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WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS:

A STUDY OF HIS WORK.

by

Charles Doyle
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NOTE

This study is twofold in purpose: (1) to examine the full range of Williams's writing, a task which has not been undertaken by anyone since Vivienne Koch in 1950. Necessarily, Miss Koch could not consider the poems of Williams's final, greatest, period. (2) to examine Peterson particularly in relation to draft material at Yale and Buffalo. Many studies of the poem have been published (including Sister M. Bernetta Quinn's important essay and, recently, Walter Scott Peterson's book length analysis), but none hitherto from this particular point of view.

As stated, my bibliography is selective. The most extensive bibliographical work on Williams is that of Linda Walshimer Wagner, in her book and her later checklist. I have included by no means all of Mrs Wagner's entries and some items in my bibliography will not be found in either of her lists. All three lists, together with that of Sister M. Bernetta Quinn, should be used in conjunction. A full scale bibliography of primary sources, compiled by Emily Mitchell Wallace, is scheduled for publication late in 1968.
A number of references appear in footnotes, but are not listed again in the bibliography. This is because, while they are considered relevant to the immediate context, they are not essential items in the broad context of Williams scholarship.

The initials CEP and CEP, used throughout, refer to Williams's Collected Earlier Poems (New York: 1951) and his Collected Later Poems (New York: 1950, revised 1963) (See bibliography).
CHAPTER ONE

THE RIVER

Among William Carlos Williams's unpublished papers at Yale are several typed and handwritten sheets which suggest that, at some late stage in his career, he intended to organize the whole corpus of his poems in a single, meaningful way. One sheet is headed: THE COMPLETE COLLECTED EXERCISES TOWARD A POSSIBLE POEM (in 2 vols), another: THE MODERN THEORY AND PRACTICE: FINAL COMPLETE COLLECTED POEMS OF W.C.W.

These titles declare the dominant preoccupation of Williams's life - poem as process, the making of the poem. His intention was to group the poems under five headings (at one stage, six)\(^1\), each group to be prefaced by a statement of his "mode of attack" and his objective assessment of the degree of success achieved.

As they are finally made, both CEP and CLP
present difficulties to any attempt to understand the plan behind their organisation. We have no means of knowing how the actual run of the poems relates to the scheme. Nor have we the specific comments, although a great deal of Williams's prose is relevant. Characteristically pragmatic, he may have felt that such a procedure would give criticism and apologetics too prominent a place.

The "chapter" titles indicate a roughly chronological grouping for the poems, but the crucial consideration is Williams's quest for, and development of, true form. Going at once to the point, "The River", his proposed title for the opening group, draws attention to the centrality of the Passaic River, not only in Paterson, but from the very beginning of Williams's career. In the important early long poem, "The Wanderer" (CEP, 3-12), "the "old queen" (his Muse) issues a double command, to "the filthy Passaic" and to the young Williams:

Enter, youth, into this bulk!
Enter, river, into this young man!
Although not published until its inclusion in *Al Que Quiere* (1917), "The Wanderer" was written considerably earlier. Late in life, Williams spoke of it to Edith Heal as "a reconstruction from memory of my early Keatsian *Endymion* imitation that I destroyed, burned in a furnace! It is the story of growing up". Its focal, quasi-religious experience is probably that to which Williams refers when, writing to Marianne Moore in 1934, he tells her the origin of the "inner security" she discerned in his work:

It is something which occurred once when I was about twenty, a sudden resignation to existence, a despair - if you wish to call it that, but a despair which made everything a unit and at the same time a part of myself. I suppose it might be called a sort of nameless religious experience. I resigned, I gave up. I decided there was nothing else in life for me but to work...I won't follow causes. I can't. The reason is that it seems so much more important to me that I am... As a reward for this anonymity
I feel as much a part of things as trees and stones. Heaven seems frankly impossible.

Almost as important, and during the same vital period, was his meeting with Ezra Pound, a fellow-student at the University of Pennsylvania. The friendship, which lasted until Williams’s death in 1963, was complex, fruitful and at times painful, as any account of Williams’s career must inevitably show. Estimates of the effects of this friendship tend to centre on the question of how much influence Pound had upon Williams; conclusions vary greatly. Williams, never easily led, claimed that the two were not rivals. He qualifies his own often-quoted remark that: "Before meeting Ezra Pound is like B.C. and A.D." 4, adding that Pound "was not impressed" either by his friend’s "studied Keatsian sonnets" or his "quick spontaneous poems", Whitmanesque pieces written into copybooks with marbelized covers. Nevertheless Pound, from the early days, adopted a master-to-pupil tone towards Williams and throughout his writing career Williams was often very conscious of Pound in the background.

A difference between them was that Pound had
determined from the first to be a writer, while Williams eventually deliberately chose writing from a number of possibilities open to him. He was interested in acting, in writing and producing plays. He could sing and played the violin well enough to perform at a celebration of Penn alumni; but a more serious consideration than either music or acting was painting. In her own youth, his mother had won art prizes in Paris. Another of his lasting friendships at Penn was with a painter: "I met Charles Demuth over a dish of prunes at Mrs. Chein's boarding house on Locust Street and formed a lifelong friendship on the spot with dear Charlie..." Later painter and poet, each in his medium illustrated the other's work; but in those early days Williams made line drawings for a publication called The 'Scope (of which he was art editor in 1906). His self-portrait in oils, from a somewhat later period, is also at Penn, in the Van Pelt Library. For a time he was devoted enough to the idea of painting to go each Sunday afternoon and watch a Philadelphia painter, John Wilson, at work. Wilson, whom Williams later saw as "a failure of an artist", soon had the younger man painting, but his real value was that, "He painted because
that's all he could do, all he wanted to do".  

For all he wanted to do, Williams decided on the accessibility of words: "Words it would be and their intervals: Bam! Bam!" It was to be a long time from the moment of this decision and from his discovery of "resignation" until he was writing true poems. Where from the first Pound made a conscious effort to assimilate past cultures through experimenting with a variety of verse techniques, Williams (both through narrower reading and a less clear sense of what he was doing) turned to pseudo-romanticism and the pseudo-Elizabethan. Distressed at the printing errors in his self-published first book, Poems (1909), he re-issued it with corrections of the order of "yclad" (for "y-clad") and "love-worn" (for "raptured"). Pound's letter from London on the book is just: "Your book would not attract even passing attention here. There are fine lines in it, but nowhere I think do you add anything to the poets you use as models". Since Williams himself specifies Milton, Keats and Shakespeare as "models", clearly he was by no means ready for a "modern movement". Browning's presence, evident in Pound's
first version of *Personae* is not to be found in Williams's work until some years later. Pound's first letter to Williams from London is a typical example of Pound teaching, but it also tells us that Williams did not particularly like the poems Pound was writing at that time. 11

Yet, within a short period, Williams's sense of the poem was to move much closer to Pound's. In 1908-09, centering around T.E. Hulme, the Imagist movement had its first beginnings as a series of café meetings in London. Pound was to establish himself as spokesman for the movement a few years later. His first associates were H.D. (Hilda Doolittle who, on Pound's insistence, became "H.D. Imagiste" for a time. She was a friend of both Pound and Williams while they were all still students) and her husband, Richard Aldington. 12 Williams soon became part of the group.

When, in 1912, *The Poetry Review*, London, was the first periodical to publish Williams's poems, these were supported by Pound's "Introductory Note", which in substance is a faint intimation of the famous "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste", to come a few months later.
In Williams's favour, Pound felt he was able to say: "He apparently means what he says. He is not overcrowded with false ornament".

In the years immediately before the first World War, Pound established himself as a serious poet and critic and also became foreign editor of the newly founded Poetry, which he attempted, without success, to win over completely to Imagism. When, after a four-year interval, Williams brought out his second book of poems, The Tempers (1913) it was Pound who found a publisher for it, Elkin Mathews of London.

Yet Williams was independent, as is shown by his early correspondence with Harriet Monroe, who printed four of his poems in Poetry, June, 1913 (his first American periodical publication). Some of his observations are remarkably sharp, as is his apparent self-assurance when he chides her for so soon adopting the "editor" attitude:

Now life is above all things else at any moment subversive of life as it was the moment before - always new, irregular. Verse to be alive must have infused into it something of the same order, some
tincture of disestablishment...I am speaking of modern verse. ¹³

A comment further on illuminates another aspect of his thinking at this time:

if you wish to judge it as a fixed iambic measure you are dogmatically right as to the disturbing fourth or sixth lines; but why not call it some other kind of a measure?

The Tembers is, in some sense, a transitional book. In CEP it is made to look stronger than it actually was (and is so treated by some commentators), but the impressive portrait poëms, — "Le Médecin Malgré Lui", "To Mark Anthony in Heaven" and "Portrait of a Lady" were originally published much later (the last as late as 1920, when it appeared in the August issue of The Dial) some sort of transition appears to take place in the book itself. It is an old mixture of Pound and the English romantic lyric as represented in Palgrave. There is evidence throughout of a Poundian search for music, most typically in
"Homage" (CEP, 18), of the "second strophe" of which Pound felt himself able to comment, "his verse is sound as a bell". 14

The book has also a certain eclecticism, using free verse, the Elizabethan lyric, the Browning dramatic monologue (Williams, in his use of this is, like Pound usually, less interested in the "character" than in what he himself has to say) and there are even lines here and there which could have been written by Seamus O'Sullivan ("Over the five-barred gate, and will still be straying" – CEP, 25). "Mezzo Forte" (CEP, 21) is Poundian both in title and tone, as are "The Ordeal", "Appeal" and "Portent" (CEP, 23, 24, 27) in grammar and syntax.

Looking back, in 1953, Williams could see clearly that he was, in 1913, "beginning to turn away from the romantic". From the later vantage point, he speculated that the cause of the change was his great interest in the local, his experience of medicine and his "intense Americanism". Very little of these actual qualities show in The Tempers and he does not mention another relevant fact. We cannot, of course, establish a precise moment of change, but the change appears to owe
something to his undertaking the responsibilities of marriage in 1912.

It was particularly from this time on that he was drawn to Imagism, although his actual association and main publishing outlet for the next few years was with others and the group around Alfred Kreymborg at Grantwood. Williams and Mina Loy acted, with the Provincetown Players, in Kreymborg's play Lima Beans, but little occurred to forward his reputation as a poet, so that when his third book, Al Que Quiere (To Him Who Wants It), appeared in 1917, he, as on two previous occasions, paid a sizeable portion of the publishing cost.

Williams himself described the poems in this volume as "quiet", but as acute a critic as his friend Kenneth Burke saw it in 1922 and again in his valediction of 1963 as among Williams's finest work. In Al Que Quiere he first tapped the vein which, to his lasting irritation, Wallace Stevens was later to call the "anti-poetic".

An American, but only of the first generation, Williams was doubly cut off from the traditional past. Rejecting Europe, he could lay no easy claim to the American past towards which some of
his contemporaries had begun to look for landmarks. He could not do that until he had established the viability of the present as a vital source of discovery for what goes into the making of America. Never a chauvinist or a regionalist, Williams' discoveries began from what was presented to his senses. His leading stratagem in *Al Que Quiere* is to go directly and simply to the object of concern, but not simply passively. He partakes of it. Not interested in mere logic or "the finished product", he had in him an element of incoherence which, when it served him well, invested his work with great vitality.

So much is made of Williams's "objectivism" that his lifelong sense of the truth of the world of the imagination is often overlooked. This is plain from "Sub Terra" (*CEP*, 117), the opening poem of *Al Que Quiere*, in his muted exclamation:

---

God, if I could fathom
The guts of shadows!

---

He is searching for nuances. Incidentally, his consciousness of the world of imagination tends to emphasize the "otherness" of the material world, pondering its nature as an order of experience:
For the simple truth is
that though I see you clear enough
you are not there!

The excitement of actually being alive, compound of mystery and "thingness", energizes "Danse Russe" (CEP, 148) one of the many self-portraits of this period (a poem Burke calls, with approval, "crazy"). Here, as elsewhere, the portrait is of the poet dancing. His dance, of life, is joyous and in some degree narcissistic, a celebration of artistic loneliness. In his domestic setting, he is in tension with it and yet can ask:

Who shall say I am not
the happy genius of my household?

A Chagall-like poem, "Ballet" (CEP, 169) repeats the association between dance and loneliness. In "January Morning" (CEP, 162) the dance becomes openly identified with the technique of exact observation, the measuring, the imposition of order. Again, the dancer is solitary:

The young doctor is dancing with happiness in the sparkling wind, alone
at the prow of the ferry! He notices the curdy barnacles and broken ice crusts left at the slip's base by the low tide and thinks of summer and green shell-crusted ledges among the emerald eel-grass!

The poem's final "suite" (XV), an address to his Muse, expresses the loneliness and "madness" and something in addition, a need to communicate in and to the common speech:

All this —
was for you, old woman.
I wanted to write a poem that you would understand.
For what good is it to me if you can't understand it?

But you got to try hard —

"Canthara" (CEP, 143) is a slyly humorous treatment of the dance, the sexual dance of vigorous youth contrasted with the dance of memory of the old man urinating, responding to the "familiar music" with a wry music of his own. The deliberate
indelicacy of this scene sharply focuses one aspect of Williams's sense of beauty, which he touches upon again in the fine opening lines of the otherwise sentimental "Apology" (CEP, 131):

The beauty of
the terrible faces
of our nonentities
stirs me to it...

lines which also exemplify his early mastery of the short line, of which he said, "I didn't go in for long lines because of my nervous nature. The rhythmic pace was the pace of speech, an excited pace because I was excited when I wrote". His implication that he had mastered the short line in Al Que Quiere is largely justified.

Another feature of the book is a physical sense of colour. As a poet of sensation Williams was not given to emphasizing visual experience, rather the contrary. Using colours widely, he has a definite sense of them as secondary qualities, but he does, at random, use them symbolically. An interesting example of this is the yellow "stain of love", which occurs in "First Version: 1915"
and "Love Song" (CEP, 173, 174) and may be related to the yellow, engendering sun, the pregnancy and "stain at the bottom of the retort" in Paterson IV.

A key poem of Al Que Quiere is "To a Solitary Disciple" (CEP, 187), which is concerned with just the problem of distinguishing essential from secondary qualities. In part, it is an appeal to the disciple to keep his eye on the object, for the sheer tactic of precise observation which he himself claimed for "Gulls" (CEP, 126; also in Al Que Quiere); but "To a Solitary Disciple" goes far beyond that and beyond the Imagist doctrine which had been Williams's principal guide during the Others period. A demonstration, it instructs the disciple to go beyond the surface image to essentials, to seek what Williams would later call "the radiant gist". Here he seeks not the accidental but the indispensable or universal qualities of the scene. Beyond every injunction for us to see is Williams's realization that what "is" differs from our experience of it; but true poems are made from the effort to bring these two facts of experience closer to each other. The cut back line, the "short breath" measure aids such a purpose.

Curiously, in "Gulls" (only part sheer observation)
we find a fair example of many impediments Williams was so soon to discard completely. There is the conscious address to "my townspeople", characteristic of a number of early poems, which is the poet too openly displaying one aspect of his sense of the artist - he the eagle, they the gulls. Addressing the people in a long, quite heavily punctuated line, he reports an event in his own life. Such a strategy, deliberately placing a barrier between poem and experience, would not satisfy Williams for long, as may be seen in many poems of that period, such as "Dedication to a Plot of Ground" (CEP, 171) 17, which, although by no means free of punctuation, is organized, in line and syntax, so that there is a great thrust of energy through the poem so that its rough, energetic, colloquial conclusion seems entirely fitting with all that has preceded it. Sometimes such a thrust is made almost without punctuation, as in "Dawn", "Winter Sunset" (CEP, 138, 127). This forward movement illustrates Williams's understanding of Aristotle, his insistence on the distinction between copying nature and imitating nature. 18 Art is a re-presentation, an "enlargement of nature", a parallel action involving the imagination. The
poem as an action re-presents nature as process, in "Dawn", for example, as the verbal series "pound", "beating", "rising", "stirring", "quickening", "bursting", "spreading", "dividing", "lumbering" - each in form and denotation conveying movement and energy.

Much of the strength of Williams's best work is drawn from his leaning to noun (thing) and verb (process). This deployment of the verb, to become one of his chief working methods, is related to what he later (in the Preface to Paterson) termed "interpenetration". Thus, in "Winter Quiet" (CEP, 141), his own reactions to winter become part of the scene, of "nature":

Tense with suppressed excitement
the fences watch where the ground
has humped an aching shoulder for the ecstasy.

Technically, interpenetration is related to juxtaposition, a chief means of metamorphic poems. "Drink" (CEP, 140), is an instance of juxtaposition being used to suggest an actual interpenetrative failure, while the sense of interpenetration is
held in the poem's Whitmanesque closing lines:

My whisky is
a tough way of life:

The wild cherry
continually pressing back
peach orchards.

I am a penniless
rumsoak.

Where shall I have that solidity
which trees find
in the ground?

My stuff
is the feel of good legs
and a broad pelvis
under the gold hair ornaments
of skyscrapers. (CEP 140)

The poem's two elements, drink (instability) and
rootedness (a prime virtue for Williams) are set
over against each other, and that is the action.
Yet even here the question set in the middle of the poem is a more direct approach than Williams would later prefer.

At this stage, however, the directness, combined with understatement, contributes considerably towards establishing Williams's world in the poem and his stance towards it, as two of the "Pastoral" poems show (CEP, 121, 124). The first of these is an amplification of his sense of "inner security":

When I was younger
it was plain to me
I must make something of myself.
Older now
I walk back streets
admiring the houses
of the very poor.

Most of the remainder of the poem is an exact catalogue of objects seen, but there is a concluding comment:

No one
will believe this
of vast import to the nation.
Two overt contrasts are made in the second poem: between the sparrows hopping on the pavement and the "shut-in" lives of humans, and between the movement of "the old man who goes about gathering dog-lime" and that of the Episcopal minister (one of the more obviously sentimental comparisons of Williams's earlier work). The poem concludes:

These things
astonish me beyond words. (CEP 124)

Here, as in the first poem, Williams is actually offering us a self-portrait, recording his own responses with a directness (i.e., a degree of comment), which he would soon come to see as undesirable. Such poems are in themselves valuable insights into his total sense of "the poem".

A few years later, in the Prologue to Kora in Hell, occurs a paragraph in which he obviously had in mind another Al Que Quiere poem, "Chicory and Daisies" (CEP, 122):

A poet witnessing the chicory flower
and realizing its virtues of form and
color so constructs his praise of it as to borrow no particle from right or left. He gives his poem over to the flower and its plant themselves, that they may benefit by those cooling winds of the imagination which thus returned upon them will refresh then at their task of saving the world. 19

In "saving the world" we have (not for the first or last time) Williams's view of the poem as moral commitment. Otherwise, the search for Disciple" harmony invoked in "To a Solitary" is repeated here as is the conception of beauty as a fugitive, subtle quality, to be discovered in the ordinary as much as anywhere. This paragraph and the poem to his disciple are both gestures against convention, as is "Tract" (CEP, 129), where the distinctions between essential and secondary are related to social action. In separating the conventional from the essential at the funeral we maintain contact with reality and thereby more honour the dead. By analogy Williams is also stating his practice as poet.

Several poems in Al Que Quiere touch upon Williams's ambivalent sense of the "Dream". In
"Libertad! Igualidad! Fraternidad!" (CEP, 134), a socio-political incident contains the activist "It is dreams that have destroyed us" and the fatalist "dreams are not a bad thing", which anticipates the observation in "The Poem as a Field of Action" that: "The poem is a dream, a daydream of wish fulfillment...the subject-matter of the poem is always phantasy - what is wished for, realized in the 'dream' of the poem...". This conflict is handled with subtlety in the juxtapositions of "Good Night" (CEP, 145), where the objective reality of "a glass filled with parsley - crisped green" is set over against the romanticism of "memory playing the clown" and evoking pictures of "three vague, meaningless girls", their "little slippers" and "high-school French". Memory, the clown, has transformed them into "phantasy", to which the glass of fresh parsley is said to be preferable. Yet the poem is discovered in the fact that momentarily the "three girls in crimson satin" have dominated the poet's imagination. In some sense the object on the draining-board and the subjective memory of the opera have equal value. They represent an inclusion as well as a possible choice, the melding of objective-subjective expressed
in a key line of "The Wanderer", "I knew all - it became me", to be repeated nearly half a century later in *Paterson V*.

Two portraits, of a woman in bed (CEP, 150) and "Sympathetic Portrait of a Child" (CEP, 155), very different in method, serve to illustrate the best qualities of *Al Que Quiere*. That of the woman is from the "inside", through her voice, while that of the murderer's daughter is the poet's account of her reaction to him. Each is an instance of what Kenneth Burke calls Williams's "remarkable powers of definition, of lucidity". 21
NOTES


   This is a succinct summary of Williams's career as it developed, although he later deleted the second heading.

2. William Carlos Williams, I Wanted to Write a Poem, Reported and Edited by Edith Heal (Boston, 1958), pp. 25-26. (Hereafter IWWP)

   A page of early Williams manuscript is reproduced in The Massachusetts Review, Winter 1962, p.307, with the description and comment:

   "A manuscript page of WCWs earliest extant verse, 1908....It is actually in the possession of John C. Thirlwall."

4. **IWWP**, p.5


8. *Autol*, p.61

9. These corrections are handwritten into the copy of *Poems* (1909) in the Yale Collection.


11. Ibid., p.3


14. Text of this "Introductory Note" is given in *IWWP*, p.12-13


16. *IWWP*, p.15

17. The material of this poem is quite closely related to "A Descendant of Kings", a short story of a somewhat later period (included in *The Knife of the Times*.)

18. See, for example, "How to Write a Short Story (Notes)" in *Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams* (New York, 1954), p.305. (Hereafter *SE*.)

19. *Kora in Hell* (Boston, 1920), with a frontispiece by Stuart Davis. (Hereafter *KH*.)
The second edition, published without the original Prologue and with a very much shorter one written in the year of publication (San Francisco, 1957) is cited throughout. The original Prologue had itself recently (1954) been republished as the opening essay in SE.

20. SE, 281.

CHAPTER TWO

DESCENT AND CONTACT

What Williams regarded as, for him, a new kind of poem was the "Improvisation", groups of which were published in The Little Review in 1917 and 1918. He continued to employ the mode, at intervals, for many years, but his most significant work in it was formed into Kora in Hell (1920). Possibly he was influenced by Pound in using the Persephone myth, but it exactly complements another motif frequently repeated in his own work, the Venus.

A poem first published in England in The Poetry Review (1912) is titled "From 'The Birth of Venus', Song" (CEP, 20). The motif occurs again in A Voyage to Pagany (1923) and one of the longer pieces of January: A Noelette and Other Prose (1932) is "The Venus", which Pound claims was "written to occur somewhere" in A Voyage to Pagany. Other references may be found in SE and Paterson and in
CLP we find "Venus Over the Desert" and the long-lined "The Birth of Venus".

"Born again, Venus from the confused sea..."; 2

Venus is the "reduction to one":

"...she is one.

Over and over again, she is one".

Venus is also "beautiful thing", the "radiant gist" of fully realised form, the "fierce singleness" which is the opposite of "divorce", separateness, the flux, multiplicity. Rising up through the waves in beauty, Venus is the classic wholeness, the "direct object" which Williams valued so much in Marianne Moore's work, "free from the smears of mystery, as pliant, as 'natural' as Venus on the wave." 3

This acceptance of the thing unmodified, intrinsic in beauty, contrasts with the Kora motif, immersion in "the filthy Passaic", descent to the "formless ground". Thus the "improvisations" are complementary to Williams's short-lined, "hard, dry" poems of "accurate description". 4 Together, the two motifs attest to Williams's intuition of the co-presence of ascent and descent, order and chaos, form and formlessness, that there can be no radium without "pitchblende".

Many of Williams's leading ideas are to be
found in the Prologue to KH. The essay itself is a collage: anecdotes of various of his contemporaries, painters and poets, a letter from H.D., excerpts from Pound's letters responding to the "Improvisations" as Margaret Anderson had published them, a letter from Wallace Stevens, a poem of Kreymborg's. This technique Williams was to establish as his modus operandi for a great part of his more extended work.

Through anecdotes of Walter Arenstberg he introduces his concept of "novelty" or "the new", his own version of Pound's "Make It New"; his aim of "seeing the thing itself without forethought or afterthought but with a great intensity of perception". (SE, 5); his rejection of H.D's fervency and belief in the flux: "There is nothing sacred about literature....it'll be good if the authentic spirit of change is on it", (SE, 10) although he also sees that "change is mockery" to any sense of the poem as masterpiece or object of devotion. Of the specific poem to which H.D. had plaintively objected, he says, "it filled a gap that I did not know how better to fill at the time", a pragmatism he will extend and clarify in Spring and All. Acutely conscious of the flux, Williams realised
instinctively that his own work was part of it. He had to ensure two things: one, that "what actually impinges on the senses must be rendered as it appears by use of which, only, and under which, untouched, the significance has to be disclosed".  

Two, that, in the rendering, the thing itself remains part of the living flux, does not become an ossified museum-piece.

An attempt to begin from the Prologue and follow through the development of Williams's ideas, seeking system, would be fruitless. His mind seems to have worked by accretion, so that when some years later, he declares, "the 'great outdoors', 'joy for health' and all such crap (because a covered lie) we are determined shall give way before the far greater mountains, the far greater depths of the imagination", he is not, as has sometimes been suggested, contradicting his earlier position. He maintained to the end his belief in "no ideas but in things" alongside a rejoicing in his sense of the "imagination", which increased throughout his life.

In the Prologue, he vaunts the "thing itself", the true, against the "associational or sentimental value... the false." (SE, 11) Lack
of imagination is the source of sentimentality, so also is the "pastime" of creating similes. Both detract from the real object of the poet's search, which is based on a "power which discovers in things those inimitable particles of dissimilarity to all other things which are the peculiar perfections of the thing in question." (SE, 16).

Here Williams is close to Pound and Poundian imagisme, with its famous call for "direct treatment of the thing itself". Reacting to the improvisations, Pound wrote to Williams late in 1917, "The thing that saves your work is opacity, and don't you forget it. Opacity is NOT an American quality." While one aspect of this opacity is attention to the "thing", another is escape from, rejection of, fixed or traditional forms in favour of "broken" composition. This, too, is of a piece with the world's discreteness, dependent in no way on a logical recounting of events, the poem does not even derive from events as such, "but solely from that attenuated power which draws perhaps many broken things into a dance giving them thus a full being." (SE, 14)

Both in his devotion to the object and in
his pursuit of imaginative freedom in the improvisations, Williams is, in a very real sense, anti-literary. When he suggests that, "The attention has been held too rigid on the one plane instead of following a more flexible, jagged resort. It is to loosen the attention, my attention since I occupy part of the field, that I write these improvisations" (SE, 11), he is in some sense anticipating McLuhan's criticism of the lineal nature of modern American society (and, by extension, Western society as a whole). Some light is cast on Williams's work if we see him as intuitively in sympathy with what McLuhan was to call "oral man", for whom "all time is now", whose sense of the world is of "simultaneity and inclusiveness".9

Literariness is one outcome of literateness. Williams concludes a very early poem, a pair of archaistic rhyming quatrains:

And thou beloved art that godly thing!
Marvelous and terrible; in glance
An injured June roused against Heaven's King!
And thy name, lovely One, is Ignorance.

(CEP, 21)
In the Prologue he speaks of, "The raw beauty of ignorance that lies like an opal mist over the west coast of the Atlantic, beginning at the Grand Banks and extending into the recesses of our brains." (SE, 16). As he makes clear, this is related to a passage in the main text of KH. Both concern interpenetration. They add dimension to his reaction to "the terrible faces of our nonentities". Ignorance, in his sense, is closely allied to innocence and that, in its turn, appears to be an avoidance of being fundamentally intellectual. Favoured with such innocence man can more easily participate in "the thing itself" and thus be more readily open to experience. Not riddled with half-truths, it is the "ignorant" who are capable of that "thousandth part of accurate understanding" and of discovering the music in things.

The Prologue ends with Williams's defence of America, (which drew Pound's good-humoured jibe, "a bloomin' foreigner....My dear boy, you have never felt the whoop of the P&traries."10), his attack on Eliot as a "subtle conformist", his ambivalent attitude to Pound as "the best enemy United States verse has", and his banner-cry,
"Nothing is good save the new", a concept hinted at earlier in "the new distance" of "The Wanderer", and, as we have observed, shared with Pound.

