest elements of this myth are present in Waite’s own description, Williams amplifies this attribute by laying heavy emphasis on the procreative power of the Stone as the object from which all created being, like Plato’s Form of the Good, emanates. Although Williams refuses an equivalency between God and the Stone by calling Chloe’s prayer to it idolatry (*MD* 78-9), the Stone does function as a “unique symbol” or image of God’s own unity, His “utter self-existence,” and the goodness “of mere being in itself” (*Witchcraft* 155). Williams’s phrase “This also is Thou, Neither is this Thou” applies here (cf. *Descent of the Dove* 3). Like Beatrice in the *Divine Comedy*, the Stone is a potent image of things beyond it, “an image of nobility, of virtue, of the Redeemed Life, and in some sense of Almighty God himself” (*Figure of Beatrice* 8).

When Chloe asks whether the letters of the Tetragrammaton are “real,” Arglay replies that they are “real in another manner—more or less real than we are” (*MD* 38-9). Arglay quickly admits, however, that he cannot understand how there can be “degrees in Reality” (*MD* 39). St. Augustine, in what has been subsequently described as “soteriological metaphysics” (Zum Brunn vii), characterizes the movement toward God in Christ as an increase in being or *magis esse*, and the movement away from God in sin as a lessening of being or *minus*

esse.¹² Depending on one's position along this continuum relative to God, one can therefore exist to a greater or lesser extent—since, according to both Plato and Augustine, all existence is derived through a greater or lesser participation in God's own being along this continuum. The assertion that the "Way to the Stone is in the Stone" (*MD* 198), like the phrase "the world is in the Grail" ("Malory and the Grail Legend" 192) remind the reader that these objects exist as close to God along this continuum, this "dialectic of *magis esse* and *minus esse*" (Zum Brunn 50), as is metaphysically possible.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is the image of Iblis or Satan. Williams expands Waite's brief and ambiguous sentence "In a sense it fell from heaven, like the stone from the crown of Lucifer" to write that Iblis possessed the Stone and that significantly "his fall was not assured until that Stone dropped from his head" (*MD* 44). In light of the Stone's metaphysical completeness and its association with the rise of the universe, this image depicts not only a moral falling, but also a derogation of Iblis's being. The loss of the Stone as a prerequisite for Iblis's fall is consonant with the *Malleus*'s description of God's refusal to allow Satan to serve as the centre and source of all other created beings. Not only is Iblis's loss of the Stone symbolic of God's refusal to allow him metaphysical ascendancy relative to other created beings, Williams's direct assertion (something only implied by Waite) that Adam retained the Stone even after the Fall suggests that humans, relative to Iblis, are permitted a closer participation in God's own being and goodness. Iblis's loss of the Stone, therefore, diminishes him to a mere shadow of existence further away from God and closer to the *minus esse* of the continuum than any human being (cf. *Witchcraft* 36-7). By contrast Tumulty, even after he is apparently destroyed by the Stone, seems to continue to know that Stone is all around him, though indescribably remote (*MD* 245-6). This is an apt description of hell as privation, a steady movement along Augustine's *minus esse* continuum without reaching the final and absolute abyss of annihilation. In fact, Williams's later hint that Tumulty is never quite beyond the hope of redemption is predicated on his continued existence, however greatly that existence may be diminished at any particular chronological point (see *MD* 259).¹³

A final word should be said about the fact that Stone is repeatedly referred to by its keepers as the "End of Desire" (*MD* 43, 78,

