

FROM A PUBLISHER'S POINT OF VIEW: CHARLES WILLIAMS'S ROLE IN PUBLISHING KIERKEGAARD IN ENGLISH¹

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I am an author and a publisher,
And doubly in me the great longings stir
To write, to print, and to proclaim aloud,
Here in the outer world and to the crowd,
A wisdom so far hidden ...

—Thyrsis, in *The Masque of the Perusal*²

The imagination is what providence uses in order to get men into reality, into existence, to get them far enough out, or in, or down in existence. And when imagination has helped them as far out as they are meant to go—that is where reality, properly speaking, begins.

—Søren Kierkegaard, *Journal*, 1854³

Charles Williams is remembered today as a prolific and diverse writer who was associated with the Inklings, the Oxford literary group that included C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien. Most of those familiar with Williams's publications, which include seven novels, seven volumes of poetry, fifteen plays, four books of literary criticism, four theological works, and six biographies, are aware that this substantial literary output was produced while Williams had a fulltime day job.⁴ From 1908 until his death, Williams was employed by Oxford University Press (OUP) and engaged in another type of literary labor—the editorial work that brings authors' works into a publishable form. Although a small group of

¹ Support for research was provided by the Bibliographical Society.

² Charles Williams, *The Masques of Amen House: Together with Amen House Poems and with Selections from the Music for the Masques* by Hubert J. Foss, 63.

³ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. and trans. Alexander Dru 519.

⁴ See Lois Glenn, *Charles W. S. Williams: A Checklist*.

scholars and supporters has sustained interest in Williams's published works and kept most of them in print, Williams's editorial work has received minimal attention. This is somewhat explained by the dearth of documentation regarding Williams's editorial activities. Indeed, one historian of OUP claimed that Williams "left no record of himself as a publisher."⁵

But Williams was involved with a number of important publishing projects at OUP and for one of the most significant of these—the publication of the works of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard in English—there is a record of Williams as a publisher.⁶ Using correspondence from the personal papers of Walter Lowrie, one of Kierkegaard's earliest English promoters and translators, this paper explores the nature of Williams's important role in this precarious but ultimately successful publishing venture.⁷ This correspondence reveals much about the daily work with which Williams was concerned, which included dealing with issues of selection, content, accuracy, collaboration, format, cost, and scheduling. Spanning a period of time from 1936 to 1945, which was significant for both Williams and the world, this correspondence also provides insights into other dimensions of Williams's life, particularly his own literary labors and theological formation. Finally, this glimpse of Williams's professional life suggests that there was an integral relation between his literary endeavors as an author and as an editor.

The Author, the Translator, and the Editor

The imaginative theological writings of Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) are, in the words of W. H. Auden, principally preoccupied with “the problem of preaching to a secularized society which was still officially Christian.”⁸ According to C. Stephen Evans, Kierkegaard spoke a prophetic word to both the church and the secular world:

⁵ Peter Sutcliffe, *The Oxford University Press: An Informal History*, 202.

⁶ Charles Hadfield, “CW at Amen House,” in *Charles Williams: A Celebration*, ed. Brian Horne, 15; Roger Poole, “The Unknown Kierkegaard: Twentieth-Century Receptions,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino, 57.

⁷ The Walter Lowrie Papers (hereafter WLP) used by permission of Princeton University Library.

⁸ *The Living Thought of Kierkegaard: Presented by W. H. Auden*, 3. Auden found his way to Kierkegaard and back to the church through his interactions with the person and works of Williams. See Auden's “Preface” to the Living Age Edition of

To the secular, intellectual world Kierkegaard presents a powerful case that the decline of faith among European intellectuals is not rooted in intellectual problems or the growth of scientific knowledge but in diminished imaginative power and the loss of an emotional grasp of what it means to exist as a human being. To the Church, Kierkegaard presents a powerful protest against "Christendom," the domestication of Christian faith by the equation of faith with human culture.⁹

After Kierkegaard's death, the Danish public, "exhausted by the demands he had made on it, consigned the man and his works to oblivion."¹⁰ But in the early twentieth century, Kierkegaard's works began to be noticed on the European continent, especially through German translations.¹¹ The nascent theologian Karl Barth became one of Kierkegaard's most popular promoters, until he renounced him in the 1930s.¹² One of those influenced by the early Barth was the American Episcopal clergyman Walter Lowrie.

Walter Lowrie (1868-1959) was born into a prominent Presbyterian family and matriculated at the premier Presbyterian institutions of his day, the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) and Princeton Theological Seminary. Graduate fellowships took him to Germany and Italy, where he studied early Christianity. With a self-described "distaste for the self-assertion and narrowness of theological science" but a desire and passion "for teaching Christianity," Lowrie spent his professional life serving a number of Episcopal churches and writing books.¹³ In 1907, he became Rector of St. Paul's American Church in Rome, where he remained until he retired to his wife's family estate in Princeton, New Jersey, in 1930. Finding the name of Kierkegaard largely unknown in the United States, Lowrie embarked on a twenty-seven-year mission to

Williams's *The Descent of the Dove: A History of the Holy Spirit in the Church*, v.; Arthur Kirsch, *Auden and Christianity*, 23.