Tension created by the opposition between "thing itself" and "the authentic spirit of change" is the central working principle of the improvisations, whose function is "the shifting of categories...the disjointing process...". Williams recognizes that when a moment of balance does occur (which may be the poem), the poet retreats from it as from a doom, preferring the flux itself, which is life, "the gross buffetings of good and evil fortune". The furthest reach away from such a balance or stoppage is interpenetration. This is vital process, the dance of life:

Ha, goodbye, I have a rendez vous in the tips of three birch sisters.
Encourage vos musiciens! Ask them to play faster. I will return - later.
Ah you are kind. - and I? must dance with the wind, make my own snow flake, whistle a contrapuntal melody to my own fugue [sic]! Huzza then, this is' the dance of the blue moss bank!
Huzzah then, this is the mazurka of the hollow log! Huzzah then, this is the dance of rain in the cold trees.

(KH, p.13)

Thus, against balance as stasis or "stoppage", in the imagination everything is held in a kind of balance or, rather, a dance, which the mind can order as it will, holding opposites to itself. This is akin to the first part of Bergson's aesthetic theory, summarized by Hulme as, "the conception of reality as a flux of interpenetrated elements unseizable by the intellect...".\textsuperscript{12}

Williams has a good deal to say on the relationship between imagination and reality. While, in art, imagination controls reality, it is also dependent on reality. Imagination is free of the time category, having "neither beginning nor end" so that "it delights in its own seasons reversing the usual order at will. Of the air of the coldest room it will seem to build the hottest passions." (KH, 15). The cold room, the dead young woman of intelligence and the murdered "fellow of very gross behavior", these are the "array" of facts. Making no explicit moral distinctions, the poet sends them "on their
way side by side". Imagination "can instruct the mind" in the proper uses of emotions and experiences.

Imagination juxtaposes complementary oppositions, which may widen out into a total realization of the relativeness of all possibilities, a sense of which may account for Einstein's continuing fascination for Williams. Was it Pope Clement raped Persephone, or "did the devil wear a mitre in that year?" (KH, 23) The possibility of such speculation is set off against the attempt to impose order through written "history", "an attempt to make the past seem stable and of course it's all a lie". The relativeness of all facts is held in poise not by history but by art, which "perfects" the facts it employs as substance: "the perfections revealed by a Rembrandt are equal whether it be question of a laughing Saskia or an old woman cleaning her nails." (KH, 24)

Repeated reference to hands (and fingernails) in KH testifies to the importance of the sense of touch, which in turn is related to sexuality, the primary opposition. "Your hands please. Ah, if I had your hands". The hands are an offering of the self and (Williams universalizes the image) anthropologically they are the instruments when
"the nights are long for lice combing or moon dodging - and the net comes in empty again". Present touch, present sensation, NOW - these are the important things. Thus it is pointless to "remember the weather two years back".

Now, or two years back, at every stage the poet is Herculean, carrying the world upon his shoulders. In this way he transcends subjective and objective categories as "the imagination transcends the thing itself". Each imagination has its own "weather" (as he will come to say that a community has a prevailing "weather" 14) in which: "The true seasons blossom or wilt not in fixed order but so that many of them may pass in a few weeks or hours whereas sometimes a whole life passes and the season remains of a piece from one end to the other." (KH, 93)

Later, Williams himself saw the "dislocation of sense" in the improvisations as a fault, but he realized that he had discovered methods and "values" which could be extended. Karl Shapiro is, perhaps, going a little too far when he sees the method of KH as "identical" with that of Paterson 15, but they certainly have in common the juxtapositional technique.
Otherwise there are many foreshadowings of Paterson in KH, sometimes in incidentals, more often in the preoccupations. Commonly, Williams's work interlinks in this way. There are in KH notations for In the American Grain and a brief passage on the "green-flowered asphodel." The descent, drunkenness, Phyllis - these elements of Paterson are anticipated in KH. Williams also touches upon the importance of "the language of the day" in the imagination's very texture, (KH, 49) asserting that, otherwise, "a poem can be made of anything". It is form created from formlessness. "That which is known" has form, but it has value "only by virtue of the dark" which is formlessness. The known is that which is totally assimilated into one's being, which "passes out of the mind into the muscles". (KH, 71)

Such a known thing is now related to the will in reacting to formlessness. Words, language are a chief agent of this reaction or "vibration", but their value is not an absolute. A word, the "one true phrase", is no more true than its opposite, every solid is an "April zephyr", yet: "The particular thing... dwarfs the imagination; makes logic a butterfly, offers a finality that sends us spinning through space, a fixity the mind
could climb forever, a revolving mountain, a complexity with a surface of glass; the gist of poetry." (KH, 82)

Williams originally thought of KH as a poem. Pound and, later, Taupin recognized its affinities with Rimbaud. Williams, however, deleted it from his scheme of THE COMPLETE COLLECTED EXERCISES TOWARD A POSSIBLE POEM. Seen in relation to his total work, it is a key repository of his ideas, at the same time demonstrating that these were not highly systematized or even particularly consistent with one another. KH is important not least for showing how he maintained concurrently a view of the primacy of the "thing itself" and of the transcendent value of imagination. These views are ramified in "Notes from a Talk on Poetry" (Poetry, 1919): "The world of the senses lies unintelligible on all sides. It only exists when its emotion is fastened to it. This is artistic creation." 13 Here the "fastening" of emotion to action is virtually identical with transforming it imaginatively, but there is another point of importance. Even a great scientific discovery (e.g. the Curies' isolating of radium) is "stale, useless" once it has been
achieved. Only the very act of discovery engenders a live emotion. Adapting from Pound, he observes that "a truth twenty years old is a lie because the emotion has gone out of it." (Years later he will describe a corpse as "a lie" for the same reason.) In contrast to this he introduces an idea which was to become central for the "Objectivists": "To each thing its special quality, its special value that will enable it to stand alone. When each poem has achieved its particular form unlike any other, when it shall stand alone — then we have achieved our language."

At this time Williams met Robert McAlmon ("who was drifting about after having done a bit in one of the Canadian regiments": Autoh, 172) at a party at Lola Ridge's in Greenwich Village. They planned, and soon started, the first series of Contact.

With Pound in mind, Williams's "Sample Critical Statement" in Contact, while being a denial that he had insisted the American writer should ignore Europe, asserts that his work must begin in "the sensual accidents of his immediate contacts", in the achieving of a locus. Even great phases of
other countries' art depend on their source localities. The locality is important because contact is important. This is the main emphasis of Williams's prose pieces for the magazine and is, in some sense, what the fictional character Evan Dionysius ("Dev") Evans stands for in the Contact story wherein he first appears, but also later in A Voyage to Parany.

Contact of itself does not make art, but it is essential to art. No writing can be of value unless it derives from contact with experience, which means contact with other human beings. By definition, all experience must be local and will inevitably be affected by its location. To hold so is not parochial, and even memory and imagination depend initially on contact. "What are its contacts?" is the most important, perhaps the only important, question to ask of any work. Despite the obvious fact that many American achievements - in building, machinery, manufacture, etc - have been brought about by "paying naked attention first to the thing itself", he observes that his fellows are timid in applying this principle to the arts. Even criticism, to be at its fullest value, must originate in the environment which has produced the work itself.
He describes his next collection of poems, Sour Grapes, as "a mood book...poems of disappointment and sorrow". (IWP, 33). The mood is presented partly through interpenetration, but also in part through a sense of "otherness".

In "Blizzard" (CEP, 198) mood and natural process are one, while in "January" and "Approach of Winter" (both CEP, 197) man is a vital, stabilized centre among chaos, decay, sterility - the natural processes of wintering weather. The two methods tend to combine in "The Desolate Field":

Vast and grey, the sky
is a simulacrum
to all but him whose days
are vast and grey... (CEP, 196)

Dominating the book is a mood of dissatisfaction with the tenor of his everyday life. The poems focus in isolated figures, the doctor going about his medical duties in bad weather (in "Complaint", for example), his own inner weather dour. Subtle antithesis is made between this isolation and the artist's relatively "happy" loneliness:
When I am alone I am happy...
When I reach my doorstep
I am greeted by
the happy shrieks of my children
and my heart sinks.
I am crushed. (CEP, 213)

In the long poem "March", he speaks of "the happy loneliness of poetry,"\(^{19}\) and the mood also makes "The Lonely Street".

"Memory of April" (CEP, 207) represents another of the book's moods, which may be summed up in Williams's own words. In a letter to the Midwest poet, Alva Turner, in 1920, he wrote: "Disgust is my most moving emotion....I am always, unhappily, knee deep in blue mud."\(^{20}\) Disgust interpenetrates his sense of sexual experience in "Arrival":

the autumn
dropping its silk and linen leaves
about her ankles.
The tawdry veined body emerges
twisted upon itself
like a winter wind...! (CEP, 215)
A similar sexual disgust is an important element in "To a Friend Concerning Several Ladies" (CEP, 216). This is another poem of the poet's desire to pursue his vocation being impeded by the world, but the terms are not domestic. His passion for women and his feeling for the city are correlated. He is concerned to achieve a balance between these desires and the other desire to live a quiet writer's life, with "a few chrysanthemums...a few people". Too much "city" leads to self-digust, too much of writing to staleness, so that implicitly one is necessary to the other. This is the earliest poem of in which the metropolis figures importantly. 21

Williams has been recognized many times as one of the finest flower poets in the language. A good number of the affirmative poems in Sour Grapes are centred in flowers: "Daisy", "Primrose", "Queen Anne's Lace", "Great Mullen", "The Tulip Bed", "Blueflags". These alone can serve to show the range and subtlety of his technique. In "Daisy", for example, he accumulates details of accurate observation concerning flower and scene (the daisy is "the sun...upon a slender green stem") allowing these details to carry crucial
hints of a larger world, in this instance the world of sexual love. "Queen Anne's Lace" has the same larger theme. The woman's body is seen in terms of white flowers, but the poem is not so much metaphorical as analogical, its terms being kept separate. Woman and flowers share a quality of whiteness ("a clarity beyond the facts"), so that what is distinctive about them individually is a defining, unique radiance. Again, immediate attention has been paid to accurate observation.

The same complex of sexual feeling, expressed through minutely observed nature is characteristic of "Great Mullen" (this group of poems is CEP 208-211). More overtly an action, this poem is closely controlled in its punctuation and syntax. It jerks from one short, emphatic phrase to the next, in contrast with the declarative "Blueflags" (CEP, 225), whose lines are organized in groups which Williams would many years later call "the variable foot", thrust through from beginning of poem to end. Where in "Great Mullen" the poet's consciousness is moving jerkily, disturbed (as fits the poem's sexual level), in "Blueflags" the consciousness is serene, serial, causal, with the poem's interest held chiefly in the way line
placement responds to causal pattern.

Yet another aspect of Williams's practice may be discerned in "To Make an Old Lady" (CPD, 200), whose opening anticipates that of Paterson V:

Old age is
a flight of small
cheeping birds...

Once on course this is a typical Williams imagist poem, but the opening line endows it with a somewhat different character. The phrase is similar in function to "so much depends upon", which opens "The Red Wheelbarrow", but in specifying "old age" he has transformed the poem into a thought-out analogy (which one critic has even seen as an "objective correlative" 22). This procedure is different from the customary Williams not because his is an entirely "unmediated vision". He is not so totally free of metaphor as some critics (Karl Shapiro, for example) hold, but usually he presents his material "objectively" before exploiting it metaphorically.

Contrary to Williams's often expressed aims of tightness and accuracy, a number of poems in
Sour Grapes are long-lined and diffuse: "A Celebration", "A Good Night", "Overture to a Dance of Locomotives", "Portrait of the Author" (which McAlmon rescued from the waste paper basket) and a number of the very short items. We cannot discover a single rationale or method for these pieces (two are grouped by Hillis Miller as poems of "dissonance"\(^2\)), but may note that generally they lack the intensity of Williams's finer work, even of this early period. Later he would avoid such syntactical and grammatical explicitness, realizing that the resulting poem (even though, in some instances, it has surrealist elements) is statement. The speaking voice, so important in his work, is muffled in these pieces, more cleanly evident in such as "Waiting", "The Cold Night" and "Lighthearted William". "The Great Figure", another Sour Grapes poem which is less than completely successful, represents his most baldly direct rendering of the object, more nearly characteristic than such poems as "A Good Night", but it lacks the reverberation which so often makes his imagist poems more than merely imagistic.
NOTES

1. The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, op. cit., p. 397

2. January: A Novelette and Other Prose, (Toulon, 1932), p.20f. (Hereafter cited as A Novelette)

3. SE, p.125


5. SE, 119. This statement occurs in the Stein essay (1931), but the ideas expressed apply throughout most of Williams's career after about 1912.

6. SE, 249.

7. The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, p.3-14

As quoted in Williams's "Prologue", the first sentence reads, "The thing that saves your work is opacity, and don't forget it" (SE, p.8).

Williams's talk of deflection from "the thing" as "an easy lateral sliding" may be related to Hulme's remark on the language of poetry: "It always endeavours to arrest you, and to make you continuously see a physical thing, to prevent you gliding through an abstract process"; Speculations, p.134

"Romanticism and Classicism", the essay in which this occurs, was, of course, written long before 1924.


11. A Novelette, p.25.


15. Karl Shapiro, *In Defence of Ignorance*,


17. Anticipating the late poem "Asphodel, that

18. "Notes from a Talk on Poetry", *Poetry* XIV,
    (July, 1919), p.211-216.

    UB has a typescript of "March" edited by H.D.,
    with wholesale excisions. Williams followed
    many of her suggestions, but not to delete
    section V (H.D. herself had cut the poem into
    sections and numbered them.) A note in Williams's
    hand (presumably to C.D. Abbott) reads:
    "Here's an old script (not original script)
    but corrected and 'purified' by H.D. in London —
    perhaps in 1913 or so. W C Williams."

* University of Buffalo. See prefatory Note.
20. SL, no. 32, p. 46, 47.

21. Williams's use of the metropolis is the subject of an essay in David R. Weimer, 

22. N. Myers, "Sentimentalism in the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams", 

23. J. Hillis Miller, Poets of Reality, 
(California, 1964), p. 349.

24. C2OV, op. cit., p. 49
CHAPTER THREE

SPRING AND ALL

Formally, Williams's next book, Spring and All, is a step nearer to Paterson. With characteristic poems it combines prose which is a mixture of "surrealist" and critical-theoretical. (A single prose "improvisation", on a favourite theme — food, was included in Sour Grapes.) Like the prose, the poems are untitled but numbered. Some of them achieved titles in a selection of his work, Go Go, published in the same year (1925).

Opening with a long prose section, Spring and All goes at once to the point, emphasizing contact and rejection of past and future for now, the present moment. In addition there is the puzzling assertion, reiterated at intervals throughout Williams's life, apparently inconsistent with his "No ideas but in things", but working in quite a different direction:

"I love my fellow creature...but he doesn't exist! Neither does she. I do, in a
bastardly sort of way.
To whom then am I addressed? To the imagination." (SA, p.3)

There is a certain makeshift quality about even his critical prose. Here, and elsewhere, he is not suggesting that "reality" exists only as a figment of his own imagination. For him the imagination intensifies a pre-existent reality. From this intensification comes the "eternal moment" when we are truly alive. Thus it is, in effect, a Joycean epiphany.

Williams himself, governed by the external reality, was particularly susceptible to climate and season, so that many years later McAlmon was to remark of him that he tended to withdraw in winter, to expand again in spring. When, in the late 'twenties, Williams found himself as a writer withered and introverted, a product of the period was the unsuccessful, but highly interesting, "The Descent of Winter". The season gives Spring and All its particular character, of a beginning, a birth, with cataclysmic power, expressed in a key image, which was to become central: "The rock has split, the egg has hatched" (SA, p.14), including the
sense that power, delicacy and beauty may go together.

Part manifesto, part evocation, the prose opening focuses in the first poem, one of Williams's best, "By the road to the contagious hospital" (CEP, 241 - titled "Spring and All")\(^3\). Here his method is similar to that in "To a Friend Concerning Several Ladies", combining meditation with concentration on the external world. Fusion is better achieved in the later poem. A poem of birth, it embodies process in itself. In the purely external sense it concerns intimations of spring, but once again the poem's force, its emotion, is carried in its form:

> By the road to the contagious hospital
> under the surge of the blue mottled clouds driven from the northeast - a cold wind.

Almost, but not quite, a metaphor, driven from the northeast over the patchy mud fields, this wind is the birth of spring:

> Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
deased spring approaches—
All birth is this entering of

the new world naked,
cold, uncertain of all
save that they enter...

Objectively rendered as it is, "the stark dignity of /entrance" is the core of the poem, for "dignity" is the centrifugal point to which the emotion ultimately attaches, dignity - and in particular the peculiarly moving dignity of "entrance"; but the vital fact concerning the plants is declared in the resolution:

rooted, they
grip down and begin to awaken.

A process has been enacted and, Hillis Miller suggests,^4^ Williams's own poetic method has been described:

One by one objects are defined -
It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf.

Poem II of _Spring and All_\(^5\) is also a poem of
roots, sources. Beginning with petals, going to
the leaves and, finally, the "dark" where the flowers
are rooted, Williams seems intent on conveying that
this "dark" is suffused upwards through the plants,
for even though the petals are "radiant with trans-
piercing light", they are also of "shaded flame"
and "darkened with mauve". This, and the following
poem, on "the artist figure of/the farmer", are
concerned with design and the prose passage which
follows vaunts the new, rejecting tradition, par-
ticularly on the grounds that "design is a function
of the IMAGINATION" (SA, p.16). The farmer's
function (CEP, 243) is analogous to the poet's,
his sowing of the seed comparable with the poet's
use of imagination. Ground and wind are the
natural setting. The farmer imposes an order on
the sowing, which might have come about naturally
and haphazardly by means of the wind. His order-
liness will make reaping easier for him. This
orderliness is also a function of the imagination.
man's need for it is what makes nature, in a sense,
his antagonist, for nature has its own order, which
may not coincide with man's design.

For Williams's work generally, this kind of
explication should make one uneasy, especially in
view of what Pound calls "explicit rendering", which was Williams's aim as well as his friend's. As a long work with "philosophical" grounding, Paterson must be excepted from this uneasiness. Something of the same may be said for *Spring and All*, though its status as a single work is much more problematic.

Ostrom has argued that the poems are a unity (and in so doing has argued against explication, seeing Williams's typical poem as "completely free from interpretation or comment - the images stand alone, the things in themselves, with only the method of their arrangement to give (implicitly) any understanding of their "meaning" (reality)".)

He sees subsequent omission of the prose as a stripping down of the work to essentials, but in *Go Go* a selection of the poems was published and in *Collected Poems 1921-1931* the "Spring and All" poems are arranged in an order different from the original.

Williams himself, most ostensibly in his repeated rejections of "subject matter", preferred that his poems be "completely free from interpretation or comment". His most useful of many statements of the position occurs in "Notes in Diary Form", where he names the condition he is seeking "vividness":

...
poetry should strive for nothing else, this vividness alone, per se, for itself. The realization of this has its own internal fire that is "like" nothing. Therefore the bastardy of the simile. That thing, the vividness of which is poetry by itself, makes the poem. There is no need to explain or compare. Make it and it is a poem. This is modern, not the saga. There are no sagas—only trees now, animals, engines: There's that. (SE, p. 68)

This is the condition of his best poems, such as "[Og] the road to the contagious hospital" (since it is immediately relevant); but the very vividness offers us something beyond itself. Yet Spring and All is organized at least as a series. Even if such a poem as "The Red Wheelbarrow" can, as pure image, impinge on us by its "vividness" alone, Williams himself was conscious of something more being involved, as his opening line to that small poem testifies. While the best poems of Spring and All offer themselves "free from interpretation", the work as a whole invites it.
In Go Go and CP 1921-31 poem IV, "Flight to the City", is placed first. Its fragmentariness seems to deny the meditative coherence of poems I - III, although it shares elements with "The Pot of Flowers" (the light against a black ground), and with "The Farmer":

Nobody
to say it -
Nobody to say: pinholes

(CEP, 244)

It is impossible to suggest reasons for the changed order. Equating the city with sexual love, "Flight to the City" employs the same variables as "To a Friend Concerning Several Ladies". The "pinholes" are stars, but also where the seed is sown. Seen against cityscape rather than "blank fields", the poet's job is to

Burst it asunder
break through to the fifty words necessary

which appears also to be the lover's task in the city.
Two things about the poem are worth noting: its brokenness of line, apparently enacting the "sundering", and its quasi-symbolical use of the city. More than "vividness" is involved in a perception of "skyscrapers/filled with nut-chocolates". Yet the prose passage immediately following is an attack on symbolism (SA, 18-22). In pursuit of "the thing itself", Williams would continue to condemn symbolism (for example, in his essay "Against the Weather", included in SE dated 1939) and yet to make use of symbols and quasi-symbolical motifs. A motif of Springs and All is the wind, cold in the first three poems, "dovetame" in "Flight to the City". The cold wind of poem I, herald of birth, is also agent of destruction, explicitly so in poem V, "The Black Winds" (CEP, 245; titled "The Immemorial Winds" later, in An Early Martyr) Here the black/white is momentarily aligned with birth and death:

Hate is of the night and the day of flowers and rocks

but immediately Williams is aware of what is implied by writing in this way:
nothing
is gained by saying the night breeds
murder - It is the classical mistake
for

There is nothing in the twist
of the wind but - dashes of cold rain

Thus the poem is resolved into a comment on method,
process, amplified in poem VI following, which
states a central Coleridgean paradox in Williams:

everything
I have done
is the same

if to do
is capable
of an
infinity of
combinations

repeated in Paterson as the headnote, "by multiplication a reduction to one".
At this point refusal to systematize is, in fact, being used as organizational technique. What counts is energy and although

energy in vacuo

has the power

of confusion

"by the aid of the imagination" (SA, 27) it may be combined so that the individual raises himself "to some approximate co-extension with the universe".

Carrying his sense of subject/object interplay into every experiential area, Williams perceives the artist as fixing "the particular with the universality of his own personality". Form in art is imagination's response to the universe; naturally limited, "the powers of man are so pitifully small, with the ocean to swallow", but imagination's fullness is, nevertheless, comparable with the ocean's plenitude. For maker and receiver, fruitful interaction with art shows the "importance of personality". When "completed by the imagination", the individual's life has value even confronted by the immensity of the universe. Hence the futility of attempting to "copy" nature rather than
rendering it (Williams's usage of the Aristotelian theory).

Having just mentioned Juan Gris's attempt to separate paint from representation (imagination from a limited sense of "reality") Williams turns his attention to traditional symbolism in "The Rose" (poem VII, CEP, 249), finding in the courtly love sense that, "The rose is obsolete" (Marion Strotel, reviewing the volume in Poetry, finding it "smart", "tiresome", "adolescent", notes, "he even deprecates the rose"!?) Obsolete as a traditional symbol, the rose's "each petal ends in/an edge". Love, therefore, is to be discovered in an actuality which it shares with the petal's edge. As art, "cold, precise, touching", the petal's edge is "of steel/infinitely fine":

The fragility of the flower unbruised penetrates space.

"At the Faucet of June" (poem VIII, CEP, 251) then presents the universe's potentialities as disparate elements, unmodified. Resemblances, leaps of the mind, are juxtaposed, exemplifying the im-
mediate world, sun shining on a varnished floor surface, a song "inflated to/fifty pounds pressure", J.P. Morgan as a satyr in Persephone's cow pasture. We may note in passing that this is a typical instance of Williams's use of the apparently irrelevant, or his sense that all things are relevant. In the poem's conclusion (where the presence of the wind motif may suggest that it's method, too, is acceptable relatively) the importance of what happens is stressed:


The co-presence of these details is a discovery of order among them, detached "from ordinary experience to the imagination" (SA, 34). Direct realism in art is bewildering, the "only realism in art is of the imagination" (SA, p.35). Today the serious artist must occupy himself in the "invention
of new forms to embody this reality of art" (36). This reality, the creative force of imagination, "completes" science and enables the survival of intelligence. It is the vigour of a process, an accomplishment (suggesting identical means and end.) In "Young Love" (poem IX, CEP 253; titled "Young Romance" when included in An Early Martyr) the process question, "What about all this writing?" is answered with parallels, Kiki, the well-known Parisian "model-songstress" of the 'twenties' and Miss Margaret Jarvis's "beckhandspring". Against such clean, exact accomplishment is set fuzzy romantic possibility:

Once
anything might have happened
You lay relaxed on my knees-
the starry night
spread out warm and blind
above the hospital-

Pah!

It is unclean
which is not straight to the mark
Dismissing such "young love" (the incident occurs in the city and secretes that city/artist opposition noted on several occasions) this links back to poem IV:

Clean is he alone
after whom stream
the broken pieces of the city –

flying apart at his approaches.

Such is the artist, breaker and reintegrator, breaking the city apart, but by his very being drawing the pieces after him into new, "clean" unity. What applies to the artist applies, in some measure, to all men ("When we name it, life exists" - SA, 41).

Rejecting "acquisitive understanding", Williams sees his own role as nominalist. As he sees it here, his own intellectual limitations (inherent and circumstantial) caused a long repression relieved only by "flashes of inspiration" and ultimately by the liberating process of the KH improvisations, which led him to realize the work to be done in discovering "new forms, new names for experience" (SA, 44). Simultaneously, it
became clear to him that beauty depends on reality ("melon flowers that open/...about the edge of refuse"), universalized by imagination. "The Right of Way" (poem XI, CEP 258) shows how universal and relative are one and the same, the theme of interrelation being carried through to the next poem, "Composition".

As if to prevent easy schematizing, test the tenuity of his view of order, Williams next offers the dissonances of "The Agonized Spires" (CEP 262), but these tend to turn back on each other - sea/steel/coral/electricity/twilight/triphammers, etc. are interconnected, crucially:

The aggregate
is untamed
encapsulating
irritants
but
of agonized spires
knits
peace.

Imaginatively, death itself ("Death the Barber! CEP 264) is included in the composition,
leading to the Heraclitean realizations of
"Light Becomes Darkness":

The decay of cathedrals
is efflorescent
through the phenomenal
growth of movie houses (CEP, 266)

but in our very beings we resist the process of
mutability. This desire to circumvent it is yet
an aspect of it:

I can't die

- moaned the old
jaundiced woman
rolling her
saffron eyeballs

I can't die
I can't die. (CEP, 268)

What Williams admires is the old woman's assertion
of her own individuality, so also in "Shoot it Jimmy"
(269), the jazzman's, "Nobody else/but me--/They
can't copy it."

Next, in the famous "To Elsie" (poem XVIII, CEP 270, "The pure products of America") Williams faces the peculiar American problem. In what is the imagination to root itself, to find nutriment? Achieving in a high degree here his aim to leave "the thing itself" undistorted, we can indicate the excellence of such a poem as this simply by pointing and perhaps mentioning its subtlety of lineation. Its core is a concern for America's apparent lack of deep-rooted tradition. Fusion is extraordinarily difficult,

while the imagination strains
after deer
going by fields of goldenrod in

the stifling heat of September.

The environment of "chokecherry/or viburnum" is simply the location of some unspecified outrage,

as if the earth under our feet
were
an excrement of some sky
So that

Somehow
it seems to destroy us

It is only in isolate flecks that
something
is given off

Here also are the "Dirty satyrs" of "Horned Purple" (CEP 273), but interpolated is the example of Pio Baroja, forsaking a limited, intellectual milieu to labour manually among "the social class". Workers are akin to the artist in possessing "energy" (which is also "force", "rhythm"). Williams's concept of "energy" is apparently connected with views attributed to Virgil Jordan, the New Jersey economist (husband of Williams's old friend, Viola Baxter) in a Contact piece entitled "Patterns". Herein the individual is seen as a transformer of "energy". In a creative discharge of power, "resistance is overcome, form given to material, and the individual is in actual contact with the obstacle".

Creative discharge is the discovery of new patterns. In "free" (truly creative) art "patterns
...are moulded to the material. Artistic activity is the direct discharge of energy on material.

A "Venus" poem at this point (poem XX) offers the woman's young body held aloft, afloat in clarity ("the sea that is cold") in contrast to:

Underneath the sea where it is dark
there is no edge
so two -

BEYOND THE SEA'S EDGE (PETAL'S EDGE) IS MULITPLICITY.

