

## Missional Fire: *The House of the Octopus* and the Household of Redemption

“Of our moral effort the less said the better; grace is always itself alone, and demands only our adoration; and therefore it is between our ignorances that our courteous Lord might cause exchange to lie, till the exchange itself become an invocation of the adorable Spirit who has so often deigned to instruct and correct the Church by voices without as well as within the Church. The last virtue which the organization of Christendom can achieve is humility, for while it is composed of members of the visible Church it always regards itself as an image of the invisible” —*The Descent of the Dove*

“Phosphorescent on the stagnant level  
a headless figure walks in crimson cope  
volcanic dust blown under the moon.  
A brainless form, as of the Emperor,  
walks, indecent hands hidden under the cope,  
dishallowing in that crimson the flush on the mounds of Caucasia.

. . . .

“Inarticulate always on an inarticulate sea  
beyond P’o-lu the headless Emperor moves,  
the octopuses round him; lost are the Roman hands;  
lost are the substantial instruments of being.”  
--“The Vision of the Empire” from *Taliessin through Logres*

### The Role of the Flame

The Flame is an angelic entity who acts on behalf of the Holy Spirit, many times speaking directly as the voice of the Spirit. The Flame also acts as a tester and judge of those outside the Church.

- 249-250: Identity and relationship to the Church
- 252: Within the church as cleansing water
- 297ff.: The Spirit judges and reveals
- 314: The nature of the Flame
- 322-323: Gathering of his martyrs

Discussion Question: How does The Flame compare and contrast with Williams’ other “providential” actors?

The Skeleton	Death; Christ’s back
The Accuser	Prosecutor of the Church
The Third King and Mother Myrrh	Death and the Grave
Mary in <i>Death of Good Fortune</i>	Mother of the Church; Wisdom

## Other Discussion Questions

1. Compare and contrast Anthony with Thomas Cranmer or with T. S. Eliot's Thomas Becket. What do you learn about Anthony's particular temptations and motivations?
2. What is the role of the Church in this play? Why do they assume a particular authority and privilege?
3. Characterize the other characters. They each represent certain principles or possible positions:

### **Absorption—Betrayal—Apostasy—Compromise—Co-Inherence—Exchange—Martyrdom**

4. How does the theme of co-inherence and exchange work itself out in the play?
5. Does Assantu understand more truth than the soldiers of P'o l'u? Why or why not?
6. How does The Marshall embody Williams' notion of The Infamy?
7. How important is the theme of eating and swallowing to the meaning of the play?
8. What makes the absorption of P'o l'u different than the way of exchange?

### **Co-Inherence in Williams**

The Trinity-in-Unity

(The Divine Economy of the Triune Godhead/ Father-Son-Holy Spirit)

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The Dual Natures/ Single Personhood of Christ

Perfectly God, Perfectly Man

Two Nature/Two Wills Perfectly Working in Unison in Jesus

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The Unity of the Body of Christ/ The Church

Mother Church as Diversified yet in Unified Telos

Mary as Theotokos

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Salvation/Redemption as Corporate and Cooperative in Character

The Way of Exchange/ The Economy of Pardon

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The Promised New Jerusalem/ The City

The *Eshaton* as The Reconciled Creation/Humanity