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What the Spirit Knows: Charles Williams and Kenneth Burke

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by

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ABSTRACT

What The Spirit Knows: Charles Williams And Kenneth Burke examines the
Arthurian poetry of Charles Williams using a methodology derived from Kenneth Burke.
This is an experiment in literary criticism of a Christian poet using a methodology that is
not specifically Christian. Key critical ideas found in Burke are utilized in reading poems
from *Taliessin Through Logres* and *Region of the Summer Stars*. Burke's work on form
and symbol (primarily from *Counter-Statement*) is addressed first. Form in an individual
poem (using "Taliessin's Song of the Unicorn) and in an entire cycle is examined.

Burke lists several uses for symbol in *Counter-Statement,* and an example of each
of these from Williams' poetry is described. Burke relates the ideas of substance and
scapegoat (with the latter being a special case of the former). Williams also had much to
say poetically about substance and the relations of people within Cities, Kingdoms, and
other normal social groups. Scapegoating occurs in Burke when a victim is at once
identified substantially with a group, yet symbolically cast from the group to bear some
punishment that symbolically expiates the sin of the entire group. Williams does not treat
the scapegoat as traditionally as he might, chiefly due to his Christian orientation.

Burke is perhaps most famous for his introduction of the Pentad: five elements
present in motivation within a work. Williams is able to mold the Arthurian myth to his
own purposes through his manipulation of the elements of the Pentad. For Burke,

rhetoric is largely a question of identification. He also shows that the poet's

identification with his own creation often betrays itself within the text. Since Williams

strongly identified himself with Taliessin, several examples of the narrator betraying the

beliefs and feelings of the poet are discussed. Burke's use of the hierarchical dialectic as

a form of entelechy is compared to Williams use of dualism within the Christian belief

system.

Introduction

Charles Williams, who lived from 1886 to 1945, is best known for being one of the Inklings, a group of Christian writers who lived in Oxford in the 1940's. Although Williams is less well-known than C.S Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, two other members of this circle, he is remembered today for seven novels, some theology and literary criticism, and a cycle of poems that centers around the Arthurian legends. It is these poems that I will concentrate on. The Arthurian poems were published in two volumes: *Taliessin Through Logres* (1938) and *Region of the Summer Stars* (1944). Each volume contains several lyrical poems, each narrated by various members of the Arthurian mythology, though the chief narrator is Taliessin, the king's bard.

Kenneth Burke was the initiator and codifier of many great critical ideas of the twentieth century. As I read through Burke's work, I was impressed by the vocabulary he uses and the concepts that are expressed. Although Burke's religious faith, or lack of it, is less readily obvious than Williams', he made religious terminology central to much of his writing and criticism. As I read Kenneth Burke's critical works, I wondered how Burke's ideas, which are tolerant if not sympathetic toward Christianity, would aid in reading a poet who was unashamedly Christian. This thesis will be an experiment in criticism. As such, I hope that it will answer two main questions. First, can Burke's central ideas, which he himself used in short critical vignettes, be productive when used

as a critical method, especially with a Christian poet? And second, will the poetry of

Charles Williams yield new insights if subjected to a Burkean reading?

I plan to look at *Taliessin Through Logres* and *Region of the Summer Stars* as

read through some of Burke's primary critical methods. Most of Burke's critical methods

used in this thesis involve his interpretations of literary psychology, either of the author

or of the audience. This emphasis on psychology seemed particularly useful in light of

Williams' strong identification with Taliessin. First, however, I chose to examine

Burke's ideas on form and symbol, which form the foundation of any literary criticism

based on Burke and which relate to the psychology of the reader. Next, I will examine

substance-- the beginning of postmodern psychology, and scapegoat-- the psychology of

blame. I'll then take a look at the various components of the Pentad and how the ratios

play out in the Taliessin poetry (the psychology of motive).

Burke is also noted for expanding on the psychological concept of identification.

Using his examples of Milton and Arnold in *A Rhetoric of Motives* as models, I will read

Williams' Arthurian poetry for evidence of that same kind of identification. Finally,

since Burke saw the dialectic as ultimately entelechial, I will examine some of Burke's

statements on the dialectic and look at the dialectic in Williams' poetry.

This experiment traces one possible application of Burke's critical methods to a

fairly large body of work. I was able to come to some fairly certain conclusions. First, I

do think that Burke can successfully be used to write literary criticism. Though many

have reduced the pentad to a reductive formula, there are other strong and fruitful lines of

thought to develop. Second, Burke's critical methods present a fruitful starting point for

"Christian" criticism. Burke's vocabulary and the Christian critic's vocabulary overlap to

the extent that there are almost unlimited possibilities for using Burke as a springboard for specifically Christian criticism. By choosing a critical method that is not explicitly Christian, I will be able to at once "stand outside" Williams' poetry and use Burke to examine it from without, yet still read from "inside" the poetry, since I share much of Williams' worldview. Finally, I will show that using Burke to read Williams highlights some aspects of Williams' poetry, such as identification and substance, that have yet to be fully explored.

Literature Review

  Scholars have been commenting on Williams' poetry since the 1940's, though nothing has been written specifically on Williams and Burke. While a thorough examination of Williams criticism is outside the scope of this work, several authors have presented interpretations of Williams' Arthurian cycles which have formed a strong foundation for this present juxtaposition of Burke and Williams. C.S. Lewis himself was an early interpreter of Williams' Arthurian poems. His "Williams and the Arthuriad" is perhaps the most useful guide to the cycle yet written. Written shortly after Williams' death, Lewis gives an interpretation of the poems based on his conversations with Williams and his familiarity with Williams' other works. He places the poems in what he believes to be chronological order and comments upon them one by one. Any reading on the Taliessin cycle must start with Lewis, both because of Lewis' strong abilities in literary criticism and because of his close friendship with Williams. Another interpreter who actually knew Williams is Alice Mary Hadfield. In addition to biographies of Williams, she has published several articles on his Arthurian poems, and was perhaps the first to closely examine the autobiographical link between Williams and Taliessin upon which I will elaborate.

  Another author to examine the figure of Taliessin is David Dowdy. He traces Taliessin as a figure in Celtic mythology and examines the poems in the cycle which deal most closely with Taliessin. Dowdy claims that Williams was attempting to embody "living myth" in the cycle and that his purpose was to illustrate a mythology which is not

removed from everyday life, but united with it (10). Although Logres (Williams' name

for Britain) failed to fulfill this attempt because the Grail was not brought to the Round

Table, the cycle ends in triumph, with "a picture of the final reconciliation" (12).   This

thesis will make the case that the mythology could indeed be "living," since Williams

drew many of his themes and theories from his own experience.

Interestingly enough, only three years later, in 1983, Richard Woods wrote an

article with a very similar title: "The Figure of Taliesin in Charles Williams' Arthuriad."

Woods points out that Williams may have been drawn to Taliessin because he was a

figure in British myth who was "the poet-prophet *par excellence*" (13). Because

Williams viewed himself as a modern poet-prophet, he would have seen Taliessin as a

possible poetic alter ego. He also makes the claim that Williams departed from Celtic

myth because he wanted to write a "spiritual autobiography" (16). I'll look further at

these claims as we discuss Williams and Burke's concept of identification.

In 1987 Judith Kollman wrote "The Question of Influence in Charles Williams's

Arthurian Cycles," though she admitted that the article dealt more with the sources of

allusions that she was able to discover in the poems than actual influences on Williams'

poetry. She shows that Williams uses two types of allusion, the direct quote and the

"pastiche" quote, so named because Williams makes significant changes to the source

quote while leaving enough intact to allow it to be recognized.

In a later article, "Charles Williams' *Taliessin Through Logres* and *The Region of

the Summer Stars*," Kollman questions the accepted critical view that Williams' second

cycle, *Region of the Summer Stars,* was left incomplete by his death. *Taliessin* was

published in 1938 and *Region* in 1944, the year before Williams' death. Kollman

borrows Williams' metaphor of the stone and the shell (which he in turn borrowed from Wordsworth), naming *Taliessin* the stone and *Region* the shell, and she attempts to show how one cycle completes the other. In my chapter on Form, I show that *Taliessin* is a complete work in itself; *Region* is a more detailed elaboration on the ideas first presented in *Taliessin.* In "Eros, Philia and Agape in Charles Williams' Arthuriad," Kollman emphasizes that all forms of love, including *eros*, arise from God. Williams chooses to have each type of love personified in one of the Grail achievers: Bors represents *eros* in its proper marital state, Parsival represents *philia,* and Galahad represents *agape.* This poetic embodiment of theology is one of the ways that Williams uses symbolism in the cycles and will be further examined in the chapter on symbols.

