



The  
**Charles  
Williams**  
Society



**Newsletter**

No. 98

Spring 2001

## The Charles Williams Society

The Society was founded in 1975, thirty years after Charles Williams's sudden death at the end of the Second World War. It exists to celebrate Charles Williams and to provide a forum for the exchange of views and information about his life and work.

Members of the Society receive a quarterly newsletter and may attend the Society's meetings which are held three times a year. Facilities for members also include a postal lending library and a reference library housed at King's College London.

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### Officers of the Society

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Web site: [http://www.geocities.com/charles\\_wms\\_soc/](http://www.geocities.com/charles_wms_soc/)

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### Reading groups

For information about the **Oxford** reading group please contact Brenda Boughton, tel: 01865 515589.



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### **From the Editor**

It is appropriate that we publish Charles Huttar's paper on Myths of the End Time in the first issue of the new millenium. Now that we are well into the new year, and Y2K+1 has passed off as lacking in global catastrophic incident as its predecessor, a number of authors have turned their attention to the Mayan calendar which, as I understand, comes to an abrupt and ominous stop in December 2012. Speculation on this was kicked off by Graham Hancock in the eighties with his *Fingerprints of the Gods* among others. The extra twelve years is useful as giving a bit of scope for predicting interesting times ahead.

"May you live in interesting times" is, as you will recall, a famous ancient Chinese curse. The protagonists in Charles Williams's novels certainly live in interesting times, but also in times, places, and domestic situations that are familiar and recognizable. A large part of the appeal of the novels is the incursion of the praeternatural into the familiar. As Charles Huttar points out, Williams avoids setting his End Time myths in some unspecified future or 'otherworld'. Personally I cannot whip up any interest in the doings of oddly named beings in worlds wholly conjured from their authors' heads (and I admit, in connection with this, that I find *The Lord of the Rings* unreadable). There is, however, something seductive in the notion that a person who asks me for change on London Bridge might be really the creature of an adept of goëtia, temporarily propelled about the City by a ghost on a mission to save the world. Part of me would wish to live in such interesting times.

But there is a problem. I am no Richard Furnival, and certainly not as courageous as Kenneth Mornington or the Duke of the North Ridings. No, I see myself much more in the mould of Jim Pooley, reluctant hero of another End Time novel set in modern London – *The Antipope* by Robert Rankin. In this tale the Borgia Pope turns up again in Brentford to establish his new order, somewhat after the manner of Simon the Clerk. Jim, closely questioned by the local occult master as to whether he had noticed anything strange on the night when two supernatural murders coincided with ‘cowboy night’ in *The Flying Swan*, replies that he and a friend “saw something that night, or thought we did, for we had both consumed a preposterous amount of good old Snakebelly.” Later, forced to admit that he has to act, Pooley queries the nature of his adversary.

“But who is he?” said Jim. “I have been plunged into all this, outside the sun shines, in offices clerks toil at their mundane duties, buses rumble towards Ealing Broadway and I am expected to do battle with the powers of darkness. It all seems a little unfair.”

There is a fair amount of ‘End Time’ interest (along with drunken humour and unlikely asides such as the teleportation of the Great Pyramid to Brentford football stadium) in Rankin’s *Brentford ‘Trilogy’* (which runs to about six books now). And I think I could live in such times – as long as the pubs stay open. But I expect 2012 will pass without incident also.

Edward Gauntlett

## Council Meeting Report

The Council of the Charles Williams Society met on Saturday 10 February 2001 at Pusey House, Oxford.

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There were two resignations presented. Gillian Lunn wished to leave Council and Richard Jeffery wished to quit as Treasurer, though not as a member of Council. The Chairman expressed the Society's thanks to both, and the Secretary was asked to write to Mrs Lunn (who was not present at the meeting).

It seemed likely that Michael Williams's ashes would be buried in his parents' grave in the Spring. It was hoped that the Society would then be able to do something to ensure the good condition of the grave.

It was noted that the new Gift Aid scheme would enable members who paid tax to increase their contribution to the Society. Forms would be included with the next Newsletter.

The Librarian was in touch with the Warden of Pusey House about the possibility of housing the Reference Library there.

Dates for 2002 were provisionally fixed for February 23rd, June 15th (AGM), and November 2nd.

The Secretary was asked to write to the widow of Bishop John Taylor, expressing sympathy for his death and gratitude for his paper to the Society.

Richard Sturch

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## Society News & Notes

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### Council Changes

Richard Jeffery has resigned as the Society's Treasurer but will remain a member of the Council. We thank Richard for his work over the past few years and are most grateful to Stephen Barber who will take over as Treasurer after the AGM. Any correspondence for the Treasurer should be sent to the Secretary in the interim.

When Gillian Lunn resigned as Secretary in 1998 she continued her work as a Council member. Now that Gillian has decided the time has come for her to leave the Council we thank her once again for the many years of devoted work that she has given to the Society. We also wish her many years of responsibility-free attendance at meetings.

### AGM Saturday 9 June

Do come to the AGM if you can. This is an opportunity to contribute your views and suggestions about our affairs.

There are two vacancies on the Council and nominations are invited. Anyone who is unable to attend but who wishes to nominate another member for election to the Council may do so by writing to the Secretary by Saturday 2 June. The letter must be signed by the proposer, seconder, and nominee.

If time is available after the official business there will be an opportunity for members to read a favourite passage from CW and share briefly its interest for them.

### Subscriptions

These are now due for 2001–2002 and a form is enclosed. We would greatly appreciate prompt payment of subscriptions, preferably by standing order if at all possible.

### Gift Aid Declaration Form

UK members are asked to read the enclosed Gift Aid Declaration Form and, if they are tax-payers, to complete and return the form to the Membership Secretary. The Gift Aid Declaration replaces the old covenant form and should be completed by anyone who has previously covenanted their subscription.

