ROCZNIKI HUMANISTYCZNE
Tom LXIII, zeszyt 11 – 2015
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.18290/rh.2015.63.11-15

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A MINOR APOCALYPSE? THE APOCALYPTIC IN CHARLES WILLIAMS'S *SHADOWS OF ECSTASY*

A b s t r a c t. The study examines *Shadows of Ecstasy* (1933), the earliest novel of Charles Williams (1886-1945)—British poet, playwright, theological writer, literary critic, bibliographer, and author of seven works of fiction—in the context of the apocalyptic as discussed by Barry Brummett (1991), Douglas Robinson (1998), and other scholars. Based on the characteristics presented by Brummet, Andrzej Sławomir Kowalczyk traces apocalyptic motifs in the novel, drawing attention to both its socio-political and religious/spiritual aspects. Kowalczyk comes to the conclusion that despite some evident allusions to the biblical apocalyptic, Williams's text is more ambiguous than its biblical hypotext in terms of its ideological/moral significance, raising a number of open-ended questions. This, in turn, extends its apocalyptic "revelation" onto the reader, who is invited to rethink her/his perception of Western culture/civilization, making room for some spiritual/metaphysical elements in the materialistic outlook predominant in the 20th century.

Key words: Charles Williams; the apocalyptic; 20th-century British fiction; the spiritual in literature.

1.

As Douglas Robinson (1998) observes, the terms "literature" and "apocalyptic" "overlap so extensively as to be virtually coterminous" (360). Not only can apocalyptic writing be regarded as "literary" but also, he further contends, "all literature can easily be read as apocalyptic," chiefly for two reasons (360). First, apocalyptic imagery has been rooted in culture so deeply "as to be virtually ubiquitous;" second, following Frank Kermode, Robinson believes the classic narrative structure of rising action-climax-denouement

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"to have been modelled on the apocalypse," both being "grounded in a human need for closure" (360).[1] In a similar vein, other scholars tend to underline the fact that the understanding of the "apocalyptic" is far from unambiguous (Brummett 1991: 7–9; Croteau 2009: 6–7). Biblical researchers also notice that even the fundamental recognition of apocalypse as a literary genre, represented most conspicuously by the Book of Daniel and St. John's Book of Revelation, involves "a *way of thinking* that emerges in various contexts" (Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman III 2003: 19, emphasis added).[2] Indeed, certain biblical motifs can be found—in a more or less secularized form—in contemporary apocalyptic texts. One could mention, for instance, the overwhelming lack of hope associated with an apparent triumph of evil, the idea of God's sovereignty, different visions of heaven, ethical rules encouraging man's perseverance, the second coming of Christ, and the emerging of some new world/universe (Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman III 2003: 19–20).

The above reservations notwithstanding, it is possible to distinguish a set of criteria characteristic of the apocalyptic, like those proposed by Barry Brummett (1991). In this study I intend to apply his observations to the analysis and interpretation of *Shadows of Ecstasy*, a novel by Charles Williams (1886–1945), British poet, playwright, theological writer, literary critic, bibliographer, and author of seven novels, better known as "supernatural thrillers." Written in 1925/26 and originally titled *The Black Bastard*, the novel was thoroughly revised and published only in 1933 as *Shadows of Ecstasy*, after his four fictional texts had come out (Hadfield 1983: 81, 92–93). Although several readings of the book have been proposed (e.g. in Howard 1983, Dunning 2000, Ashenden 2008), none of them centres on its apocalyptic elements.[3] It is my contention that the critical recognition of these components can enrich the novel's understanding, simultaneously shedding more light on its major spiritual conflict—one between Christianity and esoterism/Hermeticism. The question posed in the title of this study

[1] On the other hand, Robinson (1998) does point out the differences, the most important of which are pragmatic ones, related to the truth-value of certain texts (360–61). Still, his informed discussion of the issue leads him to the conclusion that drawing "clear-cut distinctions between 'literature' and 'apocalyptic' [is] ultimately impossible" (364).

[2] Likewise, in her diachronic study of the Apocalypse, Martha Himmelfarb (2010) observes that although "the apocalypse as a literary genre fell into disuse, the ancient apocalypses and their images and ideas maintained their hold on the imagination of Christians" (136).

[3] In his journal article, David J. Leigh, S.J. (2007) makes some rather general remarks on Williams's three "Apocalyptic Novels," but he does not mention *Shadows of Ecstasy* among them.