Although I do not refer to Joe McClatchey's articles directly in this thesis, his work has formed the foundation of all my reading of Williams, since he was the professor who introduced me to Williams as an undergraduate. In "The Diagrammatised Glory of Charles Williams's *Taliessin Through Logres,* McClatchey charts Williams' images on a three-by-three grid: mapping (geometry), measuring (geography), and myth (Logos), cross-referenced with Potentiality, Separateness, and Unity. The result is a thorough introduction to the important imagery in the work. In his "Charles Williams and the Arthurian Tradition," McClatchey makes the case for a fourth Grail Achiever. For McClatchey, Taliessin's vision during Lancelot's mass qualifies him as a Grail Achiever, much as Paul's vision on the road to Damascus qualifies him as an apostle.

Rhetoric in the Taliessin poems interests several critics, and as Burke's theories speak directly to the field of rhetoric, these studies were of special interest. Angelika Schneider argues that Williams uses both imagery and language to illustrate coinherence

(Williams' theology of the connectedness of all believers) in "Coinherent Rhetoric in *Taliessin through Logres.*" His images work on three levels: first, they are coherent with Arthurian myth. Second, they provide examples of coinherence (i.e. the body or the empire). Finally, they work as meta-images. This is Schneider's reason for Williams' choice of Taliessin as the central figure in the cycle; he is a poet, and poetry is the central meta-image of the cycle.

Although it would now be considered heretical for a Christian to "dabble" in the occult as Williams did, Roma King asserts that Williams saw the desire for occult knowledge as only a short step from the desire for knowledge of God. This desire for knowledge signifies the original duality of obedience versus disobedience. This duality is central to understanding the poetry. Before he wrote the Taliessin cycles, Williams had been a member of The Fellowship of the Rosy Cross (an occult group led by Arthur Edward Waite). This group interpreted "occult" to mean "hidden," not necessarily "Satanic" or "forbidden," as the word is more popularly interpreted today. Williams' seven novels deal with the occult in different manifestations, and King maintains that the occult is present in the poetry as well. King has also written the only book-length study to date of Williams' poetry, *The Pattern in the Web,* in which he comments on each poem in the cycle. Although he includes Williams' own comments from notes to the poems and from other writings, he does not include much from Williams' own life tin his criticism. This essay will partially fill that gap with the psychological emphasis brought to this interpretation by Burke's theory.

In her examination of the image of the City in the cycle, Mariann Russell notes both the Christian and the Romantic aspects of the City. More interestingly, she brings

up dialectical aspects in the poetry that I examine in this thesis, although she comes to a very different conclusion than I do. While Russell dwells on the "union of opposites" (11), I will show that while Williams does operate dialectically, his synthesis is not so much a union of opposites as a union of complements.

The pervasiveness of doublets and oppositions in the cycle also intrigues John-Manuel Andriote in "An Introduction to Charles Williams's Incarnationalism and the *Taliessin* Poetry." Andriote notes that Williams' most effective symbols interact with one another to illustrate double-nature. A third author who has written on the symbolic pairings in the cycle is Glen Cavaliero in "Charles Williams and the Arthuriad: Poetry as Sacrament." Cavaliero quotes Williams describing the Beatrician moment, "It is the moment which contains, almost equally, the actual and the potential" (214). He uses the poem "Bors to Elayne: On the King's Coins" to illustrate Williams' belief on the nature of language. Because Christ is double-natured, the double-nature is the ideal state; if only one aspect of nature has preeminence, remarkable damage can occur: "when words escape from verse they hurry to rape souls" (218). But when the two aspects of the nature are combined rightly, they have the power to convey in words the Divine Word (as do Images, in the Beatrician moment). Burke, of course, is highly interested in words as they make meaning, and this idea is discussed further in my chapter on Substance. Cavaliero echoes postmodern theory as he notes the loss of poetic foundations and asks whether it is possible "to live meaningfully by words when there is no divine Word to authenticate them" (214).

Since there are currently no studies linking Burke and Williams, I concentrated my literature study on other significant interpretations of Williams' poetry. There are

also a few articles on using Burke methodologically which I should mention. In "Neither Trust nor Suspicion: Kenneth Burke's Rhetoric and Hermeneutics," Timothy Crusius shows how Burke is able to integrate hermeneutics and rhetoric by abandoning both the hermeneutics of tradition and the hermeneutics of suspicion and choosing a third alternative which leaves both trust and suspicion suspended in paradox (80). This is done through Burke's technique of "discounting." Crusius' discussion of discounting and identification in Burke is useful in applying Burke's concepts of identification to Williams. Identification is also a key term for Dennis G. Day in "Persuasion and the Concept of Identification." Day shows how Burke revolutionized rhetoric by making identification the only means of persuasion.

Two writers focus on Burke's theories in relation to religion. James Macklin uses terms from Burke's logology in analyzing Augustine and the Catholic Mass in "A Trinitarian Logology." Macklin contrasts Burke with Derrida; although Derrida removes the object from his semiotic discussions, Burke does not. The presence of the object (crucial to Christian thought which is grounded in the Ultimate Object) makes Burke more effective in discussing religion than is Derrida. This idea, of course, is crucial to my study, since Burke is being used to illuminate the religious thought of a Christian poet. The trinitarian logology to which Macklin refers is derived from C.S. Peirce's triadic rhetorical theory that all communication requires a word, a thing, and an interpretant. Macklin shows that the third term is essential in explaining why religion has meaning; the third term relates the word to the unseen object (i.e. God).

Perhaps the author whose methodology I most closely approximate in this thesis is Laurence Coupe in "Words and the Word: Kenneth Burke's Logology and T.S. Eliot's

Mythology." Coupe writes, "Language defines humanity, and humanity always seeks to go beyond itself. A yearning for the supernatural is natural" (40). This is his take on Burke's emphasis on studying words about God. He goes on to look at *The Waste Land* as Eliot's attempt at mythopoeia (informed by Frazer and Jessie Weston). Just a few years later, Williams would take this same subject, Arthurian legend, and attempt to do the same thing.

Interestingly, Coupe contrasts Wallace Stevens' "rage for order" with Eliot's writing in "*Ulysses,* Order and Myth." Coupe refers to Stevens' "blessed rage," that "impl[ies] that the human urge towards perfection of language is in itself a mode of redemption, with the beauty of poetry revealing the sacredness of earthly existence" (41). He claims that Eliot "desire[s] release from words and world alike…. Perfectionism' is a matter of negation rather than fulfilment" (41). As we will see, Williams recognizes both of these tendencies and accommodates them both in his 'Way of Affirmation' and his 'Way of Negation.' Like Burke, Williams recognizes that the most honest path (if not the easiest) is the one that allows for and affirms two possible extremes, even as the individual tries to exist in the space of paradoxical confrontation between them.

While the aforementioned critical works influence my ideas here, the critical method that I will use widens the scope of Burke's ideas that have been used in a single critical essay. The number of poems in Williams' cycles and the difficulty in reading much of Williams' poetry have made this kind of broad treatment possible and indeed, productive.

Burke and Williams: Form, Symbol

Foundational to the study of poetry are the study of form and the study of symbol. As such, these two concepts present a logical entry to the present study, both because of their foundational nature in poetics and because Burke emphasized these concepts in his earliest writings. These earlier writings, especially the essays in *Counter-Statement,* which was first published in 1931, tended to be closer to pure literary criticism than the later writings which tended to move away from criticism toward theory. One of Burke's first important critical theories was published in his first book, *Counter-Statement.* There he defines form as "an arousing and fulfillment of desires. A work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence" (124); thus, literary form works with the psychology of the audience. Burke makes allowance for changing audiences and ideologies, stating that "the conventional forms of one age are as resolutely shunned by another" (139). As I read Williams' work, I must be aware that I myself am reading as a postmodern critic. The form may affect me differently than it did Williams' contemporary readers. According to Burke, this difference is expected and normal. Further, Burke is careful to differentiate between form and information and to note that the psychology of art concerns the former rather than the latter.

Burke's statements on form can be applied both to individual poems and to the structure of the cycle as a whole. Although Burke's idea of form could be utilized in a substantial critical work, one example will suffice for illustration here. One of the shorter

poems in the cycles, "Taliessin's Song of the Unicorn" is a 36-line poem which grammatically constitutes one long sentence. Williams sets up expectations in the first half of the poem (roughly the first 20 lines). The title of the poem identifies the speaker as Taliessin, the poet. In the first 20 lines, Taliessin explains why the unicorn cannot have a "normal" relationship: he is susceptible to a girl, but can do her "no good," as he is to her a "snorting, alien love" (7, 9). The unicorn "has no voice to explain" his origins (10-11), and the only way he can have a physical union with her is for his "gruesome horn only to be / polished, its rifling rubbed between breasts" (15-16). The only natural result of this relationship is when a "true man runs and sets the maid free … and over their couch the spoiled head displayed" (16, 18).