95, 198, &c.). Interestingly, Williams uses similar language in his previous novel when describing Prester John and the Graal as “[...] the desire of all men” (*WH* 251). There are a number of ways to understand this phrase. Tumulty, for example, makes an attempt to convince Chloe that “The end of desire [is] to get what you want” (*MD* 198). Though there is a sense in which this is certainly true, there is also a wider philosophical tradition behind the phrase “End of Desire” that is specifically informed by metaphysics. Aristotle argues that “good is what all things desire” (*Ethics* i.1.1094a3). Aquinas elaborates on this principle, writing that “The goodness of a thing consists in its being desirable; [...] Now clearly desirability is consequent upon perfection, for things always desire their perfection. And the perfection of a thing depends on how far it has achieved actuality: It is clear then that a thing is good inasmuch as it exists [...]” (Aquinas Ia.5.1b, MacDonald 19). Aquinas argues that all things have an intended function—and in order to achieve that function perfectly (or completely), a thing must first exist. If existence is part of that perfection or completeness, and that perfection or desire is good, then being must be a part of that goodness. Set within this context, the Stone’s ability to heal people of illness seems only a natural outflow of its metaphysical properties as the “End of Desire.” The elderly Mrs. Ferguson’s exclamation, “I felt the strength just pouring into me from that stone [...]” (*MD* 104) and then her sister’s avowal, “Auntie’s asthma’s gone. It went in the middle of a cough” (*MD* 108) are manifestations of the Stone aiding them not only in moving along the continuum of being, but also in realizing their ultimate end: wholeness and happiness in the plenitude of God’s own utter self-existence who “is the perfect satisfaction of desire” (*He Came Down* 55).

At the end of the novel Chloe receives through the Stone a vision that she, unlike Tumulty, seeks “for no personal gain, to satisfy no transcendental curiosity, [...] but purely from an instinct of love” (Underhill 85): “Vague in image, but intense in appeal, her heart gathered all—from herself to Giles Tumulty—in a sudden presentation of them to the Mystery with which they had trafficked” (*MD* 259). In the same way that the being of Prester John and the Graal conflate into a single and shared existence, Chloe appears briefly to be not only the servant of the Stone, but, with the letters of the Tetragrammaton shining on her forehead, a very part of it (*MD* 262). This leads to an awareness

on her part of a shared being, a Coinherence, with the whole created universe and with God, the "Centre of all." Unlike earlier in the book, she can no longer say that "Nothing justifie[s] her existence" (*MD* 50). In this culmination Williams presents us with another image of the universal manifesting itself in the particular. The Stone not only "justifies her existence," but clothes her and everything around her in meaning: "No violent outbreak or dazzling splendour was there; a perfection of existence flowed from her and passed outward so that [Arglay] seemed both to stand in it and to look on it with his natural eyes" (*MD* 262).

While much of the significance of the Graal and the Stone derive from their place "at the centre" and their association with the rise of the spiritual and material universe, Williams reserves his most potent image of Platonic emanation for the dancing golden figures and the original Tarot deck in *The Greater Trumps* (*GT*). And although he again turns to Waite's work as a source of inspiration for the novel's central image, the Tarot, he departs here further from Waite's text than in any previous novel. His metaphysical elaborations on the Greater Trumps, especially the Fool and the Juggler, are especially significant of his growing sophistication as a writer.

Much of the novel's action revolves around the love affair of a gypsy named Henry and a young woman named Nancy. Nancy lives with her father Lothair Coningsby, her brother Ralph, and her unmarried Aunt Sybil. Lothair has recently inherited a very unusual deck of Tarot cards which Henry identifies as "the root and origin of all cards" (*GT* 44), the very "originals" (*GT* 26). In an attempt to wrest them from his potential father-in-law's control, Henry enlists the help of his grandfather Aaron Lee. In a locked room in his country house Aaron keeps a table that is covered by an intricately marked golden plate upon which were "a number of little figures, each about three inches high, also of gold, it seemed, very wonderfully wrought [...] there were many of them, and they were all in movement [...] as if of their own volition" (*GT* 28). Henry and Aaron both believe that the moving or dancing figures are closely related to the Tarot cards and that they can be used together to plumb the deepest mysteries of the cosmos, to acquire "knowledge of the dance" (*GT* 89) and thereby "extend [their] field of consciousness" (Underhill 84). In an effort to acquire the cards from Lothair, Henry and

Aaron invite the Coningsbys to visit Aaron's house for a few days over Christmas. Henry hopes that his future father-in-law might part with the cards if he can be convinced that they are modeled on his grandfather's figures and that, echoing the metaphysic Williams builds in his previous novel around the Stone, to keep them apart is to "keep in being the division of unity" (GT 89). To this end, shortly after the visitors arrive Henry tours them through the locked room and describes the amazing figures. He explains that they "move in order [...] all but one: the one [figure of the Fool] in the centre. You may recognize them; the figures are those painted on the Tarot cards [...]" (GT 73). Lothair, however, remains stubbornly unconvinced.

