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THE VERSE DRAMA OF CHARLES WILLIAMS

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## PREFACE

This thesis will consider only the later verse-drama of Charles Williams, from Thomas Crenmer of Canterbury (1936). Abbreviations used are Crenmer for Thomas Crenmer of Canterbury, Chelmsford for Judgment at Chelmsford, and Good Fortune for The Death of Good Fortune. The text used, to which unspecified page numbers belong, is Collected Plays (O.U.P. 1963). I would like to thank Mrs. A.M. Hadfield for her prompt reply to enquiries about the plays, the librarians at Hessey University, and Mr. R.A. Neale and Mr. John Dewick for their supervision and encouragement.

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## INTRODUCTION

Charles Williams' Collected Plays, except for The Three Temptations, were written for specific church groups. Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury was commissioned for the 1936 Canterbury Festival, to be performed in the cloisters of the cathedral. Judgment at Chelmsford (1939) was written to celebrate the centenary of the foundation of the diocese of Chelmsford and Seed of Adam (1936) is a Nativity play written for the Religious Drama Society of the same diocese. House by the Stable, The Death of Good Fortune (both written in 1937) and Grab and Grace (1941), also Christmas plays, were written for a wartime touring group, the Pilgrim Players. The United Council for Missionary Education asked Williams to write House of the Octopus in 1945. The commissioning of plays played a large part in determining subject, theme and structure, e.g. Cranmer's setting in the Church and main character, the main subject of The House of the Octopus (missionary), and Chelmsford's whole pageant structure and subject matter - the eight episodes from Chelmsford's history. Williams had too to consider the number, sex and acting capacity of members of the groups he wrote for and resources for production. He speaks of this in relation to the chorus in an article on "Religious Drama": "The Chorus is often, it seems, a matter of necessity in which the author has (very willingly) to oblige the producer. At least I know it has been so in my own case." But he adds "I am far from saying that one is not responsible, even so, for what one makes of it."

The subject of this essay is what Williams makes of the limitations or possibilities of the occasions for, and traditions in, which he wrote.

"Propaganda does not destroy art. Missionary plays (with whatever mission) can yet be well written and effective. But there is a condition and it is that the design must not be imposed from without. ...In art nothing is exciting but art...Propaganda, if any, of the idea must arise from within...."<sup>1</sup>

### Chapter I , Background

Williams' Collected Plays, in the tradition of religious drama,<sup>2</sup> are didactic i.e. they are "designed to demonstrate, or to present in an impressive and persuasive form, a moral, religious, or other thesis or doctrine... to be distinguished from purely imaginative works which are written, not to propose or enforce a doctrine, but as ends in themselves for their inherent interest and appeal".<sup>3</sup> Unlike his novels they are all explicitly Christian. Williams "belongs to the tradition of Christian transcendentalism in English poetry - Spenser, Vaughan, the later Wordsworth and Coleridge, and Patmore."<sup>4</sup> Yet he was largely responsible for the Oxford University Press's translations of Kierkegaard, and Williams' work shows the influence of Kierkegaard.<sup>5</sup>

Williams was an Anglican, combining a High Church love of liturgy and emphasis on tradition - both seen in Cranmer - with a protestant individualism emphasising the Bible and personal experience.<sup>6</sup> But his protestantism was romantic rather than fundamentalist. "There's no need to introduce Christ unless you wish. It's a fact of experience" says Peter Stanhope in Descent into Hell, one of Williams' novels. And in an article called "Natural Goodness" Williams wrote "It is a little unfortunate that in ordinary English talk the words "natural" and supernatural" have come to be considered as opposed rather than as complementary." For his approach is sacramentalist. In Cranmer, The

Death of Good Fortune, and Seed of Adam, this approach is seen in his use of the word "image".

