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## The Counsel of Elrond

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### The Counsel of Elrond



# The Counsel OF Elrond

Glen Good Knight

## Affirming the Images

This issue of *Mythlore* can be called a special Charles Williams issue. Several people in the Society have suggested it, and I wholeheartedly agreed. Williams is little-known in comparison with Tolkien and Lewis. This is due in part to the timing of his death at the peak of his literary career in 1945. No appreciable American following had formed before that time, in part due to the preoccupation of the world with the War. Even in England, in comparison to people like Sayers, Eliot, Auden and Lewis, his following was relatively small. I believe if he had lived longer and finished many planned works in the more developed style he was emerging into, he would be as well-known now as, say, W. H. Auden. In the last few years, his works seem to have undergone a renaissance of sorts. Nine of his works are available in this country in paperback, and his Arthurian poetry, which was out of print for over ten years, has been reissued in England.

The only works by Williams on the "regular" Mythopoeic Society reading list are his seven novels. I feel his greatest achievement by far was his Arthurian poetry. His poetry is not on the list because of its great unavailability in America. Yet anyone who has knowledge of Williams only through the novels is missing many things in the fuller image of the man.

My hope is that this issue of *Mythlore* will stimulate many more people into reading more of, and about, Charles Williams. I would like to try to describe briefly why I find Williams one of my favorite people. He was a tremendous catalyst and liberator to my own thinking, my approaches to life, and my life style. In my editorial in *Mythlore* 5, I told of reading Tolkien as a high school student, and my discovery of Lewis a year later. I did not know of Williams till 1964, and did not read any books by him until 1965. Many *Dimensions* was the first work read, and my initial reaction was not enthusiastic. In comparison to Tolkien and Lewis, Williams seemed very hazy and esoteric. I didn't enjoy the book, but felt I should finish it, and eventually did. Then the book had a different light and was more meaningful, but I still wasn't a Williams "fan." Knowing that C.S. Lewis had written a commentary on Williams' Arthurian poetry, published along with an unfinished manuscript by Williams entitled "The Figure of Arthur," I tracked down a copy. Here I sensed was a side to Williams much deeper than *Many Dimensions*. His Arthurian poetry, entitled *Talesienn through Logres and The Region of the Summer Stars*, is very difficult reading, yet romantically rich in luxurious images. There is a sustained sense of underlying joy through the work, even though much of it deals with the fall of the temporal Logres. In reading *The Place of The Lion* next, I found it less puzzling than *Many Dimensions*, and I was growing slowly into an appreciation of Williams. As a young person who didn't have enough background, in either life experiences or scope of reading, I felt I needed some kind of commentary on Williams to help clear up several questions and blank pages I had. Mary McDermott Shideler's *The Theology of Romantic Love: A Study in the Writings of Charles Williams* (which is not easy reading itself) did give the kind of mature, organized insight that I needed. Her book opened up a key to Williams: *The Affirmation of the Images*. Williams himself discusses it in his critical works several times, and his novels and poetry illustrate it profusely. The key phrase of Williams was "This is Thou; neither is This Thou," which cryptically states his view of life as a complementary balance between the Affirmation of the Images and The Rejection of the Images. Williams feels that there are two approaches to life, and that each person follows both ways, with the individual stressing one in preference to the other. The Rejection of the Images is the Way of the mystic, the ascetic, the transcendent. It is the Way that seeks to clear away all objects and experiences that hinder the clear vision of ultimate reality, of ultimate experience. The Way of Affirmation belongs to the poet, the artist, the romantic, the imminent, to those who see the ultimate mirrored in the universe around them. To describe this in religious terms, those who follow the Way of Rejection of the Images desire the direct contact

of God Himself, and to free themselves from all the surrounding distractions. In the words of the mystic soul, it is "the flight of the alone to the alone." Williams clearly points out that this is not a basically negative Way; it is negative only in its rejection of the images. As I stated before, Williams felt both are legitimate approaches, and no individual can be totally exclusive of one way in his life.