Williams frames the Platonic correspondence between the dancing figures and the wider world so tightly that Henry's explanation of the relationship between the two seems to skirt determinism: "If you cry, it's because the measure will have it so; if you laugh, it's because some gayer step demands it, not because you will. If you ache, the dance strains you; if you are healthy, the dance carries you" (GT 95). Nevertheless, while always stressing order and rationality, Williams does manage to strike a fine balance between "let[ting] yourself do what [the cards] mean" (GT 22) and admitting that the cards are "modified [...] by the nature of the hands between which they are held" (GT 97). Indeed, Henry asserts his own will over the cards to the extent that he is able to use them, against their nature, to raise a storm in the hope of killing Lothair (GT 89).

In spite of Henry's attempt to use the cards as magical tools to "get what he wants," the cards themselves remain a rational image of Platonic emanation and therefore inherently good in themselves.¹⁴ Sybil intuitively understands the natural goodness of the symbolic correspondence Henry describes, grasping it in terms strongly reminiscent of Platonic emanation and also in a way that ties a perfectly balanced correspondence between opposites within the cosmos back to the Creation. Sybil perceives herself as:

part of an existence in which one beauty was always providing a reason and a place for an entirely opposite beauty. As society for solitude, and walking for sitting down, and one dress for another, and emotions for intellect, and snowstorms for hot drinks [...] and even one movement for another, so highly complex was the admirable

order of the created universe. It was all rather like Henry's charming little figures in their perpetual dance; perhaps they were a symbol of it [...] (GT 134)

That all these things, each in its own place, can be described as "beautiful" subtly points toward both Williams's doctrine of Coinherence and the "goodness of mere being in itself."

Like the Stone and the Graal, the figures and the cards possess unique metaphysical power. Nancy begins to suspect this after she uses the Deniers suit of the Tarots, with Henry, to create earth (GT 47-8). "It's more than fortune-telling, isn't it? Why do the cards make earth?" (GT 94). Henry, hinting at a hierarchy of being modeled on Platonic emanation, suggests they have this power because "These cards are in touch with a thing [for which] there aren't any words [...] with the Dance [...] that is . . . everything" (GT 50-51). The creation of earth using the Deniers is not "merely petty magic" (Peckham 241), but a potent metaphysic: it is the procreative power of God to draw matter out of nothingness, to create *ex nihilo*; it is the very apogee of divine power.

Two of the Greater Trumps stand out among the rest: The Fool, already described as being "at the centre," and the Juggler. Of these two, the Fool is certainly the most mysterious. His number in the Tarot deck is nought or zero. Given the larger metaphysical tradition that Williams seems so consistently and consciously to work within, this seems *prima facie* to suggest that the Fool may be a diabolical figure—one who, like Iblis, has been pushed to the utter extremity of *minus esse* along the continuum of being. The Fool's relation to the rest of the cards is equally unclear. This is important because, as Henry explains (GT 44) and Sybil later intuits (GT 134), it is only through relation and context that truth and meaning are possible. Indeed, the uncertainty is heightened by Sybil's observation that: "[The Fool] might come anywhere. Nought isn't a number at all. It's the opposite of number" (GT 17); further on even Aaron admits "There are no writings which tell us anything at all of the Fool" (GT 30). As the novel unfolds, however, the designation *nought* seems less to indicate a lack of being than an utter transcendence in being, a dichotomy between created being and creating Being: "[It is] that which has no number and is called the Fool, because mankind finds it folly till it is known. It is sovereign or it is nothing, and if it is nothing

then man was born dead" (GT 196; cf. King 175). The Fool, at the centre of the dance, stands in the place of God and functions as a Form of the Good, just as the Stone and the Graal function similarly as Platonic surrogates in their respective narratives. In a striking elaboration of the Platonic model along specifically Christian lines, Williams indicates that the creative power of God does not reside directly in the Fool, but in the Juggler. "[Nancy] saw—but this more in her own mind—the remote figure of the Juggler, standing in the void before creation was, and flinging up the glowing balls which came into being as they left his hands, and became planets and stars [...]" (GT 140). It recalls the way in which Christ, not the Father, is described as the one "through whom all things were made" (Jn 1.3). Like the Father and Son, the Fool and the Juggler are a unity for they "came together; they embraced; the tossing balls fell over them in a shower of gold [...]" (GT 103).