Reversed in CEP (277), the brief poems XXI and XXII modulate in stages to pure objectiveness. In "Quietness" we have an objective image, which is disturbed by the single word "lascivious" (a feeling also present through the hands in "The Sea") serving to remind us of the Fall. This method used in its immediate predecessor deepens further our response to "The Red Wheelbarrow", which is lifted above the status of a mere imagist piece by its suggestive opening phrase, "so much depends upon" and, once again, by the poem's organization on the page, everything physically depending from "depends", with three nouns - barrow, water, chickens - thrust at the reader in
rapid succession, so that in each case their "vividness" carries the preceding "description" with it:

so much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow
glazed with rain
water
beside the white
chickens

Visual colour is given, but made tactile by the rain's glazing process. Thus the poem gives a startling clarity also to the prose remark which follows it, that: "The same things exist, but in a different condition when energized by the imagination". (Ca, 75)

Vaunting imagination over reality, the poem over science, poems XXIII and XXIV (CPP 278, 280) enact the interaction of nature/imagination, "interpenetration, both ways" (XXIV ends in
recalling XI) reminding us of a remark in the letter to Marianne Moore: "As a reward for this anonymity I feel as much a part of things as trees and stones".

While "poetry feeds the imagination...prose feeds the emotions", all writing "deals with words and words only", an assertion supported by "Rapid Transit" (poem XXV), a series of disjointed "colloquial" fragments. Poem XXVI ("At the Ball Game", CEP 284) reaffirms the necessary connection between beauty and reality, in this instance mixing good and bad characteristics of the crowd in its "spirit of uselessness". Reality "exists free from human action", but the imagination "creates a new object, a play, a dance which is not a mirror up to nature but...

Several elements in "The Wildflower" (XXVIII) occur throughout Spring and All (black/white, colour of flower like that of bushes in opening poem, "farmers who live poorly", "The Pot of Flowers") but it would be contrary to Williams's methods to end with a summary. He simply stops. It is in the nature of his view of process. Yet Spring and All holds an important place in his earlier work because it brings a good deal of his method and his thinking to a coherency which has moments of true splendour.
NOTES

1. *Spring and All*, (Dijon, 1923) (hereafter SA).


3. For prose passages page references are to SA first edition. Since no edition of SA is easily available, CEP reference is given for the poems.


5. "The Pot of Flowers" (CEP 242) is titled, possibly for "Objectivist" reasons, "The Pot of Primroses" in Williams's *Collected Poems 1921-1931* (New York, 1934). This volume is referred to hereafter as CP 21-31.


10. Virgil Jordan, "Patterns", *Contact*, IV, (1922). The piece was a summary by either Williams or McAlmon, to which Jordan added a note, "...unintelligible, since everything is left out but a few bones...".
CHAPTER FOUR

WORDS AND HISTORY

Setting out as if he were about to write a sequel to *Bleak House*, Williams achieved *The Great American Novel* in about one-third of average novel length, including in the "picaresque" adventures of his hero (a "baby" Ford car) letters quoted from friends, anecdotes (but a minimum of story), aesthetic and theoretical discussion and an anticipation of much of the historical data of *In the American Grain*.

The early part of this work is concerned with words and the idea of "progress". Two decades later he would write of "the concept of verbalism...the genius of a generation, the concept of words as things..." and, for Williams, words were things. Sometimes, in fact, they were more than merely things. His sense of the power of words shares something with that of Mallarmé, and possibly it is Mallarmé's generation which had "the concept of verb-
alism" as its "genius". The French orientation of much of Williams's work has been widely recognized, the influence of Rimbaud, for example, and (according to Rexroth\(^3\)), of Max Jacob and Fargue. At the end of the 'twenties he would translate Soupault and, later still, Yvan Goll and René Char; but what Williams shares with Mallarmé is a sense of the word as magical. Early in The Great American Novel, he connects words with the Kora motif, but to this he adds the Heraclitean element, the sense of "perpetual change" so centrally his: "Words progress into the ground....Now I am not what I was when the word was forming to say what I am". (GAN 307) Words are all the five senses, "it is words you are made out of" (308). His method of proceeding is dialectical:

Words are words. Fog of words. The car runs through it. The words take up the smell of the car. Petrol. Face powder, arm pits, food-grease in the hair, foul breath, clean musk. Words. Words cannot progress. Words are indivisible crystals. One cannot break them - Avu tøst grang splith gre pragh og bm - Yes, one can break them. One can make words. Progress?
If I make a word I shall make myself into a word. (GAN 308)

More of a pragmatist than a careful intellectual, Williams never felt the need to establish precise, fixed usages for his theoretical terms. It is simultaneously true that his concern is with "what actually impinges on the senses" (SE 119) and with his conviction that "a poem is made up of words and punctuation, that is, words and the spaces between them"⁴. In a letter on the poem, to Kay Boyle in 1932, he declared: "it deals with reality, the actuality of every day, by virtue of its use of language"⁵. While words "have a contour and complexion imposed upon them by the weather, by the shapes of men's lives in places" (SE 132) the value of a piece of writing does not therefore inhere in "the sentiments, ideas, schemes portrayed" (SE 109) but precisely in the "vividness" with which the "thing" is rendered. Making a poem is re-presenting one thing as another thing by bringing about an important structural or inventive change. "Creation is speech. God spoke the world by uttering the Word. The poet, therefore, imitates the act of creation itself, in creating his poem, and what he creates is real: imagination is real"⁶.
The word must be free of past associations; "Everything, no matter what it is must be re-valuated" (GAN 314-315). This revaluation, which appears to involve the dislocation characteristic of KH, is felt as living in hell. It is also a recognition that America can remain Nuevo Mundo only if it is not invaded by Europe, only if its newness is not tampered with. Rejecting progress, influence, the "fad of evolution", the "impertinence" of time, he extols "the foamy crest of involution, like Venus on her wave" (GAN 337), "Nothing, save for the moment! In the moment exists all the past and the future!" (GAN 337).

What Williams wants is for language to begin again, in American speech. This is the programme of GAN, wide-ranging in its apparent aimlessness, encompassing key moments in American consciousness, a rejection of traditional fixities, patches of surrealism, naturalism, parody, irony. A rejection of Europe, a turning to some heroic moments in the American past only to arrive at a typical American success story of the poor immigrant who became rich, successful and famous and to cap it with an account of a typical shoddy product bred of such an individualist system. He will not have Europe, but he
will not, on the other hand, allow any self-deception concerning America. He documents sad realities, but in his next prose work he will extend the documentary method to provide, in one of the important American books of the twentieth-century, a grounding for the American sensibility.

A major influence on Williams's *In the American Grain* was D.H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature*, which preceded it by two years. Lawrence's sense of the blood-tie to a place or person fitted exactly Williams's need to find roots not only for himself but for America, in myths that would offer the feeling of a known place. From the beginning of his series of narratives Williams is sensible of a dichotomy, of two types of people, based on contact. On the one hand were those, the Indians and some explorers, travellers and settlers, whose contact with the new continent was positive. On the other were those who voyaged to the new land to prey upon it and to return to the Old World with their plunder. Either that or, somewhat later, to settle on the land, as did the Puritans, and yet reject contact with it and inhibit the contact of others.
First conceived in the very early 'twenties, *In the American Grain* became Williams's attempt to discover "what the land of my more or less accidental birth" might signify (Autoh 178) by direct examination of the original records of American founders or "heroes" (Williams uses the apostrophes). Much of the work was done at the New York Public Library during one half of a year off (the other half being spent travelling in Europe); but by then (1924) five of the most substantial chapters had been published in separate issues of the magazine *Broom*.

Williams contends that history is as much a matter of language and imagination as of data. The past may be falsified by a misuse of language, failure to recognize its nuances, failure to perceive "new contours" in "old words". In a headnote he informs the reader that he sought to draw from examined sources "the strange phosphorus of life, nameless under an old misappellation". His use of sources is somewhat of the same spirit as Pound's approach to translation. Williams is not afraid to compress, adapt or modify in order to express more strongly and succinctly the spirit of his subjects. Nor does he feel it necessary to provide scholarly footnotes explaining his method.
Implicitly rejecting the theory of American innocence, his two opening essays offer a polarization. Portraying Red Eric in strong verbal rhythms and concrete language, he indicates the contradictions to be built into America from the very start, conveying in the undertow of his opening sentence also the initial problem of the making of America, "to take what is mine by single strength, theirs by the crookedness of their law" (IAG 1), a sentiment which grew in the Revolutionary overthrow of Burgoyne and the British, basis of American individualism.

Eric's departure from Norway was a rejection as well as a banishment. This dark opening sketch implies a contrast between Red Eric, around whom is an aura of displacement and discontent, and his son Leif Erickson, Leif the Lucky, a more successful adventurer. Williams insists on evil as an inevitable part of the beginning, but he insists also on goodness and greatness, the two being compounded into one in the second essay "The Discovery of the Indies". The good, the vital, is expressed in a sexual image: "it is as the achievement of a flower, pure, white, waxlike and fragrant, that Columbus' infatuated course must be depicted" (IAG 7).
yet the all-important first voyage results in discovery of "a predestined and bitter fruit existing, perversely, before the white flower of its birth". (IAG 7)

Although he gives a different source (The Long Island Book) for the Red Eric piece, Williams uses for the two opening essays and a number of others the volumes of Original Narratives of Early American History, the Red Eric and Columbus material coming from volume 1, The Northman, Columbus and Cabot (1906). Compressing and adapting from Columbus's Journals and letters, he portrays a dedicated, purposeful man, pragmatic, single-minded, intent even in gravest peril on making his discoveries known and available, writing them on parchment, enclosing them in a cask, putting them in the sea to be found in case of shipwreck. To Williams it seems that Columbus was in the hands of a savage power, fate, destiny, process, "a straw in the play of elemental giants" (IAG 10), attempting to absorb into himself the immensity of the new world.

Somewhat over half the essay, the second part, is taken, with slight compressions and alterations, from the "Journal of Columbus's First Voyage". Thus Williams employs the "borrowing" technique used by Pound and Eliot in poetry and here marshals it with
great skill, placing the First Voyage last to make it his climax. More than half the remainder concerns the difficult fourth voyage, based on a letter to the King and Queen of Spain. Thus Columbus's later ill fortunes are told before the great discovery, lending poignancy to the account. This arrangement (noticed only by Waldo Frank - IWEP 42) allows him to create a Columbus of depth, akin to the figure in Whitman's "Passage to India", wherein his growing despair is an inseparable part of his intense effort. Columbus continues as he does realizing that "for a time it preserves us free from tedium" (IAG 22), though the true "end" of his life was the great moment at San Salvador, the discovery of the green land which was his "beautiful thing" (IAG 26). This moment will appear again for Williams in Paterson and provides a key motif for the poem.

Written "in big square paragraphs like Inc masonry" (IWEP 42), "The Destruction of Tenochtitlan" and the following essay, "The Fountain of Eternal Youth" demonstrate the bloodlust, evil and despair attendant upon America's founding, Cortez's unfamliarity and the coincidental timing of his arrival endowing him with godlike aura, his cold courage
and implacability overriding Montezuma's tractable dignity. This, and Ponce de Leon's crass vanity: "History begins for us with murder and enslavement, not with discovery". (IAG 39).

Sexual imagery does not occur in the Columbus essay by chance. Williams saw the continent as a woman at once tender and cruel, as he sees the positive response to the American land as a form of marriage (again thematically prefiguring Paterson). This is most overtly so in the De Soto essay, where "She" opens the essay and is interpolated into the account of De Soto's adventures throughout, a presence not in the source material but quite possibly derived from it. The Indians themselves have this feminine quality, but both they and "She" exhibit a masculine defiance. At the very opening of the essay "She" promises De Soto his acceptance, his "immersion" into the American land (perhaps as intended, the figure recalls Williams's immersion in the Passaic) but only at death; "you shall receive of me, nothing - save one long caress as of a great river passing forever upon your sweet corpse". (IAG 45) This finds a curious echo in Paterson itself:
I wish to be with you abed, we two
as if the bed were the bed of a stream

(P 35)

Writing about Raleigh, Williams finds something approaching an "objective correlative" for England: "his England had become a mouthful of smoke sucked from the embers of a burnt world" (IAG 59), but he admires Raleigh, apart from his courage, for his pursuit of the beautiful thing: "he conceived a voyage from perfection to find - an England new again; to found a colony; the outward thrust, to seek. But it turned out to be a voyage on the body of his Queen: England, Elizabeth - Virginia!" (IAG 60). Writing in Raleigh's "manner" (as he noted in a letter to Selden Rodman, who anthologized the piece as a poem11) Williams uses this trope, which reappears at intervals in his work, of perceiving the human body and the physical world in terms of one another.

As he viewed it, the Puritans who ventured to America in The Mayflower belied the name of their own ship. With an opportunity to flower, flourish in new soil, they did not do so, proving themselves capable of engendering only violence and despair,
"the secret inversion of loveliness". Brought with them, their incapacity was something "the wild continent" would not allow them to grow beyond. Williams laments the materialism of those dwelling in the "stupified jungles", always willing to trade for gain "permanent values (the hope of an aristocracy". (IAG 68).

Based on another of the Original Narratives, "The Voyages of Samuel de Champlain", the Champlain essay is somewhat perfunctory, using only a few pages of a long account. Williams appears to have attempted epitomizing Champlain as in an epiphany, his absorption in his task, his carrying the vision of France to the new world; but Champlain failed signally in the most important thing, to recognize the "authenticity" of the new ground.

Two essays on the Puritans follow, "The May-Pole of Merrymount" and "Cotton Mather's Wonders of the Invisible World". With minor textual differences (chiefly in spelling forms), the Mather material may be found in the Original Narratives. The other is a longish review of a reprint of Thomas Morton's The New English Canaan, prefaced by A.C. Adams, in which Adams's attitude to Morton is criticized on the ground that the minutiae of
history may be even more important than "to champion a winner". Morton is in favourable contrast with the Puritans. Their loathing of Morton's womanizing is "spiritless", while his stance is epitomized in the "may-pole" itself. Morton accepted what was around him, while the Puritan strictures upon it led to madness and ultimately to the witchcraft persecutions recounted in Cotton Mather's Wonders.

It says much for Williams's writing tact that he can follow the piece from Mather with an account of "Père Sebastian Rasles" which begins, breathlessly, as a résumé of a few weeks in Paris.¹³ This essay purports to report a conversation with the French critic Valéry Larbaud. Perhaps more even than Columbus,—Rasles and Daniel Boone serve Williams's realization that greatness and loneliness go together. Vivid and moving, the account of Rasles is prepared for by a long exchange with Larbaud on American Puritanism. In many ways Rasles is the book's central portrait.

From admiring the old world expedience of everyone's "tearing his own meat", Williams is drawn by Larbaud to test his own view of the Puritans. Williams's response is concrete:
Their sureness which you praise is of their tight tied littleness which, firm as it was, infuriates me today. It is their littleness that explains their admirable courage, close to the miraculous. It was good when through that first December they were going about in small boats in Cape Cod Bay, through rain and cold, under attack, when save for the finding of corn buried in the sand, they might not have had seed for the spring planting. (IAG 110-111)

Ierbaugh sees the Puritan beginnings as magnificent, the protagonists as giants, "cruel, but enormous, who eat flesh"; but Williams insists on their littleness. "There was a maggot in them", he observes; "It was their beliefs". Because a Puritan preacher asked no material payment for promise of absolution, the Indians began to kiss his hand in gratitude, but he shook them off with distaste. Williams relates this trivial incident as the crux: "...it is very ugly - and it is that which has persisted: afraid to touch!" (IAG 119). Life-dying, this direct token of refusal of
contact contrasts starkly with the young Puritan woman who, dressed in scarlet satin with a purple cloak, defiantly went to her wedding on a white horse. "All that will be new in America will be anti-Puritan". (IAG 120). Another sort of contrast, Rasles was a beautiful example of the goodness and effectiveness of tender, giving contact.

In transcribing John Paul Jones's letter account of a sea battle, Williams is not so much interested in the victory as in the ineptitude with which it was brought about. Writing about Aaron Burr in "The Virtue of History" he makes an implied comparison with Washington, presenting Burr not as a danger to the state, but as one who attempted to prevent the narrowing down of freedoms. Williams's "aristocratic" conception of democracy is nowhere more evident than here, where he observes with approval of Burr, "The common good he found common" (IAG 203). Burr's relationships with women are seen as an aspect of his freedom. True, Burr was a failure, but he had style, and therein lay his value. So also did Jones have a certain style.

"Whitman had to come from under. All have to come from under and through a dead layer" (IAG 213), Williams declares in "The Descent", a
small but important piece on Sam Houston, who, in misfortune, begins to rehabilitate himself by taking "the descent once more, to the ground", which is to say that he returned to the beginnings of things, in this instance to the Indians and Cherokees: "He took an Indian woman for his wife". (IAG 214) After many years he "re-ascended" for a second time, to become an American "hero" at San Jacinto.

Williams uses his occasion here to rail at the universities and the "foreign congeries of literary cleptrope". Sometimes his notion of "descent" is almost mystical, but here, "It is imperative that we sink", is an appeal for rootedness in the American soil. For Americans there is no other choice but to begin at their own beginnings.

Since the publisher, Charles Boni, expressed doubts about a book of American history without Lincoln in it, Williams provided his concluding page; but the real ending of In the American Grain is with Poe; the culmination of Williams's dig back through history to the real substance is to discover the making of the first true American poet. Shrugging off French aspirations for Poe, Williams claims him for America as "a genius intimately shaped by his locality and time" (IAG 215). Poe's
distinguishing mark is his assertion of the new locality, his effort, in criticism and the poem, to clear the ground of all irrelevancies. Poe's provincialism compares strongly with J.R. Lowell's "puerile sophistications". Poe, in such pieces as "The Philosophy of Composition" is discerned as a teacher somewhat before the Poundian fashion of three-quarters of a century later. Williams finds his own conception of the local in Poe: "What he wanted was connected with no particular place; therefore it must be where he was". (IAG 220)

This is allied with Poe's lack of concern with poetry as a department of literature. Poe felt that poetry was, more importantly, related to "the soul". He wanted to "tell his soul" and, foregoing "the pleasing wraiths of former masteries" (a phrase for which Williams had a fondness, using it more than once), sought as a means of doing so "to detach a 'method' from the common usage". Penetrating and refined at once, his conception of the local was to advise against writing of the scene, trees, mountains, etc., "to concentrate on the writing itself", thereby expressing the true local condition, that of the soul.
Williams concurs in Poe's assessment of Hawthorne as brilliant, but a localist in the wrong sense, doing for his own locality what many other artists of merit were doing for theirs, but copying others' methods to do it, originating nothing, inventing nothing. Against this, and against Hawthorne's notorious isolation, Poe's was an isolation many shades deeper, awareness of himself in the very midst of chaos, battling against both formlessness and falsified form.

Because in some manner he reproduced in himself Poe's dilemma, Williams's comprehension of Poe's predicament is a moment of keen insight, his Poe marooned in his own time, "surrounded...by that world of unreality, a formless 'population' - drifting and feeding" (IAG 232), so that "a huge terror possessed him", which manifested itself in his very technique, so that: "His passion for the refrain is like an echo from a hollow. It is his own voice returning". (IAG 232)

Ultimately, Poe's is a kind of individuality Williams can respect. For him it is a pervasiveness of women and a singleness in men which counts. Where we find our myths and rootedness in the past is in the lives and "presences" of individual men, not in movements or traditions.
NOTES

1. The Great American Novel, (Paris, 1923), 79 pp. Hereafter GAN. References, however, are to the only readily available edition, the text included in American Short Novels, ed. by R.P. Blackmur, (New York, 1960), p.307-343. (references are, therefore, compound, e.g. GAN, 324).


6. Senior (op. cit.) here refers to AE (George Russell), but the words apply precisely to Williams, especially in view of his insistence on "imitation" as re-creation rather than copying. Senior quotes AE's *The Candle of Vision,* (London, 1931), p. 120: "The roots of human speech are the sound correspondences of powers which in their combination and interaction make up the universe".


9. Based on the Original Narratives in Early American History volume Spanish Explorers in the Southern United States, particularly "The Narrative of the Expedition of Hernando de Soto, by the Gentleman of Elvas", ch. 7f. There is throughout Williams's essay a nine-year difference from his source in all dates.
cited.

Of this IAG essay Williams noted:
"The chapter on De Soto was used by Hart Crane in 'The Bridge'". (IWJP 43).


11. SL no. 177, p. 276.

12. Thomas Morton, The New English Canaan, ed. by A.C. Adams, (Boston, 1883). The editor is not A.C., but C.F. Adams, jr.

13. Apparently in response to references to her in Autob, Bryher, in her own autobiography The Heart to Artemis, (New York, 1962), says of Williams on this visit, "his apparent hatred of his native land startled even us" - p. 218. Pro-American as he always was, Williams never hesitated to voice harsh criticism of his own country.
CHAPTER FIVE

PAGANY AND THE PASSAIC: MORE PROSE

A Voyage to Pagany, "the damned long-winded whatever-it-is that I have written" (SL, p.98), is Williams's "first (limping) novel" (Autobi 186), i.e., his first serious attempt at a full-scale work of fiction. Its central character is the Dev Evans who figures in a story disarmingly titled "Sample Prose Piece" in the first series of Contact. Evans's trip to Europe is a voyage of discovery in reverse, based on Williams's own experiences although he claimed that the character (a writer/doctor) is not autobiographical. Ambivalently, Evans enjoys his medical practice, yet wishes to give it up for writing. He also feels he has "come home" to the old world, but that it is Passaic, "ravaged, beaten. Each man looked to be feeling his destiny there". (VP 20-21).

The Paris chapters cover the same period as
the Rasles essay, and some of the impressions noted
in VP ii-iv are much later condensed into the
Madame Curie passage of Paterson IV. As with
Hawthorne's Europe-sited fiction, much of the
material is unassimilated. Pound notes that:
"Entire pages could have found place in a simple
autobiography of travel". To offset this, we
are introduced to Dev's sister and to his writer
friend, Jack. Dev's feelings for these two, in
each case either quasi-homosexual or quasi-incest-
uous, are subtly played off against the complex
of his reactions to the new and old worlds.
America and France, grass (following Whitman) and
cathedral ("the decay of cathedrals", poem xv, SA).
A question put to him by Sis is the book's refrain:
"Dev, why don't you stay over here?" (VP 47),
counteracted by Dev's assertion that they are
"Virginians", not by descent, but in a better way,
by choosing to see themselves as such (VP 54), a
neat epitomizing of Williams's own localist
attitudes.

Nevertheless, Dev is on the defensive. Reject-
ing the France of his childhood memories, he yet
begins to respond romantically to its present
ambience. Enjoying it as an art centre, he delights
also in physical contact with people in the streets. In reaction, asked for a cocktail speech: "He said something stupid in his embarrassment...Something about the honor that is done corpses in Paris" (VP 61).

While Sis remains a term of the book throughout, Dev's experience is polarized against that of various women, one of whom, Lou, he has arranged to meet in France. Leaving Paris, he meets her at Carcassonne, but their encounter is inhibited by the town's insistently European character, so they agree to move, first to Marseilles then Villefranche. Here their differences become openly apparent, figured in Lou's avidness for tennis, a pastime which takes her away from him a good deal of the time. A series of figures sums up the thwarting of their intimacy, beginning with the intrusive nightly presence of Cap Ferrat light sweeping into their room and out again at intervals of a few seconds. Lou is "nearly freed of everything that had been America" (VP 97), but the approaching end of their relationship is signalled symbolically when Dev sights the periscope of a French submarine in the grey, wintry Mediterranean water. When they finally part it is, in fact, because Lou lacked the Venus quality, which Dev had felt in Delise, met briefly in Paris.
Dev continues on to Italy. Williams's account has Hawthorne's sparseness, but Williams has the benefit of time and can accept the experience of travel unimpeded by Puritan doubts as to the value of his calling. If art "is nothing but a form of the night", still "it is not damned". Dev's pilgrimage may be seen in Faustian terms, but it is due to conclude in a rejection.

Williams's own immersion in the "filthy Passaic" was anti-Faustian. From Seine on, particularly in the last two-thirds of narrative, action is related to rivers. This is not so much symbolist as a trend of consciousness, including the classical river/sea opposition: "...remembering only the sea that is greater.

"Flow. Flow under the old bridge forever new and say to it that only that which is made out of nothing at all is forever new. Make new, make new". (VP 130). Pound and Heraclitus at once; again: "Make new. (And the river meanwhile was getting broader and going about its business.)"

Arriving in Rome, Dev is possessed almost to frenzy by the sense of Venus, who has momentarily become identified with all that he will reject, but cannot forget: "Rome starting alive from the
rock. He felt it, he could touch the fragments. There is the Venus. There, crouching at the top of the stairs. But that is a stone. No, it is Venus! It is she. No it is a stone. It is she, I say. Venus! The presence is over the stone". (VP 147). Equally here he is fascinated by a sense of process, discovery, invention. It is the birth of Venus, the Botticellian moment, which holds him most of all. Thus, in the Rome chapter, when he sees the blonde, German girl again: "it was she standing upon the shell; the hair, the eyes, the flesh that Botticelli had striven to imitate..." (VP 148). Against this imagining of beauty's birth is set present reality, muddy Tiber; against oncoming spring, Rome felt as "a motion of crumbling monuments". Momentarily happy, Dev is conscious of his own resistance to being "driven back", to "the gilded Venus", a survival of the past invading his consciousness.

In Williams an antithesis often recurs between "filth" and "cleanliness" (as in poem ix, SA). He begins, and continues, plunged into "the filthy Passaic", filth seeming a precondition for pure cleanliness. The antithesis accords naturally with Europe-America tensions: "Some Americans,
his friends in Paris, had escaped to no purpose. Just struck out desperately to have the filth off them. But they could not go home. What is home? They at least wanted to be clean". (VP 153).

To strike out desperately is to fail oneself. Larbaud had said of Williams that he manifested in himself the chief Puritan characteristics of which he wrote. Williams's insistence that the chief virtue is "to keep on" seems to confirm that. Pursue the process, continue in it, part of it. Expressing reservations about "science", he apparently regards it as a series of end "discoveries", while what matters is not the discovery as such, but to "keep on" after it. This is a man's being, just as he is truly born when he embarks on the governing process of his life, at that time and place where this process begins: "The place of my birth is the place where the word begins". (VP 155).

History, the old, is rejected, as something which has ceased to proceed. The "thing that goes on and never stops" is beauty. This is the core of the book and the "message" is conveyed in a passage dominated by sea-gods. They are everywhere. Historic Venice seems to Dev a dead
place, where the thin pale-green wavelets are almost motionless. Walking by the water, he gathers frail shells and now the shell which had borne up Venus becomes something different, a husk: "The whole world is a shell of past loveliness". From such shells has derived the "artificial pearl", Venice.⁵

Now Dev encounters, for the first time, "a young woman in black", seen against snow patches. Talking "plain American", she may readily be seen as contrast to Venus. Dev establishes a relationship with her which continues into the final part of the novel.

When he travels to Vienna his experience of the old world is very different. Here his profession of doctor impinges on him. Establishing a liaison with the lady in black, he now also becomes involved with a Europe which is no beautiful husk but /applying itself vigorously to practical matters. Now a European forthrightness of approach, the wholehearted acceptance of ugliness if it can be transformed into beauty and precision, contrasts with American softness and fear. Yet in Vienna the beautiful pragmatism of the pursuit of knowledge has behind it disease
in the loins of its own youth. Musing on a remark in *Measure for Measure*, "Better to geld the youths of Vienna", Dev concludes that it is "a beastly morbid problem. The syphilitic right on one side, and a castrated athlete on the other". (VP 212).

As they walk by the Danube together Dev learns that Miss Black, like his own sister, rejects America. To her it seems that Americans have no conception of life's depths. To palliate the fury which they sense everywhere about them they offer, "aeroplanes, radio and philosophies". Their morality is to amputate, by prohibitions (VP 213-216).

Momentarily discomfited, Dev makes his own view clear later, at a music concert, a performance of Bach at which Miss Black speaks condescendingly of jazz: "'But it is anchored', said Dev eagerly. 'It is extremely local'". (VP 234). To this he adds that, while art has a good deal to do with place, when it is great it annihilates time. It is in a field of spring flowers, shortly after this discussion, that she ceases to be formally Miss Black, is now Grace. Their growing intimacy is clearly in part due to shared American background. Yet it becomes evident that, to her, Europe is the better of a bad choice, "a little more tolerable -
that is all". She is his temptation to relinquish U.S.A. permanently, tempting him in the setting of the renowned Viennese Riding Academy, representative of the best European beauty and culture.

Counterattacking, he asks her to return to America with him, but she repeats her wish for him to remain. When they finally part it is for Dev to meet his sister again. Now he persuades her to stay, but observes: "Europe is poison to us Americans - delicious -distressing". And, a short while later: "'I belong to the sea'". (VP 314).

Yet the near-incestuous relationship suggests that Bess is projection, that the whole problem, Europe or America, is in Dev himself, inherited with his nationality. He attempts to resolve it by suggesting that "Art is a country by itself". (VP 329).

