“Exit, Pursued by a Bear”:
Bears as Cosmic Catalysts in the Writings of Charles Williams,
C.S. Lewis, and William Shakespeare

Thesis: Although Mr. Bultitude, Peter Stanhope’s Pastoral bear, and the Winter’s Tale bear seem to be cheap tropes employed by the authors to move the plot forward in their respective texts, these three characters are, in fact, key demonstrators of what Williams terms “the doctrine of co-inherence” because, true to the tragicomic pastoral conventions to which all three texts subscribe, the bears are agents of change who accomplish divine purposes within the stories and whose actions allow for the final comedic marriages at the end of each tale.

I. Pastoral literature is literature involving a rural setting (shepherds, traditionally), which is often portrayed in an idealized or romanticized manner.

A. Many pastorals share similar elements and characters: removal from home into a rural setting; a shepherd or shepherdess who leads a simple or idealized life, removed from the problems of the city; the parted lovers who reunite in the final happy marriage, etc. (Alpers 80-81).

B. Pastorals involve shared conventions as mentioned above, but also involve the “coming together” (con + venio) of all of these elements and peoples to produce a vision of idyllic, simplified, socially-cohesive life (Alpers 82).

C. A pastoral setting in a text can often be a place of righting or conquering urban woes, as in Shakespeare’s As You Like It.

II. The Winter’s Tale, Stanhope’s play in Descent into Hell, and That Hideous Strength are all examples of tragicomic pastorals.

A. Tragicomic literature is literature that contains aspects of both comedy and tragedy.

B. Shakespeare’s The Winter’s Tale is an example of the tragicomic pastoral.

1. WT includes traditional pastoral elements.
2. *WT* begins in tragedy (the loss of Perdita and Hermione) and ends in comedy (everyone is reunited, and Perdita and Florizel marry).

C. Stanhope’s *A Pastoral* is an example of the tragicomic pastoral.

1. *Pastoral* includes traditional pastoral elements (Williams 12).
2. *Pastoral* begins in tragedy (the loss of the Princess from the castle, falling in with bandits, being chased by a bear) and ends in comedy (the Princess marries the Woodcutter’s son, and everyone is united in joy) (Williams 93).

D. Lewis’ *That Hideous Strength* is an example of the tragicomic pastoral.

1. The story includes traditional pastoral elements.
2. The story begins with tragedy (a dissolved marriage and an evil conspiracy) and ends in comedy (restoration of marriage and foiled conspiracy).

III. The bears in each of these stories act as agents of action and change.

A. Bears in tragicomic pastoral literature are natural agents of change because they balance terrifying fierceness with potential comedic docility (Clubb 28).
B. Bears in these stories keep people moving (Williams 138; *WT* III.3).
C. Because they keep characters moving, the mostly tragic actions of these bears (chasing, killing, etc.) often make possible the comedic resolutions of the stories (the marriages).
D. Some bears, namely Mr. Bultitude, even perform world-saving activities (Lewis 348; 376).

IV. The activities of the bears and the effects of their actions in these stories demonstrate and illuminate the doctrine of co-inherence.

A. The bears help to make up the “pattern of the glory” in their stories, since, according to Williams, “The glory of God is in facts” (Williams, qtd. in Hefling 6).
B. The bears act within the co-inherence of all created things (Hefling 18).

1. Co-inherence has its root in the doctrine of the Trinity (Hefling 18).
2. Co-inherence exists naturally between men, and through the Incarnation, supernaturally between all created things (Hefling 18).
3. Co-inherence makes possible the exchange of burdens, as in Williams’ doctrine of substituted love; it also makes such exchanges morally imperative (Hefling 18).
C. Bears in these stories act within the co-inherence of all created things in order to fulfill the Providential will of God.

D. Bears act as catalysts, enabling others to fulfill their own roles in the cosmic dance (Williams 146-147).

V. According to Williams, the whole world is a tragicomedy, and it is each person’s duty, be he shepherd, duke, brigand, or bear, to seek the will of Providence, to take his place in the cosmic dance, and to delight in the closing of the play, the resolution of the divine comedy, wherein Christ and his Church come together in the eternal union of a most glorious marriage.

This text serves as a good introduction to the pastoral as a mode of literature. Alpers, a literary historian and Professor Emeritus of literature at UC Berkeley, includes a very helpful chapter on pastoral conventions. Part I covers pastoral conventions in the genre, and part II traces the development of the pastoral mode in poetry and narrative.


Clubb, Professor Emeritus of Italian and Comparative Literature at UC Berkeley, explores the history of the bear within tragicomic literature, especially in Italian pastoral plays. She traces the use of various animals within literature, and identifies the bear as the purest animal representation of the tragicomic form, because of the balance between its fierce animalism and its potential tameness when subdued and trained. Clubb argues specifically for the appropriateness of the “exit, pursued by a bear” direction in Shakespeare’s pastoral tragicomedy *The Winter’s Tale*.


Hadfield, Oxford graduate and assistant to Williams at the Oxford University Press, provides an excellent analysis of Williams’ implementation of the doctrine of substitution and co-inherence in his major poetical works, *Taliessin through Logres* and *The Region of the Summer Stars*. The essay provides a decent introduction to Williams’ poetry, and also provides a compelling apology for why the themes of co-inherence, substitution, and exchange surface so frequently in Williams’ poetry and prose.


This text includes selections from Williams’ four theological texts: *Descent of the Dove, The Image of the City, He Came Down from Heaven,* and *The Forgiveness of Sins*. Hefling provides an excellent overview and introduction to Williams’ most prevalent theological concepts, including an comprehensive definition of co-inherence.


This book is a collection of scholarly essays that focus on the fantastical fiction of Lewis, Tolkien, and Williams. The Lewis essays are not particularly helpful, but the perspectives provided in Winship’s, Hadfield’s, and Spacks’ essays on Williams illuminate the development of common themes within Williams’ other fiction.


This third book of Lewis’ Space Trilogy is an essentially fictionalized version of Lewis’ concerns in his non-fiction work *The Abolition of Man*. Lewis predicts the dangers of innovation in social reform for mankind, represented in this book by the nefarious NICE. Lewis’ text demonstrates the concept of co-inherence in respect to cosmic order and the enabling of the victory of the good guys in the end, whose primary functions include, to paraphrase McPhee, sitting at St. Anne’s growing winter vegetables, training performing bears, and awaiting orders. This demonstrates the tendency in the pastoral tragicomedy of the natural good to triumph over the troubles of urban strife.

One of Shakespeare’s later works, the main story seems to be drawn from Robert Greene’s *Pandosto*, another pastoral romance, though both texts seem to have their roots in traditional Italian pastorals. This text is used as a standard for comparison of the tragicomic pastoral, and it is also the originator of the “exit, pursued by a bear” trope.


Shideler provides a breakdown by subject of some of Williams’ main theological concerns, beginning with his treatment of images, as in his studies of Dante and Beatrice. Part II deals with “The Diagram of Glory,” which is a treatment of his theology of the fall and the atonement, the Trinity, and the relation of nature with the supernatural. Part III covers aspects of the “Co-Inherent Life,” by which Shideler and Williams mean acceptance of the way of exchange, and life thereafter lived within the city of God. Shideler’s own explanations are accompanied by citations from Williams’ various works, which makes her book a valuable resource for scholars seeking more information regarding particular topics within Williams’ works.


One of Williams’ most famous novels, *Descent into Hell* provides one of the most clear explanations and examples in fiction of Williams’ understanding of the doctrine of exchange. This text is used to support and further explain Williams’ understanding of co-inherence, and the text also provides another example of the tragicomic pastoral and the tragicomic bear.