Nancy and Sybil, again like Chloe, both experience profound epiphanies that they seek "for no personal gain, to satisfy no transcendental curiosity, [...] but purely from an instinct of love" (Underhill 85) through their contact with the figures, the cards, and the great dance they enact. Sybil's observations are especially significant in the larger metaphysical context:

[The figures of the dance] were the most beautiful things, with that varying light irradiating and striking outward from each, and a kind of gold aureole hanging in the air [...] She knew where the golden light came from among the images; it came from the figure of the Fool who moved so much the most swiftly, who seemed to be everywhere at once, whose irradiation shone therefore so universally upward that it maintained the circle of gold high over all, under which the many other rays of colour mingled and were dominated now by one, now by another. It had been, this afternoon, as if some figure—say, the Fool himself—had come speeding down from his own splendid abode of colour to her brother's side. She contemplated the idea; so, one might imagine, only no imagination could compass it, so did the beautiful perfection which was in and beyond all things make haste to sustain its creatures in their mood; immediacy to immediacy. She moved her foot lazily through the water of the bath, and half-pretended, half-believed, that little sparkles of gold rose and floated off as she did so: then she abandoned the fancy hastily. (GT 135)

Williams describes the figure of the Fool very much in the same way that Chloe eventually comes to understand that everything is somehow in the Stone “everywhere at once.” This is coupled with an image of Platonic emanation: the Fool “sustaining its creatures in their mood.” Perhaps most importantly, however, the whole experience is capped off by Sybil’s apprehension of universal meaning in the particular—here the apparently insignificant movement of Sybil’s foot becomes itself profoundly important in the context of the dance of creation.

Nor does the seemingly inscrutable nature of the Fool prevent Sybil from putting her trust directly in him. When the rest of the household becomes terrified by the violent storm Henry raises using the cards, Sybil rebukes that terror saying, “Do you suppose that the storm can ever touch the Fool?” (*GT* 139); and “[...] never mind the storm; it’s nothing; it’s under the feet of the Fool” (*GT* 140). Sybil is not frightened because, like Chloe, she understands that there are “roads and rules” that ensure an outcome metaphysically consistent with the goodness of God: “I know the dance” (*GT* 139) she says. And dance, like liturgy, is for those who understand it a form of ordered movement, a geometry, that banishes all irrational fear (cf. “The Making of *Taliessin*” 182; *Witchcraft* 78; Ridler xlvii).¹⁵

It has already been commented that Augustine describes the process of salvation as a movement along a continuum of being—echoed by Williams in Lord Arglay’s speculation that there may be degrees in reality. Our final goal is to return to the “centre”—the perfection of our being within the plenitude of God’s own being. One of the most compelling images Williams marshals of this concept is that of the Tarot’s Tower, ever falling and rising in *The Greater Trumps*. The Tower, in its cyclical creation and collapse, hovers between being and nothingness and becomes a symbol of human salvation along that continuum: like Tumulty in *Many Dimensions*, whether rising or collapsing it always participates to a greater or lesser extent in being and, therefore, in goodness. Near the end of the novel Henry experiences a vision in which he comes to share a single existence with the Tower and where its continual rise and collapse becomes a metaphysical symbol of his own salvation along the continuum of being:

Very slowly the Tower had moved right up against him; he could see it no more, for he was one with it. A quiver began at the bottom of his spine, spreading through his loins, and then it ceased, and he felt rigidity within him—up, up, till he was petrified from loins to head, himself a tower of stone. Even so, he meant to do something, to lift a great marble arm and reach up and pick the stars from heaven and table them into a crown—a hard sharp golden crown—for a head such as Nimrod's, perhaps his own [...] just as he dreamed of the premonitory prick of the starry spikes upon his head, something within him began to fall. He trembled with giddiness; he would have swayed but could not. There ran a downward rippling through his flesh; [...] he was dragged at from within every direction; he was on the edge of being torn into destruction. Then again slowly he was steadied, and again his long petrification proceeded, and so through cycle after cycle of years [...] (GT 168)

Eventually, perfection is reached and the rising and falling cease: "For there, between the two towers, the moon shines, clear and perfect, and the towers are no longer Babels ever rising and falling, but complete in their degree" (GT 195). Like Tumulty's remote awareness of the Stone, this is an illustration of hell as privation and heaven as ontological perfection. In this case, however, it is the more complex wavering of a single individual along the continuum of being.

