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### Abstract

Looks at women in the novels of Charles Williams from the perspective of feminism, especially feminist theology. Finds a wide range of female characters at various stages of spiritual development, androgyny and inclusiveness in regard to God.

### Additional Keywords

Feminist criticism; Feminist theology—Relation to Charles Williams; Williams, Charles—Characters—Women; Williams, Charles. Novels; Sarah Beach

# A Feminist Perspective in Williams' Novels

## Amy Nyman

This paper will consider a feminist perspective in the seven novels by Charles Williams. Is there a relationship between Williams and feminist theologians? Does he use inclusive language? Secondly, how do the women function in the novels? Are they autonomous individuals? Do they need to defer to the men in their lives to the extent that their own self-esteem is in jeopardy? Is each woman responsible for her choices or is she allowed to function only in relationship to men?

Feminist theoreticians tend to fall into either biblical or non-biblical frames of reference when they look to the past.[1] Those in the one group attempt to reform the structure from within and the others look to other sources, such as pagan myths, which focus on goddesses rather than gods. Mary Daley envisions a future with androgynous limitations, not patriarchal ones, but many find it too abstract. (Ibid, p.11) In her 1979 dissertation, Diane McGifford claims that Williams cannot be called a Christian apologist because his mythic narratives have an androgynous orientation.[2]

In contrast to McGifford, Madonna Kolben-schlag views Jesus as "an archetypal androgyne." She interprets social structures in a threefold pattern.[3] Emphasis originally on dynastic attitudes shifted to the romantic dyad after the Reformation. The most recent emphasis is on the autonomous individual. Prophets, mystics, and others are examples of autonomous people from the past. Jesus was "a personality that stepped out of dynastic and dyadic self-definitions." (Ibid., p. 130)

What do we know of Williams' attitude toward women outside of the novels themselves? He wrote a number of letters to Phyllis Potter while she was producing his Nativity play. In the letter dated 31 July 1936, he comments, "It is a little inconsiderate of the Nativity to have so many men about and so few women. But I pushed in two or three extra women." [4] There is no way to speculate realistically about the playwright's motivation in making such a drastic change. Was it simply for the sake of balance?

Thomas Howard observes that in the novels, Williams avoids routine theological or pietistic terms for the Deity. "God" or "Lord" or even the male pronoun "He" is rarely used.[5] Instead, terms such as "the Mercy" or "the Omnipotence" are found frequently. He suggest that Williams did not wish to indulge in routine piety by using mundane titles or phrases. (Does this make Williams an early Death-of-God theologian a la Bishop Robinson?)

In the theological essay "He Came Down from Heaven," Williams refers to "The Adam." Pronouns referring to "The Adam" are always plural, never singular male or singular female.[6] Williams' reluctance to use patriarchal terminology is evident elsewhere than in the novels. Alice Mary Hadfield, who knew him in the Amen House, indicates that CW "seldom used the word 'God,' less often 'Christ,' never 'Jesus.' He preferred 'Holy Spirit.'" [7]

Elizabeth Cady Stanton in The Woman's Bible, originally published in 1895, exegetes verses 26, 27, and 28 of the first chapter of Genesis:

26¶ And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

27¶ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

28¶ And God blessed them and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.[8]

She insists that "masculine and feminine elements were equally represented" in the Godhead prior to Creation. "If language has any meaning we have in these texts a plain declaration of the existence of the feminine element in the Godhead, equal in power and glory with the masculine. The Heavenly Mother and Father!" (Ibid.) She adds later, "It is important to note the equal dominion is given to woman over every living thing, but not one word is said giving man dominion over woman." (Ibid., p. 15)

Lady Julian of Norwich is mentioned only briefly by Williams in Descent of the Dove. [9] It is in connection with a visit she had from Marjory Kempe. He has Gregory refer to the Cathedral of Norwich in War in Heaven. Gregory points out the spire through a window to distract the nurse who is caring for Barbara.[10] The Archdeacon is reading Lady Julian's Revelations near a window immediately before his crucifixion. (Ibid., p. 239) Is Williams using these as a ploy to point his readers toward Lady Julian and her writings? Are the windows in both situations windows to eternity?