⁹ C. Stephen Evans, "Kierkegaard Among the Philosophers", 12.

¹⁰ Poole, "The Unknown Kierkegaard," 49.

¹¹ Franz Kafka, Karl Jaspers, and Martin Heidegger were all affected by Kierkegaard's thought. *Ibid.*, 50-51.

¹² T. F. Torrance, "Theology of Karl Barth," *The Scotsman*, 4; Karl Barth, "A Thank You and a Bow—Kierkegaard's Reveille," in *Fragments Grave and Gray*, ed. Martin Rumscheidt; trans. Eric Mosbacher, 95-104; Christophe Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians: Wilhelm Herrmann, Karl Barth, and Rudolf Bultmann*, 136-138. Chalamet concludes: "Kierkegaard's impact on Barth's theological development around 1919-21 was limited, but it was decisive" (138).

¹³ Walter Lowrie, "Memoirs," quoted in Donald Hardie Fox, *The Long Life of Walter Lowrie*, 65.

mediate Kierkegaard to the English-speaking world. He pursued this mission by learning Danish, publishing nearly 1,000 pages about Kierkegaard and 3,790 pages of Kierkegaard in English, and building a network of translators and publishers interested in transmitting Kierkegaard's works.¹⁴

In 1935, Charles Williams became part of this network. Williams had joined the London office of OUP in 1908 as an assistant proofreader and by 1920 he was an editor. The London office, located at Amen House after 1924 and under the direction of Sir Humphrey Milford, published "academically respectable but more commercial works under the OUP imprint."¹⁵ Williams's editorial responsibilities included reviewing and recommending manuscripts, guiding authors through the editorial process, making corrections, preparing preliminary pages, and seeing manuscripts through the printing process, "which at that time included three, galley, page, and final revise."¹⁶ By 1935, Williams's editorial work had included supervising the centenary edition of Tolstoy (1928-1937), making selections for a number of poetry anthologies, and writing introductions and other paratextual matter for OUP publications.¹⁷ By 1935, Williams had also gained some attention as an author. He had published five novels, a few plays, five volumes of poetry, a few books of literary criticism, and a couple of biographies. But many of the honors and associations for which Williams is now remembered were before him. So, too, were some of his best works: *He Came Down from Heaven* (1938) and *The Descent of the Dove* (1939), his poetic cycle *Taliessin through Logres* (1938), and his study of Dante *The Figure of Beatrice* (1943).

¹⁴ Howard A. Johnson, "Walter Lowrie (1868-1959): Man and Churchman Extraordinary," in *Sons of the Prophets*, ed. Hugh T. Kerr, 189. Lowrie also helped to bring Eduard Geismar, professor of theology at the University of Copenhagen, to the United States to deliver the 1936 Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary. These were published the next year: *Lectures on the Religious Thought of Søren Kierkegaard: Given at Princeton Theological Seminary in March, 1936, on the Stone Foundation*.

¹⁵ Bernadette Lynn Bosky, "Introduction," in *The Masques of Amen House*, 10.

¹⁶ Alice Mary Hadfield, *Charles Williams: An Exploration of His Life and Work*, 77.

¹⁷ Bosky, "Introduction," 3; Charles Williams, *The Image of the City and Other Essays*, 196-99.

The Plan to Publish

Williams was introduced to Kierkegaard in early 1935 by Alexander Dru, another early promoter and translator of Kierkegaard, who wrote to OUP proposing the publication of a ten-volume edition of Kierkegaard's works in English. Responding to Dru, Williams wrote: "We are of course a little hampered here by not having any of Kierkegaard's actual work before us. ... Kierkegaard is no doubt frightfully important but we would not promise to publish a manuscript by St. Thomas or Socrates without seeing it."¹⁸ By May, Williams was reviewing proofs of OUP's first Kierkegaard publication—Dru's translation of a short essay by the German writer Theodor Haecker on the life and significance of Kierkegaard.¹⁹ Lowrie was also involved in conversations with OUP, in New York, in early 1935 about publishing Kierkegaard's works in English. By February 1936, Williams was convinced of the merits of the project and wrote to the New York Branch of OUP: "I think myself that sooner or later Kierkegaard will have a pretty good vogue for some time, and Sir Humphrey regards him with a certain benevolence, short of being prepared to plunge wildly."²⁰

The next month, certain of the press's interest, Lowrie asked OUP to publish a big book he had written about Kierkegaard. Lowrie wrote to the New York Branch that he was not "presumptuous enough to suppose that any publisher would assume at this moment the risk of such a publication. It seems to me," he continued, "a poor risk financially, but I am ready to assume it. In a few years when people know more about S.K. in England and America such a book might sell well, but I cannot wait for that time because I conceive of my book as an essential part of the propaganda designed to make him known."²¹ After Lowrie agreed to pay for the publication of his manuscript and let Dru vet it—terms that Williams had staff at the New York Branch communicate to Lowrie²²—OUP was willing to proceed. Lowrie sent his 15-volume manuscript (which came to over 650 printed pages) to London and discussions began about the wisdom of identifying Kierkegaard in the book's title or subtitle as "A

¹⁸ Charles Williams to Alexander Dru, 19 February 1935, quoted in Hadfield, *Charles Williams*, 124.