### For Sale

Gracewing's Spring Sale is offering *Charles Williams. A Celebration. Essays in Commemoration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of His Death* at the reduced price of £4.99. This can be ordered from Gracewing Ltd., 2 Southern Avenue, Leominster, Herefordshire HR6 0QF. Tel.: 01568 616835, email: gracewing@aol.com

### Missing

The library copy of Edward Gauntlett's thesis on CW - *Frater Qui Sittit Veniat: Charles Williams and the Secret Tradition* is missing from the library. Brian Horne may have lent it to someone and forgotten to make a note of the borrower. If anyone has it in his or her possession please let Brian know. (Otherwise, to ensure my immortality, I shall have to publish it in the Newsletter. Then you'll be sorry. -Ed.)

### Roma King

...writes about his first meeting with the late Michael Williams.

"He had much in common physically and temperamentally with his father. Even their father-son conflicts were confirmation.

"I remember so vividly my first sight of him. It was from across a long book store. He looked up, saw me, smiled, and came rushing with his hands out in welcome. For a moment I felt it was Charles himself. We went out to a poky little restaurant, sat on stools, and he turned, offered his hand once again, and said, 'Roma - may I call you Roma?' My response was, 'You certainly may, Michael.' From that moment I felt we were old, old friends. London will seem a little less welcoming the next time we are there."

### Membership List

At some point in the near future we plan to produce an updated list of members' names and addresses. This will then be issued with the Newsletter.

Anyone who does not wish their details to appear should inform the Editor. On the other hand, if anyone has an email address and would like that to be in-

cluded could they let him have a note of it.

### Charles Huttar

When we published Charles Huttar's 1997 paper "Unorthodox Orthodoxy" (CW 87) we somehow managed to omit half the end-notes. Dr Huttar has kindly provided another copy of the references for that paper. Anyone requiring a copy (a single sheet to insert in the Newsletter) can obtain one by sending an sae to the Editor.

### New Member

A warm welcome is extended to the following new member of the Charles Williams Society:

Phillip Day  
29 Campbell Close  
Hitchin  
Herts SG4 0RH

## Charles Williams Society Meetings

- ◆ **Saturday 9th June 2001**  
Annual General Meeting in the Church Room of St. Matthew's Church at 12.30 pm. At 2.30 pm the Revd. Dr. Gavin Ashenden will speak on The Quest for Integration: Michal and Celia – Poetry and Letters.
- ◆ **Saturday 13th October 2001**  
A reading of *The House by the Stable*. In the Church Room of St. Matthew's Church at 2.30 pm.

## Myths of the End Time in Charles Williams's Fiction

The following paper was delivered by Dr Charles Huttar at the Charles Williams Society Conference on 17 June 2000.

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A year, a week, a day - these are units of time fixed by the processes of nature. Hours, minutes, seconds all derive from the day and have their obvious uses for convenience of measurement. The unit of a thousand years, on the other hand, has only the most tenuous of links to the natural world, and these are stretched even more when it is applied to a calendar whose zero base is not only arbitrary but erroneous (we've all encountered as schoolchildren the paradox that Christ was born "before Christ"). A millennium well illustrates the idea that, to a significant degree, we construct our reality. From ancient times it has captured the imagination. Its primary use has been not to measure scientifically the processes of nature but to explore speculatively or theologically the meaning of history.

It is no wonder, then, that amid all the recent talk of "the millennium" there has been no lack of attention to various phenomena associated in Scripture with the so-called "latter days." Yet equally interesting is the fact that we cannot remember a time in the past century when such themes were not talked of. After all, whether history is viewed in terms of cycles or as movement toward an end, a thousand years is not an exact measure but only approximate, and human ingenuity can rationalize many approximations. It was in 1920 that William Butler Yeats sensed that the end of a cycle was near and asked, "What rough beast, its hour come round at last, / Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?" And it was in 1925 that Charles Williams, writing his first novel, had a character quote those lines from Yeats (*Shadows* 45)<sup>1</sup>.

It is evident all through Williams's fiction that one of the images that fired his imagination was that of a cataclysmic ending of all things - the kind of event commonly labelled an "apocalypse." He typically does not present it, however, as a narrative of the actual end of the world; rather, as something having that apocalyptic

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quality but destined *not yet* to come to pass: always averted, for now, by a greater Order. In *The Place of the Lion*, the process of absorbing all material objects back into the Ideas that gave them shape - the work of Plato's Demiurge in reverse - begins spreading from its point of origin and seems beyond any human power to halt, but it is stopped by the commanding intellect of a second Adam. In *Many Dimensions* the threat of chaos is more subtle: if the immense power of the Stone of Suleiman should come to be at the mercy of human wills, whether driven by greed or cruelty, or even pity, the delicate balances that make up creation would be destroyed, balances on which the world's economic life and social relations and space and time themselves are all poised. By the climax of the story, that destruction is under way, as the newspaper headlines tell of "Rioting" and "Rumours of War" (*Many Dimensions*, 1947, 258) - the last phrase thrice repeated, so that we can hardly miss the echo of that apocalyptic passage in Mark 13. But as Christ says there, "the end shall not be yet," and again the world's balance is restored through the act of a dedicated individual (an act in this instance largely passive). Rioting and war enter more prominently into *Shadows of Ecstasy*, but there the destruction of the world is not threatened, only that of Western civilization, a prospect apocalyptic enough from the viewpoint of most of the story's characters (though this richly ambiguous novel shows that viewpoint to be itself deeply flawed). Another apocalyptic theme appearing in *Shadows of Ecstasy*, though in a still more muted fashion, is the expectation of the Messiah, a hope that radically defines the lives of the two Rosenberg brothers. This brings to mind *The Greater Trumps*, of which the setting is, literally, the season of Advent: here apocalypse looms imminent by means of a magical snowstorm. Only the sacrificial acts of Nancy Coningsby, and especially of her pierced hands, can evoke the divine power which rescues the world; and so Advent ends in the celebration of Nativity, not in a Last Judgement<sup>2</sup>. Of all the early novels, *War in Heaven* - curiously, the one work whose title, drawn from the Book of Revelation, would seem to insist most on the apocalyptic theme - relies the least on the threat of an imminent end; yet the potential for dissolution is present, and there is much talk, by some of the characters, of destruction as a diabolic (and therefore greatly to be desired) goal. Here, as in *Many Dimensions*, the plot centres on issues of possession of the object of power, Grail or Stone, and is resolved only by that object's self-removal; and here, too, the removal is accompanied by the death

of the person most wholly dedicated to the higher power.