Williams quotes her more at length in a

letter to Sister Mary James Power, which is dated 25 September 1934. He had been asked to state his beliefs in a letter to be included in her book Poets at Prayer. He concludes the letter with this quotation from Lady Julian:

Wouldst thou learn thy Lord's meaning  
in this thing? Learn  
it well, love was His meaning.  
What showed He thee? Love.  
Wherefore showed it He? For love.  
Who showed it thee? Love.  
What then can be amiss?[11]

Here at the end of a long letter in which he refers to the Incarnation and Creation, to the creeds of the church, and to the phrase "Bear ye one another's burdens," he focuses attention on love with Lady Julian's visionary view of it. Feminist theologian Rosemary Ruether claims that sexism, "like other distortions of Christianity, can be overcome by a return to the core symbols of the tradition of love: equality, mutuality, reciprocity, and service." [12] That sounds very much like a catalogue of Williams' major themes!

Lately, feminist theologians have been turning to a variety of sources, including Lady Julian. Caroline Walker Bynum mentions her frequently in her book Jesus as Mother. "The theme of God's motherhood is a minor one in all writers of the high Middle Ages except Julian of Norwich," for whom it is primary. [13] There is little information about Julian's life in the 14th century. She had a series of visions during a severe illness when she was near death. She spent the next twenty years living in a small cell in the cathedral. Most of her time was spent in solitary meditation and writing. She is known best through her writings in which she attempts to understand her visions.

Kathryn Johnson (Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary) used Julian's writings as a basis for a sermon entitled "Our Precious Mother Jesus." In Julian's Showings, Johnson found a "profound sense of rest and joy--consolation even in the presence of spiritual pain--which pervades every page she wrote." [14] A later Johnson comment is hauntingly similar to the kinds of experiences the characters in a Williams' novel encounter. "That Jesus for Julian was mother, father, brother, and savior all at once means something unexpectedly exciting about our own capacities for things which may seem to be inconceivable or inconsistent with what we already are." (Ibid., p. 65) In Williams' study of Dante, he says that for Dante "Beatrice was, in her degree, an image of nobility, of virtue, of the Redeemed Life, and some sense of Almighty God himself. But she also remained Beatrice right to the end." [15] He also notes that "Dante is one of those poets who begin their work with what is declared to be an intense personal experience." (Ibid., p. 7)

It is generally agreed that feminist theology is experiential. [16] It begins with specific experiences and moves to wider conclusions. (Ibid., p. 23) Characters in Williams' novels function from a similar experiential base. Each is constantly moving toward salvation or damnation by making choices--most of the time, seemingly unimportant choices. However, each choice is made, and the next, and so on, until Heaven or Hell is reached. Feminist theologians tell stories about their own or others' experiences and base theology on them. (Ibid.) Williams tells stories and theology emerges from the experiences of the characters.

Doris T. Myers notes that although Williams admits the principle of hierarchy, women are not always subject to men, and men may serve women in Williams' novels. The circumstances vary considerably. She insists that although the women characters may have traditional roles to play, "but spiritually they are as free as men" and "he is realistic in that his men and women have the same capabilities, whether for abysmal selfishness or exalted strength and nobility." [17] There is a range in the characters, according to Frederick S. Wandall. "They represent all shades of ethical persuasion, all modes of living from heaven to hell. It is to Williams' credit that he does not restrict himself to the two extremes of morality or immorality, religious belief or unbelief." [18]

Shadows of Ecstasy was the first novel that Williams wrote, probably in 1926. [19] However, it was not published until 1933. It has few women, and they do not have significant roles, politically or economically. Isabel does not "do" anything spectacular in the novel. She simply is. Her love for Roger allows her to encourage him to follow Considine, even though she cannot agree with Considine. It would make a neater package, a more suitable romantic dyad, if Roger and Isabel both believed in Considine and wanted to follow him together. Their relationship is more complex than that.

When Sir Bernard questions her, she has a problem in making her motives clear to him. [20] She is genuinely perplexed by his questions: "I don't call it anything. There isn't anything to call it. It's the way things happen if you love someone." She even claims that it makes her happy, even in the midst of pain. She has a communication problem similar to that of mystics. She has a vision of love that causes her to accept Roger and what he does or wants to do without condition. This vision cannot be verbalized easily to someone who has not experienced a vision that is like it.

She admits to Sir Bernard later: "I'm no good at words, and I'm a fool at knowing things, but when there's something in you that has its way. . . ." (Ibid., p. 165) She cannot approach understanding love through knowledge and verbalizing. She uses "being" and "doing" instead.