An image is something through which God can be known. In Williams' novel The Place of the Lion butterflies are one image. Damaris Tighe sees them merely as butterflies, but to her father they are transfigured. He affirms the image. Williams' use of the word "image" is more than Romantic nature mysticism, however, just as John in Terror of Light vehemently denies being "what the literary people call a nature - mystic." (p. 328). In Cranmer images include wealth, admiration, the English Bible, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism and Anne Boleyn. Each of these is valuable, each, in some way, and to a greater or lesser extent, images God. But when they become ends in themselves, they are "diseased". Williams' distinctive theology of romantic love is a development of this view. He interprets Dante's Divine Comedy in terms of the image, and there explains what he means by that word. "The image of Beatrice" existed in his thought, it remained there and was deliberately renewed. The word image is convenient for two reasons. First, the subjective recollection within him was of something objectively outside him; it was an image of an exterior fact and not of an interior desire. It was sight and not invention. Dante's whole assertion was that he could not have invented Beatrice. Secondly, the outer exterior shape was understood to be an image of things beyond itself. Coleridge said that a symbol must have three characteristics. (i) It must exist in itself, (ii) it must derive from something greater than itself, (iii) it must represent in itself that greatness from which it derives. I have preferred the word image to the word symbol, because it seems to me doubtful if the word symbol nowadays sufficiently expresses the vivid individual essence of the lesser thing.

Beatrice was, in her degree, an image of nobility, of virtue, of the Redeemed Life, and, in some sense of Almighty God himself. But she also remained Beatrice right to the end. But as the mental knowledge or image of her is the only way by which she herself can be known, so she herself is (for Dante) the only way by which that other Power can be known — since in fact, it was known so. The maxim of his study, as regards the final Power was : "This also is thou, neither is this thou."<sup>8</sup> In his article "The Theology of Romantic Love" Williams stresses that Love is not personal in that "Love does not belong to the Lovers but they to it"<sup>9</sup>. So Mary, in his play Seed of Adam, explains to Joseph that being in love is a literal statement : "to be in love is to be in love,

no more, no less. Love is only itself

everywhere, at all times, and to all objects"(p.159).

In common with Eliot, Williams speaks of the division in the history of Christendom between the affirmative way and the negative way. He points out that although "the Way of the Rejection of Images has been far more considered throughout Christendom, the two ways have the same maxim and the same aim — "to love everything because God loves it." This is their union and, this laid down, one way is not superior to the other nor perhaps more difficult."<sup>10</sup> Anne Ridler quotes a letter Williams wrote in 1945 which shows the relation of the two ways more clearly. "The essentials of the one Way are the accidents of the other...There must be sooner or later even in the Way of Affirmation, some sort of seclusion of the soul to the Omnipotence... the Rejection aims at this as a continual method...the affirmation endures it when it comes. As the Rejection has always to allow its debt to its parents, its teachers, its food and shelter, perhaps its love....We call it the Way and the other Way, but each is included in the other."<sup>11</sup> To emphasise the equality of the Affirmative Way Williams quotes the criticism of Christ — that he was

"a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber."

Christ himself is of course, the image par excellence. And the presence of God, in some way, in people and things is "the principle of Incarnation." It is for example "by virtue of the Incarnation that Eros and Agape are no longer divided." Incarnation is central to Williams' thought, and is the basis of another key idea of his. This is, in his idiom, the Way of Exchange. "The Holy Ghost moves us to be, by every means to which we are called, the Images of Christ... It is the intercourse of these free images which is the union of the City. The name of the City is Union.... the process of that union is the method of free exchange." <sup>12</sup> Williams here speaks of the city because of the mutual dependence of the citizens of any city. The city is an image of the City of God. "Our whole social system exists by an unformed agreement that one person shall do one job while another does another. Money is the means by which these jobs are brought into relation, the 'means of exchange'. It is usually the medium in which particular contracts are formed. And contract, or agreement, is the social fact of 'living by each other.' This is the evident sense of social exchange." It is the same exchange as that of the Church when it "declared a union of existences. It proclaimed that our own lives depended on the lives of our neighbour. St. Anthony of Egypt laid down the doctrine in so many words : "Your life and death are with your neighbour."