It is not until *Descent into Hell* that Williams steps away, in his fictions, from the theme of world destruction; the end-time vision there is of the opening of graves (ch. 11), which speaks more of an individual than a cosmic end, as does the concept of Hell that is central to the novel's image system<sup>3</sup>. But in his final novel, the spectre of apocalypse returns alongside the exploration of individual destiny; not, as in Williams's works of the early thirties, a vision of the undoing of creation itself, but in its own way chilling enough, the end of civilization as people turn into beetles - one might say, the abolition of man.

A closely related theme in most of these novels is that of the inept helplessness of the institutions of government and even, in the first and last novels, *Shadows of Ecstasy* and *All Hallows' Eve*, their ironic readiness to co-operate in their own destruction.

It is on these two novels, the beginning and the end of Charles Williams's work in fiction, that I want to concentrate now as I turn to another of the end-time myths, the myth of Antichrist. First, however, I want to sketch in a general way some ideas and feelings that were more or less "in the air" at the time Williams first turned to writing fiction. I have already alluded to Yeats and his sense, in the aftermath of a disastrous and futile war, of civilization's imminent loss of its "centre": "Things fall apart . . . / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world." But his pessimism was neither sudden nor unusual. Back when Williams was still a schoolboy, the end times had occupied people's minds as the year 1900 drew near, and the popular writer H. G. Wells took advantage of this preoccupation in several apocalyptically tinged works, most famously *The Time Machine* in 1895, with its vision of evolution-in-reverse in the distant future, and then in 1898 *The War of the Worlds*. The Boer War, shortly afterward (and, more remotely, the conflict between America and Spain), made painfully actual the fragility of Western ideals; and in the run-up to 1914, rumours of wars were rife. In *Major Barbara* (1905) Shaw ironically advanced an argument that war was central to Western civilization.

By the time of Yeats's remark in 1920 a work in theoretical history, based on another sort of cyclical view, was beginning to make a stir. That was Dr. Oswald

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Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (*Die Untergang des Abendlandes*), published in Germany early in 1918 just at the time the loss of the war was beginning to appear inevitable. Spengler conceived of this work as early as 1911, however, and the context for his pessimism was, already, wars and rumours of wars. By 1913, before the pan-European war broke out, Spengler had completed the first draft of his book. In 1922 he issued a second volume, and the following year a revised edition of the first. By that time articles about Spengler's ideas had appeared in a number of English journals, though more popular interest was not great enough to create a demand for an English translation earlier than 1926. I am trying to be precise about these dates because it would be going too far to assert that the proclamation by the invaders in *Shadows of Ecstasy* concerning the feebleness of Western civilization directly reflects Spengler's theories. That is why I preferred, above, the term "in the air."<sup>4</sup>

But there is another Continental work that demands our closer attention, one that Williams very likely could have known. In 1900 the Russian poet, philosopher and mystic Vladimir Solovyov published a book in the form of an urbane dialogue among aristocrats - a tradition going back at least to Castiglione's *Courtier* - a book in Russian with the title *War, Progress, and the End of History*. Solovyov had been in England in 1875 and had some contact with members of the Rosicrucian order there. It was during that brief visit, while engaged in study in the round Reading Room of the British Museum, that he had the second of three visions of Holy Wisdom (Sophia) that were to shape his Christian philosophy. He became a strong proponent of a unified Christendom - Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant somehow resolving their differences - and this theme takes an interesting twist in his last book, the one I have just mentioned, published not long before his death.

The full title of his book is this: *War, Progress, and the End of History, Including a Short Story of the Anti-Christ: Three Discussions*. Not until 1915 was this work available in English translation, but in that year two editions appeared, one from the University of London Press and one from Constable (and simultaneously from Putnam's in New York).<sup>5</sup> Solovyov's work then created quite a stir in the English press. Among other reviews and commentaries was a lengthy account in 1915 in *The Occult Review* (Harper). It seems to me most improbable that So-

lovyov's work could have escaped the notice of Charles Williams, and, to go a step farther, very likely that it caught his interest.

I will examine this book more closely, but first let me summarize the essential points of the Antichrist myth, which are found mainly but not exclusively in the Bible. Doing this will help us see how remarkably Charles Williams uses the details of the story.

The word *antichrist* - a direct borrowing from the Greek - occurs only five times in the New Testament; all five instances are in the first two Johannine epistles. Here "Antichrist" is the collective name for the false prophets who are already among us, those who "den[y] that Jesus is the Christ" (1 John 2:22) "come in the flesh" (4:2), and thereby "den[y] the Father" as well (2:22).<sup>6</sup> These renegades partake of the "spirit of antichrist" (4:3), who is "a liar" (2:22) and "a deceiver" (2 John 7). Their presence is a sign that "it is the last time" (1 John 2:18). The epistle writer reminds his readers that they have been warned of Antichrist's coming and tells them, "even now already is it in the world" (4:3).

All through these passages the language is close to the sayings of Jesus reported in the synoptic gospels, except that the precise word antichrist is not used; rather, "false Christs."

Many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. . . . There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.  
(Matt. 24:5-6, 24)

Jesus also seems to refer to a specific event, though not one that we can identify with precision, though many interpretations have been offered. "The abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet," will be made to "stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand)" (v. 15). Then, climaxing these events is "the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (v. 30), the angels' trumpet, and the gathering of the elect (v. 31).