¹⁹ Theodore Haecker, *Søren Kierkegaard*, trans. Alexander Dru; Stephen M. Dunning, *The Crisis and the Quest: A Kierkegaardian Reading of Charles Williams*, xxiii n. 10.

²⁰ Charles Williams to Howard Lowry, 7 February 1936, WLP.

²¹ Walter Lowrie to Howard Lowry, 12 March 1936, WLP.

²² Charles Williams to Howard Lowry, 22 September 1936, WLP.

Great Dane”: the consensus of the OUP staff was that readers would think of a particular canine rather than country.

By May 1937, Williams was going over proofs of Lowrie’s book, which was finally and simply titled *Kierkegaard*, as well as Dru’s translations of selections from Kierkegaard’s journals.²³ The next month Williams wrote to Lowrie: “Dear Dr Lowrie, I have been giving myself the pleasure of reading the proofs of your book on Kierkegaard, partly for my own information and interest and partly on behalf of the Press.” Williams apologized for falling behind in reading, editing, and returning slips due to a “dangerous illness at home.” If Lowrie wished to proceed without his feedback, Williams wrote, he would be happy to suspend his work, return the proofs, and content himself with reading the printed volume.²⁴ But Lowrie was so impressed with Williams’s editorial suggestions that he wrote: “I am willing to have [Williams] carry them out in the revision of the proofs up to the end of the book, without delay of referring them to me.”²⁵

Lowrie’s book, which falls somewhere between an autobiography and a biography, narrates the life of Kierkegaard largely using Kierkegaard’s own words—about three-fifths of the book consists of extensive quotations from Kierkegaard’s publications and papers. Lowrie points out early in his book that Kierkegaard “was disposed to value only such books as are a record of personal experience and reflection.” Such were the books that Kierkegaard wrote, and he “acknowledged that he was educated by his own books.”²⁶ Thus Lowrie was able to present Kierkegaard’s life and thought as it developed and was revealed literarily. Williams was not merely being polite when he wrote that he was reading Lowrie’s book for his “own information and interest.” Like Thyrsis in Williams’s *The Masque of the Perusal*, the ideas incarnate in Lowrie’s and Dru’s books were beginning to inhere in Williams’s nature and Kierkegaard had begun to influence his thinking, writing, and work as a publisher.²⁷ Williams lectured on Kierkegaard, quoted and wrote about him, and published him.²⁸

²³ Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, Søren Kierkegaard, *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard: A Selection*, ed. and trans. Alexander Dru; Dunning, *The Crisis and the Quest*, xxiii n. 10.

²⁴ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 4 June 1937, WLP.

²⁵ Walter Lowrie to Howard Lowry, 15 June 1937, WLP.

²⁶ Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, 28, 324.

²⁷ *Masques*, 67.

²⁸ Hadfield, *Charles Williams*, 123-25. Kierkegaard figures prominently in the final chapter of Williams’s *The Descent of the Dove: A Short History of the Holy*

In December 1936, before he had read Lowrie's and Dru's translations of Kierkegaard, Williams had informed the New York Branch that there was "no need for Dr Lowrie to write to any special person here in connection with the book."²⁹ But in December 1937, Williams wrote to Lowrie that he was the only person holding "the quivering threads of knowledge in regard to our committals to Kierkegaard." Lowrie had expressed some concerns, about the delayed delivery of his proofs and the estimated price for his book, and Williams assured Lowrie that he had referred these concerns to the Production Department. Turning to the "the long jump," Williams wrote, "we are in a slightly difficult position about K. We should like—I write unofficially, but I think truthfully—to continue the steady publication of his works." Dru's selections from Kierkegaard's journals was due out next year; after that OUP planned to publish two more of Dru's translations.³⁰ "After that," Williams wrote, "we have no settled arrangements." He continued:

Something must of course depend on the sales of these volumes. Kierkegaard was a very great man but he did rather run to length, and you will appreciate our reluctance to commit ourselves to the indefinite publication of a series of books which might mean heavy losses. ... I am not sure that we could commit ourselves financially until we see what the reception of your book and of the *Journal* is.

If additional publications of Kierkegaard were possible, Williams wanted OUP to handle them. Princeton University Press, not far down the road from Lowrie's home, had published the first major English translation of Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, in 1936 and it was likely to publish more.³¹ Williams concluded his letter with this assurance: "we

Spirit in the Church, "The Return of the Manhood", 205-33. Williams places Kierkegaard in a line of thinkers that included Augustine, Dominic, and Calvin and says of him:

He coordinated experiences in a new manner; say, using the old word, that he caused alien and opposite experiences to coinhere. He was the type of the new state of things in which Christendom had to exist, and the new mind with which Christendom knew them. He lived under a sense of judgment, of contrition, of asceticism; but also (and equally) of revolt, of refusal, of unbelief (212).

²⁹ Charles Williams to OUP, New York Branch, 21 December 1936, WLP.

³⁰ *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*, neither of which were published.

³¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. David F. Swenson.

have every wish to proceed here ... it is a matter rather of adjustment than of principle as to what is the best manner of doing it.”³²

The “best manner of doing it” that Williams pursued was having Lowrie pay for the publication of his translations. In his next letter to Lowrie, Williams updated Lowrie on Dru’s plans for future translations³³ and asked Lowrie if he would provide OUP with translations of a number of Kierkegaard’s works, which could be printed in three volumes.³⁴ Williams wrote that he was sure “Sir Humphrey would be more than willing to go on with it” if Lowrie would defray the cost. “I write thus frankly,” Williams explained, “because you said that you were writing definitely to enquire whether we should be disposed to publish if you were willing to pay.” In a postscript, Williams added: “It is very kind of you to allow me to write in this free and candid manner. Kierkegaard at any rate, whatever his other influence, has brought one group of his admirers into what is almost a state of love.”³⁵

In this letter and the two that followed, Williams worked out with Lowrie details related to a number of practical matters. He planned for volumes that would appear in a uniform but affordable format. He stressed that they should avoid any “comprehensive” titles and stick close to Kierkegaard’s own titles, since they were “in effect embarking on what may be practically a complete [edition of] Kierkegaard.” He facilitated collaboration between Lowrie and Dru and got them to check each other’s translations. He planned the timing and appearance of the translations that were in progress. And he developed a pricing strategy for the books so that they had a chance “of touching a wider public.” After explaining his proposal for the arrangement of titles, with a view toward the impact on format size and price, Williams wrote that his was “a point of view which will inevitably occur to a publisher, and not perhaps so readily to you experts who judge the arrangement of Kierkegaard by more philosophical and probably juster measurements.”³⁶

³² Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 21 December 1937, WLP.

³³ *The Concept of Dread* and *The Sickness unto Death*, neither of which was published.

³⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, trans. Walter Lowrie; *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself!* and *Three Discourses*, trans. Walter Lowrie; *Training in Christianity and the Edifying Discourses which Accompanied It*, trans. Walter Lowrie.

³⁵ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 21 January 1938, WLP.

³⁶ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 21 January 1938; 6 May 1938; 20 May 1938, WLP.

The Plan Salvaged

As Williams was congratulating Lowrie on his accomplishments and looking forward to future publications, Lowrie was becoming frustrated with OUP. He had approached OUP about publishing his book on Kierkegaard in March 1936; he was invoiced for its printing in April 1938.³⁷ The next month Lowrie wrote to OUP New York Branch manager Howard Lowry and explained that he was “already receiving letters of thanks and criticism from scholars on the continent of Europe who have received my book on Kierkegaard.” “But from you,” he continued, “I cannot even get a reply to three letters beseeching you to inform me when my book will be published here.”³⁸ The next day, the New York Branch sent a curt note to Lowrie informing him that his book would be published within two weeks and sell for \$10—about double what it was selling for in Great Britain, due to a U.S. duty on books printed abroad. When Lowrie saw this high list price, he immediately wrote to London and asked for the return of his Kierkegaard manuscripts, which he announced he would publish through the Princeton University Press.³⁹

Before he had heard from Lowrie directly, Williams wrote to the New York Branch:

We have heard indirectly from Dru that L. is so upset that he has decided to publish his K. translations in future with Princeton. This, after the care Dru and we have been taking recently to keep him attached to us, that we may take advantage of his money, supervise his translations, and control the appearance—in time and shape—of the volumes, is terribly disappointing. To be agents for Princeton volumes is not at all the same thing.

If you can do anything at all to soothe and appease him, pray do. We have been hoping to make a practical corner in K., and this is a serious blow. We gather it is the unanswered letters that annoyed him, and the curtness of the one he got. On the actual points of publication and price he might have been manageable.⁴⁰

Williams received letters from Lowrie the next day and wrote back to him the day after that. Williams offered apologies and excuses and attempted to assure Lowrie that, while OUP labored “under very many

³⁷ Walter Lowrie to Howard Lowry, 12 March 1936, WLP; OUP to Walter Lowrie, 28 April 1938, WLP.

³⁸ Walter Lowrie to Howard Lowry, 13 May 1938, WLP.

³⁹ Walter Lowrie to OUP, New York, 22 May 22 1938, WLP.

⁴⁰ Charles Williams to OUP, New York Branch, 24 May 1938, WLP.

serious difficulties which perhaps the ordinary publisher does not suffer,” “the eventual product is a better and finer thing than most publishers present.” Williams wrote “that he hoped they could find some way for the three of them—Dru, Lowrie, and Williams—“to work together for the general good of Kierkegaard and the world. A.M.D.G.” (i.e., *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*, to the greater glory of God).

After making his appeal for Lowrie to stay with OUP, Williams turned his attention to the more personal topics about which Lowrie had written. Most of Lowrie’s letters are not extant, but Williams’s responses often suggest their contents. In this letter, Williams refers to Lowrie’s Danish butler, whom Lowrie had hired to give him some confidence in working with a new language. Williams expressed his admiration for Lowrie’s courage although he wondered at it—but only in the same sense that he wondered at himself “for commenting on Shakespeare, or for trying to write verse.” Williams also discussed the influence of the dead on the living, perhaps in response to a statement Lowrie had made about the connection he felt with Kierkegaard. Williams wrote:

Without actually committing myself to an opinion on reincarnation (on which, I gather, the Christian Church has always looked doubtfully), I should be very willing to admit a kind of series of correspondences between the dead and the living, the past and the future. As for instance between Boehme and Law. And in that sense I should not find it at all difficult to believe that a certain seal or signature is set by certain of the great on certain other minds and souls—as it were pre-natally. After all Keats felt much the same about Shakespeare and most of us in our time have hoped faintly for a similar ascription. The only difference is that in your case you have industry and a certain valuable achievement to excuse and justify it.