Deciding to return home, when he reaches Cherbourg it is again a cathedral which sums up the European experience for him. Close to the sea he "felt better". All his weeks in Europe have been sea-conscious. Vouchsafed his vision of Venus in Europe, he is ready now for his own emergence from the sea, close enough to shore to make out the Nantucket lightship:

"So this is the beginning". (VP 333).
His European adventure is recounted in terms of relationships with three women, each an American, each with a somewhat different attitude to Europe and America. Ultimately Dev rejects them all because he realizes that his view of old world and new rests in the fact that he is an American himself. He recognizes that his unwillingness to avoid this irrefutable fact is what endows his opinions with their own depth and validity. For him this recognition is the beginning of all experience, but he has not rejected the contact with Europe which has fed his imagination, merely false European loyalties, which he saw he could never sustain.

Thus, aware of both its foreignness to him and its value, Williams a short while later translated a French surrealist novel, Philippe Soupault's Les Derniers Nuits de Paris, an evocation at once engaging and decadent. Within a year or two he had made collections of both his poems and prose for the decade up to 1931.

In 1932, the year in which January: A Novelette and Other Prose - 1921-1931 was printed in France, Williams brought out a second series of Contact
in three numbers in collaboration with Nathansel West and, nominally at least, with McAlmon, who was in Europe. McAlmon, according to his autobiography, became disgusted with West's standards and his influence over the easygoing Williams. When West departed for Hollywood and Contact "folded" again McAlmon expressed pleasure.

Regarded as a single work, January: A Novelette cannot stand too close a scrutiny. Appearing to lack either cumulative force or "structural necessity", it is otherwise largely insignificant. Its incidental interest includes an early reference to "the poem 'Peterson'" (in "The Simplicity of Disorder", dated 1929 in SE, where it appears as a separate essay) and a general statement favouring surrealism in itself, nominating it French, and therefore rejecting it for locolist reasons.

Observing that one stretch of the writing (chapter VI) is dull, Williams notes:

"It is bad merely because I was not able to do differently. Therefore it remains actually the thing that it is. And this is exactly what I mean and could not be said more clearly" (A Novelette 36).

This paradox forcefully records the power, independence and actuality words had for him. A similar
attitude towards the word is manifest in the section or "essay", "Conversation as Design", where the point is made that, even in a novel, conversation is "not actual", but is shaped to formal purposes. This, and other assertions relating to "discovered" form are attached to the Venus (and "The Venus" intended for VP has its effect in this context): "Born again, Venus from the confused sea...", who brings not only beauty, but also singleness, unity. Evident throughout A Novelette, Williams's romanticism centres on Venus, the "Beautiful Thing", the need of art for repeated rebirths - for the new, and the "fierce singleness" to be discovered and/or structured from multiplicity. This is a central kind of metamorphosis and against it, "the common resort is to divorce". In all this are several presentiments of Paterson.

The "other Prose" includes a short story, "The Accident", omitted from Williams's first volume of stories, The Knife of the Times and Other Stories, published in the same year, and seven essays, which form
the backbone of the first third of **SE**. One of these, "A Matisse", is brief and dates as early as the first series of Contact, two others are similar in matter and treatment to the material in *In the American Grain* (but do not succeed as well). The remaining four, all on fellow writers, are the real substance of the collection *A Novelette*. Choosing to write on Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Marianne Moore and Kenneth Burke, Williams is drawn to each primarily by his conviction of the importance of the word. Core preoccupations of the earlier *GAN* are here extended and clarified.

The Joyce essay is partially an attempt to reconstitute the shopworn concept of beauty. Using "beautiful" to label a conventional attitude, Williams characterizes Joyce's style as "truth through the breakup of beautiful words" (SE 75). Taking words, "something new" must be done with them. This conviction enables Williams to see Joyce's post-*Ulysses* work as "richer, more able in its function of unabridged commentary upon the human soul". (SE 76).

John Dewey's dictum, "the local is the only universal", occurs in the Burke essay, while, writing of Gertrude Stein, Williams poses the
related question, which in some form or other had been an American question over a long period: how can one write objectively and yet be subtle and intellectually searching in an environment marked by "triviality, crassness and intellectual bankruptcy"? (SE 118). Two alternatives immediately present themselves - satire, or flight. Williams notes that Stein and others (including himself) choose a third: "To be democratic, local (in the sense of being attached with integrity to actual experience) Stein, or any other artist, must for subtlety ascend to a plane of almost abstract design to keep alive". (SE 118-119). Two things must be insisted upon: (i) form, design, invention (i.e. form in action) and (ii) that "what actually impinges on the senses must be rendered as it appears..." (SE 119).

From a somewhat different viewpoint, the question is tackled again in the Moore essay, distinction being made between "local colour" and the "white penetration" of design. Location serves as an anchorage in reality, no more. There is no mystique concerning place for its own sake. The poem, design, is "the white of a clarity beyond the facts" (SE 124). Poems are neither nature
nor beyond nature. They are not representations
or abstractions, but have "a separate existence
uncompelled by nature or the supernatural" (SE 125).

Distinctions in art, such as proletarian or
aristocratic, do not in fact exist. These are
differences of taste, while art is absolute and
the art of writing, in particular, "is made of
words, of nothing else". The great virtue of
work such as Marianne Moore's is "her wiping soiled
words or cutting them clean out". Again, regarding
the two chief variables: "No place is important,
words" (SE 132).

Williams expressed these attitudes in a simi-
lar way in his Contact editorials of the time.
At a period when it must have been tempting to
propagandize he maintained clearly the foremost
importance of good writing for its own sake. He
dismissed forthrightly the thought that money used
to produce Contact might feed humans starving in
various parts of the world, noting that food was
already being allowed to waste wholesale, and even
being destroyed, in other parts.

his second editorial vaunts self-reliance,
living in the present, the seeking of true form
through the vernacular, rejection of symbolism and
revelation of the object, of which he exclaims:

"But always, at this point, some blank idiot cries out, 'Regionalism'! Good God, is there no intelligence left on earth. Shall we never differentiate the regional in letters from the objective immediacy of our hand to mouth, eye to brain existence?"

More forceful than VP, the stories in The Knife of the Times compare, in directness and objectivity, with the work of Gertrude Stein or Hemingway. Except the longest, "Old Doc Rivers", all are effected by a technique of clinical, external observation, both social and psychological. This tends to succeed most in the first person mode. While many are detached, cool accounts of sexual experiences, the book's real core is its sense of loneliness, backed up by a secondary theme of the individual's struggle to maintain himself psychologically.

The title story is of a married woman who spends a lifetime nursing lesbian longings for an old school friend. Its method, inconclusive action, hinted oblique ending, exemplifies his injunction: "See clearly and feel, a hint (pointedly) is enough, more would be too much". (Poetry, Sep.1942). His
unadorned prose is exactly suited to conveying necessary intimations.

"Hands Across the Sea" and "A Visit to the Fair" both have the muted quality of "hints". Both concern the unspoken sexual drives of people who have reached their "settled" years, frustrated or half-realized need to seek sexual gratification or indulge in sexual fantasy outside marriage. Each in his own way, Mr. Tibbet and Mrs. Rand in "A Visit", Dr. McFarland and Mrs. Andrews in "Hands Across the Sea", represents a special kind of loneliness, desolate imagination, in the one case emphasized "symbolically" by setting, in the other by the continual journeying of one of the principals.

Loneliness is also an important aspect of "The Sailor's Return", which treats of homosexuality with some discernment. Manuel, the farm boy, is a good worker on Mrs. Cuthbertson's farm and she likes and appreciates him until she encounters him involved in active homosexuality with his friend. She is disgusted, the more so since she knows Manuel has a fiancée. When Manuel is fired, Mrs. Cuthbertson is confronted by the fiancée, who well understands the needs and desires of Manuel's loneliness, accepts his actions and
expects the farm woman to be able to do the same.

In contrast is the sexual antagonism portrayed in "The Buffaloes", a story set in the Theodore Roosevelt era. The boy suffers and explains away the girl's aggressive feminism, until he needs an excuse to be rid of her.

Two other stories are of sexual promiscuity. Stewie, in "A Descendant of Kings", grandmother-dominated, is driven by his own loneliness into a series of sexual adventures. His sense of his own inadequacy is conveyed tragically in an underplaying of the American "tall tale", combining the effects of a reputation for sexual prowess with a sudden impotence. This impotence occurs because his women tend to deceive Stewie. As if in mockery of his lost powers, he is (after yet another abortive sexual encounter) confronted and attacked by a bull, which tosses and severely gores him. Finally able to counterattack, he grapples the bull by its ring, forces it to the ground, then drives it away with stones. His injuries are cured in a month and, through an "ad in some Western health journal", so is his "other infirmity".

Social observation is a positive dimension
of "Pink and Blue", in which Belle, the central figure, experiences a continuing inner conflict between promiscuous urges and a desire for the trappings of social respectability. Told by a woman farmer, this is an account of Belle's demoralizing effect on her husbands, particularly one of them. Belle's amours by perfumed letter, cultivating a prospective husband while still living with her current one, are carried on against a background of lonely farm life.

More searingly, "Mind and Body" evokes the loneliness of a manic depressive. The story is a series of reverberations of the opening paragraph, particularly its: "I am the only one in my family who has had the courage to live for himself". This woman's "courage" has apparently led her to pathetic hypochondria, from a "quite brilliant" university career in Classics and philosophy to an odd marriage with a small Irish male-nurse. Here, as in "An Old Time Raid", where the central figure's "hero" is an anti-social whose vitality might well have been socially useful, is a woman whose social relevance is impaired by hereditary debility and resulting flawed character.

"Old Doc Rivers", last and longest story in
the book, is one of Williams's more memorable pieces of fiction. Portrayal of Rivers is more rounded than that of characters in the shorter stories, presenting a man of greater complexity. He is a good doctor, a fine surgeon, a man of talent to whom money means little, a brilliant diagnostician, but trapped by his environment. The loneliest of the book's characters, he is a sensitive person committed to an unsympathetic place and crude associations. The narrator believes that these circumstances first caused Rivers to use drugs, which ultimately destroy him, ruining his skill in his vocation. Losing his grip, Rivers takes on some measure of the crudity of his surroundings.

In these stories, as elsewhere, Williams avoids literariness. Concrete, objective, economically told, they have a tenderness which is present in the observation of detail, in the refusal to judge; finally, Williams's sense of scope is a positive virtue. Knowing the limitations of his materials and his means enables him to give the stories a presence in truth.
NOTES


3. Pound suggested that "The Venus", included as a separate piece in *A Novalette*, is in fact integral to *VP*.


5. In "From a Folded Skyscraper", *The American Caravan*, 1927, p. 219-221, Williams repeatedly refers to Pound's verse as "his artificial pearl".


CHAPTER SIX

OBJECTIVIST, SURREALIST

Two very different qualities come together in Williams's poems: his continued immersion in the river:

- the wind is howling
  the river, shining mud-

Moral
  it looses me

Moral
  it supports me

Moral
  it has never ceased
to flow

(CEP 59)
and knowledgeable contact, "tactus eruditus", a phrase which also occurs in "Della Primavera Trasportata Alla Morele", immediately following twelve lines which are simply a list of ice-creams and their prices, a demonstration that words are things in themselves. In the same context is a categorical declaration that the poem is to be discovered in objects and actions hard before our eyes:

a green truck
dragging a concrete mixer
passes
in the street--
the clatter and true sound
of verse-- (CEP 59)

In his prose work of the early and mid-twenties Williams praises in turn Expressionism, Dadaism and Surrealism. Making some use of these general developments, he notes that they are European and appears to dismiss them as American possibilities. He did translate Soupault, however, and was, as suggested, indebted to French poetry, while continuing to seek an American form of expressionism.
Besides breaking down words, in the Joycean fashion, he continued experiment in the melding of prose and poem. Thus "The Descent of Winter" (CEP 297-311) was initially a much longer work including prose, some or all of the prose being published separately much later in SE as "Notes in Diary Form".

Work on "The Descent of Winter" preceded by only a few months Williams's first meeting (via Pound's introduction) with Louis Zukofsky. For a good few years after this 1928 meeting Williams directed his attention more to objective rendering than to expression and, in 1932, would go so far as to say: "When we are forced by a fact...it can save us from insanity, even though we do no more than photograph it". (Contact, I,ii, "Comment"). Many of his poems of the late 'twenties are no more than this:

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winter, winter
leather-green leaves
spear-shaped
in the falling snow (CEP 89)
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The sparseness, even paucity, of that phase may be
summed up in comparing the first chapter of *VP* with the same experience re-presented in the opening poem of "The Descent of Winter" with its threadbare enumeration of the numbers on the ship cabin's bulkhead.

In this group of poems Williams barely survives as a poet, yet some sort of growth continues. His use of metropolitan, industrial and domestic "landscape" widens and deepens. Many poems of the time have an undertow of anger and frustration. This is certainly true of most (though not all, as we shall see) of "The Descent of Winter". Many poems in this composite are titled only with a cryptic date, month and day. The related prose, "Notes in Diary Form", is similarly organized, but the most powerful effect of barrenness occurs in the first four sections of poem, predating the "Notes". Unable to move beyond the baldest of observed factual data the writer, in a poem of unintegrated musings ("9/30"), is driven to consider his own work's lack of fusion, his doubts about it, "waves like words, all broken". Even some of the detailing lacks sharpness. The musing carries towards old age and death.

Counterpointed against these four poems
by date proximity are three paragraphs of "Notes", 10/23/27, beginning in a confident, Steinian tone: "I will make a big, serious portrait of my time" (SE 62) but the tone falters, the statement modulates, expressing the writer's frustrated ambition.

To confirm the connection between poem and prose, there is a direct correspondence linking the diary entry for 10/28 and the first of two small poems so dated. UB manuscripts suggest that this diary entry is either excerpt or summary of an abortive novel titled Fairfield. Manuscript details indicate this uncompleted work as a specific forerunner of Paterson. Its immediate interest is in showing Williams at that stage as bound down in a sleazy environment, with his external surroundings concomitant to his interior life:

The justice of poverty
its shame its dirt
are one with the meanness
of love ("10/29", CEP 302)

For him, this is bad writing, although it describes his sense of things, a task accomplished
more "indirectly" (and autobiographically?) in the expressionistic billboard symbol:

leaping

over printed hurdles and

"¼ of their energy comes from bread"

two
gigantic highschool boys
ten feet tall.

With "11/2: A Morning Imagination of Russia",

"The Descent of Winter" enters a more positive phase.

At the corresponding point in the "Notes" Williams breaks off into a consideration of Shakespeare

"about the best Shakespeare criticism there is"—Zukofsky² including a statement Zukofsky afterwards turned to good Objectivist account: "The only human value of anything, writing included, is an intense vision of the facts"(86 71), another iteration of Williams's concern for "vividness". Simultaneously he,

for perhaps the only time in his career, has considerable doubts about poetry, which all too often is "a soft second light of dreaming" (86 67).

In "A Morning Imagination of Russia" he
returns to a mode used early, the interior monologue, in which his interest is to convey ideas rather than dramatic character. In this instance the "character" is a Soviet Russian of the period. In kind the poem demonstrates that Williams's own ideas of his scope as poet are more limited than his practice. Apart from the concern for ideas, this is quite definitely a poem including symbols, chiefly city and non-city. The pre-revolutionary past is epitomized as having "city" qualitics:

Cities are full of light, fine clothes delicacies for the table, variety, novelty - fashion: all spent for this.

(CSP 305)

The last phrase is not pejorative, but is perhaps ambiguous, the thinker feeling nostalgia for a materially rich past:

It tickled his imagination. But it passed in a rising calm
Tan der a dei; Tan der a dei!
He was singing.
The sense of the city here is very much that of "To a Friend Concerning Several Ladies", even if the sexual connection specifically is not made:

There were no cities between him and his desires...

City might quite easily be what Williams has in mind when he remarks in the Shakespeare passage, "That which locks up the mind is vicious" (SE 71). Certainly his Russian is pondering power which can "lock up the mind". Williams is musing on his own condition, as a writer, encountering difficulties, "He felt/ uncertain many days" yet he knew (and here Williams turns to the subjectivist "solution" which occurs at intervals in his writing and tends to be confusing unless his concept of "interpénétration" is kept well in mind) that, "The world was himself". On behalf of his Russian and himself, Williams is once again refusing tradition, the landscape symbolizing an inner freedom which is none the less valued for his lacking full confidence in it:

The earth and sky were very close
When the sun rose it rose in his heart.
Amid a pervasive grimness in Williams's poems of this time occur flashes of affirmation, "Out of such drab trash as this/ by a metamorphosis..." This very poem ("Struggle of Wings", CEP 291-293. Earlier version, The Dial, July 1926) shows him casting about tentatively for shape; its closing jingle, complete with rhyming couplets and archaisms, demonstrates uncertainty and strain. Yet alongside the pessimism of, for example, "Hemmed-in Males" (CEP 322) is the vigorous growth, to its horns at the top, of the "Young Sycamore"(CEP 332), involved in process, vaunting the new. In more optimistic moods he believed that writing, the "greatest work of the twentieth-century", was superior to philosophy and science.

Meeting Zukofsky re-focused Williams's work and his thinking about it in a specific way. Having for some years been part of the Imagist movement, he admired Zukofsky's early work for its quality of being based on words, language, rather than "thoughts", and may himself have invented the name of their group when he noted; "Your early poems, even when the thought has enough force or freshness, have not been objectivized in new or fresh observations".3
On the other hand, Zukofsky had found in Williams (twenty years his senior) the kind of poet he was looking for. Responding to *Spring and All*, he said of Williams: "his exclusions of sentimentalisms, extraneous comparisons, similes, overweening autobiographies of the heart, of all which permits factious 'reflection about', of sequence, of all but the full sight of the immediate" (*Symposium* essay, p. 81) manifest a "living" aesthetic. Yet the traffic was not all one way. Williams accepted helpful advice on his Stein essay and expressed admiration for Zukofsky's handling in the poem of "abstract-philosophic-jargonist language". Zukofsky anticipates, at one point, ideas of Edward Dahlberg and Charles Olson of a somewhat later period, when he sums up the concept of Williams's "reiterated improvisations": "...it is a definite metaphysical concept: the thought is the thing which, in turn, produces the thought". (*Symposium*, p. 69). Later, in his introductory material to *An Objectivists' Anthology* (1932), 4 Zukofsky included *Spring and All* on his list of essential reading, singling out poems in which "objectification is to be found" (original numbering VIII, X, XVIII, XXVI),
and including Williams's name with that of Pound, Stevens, Cummings, Eliot, Marianne Moore, Robert McAlmon and Charles Reznikoff.

Attempting a clear definition of "objectivism", Zukofsky contrasts it with "sincerity", a quality which relates to poet rather than poem and involves connotation and suggestiveness. In contrast, "objectivism" affords a sense of "rested totality" or "objectification", which is "the apprehension satisfied completely as to the appearance of the art form as an object". In An Object an "objective" is defined as "rays of the object brought to a focus". This is allied to Poundian ideas of the connection between technique and sincerity. Both in his poem and his essay Zukofsky cites Pound's remark that "a new cadence is a new idea", while in an undated note Williams asks Zukofsky for a phrase of George Oppen's "about sincerity being not in the writer but in the writing". These instances show the Objectivist spirit and its relation to the defunct Imagist movement.

An "Objectivists" Anthology includes two groups of Williams's poems, some dating back more than a decade. Among them is a version of "March" as rewritten by Zukofsky, placed in
the anthology's closing section of poems by various people all "revised" in some way by the editor! Zukofsky was not gathering the fully achieved products of a tendency, but was using the material in a Poundian, pedagogical way. Work selected is of various grades of accomplishment, having in common only the quality of including "objectification". Zukofsky's conception of an "objective" was intellectual. A note (apparently from a later period) by Williams in the Yale Collection associates Objectivism with Imagism, but adds an important rider: "The mind rather than the unsupported eye entered the picture". Paradoxically, Objectivism is subjective in its own way, as Zukofsky tacitly admits when he notes in the *Symposium* essay, "Ultimately poetry is a question of natures, of constitutions, of mental colourings" (p. 71).

Williams's name was prominent among the Objectivists, but it would foolish to attempt to see him as wholeheartedly (wholeheadedly, perhaps?) in the movement, just as it is hazardous picking one's way among apparent inconsistencies in his thinking. Already in "Paterson" (OEP 233), which appeared in *The Dial* in February 1927, he had used his dictum, "No ideas but in things", but he was
never limited to the narrow objectivism castigated by Eugene Jolas, editor of transition: "Pure objectivism fails because it is the antithesis of subjectivism. It follows the extreme swing of the pendulum towards a craze for actuality and factual experiences which can only end in artistic sterility and a return to the commonplace". With Jolas and his contributors Williams had in common a rejection of "the King's English" and a Joycean approach to language experiment. Zukofsky, on the other hand, perhaps more musically sophisticated than Williams, took from his language experiments the techniques of syllable and word count.

Williams had already reached, for himself, the Objectivist tenet that each poem has its own form. He shared the sense that only particulars could be communicated. Believing as he did in economy, process, he did not go as far as Zukofsky's injunction, "Don't write, telegraph". There is an intellectual shade of difference between the two men's views of the objectivity of writing; while Williams sees words as things, Zukofsky notes, "tho it may not be harbored as solidity in the crook of an elbow, writing (audibility in two-dimensional print)...is an object or affects
the mind as such. Considered in relation to "the gang", the group, Williams belongs because one facet of his thinking and a range of his poems belong. The real association was probably more of an individual one with Zukofsky and it persisted after the group itself had ceased to be really useful. The two continued to read and analyse each other's unpublished work.

When CP 21-31 was published in 1934, it included Stevens's introduction with the controversial remark that Williams's "passion for the anti-poetic is a blood passion..." (p.2). The point was afterwards to irritate Williams repeatedly afterwards, since for him (as he makes clear at the end of his essay on Marianne Moore) no material is anti-poetic, no "special things and special places are reserved for art" (SE 130) and concomitantly a distinction cannot be made between art as, for example, proletarian or aristocratic.

In view of his strong conviction of the pertinence of poetry, one respects Williams's dismay, but Stevens's remark is acute. He finds also in Williams's work "a little sentiment, very little, together with acute reaction" (p.2) and it is
the presence of this quality in some of Williams's poems, in tension with their realism, which may at least make it seem that he is employing factual material as if it were anti-poetic, as in "Brilliant Sad Sun":

Lee's
Lunch

Spaghetti Oysters
a Specialty Clams

and raw Winter's done
to a turn - Restaurant: Spring!
Ah, Madam, what good are your thoughts

romantic but true
beside this gaiety of the sun
and that huge appetite?

Look!
from a glass pitcher she serves
clear water to the white chickens.

What are your memories
beside that purity?
The empty pitcher dangling

from her grip
her coarse voice croaks
Bon jor'

And Patti, on her first concert tour
sang at your house in Mayaguez
and your brother was there

What beauty
beside your sadness — and
what sorrow.          (CEP 324)

By Williams's own best practice at least the last three lines here are redundant, but that apart he does seem to be effecting a deliberate contrast between the lunch counter and the rather "grand" memory of an occasion of Adalina Patti's singing. This might be regarded as a poem which includes objectivity.

Many typical Williams poems are completely independent of paraphrase. Of these, perhaps most notorious is "This is Just to Say": 
I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold.  (OEP 354)

Much admired as this poem has been, it has also been used more than once to illustrate the basic triviality of both Williams's method and his material. Yet such an attitude to it is oversolemn. Here the immediate, small occasion is light-hearted, even comic, but the poem is much more than it seems: a celebration of the physical life, rendered with stringent economy but with a high degree of essential "vividness".

Williams's technique of beginning a poem
with its "conclusion" (as in "To Waken an Old Lady"); "The Red Wheelbarrow") is a means of concrete "indirection" (roughly, presenting the object and letting it "speak for itself") which also circumvents paraphrase. As in "The Red Wheelbarrow" the concrete details gain reverberation from the opening "so much depends upon", so in "The Bull" (CEP 336), the essential condition of the whole poem is in the opening line's explanation, "It is in captivity". Otherwise the bull is the type of the physical life impeded, not (as in, say, Ted Hughes's "Jaguar") the embodiment of frustrated rage, but of long term effects. That the bull is "godlike" may suggest awesomeness, but also divorce from physical reality; he is solitary, indecisive ("nozzles/ the sweet grass gingerly"), time-killing, devitalized. The lines

Olympian commentary on
the bright passage of days

suggest both the bull's latent power and his remoteness from the "bright passage". Decorative:

- The round sun
smoothes his lacquer
through
the glossy pinetrees,
he is, despite his "ivory" hardness, a plaything
for the wind. "Milkless", he cannot reproduce his
species nor have access to companions who can.
This touches obliquely on "divorce", but also on
process and the necessity for wholeness that the
process may work properly.

Another poem concerning "divorce" is the comic
"The Sea-Elephant", also in captivity, separated
from its just environment. Two refrains, the
animal's "Blouaugh!" and the human:

They
ought
to put it back where
it came from,

are used to excellent effect, each successive usage having
a change of nuance. Towards the end of the poem
the animal presence represents love, rejection of
the sea-elephant being fear of love, fear of involve-
ment, a prime cause and circumstance of "divorce":
Yes
it's wonderful but they ought to
put it
back into the sea where it came from.
Blouaugh!

Swing - ride
walk
on wires - toss balls
stoop and
contort yourselves -
But I
am love. I am
from the sea - (CEP 71)

Thus the sea-elephant is a comic Venus, love, but also art. Though it may seem so, the concluding, "and Spring/ they say/ Spring is icumen in" is neither slight nor wilful. Included in the "Primavera" section of CP 21-31 (title originating in "Della Primavera Trasportata alla Morale"), it
concludes by affirming the beginning, which is love, the vital principle. Counterpoised against it is "Death" (CEP 78), in which, life having gone from the man, he is divorced from it to become no more than "a godforsaken curio" incapable of contact because "love cannot touch" him any more:

he's dead
the old bastard -
He's a bastard because

there's nothing legitimate in him any more
he's dead
...
He's nothing at all...

Legitimacy, "vividness", being alive, this is important. Asked, in a questionnaire, "Why do you go on living?", Williams answered, "Because I have an enjoyable body for my pleasure". He felt, as Stevens did with him and for him, that in the flux of time, "we have only our own intelligence on which to rely".
NOTES


3. SL no. 73, p. 101. The original of the SL text is in the Yale Collection, but is not in itself a letter. Notes written on a punch-holed notebook sheet, it is dated July 5, 1923, and accompanied by a covering letter which is not included in SL.


7. An interesting parallel occurs in the periodical *This Quarter*, vol.1, no.2 (1925) in a poem by Robert Roe, a now forgotten poet who contributed also to *Poetry* and *transition*. Roe's poem, "Meanings", reads in part:

   If you ask me for meanings
   I cannot give you any.
   I can only give you things.
   Everything its own meaning.


11. *The Little Review*, (final number), (May 1929), XII, No. 2, p. 38
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE LATER 'THIRTIES

Objectivist aesthetics were very much akin to those expressed in two essays in The Little Review by the visual artist Fernand Léger. Léger clearly perceived the distinction between "plastic beauty and "sentimental, descriptive or imitative values", held that every object has its own independent value, but also that the creative act is a mysterious struggle between objective and subjective. The artist's task is to attempt to see objects "in isolation - their value enhanced by every known means", thus enabling them to take on a degree of "personality" never before realized.

Williams's famous "poem is a machine" definition of the mid-'forties resembles Léger's thinking and obviously derives from Objectivist theory. A decade before The Wedge was published, reviewing George Oppen's Discrete Series (Poetry, May 1934, p.220-225), Williams wrote:
It is the acceptable fact of a poem as a mechanism that is the proof of its meaning and this is as technical a matter as in the case of any other machine. Without the poem being a workable mechanism in its own right, while at the same time it constitutes the meaning of, the poem as a whole, it will remain ineffective.

He adds, rather oddly, that therefore the poem will never make convincing whatever "propaganda" it is detailing. (p. 221). It is noteworthy that, in the second half of the 'thirties, while he had much contact and concern with social propaganda, Williams continued to put the exigencies of the poem before all else, so that (following his penetrating essay on A Draft of XXX Cantos, p. 105f) he introduces his assessment of "Pound's Eleven New 'Cantos'" by defining poetry as "a construction which embodies among its concepts, its words and the form of their composition, the deep and serious aspirations of man". (p. 167).

For him the years immediately before the
second World War are a complex, which includes his link with the newly formed publisher, New Directions, his libretto for a proposed opera by George Antheil, his most accomplished single volume of short stories, the first two (and most successful) of the Stecher trilogy of novels. These were the years when correspondents sometimes addressed him as "Comrade Williams", and of his associations with The New Masses, The New Republic, and, latterly, The Partisan Review. He contributed rather earnest assessments of books of verse by the proletarian Sol Funeroff and the "Missouri dirt farmer" H.H. Lewis to The New Masses and, answering yet another ubiquitous questionnaire, an ironic two-liner:

What's wrong with American literature?
You ask me? How much do I get?