August as that doctrine may have been, it is clear that it very soon became modified. It is regarded as Christian to live 'for' others; it is not so often regarded as Christian doctrine that we live 'from' others. There has been, everywhere, a doctrine of unselfishness, but that the self everywhere lives only within others has been less familiar. The "bear one another's burdens" became, on the whole an exterior thing." But Williams claims that exchange in the Christian Church differs from ordinary social exchange, not in kind but in power.

for an inner substitution can be made. "Substitution can be practised by bearing one another's burdens interiorly as well as exteriorly, by the turning of the general sympathy into something of immediate use; by a compact of substitution... Compacts can be made for the taking over of the suffering of troubles and worries and distresses as simply as an assent is given to the carrying of a parcel." "In The House of the Octopus Alayu and Anthony discover this depth of exchange. As is seen in this play Williams held that exchange over-rides barriers of time, place and death. The Christian stress on substitution is based on the Incarnation and Atonement of which Williams held a substitutionary view. "All life is to be vicarious" he insisted, because "it is in the exchange of burdens that they become light... "He saved others; himself he cannot save" is an exact definition of the Kingdom of Heaven in operation."<sup>13</sup>

The kingdom of heaven, the city, the republic, Williams contrasts with "the Infamy". Williams continually discusses the nature of good and evil and their relation. His basic view of evil as the perversion of good is orthodox. It is his presentation of good and evil that is distinctive. Anne Ridler suggests that the central point of all his world is the possibility of seeing all the universe as good. This was "a possibility" something he would not have thought of unaided by Revelation. It was experienced at certain rare moments only, and could--and should -- be questioned. "A great curiosity should exist about divine things. Man was intended to argue with God. Humility has never consisted in not asking questions...."<sup>14</sup> "Christian drama v..must...recover the speculative intellect....consider the nature of God"<sup>15</sup>. Williams does this in some of his plays, centering his discussion in a central symbolic figure.

For any sort of communication, the reader, listener, or member of the audience must perceive some relation between what he reads, hears or sees and his own experience. Communication depends on shared experience.

The author draws from his own experience (including literary experience) certain conclusions or generalisations. He will, to a greater or lesser extent, be able to express these, or find expression of them, in a formula common to some tradition, e.g. religious or cultural. If he is writing for people who share this tradition, communication becomes less difficult. He has only to mention, or briefly outline the formula to set in motion a train of associations in the mind of his audience. Williams uses the Christian tradition e.g. in The Death of Good Fortune, where Mary introduces herself quickly and then sits silently on stage for much of the play. By her mere presence she is an effective counterpoint to the action, communicating at first the insufficiency of Good Fortune, and after his death, reason for hope (the Nativity). Williams does not need to build up the character of Mary at length because he can rely on "prefabricated associations" in the audience. Similarly he uses people or types from English history—King Henry VIII and the Priest and Preacher in Cranmer. In the same play he uses the Communion Service from the Book of Common Prayer and the 1588 Bible. It is helpful to understand the literary tradition of the author in the same way as it is helpful to know his religious tradition. The formula may be a particular rhythm, or type of image, which helps place the speaker in time or place or characterise him. Or the formula may be a stock character. Stock characters are part of any literary tradition. They are more general than e.g. King Henry, and their evocative power is consequently lessened. They have the advantage however of a more widespread acceptance. Williams uses them extensively e.g. characters in Death of Good Fortune include the Lover, and the old woman who dislikes her daughter in law. And in House of the Octopus there is the Marshall who is the exponent and practitioner of psychological warfare. Stock characters are most

prominent in literature which seeks to show a general pattern in life, such as religious drama, satire, romance or expressionism. These themselves are formulae, In satire, such as The Importance of Being Earnest, the typical qualities of stock characters are stressed even caricatured (e.g. the effusiveness of Gwendolen and Cecily on their first meeting) to evoke attitudes of amusement, contempt, or scorn."<sup>16</sup> In Grab and Grace the morality figure of Pride, who calls herself Self-Respect, is similarly exaggerated to show that Self-Respect is merely a more subtle form of pride. In romance, complexity of character is sacrificed to "the truth of the human heart."<sup>17</sup>