Has Isabel been coerced into allowing Roger

to go with Considine? Apparently not. Sir Bernard is quite concerned that she has lost so much--a spouse--while he himself has lost only a friend. Somehow, he senses that she should not be happy. She should be mourning her loss, but she is utterly happy. Isabel does not allow Sir Bernard's worrisome attitude to affect her. She does not bow to his scepticism. She does not need Sir Bernard's approval for what she thinks and feels or what Roger does. She does not need anyone else's approval, either. She attempts to be sympathetic with everyone (Roger, Rosamond, and assorted policemen) after the brouhaha that followed Rosamond's calling the police station to report Considine's whereabouts. Isabel has a difficult time trying to handle a hysterical Rosamond, along with everything else. But there is no awareness of her scolding her sister at this point. She is even reluctant to remember the incident about the chocolates from their childhood. (Ibid., p. 134)

When Roger, devastated and grief stricken over Considine's death, returns to Isabel, "she neither sympathized nor consoled; in the deep practice of her love her heart was struck equally with his. She suffered his desolation as she had his desire; the trust of his necessity with which she had charged herself knew this union also." (Ibid., p. 218) Sir Bernard wonders if Roger was suffering and assumes that he was, "but he did not know how acutely, and Isabel did not tell him." (Ibid., p. 222) She has no need to run to Sir Bernard whimpering about Roger's pain. She did not need to tell him how Roger had changed since his return either.

Rosamond is quite different from her sister--snobbish and greedy as a child, Rosamond has not gained much maturity in maturing. "And now, like all men and all women who are not masters of life, she swayed to and fro in her intention and even in her desire." (Ibid., p. 136) She needed others' approval desperately and was not even capable of appreciating it when she had it. "She was alive and she hated life." (Ibid., p. 135) In the midst of the chaos, Rosamond collapses. Her own confusion cannot cope with the confusion around her. Her collapse allows her to ignore it. Later, when the turmoil has subsided, she recovers. Perhaps Phillip's love for her will guide her to focusing outside herself. At the end of the novel, there is talk of their wedding plans. She may begin to live in love at last although there is nothing to guarantee it. She is essentially helpless on her own. She desperately needs others to acknowledge who she is.

War in Heaven is one of the early novels and does not have very many women in it. Barbara has the only significant role and even then, is not part of the defense of the Graal or the murder mystery. Her involvement by Gregory appears to be incidental. Initially, she is seen only as Lionel's wife or Adrian's mother. Gregory is primarily interested in establishing a relationship with Adrian, who is four, in order to use the child in some occult rituals.

Gregory's decision to test the ointment on Barbara seems to be unrelated to anything else in

the story. Gregory is a quaker striking out in random attempts to gain knowledge about uses of the ointment. He uses it on himself to reach an intense sensual ecstasy. He uses it on Barbara without her awareness. She almost loses her mind as a result. Trowbridge notes that she shows signs of spiritual development as she manages to escape from hell itself.[21]

After the original hysteria, Barbara's movements become more patterned. Gregory watches intently as she reacts to the ointment. She ignores everyone in the room as she moves slowly, then quickly, to music that only she can hear. Continually, she cries to God and to Lionel for help. Barbara recovers from her second bout of hysteria before Dr. Manasseh can actually do anything. Since he is closest to her, it appears that he has done something to help her. He admits to Gregory later, "I could have drowned her knowledge, and instead she seemed to know something else. It was as if she found everything all right even on the very edge of the pit."

"He shall give His angels charge over her," Gregory said. "Perhaps He managed it in time. They've usually been rather late." (Ibid., p. 187) Gregory quotes Scripture in an attempt to understand who or what retrieved Barbara from Hell. He does not comprehend that Barbara's love for Lionel is focused on Lionel, not on herself. Gregory's love is focused on himself, his own pleasure, his own quest for knowledge to gain pleasure. His love has never been focused outward. He cannot understand that someone else's love can be focused outward and that is what saves Barbara.

Williams' phrase "a memory that was not conquered cried out" (Ibid., p. 161) points out that focus. That memory of love focused outward screams out to Lionel and to God. It is only twenty-two pages later that Gregory points out the spire of the Norwich cathedral to the nurse--the very cathedral where Lady Julian lived and wrote. And it was in her writings Williams picked out a strong focus on love--"Learn it well, love was His meaning." There may be a parallel between Barbara's love for Lionel and Nancy's love for Henry. To focus love on a spouse or spouse-to-be is learning to live in love. It can save one from Hell or allow a young woman to stop a supernatural snow storm from destroying the world.