With such a set-up, a reader looking for Burke's form in action might expect several possible conclusions. Perhaps the second half of the poem will provide a positive perspective compared to the negative perspective of the first half. Perhaps there will be a contrast between the "natural" love of a man and the love of the unicorn. The poem pivots on the word "yet" in line 21. The contrast is between the "normal" girl who prefers the human hunter and the girl who chooses the unicorn. In line 21 she is described as "cunning," not only needing to be clever, but brave. While a typical girl might shrink from the "silver horn pirouetting above / her bosom" in lines 11 and 12, this girl allows herself to be impaled by the horn, "twisting from the least / to feel the sharper impress, for the thrust to stun / her arteries into channels of tears beyond blood" (23-25). By exposing herself to the pain of loving this more-than-mortal creature, her reward is to be called "the Mother of the Unicorn's Voice" (31). The unicorn, naturally mute, receives a voice when he is able to find a girl who will give herself to him in this way,

and their "son" is "the sound of enskied / shouldering shapes … / horn-sharp, blood-deep, ocean and lightning wide, / in her paramour's song, by intellectual nuptials unclosed" (33-36).

Burke claims that there are "innate forms of the mind" which are consistently present in most of the human race, and that they can be classified in the broad terms of "unity" or "diversity" (*CS* 46). In the poem described above, the unity would be the presence of the unicorn as potential lover in both halves of the poem. The diversity comes in the different results of that love, based on the reaction of the girl. The first half results in the unicorn's death, the second in his rebirth through replication of himself. Burke's concept of the artist arranging poetic details into a "crescendo" of emotions (*CS* 45-46) certainly appears here. The first half of the poem is divided into eight independent clauses (all separated by semicolons), but the second half is all one clause, words tumbling over words until the climax is reached in line 31.

Within an individual poem, then, Burke's ideas of form and crescendo can be seen; they also shape of the cycle as a whole. The Arthurian poetry of Williams was published in two separate books, *Taliessin through Logres* and *Region of the Summer Stars*. Since the books were originally published six years apart, they should be considered separately when looking for form within the cycle.   Since the first book has more poems (twenty-four), its structure is more obvious. About three-quarters of the way through the cycle there is a poem which describes the climactic action of Arthurian legend. "The Coming of Galahad" (poem 19) is that climax point; as the central action of the cycle is the move to achieve the Grail, this is a logical choice.

If the arrival of Galahad is the turning point of the action in *Taliessin Through Logres,* the form of the cycle begins to take shape. There is a one-to-one correspondence between the five final poems that follow "Galahad" and the first five poems. "Prelude" is balanced by "Taliessin at Lancelot's Mass," which serves as an epilogue. The second poem, "Taliessin's Return to Logres" corresponds to "The Last Voyage."   In "Taliessin's Return," Taliessin has been to Byzantium at the Emperor's Court and returns to help establish Logres. In "The Last Voyage," Logres is disintegrating, and the Grail achievers are heading toward Sarras, the court of the heavenly Emperor. In the third poem, "The Vision of the Empire," the action centers on the Fall of Adam, whereas in the third poem from the end, "Percivale at Carbonek," the central act is restoration-- Galahad's plea for forgiveness. The fourth and fifth poems ("The Calling of Arthur" and "Mount Badon") both describe the founding of Logres, while the corresponding poems "The Departure of Merlin" and "The Death of Palomides" depict the dissolution of Arthur's court.

Within this framework of the five introductory poems and the five concluding poems are two balanced sets, the first consisting of six, the second of four poems. The first set of six poems continues the optimistic treatment initiated in the "Prologue" and shows the "flowering" of Camelot. The second set of four begins to introduce elements of the kingdom's destruction: adultery and incest ("Lamorack and the Queen Morgause of Orkney"), separation ("Bors to Elayne: On the King's Coins"), betrayal ("The Son of Lancelot"), and disillusionment ("Palomides before his Christening"). The three poems so far unaccounted for form a group with the climactic poem and lead up to the achievement of the Grail.

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It is important to note that Burke's emphasis on the psychology of form means that readers will feel "fulfilled" by the form whether or not they consciously anticipate it. In fact, form is most effective when it is only a subconscious desire for a certain kind of closure which is then fulfilled.

While form describes the framework, symbol describes the content of poetry. In *Counter-Statement* Burke describes the process of creating poetry. A "pattern of experience" will be translated by the poet into a Symbol (152). Burke lists specific purposes for the poetic use of symbols in *Counter-Statement* (154-60); each of these can be illustrated with examples from Williams' poetry.

The first use for symbols, according to Burke, is as "the interpretation of a situation" (154). Burke emphasizes that a symbol is an idealistic representation, that is a representation of a situation without the interference or irrelevance of prosaic detail. In the Taliessin poems, Arthur's knight Bors and his wife Elayne are examples of this type of symbol. Their relationship is a picture of idealized domestic happiness. Likewise, Taliessin is an idealistic representation of the poet: humble, valorous in battle, prophetic, charismatic, and courtly. This becomes important, of course, when we begin to label Taliessin as not only a symbol of the Poet, but as a representation of his poetical creator.

Burke's second use for symbols "favor[s] the acceptance of a situation" (154). He explains that "our minds have been closed to the situation through the exigencies of practical life" (154). For example, modern (and postmodern) readers have difficulty recognizing and admitting the possibility of a heavenly kingdom established on earth. Williams used Galahad as the symbol of that potential. It also seems likely that Williams felt that he could make a stronger case for what he saw as theological truth if he could

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embody it in a poetic situation; as an example, we recall Judith Kollman's article on embodying the three types of love in the three Grail Achievers.

A similar use of the symbolic is Burke's next function, "the corrective of a situation" (155). Here Burke declares that symbols can be embraced because they make up for gaps in the reader's own life experience. Taliessin's Company, then, with its picture of the fully-functioning church serves this purpose: "The Company throve by love, by increase of peace, / by the shyness of saving and being saved in others" ("Founding" 162-63). The psychology of this situation is obvious and hearkens back to the discussion of form. For Burke, as poetry is able to fulfill the conscious or subconscious desires of the reader, it brings pleasure to the reader. While this pleasure is often described as "aesthetic," Burke would contend that there is a strong component of reader identification followed by the fulfillment of expectations.

Burke next suggests that a symbol can be used "as an emancipator" (155). Here he is suggesting that the artist is employing symbols to work counter to prevailing morality. This presents some difficulty, since as a Christian, Williams would not ordinarily desire to circumvent the morals of his society, which had been formed by the Church and were largely made up of what Lewis would call "natural law." The exception might be in the case of romantic love, since Williams held some unconventional views in that area. His book *The Figure of Beatrice* is perhaps the best explanation of these views. Although he was married, he had several instances of "falling in love" with other women. These relationships were unconsummated, and Williams went to great lengths to "prove" that when he had one of these experiences, it was not a case of near-adultery, but rather it served to actually bring him closer to God (48-51). He symbolizes this experience in

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"The Star of Percivale." In this poem, Percivale plays the harp; Taliessin hears the music
and is inspired to sing. A servant girl hears Taliessin sing and "loves" him. Taliessin
cautions her:

Lord, art thou he that cometh? Take me for thine.

The music rang; the king's poet leaned to cry:

See thou do it not; I too am a man.

The king's poet leaned, catching the outspread hands:

More than the voice is the vision, the kingdom than the king (10-14).

Taliessin has "caught" the Glory from Percivale, and the servant girl has seen it in
Taliessin. Since she is unaware of this process, she believes that Taliessin is the one who
she loves. The Archbishop, Dubric, sees the love on the girl's face and understands
immediately what has happened:

Hast thou seen so soon, bright lass, the light of Christ's glory?

She answered: *The light of another, if aught, I bear,*

as he the song of another; he said: I obey.

And Dubric: *Also thy joy I wear* (20-23)

Here we encounter symbol as persuasion at its best. Williams does make a strong, logical
case, and embodies it beautifully in the poem. How difficult it is for the reader to
remember that he is basically justifying emotional adultery.

Burke's last use of the symbol, and the one he describes as the most appealing, is as a
"vehicle for 'artistic' effects" (156). Perhaps Williams' best use of the "artistic" symbol
is in the many ways he portrays double nature. Since double nature (though not dualism)
is at the heart of the Christian faith, in that Christ is the original and the epitome of the

double nature, in the Arthuriad, double nature is a representation of Christ or of Christ-likeness. The stone and the shell (images borrowed from Wordsworth), the nature of Broceliande as a sea-wood (Lewis 283), and slavery as a state of freedom-- and freedom as a state of slavery-- all symbolize dual nature in some way. Most especially, though, Taliessin, the one whose body is neither "flesh or fish" ("Calling" 64)—or maybe both, represents the Christian who takes upon himself the new dual nature.