Gary F. Waller sees Williams' novels in the light of the romance genre and some of Chase's comments are applicable to The House of the Octopus and others of Williams' plays "the characters and events have a kind of abstracted simplicity about them...character may be deep but it is narrow and predictable. Events take place with a formalised clarity... the characters, probably two-dimensional types, will not be complexly related to each other or to society or to the past. Human beings will on the whole be shown in ideal relation — that is they will share emotions only after these have become abstract and symbolic...Characters may become profoundly involved in some way,... but it will be a deep and narrow, an obsessive involvement...the plot we may expect to be highly coloured. Astonishing events may occur and these are likely to have a symbolic or ideological, rather than a realistic plausibility...the romance will more freely veer toward mythic, allegorical and symbolistic forms."

Expressionism moves further than romance from "a realistic plausibility." Strindberg, often regarded as the founder of expressionism, introduces Dreamplay with the comments : "time and space do not exist, on a slight groundwork

of reality, imagination spins and weaves new patterns made up of memories, experience, unfettered fancies, absurdities and improvisations. The characters are split, double and multiply, they evaporate, crystallise scatter and converge. But a single consciousness holds sway over them all — that of the dreamer. For him there are no secrets, no incongruities, no scruples and no law. He neither condemns nor acquits, but only relates...<sup>18</sup> Williams takes expressionist liberties with place and time especially in Seed of Adam, in which, for example, Adam is the father of Mary, and of the three Kings; he is Joseph's lord and merges into Caesar Augustus. This expressionism is not as abstract as Strindberg's; Williams' characters are definite historical/mythical figures. Expressionism as Williams uses it is in some way a traditional device of religious drama. Murray Roston, in Biblical Drama in England, speaks of the "medieval penchant for mingling expressionism with realism," giving as an example Joseph in Egypt standing a few feet away from his brethren in Palestine. The compression of time and space are traditional in a drama that arose before the "historical sense" dominated Western views of history. Merging of characters has a basis in tradition in the merging of abstract qualities and historical characters, or in the progressive revelation of character as in Magnificence. And a theological basis in for example, typology. But the extent of the compression is far greater in a play such as Seed of Adam. Roston takes too an example from pictorial art. "In the famous 'Martyrdom of St. Erasmus' at St. Peter's, Louvain, Dirk Bouts, for example, portrays the martyr as gazing at his own disembowelment with almost undisturbed tranquillity. As in the York Crucifixion, the physical torture itself is depicted with vivid realism, the saint's entrails being slowly extracted on a spit, but there is no attempt to provide any realistic coherence between the gruesome scene and the victim's calm, almost

detached response. For the artist here is stylistically superimposing the spiritual content of the scene upon the physically realistic setting, so that by transcending the limits of chronology he permits us an advance glimpse of the saint's joyful acceptance into heaven." (p.p.16-17) This is similar to the double perspective provided in Williams' plays by a symbolic figure such as the skeleton in Cranmer.

The Nativity play, like medieval expressionism, belongs both to a literary and a religious tradition. Roston notes that "behind the Nativity Plays ... may be perceived the tradition of the 'praesepe' or crèche" He points out the widespread practice (in almost every church and chapel) of having a model of the manger, often life-size, and concludes that the earliest shepherd plays were probably an outgrowth of the liturgical office performed at this 'praesepe'. Roston then suggests that, medieval art being well established before the rebirth of drama, "no medieval audience would be impressed by a Nativity play which fell short of the annual 'praesepe' model in visual impact. The play provided in a sense a live version of a model familiar to every spectator in which haloed figures in gorgeous robes offered and received the gifts of the Magi in a setting glimmering with jewels and glowing with richly coloured tapestry. It was this 'praesepe' tradition, coupled with the supreme sanctity of the theme for the Christian spectator, which lent a ceremonial and almost static quality to the plays of the Epiphany, with the emphasis upon dazzling spectacle rather than emotional realism. The haloes discouraged that identification of audience with character so necessary to naturalistic drama... but served to enhance by the distance they created between mortal and divine figures the solemnity of the semi-liturgical scene represented." (pp 20-1). Seed of Adam in particular belongs to this tradition.