Not surprisingly, Sybil finds herself not only at the centre of the novel's metaphysical conclusion, but, like Chloe and Prester John, an integral part of it. She is repeatedly identified as metaphysically complete throughout the novel—as "enjoy[ing] everything" (GT 38), "exist[ing] in herself" (GT 206), and in whom "[...] the delight of creation answered the delight of the Creator" (GT 126). Indeed, it is she alone who can see the movements of the Fool—so quick that they are invisible to everyone else (GT 78). In the eventual consummation of the storm raised by the Tarots, Nancy sees "Sybil standing in the middle of the hall [and] the storm in its elemental shapes of wind and water dancing about her" (GT 222). As both the Graal and the Stone are at the "centre," so too is Sybil's open hand at "the centre of all things, the power and the glory, the palm glowing with a ruddy passion veiled by the aureate flesh" (GT 227). It is truly a transcendent moment of insight where a "foot stepping from a train becomes the rock of all existence" (*Witchcraft* 78). And, raising it to a theological pitch, just as Williams describes being flowing

out from Chloe (*MD* 262) and uses the creation narrative as context for Prester John's final Mass (*WH* 253), so in this moment, "[...] the hand of the Juggler had been stretched to cast and catch the tossed balls of existence; so the hand of the Fool had a last fulfilled the everlasting promise and yielded its secrets to the expected hour" (*GT* 227).

The metaphysics of goodness—the goodness of mere being in itself—is a theme that runs through all of Williams's work and forms the whole basis of his theodicy: the goodness of the Creation, humanity's contradiction of that goodness in the Fall, and its eventual reaffirmation in the acts of the Incarnation and the Resurrection (*He Came Down* 58-9). The Archdeacon's apotheosis, Chloe's ontological union with the Stone, and the image of creation itself springing from the palm of Sybil's hand, are progressively more potent illustrations of these metaphysical principles. And although these events and images are prompted by or instantiated in hermetic objects, "The point is not where they came from but what they have become" ("Malory and the Grail Legend" 187). As central images of the metaphysics of goodness in each narrative, they function as the common "starting-point" (Underhill 180) for both magic and the mysticism—any distinction between the two is a "matter of choice" (*Witchcraft* 78) in that it relies not on essence but on praxis. In themselves they are good and "they remain as on the first day of creation" (Chesterton 125). Those who attempt to subvert their metaphysical goodness through an illicit extension of will (cf. *He Came Down* 21) engage in a sort of black magic. On the other hand, those who refuse to violate the natural metaphysical harmony that exists between themselves, the objects, and the wider universe, practice a transcendent mysticism and experience subsequent moments of insight into the interconnectedness, the Coinherence, of the cosmos and the goodness of being in itself. In this way Williams moves beyond the hermetic images to a deep affirmation of "faith in the nature of God, hope in the nature of things in God" ("The Way of Affirmation" 155).

Notes

¹ In spite of the literary evidences, earlier critics (Anne Ridler is one notable exception) have been generally anxious to downplay the depth of Waite's influence on Williams as well as his ongoing interest in hermeticism. Alice Hadfield, for example, wrote of Waite's *Fellowship* that Williams's "outlook and philosophy were not generated, or indeed much affected, by it. He was thirty-one when he joined and his mind was already well-based, developed, and directed" (30). Thomas Howard, writing at about the same time similarly remarked, "Williams was not interested in the occult at all except during a brief period in his early life" (9).