What Burke has done here, essentially, is to highlight the uses of symbols in ways that are not strictly artistic; the first four of the five uses he gives are meant to persuade the reader. Only the last, artistic effect, treats the symbol as merely ornamental. By emphasizing both uses of the symbol, Burke collapses the traditional distinction between rhetoric and poetic. Christian poetry, almost by definition, is rhetorical, since at the very least it is being written from a point of view in which the author believes that even if he does not know the whole truth, God does. As a Christian writer, Williams would have been conscious of the possible persuasive or moral effect that his poetry might have on a reader; the use of symbolism is one way to produce this effect artistically.

Burke and Williams: Substance, Scapegoat

Burke was one of the first Modernists to start questioning whether words could ever pin down the true nature, or substance, of anything. As he studied the ways that humans describe things by what they are not, he hit upon a living example of this concept in play within civilization, namely, the scapegoat. Like substance, a scapegoat is impossible to describe concretely; the scapegoat is identified with its representative people yet it is also cast out and destroyed as alien to that same people.

To Burke, substance is a paradox, since one must describe the essence of something in terms of what it is not. Although he believes that things do have their own intrinsic natures (*Grammar* 56-57), he admits that describing these intrinsic natures with precision is tricky if not impossible. In fact, he points out that we say that something is "substantially true" when what we mean is that it may be true in all aspects save one (in other words, false) (52). In his words, "whenever we find a distinction between the internal and the external … we can expect to encounter the paradoxes of substance" (47). Although Burke's idea anticipates deconstructionist theories of meaning, Burke asserts that even though substance may become ephemeral when examined too closely, examine it one must, in order to understand the real effects that any substance produces (56-57).

The Taliessin poems of Williams also address the question of substance. For Williams, the nature of creation and humans' relationsip to it, humans' relationship to the Creator, and humans' relationships to one another, all have at their cores questions of substance. One of the great controversies throughout religious history has been the

existence of evil. If God created everything that exists, He must have created evil, since it exists. Yet if God is good, how could He create evil? Williams presents his answer to this question in the poem "The Vision of the Empire." In it, the unfallen Adam complains, "Am I not too long meanly retired / in the poor space of joy's single dimension?" (*eta,* 4-5). Even though the substance of all that he has experienced to that point is good (joy), he is bored, and wants to be like God: "Does not God vision the principles at war?" (6). Notice here the word "principles," which Burke singled out as a "first term" (*Grammar* 52), and which Williams certainly intended to use as such. Adam is unhappy because he thinks that God must be able to see something besides joy-- the principles at peace, if you will-- but he (Adam) cannot. He solves this problem by choosing to see good as evil: "Let us grow to the height of God and the Emperor: / Let us gaze, son of man, on the Acts in contention" (*eta,* 7-8). Once that happens, "the good lusted against the good." (14). Human refusal to accept the given caused evil to result from wrongly perceiving something that was good in substance.

This seems to be Burke's view as well. He says in the *Rhetoric*, "Because of our choice [to look for a generalizing motive], we can treat 'war' as a '*special case of peace*'—not as a primary motive in itself, not as *essentially* real, but purely as a *derivative* condition, a *perversion*" (20). So while Williams describes the Fall as the beginning of hierarchical division, Burke is working towards reversing the process by showing us war as something we can generalize into the unity of good.

A second concern related to substance is humankind's apprehension of God. Williams liked to use two sayings to describe humans' understanding of God: "This also is Thou" and "Neither is this Thou" (Lewis 335). Thus, while everything points toward

God, since it was created by Him and thus bears His imprint, nothing by itself is equal to

God. This concept can be illustrated by one of Williams' favorite ideas, the Beatrician

moment. During a Beatrician vision, a man might see a woman not only as herself, but as

an Ideal of Romance so perfect that to pursue the vision would be to move closer to God.

Williams took this idea from Dante, of course, but it recurs time and again in this poem

cycle. In the Beatrician moment, the woman is apprehended, but so also is something

more, something that would approach the apprehension of God in some way. This

introduces the possibility that substance is not static, but shifting. Added to the

difficulties of defining true substance through language are the complexities of the flux of

the substance itself.

In *A Rhetoric of Motives,* Burke describes a process very similar to this Beatrician

moment:

> The person becomes the charismatic vessel of some 'absolute' substance. And
>
> when thus magically endowed, the person transcends his nature as an individual,
>
> becoming instead the image of the idea he stands for. He is then the representative
>
> not of himself but of the family or class substance with which he is identified. In
>
> this respect he becomes 'divine'… Thus, when the principle of social reverence
>
> attains its summing up in the person of a beloved, she is loved not merely 'for
>
> herself,' but for what she 'represents,' as charismatic vessel of a social motive
>
> which the lover, or communicant, would court roundabout. Indeed, marriage as a
>
> sacrament so binds social and religious reverence together that you could not tell
>
> where 'careerism' ends and 'God' begins. (277)

Here Burke and Williams agree that while romantic love can simply be romantic love, it can also be something more, namely, an approach to knowing God. This concept is key in the Taliessin cycle.

In the poem entitled "The Coming of Palomides," Palomides, who was a Muslim knight, comes to Logres and sees Iseult. Iseult, of course, is already well spoken-for as she sits between Mark her husband and Tristram her lover, yet Palomides sings for the court:

> Blessed for ever be the hour
>
> when first the intellectual power
>
> saw triple angles, triple sides,
>
> and that proceed which naught divides
>
> through their great centre, by the stress
>
> of the queen's arm's blissful nakedness,
>
> to unions metaphysical; (77-83)

Here is one of Williams' classic Beatrician moments. In this case, since Palomides was a pagan and since Iseult was already a representative of faithlessness, the vision ceases almost immediately:

> Down the arm of the queen Iseult
>
> quivered and darkened an angry bolt;
>
> and, as it passed, away and through
>
> and above her hand the sign withdrew.
>
> ………………………………………
>
> and aloof in the roof, beyond the feast,

> I heard the squeak of the questing beast,
>
> where it scratched itself in the blank between
>
> the queen's substance and the queen (103-106, 129-132).

Though the vision departed, it left Palomides a changed man; he became known as the knight who fruitlessly pursued the questing beast which he would never catch-- a metaphor for his doomed quest to attain a relationship with that object of his vision which no longer even existed. Thus, the queen's substance and the queen are no longer one and the same; only in Palomides' moment of heightened perception did the queen ever truly attain her own substance.

In addition to trying to describe a person's own nature, or substance, Williams' poetry also deals with the relationships between people. Burke's writing on "consubstantiality" in the *Rhetoric* applies here. He describes how in many common ways, person A can be identified with person B (family relations, common occupation, etc.). Yet at the same time, A is not B, or, as Williams would say, "This also is Thou; Neither is this Thou" (20-21). Rhetorically, consubstantiality is a powerful tool for identification, although, as Burke points out, "to begin with 'identification' is, by the same token, through roundabout, to confront the implications of *division"* (22).

In "Lamorack and the Queen Morgause of Orkney," Williams depicts the central consubstantiality/division of the Matter of Britain. In this poem, Lamorack describes the two crucial misidentifications in the myth; two sets of consubstantial siblings, Balin and Balan and Arthur and Morgause, perform two acts, which Williams points to as the beginning of the downfall of Logres:

Balin had Balan's face, and Morgause her brother's.

Did you not know the blow that darkened each from other's?

Balin and Balan fell by mistaken impious hate.

Arthur tossed loves with a woman and split his fate.

Did you not see, by the dolorous blow's might,

the contingent knowledge of the Emperor floating into sight? (47-52)

Both the blind warfare of the brothers Balin and Balan and the blind incest of Arthur and

Morgause are here equated with the Dolorous Blow (the blow which dealt the Fisher

King a grievous injury, only curable by Galahad), and the self does irreparable damage

not only to itself, but to the entire nation and even the world. Although the Dolorous

Blow was actually struck by Balin, the confusion of identity and the violent acts against

the self are here all attributed not only to him but to Arthur as well; the misidentification

of the self and the misidentification of the Other are the central acts of error.

Interestingly, this re-enactment of the Fall does not involve choosing to see wrongly as in

the Fall, but the refusal to see rightly. As a result, the original plan of the kingdom of

heaven being realized in Logres becomes an impossibility, but the "contingency" plan is

already present to take its place.

A more positive poetic description of substance is presented in the poem "Bors to

Elayne: the Fish of Broceliande." In this cycle, Bors and Elayne are the representatives

of the ideal married life. Bors begins the poem by telling Elayne, "Taliessin sang of the

sea-rooted western wood; / his song meant all things to all men, and you to me" (9). This

foreshadows the appearance of the Grail at the Round Table, when it offered to each man

the food he most preferred. For Williams, this is an opportunity to "prefer the given," to

accept the grace that is offered rather than to "look upon the acts in contention" by

choosing to be dissatisfied. In other words, Bors could have seen any woman he found desirable, but because his marriage was as it should be, he saw his wife (or perhaps because he saw his wife, his marriage was as it should be).