When the Stalinist The New Masses squabbled with the "Trotskyist" Partisan Review, Williams became directly involved, but/apparently rehabilitated when he answered yet another questionnaire for Partisan Review in 1939.

To The New Republic Williams contributed both
poems and reviews, including "The Yachts" and a piece on Walker Evans's American Photographs in which he once more asserted the importance of individual place, which should be regarded as "everywhere".

Ronald Lane Latimer, a somewhat mysterious figure who published Stevens and others, in 1935 printed Williams's An Early Martyr at his Alcestis Press. An unusual feature of CLP is the placing of this group of poems so near the beginning, though a considerable number are scattered throughout the volume, one poem "finding" its way into CLP, while two - one a strangely personal piece called "Genesis" - have remained subsequently uncollected.

Near as it is in time to CP 21-31, this collection cannot be judged solely on Objectivist criteria. Williams's qualified acceptance of work by such people as Funaroff and Lewis, should warn us not to look for propagandist poems, yet a number of the more successful poems in An Early Martyr have a socio-political relevance. The title poem itself is a "social" poem organized along a "story line", but it is verbally slack and near enough to the snare of his method at
that period - the danger of writing "chopped up prose". Everything is spelled out, the thought flatly expressed, revealing in this instance more than a suggestion of truth in Stevens's imputation of "sentimentalism". Other poems of similar preoccupation are "A Portrait of the Times", "Item", "To a Poor Old Woman", "The Reaper from Passenack" (the real concerns of which are rather deeper), "Invocation and Conclusion", "Late for Summer Weather", "Proletarian Portrait", "Sunday", "The Dead Baby" and, according to Marxist critics of the time, "The Yachts". These poems comprise approximately one-third of the collection while a proportion of the remainder had been printed earlier in Spring and All or "The Descent of Winter".

It is probably true, as Linda Wagner suggests, that Williams was disillusioned with human beings at this period, but he had written before of bare and broken trees, so that to say, "even nature became cold and lifeless" is to overlook chronology. A poem such as "Tree and Sky" is not characteristic of this period only, since winter trees appear to have been, for Williams, a kind of "objective correlative" for a mood of melancholy, consciousness of mutability.
In pieces such as "Invocation and Conclusion" and "Late for Summer Weather" Mr. Nash's attitude contrasts with the then common romanticizing of the proletariat. These poems have an authentic ring, combining sympathy and objectivity:

Fat Lost Ambling
nowhere through
the upper town they kick

their way through
heaps of
fallen maple leaves

still green - and
crisp as dollar bills
Nothing to do. Hot cha! (CEP 100)

"To a Poor Old Woman" (CEP 99), similarly based on pure observation plus sympathy, may suggest the pitfalls of "interpreting" Williams (as Parker Tyler, for example, interprets "The Red Wheelbarrow" in the Williams issue of Briercliff Quarterly\(^5\)). A kinetic poem, the "action" is re-created almost solely by line
disposition:

They taste good to her
They taste good
to her. They taste
good to her...

... a solace of ripe plums
seeming to fill the air
They taste good to her.

A chief Williams method of making a poem fluent while maintaining rapidity and lightness was to reduce conventional punctuation drastically. Early in his career he had discarded as unnecessary the practice of line capitalization. This also helped with the flow, but the verse in some instances, shaped more by his ear than anything on the page, became an apparently endless flux. Next he began to experiment, restoring capitals but not full stops, breaking poems up into visual units (thereby imposing a "punctuation" on the reader). In this practical way he arrived on many occasions, at instances of two-line or
three-line units. His most common punctuation device at this period was the dash — though, somewhat surprisingly, he did not employ it to indicate breath groupings. He adopted a method of capitalizing to mark out image-units or thought-units, a practice which seems arbitrary in "An Early Martyr", but successful in other poems, such as "A Portrait of the Times" or "To a Poor Old Woman". He varies the practice on occasion by resorting to the time-honoured custom of capitalizing a key word.

In "The Raper from Passenack", "Invocation and Conclusion" and "A Portrait of the Times" is discernable a co-extension of social depression with "the immemorial tragedy/ of lack-love". More penetrating than the others, "The Raper from Passenack" (CEP 103) concerns alienation, "divorce". An objective account of "facts", it is also something deeper. Ostensibly the raper is a criminal, the girl his victim. For both life lacks "vividness" and, in some sense, each is most fully alive during the rape and its immediate aftermath. The rape is touch, is their contact, the rapist more whole than his victim. Partially at least, he recognizes this
when he says, "I took care of you" (an idiomatic phrase facing both ways, towards life and towards death). His act has endowed him with self-assurance, a measure of fulfilment, affirmation of his own existence, which the girl has neither before nor after the violation. The sexual act is here a gross token for love. Only through pursuing a "lower" kind of contact, substitute for love, does the man achieve some kind of self-realization. The girl cannot do even this. To her the act has nothing to do with love. Contact, in this instance, brings fear of disease.

Williams is not here yielding to a male sentimentality. He uses the irony of the situation most effectively:

I suppose it's my mind - the fear of infection. I'd rather a million times have been got pregnant.

The girl's existence is lived too much in her "mind". She has some vague intimation that pregnancy would be a better outcome than the disease she fears so much, but this is not because it could be the fruit of true love, the
means of overcoming alienation. For this girl, in her very being, sexual congress is a main focus of fear. Her attitude to it is a precise index of her alienation. Williams will later use this sense of sexual contact as "dirty" many times as a figure of "divorce... in our time".

Several poems from *An Early Martyr* had been printed together (Poetry, October 1933) as an ineffectual sequence, "In the American Style". Williams broke the grouping down, presumably recognizing that even the "4th of July" section (CEP 419) was not "in the American style" in any fully effective sense. Further, he rewrote one section, "The Locust Tree in Flower" (CEP 93,94), cutting back already very short lines, reducing a "thin" poem to half its original length.

Together, the two versions are an ample demonstration of his concern for form. For all its terseness the first version (CEP 94) fails in being too explicit without making its explicitness "do" anything except state itself. Not enough is omitted to involve the reader actively in the poem, thus circumventing one of Williams's own primary requirements. Resonance and response are forfeited through over-specification.
In the shorter version the implications of a technique are developed to their logical end. Single word lines, here, are not the product of Williams's "short breath", but a rigorous stripping of verbal redundancies. The result is an example of his instinct for process. Its force is a force of words, words as things, and clearly so. "Among", the opening gambit so to speak, is not an incompleteness or an abstraction, but an action or part of an action. It suggests discreteness, disposition of separate elements, just as "of" suggests partaking. As is intended, the first two lines read as antithesis, excluding each other. The poem is set up as a polarization, offering choices, but in the action the choices disappear as the brief poem runs its course. This is intentional, since the white flowering of May cannot "choose" to bloom (as is suggested in the resolution: "again"), but what is enacted therefore is a hesitancy, on the very threshold of budding. The very shape of the poem (as Ostrom points out, p.134) is that of a branch still bare. May, as it comes, will be multiplicity as the only verb in the poem suggests. The process of spring blossoming is at once single and multiple, a
matter of old and new, broken and green, side by side. As the poem's implications arrive for him, the reader works out this action graph for himself.

Published in May, 1935, in The New Republic (a possible reason for the number of Marxian interpretations it has had), "The Yachts" (CEP 106) is, technically and otherwise, a far remove from "The Locust Tree in Flower". Of this much-anthologized piece Williams wrote to a correspondent in 1961:

This is the one consciously imitative poem I ever wrote...I felt ashamed to have forgotten the American idiom so completely. As yet I was not sufficiently grounded in the variable foot, though I was consciously enough grounded to make me feel that something had gone amiss. I was unhappy at the result. I felt ashamed of myself. I have never forgotten it.6

The American idiom apart, "The Yachts" succeeds as movement, the run of the verse being as the deployment of yachts in heavy seas.

It is also a poem of contact. First
apprehended visually, next in the line itself as motion, "The Yachts" is interpenetrative, the water's swell felt in terms of human movement. This movement derives naturally from the contemporary ambience, coloured by the time's social afflictions, human efforts to "keep afloat" or "get aboard", but the poem's ultimate force is more than social. The "ungoverned ocean" is the flux, chance, in which all humanity lives out its life. "Mothlike in mists, scintillant in the minute/brilliance of cloudless days", the yachts of human life, beautiful though they may be (and this is part of the yacht symbol), burn quickly away. Placed as it is, the word "minute" carries visually connotations both of extreme smallness and of a brief unit of time.

In the poem's course the yachts' symbolical function shifts. By mid-poem they have become products of the human, built to race (the poem uses connotations of "race" also), but ultimately getting beyond the control of their makers. The sea which "the skillful yachts pass over" is a Dantesque "sea of faces". Unusual as it is, this is yet one of Williams's finest poems.

Two poems in An Early Martyr offer quite
distinct accounts of the poet's role, "Hymn to Love Ended" (CPF 103) and "A Poem for Norman McLeod" (CPF 114). The first, an "imaginary translation from the Spanish", discusses the traditional isolated bard ("Villon beaten and cast off"), revealing something of Williams's "romantic" attitude. The second expresses his "pose", his ultimate position:

The revolution
is accomplished
noble has been
changed to no bull

and its conclusion shows how close he is to Stevens's "I am what is around me":

You can do lots
if you know
what's around you
No bull.

From his insight Stevens controlled his mundo, while Williams expresses only one pole of the strong internal tension which made his poems,
his awareness of the "objective". On the other side, even his own improvisations, written "carelessly", partook of such objectiveness simply because they had come into existence and, as themselves, could not be different from what they actually were.

Allusive, and again untypical, "An Elegy for D.H. Lawrence" (C.E.P. 361) surely owes a little to a reading of Lawrence's The Plumed Serpent. It touches Lawrence at a point central to both writers, the need for human love. Through:

The serpent in the grotto
water dripping from the stone
into a pool...
Mediterranean evenings. Ashes
of Cretan fires. And to the north
forsythia hung with
yellow bells in the cold,

Williams gives us

Poor Lawrence
worn with a fury of sad labor
to create summer from
spring's decay.
But Lawrence himself, finally, must be numbered among the, "Men driven not to love/ but to the ends of the earth". An artist unloved in his own country, he failed, in Williams's conception, to bring about the "summer" he envisioned, so that the serpent of vitality gives way to the cricket:

Greep, greep, greep the cricket
chants where the snake
with agate eyes leaned to the water.
Sorrow to the young
that Lawrence has passed
unwanted from England.
And in the gardens forsythia
and in the woods
now the crinkled spice-bush
in flower.

Throughout the poem Williams has maintained and reinforced the elegiac mood by means of skillful juxtapositions. Just as the shorter version of "The Locust Tree in Flower" works on purely verbal juxtaposition, the present poem puts together allusions, responses, articulating
them into a coherence centred on, and indeed dependent on, Lawrence himself.

In "How to Write"\textsuperscript{7}, a key essay of the period, Williams appeals to the source of art, of writing, as "the night of our unconscious past", instructing that the writer "must thoroughly abandon himself to the writing." Though followed by a phase of "ratiocination", this "anarchical phase" is the most important in writing. Such thinking is not diametrically opposed to Williams's "objectivism", although it may seem so. It does, however, differ from it, allowing purely subjective (deep?) images such as the closing lines of "Flowers by the Sea" (\textit{CP} 87):

\begin{quote}
the sea is circled and sways peacefully upon its plantlike stem
\end{quote}

much more effective than the earlier version printed in \textit{Pagan}y (Fall 1930, p.5):

\begin{quote}
the thought of the sea is circled and sways peacefully upon its plantlike stem.
\end{quote}

As his Imagism (which Thirlwall says persisted until Glenn Hughes's \textit{Imagist Anthology}, 1930\textsuperscript{8}) modulated into Objectivism, so simultaneously he
maintained his interest in Surrealism and quasi-Surrealism. While Zukofsky's expatiations do not, finally, offer a single clear definition of "Objectivism" it is certainly not intended as a diametric opposite to something labelled "Subjectivism". The interest centres on "object" (including poem as object) and "objective", but Zukofsky more than once refers to participation of the poet's senses and intelligence. Yet Williams's improvisatory side may at times seem to run counter to the facts in which he professes such interest. Williams's critical prose is not notably consistent and, besides, varies in sharpness; but his instinct to "write carelessly" in fact complements his drive to render precisely "bricks and colored threads". The carelessness is to circumvent thought about the object or action of the poem, thus dimming its "vividness".

Alcestis Press also published his next collection, Adam and Eve and the City, a more cohesive book than An Early Martyr, with a ground theme - the futility of desire. Of fifteen poems (a group of five Spanish "versions" counting as one), "Adam" and "Eve" are placed centrally and
"The City" last. Portrayals of his mother and father constructed along a narrative line, both "Adam" and "Eve" are prosy in the wrong way, lacking tension as poems. "The City" (later titled "Perpetuum Mobile: the City", CEP 384) combines narrative with metamorphic technique in a poem of contact:

--- a dream
we dreamed
each
separately
we two

of love
and of
desire --

that fused
in the night --

The "two" of the poem, man and woman, go together to the city, which is the object of their "fused" dream ("a little false"), but which disappears by day when they arrive. Again the city has a
symbolical function, as desire for love. Yet this "love" is perhaps limited to sexual desire and is, in terms of the city, expressed through a kaleidoscope of violence, sewage, gross human appetites. Contrasted with it is a stunted but immediate nature:

Over the swamps
    a wild
magnolia bud -
    greenish
white
a northern
    flower -
And so
we live
looking -  (SEP 385)

a sketch of New Jersey landscape, foreground to distant Manhattan high-rises and skyscrapers.

Man and woman finally leave the city again, and by indirection we have learned that the city's "stars/ of matchless/ splendor" too easily, even on a summer's day, dwindle "in a wall of rain".

Several shorter poems in the volume are more fully realized than these longer pieces, and perhaps
most of all "To a Wood Thrush" (CRP 367). Brief as it is, the poem is in three parts: a particular moment described in five lines, followed by a five-line comment, thus putting Williams's values in due precedence, - that the fact of the thrush's singing is "more/ than my own thoughts". There is a third shift, which dismisses his opening description as poeticizing the occasion. The incident's true point is elicited, its presentness, making the observer subject to the moment ("What can I say?"), focusing his emotions:

Vistas
of delight waking suddenly
before a cheated world.

The poem's whole validity is merely in pointing. Its only value-judgment offered in the title, "Fine Work in Pitch and Copper" (CRP 368) exhibits the same verbal structure of present action. A sense of the artist's pride in his work is conveyed through the closing triad. Still lunching, a workman:

picks up a copper strip
and runs his eye along it.
Later, Williams himself suggested that this poem is "about" his struggles with technique, search for a regular stanza pattern (INWP 57). The quest for that particular kind of order is reflected in capitalization, used still for punctuation, breaking the poem into three sections, a mathematical diminuendo (9,6,3 lines), and with each fresh sentence beginning with the line.

Philip Horton, in a review attacking Williams's Complete Collected Poems (1906-1958)\textsuperscript{10}, turned Stevens's "anti-poetic" and "sentimental" against Williams. Horton saw Williams's "objectivism" as a "deliberate stylization of the anti-poetic state of mind", but claimed that, while "overtly" objective, Williams was really sentimental, attempting to solve his own inner conflict by substituting the impersonal for the personal. While such a procedure may be "spiritual hygiene" it is not poetry, which is produced not when conflict is eliminated but when it is sustained in equilibrium, "made to function as a physical law of the poet's universe".

Stevens's subtle, well-intentioned, well-mannered insights of 1934 have become a stumbling-block in the appreciation of Williams's poems. Horton apparently missed the point of Williams's
stripped form. Usually the sentimental element in the poems (an identification with the "subject") is slight, turned to good purpose, held in austere tension against the poem's form. In "Young Woman at a Window" (CWP 369), for example, the verb tense of present action is strongly reinforced by line-structure, the poem reading in a single continuous movement of eye and mind. The two figure group is perceived in an instant of time, the woman crying, the boy, "his nose/ pressed/ to the glass", giving a strong sense impression of grief caused by longing, deprivation, the pair shut off by the glass from the outside world. Clarity of presentation offsets any sentimentality, while linear tension lifts the poem above the merely imagist.

Moving from "warmth, variability" to:

the gold hawk's-eye speaks once
coldly its perfection,

"The Rose" (CWP 369) is a representative, if not highly successful, poem of process, as also is the long, more fully realized, "The Crimson Cyclamen" (CWP 397), dedicated to Charles Demuth. Such a poem serves to show that Williams was involved in
process, as Pound was, in the sense suggested by A.N. Whitehead: "We should start from the notion of actuality as in essence a process". It can never be overlooked that while one side of Williams's interest in actuality was the object, the other side was more complex: flux, perpetual change, spontaneity, disorder, the evanescence of vitality. Out of this process, life:

out of the sea -
the Venusremembering wavelets
rippling with laughter -
freedom
for the daffodils! (CPEP 379)
NOTES


"A New Realism - the Object",
IX, No. 2 (Winter,
The Little Review, 1926), 7-8.


9. Adam and Eve and the City, (Peru, Vermont, 1936).


    O Dewey!(John)
    O James! (William)
    O Whitehead!
    - above and beyond
    your teaching stands
    the Pink Church...
CHAPTER EIGHT

WHITE MULE

When it was published in 1937, White Mule, the first novel of the trilogy concerning the immigrant Stecher family, had ten years' work and thinking behind it. Many chapters were first published in Pagan, whose editor, Richard Johns, deflected Williams from his original intention of making a story structurally much more complex. After making a beginning, Williams let the early chapters "lay about the attic for several years", later observing that he had "started without too much forethought, the way I always do" (LWIP 60). Hitting upon the idea of writing about his wife Flossie's early childhood, he combined with his knowledge of her his professional knowledge as a pediatrician and a sense of labour-management relations made keen by the Depression. The story is that of struggle for assimilation into a new
country, the combination of desire and resistance, the individual struggling with sociological and historical forces. Centering his narrative on the baby, Williams focuses in her the hopes of the future:

She entered, as Venus from the sea, dripping. The air enclosed her, she felt it all over her, touching, waking her. If Venus did not cry aloud after release from the pressures of that sea-womb, feeling the new and lighter flood springing in her chest, flinging out her arms - this one did. (WM 1).

Williams's *New Republic* friend, Fred Miller, summarized:

A couple named Joe and Gurlie, pushing immigrants of the type that used sooner or later to make the middle-class, live in Gotham, work, have babies (and the babies in turn have whooping cough). The routine of living is interrupted by a strike in the print shop of which Joe
is manager; there are visits with relatives and friends; Gurlie takes the kids out into the country for a rest. And that's about all that happens. Only it happens. 2

Joe Stecher, who had helped Gompers form the Typographers' Union, left the union upon discovering it was a business like any other, corrupt to a similar degree. Thus he approves of neither capital nor unions, professing belief in honest hard work above all else. Yet he works for a capitalist and is prepared to accept finance from another capitalist to set up his own printing shop. As part of a plan to do this he is quite prepared to win away journeymen and apprentices from his employer and to underbid him for a government contract.

Williams succeeds in making a "presence" of the baby and in depicting the gradual, half-accidental shift of the Stecher family up the social scale. Joe, subtler and more intelligent than his wife Gurlie, gentle by nature, can be ruthless on occasion and is potentially a representative American, anti-socialist, a thoroughgoing
individualist. He is portrayed as the man "in the middle", set apart from that Demos Williams appears to deplore in *The First President*. A repeated charge in the novel, by other characters, is that Joe is "too honest", but this is hardly borne out by the facts as presented.

The child Flossie is a delicate "flower" (to have been called Flora had not the name seemed insufficiently American) and the years of her parents' initial adjustment to America are also those of her own adaptation to life itself; she is exploring and fitting herself for a new world of her own. In all but rejecting that life, Flossie rejects her mother, favouring her father, who (partially in spite of himself) is for her.

Gurlie represents acceptance of the cruder, crasser side of American materialism. From the start she is clear that her desire is to be rich and powerful. Domineering, she directs Joe's energies as much as possible on behalf of herself and their daughters (the older is Lottie). His own concern for his work gradually becomes subjugated to the need and desire for money.

His (and presumably Williams's) attitudes to the unions are summed up in his response to his
brother Oscar, a good-time loving Lothario, who is fond of reminiscing and relying on union security to make light of his job. Not, as some commentators have suggested, working-class aspiring to rise, Joe is of European middle-class background, but as an immigrant has "working-class" status in America. His actual origins may be seen as an important source of his disillusionment with the unions, but it is natural, in any case, that he should strive to regain his appropriate socio-economic level. Meanwhile, brother Oscar, family scapegrace, acts in a manner irresponsible to his family and his social background. Not unnaturally, Joe feels he has done all the work while Oscar has had all the freedom, besides which Oscar's waywardness can continue because of the unions.

The social implications of his material do not cause Williams to become tractarian. He simply presents the facts of his narrative. Thus Joe is shown simultaneously as a conscientious workman, a none-too-scrupulous business dealer and a strict foreman. His refusal to countenance unionism in his own "shop" stems partly from his conviction that it is corrupt, but also from a
realization that it impedes his freedom to "hire and fire". Having dismissed the drunken, belligerent Carmody, he is driven by circumstance to help Mrs Carmody and her family.

The total situation Williams creates includes a number of ironies, but these are in no way made to stand out of the narrative. It arises naturally, for example, that Joe is sexually attracted to Mrs Carmody's peculiarly Irish beauty; and also that the drunken husband prevents what good Joe has attempted, by discovering the money gift, taking it after thrashing his wife unmercifully before their frightened children. There is a vivid incidental portrait of the fear and inner withdrawal of the eldest child.

What distinguishes Williams's prose fiction is its directness. He is specific, always. Presenting situation or character he does not theorize or qualify. Using a style which has affinities with both Gertrude Stein and Hemingway, he has not the obtrusive Steinian consciousness of words. Realizing words' importance, he does not indulge himself in them. Nor does he, like Hemingway, work from a base of romantic presuppositions concerning courage, honour, etc. His premise
is that we are alive in the world, that all our vagaries, circumstances, troubles, derive from that fact, which he therefore records as plainly as he can.

Early in the novel a balance of interest is maintained among Joe, Gurlie, the baby. This balance shifts when Gurlie, for the child's health, must take her to Vermont for the summer. There Gurlie herself discovers a new dimension of American life, the rural. Admittedly tough, she now proves by no means implacable. Discovering that old Mr and Mrs Payson are all but starving she, in her practical way, sets about remedying the situation. She (from a different European background than Joe) finds herself much at home on the "farm". Back in town meanwhile, Joe's business career is moving forward, not without personal misgivings on his own part. In parallel, but quite disparate, ways, Joe and Gurlie have now in considerable measure "arrived". The Vermont summer also serves to increase young Flossie's strength. At that point White Eagle ends.

Its sequel, In the Money, takes us right to the heart of Joe Stecher's life as a printer. Newspaper cuttings in the UB Collection, dating
from 1903, show how closely Stecher's successful bid for the contract to print U.S. Government money orders is patterned on the experience of Williams's father-in-law. Model and source material are used to present a strongly factual account of the situation. Having found that the firm employing him is as corrupt as any other, he decides to act. He had put forward a suggestion that the money orders be printed on a special paper which could not be forged; and when his idea is apparently ignored he decides to bid for the contract himself. At this stage his position becomes morally equivocal for, since his employer Wynnewood refuses to act, he accepts financial backing from a rival firm. On the day when bids are due he acts to cover the fact that he has gone to Washington.

Joe's brother, Oswald (Oscar in the earlier novel) is somewhat redeemed from the fecklessness of his earlier portrait in a chapter (XIX) in which he indulges Gurlie's nostalgia for the old European customs. Now, in the contrast between the two men, Joe appears dour and even unimaginative.

Gurlie's ambitions for status and luxury are brought out even more strongly in the second book.
She categorizes people dogmatically, rejecting them, for example, if they are Jewish, or if (as happens with the young lovers in the adjacent cabin on the ferry) she eavesdrops upon their private lives and disapproves of what she learns. A fury of low-class priggishness, she dominates her family, reacting violently to them, hating them much of the time, using her "little Dutchie" to further her own material ends. Williams conveys all this and yet makes Gurlie seem interesting, even attractive.

In these novels, as in poems, is embodied the dictum: "No ideas but in things". When Williams wishes to convey an idea - for example, that the Stechers are fighting for social survival in a situation which is "every man for himself" - he does so through incident, such as Joe's use of his knowledge of Wynnwood's business methods, Gurlie's insensitive sneer at the flux of newly arriving immigrants. Very subtly, it is shown that the Stecher family's point of live contact with America is Gurlie, rather than the more sensitive and intelligent Joe. Self-centred as she is, and at times nostalgia-prone, Gurlie has rejected her own restricted Scandinavian background, with its rigid social distinctions, only to use it on occasion
as a handy means through which she can express her contempt for America, a land which, simultaneously, she desires to possess and to pit herself against with gusto. Joe is different. His life is centred on his job as printer and, increasingly, upon his daughters. He is not to any great degree involved in the struggle to assimilate, not consciously. When he eventually becomes part of the American scheme of things it is, to a great extent, because Gurlie has driven him. While she plunges blindly, wilfully, ahead, he sees too much. He discerns that he has no interest in social success, none even in business as such. Apart from his wife's urging, what drives him along his successful business course is the American system. He remains outside even his own achievement.

Williams's detachment is so fine that he can even bring off a chapter (XVII), in the midst of his determined naturalism, in which night is personified. This follows the quarrel between Gurlie and her own mother (source and object of hatred), which has frightened Flossie to a pitch of sleeplessness and hysteria. The child's nightmarish experience is suggested, with no loss of credibility, through her sense of palpable night,
first as movement, then as presence.

By chapter end, her sense of night, so strong, has in some degree communicated itself to her father. Temporarily abandoning strict "realism", Williams allows his response to the world as continuous process to take over. Traumatic for Flossie, the situation is employed with some irony to fix Garlie's character ever more firmly. She concludes that the whole incident has occurred merely in the baby. "It was the devil in her".

Williams has aimed for "the life - but transmuted to another tighter form" (as he puts it in "Against the Weather"). These two novels (published together in 1946 as *First Act*) are part of the same effort as *In the American Grain*, to capture an unfalsified sense of America. Re-enacting the past of his wife's family enables him also to repossess her earlier life, rendering them concrete, vital and, through structure, an action newly performed.

In the year of *White Mule*’s publication, Williams (reviewing the work of H.H. Lewis, in *The New Masses*) declared himself as favouring "labor". He offers schemes for cheap publication and distribution of printed matter. Giving Lewis nothing as an inventor
of new forms (and therefore a truly central poet) he admires the "revolutionary", seeing in such as Lewis men comparable with the early Puritan colonists. For once he acknowledges that, in Lewis's case, it is the contents of the poems that matter, though as poems their urge to political action strictly limits them. Characteristic of the times, Lewis's bent was "communistic", but Williams is careful to observe that: "When he speaks of Russia, it is precisely then that he is most American, most solidly in the tradition...There is no one that as directly expresses the mind of the United States as Lewis does now".  

This is cited to indicate Williams's own sense of the need for social and political involvement. As an artist his social concern shows most directly in the work put together in his second volume of short stories, Life Along the Passaic River, his finest single gathering in that medium. Some of its strength derives from the device of a first-person narrator, a doctor, whose point of view adds insight to the narration's directness and economy. The reader gains a very real sense of this narrator even though he is usually peripheral to the stories, which concern people thwarted by
their own limitations or by straitened circumstances. Many of the most successful stories are of girl or women patients. Presentation is through concrete detail, vital speech nuances, - a piece of the time flux ordered by a clear eye and sensitive ear, illuminated by genuine insights.

Disfigured by her ailment, "The Girl with the Pimply Face" yet has an inner attractiveness to which the doctor is sensitive. Uneasy about their casual attitudes, towards fees and other matters, he nevertheless helps her family and the girl herself. Even when a colleague informs him that the family is using him, will never pay for his services, and that the girl is a whore, the doctor returns to the house to enquire after the ailing baby and see how the girl's face has reacted to medication:

The last time I went I heard the,
Come in! from the front of the house.
The fifteen-year-old was in there at the window in a rocking chair with the tightly wrapped baby in her arms. She got up. Her legs were bare to the hips.
A powerful little animal.

What are you doing? Going swimming? I asked.
Naw, that's my gym suit. What the kids wear for Physical Training in school.

How's the baby?

She's all right.

Do you mean it?