In his second letter to the Thessalonians Paul turns to precisely this topic, "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and . . . our gathering together unto him" (2:1), and in so doing he provides us with further insight into the shaping of the Anti-christ figure. Before the "day of Christ" can arrive, Paul writes, there must be "a falling away first,"<sup>7</sup> led by the "man of sin" who "exalteth himself above all . . . that is worshipped" and claims the throne and the very name of deity (vv. 2-4). Through him Satan will work "with all power and signs and lying wonders" (v. 9) - in a demonic parody of the Spirit of Christ working through his disciples.

The middle part of the Revelation to St. John adds still more to the picture. After the dragon, here explicitly identified as "the Devil, and Satan" (12:9), has warred in heaven against Michael and his angels and been defeated, a beast emerges from the sea and the dragon hands over to him "his power, and his seat, and great authority" (13:2). This beast blasphemes (vv. 5-6), wars against and defeats the saints, gains "power . . . over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations" (7), and is universally worshiped (8). Early Christian commentary identified this beast with the "false Christs" of Jesus' sayings (but now concentrated in a single figure, not plural) and the "antichrist" of John's letters. Now in addition there is a second figure (or a third, if we count the dragon - forming an unholy trinity), possibly parallel to the "false prophets" of which Jesus spoke. This is a beast that emerges from the ground in Revelation 13:11 and becomes the first beast's servant. He wins miracles, wins over the people of the world to worship the first beast, and compels everyone to be branded with "the name of the beast, or the number" (v. 17).

All of these details have led to two somewhat conflicting emphases in the Anti-christ myth; these might be labelled "force" and "fraud." In some accounts, Anti-christ is an outright and obvious enemy of the people of God, the Church: a tyrant who uses power, physical and economic, against the faithful. He is identified with Antiochus Epiphanes, who desecrated the Second Temple, then with the great persecutor Nero, and in later times with other obvious enemies, for example Peter the Great of Russia, from the viewpoint of the Old Believers; and in 1927 a book was published called *Is the Antichrist at Hand? What of Mussolini?* (Smith). In the other tradition, emphasis is placed on Antichrist's role as a deceiver, a counterfeit messiah, gaining a following through a show of religion and

a specious resemblance to the true Christ. It is the latter view of Antichrist that is employed by Vladimir Solovyov and, in his turn, by Charles Williams.

The first of the three conversations in Solovyov's book is dominated by the General, who argues for the rightness and nobility of war in a just cause: he affirms the traditional label given his profession, a "Christ-serving and worthy Russian militancy" (1).<sup>8</sup> The second conversation is dominated by the Politician, who believes that civilization has progressed to the point where soon there will be no more wars, but only good manners between nations as between individuals. A thorough chauvinist, he allows that it is still necessary to use force to put down "barbarians" and "savages" - e.g., the Herzegovinians, the Boers in South Africa, the Slavophiles in Russia who deny their essential Europeanness and are "carried away by . . . all manner of Indo-Mongolian Orientalism" (79). But war "is a passing phase" (90); soon the ideals of "culture" will prevail and all the world will have become spiritually European. The Politician's views draw stiff rejoinders from the Lady and from Mr. Z, whose role up to this point has been mainly to record the dialogue that he has happened to find going on.

In the third conversation the Prince voices his Tolstoyan philosophy, that (in Czeslaw Milosz's summary) evangelic love of one's fellow man and nonviolent resistance to injustice will not only put an end to wars but will transform a suffering humanity to a humanity wise and happy" (Milosz 23-24). The Prince venerates Jesus as a "teacher and lawgiver" though one who was "defeated by death like everyone else" (Milosz 24). (We note here that the doctrine of Christ's resurrection becomes a central issue, a touchstone for distinguishing true philosophies from false.) The prince, however, soon leaves the party in a huff, and the dominant speaker becomes Mr. Z, who considers progress - the watchword of both the Prince and the Politician, though they mean different things by it - Mr. Z holds progress to be "always a *symptom of the end*" - that is, the end of the world, of history (Solovyov, *War and Christianity* 93; emphasis in the original). For what we call progress has one inevitable limitation: it stops short of even addressing "the abolition of death" (112). But what gives us hope, says Mr. Z (and I believe he is Solovyov's mouthpiece), is the resurrection of Christ - without which there is not a Kingdom of God but "only a kingdom of death" (132). The Resurrection is what proves that Christ is God (140); it is the one thing he alone has done and no imitator has dupli-

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cated. Thus the Christ whom the Prince follows is an "impostor . . . none other than the *God of this world*" (139; emphasis in the original). Progress then will lead to "the last act of the historic tragedy" (98), in which a key player is Antichrist - who is explicitly not to be viewed as another Nero or Antiochus Epiphanes. Rather, he represents not "simple unbelief or negation of Christianity, as materialism and such like, but . . . religious *imposture*, when with the name of Christ will be associated forces in human nature which are in fact and in essence foreign, and plainly hostile to Christ and His Spirit" (98; emphasis in the original). Mr. Z agrees with the General's distinction (in Conversation 1) between a "good" and a "bad" peace - not, however, on military/diplomatic grounds but following the distinction offered by Christ (John 14:27): "My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth" (102). Mr. Z goes on to cite another statement of Christ in the same discourse, "'The works that I do, shall ye do also - and greater than these shall ye do'" (104).