The "sea-rooted western wood" refers to Broceliande, a land of mystery and a source of poetry, so Bors, a practical man, is somewhat bewildered about what is happening. He imagines himself picking up a fish, which at once is Elayne and is not Elayne (This also is Thou; Neither is this Thou). Of course, in Christian poetry, a fish is never just a fish. In contrast to Palomides' vision of Iseult which begins promisingly but comes to a jarring halt, this vision allows Bors to see Elayne as she really is but as he rarely gets to see her (the elusive quality of the fish). As C. S. Lewis says in his commentary, "a transitory vision is not necessarily a vision of the transitory" (301). There are few metaphors that describe the "slipperiness" of substance as described by Burke better than the wet and wriggling fish.

It is but a step in Burke's writing from the paradox of substance to identification with the scapegoat. Once again, the opposing phrases "This also is Thou; neither is this Thou" can be invoked. The scapegoat is at once identified with and alien to the subject. As Burke puts it, "the pattern proclaims a principle of *absolute* 'guilt,' matched by a principle that is designed for the corresponding absolute cancellation of such guilt. And this cancellation is contrived by *victimage,* by the choice of a sacrificial offering that is correspondingly absolute in the perfection of its fitness" (*Permanence* 284). In this passage,   Burke goes on to list many ways that the scapegoat can be portrayed in literature and culture.

Williams approaches the traditional scapegoat concept in a couple of ways, but he eventually seems to back away from each of them. For example, Palomides could have been a scapegoat; he was a knight, but he was also an outsider, since he was a Muslim. He was further isolated by his solitary pursuit of the Questing Beast. But rather than allowing Palomides to come to the end he deserved, especially after he triumphed over Lancelot at a tournament by cheating, Williams allows Palomides a choice, and Palomides chooses to become Christian, thus becoming one in substance with the rest of the knights rather than becoming a scapegoat.

Williams also toys with the idea of women as symbolic scapegoats:

I heard, as in a throb of stretched verse,

the women everywhere throughout it [The Empire] sob with the curse

and the altars of Christ everywhere offer the grails.

Well are women warned from serving the altar

who, by the nature of their creature, from Caucasia to Carbonek,

share with the Sacrifice the victimization of blood.

Flesh knows what spirit knows,

but spirit knows it knows—categories of identity;

women's flesh lives the quest of the Grail

in the change from Camelot to Carbonek and from Carbonek to Sarras,

puberty to Carbonek, and the stanching, and Carbonek to death.

Blessed is she who gives herself to the journey.

("Taliessin in the Rose-Garden" 157-168)

Though all women share the "victimization of blood," again Williams stops short of using women as scapegoats. They are living symbols of the Sacrifice, but are not called on to repeat the sacrifice.

Mordred is an obvious scapegoat in the Matter of Britain, but one cannot simply pin the blame on Mordred without first considering Arthur as a more ideal scapegoat. Arthur and Mordred serve as another Burkean example of consubstantiality, this one between father and son. As king, Arthur represents the entire nation. His tragic flaws have resulted in the birth of Mordred; therefore, it is fitting that Mordred should be the *agency* of the sacrifice of the scapegoat. While Arthur plays the part of the tragic hero in this cycle, thus assuming the role of scapegoat for the reader, the scapegoat in this case does not bring about the expected reconciliation. After Arthur's death, the once-unified Empire also dissolves into warring factions. Lewis comments:

All over the world the principle of co-inherence is lost. The true doctrine that 'the everlasting house the soul discovers is always another's,' has become hateful to men and they are 'frantic with fear of losing themselves in others' …One result of this is that they are busily engaged in 'choosing foes.' For if one will not have the City one is driven by the necessity of one's nature to invent a substitute for it, and this cannot be done without finding a scapegoat. When race is separated from race 'and grace prized in schism,' when all our pleasure is to be *inside* some partial and arbitrary group, then of course, we must have 'outsiders' to despise and denounce— Jews, Capitalists, Papists, the Bourgeoisie, what-not—or it is no fun. That is how 'the primal curse' appears on the political level. For that primal curse is, for

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Williams, the refusal or denial of the Identity, the spirit which said in Eden 'Let us

gaze, son of man, on the Acts in contention.' (366)

Thus in Williams' thinking, guilt results in the division of the community into

individuals, represented by the symbolic casting out of the scapegoat from the

community. Williams, of course, holds the Christians belief that there is only one Perfect

Victim who can bring about reconciliation through sacrifice—Christ. Therefore, any

Christian poet's use of the scapegoat, unless the scapegoat is Christ or represents Christ,

will only allow for partial redemption.

In Williams' Christian theology, however, the scapegoat motif is completed by

the doctrine of Substitution. As Christ became a willing scapegoat and thus was, in

Burke's words, "a total cathartic *friend*" (*Permanence* 288) the merger of *action*-- the

assumption of another's guilt-- with the formerly *passive* concept of scapegoat brings in a

new dimension. Williams believes that Christ was not the only one who can willingly

accept the guilt of others. As Christians, we can follow Christ in this way as well. As we

voluntarily take upon ourselves the burden of another, we also exceed the role of mere

scapegoat; we are mysteriously invited to share in the role of savior. "'He saved others,

himself he cannot save' is a *definition* of the Kingdom" (307) writes Lewis.

This complication of the scapegoat role can act almost dialectically as we see in

the poem "Taliessin on the Death of Virgil." At the beginning of the poem, Virgil is

playing the role of scapegoat, dying a pagan's death and bound for Hades. But

Christians, who have already accepted the substitutionary scapegoat in their lives, rush

from the future to aid their hero:

Unborn pieties lived.

Out of the infinity of time to that moment's infinity

they lived, they rushed, they dived below him, they rose

to close with his fall;

…………………………………….

Others he saved; himself he could not save.

………………………………….

Virgil was fathered of his friends.

He lived in their ends.

He was set on the marble of exchange. (19-22, 25, 39-41)

The scapegoat becomes the saved, to become in the future, a savior.

Williams and the Pentad

Burke is perhaps best known for the pentad, five terms through which he studied motive. Act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose make up the pentad, and Burke believed that any complete statement about motives would have to address them (*Grammar* xv). In moving to the Pentad, Burkean criticism thus shifts from an emphasis on the psychology of the reader to an emphasis on the psychology within the poetry. Since the five terms are derived from his study of drama, Burke called them "dramatistic," and he further asserted that the despite his use of some scientific terminology (i.e. ratio), the study of human motivation was not a science but a philosophy (xxiii).

Williams consciously utilized a mythological geography / anatomy for his Arthurian world. As an endleaf to the early editions of the work, he included a map of Europe over which was superimposed the body of a woman. Byzantium was the center, the City, the seat of the Emperor. Caucasia was the earthy, sensual theme, represented on the map by the buttocks. Gaul was the breasts that flowed with the milk of learning. Lateran (Rome) was the hands, a representation of the manual acts of the Mass. Logres was the head, where everything would come together. West of Logres was the mystical sea-wood of Broceliande, source of inspiration and prophecy. Past a certain part of Broceliande was Carbonek, the Castle of the Hallows, and past that, Sarras. Past a different part of Broceliande, at the antipodes, was P'o-Lu.

This scene illustrates first that the cycles are God-centric. In many ways the Emperor is God, or at least God's representative. As the Church is metaphorically a body

and each member acts as a part of the body, Williams drew the entire geography of Europe as a body, which was like the church. Each part or theme had its own role. As long as the parts played the roles they were assigned (preferred the given) the Empire would work together, and Logres could continue to work toward the Parousia: bringing about the Second Coming through the presence of the Grail at Camelot.

Second, the scene Williams has chosen is in many respects dialectical. The measurement, order and reason of Byzantium are balanced by unstructured, wild Broceliande. Logres is between them, "geography breathing geometry, the double-fledged Logos" ("Prelude" I.9). For Williams, double nature represents God, since Christ was God and man. "Double-fledged" means "having two wings"; God with two wings also connotes the Holy Spirit. In one of those word plays that Burke loves, the double-fledged Logos causes the reader to simultaneously "hear" the similar-sounding "double-fledged *Logres*." This idea of the double nature will recur many times throughout the cycle, always in a positive light. When the nature is split, or when only one part of the nature is embraced, disorder and chaos take over, as when the questing beast appeared "in the blank between the queen's substance and the queen" ("Coming of Palomides" 132).

As this God-centered, double-natured land waits for its destiny, the reader expects the next emphasis to be on the agent, King Arthur. A key to understanding Williams' vision of the agent lies in the epigraph that opens *Taliessin through Logres:* "Unde est, quod non operatio propria propter essentiam, sed haec propter illam habet ut sit" (*De Monarchia*, I, iii) (translated: "Hence it is that the proper operation does not exist for the sake of the essence, but the essence has its being for the sake of the operation")([18]).