In a postscript, Williams added that Milford had seen the letter and endorsed everything in it.⁴¹

The American price of Lowrie’s book was dropped to \$7, Howard Lowry met with Lowrie in Princeton, and then the former wired the London OUP office: “Walter Lowrie Happy Again. Continues Oxford.”⁴² Lowrie wrote separately to Williams, saying that he had been influenced by Williams’s letter and hoped that Williams would supervise future translations.⁴³ Williams wrote back: “I ... was touched by your very kind

⁴¹ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 26 May 1938, WLP.

⁴² Western Union Cablegram from Howard Lowry to OUP, London, 3 June 1938, WLP.

⁴³ Howard Lowry to Geoffrey Cumberlege, 3 June 1938, WLP.

suggestion that anything I had written was able to affect you.” With their publishing relationship and plans restored, Williams resumed planning and attempted to manage Lowrie’s expectations about pricing:

I quite understand that you wish it to be kept as low as possible; indeed if Kierkegaard is ever to become available for the ordinary mass, that of course will be a necessity, though I admit (speaking personally) that I feel more concerned with getting him out somehow rather than with making him very popular at the moment. With any luck we might see a prospect sooner or later of adjusting the price. Of course I realize that what we really want to do now is to arrange for something infinite to appear, as it were, which we may hope will go on also infinitely.⁴⁴

In this and subsequent letters to Lowrie and Dru, Williams coordinated the translators’ collaborations and the completion and timing of titles.⁴⁵ Williams was eager to proceed “as quickly as possible” and Lowrie’s translations, which came in more quickly than Dru’s, were published first.⁴⁶ Soon another translator, the English writer Robert Payne, intruded into the trinity of Kierkegaard workers, much to the consternation of Williams.⁴⁷ “It is all very disheartening,” Williams wrote to Lowrie:

You will understand that I shall have to go very carefully in case Payne hands his translations to a less cautious publisher, who produces them on the spot and cuts out our own efforts. From a publisher’s point of view the number of hens is rapidly becoming a nuisance. I am in danger of being pecked by them in the waiting room here any old day.⁴⁸

Williams had other and bigger issues to confront. On the day on which the Munich Agreement was signed, Williams wrote apologetically to Lowrie that “International horrors” had distracted him from “the more normal and far more profitable affairs of Kierkegaard.” A letter from Lowrie, however, had brought him “firmly back to realities” and he wrote to address Lowrie’s concerns about the remaining stock of his book—it had received some favorable attention and the New York Branch was having a hard time keeping it in stock—and whether the distribution of type would make it more difficult to produce a later edition if it were

⁴⁴ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 17 June 1938, WLP.

⁴⁵ Another title entered the mix: Søren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age and Two Minor Ethico-Religious Treatises*, trans. Alexander Dru and Walter Lowrie.

⁴⁶ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 12 July 1938, WLP.

⁴⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans.

⁴⁸ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 12 August 1938, WLP.

needed (it would not, Williams explained, thanks to the process of photolithography).⁴⁹

A little more than a month later, Williams wrote to Lowrie, “Now that it looks as if we shall live a little longer, and even publish books for a little longer, I permit myself to write to you about the present position of K. After our shattering experiences of late I feel almost shy of turning again to so shattering an author.” But Williams had to turn again to this author—and especially this translator—since Dru had recommended substantial changes to Lowrie’s manuscript of *The Point of View* and Williams wanted “to be reassured directly, as publisher,” that Lowrie approved. Williams also needed to deal with Lowrie’s introduction for this book. Lowrie had included a good bit of personal information in it, so Williams suggested putting this into another book. He wrote:

I cannot help thinking that a description by you, who are so much in sympathy with [Kierkegaard], of what one may perhaps call the catastrophic appearance of this portent on your horizon would be certainly valuable and possibly of continuous and lasting value. ... All this of course is purely personal and not in any sense official; I have not talked to my people here about it. But I do very definitely think that a book of that kind—not too long, quite personal, quite biographical and quite definite in detail besides being profound in reach—would be extraordinarily interesting. ... That is where I think your various introductions, so far as they relate to yourself, should go, and that is where I think they would have intensity and importance.

Williams added that Lowrie could “discuss the general principles of the translations of K.—what is necessary, what is desirable, and what so often goes wrong.” After apologizing for his suggestion, which he said he put “forward merely as one student to another,” Williams concluded: “I think you might be amused to have a copy of a small book which I published this year by request. It is called *He Came Down from Heaven*, and I am having a copy sent to you.”⁵⁰

Lowrie accepted Dru’s changes and, as publication work proceeded, Williams and Lowrie exchanged views on writing. Lowrie discussed the difficulty of keeping his books objective. Williams responded that he realized the difficulty:

⁴⁹ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 29 September 1938, WLP.

⁵⁰ Charles Williams, *He Came Down from Heaven*; Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 4 November 1938, WLP.