("A minor apocalypse?") concerns not only the motif's role in *Shadows of Ecstasy* but, more generally, its relevance in Williams's view of his era.[4]

2.

Discussing modern apocalyptic contexts, Brummett (1991) presents a number of characteristics which can be applied to apocalypse-related literary texts. First, he notes that "the change or threat that creates the apocalyptic [. . .] must be an unexpected one" (24). Another key factor is the inexplicability of the change (24). Also, this transition is more often than not associated with "the failure of established belief systems" (24). The resulting catastrophic events "plung[e] a bewildered people into chaos and anomie" (28). Last but not least, Brummett (1991) contends that "the apocalyptic situation is psychological, [. . .] it is entirely one of perceptions" (28). In other words, the situation cannot be presented in unequivocal, objective, or historical terms, for it always concerns a particular group of people.

With these general observations in mind, let us now have a closer look at Williams's *Shadows of Ecstasy*. The novel is wound around the central (hero-)villain, Nigel Considine, a European who spent a number of years in Africa and managed to master the secret ritual of "transmutation of energy," which allowed him to prolong his lifespan to two hundred years (83).[5] His ultimate aim is to be able to eradicate death eternally by means of an occult energy. The "shadows" mentioned in the title of the novel, or sublimated forms of the energy, include poetry, erotic love, religion, material goods, and kingship and are connected with particular characters. Among them are (i) Roger Ingram, Professor of Applied Literature at the University of London (poetry); (ii) Philip Travers, a young man passionately in love with Rosamond Murchison, believed by others to be "stuckup and not quite intelligent" (13) (erotic love); (iii) Father Ian Caithness, a parish priest of the Church of England (religion); (iv) Colonel Montroux, Considine's subordi-

[4] The question has also been meant as an allusion to the English title (*A Minor Apocalypse*) of *Mała Apokalipsa* (1979), a famous novel by Polish author Tadeusz Konwicki (1926-2015). In it, Konwicki both depicts the demise of the communist system in the Polish People's Republic (PRL) and questions some stereotypical images of the Polish democratic opposition. By analogy, Williams's *Shadows of Ecstasy* can be rendered as a commentary on antebellum England (and Europe).

[5] All page references are to the Regent College Publishing reprint of the novel (Williams 2003 [1933]).

nate and Judas-like traitor (material goods); and (v) Inkamazi, a descendant of Chaka the Zulu, educated and living in London (kingship).

As Thomas Howard (1983) contends, from Considine's standpoint the abovementioned "shadows" are only deterrents to "the realm of pure and undying ecstasy of which [they] are merest hints" (24). Furthermore, Considine believes—and, to a degree, demonstrates—that energy wasted on trying to satisfy such earthly desires could be transmuted into the genuine power of immortality. As the plot progresses, the "shadows" in the lives of particular characters are more or less abruptly juxtaposed with Considine's teaching and actions, leaving no soul unaffected, which constitutes the ideological layer of the novel.

This pivotal idea—however enigmatic it may seem to the present-day reader—is nonetheless set against the background of particularized socio-political events to be discussed below. The book's socio-political thread begins with some news from Africa concerning the death of Christian missionaries (16). Gradually, through conversations of the main characters, there emerges a picture of what is going to become an unprecedented, truly revolutionary change in the history of Europe. The narrator depicts the situation as follows:

> It seemed that something very unusual was happening in Africa. To begin with, all communication with the interior had completely ceased. Telegraphs had ceased to function, railways had been cut, roads had been blocked. By such roads as had not been blocked there were emerging against all the outer districts hostile bodies of natives, some so small as to be less than a raid, some so large as to mean an invasion, and at that, wherever they appeared, a victorious invasion. [. . .] The French had "suffered a set-back"; the Spaniards had fallen back towards the coast. Communications with Kenya, with Nigeria, with Abyssinia, with Zanzibar, had ceased. Raids had taken place on the English territories in the South. Air-investigation was being undertaken. The powers were in touch and were taking necessary steps. (22)

As the passage proves, the events are of importance to a number of European states, and the conflict is introduced as racial rather than political (Africans vs. white people). Furthermore, the reader learns that airplanes have been sent to investigate the range of the problem but "hardly any have returned" (23). What is referred to as "the African trouble" (54) takes Europe, epitomized by the English, the French and the Spaniards, by surprise:

> It became clear that the "hordes" consisted [. . .] of highly-disciplined and well-supplied armies. In the north of Africa the territory held by the European forces grew daily smaller; [. . .] The dominion of South Africa was sending out expeditions, of which no news returned. (54)

Much later, it is revealed that the Africans are capable of using their bombers, submarines, suicide pilots, fanatical (mostly female) soldiers known as "the Devotees," as well as white officers (127-28). Indeed, as Sir Bernard Travers, a retired surgeon who represents the most sceptical voice in the novel, puts it: "It must be *the first time in the history of the world* that those powers have been united" (129, emphasis added). Likewise, the narrator makes a number of authoritative comments which indicate a state of general disbelief and astonishment in Europe: "That the African armies should be able to operate destructively by sea as well as by land *was a shock* even to instructed opinion" (55, emphasis added). In light of Brummett's (1991) arguments presented above, it can be said that Williams does introduce the novel's events in a manner which enables the reader to perceive them as apocalyptic, for they are indeed "unexpected," "inexplicable," and "associated with a failure of belief system" (cf. Brummett 1991: 24).

The latter condition is conspicuous in the Proclamation of the Allied Supremacies of Africa, issued by the so-called High Executive, the leader of the African revolution. The documents are worth considering in greater detail, for they delineate the ideological premises of the rebels. Initially, the purpose of the Africans is "the freeing of the […] continent from the government and occupation of the white race" (43). The political, though, is immediately associated with the spiritual, as the High Executive aims at "the restoration to mankind of powers which have been forgotten or neglected" (43). Even more importantly, the leader of the insurgents announces that "the great age of intellect is done," further stipulating that "mankind must advance in the future by paths which the white peoples have neglected and to ends which they have not understood" (43). The High Executive also asserts that the present time is "a higher crisis than any since mankind first emerged from among the great beasts and knew himself" (43). The African movement, therefore, is far from being a local revolt; on the contrary, it appears a salient moment in the history of mankind. Accordingly, the High Executive proposes a novel manner of periodization, the Proclamation being written "in the First Year of the Second Evolution of Man" (46).

Since Europe's reaction to the declaration amounts to sending more troops to Africa, Great Britain relocating its armies from India (55), the tone of the second Proclamation is sharper: "If the powers of Europe are determined to force war upon Africa," the High Executive stipulates, "Africa will be compelled to open war upon Europe" (57–58). And yet, rhetorically and ideologically, the political is intertwined with the spiritual/religious; for instance, in the second text there appear such phrases as "the gospel which is the birthright of the African peoples," "a message of hope," and "the final devotion of conscious being" (58). Furthermore, while addressing his black followers, the High Executive urges them "to the everlasting sacrifice" and even traverses the Bible: "*Come, ye blessed, inherit the things laid up for you from the foundations of the world*" (58–59, italics original).

Other elements of the apocalyptic distinguished by Brummett (1991), chaos and anomie, are noticeable at the outset of the novel and come to the fore as the frontline approaches Britain. A sense of impending cataclysm is communicated to the reader by virtue of quoting unsettling newspaper headlines ("*Africans Still Advancing; Hordes in the Nine Valley; French Defeat in Tangier*" [21, italics original]), reporting the cases of racial street violence ("crowds began to parade the streets, booing and cheering and chasing any dark-skinned stranger who showed himself" [55]) or, more straightforwardly, via the narrator's remarks:

> The reaction of all these events on the money market was considerable […] Nothing definite was known; (55)

> A shiver of panic touched finance, allied to that other panic which had already touched the extreme villages of Southern Europe. Nervous voices made enquiries over telephones in England as nervous eyes watched aeroplanes over the Mediterranean. […] Something shook civilization, as it had been shaken a hundred times before, but that something loomed now in half-fancied forms of alien powers, of negroes flying through the air and Jews withdrawing their gold. Day by day the tremors quickened. (56)

As the story progresses, the reader has a chance of virtually "feeling" the atmosphere of London in the state of chaos, for violent events are frequently described from the perspective of the street, with crowds' reactions being written out, as it were, and channelled through working class-accent-marked voices, both joined and individualized. This is the case with the house of the Rosenbergs, surrounded and attacked by rioters: "Come out, you bloody

Jews!" (160); "Hand out the jewels! Come out and meet us! Who's afraid of the niggers? Who's doing the bunk? Jew! Jew! Jew!" (161); "I 'opes Messias isn't in a 'urry for them jewels!" (162), etc. The effect of the reader's affective involvement seems to be augmented when it becomes evident that Considine and the High Executive are the same person—the spiritual-political driving force behind the Second Evolution of Man. Consider, for instance, the description of Considine's triumphant ride, in an open car, through the streets of northern London:

> The glare by now had become much stronger, and Roger saw Considine suddenly stand up. Almost at the same moment a great cry in a strange tongue roared out beyond them [members of the mob]. A black soldier appeared running and shouting beside the car, and another, and then, rushing towards them, a whole group. He heard the steady beating of drums, and a cry resolving itself into English: "Deathless! Deathless! Glory to the Deathless One!" Considine, raising his right hand, made with it, high in the air, a sudden gesture; the cry beat all round them and ceased and broke out yet more wildly: "Glory to the Master of Love! Glory to the Deathless One!" (174)

The excerpt can be read as a travesty of Christ's triumphant entry to Jerusalem (Matthew 21), which makes Williams's apocalyptic closer to the biblical sense of the word, also inferring Considine's being a type of Antichrist, regardless of his reservations (cf. "Neither Christ or Antichrist […] but I bring a gospel of redemption" [242]). The narrator's ensuing depiction of the High Executive does bring to mind such a context,[6] contrasting Considine's exultation with Caithness's inner retreat:

> Opposite him [Roger] the figure of Considine seemed to dilate in the red glare; again and again he made the high mysterious gesture with his right hand; every now and then he cried out in a great voice and a strange tongue. Roger tore his eyes away and looked out over the Heath, but beyond the light of the watch-fires it lay in darkness, a darkness which seemed to him to be continually resolving itself into these leaping, shrieking figures. Caithness was leaning back in his corner, his eyes shut, his lips moving in swift murmured prayer. (175)

[6] Commenting on Revelation 13, biblical scholars enumerate such features of Antichrist-the Beast as mimicking Jesus's "honourable titles […], his exercise of divine power, […] his promotion of divine worship […] and his death and resurrection," also calling the Beast "a counterfeit christ, who through his flashy signs competes with Christ for allegiance and worship" (Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman III 2003: 16).

Apparently, the description appeals to the reader's senses, mixing the visual (fires against the dark sky) with the aural (voices in "strange" languages, cries, and murmur), with a varying intensity. Other stimuli of this kind include gun and revolver shots (175), "crimson-streaked faces" (176) as well as nude or virtually nude African followers of Considine's gospel, dancing wildly and committing acts of ritual suicide, dimly-lit by watch fires (176), their guru standing upright "with an exalted but an unmoved face" (176).

It will also be remembered that Brummett (1991) draws attention to the psychological dimension of the apocalyptic (28). In the novel's universe, Considine seems to be conversant with mechanisms of crowd panic and riotous behaviour. Accordingly, it is not so much the damage his devotees inflict on the capital city of Great Britain but its aftermath that matters; as the narrator puts it, alluding to the historical context well-known to Williams's contemporaries:

> The agitation which shook London was as *much worse* than that which the German raids had caused as the fear of negro barbarism was *more fundamental* than that of the Prussian. London hid and *trembled*; the jungles were threatening it and the horrors that dwelled in them. (100, emphasis added)

At some other point, the High Executive declares:

> "I have let the English feel panic, panic such as they have not felt since the Vikings raided their coasts and burned their towns a thousand years ago. They have been afraid of their feelings, of ecstasy and riot and savage glee; they have frozen love and hated death. And I have shown them these things wild and possibly triumphant; and what fear of a thousand armies will not do, fear of their own passions will. They will ask for peace." (176)

It could be argued, then, that apart from posing a threat to the white civilization, here epitomized by the English, Considine's soldiers' actions work as a *sui generis* shock therapy for the children of reason. Simultaneously, what strikes the reader is the High Executive's disregard for his fanatical supporters: during the course of the aforementioned episodes he treats his people instrumentally, in fact undermining the quasi-democratic principles he seems to have promoted via the Proclamations. For instance, consider the following utterance:

> "As for my Africans, they ask for death and they shall have death. Most of them will kill themselves or one another to-night; those who survive till to-

> morrow will die before your soldiers. I do not pity them; […] all that they are capable of I have given them. They die for the Undying." (176–77)

And contrast it with the High Executive's declarative statements:

> [. . .] the *Allied Supremacies of Africa* [. . .] desire to communicate to the rest of the world the doctrine and purpose of the cause in which they are engaged. [. . .] They announce their profound belief that [. . .] to themselves in the future the conscious leadership of mankind belongs. It is *not an imposed but an emerging leadership*; (42–3, emphasis added)