Finally, Mr. Z reads to the group from a manuscript that has been entrusted to him by a monk named Pansophius on his deathbed, a "Short Narrative about Antichrist." In this story, which is set in the future, the last of the world's great wars occurs some time in the twentieth century and results in the conquest of Europe by "all the peoples of Eastern Asia," led by Japan (145). Their subjugation of Europe lasts for fifty years, until a secret network of opposition manages to achieve at last what has never before been seen, a united Europe on a scale greater even than that of the Roman Empire, and thereby to throw off "the Mongol yoke" (149). At this point in the twenty-first century there arises "a remarkable man - many called him a superman,"<sup>9</sup> a man of great intelligence and moral idealism - but this is coupled with "inordinate pride" ("Short Story" 229).<sup>10</sup> He conceives of himself as "the son of God," "the perfect and final saviour," and Jesus as "merely the greatest of his . . . predecessors . . . [his] forerunner" (229). But after waiting in vain for divine confirmation of this vocation, he is beset by doubts, makes a formal renunciation of Christ and specifically of his resurrection from the dead, and attempts suicide. He is rescued by the Devil, who baptizes him with his spirit and proclaims him as his own son. Imbued with diabolic power he immediately proceeds not, as we might expect, to some awful wickedness, but to the composition of a book, *The Open Way to Universal Peace and*

*Welfare*. This work wins worldwide acclaim even among Christians, who see it as "permeated by the truly Christian spirit of . . . benevolence," though some are troubled by the fact that it never mentions Christ (233). Propelled by this success he is elected "lifelong president of the United States of Europe" and, shortly after, is acclaimed "Roman emperor." He publishes a manifesto that begins, "Peoples of the earth! My peace I give unto you" (233). It seems not to matter that this "peace" is defined and guaranteed by despotic power, so long as the promise of peace is fulfilled - especially as it is followed by universal prosperity and then, on the principle of "bread and circuses," by a permanent display of "the most diverse and unexpected signs and miracles" (235).<sup>11</sup> These are possible because the "superman-emperor" (234) has been joined by an assistant, a bishop from the East who is also a master magician. His name is Apollonius - or, as one translation renders it, Apollyon (*War and Christianity* 163 and *passim*).

So much for the first half of Father Pansophius's "short narrative." In the second half the emperor addresses "the religious problem" (235) - namely, that although Chritendom is now greatly reduced in numbers, through the defection of many who were Christians in name only, those remaining have firmer convictions and commitment and thus the emperor considers them a threat, especially as some among them have begun to apply the biblical teaching about Antichrist to the events of their own time. He summons some three thousand Christian leaders to a great ecumenical council in Jerusalem. Here he makes what seem magnanimous gestures for the promotion of Christianity, asking in return only that they acknowledge him as their generous patron and sovereign leader. Most of the delegates respond enthusiastically, but a pitiful minority hold back, drawn close together around their three chief leaders, Pope Peter II, the Russian Orthodox elder John, and the German theologian Professor Pauli. Seeking yet again to win them over, the emperor asks, "What more can I do for you?" The answer: "We are ready to receive every blessing if only we recognize in your bountiful hand the holy hand of Christ. . . . Confess now here before us Jesus Christ the Son of God, who came in the flesh, rose from the dead and is coming again . . . and we will receive you with love as the true forerunner of His glorious second coming" (241). At this the emperor experiences convulsions as his diabolic infilling is renewed, and the Elder John blurts out the recognition that he is Antichrist. Whereupon the magician calls forth a lightning

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bolt and strikes John dead. Pope Peter then formally excommunicates the emperor, and he too is struck dead. Then the emperor and all his followers leave the hall; there remain only "two corpses and a throng of Christians half-dead with fear" (243). Professor Pauli counsels that they withdraw to the wilderness to await the Lord's return. Here life returns to the corpses of the two faithful witnesses, Peter and John, and the formal reunification of the Church becomes a reality as the small band of Christians follow Pope Peter to Mount Sinai. Meanwhile, in Jerusalem, Apollyon has been elected pope in his place. "He declared that by the power of his keys he had opened the doors between the earthly world and the world beyond the grave, and indeed intercourse between the dead and the living, and also between men and demons, became a thing of everyday occurrence, and there developed new and unheard-of kinds of mystical fornication and idolatry" (247). The emperor now openly declares himself "the only true incarnation of the supreme Deity" (247). There is an insurrection by the Jews, a gathering of great armies by the Dead Sea to do battle, and a volcanic eruption that swallows Antichrist and all his entourage. Then Christ is seen coming down from heaven, and his thousand-year reign begins (248).

I have not thought it necessary to call attention to the numerous points where Solovyov very specifically draws on the biblical material concerning Antichrist. There are one or two items which I left out of my survey of that material, however, and one of them is relevant here because of the use Solovyov makes of it. That is the account in Revelation 11 of the two witnesses who are put to death by the beast, and their corpses left on display in a Jerusalem street for three and a half days, but who then come back to life (Rev. 11:3, 7-11). Solovyov follows this in minute detail (244, 246).

But you may well be asking what all this has to do with Charles Williams. I have not described Solovyov's story in such detail in order to claim that Williams borrowed anything from him, either consciously or unconsciously. There is of course that possibility; but what rather should interest us, I believe, and as I hope in presenting these remarks, is the way this rather oblique approach to Williams may bring into sharper focus for us certain aspects of the two novels in which he, also, thinks about and applies the myth of Antichrist. We have two points of triangulation, as it were, to use in getting a fix on just what Williams does with the myth

or more precisely, what he did in 1925 and what he did in 1945. We have the Judeo-Christian tradition of Scripture and commentary, and the fiction of a Russian religious philosopher that made a bit of a stir in England when Williams was about thirty. We need to be asking two questions: in what ways does Williams's presentation of the Antichrist figure resemble the others, and what if any *new departures* do we find in Williams? How does he modify or enlarge the Antichrist tradition?<sup>12</sup>

In *Shadows of Ecstasy*, written in 1925 though revised much later for publication,<sup>13</sup> Williams enriches the Antichrist myth by mingling with it elements of a later myth about another figure to whom the Devil gave special powers. The man who is in one sense the hero of this book, Nigel Considine, is spiritually a direct descendant of Goethe's Faust in his program of superseding "the old habits of reason . . . by profounder experiments of passion," to achieve "the conquest of death in the renewed ecstasy of vivid experience" (*Shadows* 40). We note at once that for Williams, as for Solovyov and the New Testament writers, the issue of belief in Christ's resurrection is central. In the scheme of *Shadows of Ecstasy* the conquest of death - self-resurrection by the power of one's will - lies in the future, but already Considine has gone a long way toward overcoming the mortal condition. Two hundred years old, he has the vigour of his prime, fed more by imagination than dependence on food and drink (71, 74-75) - "I have meat to eat that ye know not of" (130). Such powers are won by knowledge, Considine teaches, not the kind valued in the West but a knowledge imparted to "the exalted imagination" (41) in intense ecstatic experiences. Artists and lovers know something of it, if only in "shadows" (154).