The morality play is another literary-religious tradition that Williams draws on. The stock character here is used to express abstract qualities - the fat man is Gluttony. Allegory<sup>gor</sup> is the essential characteristic. And the situation, presented in "perfectly general terms" is described by Craig: "In consequence of the fall of Adam, man is destined to die in sin unless he be saved by the intervention of divine grace and by repentance." (p. 351). Character is often formalised with the Everyman figure yielding to temptation without a struggle, and repenting for no reason except Repentance's request. Some morality plays are austere, but in many there is humour : Craig speaks of "the brilliant and amusing Hyckescorner, an oldish play printed ....about 1512 in which Pity acts as umpire and advocate of peace in the warfare between Virtues and Vices and gets put in the stocks for her pains, but after her release converts Free Will and Imagination." (p.344). Williams' Grab and Grace contains similar incidents in Faith's imprisonment in Hell's bag, and Hell's attempt to down Grace.

Religious drama in general can be seen as a tradition. Audiences are more disposed to accept poetry in religious drama, as Eliot points out in Poetry and Drama. One final tradition that may be helpful as background to Williams' plays is the masque. Williams wrote several masques before he wrote plays, and two were enthusiastically received by the group for whom they were written and enjoyed when later produced elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> Abrams describes the masque as "an elaborate form of court entertainment, combining poetic drama, music, song, dance, costuming and spectacle, which flourished in the reigns of Elizabeth, James I and Charles I. A plot often slight, and for the main part mythological and allegorical - served to bind together these various elements. The play proper was climaxed by the event that gave the form its name - the dance of the masked

figures in which the audience often joined..."(p.49) <sup>/</sup> Masque elements are prominent in Cranmer, in Chelmsford, and Seed of Adam.

There is a danger in the use of formulae from any tradition, and it is that the author will rely too much on stock responses. Coleridge noted that "sameness must be reconciled or balanced with difference, old and familiar objects with novelty and freshness; the representative, the general and the ideal — e.g. allegorical characters or the way of exchange — must be harmonised with, respectively, the individual, the concrete, and the image. And the reason he gave for this was that the poet should, ideally, bring the whole soul of man into play." <sup>20</sup>.

J.A. Richards similarly criticises "withdrawal from experience", "no new outlook, no new direction of feeling". This is common in religious plays which rely heavily on the experience and knowledge of the audience. Roger Sale, in "England's Parnassus : C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams and J.R.R. Tolkien" criticises Williams for this in terms of "iconography" <sup>22</sup>. An icon (or religious symbol) differs from a literary symbol in that in the case of the icon, the vehicle is coherent only because of the tenor. In the case of a symbol the tenor is built up by the vehicle; the vehicle does not depend on the tenor! Williams... uses his symbols as icons. He knows, Lewis knows, and good Christians know, without going further, that... But I do not know this, and it is the province of the imagination to make me understand that a thing is so regardless of what I personally believe.... an icon is not meant to be understood imaginatively... it is only a reminder of a truth already believed in... For even if we attempt to move within Williams' inner circle and try to see just what he tells us to see, the result is imaginatively defeating. The system, as Lewis presents it and insofar as I can discover it in the

poems themselves, is thoroughly worked out so that after the reader has gotten used to plugging the right meanings in the right places, he can snugly career through the universe, secure in the knowledge that what would baffle someone on the outside is really in perfect, working order. His final assertion is the epitome of cultist declarations : I praise the vehicle because it is so hard to operate but I have mastered it. But if Williams must be classified as iconography, it must be added that the fault is endemic to much of modern literature.... The difference between Williams and the other writers mentioned [Lewis and Tolkien] lies primarily in the rigidity of his intellectual symbolic system. The reader determined to explore sympathetically and yet not give himself away is more easily defeated by Williams because the only way to read Williams at all is unresponsively and unimaginatively...Eliot, on the other hand, teases his reader in and out of belief, in and out of time, in and out of the stifling clarity of iconography... it is possible to read Four Quartets at least without giving in. The Rose Garden, unlike Broceliande [the country of Williams' poems], can be walked in by anyone."<sup>25</sup>.