Sure, she eats fine now.

Tell your mother to bring it to the office some day so I can weigh it. The food'll need increasing in another week or two anyway.

I'll tell her.

How's your face?

Gettin' better.

My God, it is, I said. And it was much better. Going back to school now?

Yeah, I had tuh. (p.30)

Without overt comment the girl and her family are presented compassionately, with the assumption that they have a right to treat the doctor in their own peculiarly casual fashion.

Following the precept of keeping his eye on the object, Williams commonly conveys more, sometimes much more, than the objective situation. Allowing it to absorb him, his method represents the external world with a high degree of empathy.
Occasionally, as at a moment towards the end of "A Night in June", the doctor will directly recount his own responses, but to show that he is in the same world, the same situation, as his patients. Assisting at a difficult birth, in a working-class household, he thinks:

This woman in her present condition would have seemed repulsive to me ten years ago — now, poor soul, I see her to be as clean as a cow that calves. The flesh of my arm lay against the flesh of her knee gratefully. It was I who was being comforted and soothed.

(p.48)

Generally the stories' opacity is comparable with that of the poems. Williams is not so much intent on exploring motive as he is circumstance. As in his poems, he is an environmentalist. His attention is held by human response to the conditions imposed on it, by poverty, narrow moral conceptions, circumscribed social background. He searches out individuality persistent and even sometimes triumphant in confronting the most
quelling ethos. Contrary to conventional moral judgments, he admires for her unvanquished spirit the pimply-faced girl who has suffered both physically and morally through her family situation.

Again, in "Jean Beicke", in the infant child undernourished and deformed, he discovers a clarity of response, an explicit courage, to admire, while in "A Face of Stone" he shows how a peasant wife, stupid, unresponsive, made ugly by worry and malnutrition, yet inspires deep love in her husband. Courage and love are what the doctor-narrator most readily responds to. Finding no need for self-justification, he is honest about his own attitudes. As in "A Face of Stone", he will begin by feeling antipathetic towards a patient, warm to that person before his story is told, but not hide or explain away his earlier feeling. To most situations his overt response is "deadpan", but we get a cumulative picture in some depth of the doctor himself.

In "The Use of Force" he experiences a whole gamut of emotions while attending a child, a suspected case of diphtheria, who struggles fiercely and unremittingly to prevent his examining her tonsils. Her parents irritate him by attempting
to shame the girl into compliance. Growing angry at the struggle, the doctor himself becomes rough:

...feeling that I must get a diagnosis now or never I went at it again. But the worst of it was that I too had got beyond reason. I could have torn the child apart in my own fury and enjoyed it. It was a pleasure to attack her. My face was burning with it.

The damned little brat must be protected against her own idiocy, one says to one's self at such times. Others must be protected against her. It is a social necessity. And all these things are true. But a blind fury, a feeling of adult shame, bred (of) a longing for muscular release are the operatives. One goes on to the end. (p.37)

Williams's social commitment shows more directly in a number of stories. In "Jean Beicke" he depicts a section of a public hospital as it was during the Depression years, using the case of the child as a focus.
She is suffering from fever, malnutrition, bone softness through calcium deficiency. Trying every means, including specialist consultation, the doctor fails to diagnose her illness. His professional attitude forces him to continue seeking solutions, while his personal feeling is that the child would be better off dead both because of her physical malformation and her family's poverty. So acute was her pain and discomfort that the child could not bear to be touched:

But anyway, we all got to be crazy about Jean. She'd just lie there and eat and sleep. Or she'd lie and look straight in front of her by the hour. Her eyes were blue, a pale sort of blue. But if you went to touch her, she'd begin to scream. (p. 76)

Their feeling for the child is professional rather than personal. She seems to have a particular clarity of self and an inner drive to live, but after all, for them, she is only one of many cases. Besides which the nurses' feelings of compunction or affection are luxuries the parents cannot afford,
except perhaps in keeping them as long as possible in the hospital, where they will be well-fed and cared for.

When Jean dies an autopsy discovers the cause to be acute mastoiditis. Since her ailments had otherwise cleared, her death was due to the sheer chance of diagnostic failure. Other dimensions of her tragedy are implied:

It seemed to me the poor kid's convolutions were unusually well developed. I kept thinking it's incredible that the complicated mechanism of the brain has come into being just for this...

I called up the ear man and he came down at once. A clear miss, he said. I think if we'd gone in there earlier, we'd have saved her.

For what? said I. Vote the straight Communist ticket.

Would it make us any dumber? said the ear man. (p.75-76).

Thus, chance and social circumstance are the combined causes of death, which here is a tragic instance
of courage and the will to live defeated.

Less successful, the remaining stories are interesting as examples of Williams's methods. "At the Front", for example, is an epiphanic anecdote in the Hemingway manner, while both "Danse Pseudomacabre" and "World's End" are juxta-position patchworks. Sketches and anecdotes in the latter are largely dependent on speech and speech patterns, the gathering method being identical with that used for making early, isolated "details" for Paterson. These stories are particularly open to a charge sometimes made of Williams's fiction in general, that it is merely untransformed transcription from life. This is true to a considerable extent, but is not necessarily a fault. His aim is to allow the matter to speak for itself, unimpeded by comment, decoration or "fine writing". Yet, as with his poems, success depends on the achieving of form. This is made not through imposition, but by a recognition or discovery of the "cleanliness", "vividness" and relevance of material in the world around him.
NOTES


3. In the Money, (Norfolk, Conn., 1940).


5. The New Masses, November 23, 1937, p. 17

CHAPTER NINE

WILLIAMS AS DRAMATIST

One of Williams's most comprehensive discussions of form is in his essay accompanying The First President\(^1\), a libretto written for George Antheil. Addressing the composer, Williams first justifies music as a medium for delineating the taciturn character of George Washington, suggesting that, had it not been a dead art, poetic drama might have served.

Music could overcome the awkwardness of projecting Washington's largely silent presence, conveying a sense of his inner life, "the secrecy of his shuttling thoughts". Since music is also a natural language to the imagination, its use will make easier the task of suggesting Washington's "universality". Despite music's rootedness in a complex tradition, its "abstract" nature enables it to "report history exactly while
draining it of its essence" (PP 305).

In detail the libretto concerns a number of events leading up to Washington's (reluctant) acceptance of the Presidency, so that, as Williams perceived, the piece might well have been presented as a pageant. He avoids this, deepening texture by escaping strict chronology through the "dream", a device in which he was to become increasingly interested. Scenes are so ordered as to point to the culmination, as tending towards Washington's destiny.

The First President is Williams's earliest full scale dramatic composition, but he had been interested in writing plays for a full thirty years prior to it, probably even before "Betty Putnam, the first play of my proposed plays for outdoor performance" (Autob 105). This early play's theme is the pointlessness of the seventeenth-century New England witch-hunts. Too bluntly portrayed, its villain, Rev. Nicholas Noyes, exploits for personal gain the moral depravity of his time and place. Williams does not quite know what to do with his situation, allowing the detached, cunning Noyes to be duped by his daughter. Yet the play is of some interest, especially in its sub-theme
of conflict between love and arranged marriage.

Another small play written at that early period, *A September Afternoon*, also draws its source material from American history, the Revolutionary War, centering on the urge to fight for freedom against the English. As Vivienne Koch points out, the dialogue is heavily influenced by Synge; Williams is indebted not only for his speech rhythms, but a for the characterization of the sceptical Marjory, who opposes the fighting convinced that the men care much more for it than for its supposed goal. Again Williams has found a situation of potential interest in the variance of attitude between Marjory and her brother, but his treatment of it, her change of mind once her brother is mortally wounded, is unconvincing and perfunctory.

Williams used American historical material in a number of other early plays, including one, *Under the Stars*, a one-act play which is a conversation between Washington and Lafayette after the Battle of Monmouth, which was incorporated into *The First President*.

From his college days, when he had experience as both actor and producer, Williams's approach to the drama was always intensely practical, always
concerned with form. Thus, notes for *Women Are Such Fools*, planned at about the same time as the libretto, contain ideas for a total reversal in presentation, in which the "audience is the play" seen from the stage, the action occurring in the minds of the playgoers. This is of a piece with his long held interest in sub-consciousness, dreams, Surrealism, "the difficult, evanescent and - unchanging poetry of the mind(')s miraculous functions. So write it". (Yale ms.)

In *The First President*, as in all his mature dramatic work, he is interested in more than mere naturalism. Beginning work on the libretto in 1932, he realized at once that the material was unsuitable for making into a triumph or pageant, that for Washington becoming President was no more than a mixed blessing. He regarded it as his duty and Williams makes this fact, set against Washington's desire for a life of bucolic quiet, the drama's central conflict. Portraying Washington as a social bumbler and clumsy lover, he bases his conception on singing voice: "It is to be a baritone opera...the tenor impersonates the successful man and lover...the soprano is love". 2
The voice was to be an instrument in the orchestration, while the dream/flashback was to be managed by projecting silent movies on a sepia screen, with Washington at first sitting, but then getting up, joining the scene, "living again the action which evaporates as it has arisen". (Yale ms.)

Williams's conception is visual to a notable degree. When Washington is most fully and happily alive this is expressed in the physical movement of dancing and the exact central scene of the play (II,ii) is a ballet; the dour Washington becomes "the only President who ever danced through every dance at his own inaugural...The snow falls. There is dancing - the soldier recognizes Washington dancing! This is the peak of the action. The pinnacle of the feeling". (PP 311). He insists that the ballet is not a mere distraction, but a focal point showing the silent Washington at his "height". "Dancing and listening through a stolid exterior, to the inner movements of his change" (PP 314), Washington is important to Williams in the way that Columbus is, a man for whom, "every pitched battle was lost before it was fought - except one". (PP 314).

The First President has not been performed,
and its music was composed not by George Antheil but by Theodore Harris. Nevertheless, Williams later wrote another libretto, _Tituba's Children_ (1950); but his real success in the drama was with two "straight" plays. He apparently felt he was making a fresh start with the first of these, _Trial Horse No.1_ (later titled _Many Loves_). Moving away from the historical material characteristic of his dramatic work up to that time, he turned to a theme which was to become central for him from then onwards—love.

Here the theme is treated discretely, an important aim being to involve the audience in the play's very fabric. Early notes (UB) show that it was conceived as a triptych, _The Comedy of Love_, but Williams soon saw that the three-fold approach could be set into the conventional structure of a three-act play. He employs a Pirandello-like device of actually making the three "plays" within the play onstage, a preoccupation with form beyond which is a view of art as a remaking of the world. How important the making is can be demonstrated from UB draft. At one point dramatist (in play) says to producer:

"Take a theme! Something simple. The
Comedy of Love that old stalking horse and let's see how we can refurbish it. I'll show you. Just as an example of what might be done. We begin. Here is the first appearance of that ghost in the life of a young man".

Another note:

"Three short plays in prose, with an overall frame and thread, about them, of verse...In which certain devices are to be proven as to their entertainment possibilities and practicability as theatrical means - to be developed and augmented as time goes on".

Once again is demonstrated Williams's interest in process. His approach is that of Artaud's, "No more masterpieces!" He has no interest in confronting an audience with a fait accompli, offering instead the chaos of actuality, involving onlookers the moment they are in the theatre, embodying directly, in action, the simplicity and profundity of disorder, its possibilities for revelation. Actor-audience
relationship is cut to a minimum. As in his poems, Williams's aim is to involve all participants equally in an experience. In the play proper the "plays within" and the preparations for them have equal importance.

As directed (and produced off-Broadway at the Living Theatre in 1959) the stage curtain is open as the theatregoers enter, with the proposed "actors" for "Serafina" (I,ii, the first sub-play) independently rehearsing their parts. Hubert, the playwright, offers Peter (his backer, who loves him and who has returned unexpectedly from abroad) two of Williams's ideas, the "new", and making as part of a larger process. When, early in I,i, Hubert momentarily leaves the stage, Alise (the leading lady, whom Hubert loves) attempts to explain to Peter, concerning the play-triptych:

These, of course, are just preliminary to the major work. He says that when he's finished with what now he has in mind he'll revolutionize the theater...

(ILL 10)

In what may appear a reversal of custom, the
sub-plays are prose and the framework verse. As in the material he was then gathering intended for Paterson, Williams shapes his sub-plays from a succession of very brief vignettes which he calls "details" and which are really verbal montages. From detail to detail the stage is used improvisationally rather than representationally. This carries into the first sub-play, "Serafina", dealing with the theme of sex as "love", an encounter between a callow young man and a frustrated, promiscuous older woman half drawn to respond to his advances. Insisting on structure rather than merely "content", Williams has Hubert cut in at the close of this play, having made his implications, and saves it from an incipient sentimentality. Peter is outraged at what Hubert is doing with his backing.

Following the first act pattern, Act II opens with Hubert-Peter dialogue, adjustment of stage properties being carried on around them. They are at cross-purposes, Peter intent on getting rid of Alise, Hubert absorbed in his theories of the essential connection between verse and drama (thus the sub-plays' prose structure is ironical):
They've never heard invention on
the stage. No one knows what poetry
should be today. It should be the
audience itself, come out of itself
and standing in its own eyes, leaning
within the opening of its own ears,
hearing itself breathe, seeing itself
in the action - lifted by poetry to
a world it never knew, a world it has
always longed for and may enter for a
few precious moments never to be known
in prose. The audience is the play.
And it is pure poetry - unless one
fails to imagine it... (ML 33).

The second sub-play, "The Funnies" (II,ii)
is one-third of the whole play. Actually
occurring at separate locations, the action of
details 1 and 2 overlaps, and they are presented
onstage together. Exploiting the technique of
inclusive consciousness, Williams has Hubert
explain to Peter, "The Mind's the scene".

Mary Loves is a "trial horse" also for metamor-
phism, a mode particularly suitable to the theme,
allowing Horace's male reaction to Ann in "The
Funnies" to be succeeded quite naturally by Miss Breen's somewhat strident lesbianism.

Structurally, Act III reverses Acts I and II. It opens with the sub-play, "Talk", probably least successful of the three. In the final, framework, scene of Many Loves, the fact that Hubert and Alise are to marry is revealed simultaneously with Alise's sense that Peter (pleading for "just this one night") can still dominate Hubert. Almost at the same moment Peter himself realizes it.

As a structure, the play suffers because, over all the varieties of "love" it examines, no really deep, ultimate sense of love unifies it. Three unpublished paragraphs, "Notes for a Lyric Drama" (UB), show that the studies of love were written separately, and suggest that their unification was brought about "more or less formally", with Williams being at least as interested "to try out the language for its sound". The framework is over-didactic, giving the audience an over-explicit awareness of structure.

In both parts of its structure, the play is not endowed with credible characters. Hubert sounds rather too frivolous to be able to deal with his theme as more than entertainment. Of the sub-play
characters, even the vivid Serafina is too much a caricature from O'Neill. Yet in an immediate sense the play succeeds. It moves, holding the interest even though key moments (Miss Breen's embracing of Ann, George's convenient death - both in "The Funnies") are unconvincing, as is the marriage of Hubert and Alise by "The Archbishop", which concludes the action. Williams's formulation, "sensitivities of the ear and the imagination, playing. Therefore a play" (UB) applies here, and offers a drama strictly limited in conception.

The gap of years between the printing of Trial Horse No.1 and the off-Broadway production of his next play, A Dream of Love (1949), is a long one, chiefly used in the writing of the earlier parts of Paterson. Developing in so many ways, he achieved also a broader sense of the nature and requirements of the drama. Taking love once more as theme, in A Dream of Love his handling of it is considerably more coherent. His central concern is the conflict between a man's right to exist for himself and the due he owes to those he loves.

Doc, the central character, loves his wife Myra, but other drives clash with his love. A
poet, he devotes much leisure time which might be spent on his wife to writing. Myra, fearing and resenting both the claims of the poem and of his sense of other women, yet tries to be generous and give him (as she sees it) as much personal freedom as may be.

A long opening scene presents Doc and Myra Thurber in their domestic setting; Doc as poet (the poems are early Williams); as a general practitioner who wants to retire and write, but feels short of money. As the scene closes he says, casually: "Oh, by the way, I'll be going to the city tomorrow. Want to come along?" She refuses, telling him it is his "afternoon off", thanking him for asking her. The city has a quasi-symbolical function similar to that in poems such as "To a Friend Concerning Several Ladies". He has an assignation there with his typist, a young housewife (Dotty), who has a craven, unimaginative husband (Cliff).

Scene ii occurs in the home of Dotty and Cliff Randall. Cliff is in his front room reading a magazine when Doc arrives, and assumes at once that Doc has come to see his wife and that she will be especially pleased. The moment Doc and
Dotty are left alone together their relationship becomes clear. When Doc departs Cliff is rebuffed in attempting to establish his husbandly status.

Act II opens with Doc become unnerved at being unable to find his car keys. Helping him search, Myra comments on his taking such a large satchel. Finding the keys, she attempts to dissuade him from going to the city. He goes off, leaving her to deal as best she can with the demands of his surgery, prescribing elementary nostrums by telephone.

Between II,i and ii Doc dies while in the city hotel room with Dotty. When the truth about him emerges Myra becomes fixated in the idea of living in the kitchen of their house (sociologically speaking), the place she has last seen him, although she refuses food, or a change of clothes, or even to sleep very much.

For the remainder of the play Williams employs the dream device, much as he has used the staging in *Many Loves*. Reality and dream are simultaneously juxtaposed. By this means two very different approaches to love, practical and "dream", are displayed. Early notes and drafts (UB) suggest that the "other woman" was to be Josephine, the Negro maid. This was rejected. Its antithesis remains,
the Milkman - presented as Doc's possible successor with Myra. This may be a means of making the "practical" appear faintly ridiculous, but Williams is not setting up a dream-real contrast. For him each level is valid.

The dream device, and variations on it, is used to have Doc explain to Myra the drive and needs of his love for her. The play has an epigraph from Symonds's translation of the Agamemnon (PL 107), referring to Helen of Troy. Myra is in the situation of Menelaus. The Doc, first physically and then mortally, had fled, to become "the phantom ruling his house". For Myra his presence is still powerfully tangible, invading her dreams, even her waking consciousness. Yet part at least of the Agamemnon excerpt applies to Doc: "Yes, in his longing after her who is beyond the sea, a phantom will seem to rule his house". This is his craving for beauty, Venus, figured in his devotion to the poem.45 The play's two women, Myra and Dotty, stand in the relation of the Muse and Venus to Williams.

When the two meet, the younger woman asks forgiveness, while the older desires overwhelmingly to know what Doc has said of her. This desire of Myra's is, in fact, to take over all the attributes
of the younger woman, particularly her relationship with Doc. Failing to achieve common ground (from her point of view) with Myra, Dotty answers a quizzing: "I chose him, if you want to put it that way, because I needed him and because he knew, without me saying more, how much I needed him. Because he was a writer, a writer about things - like that - a poet". (DL 171). Dotty escapes Myra's almost physical attempts to detain her and Myra is left solitary with a disconnected telephone and the newspaper accounts of Doc's death.

Act III, scene i, presents a structural problem, focusing as it does on two characters who are not significant to the central action; but this scene of the visit of Josephine, the maid, to Mrs Harding may be interpreted as a parallel to the meeting of Myra and Dotty. Mrs Harding tells fortunes by the cards, but can see nothing clear in them on this occasion. Advising prayer, she concludes with a singing of the hymn, "Now the day is over", which leads into the next scene, at night, when Doc "appears" to Myra (whether in a simple dream or by supernatural experience is not clear). Again the choice between Dotty and Myra is pondered. At the moment of Doc's death
Dotty had appeared to him, white, translucent (this figure momentarily appears on stage), but he tells Myra, "I have never wanted to leave you". Their relationship has been attraction/repulsion. Defending his relationship with Dotty, he evokes her as the Venus figure:

A man must protect his price, his integrity as a man, as best he is able, by whatever invention he can cook up out of his brains or his belly, as the case may be. He must create a woman of some sort out of his imagination to prove himself. Oh, it doesn't have to be a woman, but she's the generic type. It's a woman - even if it's a mathematical formula for relativity. Even more so in that case - but a woman. A woman out of his imagination to match the best. All right, a poem,...

When a man, of his own powers, small as they are, once possesses his imagination, concretely, grabs it with both hands - he is made! Or lost, I've forgotten which...(He looks at her
closely.) And just as a woman must produce out of her female belly to complete herself - a son - so a man must produce a woman, in full beauty out of the shell of his imagination and possess her, to complete himself also...

(DL 200)

Myra, who embodies the practical demands of everyday, fails to accept Doc's talk. An essential difference between them is that she has a fixed sense of love and is constantly attempting to assimilate all her experience into, while Doc (in contrast) is perpetually re-making his love. His most persuasive reason for the affair with Dotty is that it was necessary as a means of revitalizing his love for Myra!

At another moment, with an offhand: "'I don't like to be alone. Where are we?'", he seems to offer human alienation as excuse for his peccadilloes ("'Oh, but it's anybody, anybody'"). She feels herself his solitary victim and, in a sense, is. She is the Muse, from whom what he is is brought to birth. He ponders, "She is asleep! He lights a cigarette and walks about." I died when I walked
upon the grass. I died in everything. I died when I was born. (He leans over her.) From which you once rescued me - hence my devotion". (DL 201).

He continues to attempt to project himself for her, but she can feel only for herself. She is a source of strength for him, but Dotty has the incandescence. In WM Williams had written, "A man must keep on, he must keep on working and then, finally, he will see the light" (WM 46). Here Myra, as the world, is an obstacle:

Struggle, struggle, struggle. To keep what? That inherited great gleam of light! That's what it is, it's light! So, while I held my arm over my eyes, I went around hunting the light. I must have been tough to withstand that treatment. I kept right on going. (DL 204).

Awakening, Myra confronts Doc with his having gone "to a hotel with that woman". His reply is an acceptance of circumstance, a resignation: "Sure. Anything you can do you must do. I'm not proud. If it comes my way I do it". (DL 206). His answer to the accusation of betrayal "on the very
day when your love for me should have been most alert" is to claim that he had acted as he had "because on such a day love is uppermost". Her "dream" of love is to possess him completely, to the exclusion of any other experience. His is to merge her with his experience of the Venus, a kind of reconciliation different from her expressed desire: "I thought our lives were just beginning to be reconciled each to the other" (DL 207). He counters, "Here's a beautiful woman who really needs me...I needed her, too" (208). His, "To keep love alive", she modifies to, "To keep our love alive". When she becomes furious that he will not reveal to her what he told Dotty, he responds by suggesting that he has given her (Myra) the best moments of a lifetime.

III,iii is a breaking down of time and a logic sequence, all characters onstage, set in the hotel, a "re-enactment" of the scene between Doc and Dotty. She stalls his desire to possess her as quickly as possible, asking favours, reassurances, flattery. Williams uses the dramatic situation to express his most central concerns. Recognizing that divorce is "the last thing" in Doc's mind, Dotty is spokesman for Williams's
drive towards maintaining the integrity of "singleness" while concomitantly repudiating "divorce". To an extent she reconciles in herself Muse and Venus, declaring that what she desires is "To hear you talk, mostly" (DL 218). His talk is of the divorce of learning from experience (in "something they call 'the university'"), of morality from truth, of form from its own due time or place, of language as being, as sound. Dotty is excited by all this. Her "yes", echoing Molly Bloom's, affirms both understanding and human acceptance; but it ends as a burst of machine-gun fire, an explosion, a surrealist "invasion" from the outside world in course of which all trace of the hotel room vanishes.

The final scene, in the Thurber kitchen in its "daylight" guise, noise of the milkmen delivering bottles outside, includes only Myra - for whom the world has returned to a state of acceptable reality. Able to say that Doc is dead, she possesses him more securely than ever before.

To a degree, Williams succeeded in making Doc and Myra and (somewhat less so) Dotty real presences on stage, but this is really a "play of ideas". Including some use of surrealist icad-
verentence, some expressionism, its core is Williams's conviction that faith and vitality in love are more complex than is usually admitted by the common imagination or conventional morality.

Less need be said about the two remaining works in his published volume of plays, the libretto Tituba's Children and The Cure. With his principal source Marion L. Starkey's The Devil in Massachusetts, his long held interest in Cotton Mather's account of the trials (included, almost verbatim, in IAG), Williams made in Tituba's Children a play against witch-hunting, writing again about the Reverend Nicholas Noyes, villain of his early short play Betty Putnam. A parallel time sequence is used: Salem 1692, Washington 1950, but the point is made that, despite the time difference, the people are the same. This is reinforced by setting the 1950 sequence in a "club restaurant" preparing for a Halloween floor show, which is the conjunction of the two time periods. "Mac" McDee, a State Department official under suspicion of being a "red", watches this show, a presentation of the Salem trials. In a fusion of time, the Salem trial scene transforms into the questioning of McDee, a "liberal" accused of Communism. Williams uses
the device of "history repeating itself" to defend the "liberal" position, to state the case for democracy, suggesting that it will not be helped by employing totalitarian methods. His presentation is undermined, however, by a sense that American society, particularly in the great cities, is "corrupt", so that the democracy which is being championed does not come into clear focus. Otherwise the termination is not on a positive note, but suggests that just as the Salem trials continued to their grisly conclusion so also would the witch-hunts of the 1950s.

The remaining play, The Cure, begun in 1952 while Williams was recovering from a stroke (but not completed for several years) is the most realistic and simply constructed of his collected plays, and concerns the developing relationship between Prospero, a young man severely injured in a car accident, and Connie, the young married woman who nurses him. The play's point is that Connie is inhibited from living her present life fully because of her conventional ideas of personality and morality. The "cure" is as much hers as Prospero's, if it is a cure. This play, too, concerns "love", but it has nothing like the stature of Williams's most interesting drama, Man Loves and A Dream of Love.
NOTES


4. Sc. p 215

This traces the concept of beauty from the nobly beautiful, related only to aristocracy, to "broken beauty", part of which is ugliness (usually the background, an essential), and which is related to low life. Beginning from Venus, "born of the sea foam aphos", Ruin stresses her nature as the perfect form.

4. Many Loves and other plays, p.105-223, \[\text{Stat. precede} \text{fn. 5 on p. 214}\]
   A Dream of Love, cited hereafter as DL followed by relevant page numbers.


New Directions' CCP 1906-38 is a watershed of Williams's poetry rather than a further move forward, and the chapbook The Broken Span (1941) is an addendum to the larger gathering. Both collections contain details and passages intended for Paterson, including a version of "A man like a city and a woman like a flower".

In essays of the time, Williams pointed more and more to the importance of art in life, the focal essay being "Against the Weather", in which art is claimed as the only unchangeable, while the "only world that exists is the world of the senses, the world of the artist" (SE 196). Civilization's most important product, art also creates and shapes civilization, containing "new conceptions of government". The artist, besides being "objective" must also be "sensual". He needs
the latter quality to "produce" vital experience and the former to prevent ego or thought from predetermining its structure. Both qualities are dependent on where he is, simply because he happens to be there and on his local idiom, whatever it happens to be — in Williams's case, the American idiom.

As a natural outcome of his interest in process, his interest in the thing became involvement in the thing in action. Movement and structure of many poems in *The Wedge* (1944)² are testimony of this. One typescript of the book (UE) has as alternative titles, *The Language* and *The (Lang)WEDGE*. Zukofsky pointed out that these were over-explicit, and also advised against inclusion of a number of prose passages, suggesting they be omitted or remade into poems. The advice was good since the passages in question deal in somewhat stale Joycean language effects, which could only dilute a book whose central concern is the word.

A prose Introduction remains in which Williams makes his best-known statement that man is used by language and not the reverse, the poem having a more objective quality and presence than man himself. The Freudian theory of poem-making as self-therapy
(elsewhere subscribed to) is here rejected, a metamorphic view of man offered ("Hamlet today, Caesar tomorrow" - SE 255). The nature of the poem, however, is fixed. It is "a small (or large) machine made of words".

Again Williams is rejecting Stevens's imputation of sentimentality, but in "sentimental" he includes, by implication, "rhetorical". The poet's building of his machine is anti-rhetorical. He makes it from "words as he finds them interrelated about him" (SE 257) and it is in the resulting composition, "the intimate form" that "the exact meaning" of any work of art is to be discerned.

"A Sort of a Song" (CLP 7) states the point about language by, perhaps unexpectedly, using two seemingly unrelated metaphors. Like a waiting snake, words are

slow and quick, sharp
to strike, quiet to wait,
sleepless.

Presumably the idea offered in this figure is that words exist actively. With seeming irrelevance the poem concludes:
Saxifrage is my flower that splits
the rocks.