I am always trying to do it with my own poems and generally failing. There is a sense in which, I think, as one grows older, the whole of one's past experience exists more vividly than at any previous time. I am inclined to wonder whether in fact the old casual phrase about "living in the past" is not more true, on a deeper plane, than is usually supposed. For "memory" does not seem adequately to describe the experience. But I must not delay on such a subject now. I may (for other reasons than Kierkegaard) wish that you had been in London.⁵¹

In another letter, Lowrie must have commented on the distinction—and perhaps the competition—between "serious" and amateur scholars. Williams replied:

"serious scholars" must pay the price for having a reputation superior to us less learned creatures, and I suppose that is why I may run out of the gate while you are hardly allowed to look over the wall. I trust however that when you do look over the wall you will photograph the landscape and see that the photograph (as far as you are concerned) has a reasonable possibility of circulation.⁵²

Lowrie also informed Williams about his other book projects, which included one on the German philosopher and physicist Gustav Theodor Fechner and another about the archaeological record of Peter and Paul in Rome.⁵³

Lowrie submitted the latter manuscript to Scribner's, which passed on it. He then forwarded the rejection letter to Williams, asking him if he would like to see the manuscript. "Let us see your book by all means," Williams replied. "You always have shown yourself so understanding that I may say that, without feeling that I am committing myself at all. But I should like to read it and I will do whatever I can here for it." Defending the judgment of a colleague, Williams added that he felt "very strongly sympathetic with [the editor's] emotions. It is the whole question of our not being able to *make* people read a book which is the difficulty."⁵⁴

After the exchange of a few letters regarding publication dates and the completion of preliminaries, Williams informed Lowrie that he had enjoyed his book on Peter and Paul, which is a highly digressive work that

⁵¹ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 24 January 1939, WLP.

⁵² Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 30 January 1939, WLP.

⁵³ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 18 May 1939, WLP. Lowrie edited and translated a selection of Fechner's writings for publication: *Religion of a Scientist: Selections from Gustav Th. Fechner*.

⁵⁴ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 31 May 1939, WLP.

has more to do with church unity than with archaeology. Williams wrote that he could see no “objection to it as a book” and that he saw no particular reason why it should not be published—except for this: “I am quite clear that the sales over here would probably be of the smallest, since it is before anything a kind of book that would interest (a) the people who know you—personally or by letter—(b) the very few people who happen to appreciate fully the combined impersonal and personal tone of the book.” Williams then suggested that Lowrie pay for its publication:

I don't want to seem always to be, in fact, proposing that you should pay for things; it is not our habit, and only my own desire that K. should be published as soon as possible in English has allowed me to accept the position in regard to that author. What I feel about your own book is that it is pleasant and enjoyable and instructive, and I should like it to be done. On the other hand, in view of the probable small sales here I could not honestly recommend my people to spend their own money on it except for fun. And I am not quite sure that they would feel that that particular delicate delight was good enough.⁵⁵

The War

Lowrie wrote back agreeing to pay for the publication of this book, too, but before Williams could work out the details Hitler invaded Poland. On September 7, 1939, Williams sent a letter to Lowrie on OUP Amen House stationery with “as from Southfield House” typed below the letterhead. Williams opened the letter: “You will see from the above heading that we have moved from London, and you will have gathered how, like the men of Nehemiah the Tirshatha, we work between gas-masks and sirens.” Williams proceeded to outline the work before them: Lowrie’s translation of *The Point of View* would be published as soon as possible, followed by Lowrie’s translation of *Christian Discourses* (“do we need them!” Williams added) and Dru’s translation of *The Present Age*; OUP would pass on the work that another translator had offered (Williams added: “K. may rebuild civilization, but we shall have to be more economical than ever in building K.”); and Williams would get Lowrie estimates on publishing his book on Peter and Paul.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 26 July 1939, WLP. Lowrie’s book on Peter and Paul was eventually published as *SS. Peter and Paul in Rome: An Archaeological Rhapsody*.

⁵⁶ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 7 September 1939, WLP.

As assured Lowrie that OUP was “most anxious to widen and enhance Kierkegaard’s reputation,” Williams began addressing new challenges facing their enterprise—shortages of paper, restrictions on importing books, insurance against “War Risks,” and staff being drawn into military service. But most disruptive was Dru’s assignment to the British embassy in Paris “as a literary attaché.” “It is a little hard on our unfortunate K.,” Williams wrote, “that after having lived, as it were, in catastrophes, the publication of his books should be accompanied by even more universal ones.”⁵⁷ In spite of all this, the publication of Kierkegaard in English proceeded into 1940. At the beginning of that year, Milford wrote to Lowrie:

I appreciate the expense and care that you have spent on Kierkegaard, and I am very glad to be associated with the undertaking. I wish that the Oxford University Press could have seen its way to make the magnificent gesture of publishing the works at its own expense, but you will understand how deeply we are committed in many directions and how impossible such good deeds sometimes become.⁵⁸

But on May 10, Lowrie complained to the New York Branch about the \$7 price of *Christian Discourses*.⁵⁹ On May 15, he notified the branch that he was taking his next Kierkegaard translation, *Stages on Life’s Way*, to Princeton, since Princeton was able to sell books at a lower price and had a larger selling force in the United States.⁶⁰ Lowrie pointed out that the war had slowed down progress on publishing Kierkegaard and asked OUP to rescind the contract that he had recently signed with them to publish two volumes that included *For Self-Examination*, *Training in Christianity*, and other works.⁶¹

Lowrie wrote to Williams to express “the feeling of sadness” he had in breaking away from OUP and acknowledged “the liberal education” he owed to Williams. “This remote acquaintanceship with you has been very

⁵⁷ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 10 October 1939, WLP. In addition to these troubles, Lowrie informed Williams the Geismar had died and that Swenson had suffered a stroke (he died a few months later). Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 7 November 1939, WLP.