When I first came across these ideas, I interpreted them from the context of my own life up to that time. Of a sort, I was following a unhealthy form of the Way of Rejection. I often viewed the colorful parade of life with a singular detachment. Life, culture, civilization, nature seemed to roll along with a blissful obliviousness to the deeper and gut questions that often arise in the mind, both unasked-for and immediately unanswerable. Yet at the same time I knew I had within in me a deep natural spring of romanticism and childlike playfulness. This side of myself was repressed, since I felt it was hopelessly immature, and only tangled my thoughts further in my attempt to apprehend the ultimate. In effect, Williams showed me that romanticism was not to be ashamed of. I could express my previous desire to affirm and revel in the beauty of nature, things in themselves, climates of thought, and especially other people. All things do reflect the ultimate, and by using the Way of Affirmation, seeing the hidden glory glint through the object, one is helped towards a better vision of the ultimate by seeing it reflected in so many things. Each thing only reflects a small part, but opening oneself to the great variety of things - images - one's understanding of the ultimate is broadened in new, unexpected, and surprising ways.

I felt a new "acceptance" or "tolerance" of people - not just an easy going kind of "I'm okay, you're okay" attitude, but something more like "that person is basically (even though I don't appreciate every aspect) good, but he/she would be even more beautiful only if. . . ." I know it is a dangerous thing to claim you are more accepting or tolerant of people. The precise meaning can be so easily misunderstood. I don't feel I can be of much direct influence in changing people for the better. I used to wish this fervently, and at the same time was aware of my own woeful inadequacies. Basically I feel I enjoy people much more now, where before I withdrew from persons I felt I could not agree with. Now people fascinate me as beings in themselves. Whether I can agree with them on all points does not threaten or repel me to the degree previously. As Saint Paul said, "My brothers, I do not consider myself to have 'arrived' spiritually, nor do I consider myself already perfect. . . . But I do concentrate on this: I leave the past behind, with hands outstretched to whatever lies ahead. . . ." I would emphasize my feelings through this quote.

It was the new liberty given me through Williams' explanation of the Way of Affirmation, that especially affected my images of nature and other people. Without it, I surely would not have had the desire or capability to form the Mythopoeic Society, and thus would not have met so many diversely interesting personalities and minds, which have further opened up new insights into so many things and levels of consciousness. It is a very beautiful thing to feel oneself to be part of an ever-expanding positive experience.

## ACROSS the Brandywine by Bernie Zuber

Recently I read Charles Williams' *All Hallows' Eve* in order to design a cover for this issue. I knew I would find an inspiring scene in it ever since I had heard Glen read large excerpts from it at his 1968 Hallows'en party. Those of you who were there and remember that late, late reading by candlelight in the attic of Glen's former house may still feel the strange atmosphere of that whole scene. I'm glad I finally did read *All Hallows' Eve* for myself. I find it to be my favorite of the five Williams books I've read. The scene I chose to illustrate is the one in which the dead woman, Lester, sacrifices herself to save Betty from the deadly spell of Simon the sorcerer. It is one of the best-written supernatural scenes I've ever read.

*All Hallows' Eve* deals with souls in a post-mortem twilight zone and how they progress from that state. After I'd finished reading it I thought about the fact that it is only one of several stories primarily about Death that I've read since joining the Mythopoeic Society. Leaf by Niggle, *The Great Divorce*, *Lilith* and the final section of *The Last Battle* also deal with Death and Life after Death. Does this make our reading matter particularly morbid? I don't think so. I am not brave about the thought of dying so I would not like to dwell on it morbidly but those stories were more uplifting than depressing. Leaf by Niggle was, to me, a particularly cheering allegory of Purgatory and Heaven. This is why I consider it Tolkien's minor masterpiece. With the ending of *The Last Battle* Lewis gives us a similar idea of the joy that Heaven could be. In *The Great Divorce* I felt Lewis was too harsh because just about all the spirits had to go back to Hell. Still his perception of the human spirit was enlightening. *Lilith* was fascinating for its imagery even though I didn't understand all the symbols used by MacDonald. Williams' use of symbolism in *All Hallows' Eve* was more concise and his interrelation of the living and the dead tells more about human nature than some books that are supposedly about real life. I'm referring to the current rash of luridly detailed novels, avidly read by people who would undoubtedly frown on fantasy literature. I've been wondering what percentage of the people in this country still firmly maintain that all ends with Death because there