Another metaphor for words, the language, the poem,
this is the wedge, more delicate, beautiful, than
gross actuality (the rock), driving into the rock,
smashing it, beginning its crumbling to fruitful
soil. The flower, in Williams, commonly suggests
woman, so here is a reversal, or rather a completeness
of role, whereby the flower, beauty, drives
in, planting seed, enriching soil. These are metaphors. The poet aims

- through metaphor to reconcile
the people and the stones.

This seems to contravene one of his often-stated
tenets, "the bastardy of the simile", "the word
as symbol", etc. It is fruitless to seek method
and consistency in the sum of Williams's theoretical
statements, but clearly evident that he
sought first "vividness", nominalistic or cubistic
clarity, not "the word as symbol" but "the word
as reality" (SE 107). Yet, as Linda Wagner has
so ably pointed out, he used metaphor in a variety
of ways. Things having "one-thousandth part of a quality in common" (SE 11) may be apprehendable in themselves by "great intensity of perception", but they may also invite metaphor, since metaphor is an "idea" discovered in a relation of "things". Williams's various fulminations against such devices have behind them a distrust of literariness, the literary kind of metaphor, which does not result in the common illumination of two objects, but merely in verbal staleness.

Beyond this, in The Wedge Williams has made yet another shift in his deployment of the line. Often his poems present themselves more didactically or polemically than hitherto, his line, varying to accommodate the change of tack, is more obviously (in Cid Corman's phrase) "along a prose arc".

The "poem is a machine" definition is difficult to attach to the curious conglomeration of "Catastrophic Birth" (CLP 8), a poem of process, which repeats the image of the rock splitting. There are three "births": (a) the child-bearing of an Italian woman of gross proportions, (b) the action of a volcano, (c) the activity in a chemistry laboratory. Each of these brings
about change. So? "The change reveals – change". This is a way of saying that the flux of being exists in its own right and for its own sake. Yet the products of process (in this instance, violent) must be complete, whole, in themselves:

Unless each remain inflexible
there can be no new. The new opens
new ways beyond all known ways.

Each change, therefore, is a metamorphosis. Through the "she-nop" we learn that change "cleans you up/ makes you feel good inside".

The volcano's metamorphosis brings a complete change to its world, fallen "into a heap of ashes". One exception to universal change is "the drunkard", whom the earlier world had not nourished, but had confined with the rats and lizards "in disgrace underground", he and "the authorities" who had left him overlong without food and drink.

In "Paterson: the Falls" (SLP 10), a programme poem, rock is again the substance undergoing change, with water the transmogrifying agent. These poems of process, metamorphosis, are followed by "The Dance" (SLP 11), a poem of movement, which yet
suggests unity, stability, measure, comprehended in the work of art. The peasants' movement is circular and continuous, this fact being emphasized in the physical shapes of people and objects evoked. The single full stop, followed by "kicking" conveys a change of movement rather than a halt. The whole brief poem is framed by a static line repeated at opening and close. Its verbal subtleties include the participial series, the motion carried in the reiterated "l" and "r" sounds ("rolling"), the bluntness of repeated "k" and "b". This sense of the dance (going back as far as Kh), foreshadows "The Desert Music" (PF 109):

Only the counted poem, to an exact measure:
to imitate, not to copy nature, not
to copy nature

NOT, prostrate, to copy nature

but a dance!...

and will be the culmination of Paterson.

A new discursiveness is most plainly evident in "Writer's Prologue to a Play in Verse" (CIP 12). Williams's interest in the drama was at its strongest
at this period and there is evidence of a general change of involvement towards, broadly, interaction of people, forces, elements, world and mind. This poem explores the change, suggesting the human importance of imagination, which can provide all the settings and actions to accompany them. In one draft (UB) the opening line has "can", "In your minds you can jump from doors", but its omission in the final version indicates his intention to show the power, spontaneity and immediacy of imagination. He insists on the existence of concrete details alongside the mind:

You see it
in your minds and the mind at once
jostles it, turns it about, examines
and arranges it to suit its fancy.
Or rather changes it after a pattern
which is the mind itself... (CIP 12)

The poem is the mind's peculiar speech, ultimate manifestation of the individual person:

Would it disturb you if I said
you have no other speech than poetry?
Paragraph two is the writer's imaginings (as *dramatis personae*) advising the reader to seek the poems in himself, some coherent sense of his being beyond the merely hedonistic. For such a discovered truth, the ultimate sense of oneself, the first shock provides no language, and when the language comes it is poetry.⁵

"Burning the Christmas Greens" (GIP 16) combines Williams's characteristic mode of observed actuality with this newer sense of people acting in concert, in this case almost ritualistically. The mind is a means of facing outwards towards the world, as well as in. An insistent greenness in this poem offers both solid actuality and peace. Source of reassurance, it is where

small birds hide and dodge
and lift their plaintive
rallying cries...

Yet this green must be matched, balanced by red, this peace by violence, this actuality by imagination. As in "Catastrophic Birth", violence brings new life. In flames' roar the used-up actuality of the Christmas greens bursts to a new, brief,
vivid life. Green is transformed:

to red, instant and alive. Green!
those sure abutments...Gone!
lost to mind

and quick in the contracting
tunnel of the grate
appeared a world! Black
mountains, black and red - as

yet uncolored - and ash white,
an infant landscape of shimmering
ash and flame and we in
that instant, lost,

breathless to be witnesses,
as if we stood
ourselves refreshed among
the shining fauna of that fire. (CLP 18).

This vivid act of imagination has affinities with
the Paterson sequence of the bottle in the fire.

Violence is only one facet. "In Chains"

(CLIP 19) proffers its opposite:
love

will rise out of its ashes if
we water it...

Both violence and gentleness are stressed in "The Monstrous Marriage" (CLP 53, Williams's "Leda and the Swan"). With obviously gentle intent the woman in the poem reaches to rescue a wounded pigeon, but her touch goads it to fury. Attempting to win it over to gentleness

she stilled it for the moment
and wrapped it in her thought's

clean white handkerchief

but the outcome is at least ambiguous, "she adopted a hawk's life as her own", while from his side the pigeon-turned-hawk tries to learn from her love. He appears to be desolated by his transformation, but she protects him, adapting her love to his new, violent life.

This is a manner of "love's/ obscure and insatiable appetite" (CLP 54) and such love is also mutable:

My love! My love!
how sadly do we thrive:...
There is the condition of a tree, whose sharpened leaves perfect as they are look no farther than—into the grass. (CLP 54).

Discursive, non-imagistic, "To All Gentleness" (CLP 24) considers polarizations: violence, gentleness, poetic, anti-poetic. The oppositions are put expressionistically:

Secure in the enclosing rain, a column of tears borne up by the heavy flowers: the new and the unlikely, bound indissolubly together in one mastery.

Both "the new and the unlikely" may be the so-called anti-poetic, to ignore which is to lose contact with half the world. His method here is juxtapositional, pointedly placing together the poles of his discourse. The gentleness of

to buy, shall we say, the grass, or a small cloud perhaps (in
whose shadow a lifting wind whirls) or
if Queen Blanche, a pond
of waterlilies or the rain itself

is set against the violence of the crashed airman's situation, in the sea for hours before rescue. Williams
To resolve the juxtapositions, / turns again to the violent beauty of human birth, the mother being "forewoman to a gang at the ship foundry":

Never had a backache.

Not the girth of thigh, but that gentleness that harbors all violence, the valid juxtaposition, one by the other, alternates, the cosine, the cylinder and the rose. (CLP.29)

He is saying that, in the fullest experiences, the human body "knows" the external world inwardly or, put another way, "enters into" the external world. 6

Such poems are a considerable distance from Williams's earlier mode, which Gorham Munson had summed up as, "an arbitrary composition characterized by independence. He is attempting to leap straight
from contact (sharp perceptions) to the imaginat-
ion (order in the highest sense)..."7 The staple
poems of The Wedge are unlike this. Some sense of
the difference may be gained by comparing an earlier
poem, "The Right of Way" from Spring and All (CEP 258)
with "The Forgotten City" (CLP 49). Each poem
cconcerns a drive by car, but the earlier is observed
detail, while "The Forgotten City" describes the
driver's sense of strangeness and isolation as he
drives through an unfamiliar area in the aftermath
of a storm.

This poem figures the persona, Dr Paterson,
as does "Eternity" (CLP 36), where an assignation
results in his feeling isolated and alienated:

Night, greater than

the cataract

surged in the cisterns of Noah's

chest

Darkness becomes so tangible he has a sense of
swimming in it, the outer world (and his inner
world) become unreal. Night externalizes an
inner solipsism. He is moved from one encapsulation
of light to another. Since he finally halts 
under a 
street lamp to make 
some notes

the assignation apparently resolves itself into 
the poem, to the woman's (Olympia's) relief. They 
return to the world of "Breakfast/ at seven".

Even at this stage Williams had not fully 
related his poems to speech, as is evident from 
drafts of "Raleigh Was Right" (UB), e.g.

What can the small violets 
tell us that grow on furry stems 
in the long grass among 
lance shaped leaves?

...

Empty pockets 
make empty heads. Cure it 
if you can but do not believe 
that we can live today 
in the country...

Compare CLP 52. Zukofsky advised him to "realign"
the poem for "spoken cadence". Thus Williams's central criterion was not always, as he suggests, idiom. "Perfection" (CLP 40), for example, appears to be organized by letter count, a technique Zukofsky had attributed to Williams in the Symposium essay a decade earlier, nearer to musical notation than spoken idiom.

Objectors to Williams's treatment of the line commonly point to his line culminations in words such as "and", "a", "the", "so", etc. Use of such endings is deliberate, part of his effort to revitalize the poem. As a poem is a "thing in itself", so also is each word. From that point of view all words possess equal reality. Claiming that the full reality of a word is established in its relation to other words, he nevertheless felt that each word exists in its own right, part of the poet's task being to use it so (SE 128, 129).10 Speech cadences apart, Williams often employed syntax to display the autonomy, the "thingness" of individual words. This procedure, of itself, thrusts energy back and forward through the line, the syntactical/lineal arrangement often being reinforced by a deliberateness of rhythm to the same end:
No one

has moved you
since I placed you on the porch
rail a month ago
to ripen. (CLP 40)

This technique denies conventional interdependence of rhythm and grammar. Where it is customary for each of these elements to confirm the other's rightness, Williams typically sets them in tension. Besides asserting the active presence of specific words, the resulting dissonances have the more subtle effect of refusing, rather than satisfying, the ear's expectations:

Under a low sky -
this quiet morning
of red and
yellow leaves -

a bird disturbs
no more than one twig
of the green leaved
peach tree (CLP 56, "Silence")
The obvious case here is the break at "and". Prepared by the opening words, we might have received a more portentous, or dramatic, statement, but the "yellow leaves" attach us firmly to objective reality while establishing the poem's immediate scope. Following this, "disturbs" opens out to further possibilities, denied after the line break, while "the green leaved" could be as much as a forest. A small instance, but word and line placement have been used here to excellent effect. A poem of a year or two after The Medge, "When Structure Fails Rhyme Attempts to Come to the Rescue" (CLP 79), both sums up and exemplifies Williams's viewpoint:

The old horse dies slow.
By gradual degrees
the fervor of his veins
matches the leaves'
stretch, day by day. But
the pace that his
mind keeps is the pace
of his dreams.

His technical sophistication is clearly evident in the two versions of "Sparrows Among Dry Leaves"
(CEP 456 and CLP 55) where he sacrifices some degree of sharply defined individual detail for the sake of rapidity and an effect of unity of action.\textsuperscript{11}

Overshadowed as it is by Paterson and the fine late poems in "the variable foot", there is much value in Williams's shorter poetry of the late 1940s. His mastery of the imagistic poem continued, as in "The Manoeuvre" (CLP 88)\textsuperscript{12}, "The Motor-Barge" (CLP 92); but in practice he did not always scorn the simile, as in "The Horse" (CLP 89) or "The Flower":

This too I love
Flossie sitting in the sun
on its cane
the first rose

yellow as an egg the pet canary
in his cage
beside her carolling

(CLP 104)

In some instances intensity of human involvement renders the poem an epiphany:
There were roses, in the rain.
Don't cut them, I pleaded.
They won't last, she said
But they're so beautiful
where they are.
Agh, we were all beautiful once, she said
and cut them and gave them to me
in my hand. (CLI 96, "The Act").

Two published versions of an epiphanic poem are
an illuminating comparison. These are of "The Girl":

with big breasts
under a blue sweater

bareheaded -
crossing the street

reading a newspaper
stops, turns

and looks down
as though

she had seen a dime
on the pavement (CLI 123).
THE GIRL

with big breasts
in a blue sweater

was crossing the
street bareheaded

, reading a paper
held up close

but stopped, turned
and locked down

as though
she had seen a coin

lying
on the pavement.¹³

This earlier version, though more verbally explicit, is less precise and immediate, descriptive rather than epiphanic. In this type of poem, objective rendering which reverberates emotionally, Williams's most sustained success at this time was "The Smalables" (CLP 244).
Ranging far beyond imagism and his terse, tight, short line, he composed freely discursive poems such as "Russia" (CLP 93), his ability for objective rendering helping him to keep his musings in focus:

I once met Mayakovsky. Remember Mayakovsky? I have a little paper-bound volume of his in my attic, inscribed by him in his scrawling hand to our mutual friendship. He put one foot up on the table that night at 14th St. when he read to us — and his voice came like the outpourings of the Odyssey.

(CLIP 95)

Sometimes he moves discursively even in space of a short poem such as "Raindrops on a Briar" (CLP 99) and again, taking a hint from Surrealists such as Hans Arp, he can mock such discourse, as in "For a Low Voice" (CLP 105):

If you ignore the possibilities of art, huh, huh, huh, huh, huh, etc., you are likely to become involved, huh! in extreme, huh, huh, huh, huh, huh...
His new flexibility of approach was not uniformly beneficial. Two poems dealing with related material, the city, may be contrasted to demonstrate. "Approach to the City" (CLP 177), is in a mode characteristic of him from Al Que Quiero, "naked attention to the thing itself", an affectionate rendering with the observation, "I never tire of those sights". On the other hand, in "A Place (Any Place) to Transcend All Places" (CLP 113) he ponders on the evil, artificial city, compared with the good, solid rootedness of the country. The viewpoint is that of the metamorphic "Perpetuum Mobile: the City", but here the conception fails through being nakedly abstract. His remark of this time, "I was in my stride now. I thought I had found my form " (LMP 74) is true enough, but his early work in the new form had its failures.

Contemplativeness accompanied a deepened awareness of the value and necessity of love, and a pervasive new sense of the mind, the imagination, the work of art, as shown by many of the poems, such as "Labrador" (CLP 63, which originally had the bathetic title, "The Bath"). He rejects explicitly such mental abstractions as "heaven", 
"the ideal state", as always preferring the near
at hand, observed "cat/threading a hedge" - (CLP 80); but the mind's products can lift us above material
limitations, handcuffs:

the music leads them - the racially
stigmataed, the gross bodied, all
feet - cleansing from each
his awkwardness for him to blossom
(CLIP 83)

Unless it can be transformed in "voyages" of the
imagination, the physical world is pointless:

And
to the right the girl of nine,
play-pail in hand, bareheaded upon
a dune-crest facing the shining
waters. There you have it,
unexcelled as feeling. What
of it? Well, we live among
the birds and bees in vain unless
there result - now or then -
a presentation to which
these two presentations serve
as humble stopgaps - to invoke
for us a whole realm, compact of
inverted nature, straining
within the imprisoned mind to
free us. (CLP 84)

Yet for other levels of experience, in face of
love's desire, for example, the mind is "a trivial/
and momentary clatter" (CLP 87). It is at once
the breadth of personality (CLP 72) and rigid
boundary of existence:

It is in the minds
of the righteous
that death crows loudest.

(CLIP 69, "The Light Shall not Enter").

"The Mind's Games" (CLP 109) fundamentally affect,
even control, our responses, being focus of our
extension into the world. Similarly (CLP 124,
"The Clouds") mind is our extension into, and
possession of, the past. Here, evoked by the visual
image of racing clouds, comes thought of immortality,
rejection of the specious ideas of immortality held
by conventional religionists. True immortality
is discovered in the continuing relevance of work by past men of imaginative genius, "fresh in our thoughts, their/ relics, ourselves" (CLP 126).

Para-symbolically, "The Mind Hesitant" (CLP 118) shows how an experience can be simultaneously held in the mind and be part of the objective world, the two in balance. The mind in adequate relation to the external world, a form of that world may then assume autonomous existence in the mind itself. In this sense mind includes the world, love, the image of Venus (as suggested in the opening lines of "A Crystal Maze" - CLP 167). In the mind:

Anger can be transformed
to a kitten - as love
may become a mountain    (CLP 169).

The mind's a queer sponge
squeeze it and out come bird songs
small leaves highly enameled
and . moments of good reading
(rapidly) Tuck, tuck, tuck, tuck, tuck!

While there is a greater sense of sympathetic
identification towards others, these poems are not
always positive regarding love. "All that is Perfect in Woman" (CLP 139) surrealistically evokes "the dreadful symbol of/ carnivorous sex":

Blithe spirit! Monody
with feces - you
must sing of her and

behold the overpowering
foetus of her
girlish breasts...

Antithetical to such later poems as the great
"Asphodel, That Greeny Flower" (PB 153-152) is the half-tender, half-resigned "Wide Awake, Full of Love", (CLP 207):

I see your neck scrawny
your thighs worn
your hair thinning,
whose round brow
pushes it aside, and
turn again upon
the thought: To migrate
to that South to hop
again upon the shining
grass there
half ill with love
and mope and
will not startle for
the grinning worm (CLP 207)

The two most considerable poems of this period are "Two Pendants: For the Ears" (CLP 214-229) and "Choral: The Pink Church" (CLP 159-162), which gave its original title to a separate collection of Williams's poems. The first of these has its moments and is an affirmative poem, but has true "vividness" only in patches, broken by discursiveness. Earlier (Yale) drafts of "The Pink Church" show that it, too, was discursively conceived; but as we have it in CLP its great virtue is in its singing, its "choral" quality. Williams himself suggested that "the pink church" was, wrongly, interpreted as a symbol for Communism (INWP 76). Rather it is an affirmation of living in the present, a denial of Original Sin, a hymn to those who "take no thought for the morrow", a contrasting of the end-products of the Philosophy Departments with sexual man, "bringer/ of pure delights". Above even the teaching of thinkers
Williams himself respected (Dewey, Whitehead, William James) stand the pragmatic facts of the Pink Church. This seems to be a double symbol: of humanity itself, innocent to begin with, but all potential; and of the beauty, which men

Sing!

transparent to the light
to which the light
shines, through the stone,
until
the stone-light glows,
pink jade
- that is the light and is
a stone
and is a church... (CLP 159-160)

Despising both Calvinistic torturers and the false plumage of the "liveried", he celebrates, even in man's suffering,

Joy! Joy!
- out of Elysium!

The affirmation is a true possibility. The complexity of the struggle towards it is the matter of Paterson.
1. SE 196-213, closing paragraphs (misplaced) p.230. First published in Twice a Year, 1939. Williams's "weather" is not unlike that of Stevens, climate of opinion/feeling, cultural ethos.

2. The Wedge, (Cummington, Mass., 1944). The Introduction is in SE 255-257 and also CLP 3-5.

3. Stanzas reversed in UB ms., giving more logical sequence, but less power.


5. Another "poem of the mind" in this sense is "Vision of Labour: 1931" (CLP 42), with its surrealistic connecting of ditchdiggers and
dying bishop, culminating when they threw
the switch and the pump stopped and the bishop died.


9. In UB ms. all but the first stanza has pencilled notations of letter count (hand undetermined).

10. This sense of words, and even letters, is being exploited in concrete poetry.


12. UB has a number of drafts of this poem, one
of which Wagner (op. cit., p.54) compares with the final version, providing a fine specimen of Williams's working methods, in doing which her study is generally very valuable.


14. *The Pink Church*, (Columbus, Ohio, 1949).
CHAPTER ELEVEN

PATERSON

Williams published a poem entitled "Pater son" (CEP 233-235) as early as February, 1927. Its direct relevance to his "epic" poem is demonstrable in that fourteen lines of the earlier poem are included in Pater son, book I, section i and these contain several important things: the figure of Mr Pater son, the dictum, "No ideas but in things" and the macrocosm-microcosm ("Inside the bus one sees/ his thoughts sitting and standing", P 18).  

A poem of the 1930s, "Pater son: Episode 17" (CEP 438-442), became, in modified form, the "Beautiful Thing" motif of Pater son, while a number of "details" intended for that poem were included in An Early Martyr, CEP 1906-38 and The Broken Span. Williams Writing to Pound in 1936 / & speaks of "that magnum opus I've always wanted to do: the poem PATER SON", but nearly a decade earlier, in "The Simplicity of
Disorder" he implies a planned long poem. 6

Two notes in the UB Collection suggest that his final successful drive to realize Paterson was connected with his interest in drama, which developed strongly in the nineteen-forties. 7 That apart, he resorted to his now well-tried melding of prose and poem, making in his notes an explicit distinction between two kinds of material:

There are to be completely worked up parts in each section - as completely formal as possible: in each part well displayed.

BUT - juxtaposed to them are unfinished pieces - put in without fuss - for their very immediacy of expression - as they have been written under stress, under LACK of a satisfactory form - or for their need to be just there, the information. (Yale Collection)

His sense of the poem had been much the same when he wrote in 1913 to Harriet Monroe that, "life is above all things else at any moment subversive of
life as it was the moment before." Patterson is his supreme effort at synthesis, but inevitably includes the Bergsonian sense that disorder is simply an unfamiliar order. "Words form a new city", Zukofsky had written in 1930. As Doctor Paterson and the city of Paterson are one, so the creating of the word-city is the poet's "primary effort" to make himself. A headnote for Paterson I (virtually paragraph 1 of the "Author's Note" to the complete edition) outlines the whole project, in which "Part One introduces the elemental character of the place."

Book I itself is presented with an important, oracular headnote (which, again, applies to the whole poem — P 10) and a Preface, opening with the declaration that "Rigor of beauty is the quest", and the principle, formulated elsewhere through Williams's response to Dewey and Whitehead, of his own life experience:

To make a start
out of particulars
and make them general... (P 11)
The whole poem is a conflict between Williams and his own experience of chaotic, pluralist America, resulting in a number of polarizations: marriage and divorce, man and woman, convention and instinct, ideas and things, art and nature. In every instance he seeks a fusion, or a resolution based on the dominance of the preferable alternative.

His poetic means are complex, as progression through the text will show:

Sniffing the trees,
just another dog
among a lot of dogs. What
else is there? And to do?
The rest have run out —
after the rabbits. (P 11)

*Paterson* is not a narrative but "a dispersal and a metamorphosis" (P 10), its coherence carried in themes and motifs. One of the latter is the "dog motif", the dog having a quasi-symbolic function as the thoughts or a metamorphosis of the doctor-poet Paterson/Williams. In the lines quoted is a covert reference to the Pound-Eliot quest in Europe, and Williams's own refusal to follow them. For him,
"the lame", the preferable alternative is "a reply to Greek and Latin with the bare hands" (P 10 headnote). Refusing to choose the typical American success, he is endorsing his own championing, in IAG, of the man who refuses such "success" in favour of loving the American land and living fully in it now, lame or not. Aspects of this are his rejection of Old World tradition and (a refrain in Paterson) of the kind of "knowledge" purveyed in the university, inimical as it is to touch, contact.

Determinedly local, Williams chose to base his poem on Alexander Hamilton's "Paterson, the federal city"13, his own city of Rutherford not having the same degree of historical interest. In her excellent pioneering study of the poem14, Sister M. Bernetta Quinn has shown how much of Williams's intention is present in the very name, "Paterson", suggesting as it does father and son, generator/generated. Homonyms "son"/"sun" suggest self-generation, and also Williams's microcosm-macrocosm conception: "man is both subject and object in the design of reality, since through perception, according to Williams, he creates what lies about him".15 Paterson is also the "father of sound".16
Williams's key statement of method in his headnotes is "a dispersal and a metamorphosis". His poem's focus, the giant men-city Paterson, undergoes many radical transformations and yet in some sense remains the same as, from one point of view, he is the Joycean "inclusive consciousness" whose thoughts and experiences change rapidly and repeatedly, but which remains the same consciousness throughout.\textsuperscript{17}

A Preface parenthesis immediately offers a sexual connotation for "dispersal":

(The multiple seed,
packed tight with detail, scoured,
is lost in the flux and the mind,
distracted, floats off in the same scum) \textsuperscript{12}

Williams In 1919 / had spoken of the "dispersive quality" of modern poetry, going "into all corners, into every emotion, down as well as up"\textsuperscript{13}, - and thus it may be seen as participating in the "perpetual change", metamorphosis. It is of a piece also with "his " Passaic immersion, elimination of subjective/objective categories, the "interpenet-
"ration" of man and environment.

In the metamorphic cycle:

- today is tomorrow is yesterday
- is time reversed, circuitous

(Yale 186/3)

the movement of Paterson is from the "nine months' wonder" to "the final somersault/ the end" (after which comes Book V and the sketch of VI!) Cyclical pattern was originally made more overt in emphasis of correspondence between the four books and the seasons. Man and environment are interpenetrative, thus the simultaneous presentation of Paterson as man-city; but the whole of reality is metamorphic in this way, qualities manifested in their opposites, suggesting T.E. Hulme's summary of Bergson's philosophy in the first of its two parts: "the conception of reality as a flux of interpenetrated elements unceizable by the intellect...". 20

Drafts show that "rolling" (besides relating to cycle) is connected with manufacture, rolling mills, intended to exemplify a "horrid" means employed to further a wrong (material) conception of beauty. The quotation opening the published
Preface is completed in draft: "Rigor of beauty is the quest. But how will you find beauty when it is locked in the mind past all remonstrance? It is not in the things nearest us unless transposed there by our employment. Make it free, then, by the art you have, to enter these starved and broken pieces". (Yale 186/2).

Two lines follow:

My beautiful shirt is worn out? Where shall I get another?
The mills, the mills, the horrid mills, rolling...

Conscious of the dangers of over-explicitness, Williams may have realised that such lines could raise anew the whole irritating question of the "anti-poetic".

By structuring the "starved and broken pieces", by such "addition and subtraction", the poet "renews himself". Discovering and accepting the design, he avoids his craft's being "subverted by thought". Throughout his work Williams repeatedly takes this stand against analogical poetry, a position beautifully summed up by his follower Denise Levertov at the close of her poem, "Letter
to William Kinter of Muhlenberg":

I saw
without words within me, saw
as if my eyes
had grown bigger and knew
how to look without
being told what it was they saw. 21

The Preface is pervaded by mathematical
terms culminating in the phrase "from mathematics
to particulars" (P 13). This is of a piece with
Williams's repeated references to Einstein and
relativity. Mathematics was a subject of discourse
for Lyle and himself, so that we find Lyle citing
Korzybsky's supposed correlating of mathematical
symbols and the central nervous system and Lippmann's
view of the Good Society, "as awaiting the issuance
of a new language from somewhere out beyond the
more recondite Math..." 22 Lyle also quotes Havelock
Ellis as saying, "thinking is counting". Once again
we cannot tidily summarize Williams's attitude to
mathematics, nor even find a consistent view. This
is not to admit it was not of some importance to him. It is, in several ways. In his essay, "The Poem as a Field of Action" he asks, "And what is reality? How do we know reality? The only reality that we can know is MEASURE". (SE 283). The relativity of all histories and cultures is discoverable in measure, which is in itself relative. Each "world" or era calls for a different measure:

...our prosodic values should rightly be seen as only relatively true. Einstein had the speed of light as a constant - his only constant - What have we? Perhaps our concept of musical time... (SE 286)\(^2\)

In America itself this concept of musical time in poetry relates back to Poe, but could easily owe something to Williams's long-standing friendship with Zukofsky, who has correlated music and the poem throughout his career and has latterly influenced such poets as Robert Duncan and Robert Creeley in this direction. The phrase "from mathematics to particulars" may at first seem the obverse to what is expected, but it suggests that, for Williams, measure has the place which light-speed has for
Einstein, establishing the relations between objects being a means of establishing the objects themselves. This is one sense of the headnote, "by multiplication a reduction to one" (P 10), which is obviously close to Coleridge's "rendering multiplicity into unity of effect" (while Poe's criterion for the true poem is the establishment of a single poetic effect).

This headnote phrase relates also to the Dewey dictum that "the local is the only universal", while the "one" is also "Beautiful Thing", or Venus, who "is one. Over and over again, she is one" (A Novellette 31). This oneness is also characteristic of Williams's work ("All I have ever done has been one" — A Novellette 25). Work from abortive novel, Fairfield, in the 1920s, found its way into essays, into White Mule and A Dream of Love and Paterson. Laughlin suggested Life Along the Passaic River as a source for Paterson24, while JAG is quoted in the text and KH and White Mule figure in drafts.