It seems that Sale is raising three objections to Williams' writing. The first is that only a select group ("any good Christian") can respond to his work. This reminder of the limited appeal of Williams' writing may be helpful, though in itself it is not a valid objection to the plays. They were written for specific occasions for this select group. The second objection is that iconography is not meant to be understood imaginatively, somewhat qualified by the reference to Eliot's imaginative use of iconography. The third is that Williams' iconography is so thoroughly worked out as to be an end in itself. This third criticism,

if levelled at the plays, is only partly true. Williams, in most of his plays, uses iconography to convey a vivid impression of some aspect "a truth already believed in", Often his ideas are in some way new and distinctive. The excitement of the plays is often an intellectual excitement, but he does "start, elaborate and sustain a pattern of interest."<sup>24</sup> By ceremony and spectacle, poetry and dance and other masque elements he builds up and intensifies his impression of some truth. This is a valid form in the tradition of the masque, of romance which sacrifices verisimilitude to "the truth of the human heart" (Hawthorne), expressionism whose dreamer "only relates" (Strindberg) and the Nativity Play whose "dazzling spectacle discouraged... identification of audience with character...but...served to enhance by the distance they created between mortal and divine figures, the solemnity of the semi-liturgical scene represented" (Roston). The "life-blood" of this drama, as of the morality play is "Religion and its success depends on its awakening and releasing a pent-up body of religious knowledge and religious feeling."<sup>25</sup>

Dawson quotes Williams' view of the role of religious literature: it should express "not doctrine, but existence, or only doctrine as existence".<sup>26</sup> This is presumably why the characters in his novels are often not explicitly Christian. The plays, as Sale points out, are rigidly Christian. Yet, in several of the plays, the focus is on one person; ideas are embodied in his conflict and development which is the central action of the play. In these plays doctrine is seen "as existence", and an imaginative experience is at least possible. Sale is demanding from Williams the "sensuous apprehension of thought" that Eliot praised in the Metaphysical poets and in Shakespeare. Eliot, comparing Milton with Shakespeare speaks of two qualities that Milton lacks. The first is "particularity" — "the feeling of being in a

particular place at a particular time. "The second quality is "perpetual novelty"; words developed in significance". These qualities arose from certain combinations of words, such as "rocky wood".<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere he speaks of "that perpetual slight alteration of language, words perpetually encased into meanings....which evidences a very high development of the senses."<sup>28</sup> Eliot is referring specifically to sensuous imagery, which he maintains Milton lacks. He relies instead on the sound effects of words, on "auditory imagery". Williams tends to do this too to build up another world, whereas sensuous imagery relates the subject to the audience by the interaction of two meanings, of two groups of associations. But this sort of interaction is not limited to sensuous imagery. This effect is possible by other powerful combinations.

The play as a whole functions in a similar way to the image. A play is, in a sense, an image, built up by the interaction of its component parts in a "sequence of impressions."<sup>29</sup> Just as the interaction of "rocky" and "wood" results in particularity and new meaning, so the interaction of different aspects of the play— language, e.g. in rhythm and imagery, people, scenery, silence, actions— builds up, modifies and varies the central impression.

Clickés are just as possible in the larger image of the play as in a phrase, by the use of stock situations, characters, rhythms and ideas. This is Sale's accusation. For this reason Williams' plays are often better when he employs historical or semi-historical characters; by telescoping of time too he is able to multiply associations and significance, building up characters in the same way as a symbol is built up.