On the most telling resemblance to Faust, however, the book is much less explicit: namely, the diabolical means by which Faust obtained his superior knowledge and powers. Williams gets at that quite indirectly, focusing our attention at first on a comparison of Considine not with Faust but with Christ. Considine speaks of his "gospel"; he calls men and they follow him; he "pass[es] through the midst" of those who would do him violence. He flaunts the parallel, in a number of direct quotations such as the one about "meat to eat" (John 4:32) and in less direct allusions. For example, he contemplates the remote possibility of a Judas-like betrayal for "pieces of silver" (*Shadows* 155). But he intends to succeed, he says, where his first-century predecessor failed (73). Christ, he thinks - in language very reminis-

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cent of Solovoyov - was only "the herald of the first conqueror of death" (75).

There is enough truth in Considine's critique of Western civilization, and indeed of the shortcomings of Christendom as it is bound up with Western civilization, to make the philosophy he presents very persuasive. In fact, the novel's protagonist, Roger Ingram, is persuaded. But through other characters Williams makes available to his readers a different perspective on the contrast between Considine and Christ. Considine's thought is fatally flawed by his rejection of two important facts, first that there is another being in the universe greater than himself, to which his proper relation is one of obedience, and second, that resurrection has already occurred - not by the exercise of Christ's own will but by the will and power of that higher being. Christ himself, as the Christians in the novel acknowledge (*Shadows* 131, 182), submitted to failure, and Considine's rejection of that ultimate experience differentiates his own egocentric philosophy from the love-centred teaching of Christ. Considine's appeal is thus exposed as a devilishly deceptive temptation, and his apparent heroism as based on falsity - much like that of Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. But while Milton's poem is assuredly a subtext for Williams's novel, the term which explicitly surfaces at three points in the novel is not Satan but "Antichrist" (190, 208).<sup>14</sup>

As we have noted, the essential features of the concept of Antichrist include an association with eschatology and a mirror-imaging of Christ, a resemblance so close as to be almost invincibly deceptive. These hints have been enlarged through the centuries into a full-blown myth, presented most graphically, for example, in the sixteenth-century frescoes by Luca Signorelli in Orvieto Cathedral, depicting the Last Days. Here a man who looks like Christ addresses a crowd of eager followers, who apparently fail to notice (though the viewer can plainly see) the Devil whispering to him what to say.<sup>15</sup> Williams, working in a different medium and a different century, avoids such naive unrealism. But once his subtle clues are understood,<sup>16</sup> the identification of his tempter with both Antichrist and Faust is quite clear.

In presenting Considine as he does, Williams skates very close to the edge of the ice, and each reader must decide whether, for him or her, the risk succeeds. For example, the explicit identification of Considine as "Antichrist" is made each

time by the priest Ian Caithness, who is (to me) a less than wholly sympathetic character: though at times he speaks with authority for true Christian doctrine, as in the chapter "The Mass at Lambeth," he loses a great deal of credibility with us when he plays the role of Caiaphas to Colonel Mottreux's Judas. The other two representatives of Christianity, Isabel and the Zulu king Inkamasi, maintain (in my view) a personal integrity that valorizes their critique of Considine and his refusal of *kenosis*. Yet from another character who is presented with great sympathy, the critic Roger Ingram whose views about poetry seem to parallel Williams's own, Considine commands wholehearted assent. Williams may be using here one little detail of the Antichrist story that I did not mention before. The beast that rises from the sea in Revelation 13:3 has on one of its heads a fatal wound that has been healed, and it is this miracle that impels the whole world to worship him. Is Williams alluding to this circumstance when he has Considine felled by a gunshot to the head - after which Roger, finding that his hero's body has disappeared, cannot decide whether he is truly and finally dead, or will return? Roger's closing reverie includes the appeal - in a phrase drawn from Revelation (22:20) - "Come quickly."

Thus from beginning to end the novel sounds an eschatological note. Early on Considine asserts that "the cycles are accomplished" (*Shadows* 53), and "the time is come very near now" (73). Like Solovyov and Spengler, Williams depicts the imminent collapse of a Western civilization that has fallen into decay. The world is ripe for the Superman to pluck. The West is corrupted by materialism and torn from any anchorage either rational or spiritual. It is from Africa that the threat comes. In this, Williams differs from Solovyov, who is worried about Asia; but a more important difference is that Williams treats in a much more positive manner the alternative way of thinking which would replace that of the West.

Again in *All Hallows' Eve* there is a contemporary political backdrop. Written in the last year of World War II, the novel is set in the near future, just after the truce. The victorious Allied powers find themselves driven, in the interests of forging peace, to centralize world power in the hands of certain marvelously charismatic leaders who have recently gained great popularity in Russia, China, and (after taking America by storm) Great Britain. But these three are actually one: the London-based prophet Simon Leclerc has cloned himself by magic and sent the copies off to Russia and China. They are mere projections of his will and, when the time is

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ripe, are to be reunified with him, thus giving Simon uncontested control of the world. Here is ambition on a staggering scale, though of a kind all too painfully familiar at a time when Hitler was still alive. But Hitler "was a foolery," says Simon. "I am the one who is to come, not Hitler!" (*Hallows* 59). The language is, of course, a messianic claim,<sup>17</sup> and Simon will shortly take steps to "sen[d] out his messenger before him" to prepare the way for his triumphal advent (140; cf. Matt. 11:10).