² In 1923 Williams was "Invested as Master of the Temple and solemnly Installed" (Willard 273). By 1925 he had finished his first draft of *The Black Bastard* which was eventually published in 1933, after heavy revision, as *Shadows of Ecstasy*; sometime in 1926 he finished a second novel, *The Corpse*, which later became his first published novel in 1930 under the title *War in Heaven* (Hadfield 81-2, 92). It is unlikely that Williams began writing his third novel, *Many Dimensions*, until sometime after *War in Heaven* had been accepted for publication in 1929 (Hadfield 96). Although he attended his last meeting of the *Fellowship* after participating in the Ceremony of Consecration of the Threshold of Sacred Mystery in June 1927 (Willard 273), Williams continued to turn to Waite's works for inspiration.

³ Other critics (Brewer 62-3, Willard 284) have identified the Stone in *Many Dimensions* with the philosophers' stone described in Waite's *Secret Tradition of Alchemy* (1926). The Stone as described by Hajji Ibrahim (MD 44), however, shares a significant number of attributes with the "mysterious stone called Schethl'yâ" (228) described by Waite in *The Holy Kabbalah*. The Stone in Williams's novel, moreover, is a real physical object while the philosophers' stone is more usually employed in the alchemical tradition as a metaphor for the *process* not the *object* of transmutation.

⁴ *The Place of the Lion* (1931) is not considered because it does not offer a single hermetic object as an image around which the text is built. In addition, although "the supernatural element is prominent, magic does not play a part" (Brewer 63). Neither does *Shadows of Ecstasy* (1933), written first and published as the last of these five, lend itself as readily to this type of analysis because in place of a single hermetic object, Williams substitutes a living man.

⁵ Plotinus is the first ancient philosopher overtly to propose an equivalency between being and goodness (see *Enneads* 1.8). His work influenced Augustine and, through him, the larger development of Christian metaphysics.

⁶ Exodus 3.14 is one of the most frequently cited verses in support of the metaphysical equivalency of being and goodness. Augustine alone comments on it in fifty separate passages (see Zum Brunn 102ff.).

⁷ Whether or not Williams actually believed in the existence of the Devil is uncertain. There is an interesting passage in *The Greater Trumps* where Sybil contemplates praying for the redemption of Satan but at last refrains because "she [doesn't] believe in the Devil" (136). In *Witchcraft* Williams describes Satan's fall from Heaven, both mythologically and in the Resurrection, as a defeat of evil so thorough that "In the new state such things could not be, and there was no such great need to make war on them" (36-7). But he adds, during the persecutions, that "The Church, in fact, had begun to need an opponent whom it could

divinely hate. It might spiritually oppose, but it certain was not allowed to hate, its persecutors. The crosses went up; the torches flared; the wild beasts were loosed" (37). In a similar vein Williams comments in *He Came Down from Heaven*: "The devil, even if he is a fact, has been an indulgence" (18). See also *Witchcraft* 310-11.

⁸ Williams elsewhere suggests a relationship other than antithesis between magic and religion. For example, he argues that the answer to Christ's question "Who do you say I am?" (Mk 8.29) was for Peter "a kind of incantation, the invocation of a ritual, antique, and magical title" (*He Came Down* 51).

⁹ Scheper argues that in this scene the Archdeacon dies (144). If this is so his death seems less an ending and more an apotheosis like that of Enoch (Gen 5.24) or Elijah (2 Kings 2.11). See also "Malory and the Grail Legend" 193-4.

¹⁰ Although this apotheosis takes place in the context of the Mass, Williams's subsequent novels also show an ecclesial setting isn't in itself necessary for an effective use of images to illustrate Christian metaphysical abstractions. Neither Chloe's nor Sibyl's final epiphanies, for example, take place within the context of a liturgy.

¹¹ Williams comments on this divine unity with specific reference even to the Incarnation, writing "even now, in spite of the Athanasian Creed, the single existence of the Incarnate Word is too often almost Gnostically contemplated as an inhabitation of the flesh by the Word. But it is not so; what He is, He is wholly and absolutely, and even in His death and in the separation of body and soul He remains wholly and absolutely one" ("Natural Goodness" 76).

¹² The Latin terms are themselves translated borrowings from Plotinus's Greek *ἥτον* and *μᾶλλον εἶναι* (see *Enneads* 6, 9, 11-13; Zum Brunn 58).