Chloe is the central figure in Many Dimensions. On the surface, she is merely Lord Arglay's secretary. She does more than type his notes, however. She does research on various topics. He occasionally interrupts the work on his book to ask her a question: "What is the best thing that ever was?"[22] He is not being flippant or making small talk. He wants to know what she thinks. She scolds him for neglecting the work at hand. He insists that she stay for lunch with his nephew. Her employer wants her input for the work on his book and in other areas.

It is obvious that Chloe is the only one who really senses that the Stone is a Holy Thing and should be treated with a peculiar respect. It is through Chloe that the Stone is restored. How does

she accomplish this? It is not through knowledge or through self-serving desire on her part. Others do want the Stone for various self-serving reasons. She was able to do what no one else could. The Hajji explained, "This Holy Thing has been kept in seclusion through many centuries, and in all that time none of its keepers have approached or touched it. And since Giles Tumulty stole it, men have grasped at it in their own wisdom. But this woman has put her will at its disposal." (Ibid., p. 22)

When Chloe is threatened because she has one of the Types of the Stone, she refuses to use it in the usual manner for her own safety. That would require her to force her will on the Stone. She questions herself: "What did you do if you had decided to believe in God? So far as her early training served her, she thought you gave up your will to His." (Ibid., p. 215) She understands that she cannot use the Stone for her own protection because it would be telling the Stone what to do. She should be doing what the Stone wanted her to do instead.

The attempted theft of the Stone occurs one night when she is at home alone. Chloe is aware that someone is in the darkened room with her. Of course, she senses that whoever is there is intent on having the Type. In sheer panic, she almost uses it as an escape to leave the room. After a brief but painful struggle, she submits her will to God's. In prayer, she asks first, "Thy will do if Thou wilt; or not." Later, it becomes simply, "Do, or do not." (Ibid., pp. 218-219)

Her panic dissolves into calm as she receives the protection: "From somewhere beyond her, where her hands clasped the Stone, that narrow line of light emerged; she lay within it and it passed through and about her without hindrance. The more clear it grew to her knowledge, the more clearly within she enunciated the formula she had shaped with such pain and at last unconsciously abandoned the formula itself for the meaning that lay within it." (Ibid., p. 219) Sometime later, a constable finds a man's body "burnt and broken" in a heap outside the door. Chloe is not harmed; her would-be attacker is no more.

Trowbridge sees Chloe as the saviour of the Stone as Prester John is the saviour of the Graal in War in Heaven [23] Even though Prester John exists in the story as a flesh-and-blood character, he is not a natural figure who is now the keeper of the Graal. Even Gregory is aware of the unusual nature of this visitor in the grey flannel suit. Prester John is really a "deus ex machina" who travels in the time and space knowingly protecting an object of holiness.[24] Chloe, on the other hand, has little actual knowledge of what she is doing, especially at the beginning. She slowly senses her part in restoring the Stone by willing to be a path for it. Is she even aware of the ultimate sacrifice that she will make? Prester John exists outside of time and space as we understand it. He cannot be harmed as Chloe can.

Damaris in Place of the Lion is one of Williams' more complex characters. At the opening of

the story, she is quite self-centered and self-contained, thank you very much. She needs no one; and presumably from her perspective, no one needs her. Her father and his increasing enthusiasm for butterflies really does not interest her. Anthony, her fiance, and his interest in her, really does not interest her.

What does interest Damaris? Her work on her dissertation. Anything else and everything else is only an annoying distraction from her true work. What matters is her academic career and nothing and nobody else. She is concerned about not making enemies for any reason and almost regrets sending a letter that could cause waves to an academic journal. Anthony thinks that she experiences life as dying and scholarly whereas he views it as living and intelligent. In a moment of anger, he accuses her of actually studying "The Damaristic Tradition at the Court of Damaris" rather than anything else.[25]

It is not that Damaris conscientiously avoids mutuality or reciprocity, neither of them exists within her realm of existence. She sees no relationship between ideas and the real world. She has a scholar's detachment from her subject matter. Her detachment is so complete and so controlled that she is only irritated, not frightened, when Dora screams that the snake is coming. (Ibid., pp. 31-33)

Anthony realizes that Damaris studies reality for her own purposes only, and he becomes increasingly aware how destructive that can be. (Ibid., p. 155) The destruction begins with her horrifying vision of the huge bird. She is frightened enough to call for Anthony. Part of her vision is going to her father and being rejected. That rejection is also very frightening. Anthony comes to her rescue. Finally, she can apologize to him and ask his help. Mutuality and reciprocity begin as "In such conversation, question and answer exchanged between them while Damaris searched her heart." (Ibid., p. 137)

It is the beginning of her being able to turn away from self-centeredness to become aware of others' needs. Damaris can see that Quentin needs her help and she is eager to provide it. He is being chased by Foster, who has become more beast than man. She does have relapses, but essentially she is pointed in the direction of Heaven, not Hell, as she was earlier.