At the other extreme lies the fault that Dr. Johnson noted in the Metaphysical poets (and Eliot agrees that in the case of Cleveland,

this was just): "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together."<sup>30</sup> The different components of the play may not harmonise. This does happen in Williams' work. It is perhaps most obvious in the novels where the emotion appropriate to the symbolism and themes seems too intense for the almost "cozy" style. Of the plays, it is most obvious perhaps in Terror of Light, the prose play. Poetry enables Williams to distance the play sufficiently for the introduction of magicians and spirits of the dead. Poetry builds up and expresses the intensity of the situation at the heart of the play. Murray Roston criticises the verse, for example, of Seed of Adam because it "falls so far short of the subject matter. It creates an impression of scintillating originality in its verbal juxtapositions and compressed imagery, but the effect remains superficial and the basal internal rhymes betray the doggerel beneath the alliterative camouflage." He goes on to speak of the "more recent Terror of Light which moved into prose and whose opening section has a simplicity and directness more effective than any of his verse drama. The disciples a few days after the Crucifixion come alive as troubled human beings unsure of their next move but convinced that the world has in some way been profoundly changed. But Simon Magus enters with Luna and the play disintegrates into scenes of ghosts and necromancy "(p.292). It is presumably because of the lesser ability of prose to carry weighty themes and subject matter such as "ghosts and necromancy" that Williams intended the final draft to be in prose."<sup>31</sup> Poetry is, ideally, of the essence of a play in its theme and subject. In a letter Alice Hadfield writes "I can certainly tell you that none of the plays was written first in prose and then in verse. C.W.'s mind did not work that way. Poetry was thought of as poetry and grew as poetry. Prose did the same, in its nature as prose. Both are used in the plays, and within the plays,

but each grew as itself and was not worked as an alternative. Terror of Light never got "worked" into verse. It would have had to be completely thought again in poetry - no doubt one reason why he never did it." /

Two movements in Williams' plays, following chronological sequence, can be seen. The first concerns choice of subject and is circular. Cranmer centres on the conflict within an historical character, Thomas Cranmer. Judgment at Chelmsford seems historical in that, between prologue and epilogue, eight semi-historical scenes are shown. But the concern is not with any of these scenes and the people in them but rather with the spiritual states of which each is an example. And the pageant - play focusses on a lightly-delineated and only spasmodically seen personification- Chelmsford. There is a definite progression, both in time and in Chelmsford, but the play is more of a pageant-play.<sup>32</sup> Seed of Adam was actually written before Judgment at Chelmsford, though it is placed after Judgment at Chelmsford in Collected Plays. Seed of Adam is noted for "telescoping" of time and character. Characters are historical or mythical even if coalesced, but attention moves from the historical and more widely accepted mythical characters, to the fictionalised or fictional characters of the Tsar of Caucasie, Sultan of Bagdad, King of Myrrh and Mother Myrrh (Hell). In Death of Good Fortune in which Good Fortune is the central character, Mary is an historical figure, but the others are all generalised ("the magician", "the lover" etc.). House by the Stable, like Good Fortune, is a Christmas Play but the conflict does not focus on the Nativity. And two of the main characters are allegorical-Hell and Pride. Grah and Grace is a sequel to House by the Stable, and all the characters except for Gabriel, the angel-servant and Man are allegorical.

With House of the Octopus, the direction begins to turn: The play is located in "a land in the outer seas" in the twentieth century. And the inhabitants are recently - primitive islanders (distinguished by name), a twentieth century missionary priest, and oppressors who combine elements of both. Terror of Light is back with Cranmer with historical characters - this time in Jerusalem at Pentecost. The radio play The Three Temptations relies heavily on telescoping but is firmly based in history.

The other movement is linear : it is a movement towards simplicity and naturalism with a less dense exploitation of language in such forms as alliteration, rhyme, strong and changing rhythm, and of spectacle and other masque elements. The writing of a prose play and a radio play is perhaps indicative of this change.

When Williams creates distance in his plays - distance from the everyday and the trite which can be achieved by placing characters backward in time and by stylisation of language and when he adds to particularity by using definite historical characters, his ability to express spiritual truths, especially violent, unusual or powerful spiritual truths, effectively is greater. When action is focused on a conflicting and developing character, and from this focus ideas emerge, Williams most successfully draws his reader into an understanding of the play - and his ideas. For these reasons Cranmer is perhaps Williams' most effective verse-play. Seed of Adam, which uses similar masque elements in a symbolic structure, is less successful. The other Christmas plays are simpler, and particularly in House by the Stable, Williams uses this simplicity to effect. House of the Octopus combines a more normal play structure than any of the other plays with the simplicity of House by the Stable. The limits of this simplicity in expressing Williams' ideas can be seen both in some of the Nativity Plays and in House of the Octopus.