31

Reworded, the agent must exist to serve the action. The Kingdom awaits someone to serve it and fulfill its destiny.

This person, the agent, was to have been Arthur. He is the center upon which the Matter of Britain turns. Events take a wrong turn, however. On the very day of his coronation, as Lancelot brings Guinevere toward the king and the throne, Arthur looks at her and wonders "the king made for the kingdom, or the kingdom made for the king?" ("Crowning of Arthur" 63). The answer to that question rests in the epigraph, above. The essence has its being for the sake of the operation. When Arthur questions that order, he is reenacting the Fall. "Thwart drove his current against the current of Merlin : / in beleaguered Sophia they sang of the dolorous blow" (64-65).

At that moment, Arthur lost for his kingdom the destiny it had awaited. Separation, an ominous sign in Williams' work, is often represented in both Burke and Williams in relation to money. As Burke notes in the *Rhetoric,* "the divisive aspects of money pervade the modern rhetorical situation with an especially urgent need for 'mystifying' terms that proclaim the ideal unity of people thus set apart" (129). In "Bors to Elayne: on the King's Coins," Williams reflects on the term "exchange." In this poem, Bors praises Elayne for caring for their household:

> At the turn of the day, and none only to earn;
>
> in the day of the turn, and none only to pay;
>
> for the hall is raised to the power of exchange of all
>
> by the small spread organisms of your hands. (24-27)

Meanwhile, in London, the King has decided to mint coins. Although the economists see this as a step in the right direction, Bors is worried. He tells Elayne, "I saw that this was

the true end of our making" (52). Here "end" has multiple meanings. As it means

"result," he sees that the result of all that the King and the round table have worked for is

these coins which will bear the "dead head" of the King to other lands—but which in

themselves can clothe and feed no one. As "end" means terminus, once Exchange has

been replaced with coins in peoples' economic relationships, there will be no more

making, no more creative use of Exchange to better one another. When Taliessin saw the

king's symbol on the coins:

> Taliessin's look darkened; his hand shook
>
> while he touched the dragons; he said 'We had a good thought.
>
> Sir, if you made verse you would doubt symbols.
>
> I am afraid of the little loosed dragons.
>
> When the means are autonomous, they are deadly; when words
>
> escape from verse they hurry to rape souls;
>
> when sensation slips from intellect, expect the tyrant;
>
> the brood of carriers levels the good they carry.
>
> We have taught our images to be free; are we glad? (65-73)

By substituting the dramatistic word "agency" for "means," and assuming that the word

"autonomous" relates to the "agent," the above reads, "When the agencies are the agent,

they are deadly." Means are to serve an end, not the end the means--"the king for the

kingdom or the kingdom for the king?" Burke claims that "the words of the poet are not

puppets, but acts" (*Attitude* 336). In the same way, though the king sees the coins as his

"puppets," to the extent that they have his head on them, they also are not puppets but

acts, and let loose, they will be ungovernable—they will become autonomous.

In *Attitudes toward History,* Burke writes, "Money is *per se* an alienating device, leading to impersonality and individualism" (316). This claim about the essential division that money causes is mirrored here; words escape from verse, sensation from intellect. Williams terms this "convenient heresy," since as Burke frequently writes, money is the ultimate secular god-term (*Grammar* 355-56). In Williams, division is the result of the Fall, as we see in "The Prayers of the Pope:" "He felt within him the themes divide, / each dreadfully autonomous in its own corporal place, / its virtue monopolized, its grace prized, in schism" (128-130).

In Williams, autonomy causes not only impersonality and individualism, secular vices, but it divides members of the Body of Christ from the rest of the Body. Thus autonomy is an especially dangerous state for the Christian. When Arthur uses his assets for his own purposes, this autonomy results. In "Bors to Elayne: on the King's Coins," Williams gives the Archbishop these final words:

> … the everlasting house the soul discovers
>
> is always another's; we must lose our own ends;
>
> we must always live in the habitation of our lovers,
>
> my friend's shelter for me, mine for him.
>
> …………………………………………
>
> for the wealth of the self is the health of the self exchanged. (80-83, 86)

Since the person who should have been the Agent, Arthur, chose to become autonomous, he could no longer be an effective agent, as he was turned too much inward. During the Mass in "The Star of Percivale," "the king in the elevation beheld and loved himself crowned" (35). This self-love ultimately resulted in Arthur's generative powers

focusing on the one most like himself (his sister) and the incestuous conception of Mordred.

The Agent must then become Merlin. It might seem at first that Galahad would be the logical Agent, but Galahad is actually the Agency. The Act is the bringing of the Grail to Logres (to the extent that it is possible following Arthur's errors), accomplished through the person of Galahad. Galahad is not so much a personality as a means. His nature is such that the Grail can be achieved through him. Merlin, as the agent, however, performs three crucial actions. He disguises Helayne so that Lancelot will believe she is Guinevere, he takes the shape of a wolf and carries the baby Galahad to safety, and he and Blanchefleur foster the young Galahad.   Once Merlin conveys Galahad to Camelot and seats him in the Perilous Seat at the Round Table, the Agency is set into motion, and Merlin is free to leave Arthur's court.

In Williams' and in many other versions, the centerpiece of Arthurian romance is the Grail Quest, so examining what Williams wrote about the Grail yields insight into his portrayal of motivation in the cycles. In *The Arthurian Torso,* Williams claims that the Grail is, "that which in the knowledge of Christendom is the unifying act, perilous and perpetual, universal and individual" (197). While at first this quote seems to be referring to the Grail Quest, it becomes apparent that Williams means the first appearance of the Grail, in the Last Supper-- that is, the institution of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is a quintessential Burkean symbol, though Burke rarely if ever mentioned it. It is an act commemorating another act, symbolizing the ultimate identification of the self with the scapegoat in ritually consuming the scapegoat and becoming co-substantial. So the central Act of the Taliessin cycle is the Eucharist, symbolized by the Grail.

Williams also chose the Grail because it stood against the Gnostic heresy of "the unreality of matter and the evil of the flesh" (*Arthurian* 198). While the Eucharist was substantially the Body and Blood of Christ, it was even more substantially, in a different sense, a cup made of some material and filled with wine, and a piece of bread. As I have already noted, this paradox of substance signals for Burke opportunities for rhetorical power (*Grammar* 52). One of Williams' main themes in the Taliessin cycle is the defeat of duality and the celebration of paradox; witness his frequent use of combined terms such as "twy-nature" and "double-fledged." The Grail is itself one of these double-natured entities. "This was His very death; it was also His very Resurrection; it was, all ways, His Incarnation. It was a double Act; there was a kind of exchange in it. The Church gave itself, and Christ gave Himself, and the two were united" (*Arthurian* 198). Williams also echoes Burke's action/passion contrast:

The Flesh and the Blood, invoked by the act of the celebrant were there in their own full act—and were yet passive. They were carried, and were unmoving; they were eaten, yet they themselves received the eater into themselves; they were separate, yet they were one. They were the visibility of the invisible (206).

The Eucharist is an act, yet as it is performed it becomes an aspect of the scene, as it unites the partaker with the Body of Christ.

Galahad is reaffirmed as the Agency in the poem "Percivale at Carbonek." In this poem, the central Act of the cycle takes place; the Grail is achieved. But most of the poem centers around Galahad's preparation for entering Carbonek. To enter Carbonek, he does not need to perform some heroic feat; he is passive, and his request is for Bors to

act as the kinsman of Lancelot and grant him forgiveness in his father's name. "'Forgive Us,' the High Prince said, 'for Our existence; / forgive the means of grace and the hope of glory. / In the name of Our father, forgive Our mother for Our birth'" (38-40). Only after he receives Bors' forgiveness will he enter Carbonek.

Of Burke's pentad, only purpose remains to be discussed in relation to Williams' poems. Before Arthur's "fall," the purpose of the Kingdom of Logres was to unite sense and intellect and bring about the Second Coming:

> The Empire, in the peace of the Emperor,
>
> expected perfection; it awaited the Second Coming
>
> of the Union, of the twy-natured single Person,
>
> …………………………………………..
>
> in them looked on the sea, and across the sea
>
> saw coming, from the world of the Three-in-One,
>
> in a rich container, the Blood of the Deivirilis,
>
> communicated everywhere, but there singly borne,
>
> and the morn of the Trinity rising through the sea to the sun.
>
> (*Region*, "Prelude" 49-51, 59-63)

Once Arthur "fell" and the second coming was no longer possible, there was a contingent plan; the worthy knights Galahad, Percivale and Bors would achieve the Grail and return it to Sarras, and the doctrines of exchange and substitution would be perpetuated in Logres by a select few. As Merlin says in "The Calling of Taliessin:"

> If in the end anything fail of all
>
> purposed by our mother and the Emperor, if the term

be held less firm in Camelot than in Carbonek,

as well my sister and I may guess now

and prepare the ambiguous rite for either chance

in the kingdom of Arthur; if cease the coming from the seas

at the evil luck of a blow dolorously struck,

it may be that this gathering of souls, that the king's poet's household

shall follow in Logres and Britain the spiritual roads

that the son of Helayne shall trace westward through the trees

………………………………………………………………..

they are strown with a high habit, with the doctrine of largesse (415-424, 429).