It is easier to see the dynasty-dyad-autonomy pattern as described by Madonna Kohlbenschlag in The Greater Trumps than in the other novels. Aaron and Lothair are both heads of families and attempt to speak for their families. Aaron wants to use knowledge about the occult from family lore. His grandson Henry wants to use knowledge to gain power. Lothair wants peace and quiet within a traditional family setting. Anything out of the ordinary, such as quarreling children, is lunacy to him and to be avoided at all costs.

Henry and Nancy are the romantic dyad which is pulling away from the two families involved.

Henry, however, is only using Nancy to gain possession of the fortune-telling cards. He is certain that using the cards, in conjunction with the golden figures that his family has protected for generations, will give him immense power. Nancy is simply a young woman very much in love although she is at the edge of love, the beginning of it. She has not lived in love as yet.

Individual characters reveal their relationship to love as they observe the golden figures of the dance, especially the Fool in the center. Sybil is the only one who can see the Fool move among all the figures. She understands that living in love means to move, to dance, to be flexible, to be available for the needs of others. Nancy feels that she expects the Fool to move, but that it does not.

Aaron, Henry, Lothair, and Ralph all see the Fool at the center, immobile.[26] Each of them is, in a sense, immobile in his ability to dance, that is, to love. In the moments of crisis, Aaron goes to pieces, genuinely frightened at the prospect that the storm is supernatural and cannot be stopped. It could mean the end of the world. He is paralyzed with fright and refuses to go into the mist with Sybil to help anyone else. Lothair is simply bewildered by the apparent chaos. Golden figures that move and produce light, a snow storm that is after him specifically, an impenetrable mist inside a home--none of these make any sense to his traditional frame of reference. It must be lunacy! However, he is not overwhelmed completely in that he does desire to protect Nancy, his daughter.

Henry seeks knowledge and thinks that it is more important than love. He does love Nancy finally, but initially he is interested only in gaining access to the fortune-telling cards. He is devastated when Nancy knocks some of the cards from his hands during the storm. He is frightened in much the same way that his grandfather Aaron is. It is likely that the end of the world is coming. His knowledge seems to be of no use to stop it. Nancy's desire to try to stop the storm without knowledge, with only a desire to help, strikes him as being foolish. But that's just what the Fool tells us. It is love that allows us to dance, frees us to serve each other, and makes us autonomous through mutuality and exchange.

Aaron, Henry, Lothair, and Ralph are all affected by external forces or influences. Sybil is not. The novel opens with a family scene--Lothair is annoyed because Ralph and Nancy are squabbling, but Sybil reports that she has had a nice day. She always does, regardless of external events. Sybil is a self-contained, but not a self-centered entity. She wields a certain power in that she can quiet the children with a gesture.

Thomas Howard compares Sybil to Lady Juliana of Norwich: "The Lady Juliana was speaking of the state in which charity has been perfected, and therefore joy perfected. It is not exclusively a future state, although it is certainly that, of

course. But Sybil knows something of that freedom already. (Thomas Howard, op. cit., p. 126)

In commenting on the situation after Nancy shuffles the cards to create earth, Thomas Howard says, "We are presumably meant to see as an enactment of the central mystery of exchange in which our mortal flesh (represented here by Nancy: all humanity is, as it were, 'feminine' vis-a-vis deity) is taken into godhood, represented here by Henry, who is masculine. . . . There is something, then, in the love that obtains between a man and woman, that echoes the mystery of the human being 'wedded' to the divine--of masculine initiative and feminine responsiveness." (Ibid., p. 136) Later, as Nancy and Henry enter the room with the golden figures in an attempt to still the storm, "we find that Henry must follow Nancy (power and authority--the traditional role of the man in betrothal--must submit to submission itself), in order to discover the saving dominion of Love over domination." (Ibid., p. 145) It is Nancy who convinces Henry that they should go into the room and try to do something. He had given up and was waiting in the dark for the world to end. It was Nancy's initiative that stopped the storm. There is a place for masculine initiative and a place for feminine initiative. Circumstances vary and people and their capabilities vary.