¹³ Williams makes his closest approach to complete annihilation in *War in Heaven*, describing one character thus: "No mortal mind could conceive a desire which was not based on a natural and right desire; even the hunger for death was but a perversion of the death which precedes all holy birth. But of every conceivable and inconceivable desire this was the negation. This was desire itself sick, but not unto death; rejection which tore all things asunder and swept them with it in its fall through the abyss" (242).

¹⁴ Williams makes a clear distinction between the ontological goodness of a thing and its potential evil uses. Sybil remarks of Aaron's duplicity that "even if [Aaron's] courtesy had hidden some other intention [...] still courtesy in itself was good and to be enjoyed: yes, certainly good was not to be denied in itself because motives were a little mixed" (*GT* 156) and, "The courtesy was one thing; the purpose of the courtesy was another thing; there need be no confusion of substances" (*GT* 157). Boethius makes the same distinction between being and praxis arguing that, while all things that exist are good, not all things are just since "good has to do with essence [...] but being just with an act" (*De Hebdomadibus* I.164).

¹⁵ Scheper (146) argues that in *All Hallows' Eve* magic is a parody of liturgy and the magician a parody of Christ. This is consonant with the Christian tenet that evil has no substance of its own and that, consequently, it can *only* be a corruption or parody of some preexisting good. Though this approach works very well in *All Hallows' Eve* it is perhaps more difficult to see how objects such as the Graal and the Stone of Suleiman, in place of agents like Simon the Clerk, can be, in themselves, parodies. Rather, these objects appear metaphysically good in themselves though liable to misuse. Scheper acknowledges that Williams's final two novels focus exclusively on human interactions while his earlier

narratives are constructed around "human interactions in relation to a symbolic artifact such as the Grail, the Stone, the Tarot, or the Archetypes" (153).

Works Cited

- Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1977. 2 vols.
—. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1934.
Aquinas, St. Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*. Cambridge: Blackfriars, 1964. 61 vols.
Ashenden, Gavin. "Charles Williams and the Tradition of Alchemy." *VII: An Anglo-American Literary Review* 18 (2001): 51-72.
Augustine, St. *Confessions*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1977. 2 vols.
Boethius. "*De hebdomadibus*." Trans Scott MacDonald. *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991. 299-304.
Brewer, Elisabeth. "Charles Williams and Arthur Edward Waite." *VII: An Anglo-American Literary Review* 4 (1983): 45-67.
Chesterton, G.K. *St. Thomas Aquinas*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1933.
Flieger, Verlyn. "Time in the Stone of Suleiman." *The Rhetoric of Vision: Essays on Charles Williams*. Eds. Charles Huttar and Peter Schakel. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1996. 75-89.
Hadfield, Alice Mary. *Charles Williams: An Exploration of His Life and Work*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983.
Howard, Thomas. *The Novels of Charles Williams*. New York: Oxford UP, 1983.
King, Roma A. Jr. "The Occult as Rhetoric in the Poetry of Charles Williams." *The Rhetoric of Vision: Essays on Charles Williams*. Eds. Charles Huttar and Peter Schakel. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1996. 165-178.
Lewis, C.S. "Preface." 1947. *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*. Ed. C.S. Lewis. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966. v-xiv.
MacDonald, Scott. "The Relation Between Being and Goodness." Ed. Scott MacDonald. *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991. 1-28.
Metcalf, Stephen. "The Athanasian Principle in Williams's Use of Images." *The Rhetoric of Vision: Essays on Charles Williams*. Ed. Charles Huttar and Peter Schakel. London: Associated UP, 1991. 27-43.
Milton, John. *The English Poems of John Milton*. London: Oxford UP, 1940.
Peckham, Robert. "Rhetoric and the Supernatural in the Novels of Charles Williams." *Renascence* 45 (1993): 337-246.
Plato. *The Republic*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1956. 2 vols.
Plotinus. *Enneads*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989. 3 vols.
Ridler, Anne. "Introduction." *The Image of the City and Other Essays*. London: Oxford UP, 1958.
Sayers, Dorothy. *Further Papers on Dante*. London: Methuen, 1957.
Scheper, George L. "*All Hallows' Eve*: The Cessation of Rhetoric and the Redemption of Language." *The Rhetoric of Vision: Essays on Charles Williams*. Eds. Charles Huttar and Peter Schakel. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1996. 132-161.