> The gospel which is *the birthright of the African peoples* and which they offer as *a message of hope* even to the degraded and outworn nations of the white race [. . .]; (58, emphasis added)

> [. . .] from the centre of the white race it [the High Executive] seriously warns them [the English] that the forces now in action shall be multiplied a thousand times to effect the ends upon which it is determined—*the freedom of the black peoples and the restoration of Africa*; (168–69, emphasis added)

> "[. . .] little by little through many years we proposed to ourselves to *show the people of Africa the doctrines of freedom and sacrifice and ecstasy*, and I determined to strike at Europe by panic and strength." (180, emphasis added)

Not only do these excerpts corroborate the manipulative, self-centred character of Considine's overall design but also they bring to mind biblical apocalyptic contexts, and especially the figure of the so-called False Prophet, who accompanies the Beast (Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10). Antichrist's being the arch-deceiver has also been pointed out, both in the Bible (Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman III 2003: 16) and in the Dead Sea Scrolls ("Antychryst" 1985).

Considine's end may also be perceived with regard to Antichrist's defeat. On the one hand, he is "accidentally" shot dead by his closest subordinate, Colonel Mottreux, as a result of the latter's greed for a set of precious gemstones which Considine inherited after the suicidal death of a Jewish multimillionaire, Rosenberg (Needless to say, Considine's "spiritual" influence might be suspected). On the other hand, Mottreux's role in his guru's death is somewhat instigated by father Ian Caithness, a representative of the Church of England and confidant of the Prime Minister; it is exactly owing to his political connections that the priest promises immunity to the budding assassin (cf. "Anyone who saved England, […] anyone who did would be a friend of all men. […] You should be with me till all was agreed; it would be

easy. . . ." [230]). In a manner, then, it can be said that as an "enemy of Christ" (Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman III 2003: 16), the High Executive, Antichrist-like fraud, deserves to be vanquished by the genuine (i.e. Christian) Truth, represented in the book by Caithness. Accordingly, Considine, the self-anointed leader of the Second Evolution of Man, turns out to be one more false messiah.

And indeed, with Considine's death, his armies soon dissipate and are "overwhelmed," as press reports put it (255). Politically, the situation seems to have returned to the norm:

> [Considine's] papers Caithness had seized, which after a great deal of trouble were at least partially decoded […], contained sufficient allusions in detail to make the task of *the uncovering of Considine's bases*—houses in Europe and headquarters in Africa—*a much easier business than had been feared*. An encouraging but slightly vague account appeared in the Press of *how a British patriot* [i.e. Mottreux] […] *had shot Considine* while being pressed to join him. It was understood that he had *deliberately sacrificed himself in order to help England*, and a good deal of quiet (and not too quiet) pride was felt that it was an English subject, or at least a Dominion subject, who had acted so. (255-56, emphasis added)

Likewise, a tone of optimism can be recognized in the description of Britain's international relations:

> Mr. Suydler [the Prime Minister] made a great speech at an Albert Hall Meeting, and was cheered wildly when he announced that the European Governments had determined to *sign no formal terms of peace* with an enemy who had no business to be there at all, but *to hold a conference* in Madeira *to decide on the future settlement of Africa*, the terms of which would afterwards be submitted to the League of Nations, *thus confirming the passionate belief of the Powers in democratic control*. Mr. Suydler was also loudly applauded in the course of his witty and brilliant remarks upon the attempts of the madman who had been responsible for all the trouble to turn his megalomaniac nonsense into philosophical nonsense. […] Terrific cheers. (256-57, emphasis added)

However, this black-and-white reading concerning the triumph of good over evil raises too many reservations to be accepted. First, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, Caithness's Christian beliefs are far from exemplary, his spiritual power actually being questioned (Kowalczyk 2013). Furthermore, according to Howard (1983), the narrator "has not got our *feelings*

quite squarely on the side of […] Caithness, who [is] patently in the right" (36, emphasis original). Just to the contrary, the narrator tends to empathize with Considine's attitude and (certain) actions, if not overtly, then by virtue of ironic distance, reflected most explicitly in the worldview of Sir Bernard the surgeon, whose standpoint is foregrounded in the novel. Second, one cannot but doubt whether the "normality" brought back after the African rebellion is indeed a political (and "spiritual") order worth the praise. In fact, as the passages above indicate, it is European colonialism, hidden behind the façade of democracy, which proves triumphant. One may also wonder if the ends justify the means: are Europe's governments' actions (including the thwarting of the black revolution) less manipulative than Considine's political-spiritual gospel? Can Christians resort to deception and violence while fighting an Antichrist? Last but not least, there is the novel's open ending, with the possibility of Considine's return…