It is no part of Williams's strategy in this novel, as it was in *Shadows of Ecstasy*, to be subtle about the characterization of Simon the Clerk as Antichrist, the distorted mirror image of Christ. We can detect the shift in Williams's attitude in a short article he published in *Time and Tide* in 1938. By that time he had apparently decided that in the marketplace of ideas it will not do to be always striving to rehabilitate figures that popular imagination has demonized - Voltaire is the immediate case in point. Though, as we know, Williams is personally inclined to show the good side of even the most vilified characters, he feels compelled to acknowledge the necessity of there being "images of horror and iniquity - of Antichrist" (Williams, "Antichrist" 119). Such an image must be of a man neither mad nor Romantic (unless in a sterile or pseudo-romantic way), one with a passion for destructiveness, and in no way provoking a response of laughter; wholly egocentric, "hav[ing no] serious purpose, except himself" (119); incapable, that is, of true community.

We can work out how this description fits Nigel Considine; but with Simon the Clerk Williams makes it much clearer. The reversed Tetragrammaton by which he performs magic is one sure giveaway. The wonders he works are hideously inferior parodies of the divine mysteries which they imitate, the Trinity, the creation of humankind, incarnation, the healing of bodies and troubled spirits, and the founding of a church. Indeed, it is the undoing of creation in which he is engaged - the "reversal" of "great pronouncements" (*Hallows* 108). Still, he has no trouble winning masses of adherents; and, since the rise of Hitler, who would accuse Williams of violating realism in this respect? Simon's transparent self-centredness, his shocking contempt for those who believe in him (57, 64, 177-78), and his role as Tempter (80) clearly identify him, for the reader, as Satanic. Williams's narrator tells us explicitly that Lady Wallingford, for instance, has

become "one of those indistinguishable creatures who were his living spiritual food" (109). Simon is more unambiguously evil than, for example, the Antichrist figure in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*, the Grand Inquisitor, to whom Williams may be indebted for Simon's principle that "men need both comfort and control" (63). Born like Nigel Considine in the eighteenth century and reared like him in traditions of forbidden knowledge, he shares with Considine a view of Jesus Christ as merely an earlier and lesser sorcerer (177). His name suggests a closer identification with a different predecessor, Simon Magus (150), whose legend is one of the sources of the Faust myth. That his followers "carry his mark in [their] bodies" (100) is both a parody of Christ (Gal. 6:7) and an attribute of Antichrist (Rev. 13:16-17). He is a liar and deceiver, manipulating words and draining them of meaning: he babbles of love but knows nothing of it, he offers his followers a "peace" that is entirely spurious. But his relationship to truth is more complex than that of a completely knowing lie, for he, as much as anyone else, is the victim of his own deception. Like Nigel Considine and Milton's Satan (as interpreted by Williams), Simon "has . . . in the centre of his heart a single tiny everlasting illusion" (241).

Another way *All Hallows' Eve* differs from *Shadows of Ecstasy* is that Simon's failure occurs not by external agency, a bullet to the head from a greed-crazed disciple, but as the logical outcome of precisely the "tiny illusion" at the heart of his being. I do not mean to suggest this is an improvement: given Williams's basic concept for *Shadows of Ecstasy*, it was artistically appropriate that Nigel Considine's project should fail through an unpreventable event (though not entirely unforeseen), and that we should be left not fully certain that it has failed. But by 1945 Williams had turned away from that strategy, and so the seeds of Simon's destruction are in himself.

But the two novels have very important characteristics in common. First, Williams carefully avoids, as the Book of Revelation and Solovyov do not, bringing the Devil into his narrative directly. However one may judge the place of Williams's novels in the tradition of realistic fiction, his choice in this respect seems to me a significant assertion that he intends to work within that tradition.<sup>18</sup> Second, in both novels the Antichrist's sense of timing is off; he is not given time to bring his designs to fruition, and thus we have just two more examples of pretenders, of whom

there have been many in the course of centuries, who have some qualities of Antichrist but turn out not to be *the* Antichrist of New Testament prophecy. The clock of history continues to tick. Except in the negligible terms of an artificial calendar, the millennium has not yet arrived.

#### NOTES

1. He would echo Yeats again in *The Place of the Lion*: “What new monstrosity, what beast of indescribable might or beauty, was even now perhaps dragging itself down the stairs? What behemoth would come lumbering through the hall?” (111).
2. These observations are developed more fully in Huttar, “CW’s Christmas Novel: *The Greater Trumps*.”
3. Already adumbrated in *War in Heaven*: Gregory Persimmons “existed supernaturally, and in Hell” (76).
4. Cf. Benito Mussolini’s suggestion in his 1926 autobiography that perhaps “everything is breaking up and that in August 1914 it was not a war of nations that began but the crash which is threatening, more and more imminently, the civilisation of the white races” (quoted in Heim 95-96).
5. The final section, the “Short Story of Antichrist”, may also be found, slightly abridged, in *A Solovyov Anthology* 229-47.
6. Biblical quotations are from the King James version.
7. The Greek word *apostasia* here, implying that it originates from within the Church, strikes much the same note as that found in the Johannine epistles.
8. Except as noted below, quotations and page citations are from the Stephen Graham edition, *War and Christianity*.
9. In this word Solovyov alludes to the ideas of Frierich Nietzsche (who also wrote of “Antichrist”), and the relation between Nietzsche’s work and the en-

quiry that here concerns us, especially as regards Williams's *Shadows of Ecstasy*, suggests itself as a fruitful topic for exploration; but not in the present paper.

10. I shift here, for the "Short Story", to the translation by Natalie Duddington found in *A Solovyov Anthology*.

11. One of these is mastery of "atmospheric electricity" in commanding "fire to come down from heaven" (234), and explicit allusion to the miracle performed by the second beast in Rev. 13:13.

12. One final preliminary remark I here relegate to a note. For a more thorough treatment of my topic, we should have before us one other book which it seems very likely that Charles Williams read, a novel about Antichrist called *Lord of the World*, written by Robert Hugh Benson and published in 1907. Other, more certain connections between Williams and Benson were presented to the Charles Williams Society some years ago by Mrs. Gwen Watkins. She mentioned *Lord of the World* briefly but that was not the main focus of her talk; she did, however, speculate that it may have been in Benson's novel that Williams first encountered the figure of the *Uebermensch* (Watkins 231) and went on to suggest some specific parallels (232). Further discussion of Benson's novel is impossible within the present space limitations.

