



The Novels of Charles Williams:

Thomas Howard

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The fanciful novels of Charles Williams have long fascinated a rather elite reading public - T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, and C.S. Lewis, for example, were among his great admirers. But those books - which include 'The Place of the Lion' 'Descent into Hell' and 'All Hallows' Eve' - are also dense and perplexing, and even the writer's fondest devotees have found the meanings of his fiction elusive. Here at last is a clear and informed guide to the complexities and rich rewards of Charles Williams' novels. As Thomas Howard notes, Williams' tales might best be described as metaphysical thrillers, in which Williams used occult machinery in much the same way that Conrad used exotic locales and Joyce used the subconscious: to vivify human experience and awaken readers to its range and possibilities. One tale might feature a chase for the Holy Grail across Hertfordshire fields, while in another the picture may switch with no apology at all from a policeman at a crossroad to the Byzantine Emperor. As Howard lucidly demonstrates, the controlling factor behind Williams' work is an essentially Christian worldview in which heaven and hell seem to lurk under every bush and the constant theme is order versus disintegration. Concentrating on Williams' novels, Howard brilliantly illuminates the major concerns that informed all of Williams' thinking. Howard also considers Williams' work in the context of modern fictional practice and assesses its place in the tradition of the English language novel.

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