NOTES

1. Image of the City p. 56.
2. "Religious drama" i.e. drama drawing on the experience of one tradition as expressed in its symbolism and doctrines.
3. Abrams, Glossary of Literary Terms.
4. John Heath-Stubbs, Charles Williams. ^
5. (see, for example, William V. Spanos, "Charles Williams' "Seed of Adam": The Existential Flight from Death", Christian Scholar. XLIX/2, Summer 1966.
6. p. 98, "Peter Stanhope" was too the pseudonym Williams used when he wrote Chelmsford.
7. Image of the City, p. 75.
8. Figure of Beatrice, p. 7. And in the introduction to Descent of the Dove Williams sums up the history of the Christian Church in the phrase "This also is thou - neither is this thou."
9. He Came Down from Heaven pp. 68-80.
10. Image of the City pp. 68-69.
11. Image of the City p. Xi.
12. Image of the City p. 103.
13. See "The Way of Exchange" and "The Redeemed City" in Image of the City.
14. He Came Down from Heaven p. 32.
15. Image of the City p. 57.
16. Abrams, Glossary, p. 85.
17. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Preface to House of Seven Gables; quoted by Richard Chase, The American Novel and its Tradition, Chapter 1. Chase distinguishes between the romance and the mainstream novel.
18. (translated by Elizabeth Sprigge.
19. The Masque of the Manuscript (1927) and The Masque of Perusal

- (1929). See Hadfield pp. 70-6.
20. Biographia Literaria, ch. XIV.
  21. Practical Criticism, pp. 240-54.
  22. Sale is speaking more specifically of the poetry but he does include all Williams' work in his assessment.
  23. Hudson Review, XVII, Summer 1964, pp. 205-25.
  24. John Styan, The Elements of Drama.
  25. Craig, p. 4.
  26. Dawson p. 88. The comment is from The Fourth Report of the Chelmsford Diocesan Religious Drama Guild.
  27. Selected Essays, "Milton I".
  28. Selected Essays, p. 209.
  29. John Styan in The Elements of Drama uses this phrase.
  30. Quoted by Eliot in "The Metaphysical Poets", Selected Essays.
  31. John Heath-Stubbs, Introduction to Collected Plays.
  32. As Cranmer is also a festival play, with many similarities, and Seed of Adam too is similar, and because Chelmsford is not as unified as one would expect drama to be, this play will not be looked at closely.

"A play must start, elaborate and sustain a pattern of interest ... the "poetry" lies in the depth and strength of the whole meaning of the stage action, and only indirectly in the words spoken....language is only one manifestation of the original image of the play conceived in the dramatist's mind. But the poetic dramatist uses language as his strongest contributing instrument in the communication of his idea."

- John Styan.

#### Chapter Two: Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury

Writers on serious drama, have traditionally insisted on unity of action, action here being more than a "plot-line". Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury is about the rise to authority, and subsequent fall from power, of Thomas Cranmer - the play includes events from 1522-56 - and his finding salvation through these events. This worked out in the concept of the "image". An image, as used here, is an approach to God, valid but limited and incomplete by itself. In the symbolism of the play, each image is seen as a bone of the skeleton. In isolation, i.e. when it becomes an end instead of a means, the bone becomes "diseased". The play centrally presents Cranmer discovering that his image of knowledge and scholarship is incomplete and even unimportant in itself, that "all life is redemption". And his acceptance of this in an honesty which requires him to take back his recantation and yet admit that "if the Pope had bid me live, I should have served him". In the symbolism of the play, he runs to meet the skeleton. Counterpointing this movement of Cranmer in time and toward salvation is the Skeleton's leading of Cranmer. The Skeleton describes himself variously as "the devil or God", "necessity", "necessary Love", "figura rerum" (i.e. the nature of things). He has a certain control over events. And comments wryly or passionately from Heaven's point of view. Cranmer develops; the Skeleton is gradually revealed,