Sybil takes the initiative in talking with and comforting Joanna on the road. The two aunts seem to communicate. Joanna is Aaron's mad sister. She searches for her lost child who actually had died many years before. In a frenzy, Joanna scratches Nancy's hand with her nails, "as another body was torn by nails in its struggle with evil." (Ibid.) At the end of the novel, Sybil tells everyone that Joanna is content now because she thinks that Nancy is her lost child. For the second time, Nancy becomes Messiah. Her father questions Sybil about the age and sex of Joanna's lost child. Neither matters. Is Williams telling his readers that it is all right to think of Messiah as a woman?

The reader stumbles across Lester, the central figure in All Hallows' Eve, as Lester herself stumbles around London shortly after her death. As she reviews her life, she realizes how selfish and self-centered she had been all her life. She has a vague notion or intention that she could do differently or better somehow. There is no way to get anyone's approval for what she thinks or does. In fact, there is literally no one around at all for quite some time. Lester understands that her relationships with Richard, her husband, and with Betty, a school chum, should be dealt with in a new way.

She looks to Richard to use his handkerchief after a spell of crying. It is then that she realizes that she needs him and needs others, as well. This recognition is the beginning of her salvation and is similar to what Damaris experiences in Place of the Lion.

Evelyn was with Lester and was killed at the same time. Evelyn was even more selfish in life

than Lester was and, in addition, lacked Lester's sincerity.[27] She is not ready to respond positively to anyone. Basically, she whimpers about various real and imagined wrongs done to her. "But I haven't done anything!" is her constant complaint, which is completely true in the sense that she has never done a charitable thing for anyone else. She is not willing to help Betty in any way--partly out of fear and partly out of self-centeredness.

Lester moves towards charity in her relationships with Richard, Betty, and Evelyn. She accepts opportunities to aid each of them, thereby moving closer to her own salvation. In contrast, Evelyn moves further from the others and toward her damnation.

Betty has an unusual background. She is the product of an adulterous relationship between Lady Wallingford and Simon. Her legal father, Sir Wallingford, has no idea that Betty is not his daughter and that his wife is not just a follower of Simon's, but an accomplice. Simon wanted to have a child for his own evil purposes, not for love. He can separate Betty's soul from her body and send her soul into the future on errands for him. He needs her to guarantee the success of his plan to dominate the world.

The love that Betty and Jonathan share begins to help Betty experience real love for the first time. She calls out for help while on an errand for Simon. Both Lester and Evelyn hear Betty's frightened call and recognize her voice. Evelyn wants to find her in order to torture her as she did when they were school chums. This intention moves Evelyn a step closer to damnation. Lester responds to Betty's pleas with a desire to help in whatever way is appropriate.

At the Highgate house, where the Wallingfords live, Lester willingly interposes herself for Betty. First, she must ask for and receive Betty's forgiveness. Then Lester places herself so that she receives the full impact of Simon's power as he attempts to use Betty once again. This time, though, it is different. He intends Betty's death as part of his evil schemes.[28] As Lester leans back against a framework of some kind, the reader realizes that the framework of support is in actuality a cross and that Lester is crucified for Betty's sake.

Betty's mother is not a villain in quite the same way that Simon is. It is unclear how and when their relationship began. It is not a simple matter of physical attraction because they have sexual intercourse only once, for the express purpose of conceiving a child for Simon to use. Is she mesmerized by Simon's hollow promises? She is, as far as we know, completely obedient to Simon's commands. She debases Betty all her life, even to treating her shabbily like a servant when they are spending holidays away from home. It is not until Simon tries to kill Betty by using voodoo that her mother attempts to protect her. She goes so far as to supply the hair from Betty's hairbrush for the doll, but then, somehow, Simon stabs Sara's finger

instead. Why did the mother replace the daughter for a sacrifice? Is there hope for the mother's salvation after many years of abuse? Sara's possible salvation is based on the fact that she dedicated her life unselfishly to serving Simon. It was never for her own gain, but out of love for him. In discussing Sara and Simon's relationship, Williams comments that they "had never exchanged that joyous smile of equality which marks all happy human or celestial government." (Williams, *Eve*, op. cit., p. 166)

Evelyn finally does reject joy, even though Lester tries to help her again. She meanders into meaningless existence "there to wait and wander and mutter till she found what companions she could." [29]

Pauline and Lawrence are the most important characters in *Descent into Hell* because each of them makes the most progress toward Heaven or Hell. Each of them journeys in a specific direction by making small choices along the way. Lawrence refuses reality by denying fact and turns inward toward increasing self-centeredness. In contrast, Pauline accepts guidance from Peter in facing her double and from her grandmother Margaret in bearing others' burdens.