The discussion leads us towards the pivotal question of the role of the apocalyptic in *Shadows of Ecstasy*. Are we facing a minor or full-scale apocalypse? From the socio-political standpoint hardly anything changes, the pre-apocalyptic order having defended its boundaries well enough. The rather cynical British Prime Minister, the foreign ambassador, the League of Nations, and the Church of England have used the African trouble to augment their positions. In terms of damage, its actual impact on London turned out to be psychological rather than material: "A few bombs had been dropped but more for noise and mental horror than to destroy" (183). Also, emotions stirred by Considine's actions in British citizens, intended, as he puts it, "to teach London to feel" (173)—when unleashed—proved to demonstrate people's most primitive instincts, finding vent in street riots, demolishing buildings, and racial violence, grounded in overwhelming panic (How "un-British," one might say). Nor did Considine achieve his political-spiritual aims, his ideas dying almost at the moment of his passing.

On the other hand, there are some profound changes to be observed on the level of individual characters. Sir Bernard, if for a while, has to let the supernatural into his sceptical outlook; his son, Philip Travers, develops a deeper understanding of love in spiritual terms; Professor Roger Ingram seems to remain to be affected by his charismatic guru; while Inkamazi dies an honourable death, which brings him closer to his Zulu royal ancestors. Somewhat paradoxically, then, Considine's new gospel has not been totally fruitless.

It can be argued that Williams's apocalyptic in its most basic sense of "revelation" affects the reader as well, leading her/him to the re-examining of the foundations of Western culture/civilization. However improbable the entire idea of Considine's African revolution may seem, it does reveal the superficiality of "the children of intellect and science and learning" (58), who, as Williams seems to indicate, have lost the capacity of Imagination—in the artistic and spiritual understanding of the word. In this manner, the novel's open-ended structure, coupled with its dialectical tensions, leaves the reader in limbo, perhaps making her/him more prone to accept an old truth expressed, among others, by Shakespeare's Hamlet: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio/ Than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (1.5.167-8). And, Williams continues,

> If now, while the world shouted over the defeat of his [Considine's] allies and subjects, while it drove its terror back into its own unmapped jungles, and subdued its fiercer desires to an alien government of sterile sayings, if now he came once more to threaten and deliver it. If—ah beyond, beyond belief!—but if he returned. … (260)

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MAŁA APOKALIPSA? ELEMENTY APOKALIPTYCZNE W POWIEŚCI *SHADOWS OF ECSTASY* CHARLESA WILLIAMSA

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Artykuł zawiera analizę elementów apokaliptycznych w nietłumaczonym na język polski utworze *Shadows of Ecstasy* (1933) Charlesa Williamsa (1886-1945) – brytyjskiego poety, dramaturga, świeckiego teologa, krytyka literackiego i autora siedmiu powieści określanych jako „thrillery metafizyczne". Bazując na teoretycznych ustaleniach takich badaczy jak Barry Brummett (1991) czy Douglas Robinson (1998), Andrzej Sławomir Kowalczyk analizuje „apokaliptyczność" świata powieści zarówno w odniesieniu do aspektów społeczno-politycznych, jak i religijnych/ duchowych. Autor artykułu podkreśla fakt, że mimo licznych podobieństw do Księgi Apokalipsy, powieść nie pozwala na automatyczne „przeniesienie" biblijnych interpretacji konfliktu dobra i zła. Wynika to m. in. z ambiwalencji w konstrukcji kluczowych postaci (zwłaszcza typu „Antychrysta" Nigela Considine'a), z dominującego punktu widzenia, oraz z otwartego zakończenia powieści. Zdaniem badacza taka kompozycja jest swego rodzaju Williamsowskim zaproszeniem czytelnika do przeżycia jego własnej „małej apokalipsy" czy „objawienia" – w sensie odkrywania pierwiastka duchowego w dominującym na początku XX w. materialistycznym obrazie świata.

Słowa kluczowe: Charles Williams; apokalipsa; powieść brytyjska XX w.; duchowość w literaturze.