- Shideler, Mary McDermott. *The Theology of Romantic Love*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962.
- Spencer, Kathleen. "Naturalizing the Fantastic: Narrative Techniques in the Novels of Charles Williams." *Extrapolation*. 28.1 (1987): 62-74.
- Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*. New York: Dutton, 1911.
- Urang, Gunnar. *Shadows of Heaven: Religion and Fantasy in the Fiction of C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and J.R.R. Tolkien*. London: SCM Press, 1971.
- Waite, Arthur Edward. *The Hidden Church of the Holy Graal*. London: Rebman, 1909.
- . *The Holy Kabbalah*. 1929. New Hyde Park: University Books, 1975.
- . *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot: Being Fragments of a Secret Tradition under the Veil of Divination*. 1910. New Hyde Park: University Books, 1966.
- Willard, Thomas. "Acts of the Companions: A. E. Waite's Fellowship and the Novels of Charles Williams." *Secret Texts: The Literature of Secret Societies*. Eds. Marie Mulvey Roberts and Hugh Ormsby-Lennon. New York: AMS Press, 1995. 269-302.
- Williams, Charles. *The Descent of the Dove*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939.
- . *The English Poetic Mind*. 1932. New York: Russell & Russell, 1963.
- . "The Figure of Arthur." *Arthurian Torso*. Ed. C.S. Lewis. London: Oxford UP, 1948. 3-90.
- . *The Figure of Beatrice*. London: Faber & Faber, 1943.
- . *The Greater Trumps*. 1932. London: Faber & Faber, 1962.
- . *He Came Down from Heaven and The Forgiveness of Sins*. London: Faber & Faber, 1938.
- . "The Image of Man." 1942. *The Image of the City and Other Essays*. Ed. Anne Ridler. London: Oxford UP, 1958. 143-146.
- . "The Making of Taliessin." 1941. *The Image of the City and Other Essays*. Ed. Anne Ridler. London: Oxford UP, 1958. 179-183.
- . "Malory and the Grail Legend." 1944. *The Image of the City and Other Essays*. Ed. Anne Ridler. London: Oxford UP, 1958. 186-194.
- . *Many Dimensions*. 1931. London: Faber & Faber, 1954.
- . "Natural Goodness." 1941. *The Image of the City and Other Essays*. Ed. Anne Ridler. London: Oxford UP, 1958. 75-80.
- . *War in Heaven*. 1930. London: Faber & Faber, 1962.
- . "The Way of Affirmation." 1940. *The Image of the City and Other Essays*. Ed. Anne Ridler. London: Oxford UP, 1958. 154-158.
- . *Witchcraft*. London: Faber & Faber, 1941.
- Zum Brunn, Emilie. *St. Augustine: Being and Nothingness*. New York: Paragon House, 1988.



~ Mythcon 37 ~

The Map and the Territory: Maps and Landscapes in Fantasy with a track on Native American Fantasy/ Native Americans in Fantasy

August 4-7, 2006 University of Oklahoma Norman, Oklahoma, USA

Author Guest of Honor: Lois McMaster Bujold

Scholar Guest of Honor: Amy H. Sturgis

The Site:

- Thurman J. White Forum Building on the OU campus

Housing:

- The Sooner Hotel & Suites (standard hotel rooms and two-bedroom cottage suites)
- Breakfast, lunch, and dinner in the Commons Restaurant on-site

Events:

- Book signing and reception at the University of Oklahoma main campus bookstore.
- Annual Banquet in the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History.

Campus Amenities:

- Special exhibit on Native American authors at the Western History Collections
- Special exhibit on maps in the History of Science Collection in Bizzell Library
- Maps and brochures are available for self-guiding walking tours of the campus, with a focus on our wonderful sculptures, architecture, and gardens.

Transportation:

Fly into Will Rogers International Airport in Oklahoma City (about 45 minutes from Norman) or the nearby hub airports at Dallas/Fort Worth (a three-hour drive by rental car).

Please join us in Oklahoma in 2006 --

We never met a hobbit we didn't like!

For more information,
contact Janet Brennan Croft, 405-325-1918 or jbcroft@ou.edu
Go to www.mythsoc.org for registration details