This novel has many women characters and they cover a great range. It also abounds in "odd couples." Pauline and Lawrence are the travelers although they start in different places and are going in different directions. Lawrence may also be paired with the suicide who died using a rope and is attempting to return to fact, to the City. Lawrence is slowly dying inside by descending a rope.

Another pair, Margaret and Peter, both serve as guides for Pauline. Both of them have already reached a particular level of spirituality, which allows them to advise someone who is still searching. Peter and Pauline function as a pair as he carries her burden of fear. She, in turn, carries a similar burden for her ancestor.

Adela and Hugh are a romantic pair. They appear basically to be somewhat selfish. Both think they are using the other for some advantage. There may be a possibility that, through love, they will learn to live in love sometime in the future. They could have given up their evening of theater to be at Lawrence's for the usual gathering, or they could have been honest with him about their absence. A relationship that begins with a deception does not have a firm start.

Catherine, director of the play, wants the surface of the play to look good. She is concerned about gaining the approval of the audience and the critics. She is much less concerned about the actual substance of the play--what the play actually says. Lily is her partner in crime in that she attempts to gloss over reality by muttering that everything will be all right, whether it is or not. It is the appearance that matters to Lily, not the substance or the facts of reality. Catherine focuses on the exterior of the play while Lily fusses over the exterior of reality.



As the story unfolds, Pauline is more and more willing to reciprocate with others as she learns to live in love as Margaret had learned some time before. Adela, Catherine, and to a lesser degree, Myrtle, are all using others and reality for their own self-centered purposes. They look to others for approval of superficial matters only. Substance has no real meaning for them.

Lily, on one level, serves as a counterpart for Peter because she guides and influences Myrtle and Adela. She also tries to tempt Pauline, but she is too late, for Pauline has already begun to experience Exchange as a result of Peter's and Margaret's guidance.

Adela views herself as self-contained, but she needs to have a man, preferably Hugh, not Lawrence, in order to bolster her social ego.

Rosamond and Lady Wallingford are not autonomous initially. Neither appears to be moving toward Heaven or Hell. Both defer to others in their lives. Rosamond is petulant, childish, and self-centered. She expects the world to revolve around her and simply cannot function when it does not. Sara Wallingford is almost a robot under Simon's domination. There is a strong indication that Rosamond and Phillip will wed. There is a possibility that romantic love will start Rosamond in the right direction.

Several women show definite stages of development as they move toward salvation or damnation. Evelyn, Dora, Adela, Catherine, and Myrtle are in the latter category. Mutuality and exchange become more and more difficult for them. Dora is under Berringer's influence, but decides to write the notes herself after he is in the coma. Evelyn comes under Simon's spell late in the story, but her earlier choices are strictly her own. Adela defers to Hugh only occasionally, and that is done to flatter his ego.

Lester, Pauline, and Nancy are struggling toward salvation. Each has a different journey, but they are traveling toward the same goal. Nancy submits to Henry at one point, but later takes the initiative when his knowledge fails. Pauline looks to Peter and Margaret for guidance. She is not coerced by either of them. Even Simon's fully focused evil power cannot dominate Lester.

Betty is very much under the influence of her mother and Simon at the beginning of her story. Her love for Jonathan and Lester's sacrifice allow her to be more autonomous. Damaris is a special case in that she appears to be self-sufficient at the outset. However, her apparent autonomy is intellectual only. She holds back her emotions so that she is not functioning fully. She moves toward Heaven after recognizing a need for Anthony and being able to see that she should help Quentin.

Lily stands on her own without solid relationships with anyone. She is not moving toward Hell because she already is Hell. Joanna is also a solitary figure who marches to a very different drummer. Her madness isolates her from society, but she is sincere in her search.

Chloe gives and receives respect from her employer, Lord Arglay. She is uncomfortable with Giles and Reginald because she senses that they do not respect the Stone as an object to adore. She is capable of resisting outside pressures to use the Stone. She defers to no one, including her fiance Frank, who is genuinely bewildered.