Williams' description of purpose in the Taliessin cycles is a good example of how throughout these poems he incorporates echoes and parallels to the Christian monomyth. As God had a contingent plan for His purpose of salvation after Adam's fall, Williams also provided in these poem cycles another way to bring about the purpose that was destined.

Identification

Identification as a rhetorical tool is one of Burke's most important contributions, and thus is at the core of any critical effort that is based on Burke's theories. Burke opens *A Rhetoric of Motives* with two memorable examples of his own literary criticism. In both of them, he identifies the poet with the major character in the poem-- Milton with Samson and Arnold with Empedocles and Sohrab-- and shows how the poet's own conflicts are "resolved" in the poetry (3-10). Williams also left many strong hints of identification with his chief character, among them the obvious one, that Taliessin is a Christian poet.

As already noted, Williams had unusual relationships with women. While he married in 1910 and remained physically faithful to his wife Florence, he had a series of "intellectual" romantic relationships with women. The first and most influential of these was with a woman he met through his employment at Oxford University Press. Her name was Phyllis Jones, and Williams fell in love with her. From 1924 until Jones left to be married in 1934, they worked together and Williams often wrote poetry to her. He gave her the name "Celia," as he had named his wife "Michal" and would later name Lois Lang-Sims "Lalage".

In *The Figure of Beatrice,* Williams makes a case for the kind of experience that he had with Phyllis Jones. After Beatrice's death, Dante had a second love who he called "The Lady of the Window" (42). Williams wonders if, as in many cases, the first "Beatrician" experience leads to marriage, what is to be made of the second image? The

beholder in most cases will be married already, but the marital state of the beholder does not lessen the power of the image. Williams calls on the reader to recall the Ways of Affirmation and Negation. In the first vision, Romantic Love is affirmed in all ways, including the physical. With the second vision, the beholder is allowed to feel love, but he must free himself from physical desire towards it (*Beatrice* 49). Williams writes of the spouse's probable objection to her husband's adoration of a second vision, "Natural jealousy and supernatural zeal… have brought us to regard that great opportunity of the second image rather as a sin than as a goodness" (49). He goes on to assert that jealousy should be considered as much a sin as adultery. He concludes his argument by claiming that "if it were possible to create in marriage a mutual adoration towards the second image… and also a mutual limitation of the method of it, I do not know what new liberties and powers might not be achieved" (50).

The Figure of Beatrice was published in 1943, almost ten years after Jones left the Oxford University Press to marry. While Williams' critical work on Dante is rightfully considered to be scholarly and influential, at least this portion of it appears to be much more of a rationalization of his own behavior with regard to his marriage and Miss Jones. Lois Lang-Sims appeared on the scene at about the time that *Beatrice* was published. She had written to Williams asking him about the actual person of the beloved and its relationship to the Beatrician vision (*Lalage* 23). This initiated a correspondence and a strange relationship in which, when they met, Williams assigned Lang-Sims tasks such as memorizing Milton and physically punished her when she failed (Fredrick 32-37).

In her published account of this relationship, Lang-Sims describes how Williams "lived out" the Taliessin myth. "Charles had worked for the [Oxford University] Press

for thirty-five years…. In his mythical world it was sometimes Byzantium, sometimes Camelot… with Sir Humphrey Milford in the alternating roles of the Emperor and the High King" (*Lalage* 27-28). Williams himself wrote to her, "Some years ago there was begun a Company . . scattered and unknown to each other . . called of the Co-inherence" (27). In fact, he sent her a copy of the "Promulgation" of this Company. Its guidelines included formal union of members with one another and the practice of coinherence, substitution, and exchange (30). Williams later assigned Lang-Sims five tasks and wrote,

> If it seems to you for a year worth—making this movement? Daring this
>
> discipline? Practising this ritual? Playing this game? Then we all march at your
>
> service….You are young and you are wise at once; each in the other—
>
> Blanchfleur (who was Percivale's sister and foster-warden of Galahad) and a girl
>
> slave (36-37).

As Blanchefleur was Taliessin's true, though unconsummated love, Williams casts Lang-Sims in the dual roles of lover and slave. These two roles for women recur repeatedly in both the poetry and in Williams' real-life relationships.

Williams gave Lang-Sims some poems (unpublished at that time, but later to appear in *Region of the Summer Stars*). As Lang-Sims relates, these were "The Founding of the Company" and

> the poems describing the relationship between the King's poet and the slave girl
>
> whom he sees as an image of the Princess Dindrane whom he loves. (Dindrane
>
> was, of course, Phillida or Celia: in the poetry Taliessin loses her to a Convent,
>
> more acceptably than by her two successive marriages in real life.) I was, not
>
> surprisingly, confused and bemused by the way in which the "Company"

appeared to be at the same time the "household" of the King's poet in Charles's

own highly original version of the Arthurian myth, and the circle of his own

personal friends. Dimly I perceived that the key to unraveling this confusion was

to be found in Charles's total identification of the King's poet, Taliessin, with

himself (*Lalage* 38-39)

In "Neither Trust nor Suspicion: Kenneth Burke's Rhetoric and Hermeneutics,"

Timothy Crusius suggests considering Burke's method of "discounting," in which, "as

one looks at one thing, one reads something else into it" (81). Burke illustrates this

technique in *A Rhetoric of Motives* as he reads Milton's "Samson" and "discounts" it to

reveal that the poem expresses Milton's ambiguous desire for suicide (6). Williams, as

we know, would have said, "This also is Thou; neither is this Thou" (*Beatrice* 8), and

perhaps would have gone on to clarify: "when a poem is said to have two meanings, both

are included in the poem; we have only one set of words. The meanings, that is, are

united; and the poem is their union" (45). As Burke read Milton, a Christian,

"committing suicide" (a sin) in his poetry, so one might read Williams as committing

adultery in his. In both cases, the author can technically avoid the sin which is beckoning

to him while artistically not only committing the sin, but justifying it.

There are other, less controversial, possibilities of Charles Williams' self-

identification with Taliessin. Williams describes the poet's nature and his task and gives

Taliessin a "storybook ending." Williams did use Celtic mythology as his source for

Taliessin's origin (Dowdy 7), so much of the content of "The Calling of Taliessin" is a

retelling of the myth. There are some details, though, that can be discounted to reveal

qualities that can probably be identified with the author. The importance of the double-

nature has already been described. Williams portrays the poet as having a double nature, thus, perhaps, being closer to God's nature than a "normal" man: "striving in his young body with the double living / of the breath in the lung and the sung breath in the brain" (33-34). Here Williams makes a play on breath as life and breath as inspiration. As the poet receives inspiration, he is identified with the Holy Spirit, who is known as "wind" and said to be the inspirer of Holy Scripture (Dowdy 7). In addition, Taliessin possesses qualities which set him aside from "ordinary" men; powers of language were his from before birth: "before speech came to pass, I was full of the danger of loquacity" ("Calling" 63). His nature is mysterious-- "It is a doubt if my body is flesh or fish" (64)-- and he stands apart from the rest of the human race: "no woman will ever wish to bed me" (65). The poet must frequent the dangerous sea-wood of Broceliande, and

> his heart
>
> beat lest dread or desolation wrecked his mind
>
> so that he fell from his kind, and the grand art failed—
>
> control lost and all sense crossed (130-133)

In other words, the poet runs the risk, as he enters that forest in search of inspiration, of finding madness there instead. Without a doubt, Williams believed that as "the king's poet," he was different than other men. Here he employs double nature not in a general sense as it can describe all Christians-- human nature taking on Christ's nature-- but to highlight his special role as the inspired poet/prophet.

The poet's task is described in "The Star of Percivale" and "The Founding of the Company." In "The Star of Percivale," the poet serves as a link between another inspired artist, Percivale, and the audience. As Taliessin sings to the "borrowed" music, a maid

"heard, rose, ran fleetly to fall at his feet" (6, 8). The maid mistakes the messenger for

the message: "Lord, art thou he that cometh? Take me for thine" (10). The poet,

however, cautions her not to make this error. "See thou do it not; I too am a man" (12).