⁵⁸ Humphrey Milford to Walter Lowrie, 26 January 1940, WLP.

⁵⁹ One of the factors resulting in higher prices was a duty that had to be paid by American authors for books imported into the U.S. See OUP, New York, to Walter Lowrie, 16 May 1940, WLP.

⁶⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life’s Way*, trans. Walter Lowrie.

⁶¹ Walter Lowrie to OUP, New York, 10 and 15 May 1940; Walter Lowrie to OUP, Oxford, 30 May 1940, WLP.

pleasant to me,” he added. Lowrie apologized for “interjecting” his “personal interests and concerns at such a time as this, in the midst of such dolorous and tragic events.” He pointed out that he had “made no loud complaint” about his book *Peter and Paul* being held up for many months, having made “due allowance for [OUP’s] difficulties.” But, he continued, twice as many copies of his book *Kierkegaard* had been sold in the United States than in Great Britain—and that was before the war. “I heartily hope,” Lowrie concluded, “in the interest of the prompt dissemination of Kierkegaard’s writings, that the Oxford University Press will permit me to rescind the contract and let these two last manuscripts be published in America.”⁶²

Williams wrote back to Lowrie, acknowledging the “exemplary consideration” that Lowrie had shown thus far and added that Lowrie’s trials had been made “much worse by the present situation.” “On the other hand,” Williams added, “I hope that you will count it to us for virtue that we have ... been so very anxious to maintain under all difficulties some kind of connection with *Kierkegaard*.”⁶³ In response to Lowrie’s request to return his manuscripts, Williams explained that proofs had already started going to Lowrie and that the printer had already “arranged a routine of the book and that a breach now would be embarrassing to all sides.” “You will see my difficulty,” Williams wrote,

and indeed I very much hope that you will let these at least go through. I quite realize how you must have felt that you were, and had been all through, casting your bread onto the waters which never returned it. In fact, although you do sell more of *Kierkegaard* in America than here, I do feel that his publication by us formally instead of merely as an agent for Princeton has not been without its use. Princeton is a very noble University; on the other hand over here perhaps the prestige of Oxford has played a part in the reception of *Kierkegaard* more intangible but no less effective than the actual sales.⁶⁴

In spite of Williams’s appeal, and letters from Milford and others, Lowrie would not reverse his decision and OUP became the European agent for Princeton’s Kierkegaard publications, buying flat sheets that it published under its own imprint.⁶⁵

⁶² Walter Lowrie to Charles Williams, 16 May 1940, WLP.

⁶³ Kierkegaard is underscored in the letter, but Williams seems to be referring to the man as well as the book.

⁶⁴ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 3 June 1940, WLP.

⁶⁵ Joseph A. Brandt to Humphrey Milford, 18 September 1940; Humphrey Milford to Joseph A. Brandt, 26 October 1940, WLP.

Williams's work on Kierkegaard continued for a while longer: he wrote an introduction for *The Present Age*;⁶⁶ he worked to get Princeton to bring out Lowrie's translations in the same format as OUP's books ("As far as may be we ought to aim at a certain uniformity");⁶⁷ he allocated royalties;⁶⁸ he tried to keep Lowrie's books in stock in New York;⁶⁹ and he dealt with booksellers who had reported erroneously that Lowrie's books were out of print.⁷⁰ And the correspondence between Williams and Lowrie continued, and continued to involve an exchange of business details as well as personal comments about the war.

In a letter written soon after the Blitz had begun, Williams wrote to Lowrie about lost proofs and coordinating OUP's publication plans with Lowrie's. Williams hoped that between them they would "clear the most important part of Kierkegaard altogether for the English-speaking peoples," which, he wrote, "will be a very valuable work." Williams added that he was "a little personally sad" that he would not have the same kind of access to the Princeton publication, at hand on his shelves. After lamenting the loss of this "accidental privilege," Williams concluded:

We shall go on maintaining our jobs until the worst happens, if it does. I admit that it seems unbelievable occasionally that the high banners should still be flying. But if the German Government think they are going to frighten us out of our intellectual duties, the German Government is wrong! I have been in London enough to appreciate what is happening, and I merely reiterate the last sentence. Screaming bombs are not my idea of a quiet night or a peaceful end, but I am sure Kierkegaard would have felt them merely expository of his own gospel, with other things of course.⁷¹

In another letter, Williams wrote about the difficulty of importing Princeton's sheets, due to limitation imposed by the Board of Trade that privileged war material, and the need to get back from Lowrie corrected proofs to meet publication dates. Williams expressed sympathy for troubles Lowrie was having with a refugee and added:

⁶⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age: And Two Minor Ethico-Religious Treatises*, trans. Alexander Dru and Walter Lowrie. Williams concluded his introduction: "The reader to whom Kierkegaard looked forward was the man who, in terror, in despair, in humility, in trust, was also able to recognize the unique. 'It is God who waits. Leap, then, into the arms of God'" (xii).