Barbara and Isabel live in love with their husbands. Each woman is independent of her spouse in that he may have his own ideas to be free to live his own lifestyle. Neither wife has to receive approval from him or anyone else.

Both Sybil and Margaret are obviously autonomous individuals who have reached a specific level of spirituality. Each serves as a guide to those around her. Sybil influences virtually everyone else in the story, and Margaret encourages Pauline and the suicide.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton gave the opening address for the International Council of Women which met in Washington, D.C., March 25 through April 1, 1888. In part, she said:

Some men tell us we must be patient and persuasive; that we must be womanly. My friends, what is man's idea of womanliness? It is to have a manner which pleases him--quiet, deferential, approaching him as a subject does a master. He wants no self-assertion on our part, no defiance, no vehement arraignment of him as a robber and a criminal. What do we know yet of the womanly? The women we have seen thus far have been, with rare exceptions, the mere echoes of men. Man has spoken in the State, the Church, and the Home, and made the codes, creeds, and customs which govern every relation in life, and women have simply echoed all his thoughts and walked in paths he prescribed. And this they call womanly.[30]

Womanly? Echoes? The women in Charles Williams' novels may be headed for Heaven or Hell, but they are definitely not mere echoes.

#### NOTES

- [1] Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, Woman-spirit Rising, (San Francisco, 1979), p. 10.
- [2] Diane McGifford, Eros and Logos: The Androgynous Vision in the Mythic Narratives of Charles Williams, University of Manitoba, 1979.
- [3] Madonna Kolbenschlag, Kiss Sleeping Beauty Good-bye, (Garden City, New York, 1960), p. 129.
- [4] Found in the Wade Collection, Wheaton College.
- [5] Thomas Howard, The Novels of Charles Williams, (New York, 1983), p. 75.
- [6] Charles Williams, He Came Down from Heaven and the Forgiveness of Sins, (Grand Rapids, MI, 1984), p. 21.
- [7] Alice Mary Hadfield, Charles Williams: An Exploration of His Life and Work, (New York, 1983) p. 67.

- [8] Elizabeth Cady Stanton, The Woman's Bible, (Seattle, WA, 1974), p. 14.
- [9] Charles Williams, Descent of the Dove, (New York, 1956), pp. 143-144.
- [10] Charles Williams, War in Heaven, (Grand Rapids, MI), p. 183.
- [11] Sister Mary James Power, Poets at Prayer, (Freeport, NY, 1938), p. 153.
- [12] As summarized by Eric W. Gritsch, Dialog, Volume 24 (Winter, 1985), (St. Paul, MN), p. 12.
- [13] Caroline Walker Bynum, Jesus as Mother, (Los Angeles, CA, 1982), p. 168.
- [14] Kathryn Johnson, Dialog, Volume 24 (Winter, 1985), (St. Paul, MN), p. 6.
- [15] Charles Williams, The Figure of Beatrice, (New York, 1983), pp. 7-8.
- [16] Mary D. Pellauer, Dialog, Volume 24 (Winter, 1985), (St. Paul, MN), p. 22.
- [17] Doris T. Myers, Cimarron Review, (17 October 1971), p. 18.
- [18] Frederick S. Wandall, Minor British Novelists, (Carbondale, IL, 1967), p. 126.
- [19] Thomas Howard, op. cit., p. 22.
- [20] Charles Williams, Shadows of Ecstasy, (Grand Rapids, MI, 1965), pp. 162-163.
- [21] Charles Williams, War in Heaven, (Grand Rapids, MI, 1965), p. 230.
- [22] Charles Williams, Many Dimensions, (Grand Rapids, MI, 1965), p. 18.
- [23] Clinton W. Trowbridge, "The Twentieth Century British Supernatural Novel," unpublished dissertation, University of Florida, 1958, p. 212.
- [24] Sape Ann Zylstra, "Charles Williams: An Analysis and Appraisal of His Major Works," unpublished dissertation, Emory University, 1969, p. 57.
- [25] Charles Williams, The Place of the Lion, (Grand Rapids, MI, 1965), p. 2.
- [26] Charles Williams, The Greater Trumps, (Grand Rapids, MI, 1976), pp. 72-75.
- [27] Charles Williams, All Hallows' Eve, (New York, 1963), p. 156.
- [28] Thomas Howard, op. cit., p. 173.
- [29] Charles Williams, All Hallows' Eve, p. 269.
- [30] Mary Ann B. Oakley, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, (New York, 1972), pp. 119-121.
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