Williams himself frequently had women admirers who were drawn to him after hearing

him lecture (Fredrick 32). In order to live up to *Taliessin's* epigraph, the king for the

kingdom, not the kingdom for the king, one must point idolizing fans toward the end that

one lives for. Thus Taliessin's response, "More than the voice is the vision, the kingdom

than the king" (14).   Again we see the dangerous line that Williams walked. If he could

react perfectly, as Taliessin did here, he would fulfill his mission as poet. Williams was

not Taliessin, however, and the danger, not just of sexual sin, but of sins of pride, was

constant. While he could write his apologia in the Taliessin poems, his own life was not

so tidy; his wife was bitter to the end of her life about his indiscretions (especially with

Phyllida).

      "The Founding of the Company" is one of the poems that Williams gave to Lois

Lang-Sims, and it probably describes his own life more closely than any of the others in

the cycles. As he wrote to Lang-Sims, "Some years ago there was begun a Company . . .

scattered and unknown to each other . . . called of the Co-inherence" (27). The Company

did exist, in some fashion, within Williams' circle of acquaintances, and he, as Taliessin,

was the center of it.   It was unplanned--"a few found themselves in common," (4)

unorganized-- "it was known by no name, least his own," (7) and based on love. The

Company was Christian-- "grounded in the Acts of the Throne" (13)-- and democratic--

"having no decision, no vote or admission, / but for the single note that any soul / took of

its own election of the Way" (15-17). It had three degrees. The members of the first

degree "were those who lived by a frankness of honourable exchange" (43). The second degree involved substitution. "Whenever need was drew breath daily / in another's place, according to the grace of the Spirit / 'dying each other's life, living each other's death.'" (62-64). The third and highest degree, with only a few members, was "where the full salvation of all souls / is seen, and their co-inhering" (84-85). Lang-Sims describes meeting Williams' circle of friends after his death and wondering what roles each of them played in The Company (18).

Taliessin also embodies Williams' emotions as he labored with his writing. "The king's poet ached with belated verse; / he took part against himself; his heart waited / for his voice, and again his voice for his dumb heart" (113-115). Likewise, we can read Williams when we see Taliessin's ambivalence about being recognized as a leader: "What should I do, calling / myself a master, and falling so to P'o-l'u?" (123-124). When he asks if he is to be superfluous (as any poet is), he is comforted by Dinadan in a speech that could well put forth Williams' rule for living:

Labour without grudge is without grief,

and the dayspring will have its head where it bids.

Any may be; one must. To neighbour

whom and as the Omnipotence wills is a fetch

of grace; the lowest wretch is called greatest. (141-145)

During the reign of Camelot,

The Company throve by love, by increase of peace,

by the shyness of saving and being saved in others—

the Christ-taunting and Christ-planting maxim

> which throughout Logres the excellent absurdity held. (162-165)

This idea of humility or shyness in the face of great favor, and equally in the face of great humiliation, emerged in Williams' poetry as a concept known as "defeated irony," described by Lewis as "irony with its sting drawn, accepted by the victim with laughter at its 'excellent absurdity'" (355). Williams lived by this concept, since, as Cavaliero writes in his Introduction to *Letters to Lalage,* "If nothing was certain, then everything was possible—even hope" (8). It is important to note that even as one can identify sins or weaknesses in Williams' poetry that are likely identifiable with the man himself, one should not overlook the positive aspects of himself that Williams revealed in the poems. Although he may have had areas of weakness, he was also a Christian with great charisma, who taught with wisdom and who inspired many. This is the true legacy that he has left.

The poem "The Prayers of the Pope" tells something of the end of the company. Williams was writing these poems (in *Region of the Summer Stars*) during World War II; they were published in 1944. Oxford University Press had moved its operations from London to Oxford, and Williams was living there away from his family and many of the friends who had formed "The Company." Perhaps he sensed that he himself did not have much time remaining; he died in May of 1945. The poem begins as "Taliessin gathered his people before the battle" (176). In the speech that follows, Taliessin speaks of the short time remaining to them and remembers his youth. He releases them and "restore[s] / again to God the once-permitted lieutenancy" (191-192). One of the members of the company asks to "live again the moment of ratification" (200), almost as if he were renewing wedding vows on the deathbed of his beloved. Taliessin answers:

What skill have We had but to be the will

of the whole Company?—We a needful superfluity,

the air in which the summer stars shine,

nay, less—the mode only of their placing and gracing.

It is a command; swear. (204-208)

The scene ends as "all the household exchanged the kiss of peace" (211); characteristically for Taliessin, and for Williams, an act of exchange is the last act of The Company. Who knows whether a scene like this actually took place in Williams' own Company, or whether he wrote the ending he would have liked The Company to have.

Williams, Burke, and the dialectic

Arguably, Burke's greatest contribution for Christian readers is his theory of the hierarchical dialectic, which when encountered produces transformation and rebirth. For Burke, hierarchy and dialectic are closely related. As a term encounters its antithesis, a third term must be realized, but the third term must be one that produces a progression. As Burke comments on Plato's types of government, he notes, "We are saying that to leave the four kinds merely confronting one another in their diversity would have been 'dialectical' in the sense of the parliamentary jangle, but that this attempt to arrange them hierarchically transforms the dialectical into an 'ultimate' order" (*Rhetoric* 188-189). For Burke, any ultimate order will culminate in what he calls "God-terms;" for the Christian, any ultimate order will culminate with God Himself.

Although dialectic can apply in many secular situations, as Burke illustrates, it bears special weight for Christians who identify themselves as having been "born again." Burke explains this in *A Grammar of Motives* when he discusses the results of the sacrifice of the Scapegoat. "The alienating of iniquities from the self to the scapegoat amounts to a *rebirth* of the self. In brief, it would promise a conversion to a new principle of motivation—and when such a transformation is conceived in terms of the familial or substantial, it amounts to a change of parentage" (407).

Williams uses hierarchical dialectic in the poem "The Vision of the Empire." As Burke defines humans as the "symbol using" animals (*Religion* 1), Williams employs the same nomenclature here. He uses both kinds of antitheses that Burke describes, the

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counterpart-- *intelligo* and *credo* (*delta, 5*)-- and the opposite-- the Emperor and the Headless Emperor (*theta,* 20, 33). Williams makes a careful distinction between the two types; while counterpart and paradox are a valuable illustration of the concept of coinherence, opposites illustrate duality. Because duality was one of the heresies he described in "Prelude," (III, 1-3), it could not represent the fullness of the Empire; only true coinherence, as of the Trinity, or the body, could. This echoes Burke's distinction between dialectic-- opposing terms-- and hierarchical or transformational dialectic, in which two antithetical terms can combine or coinhere to approach transcendence.

I find it interesting that although Burke does seem to be able to situate Christ as the perfect example of the scapegoat, he does not also specifically describe him as the perfect example of rebirth through dialectic. For if Christ represents Good, Life, and Freedom, in His death on the cross He encounters His antitheses: Evil, Death, and Slavery. In His nearly literal Rebirth, He is changed, since before His Passion he was God but not Savior. Burke does approach this truth in the *Grammar* as he describes God's change of attitude toward humanity:

> Theological notions of creation and re-creation bring us nearest to the concept of total acts….Here we have something like the conversion of God himself, brought about by Christ's sacrifice (a total action, a total passion). From the godlike nature came a godlike act that acted upon God himself. And as regards mankind, it amounts to a radical change in the very structure of the Universe, since it changed God's attitude towards men, and in God's attitude towards men resides the ultimate ground of human action. (19-20)

Burke may or may not have been a Christian believer; he was comfortable enough with paradox that it would probably delight him to leave his reader wondering. Nonetheless, he uses Christianity as a frame for so much of his thinking and his writing that it is easy for the Christian scholar to "appropriate" Burke's thought without much modification. What then is the difference, the place where Burke and the Williams, an overtly Christian writer, part ways? In *Attitudes toward History,* Burke writes,

One wants to foretell the course of history. One wants to know "the trend." So one draws up a simple questionnaire, on a post card…. [O]ne tabulates the returns….[B]y a matter of simple arithmetic you can learn the "attitude of the public" on this   important issue. And you size up the "trend of history" accordingly. As a matter of fact, the expression of the vote… tells you *nothing.* The future is really disclosed *by finding out what people can sing about.* (334-335)

In the Taliessin cycle, what Williams "sings" about is the "contingent plan." What is a contingent plan after all but a dialectic of plan, failure, transformed plan? While Burke stops at hierarchy, Williams sings of hierarchy transformed:

The Table ascended; each in turn lordliest and least—

slave and squire, woman and wizard, poet and priest;

interchanged adoration, interdispersed prayer,

the ruddy pillar of the Infant was the passage of the porphyry stair.

…………………………………………………

manacled by the web, in the web made free;

there was no capable song for the joy in me.

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("Taliessin at Lancelot's Mass", 45-48, 51-52)

As Williams might say about Burke, "Flesh knows what spirit knows, / but spirit knows it

knows" ("Taliessin in the Rose-Garden", 163-164).

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