⁶⁷ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 18 July 1940, WLP.

⁶⁸ Charles Williams to Alexander Dru, 24 July 1940, WLP.

⁶⁹ Walter Lowrie to Philip Vaudrin, 25 July 1940, WLP.

⁷⁰ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 13 August 1940, WLP.

⁷¹ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 30 September 1940, WLP.

The position here is quite simple; so long as we are alive we do all that we can, and as at any moment we may be dead, we do it with the oddest sensations. Occasionally a bomb will knock a house and its inhabitants out of existence before the plane can even be heard. Almost Kierkegaardian. Catastrophe and that kind of thing. I am a little inclined to think that we may lose interest in the theology of crisis, considering what a great deal of crisis we are living in.⁷²

The End

In March 1941, Williams wrote to Lowrie to inform him that Lowrie's last two translations were "on point of publication" and that advance copies were ready. Williams wrote: "I am glad at least to be able to tell you that the thing is finished; I wish I could look forward to being involved in more of your translations. But that is not your fault, and I entirely sympathize with you." Williams then asked for personal copies of Lowrie's future translations. "I hope this suggestion does not seem too crude, but it would be a very great pleasure to me to have my own copies independent of the chances and changes of a publishing office."⁷³ Lowrie's relationship with OUP was not over (correspondence about published works continued until the end of his life), but OUP would publish no more new books of Lowrie's—or Kierkegaard's. Dru's war work, which Williams described as "some sort of liaison post between ourselves and the Poles," prevented further work by him on Kierkegaard and so Lowrie proceeded to translate the titles on which Dru had been working.⁷⁴

One of the last issues discussed between Williams and Lowrie had to do with an appendix that Lowrie added to his translation of Kierkegaard's book *Repetition*. This essay, titled "How Kierkegaard Got into English," begins by announcing that "Mr. Charles Williams of the Oxford University Press ... affectionately fostered the enterprise of publishing S. K.'s works in English." Lowrie expressed his affection for Williams by writing: "Charles Williams is the only man I have ever taken to my heart 'unsight unseen.'" This essay, inspired by an earlier suggestion of Williams's, reveals much about how Lowrie became interested in Kierkegaard and how he worked to get English translations of Kierkegaard

⁷² Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 17 October 1940, WLP.

⁷³ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 25 March 1941, WLP.

⁷⁴ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 27 January 1942, WLP.

published.⁷⁵ Milford thought it revealed too much. After reading Lowrie's essay in 1942, in sheets of *Repetition* sent by Princeton, Milford complained to Princeton publisher Joseph Brandt about the essay's public exhibition of OUP's private business correspondence, from which Lowrie had quoted, as well as OUP's private arrangements, such as Lowrie's subventions of his publications.⁷⁶ The OUP edition of *Repetition*, published in 1942, did not include Lowrie's essay.

In his last letter to Lowrie, dated November 29, 1944, Williams thanked Lowrie for sending him a copy of *The Concept of Dread* and closed his letter:

I look forward very much to reading it, though I feel that I shall never really get down to K. until I have retired into a back room in Hoxton, where no doubt I shall need him as well as read him. But it is extremely kind of you to send it to me and I shall preserve it until my Hoxton period comes with the greatest of care.

I hope all goes well with you.

Always yours,

Charles Williams⁷⁷

Williams died about six months later.

Conclusion

During the period of his correspondence with Lowrie, Williams's life was full of triumphs and tribulations. Williams's most mature writing comes from this time and his reputation was growing as well. After his relocation to Oxford in 1939, Williams's connections with some of the Inklings grew stronger and he became a popular lecturer at Oxford University, which awarded him an honorary MA degree in 1943. But there were stresses associated with living such a crowded and increasingly public life; and to these were added the stresses of living in a time of war, which made his business of publishing difficult and separated Williams's from his life and family in London.

Williams's Kierkegaard correspondence sheds some light on this period of Williams's life, but most importantly it is a record of the significant role he had in getting Kierkegaard before the English-speaking

⁷⁵ Walter Lowrie, "How Kierkegaard Got into English," in Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology*, trans. Walter Lowrie, 177, 190.

⁷⁶ Humphrey Milford to Joseph Brandt, 20 March 1942, WLP.

⁷⁷ Charles Williams to Walter Lowrie, 29 November 1944, WLP.

world. Within a few years, OUP published seven Kierkegaard books—including twenty of his works—and laid the foundation for Princeton to continue publishing Kierkegaard into the present. This enterprise was, as Lowrie wrote, “fostered” by Williams.

Finally, in addition to getting a glimpse of Williams at work, as a shrewd and strategic editor, this “business” correspondence reveals the way in which Williams mixed practical and philosophical concerns and it shows something of how his work as an editor connected with his work as an author. Williams’s work at OUP provided him with access to persons such as Kierkegaard and Lowrie. In the case of these two, Williams was creatively and theologically inspired. And this inspiration influenced all of his literary labors.

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