



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,  
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

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Volume 8  
Number 4

Article 13

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12-15-1982

## Charles Williams and The Angelicals

Rhona Beare

University of Newcastle, Australia

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### Recommended Citation

Beare, Rhona (1982) "Charles Williams and The Angelicals," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 8 : No. 4 , Article 13.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol8/iss4/13>

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## Mythcon 52: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico; July 29 - August 1, 2022

<http://www.mythsoc.org/mythcon/mythcon-52.htm>

### Abstract

Notes similarities between the angelicals that appear in *The Place of the Lion* and the Gnostic archons, which are also represented in animal form.

### Additional Keywords

Archons—Relation to Charles Williams; Williams, Charles. *The Place of the Lion*

# Charles Williams and The Angelicals

Rhona Beare

In The Place of the Lion there are nine Angelicals: angels who (like the Archons of the Gnostics) appear in animal form. Only eight actually come into the story: the missing one appears to be the seventh, and was perhaps an ox. Charles Williams described the Lion and the Serpent moving in concentric circles, and later the Lion and the Lamb. He mentions the "concentric ... circles of ... cosmology" (p. 60), and says that the first circle is that of the Lion, and the second that of the Serpent. The Gnostic archons also move in concentric circles. Origen (Contra Celsum VI 24. 30) quotes Celsus' description of a Gnostic diagram, and compares it with one he had himself obtained. There are ten (perhaps it should be seven) concentric circles, representing the ten (or seven) heavens. The Gnostics supposed, like Aristotle and Dante, that the earth was at the centre of the universe, and that the sun, moon, and planets circled round it. Each planet was moved by the angel or Intelligence who ruled it. The Gnostics believed that these were wicked angels, and pictured them in the shape of savage or contemptible animals, but the Bible talks of good angels in animal form. The Four Living Creatures of Ezekiel ch. 1, who in chapter 10 are called cherubim, are like a lion, a calf, a man, and a flying eagle; compare Revelation 4:7. The seraphim of Isaiah 6:2 may have been flying serpents; A.S. Herbert in The Cambridge Bible Commentary, 1973, p. 58, says "The seraphim are depicted as having a serpent body, wings, and human heads and hands." Celsus, describing the Gnostic diagram with its concentric circles, explains that there are seven archons, the first like a lion, the second a bull, the third a serpent, the fourth an eagle, the fifth a bear, the sixth a dog, the seventh an ass. Origen's diagram agreed, and added their names. The lion is Michael, the bull is Suriel (a form of the name Uriel), the serpent is Raphael, the eagle is Gabriel. These four seem to be identified with the Four Living Creatures of Rev. 4:7 (except that a serpent replaces the man) and with the Christian archangels whose names are best known to us. After listing the lion, bull, serpent, eagle, bear, dog and ass, Celsus adds "Some people return to the archontic forms so that they become lions or bulls or serpents or eagles or bears or dogs." I think Charles Williams had this in mind when he described Foster turning into a savage lion and Dora Wilmot becoming a serpent.

If the Angelicals are Gnostic archons, then they move in concentric circles for the same reason as the archons: they are the Intelligences that rule the sun, moon and planets. I expect Charles Williams would arrange the planets in the modern order, beginning with the one closest to the sun: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn. The sun and moon stand outside this list, not being planets; he might put them first and last. This would be the result:

The Lion of strength	rules the Sun.
The Serpent of subtlety	rules Mercury.
The Butterfly of beauty	rules Venus.
The Horse of speed	rules Mars.
The Eagle of wisdom	rules Jupiter.
The Unicorn of piety	rules Saturn.

The seventh Angelical is not mentioned (I suggested he might be an ox); the eighth is the Phoenix. What their astronomical significance is I do not see. They can hardly be Uranus and Neptune, which are too modern, or the stellar sphere and the primum mobile, which are too archaic. But the ninth, the Lamb of innocence and joy, seems to be the Moon. In Taliessin Through Logres joy is linked to the moon and to Galahad, who in "Per-cival at Carbonek" is called joy, and in "The Departure of Merlin" is called "the joyous moon." The planet Mercury goes well with the Serpent of subtlety because Mercury was a cunning god and two serpents intertwined on his wand. Venus is the goddess of beauty, therefore the Butterfly of beauty is assigned to the planet Venus. The Horse of speed may be inspired by the war-horse in Job 39:25; in He Came Down from Heaven, p.97, Charles Williams says he could imagine that horse supporting the throne of God like the Four Living Creatures. If the Horse is a war-horse, then he is a good symbol for Mars. The god Jupiter had an eagle, an eagle represents imperial power, and Dante assigns the planet Jupiter to the just rulers and describes them forming themselves into an eagle. Dante assigns Saturn to the contemplatives: those who retire from the world in order to contemplate God. This could be symbolized by the Unicorn of piety.

## Auction

We are trying an experimental auction through Mythlore. The auction at the annual Mythopoeic Conference will continue, but here we make items available to a much larger audience, which is beneficial to all concerned. To keep the procedure as simple as possible, you must bid at least the minimum price given. The item will go to the highest bidder, except that first if there is more than one bidder, the next to the highest bidder will be informed by postcard that a higher bid exists. This bidder will then have the opportunity to raise his or her bid. This will continue until the next to the highest bidder is not willing to bid higher. Since this is not exactly the same as an auction with a group of people present, it is important to bid as high as you are willing to at the start, since only the two highest bidders will have the opportunity to bid higher. Postage and handling are additional. To save time, acceptable increments of bids will be 10% of the original minimum bid given, or \$2, whichever is greater. Send your bids to the Editor. See page 2 for the address. Deadline for bids on these items is March 1, 1982.

1. Book. The Silmarillion by J. R. R. Tolkien, British first edition. Very fine, dj. \$45
2. Book. Bilbo le Hobbit by J. R. R. Tolkien. Paris: Stock. New, cloth. \$20
3. Book. Smith of Wootton Major by J. R. R. Tolkien. London: Allen & Unwin, second impression, 1967. Fair, hardbound. \$15
4. Book. The Image of the City and Other Essays by Charles Williams, selected by Anne Ridler. Oxford U. P. 1970. Good, hardbound. \$20

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