13. In the discussion following this talk, Stephen Medcalf rightly pointed out that we do not know the extent of this revision – which may have been considerable – or exactly what elements of the work belong to its original conception.

14. For further development of the Miltonic connection see Huttar, "Changing Views". Additional details are also provided there on Considine's claimed rivalry to Christ.

15. Czeslaw Milosz says it was his memory of the Signorelli fresco that aroused his interest in Solovyov's work (Milosz 24).

16. Huttar, "Changing Views" 228-33.

17. Cf. Matt. 11:3; John 1:20; 4:35; 6:14; Heb. 10:37; Rev. 1:4, 8.

18. It is worth noting also that Williams prefers a contemporary setting to one (like Solovyov's) in an imagined distant future. The society depicted is the one familiar to us. The choice suggests that, *pace* the label "fantasy" often applied to Williams's fiction, he believed the spiritual realities he depicted to be inherent in the world we live in.

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## ***The Crisis and the Quest: A Kierkegaardian Reading of Charles Williams***

**By Stephen M Dunning**

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*Reviewed by Brian Horne*

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Charles Williams's first novel, *Shadows of Ecstasy* has long been a source of puzzlement and controversy among his readers. To some it is of little significance: portentous in manner and clumsy in execution; interesting only in so far as it is an early – and botched – attempt at fiction by a writer who had still to find his distinctive voice. To others it is full of interest and a vital part of the Williams *oeuvre* offering an indispensable insight into the mind and imagination of a man whose more esoteric interests are brushed aside by those who would want to claim him as the articulator of Christian orthodoxy. Stephen Dunning is a convinced member of the latter group. For him *Shadows of Ecstasy*, for all its faults and, indeed, because of its faults, operates as a kind of key which unlocks the door to the central preoccupations of Charles Williams; it enables us to gain a purchase on the causes of both the achievements and failures of this remarkable author. Its very flaws – as a novel – are a revelation of its peculiar significance. He reads it as a novel of crisis: the fictional depiction of the central spiritual and intellectual crisis of Williams himself. It is discussed in detail in the second chapter, 'The Crisis Formulated', and the phrase "*Shadows of Ecstasy* crisis" is repeated like a leitmotif over and over again throughout the book. All of Williams's major works, the early poetry included, are to be seen as variations upon the theme that makes its appearance in such a dramatic way in this first confused attempt at a novel. Briefly described, the crisis in *Shadows of Ecstasy* is identified by Dunning as 'the conflict between Considine's hermetism and Christianity' (p 38). It is said to develop later into a conflict between competing systems of thought or perceptions of reality: a conflict between a type of religious aestheticism, in which poetry plays a redemptive role, and a dogmatic religion of revelation in the specific form of Christian faith. Dunning has arrived at this

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reading of Williams by way of the nineteenth century Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard whose theory of the existential stages through which a human being might (or might not) pass – the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious – is used as the means of understanding what is going on in Williams’s writings. The way into this, at first sight quixotic, method of interpretation is provided by Alice Mary Hadfield’s description of the Williams encounter with Kierkegaard in 1936: “Kierkegaard gave Charles’s mind a new stimulus which brought with it the strength of recognizing a truth basic to himself.” (p 125) The model of Kierkegaard’s theory is then applied like a template upon all Williams’s works; every one is interpreted with the Kierkegaardian distinctions in mind. The result is fascinating and ingenious, thought-provoking and very well researched – and I am not convinced.

What I am prepared to acknowledge without hesitation is Williams’s high estimation of the art of poetry and that there was a struggle, as there has been in so many who have also been believers, between the apparently competing claims of art and religion. It would be strange if this had not been the case. It was almost commonplace. He was, after all, born in 1886 – only four years since the first performance of Richard Wagner’s *Parsifal*, that work in which religion has been transmuted into art. The conversation of the intelligentsia in Europe was saturated with discussions of the relationship of art to religion, and had been for nearly a century. How could he, who believed in his own high vocation as a poet, not experience a conflict that had already been experienced by his older contemporaries with literary talents greater than his own: Gerard Manley Hopkins and Oscar Wilde? It is not the identification of a conflict nor the fact of its reaching critical dimensions that I contest. It is the schematic application of the hermeneutical tool to every text that I find unpersuasive.

The book offers much in the way of illuminating textual criticism and the chapters on *Cranmer* and the Arthurian cycles are particularly penetrating in their analysis, but much that is of value could have been said without the assistance of Kierkegaard, and the ultimate estimation of the book will depend upon one’s attitude to two things: (a) Kierkegaard’s depiction of the human condition, and (b) its usefulness as a way of reaching the heart of Williams. Here I am at odds with Dunning. It seems to me that Kierkegaard, for all his reputation and influence upon subsequent

generations, was simply wrong in his construal of both Christianity and human nature. And if Charles Williams thought Kierkegaard was right, then I am forced to say that Williams was wrong too. (But then I am not sure that Williams really understood Kierkegaard.) Given so fundamental a disagreement with the author I can see relatively little value in applying the Kierkegaardian template in so schematic a way to Williams's works. Dunning speaks frequently of the incoherence in Williams's thought, but such incoherence as there is (and there is a great deal less than is often supposed) arises not out of a crisis of a specifically Kierkegaardian kind but for quite other reasons.

This having been said there remains a niggling doubt. There is the biographical evidence to consider. What did Alice Mary Hadfield mean when she said that Kierkegaard 'spoke' to Williams's condition? Might Stephen Dunning be right after all? Williams spent much of his time and energies in the late thirties preparing the English translations of Kierkegaard's texts; was he really a Kierkegaardian persona who failed to escape the tragic trap that Kierkegaard is supposed to have identified? If this is so (and I am not yet prepared to admit it) and if the works of Williams only reveal their true features when they are laid upon the Kierkegaardian grid, then they would turn out to be much less interesting than I had supposed them to be.

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