Opposite the Giant, the man-city Paterson are "innumerable women, each like a flower" (P 15). Drafts include a specific "bouquet" and a suggestion of colour symbolism little of which remains. Garrett Mountain, the rock, is a woman. The Passaic,
life-principle, River of Life, is also woman, prefigured in Fairfield as Dolores Maria Pischak, counterpart of Anna Livia Plurabelle. 25

The "innumerable women" include the poetess whose letters are quoted through the first two books of Paterson, helping to define the difficulty of conjoining poem and "reality". This use of prose material (there are over one hundred prose items in the poem) has been widely misunderstood, prompting the suggestion of the poem's inability to cope with the range of contemporary experience, including the breakdown of language itself. Rather, the opposite is the case, the prose an important structural element. Williams's whole career demonstrates that the dividing line between prose and poem is an artificial one. His own best critical defence occurs in a remarkable essay on Pound's A Draft of XXX Cantos:

His excellence is that of the maker, not the measurer - I say he is a poet. This is in effect to have stepped beyond measure.

It is that the material is so molded that it is changed in kind from other
statement. It is a sort beyond measure.

The measure is an inevitability, an unavoidable accessory after the fact. If one move, if one run, if one seize up a material - it cannot avoid having a measure, it cannot avoid a movement which clings to it...

That is the way Pound's verse impresses me and why he can include pieces of prose and have them still part of a poem. It is incorporated in a movement of the intelligence which is special, beyond usual thought and action...

It is that which is the evidence of invention. Pound's line is the movement of his thought, his concept of the whole.

(SE 108)

Williams himself uses prose of all kinds as an importation of "reality" directly into the poem, instances of the "thing in itself". A weapon against literariness, it affords repeated opportunities for direct transcription of the language. He found his early model for alternating verse and prose in 1909 when he and H.D. read Aucassin and Nicolette together (Autob 52).
A brief passage from HХ: "Of Ymir's flesh the earth was made and of his thoughts were all the gloomy clouds created" (44) occurs in verse form in some Yale drafts of this early part of Paterson. The early placing of this passage, which gives clarity to some otherwise obscure points in the poem (e.g. P 193, "This dress is sweaty") offers the possibility that, besides creating his own myth, Williams intended to make (perhaps even a systematic) use of classical mythology. Some passages of mythological significance remain, but they are made purely incidental.

As we move into the poem proper (I, i), Paterson's thoughts are equated with the river's movement and the fall of water. The river is at once the stream of (human) consciousness and a certain faculty of intuition above and beyond it. This opening passage is interrupted first by an excerpt from the poetess, raising the issue of life vs. art, and later by the prose account of David Hower's discovery of pearls in Notch Brook (P 17). In "the low mountain" may be discovered "Coloured crystals the secret of those rocks" (P 17). She, low mountain with Park as head, lies sleeping:

Pearls at her ankles, her monstrous hair spangled with apple blossoms.
The central tenet, "No ideas but in things" is contrasted with sophistries:

Twice a month Paterson receives communications from the Pope and Jacques Barzun (Isocrates).

(P 17-18)

Falls and river, source of thoughts, are also therefore source of speech, language, self-naming ("PISS-AGH! the giant lets fly!"). An obscure reference to "Muncie" in this passage may offer yet another dimension of Williams's approach, a rather striking kinship with R.S. Lynd's sociological studies of "Middletown" carried out in the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties. Lyle wrote to Williams about Middletown in Transition 27 and the studies are based, at least partially, on the small midwest town of Muncie, Indiana.

The cryptic reference in the poem may offer more than it seems to at first sight. In Middletown, for example, Lynd notes that:

an outstanding characteristic of the ways of living of any people at any given time is that they are in process of change, the rate and direction of change depending upon strong centers of cultural diffusion,
the appearance of new inventions, migration and other factors which alter the process. (5)

Since Paterson focuses on a city created by the industrial expansion of the United States, was populated partly by migrants and has undergone a typically American socio-cultural develop, there is an obvious parallel. Lynd explains that one of his techniques is "using as a groundwork for the observed behavior of today the reconstructed and in so far as possible equally objectively observed behaviour of 1890" (5). This refers to his use of documents and is equally true of Paterson.

Looking for a city to write around, Williams rejected Manhattan as too complex and Rutherford as lacking in historical and social depth. In a comparable search, though with different central aims, Lynd's two main objectives were remarkably similar to Williams's:

(1) that the city be as representative as possible of contemporary American life, and

(2) that it be at the same time compact compact and homogeneous enough to be
manageable in such a total-situation study.  (Middletown, 7).

Williams's use of population statistics, etc., can be matched in Lynd and is typical of such sociological studies. Lynd's pointing out of the quality of nineteenth-century life, the belief in al tradition/remedies, etc., is in the same spirit as passages of Williams on the "wonders" (e.g. P 19). Middletown's gas boom of the 1880s had effects similar to those of the Society for Useful Manufactures in Paterson. Lynd gradually realised the primacy of money and the economic conditioning of all aspects of life in the society, "the tendency of this sensitive institution of credit to serve as a repressive agent" (Middletown 47). To this correspond Williams's Poundian economics of the later books of Paterson.

One of Williams's major themes, "Divorce is/ the sign of knowledge in our time" (P 28) is prefigured in a passage in Middletown:

...a value divorced from current, tangible existence in the world all about men and largely without commerce with these
concrete existential realities has become an ideal to which independent existence is attributed. Hence the anomaly of Middletown's regard for the symbol of education and its disregard for the concrete procedure of the schoolroom. (221).

Lynd also writes of the "divorce" brought about by mass-production employments and the need to travel to work.

He stresses the importance of talk, discussion, sermons, oratory, and of libraries and reading, all of which anticipates Paterson, while his note of the decline in religious observance and in attention to preachers is matched in the public reception of Klaus Ehrens in Paterson II.

These correspondences suggest that Williams was familiar with Middletown. It would be satisfying to discover in Lynd's book a source for Paterson, and one might begin from the walking motif of Paterson II (and Lynd's observation of walking as a common Middletown pastime) or by comparing the "weather report" in Paterson II (104), with one of Lynd's cited typical diary entries of late nineteenth-century Middletowners. The important point, rather,
is that Williams wanted to give Paterson a sociological "presence" and, as we have seen, from the depression onward part of his concern in writing was social. His whole view of its value was one of social usefulness.

Reverting to the Paterson text, three passages from New Jersey history follow (p. 18-20), the first describing a monstrous-headed dwarf who, later in the poem, is metamorphosed into a figure of the poet. Between this and a report of the catching of a large fish (headlined in The Paterson Advertiser, "The Monster Taken") is the brief account of the growth of a polyglot "heterogeneous population"—thousands originating in the ten house hamlet Alexander Hamilton had seen by the Falls. This, too, presumably, is a monstrous growth.

Now in a brief, fused poem several "themes" are made explicit: "They begin!" (p. 20). Human relationships—sexual, marital, social, psychological—are figured in a traditional flower-bee metaphor, deriving from "each like a flower". The bee fails, the flowers "sink back into the loam/ crying out". This is, "Marriage come to have a shuddering/ implication", while what is lacking is a sufficient means of communication:
The language is missing them
they die also
incommunicado.

The language, the language
fails them
They do not know the words
or have not
The courage to use them... (P 20)

- the language
is divorced from their minds... (P 21)

Next a prose passage (P 21-22, on the Ramapos) contrasts the setting's natural beauty with the clamour and violence of the people: Indians, British army deserters, negro slaves, Irish women - all contributing to the polyglot babble. While indicating the pluralism of American society, Williams also suggests the bizarre effects of forced marriage. This is backed up by an account of a picture of the wives of an African chief found in an early National Geographic.28

Marriage and death are combined in the passage on Mrs Sarah Cumming's disappearance over the falls
(p. 23-24). The unctuous tone of the account of the lady's death embodies "a false language" (a fall language). Repeated from the opening passage, where it is Paterson's, the "stone ear" (since she is a rock) is also the woman's. Mrs Cumming died because she found no "redeeming language", only "the voice of distress". This is the fate of all men not redeemed by the Word.

Some Paterson drafts contain more overt religious reference. Thus, for the comical Sam Patch/Noah Faitoute Paterson, Williams (while working on Book I) apparently read Noah Davis's The Narrative of a Coloured Man (1859), for his notes include a five-page summary of "Chapter III - Religious Experience - Conviction - Conversion", an account not unlike parts of William James's The Varieties of Religious Experience. Patch, who occurs at this point in the text as another Paterson metamorphosis, was an actual person. Born in Rhode Island in 1807 he was a cotton spinner in the Hamilton mills at Paterson, who became famous for daredevil diving feats from cliffs and other similar heights. Thus Noah is the flood survivor, Faitoute is based on one of Patch's two frequent saws: "Some things can be done as well as others. "P for short" (p. 25)
is a partially disguised verbal pun, the initial
of Paterson, but also a reference to the Passaic
("PISS-AGH!"). Similarly, "Crane, who had charge
of the bridge" (P 26) may be Williams's humour.
Like Mrs Cumming, Patch climbs "the hundred steps".
His final jump, not into the Passaic but the
Genesee, is preceded by an inadequate speech. In
this failure of speech he is America: "A great
silence followed as the crowd stood spellbound"
(P 27 - possible pun in last word quoted).

This carries over directly to I, ii, in the
reiteration of "I/ cannot say. I cannot say..." (P 28).
the divorce of language and reality, and an echo
device - how (howl), disposal (proposal), our ears
(ear), which simultaneously suggests partial
apprehension of language and yet enriches the text.
It particularizes the language/reality divorce,
"the sign of knowledge in our time", while inter-
woven into the text at this point are suggestions
of "stone ears", deaf ears", the deafening tumble
of the river (life and language) "inducing sleep
and silence".

Exemplifying the "innumerable women", the two
"half grown girls" (P 29) are also the "beautiful"
and the language, the falls. Standing for the
femaleness of the poet's opposition, his lyrical
evoking of them as individuals is broken by the banal, "Ain't they beautiful!" Randall Jarrell noticed the mythological aspect of this passage:

Girls walk by the river at Easter and one, bearing a willow twig in her hand as Artemis bore the moon’s crescent bow, holds it, the gathered spray, upright in the air, the pouring air, strokes the soft fur —

Ain’t they beautiful!

(How could words show better than these last three the touching half-success, half-failure of their language?)

In the face of this half-language, the next passage, on the "robin" and Erasmus, is a rejection of the culture of the European past and of an English name for an American bird, token man of a "subtle transformation" of his ground. Now the "giant" Paterson is metamorphosed into Paterson/Williams, the doctor-poet, dismissing the validity in the poem of his own personal life. Recognizing that his "theme" must find fit language (with a hint forward - P 30 - that this may be discovered among the common
people in the park in *Paterson II*). One headnote is repeated, localized, the task:

... a mass of detail to interrelate on a new ground, difficultly (P 30)

which is, in some sense, a summary of method.

River and bush are then correlated, followed by emphasis on the colour white (suggesting the passage's epiphanic intensity), which here could be vestige of a system of colour symbolism. Paterson cannot be fully convinced of beauty's existence merely by thinking of it. Echoing the "death" he has contemplated, the language available to him is "stale as a whale's breath". Pondering the "silent, uncommunicative" fates of Mrs Cumming and Sam Patch, Paterson feels he has at last begun to,

know clearly (as through clear ice) whence I draw my breath or how to employ it clearly (P 31)

The repetition, here and later, of "clearly" carries the burden of the whole poem, the quest for a clear, unfalsifying, unequivocal language.
Now Paterson is momentarily metamorphosed into a tree, first a gale-swept juniper and then (inter-penetrantly) a sycamore. The tree's branches are the "innumerable women" (P 30, 31). One "mottled branch" exhibits the same "giraffish awkwardness" as the "first wife" of the African chief (P 31-32, but also ante P 22). This may suggest that the wives on the log are "branches" of a dead tree, a past form of society. At both points (P 23, P 32) the women are "thick lightnings", which could strike a tree down. A pun at this point (on "sum", S.U.M., Society for Useful Manufactures), repeated from the Preface, equates women with the effect of industrial forces: "in sum, a sleep, a/ source, a scourge . "

His thought moves to the university, "a green bud", potential source of true growth, but in practice a prime example of the divorce of knowledge (language) from reality ("Now come the Universities, the conformists of all colours...", IAG 214)\(^3\), then back to the two women, sisters, the cry for divorce, reality in "the indifferent gale". The "first wife" becomes a flower, "a flower within a flower" (a possible momentary identification of Muse and Venus), but the flower's "history": "laughs at the names/ by which they think to trap it" (P 33). This
"history" becomes a fanged monster, defiant of the "rifle-shot of learning", living in its own odours and language. Following this is the image of "the snow falling into the water", the white clarity of (realized) form being lost in the flow of language. Some, however, falls upon rocks and dry weeds. At this point (P 34) the natural scene is evoked in imagistic detail:

The vague accuracies of events dancing two and two with language which they forever surpass...

A sexual "replica" follows, given an air of carpe diem:

we sit and talk
I wish to be with you abed, we two
as if the bed were the bed of a stream

(P 35)

This image echoes the opening of the De Soto essay in IAG, "Earth" speaking:

And in the end you shall receive of me, nothing - save one long caress as of a
great river passing forever upon your
sweet corpse. (IAE 45).

As the lovers sit and talk, in contrast the
"silence speaks of the giants/ who have died in
the past" (E 36); but another element, air (wind)
has suggested throughout this section an intrens-
igence man encounters, bringing him both "rumours"
and experiences of "separate worlds", embodied in
several examples of alienated human beings, one
in a letter from a woman, T., showing through
paucity of language the crude limits of her contact
with life. This letter introduces the fire element.

The final verse passage of I, ii, (E 39)
contains a number of echoes of Eliot, indicating
an approach to Eliot's less concrete procedure. In
one draft also (Yale 186/2) there is a colour
reference more typical of Stevens ("...geraniums
in tin cans spreading their leaves/ reflected red
upon the frost"), so the final cut-off of the
passage, "No ideas but/ in the facts . . .", is
not only a repetition (in a slightly different,
more circumscribed form) of a central dictum, but
a check by Williams on his own method.

I, ii, closes with an excerpt from an Edward
Dahlberg letter. Lining up with the poetess, "C" ("Cressida"), Dahlberg accuses Paterson/Williams of turning away "the few waifs and Ishmaels of the spirit in this country", of being merely irritated by men's suffering, and of literariness. Since the aim of Paterson is marriage of language with reality, to quote this passage is partially a confession of failure; but it has a charge or irony, since the passage itself illustrates that, in his own fashion, Dahlberg is at least as "literary" and self-involved as his correspondent.

Possibly echoing the opening of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, I,iii, sets up an opposition between red rose (imagination) and green rose (the facts). The "idiot" reminds himself that "The rose is green and will bloom/ overtopping you" (P 41). He concludes:

My whole life
has hung too long upon a partial victory.

But, creature of the weather, I
don't want to go any faster than
I have to go to win.
The "weather", from the mere fact that it sets conditions, is usually a curtailment of freedom. To complete his victory it is necessary for him to lift his effort from the merely aesthetic to the moral realm (The making of Paterson being such a lifting).

Now he is metamorphosed again into a tree (P42 - P44 top: one draft of this passage is titled "The Sycamore"). His thoughts are raindrops pouring from the leaves. This is his version of "the child is father to the man", a notion he both accepts and rejects. His sense of "everybody has roots" raises again the question of living's purpose, a dismissal of the university and its upstart "clerks":

spitted on fixed concepts like roasting hogs, sputtering, their drip sizzling in the fire  (P 44)

Their conceptions resemble reality, which, however, is "something else the same".

Documenting knowledge/reality divorce, the next passage is a vignette of a doctor displaying the wrong kind of detachment, followed by the small, desperate voice of the colored woman asking, "Will you give me
a baby?". These alienations are shown to be at the very root of our way of life.

Statistical facts are used to evoke material preoccupations and wealth, epitomized in, "A special French maid/ her sole duty to groom/ the pet Pomeranians" (P 45). This is followed immediately by a prose passage, an appraisal of the "goods and chattels" of one Cornelius Boremus (whose name is possibly a concealed irony), exemplar of the materially provident. In contrast is the spoliation of the lake (P 46-47), first drained of water, then emptied of fish and eels, an action produced through men's ignorance, the restriction of knowledge.

The ensuing verse thematically echoes the Preface's "lame dog" passage (P 11):

Novelless
he envies the men that ran
and could run off
toward the peripheries -
to other centers...

a sort of springtime
toward which their minds aspired (P 48)
while his own condition resembles that of Sam Patch's body frozen in the ice, waiting for the spring thaw. Another brief prose account of a falls death follows and, after it, an evocation of the river's industrial pollution, "the gravel of the ravished park", screaming children, the determinacy of "the convolutions of the sexual orchid/ hedged by fern and honey smells..." (P 49), and the "pathetic souvenirs" of unhappy marriage. All are:

A chemistry, corollary
to academic misuse, which the theorem
with accuracy, accurately misses...

(P 49)

An exchange between P. and I. (confusingly, P. here is Pound35) asserts Paterson/Williams's interest in process rather than end-product. Then Paterson, "among the rest" drives out to the convent of the Little Sisters of St Ann36, his musing about its pretended "mystery" shifting from irritation, through horror to a sense of tranquillity, a statement of his apprehension of beauty in the grossest quotidian.

Text moves ("He shifts his change") to a very
brief prose account of an earthquake (a rock-splitting anticipated by the "senseless rapes" of P 51?), then the closing poetry of *Paterson I*. Thought (but not speech) clambers "upon the wet rock". This, and the final excerpt, from Symonds's *Studies of the Greek Poets* (P 53) both concern speech: one, describing how the "pouring torrent" shrouds in its din "Earth, the chatterer, father of all/ speech . . . . . . . ." (P 52).

The passage from Symonds repeats the figure of the poet as "dwarf or cripple", pointing to the "harmony which subsists between crabbed verses and the distorted subjects with which they dealt" (P 53), which, seeming at first reading a defence, is reiterated rejection of the idea of "anti-poetic".

Williams had difficulty in moving from *Paterson I* to *Paterson II*\(^3\)\(^2\), apparently at one time stopping work on it for many months. He then planned to use as an "interlude" between the two "books" the poetess's letter which now closes II. He considered centering it on the Paterson strike which is featured in "The Wanderer", while in another draft it is subheaded "summer" (with a parenthesis: "(Pleasure. Happy, happy, happy!)"). In the same set of draft (Yale 185) he insists in one
place that "The Whole Poem is/ONE/...", describing it in another as "a somewhat long episodic poem". Episodic it is, as he himself came to recognize, but paradoxically this is its "single effect", the rendering of flux.

II, i, in the event, is an articulation from the ending of Book I, beginning with musings in the "moist chamber" of Paterson's mind, but asserting the external objectivity of the world:

concretely -

The scene's the Park
upon the rock,
female to the city (P 57)

Paterson is there with his dog ("the dog of his thoughts"). Young men and women in the park are characterized by lines from "The Wanderer":

... the ugly legs of the young girls, pistons too powerful for delicacy!
the men's arms, red, used to heat and cold, to toss quartered beaves and ...

Beginning to open up to vitality, the thought modu-
lates into "the ground dry, - passive-possessive" and here the "Walking" motif begins (P 59), its basic source a medical or quasi-medical textbook (clipping with UB drafts). The key to its use in the poem occurs in the first sentence of the clipping: "Walking is one of the simplest and most fundamental actions and may serve as an example of dynamic posture". The last two words have been underlined, and the last four verse lines on P 59 are a quotation from the cutting.

Immediately an excerpt from one of the poetess's letters undercuts Paterson's "I'm still the positive", making his "dynamic posture" an irony. The excerpt shows that the relationship between Paterson and poetess has ended in "divorce", revealing also the woman's realization that she cannot create without man. The following italicized exchange of questions (P 60) appears to suggest that Americans are more interested in function than in individual 39, but Paterson refuses the point, answering the American form of the question (the unassigned pronouns allow him to participate in both sides of the exchange):

What do I do? I listen, to the water falling. (No sound of it here but the wind!)
His reception of language is impeded by the wind's insistence on a different language (from elsewhere, foreign). Into the ensuing prose passage of local history is interpolated Alexander Hamilton's phrase for the people, "a great beast" (this sense of them epitomized in the verse following, a crow under attack from a swarm of small birds). This "great beast" is the Demos of The First President. Which

Still walking, Paterson crosses the disused pastureland, now stubble, the labour put into it "a flame, / spent":

When! from before his feet half tripping,
picking a way, there starts

a flight of empurpled wings!

(P 62)

suggesting a flight of true imagination ("from the dust kindled/ to sudden ardo!"). Imagination is then metamorphosed into "a grasshopper of red basalt". Led forward, by the "announcing wings" (which do not need to "unfold for flight") Paterson is stopped by an interpolated protest, one of the poetess's letters (the prose working actively to
impede the sense of flight); but this flight is not to be stopped, continuing in an identification of love and art:

Love that is a stone endlessly in flight, so long as stone shall last bearing the chisel's stroke. (P 63)

Through imagination, Paterson participates in stone (rock), the necessary passive principle, recalling the remark in KH Prologue that "The world of action is a world of stones" (SE 14) (And see forward: "(Thus the mind grows, up flinty pinnacles)" P 63). This verse passage (P 63-64, which may be related to poems from The Wedge, "A Sort of a Song" and "Catastrophic Birth") is to the effect that art outlives the flesh, but that love also combats death. Placed as it is, the prose account of the mink "chase" has a kind of "objective correlative" effect, as a figuring of the elusiveness of imagination.

A "high" passage of verse, "Without invention nothing is well spaced" (P 65), follows. Related to Pound's "usura" Canto, it is Williams's amplest statement of his concept of invention. Most often he relates the concept to structure, but
on occasion he goes beyond this, as in "Against the Weather", where he says, "After a while they will run out of bombs. Then they will need something to fall back on: today. Only the artist can invent it" (SE 197). Today is, and must be, one's immediate environment. Each day the positions, and the relative positions, of the stars change and need to be "new measured", the measure and the imagination are in some sense interdependent ("unless there is/ a new mind there cannot be a new/ line" P 65). Williams is taking his customary position of affirming the present, or the possibilities of the present.

Specifically, the imagination's calling forth of the witch-hazel bush becomes a "present" scene, Paterson observing two lovers, "modern replicas" of the delineated giants, feels their

frank vulgarity.

Minds beaten thin

by waste ... (P 66)

and that "SOME sort/of breakdown/has occurred."

As "their pitiful thoughts do meet/ in the flesh", so they are his "pitiful thoughts" and, as such, not
"undignified" (nor anti-poetic). True, "they sleep", but equally they are "surrounded/ by churring loves. Gay wings...", and can be transformed by the imagination.

Continuing his walk, Paterson meets the collie and her master, a "clean-dog", as distinct from Musty (echoing the "musty bone" of the Preface). These are figures of the flux, the variety of fate, the all-encompassing nature of thought, imagination, as are the picknickers' voices in the Park, "multiple and inarticulate", the "'great beast' come to sun himself" (p. 70), gaily, since "it is all for pleasure". The gaiety is endowed upon the scene by Paterson himself, for otherwise the picknickers are "aloof" or indifferent to their surroundings and to each other. Perhaps to suggest this misrelaton of Paterson's expectations and the other participants in the scene, Williams introduces a "lift" into the vocabulary, using language which remains highly concrete, but which is uncharacteristic of the environment ("escarpment", "abutting", "stanchions" "rampart" - details in the scene, but untypical of the ethos). Obliquely, these details and the trumpet sound are put in perspective parenthetically:
Stand at the rampart (use a metronome if your ear is deficient, one made in Hungary if you prefer) (P 71)

At "the core of gaiety" a young man plays a guitar while Mary, the old Italian woman, dances (P 73) matching "the sun in frank vulgarity" (P 66 ante), chiding the other people for lacking her own vitality. Her dance has a Bacchanalian quality, affirmative, gay, fertile, carrying forward to IV,i and the closing note of V (see below). It contrasts with, and complements, the goatish wooing of a couple surrounded by indifferent children playing. The pervasive dismayed hedonism is juxtaposed to recollection of Russian peasants:

the peon in the lost
Eisenstein film drinking

from a wine-skin with the abandon of a horse drinking

so that it slopped down his chin?
down his neck, dribbling
over his shirt-front and down
onto his pants – laughing, toothless?

Heavenly man! (P 74)

The human use of the natural setting is also contrasted with an earlier purity:

oaks, choke-cherry,
dogwoods, white and green, iron-wood:
humped roots matted into the shallow soil – mostly gone (P 77).

The section closes with a contrast, between the poem's method – "an elucidation by multiplicity" and the environmental pressures towards conformity, the rich topsoil eroded by man's tread, the need "for belief, to be good dogs" opposed by an ominous large sign: "NO LOGS ALLOWED AT LARGE IN THIS PARK" (P 77).

The cryptic opening of II, ii, "Blocked. / (Make a song out of that: concretely) By whom?" (P 78) is a meditative response to the poetess's question: "That kind of blockage, exiling one's self from one's self – have you ever experienced
it?" (P 59-60). At this point makes his song from a series of blockages and their polarizations, the section's basic juxtaposition being that of the evangelist Klaus Ehrens's sermon with Hamilton's fiscal schemes, the Hamiltonian economic fortification of business interests prevalent in U.S.A. at least until the Great Crash of 1929.

Ehrens's figure is also contrasted with the effects of a "massive church", the Church of European tradition, making serfs of its adherents and (drafts suggest) offering aesthetic formulations of "love". David Lilienthal, who combined in his life active work for peace with the vision to create and sustain the Tennessee Valley Authority (opposite to the polluted Passaic) as a public corporation, is considered against the Senate "trying to block him". Williams refers to the smear tactic of labelling people "Communist", asking, "are the Communists any worse than the guilty bastards trying in that way to undermine us?" (P 78). Besides deploiring the economic monopoly of industrial capitalists, he charges them with the more central "guilt" of undermining, polluting language itself. Lilienthal showed that industrial needs could combine with respect for nature.
As Paterson continues walking, observing the multiplicity around him, there is music. Something of a St Francis figure "calling to the birds and trees", but his attempt to speak to those around him is held off by the poetess's, "There are people - especially among women - who can speak only to one person" (P 80). When his sermon begins, Ehrens, despite his passionate

BUT  
You can't ignore the words of Our Lord Jesus Christ who died on the Cross for us...
(P 82-83)

fails to capture the crowd's attention. He speaks on revealing himself as, initially, a typical American "success" story. Hamilton's realization of the need for federation and the establishment of good money credit is interwoven here with Ehrens's assessment of his own material success: "It did not make me good" (P 85). To reinforce the point a representative American, John P. Altgeld, is presented in a parody of patriotic song: "America the golden!/ with trick and money/ damned".

The sermon is interrupted by a lyric passage
on the nature of beauty (p. 83-89) thus reverting to the epigraphic "Rigor of beauty is the quest" (in the Yale Collection this material is included with drafts for Book I): three forms of beauty are listed, the religious, imaginative and the beauty of being itself. Any of these may be "the beauty of holiness", or some balance of them, the whole fabric of life, perhaps, insofar as it can be kept intact from the "lurking schismatists".

In a page of UB draft Williams notes a plan for the poem (or perhaps II only): "A design on the general structure of Chaucer's CANTERBURY TALES" (Chaucer being, according to the Préface to SE xvii, one of the "contemporaries of mind with whom I am constantly in touch - through the art of writing"). The linking device was to be "the dreams of N.F. PATERSON", but stress is put on the paramount importance of the language, as structure is emphasized in the cancelled draft of a letter to Kenneth Burke included in the same file. Much of the substance was to consist of "a series of digested letters" (particularly those of Iyle). Little direct trace of Chaucer is evident (see p. 203) and the Chaucerian model has not been especially adhered to, but the dream
situation frames the poem, surfacing at times as it does here in the reversion to first person, modulating from Ehrens to Paterson: "And I began to feel better ... - and leaned on the parapet, thinking" (P 89). At this point he has "shifted his change" again from metamorphosis as the "fresh budding tree", which not only rounds off the lyric on beauty but refers us back, first to the chokecherry (P 77), which drafts suggest was to feature in some way not brought out by the final text, and then to the long lyric beginning at P 42. Thus the vague concept of "holiness" is offered as one alternative, the tree's newness and rootedness as the other.

Ehrens's claim of Christ's contempt for money is succeeded by excerpts from a Social Credit leaflet, which Pound had sent Williams (Yale file of Pound correspondence). A typed copy at UB is headed, in Williams's hand, "Following the preacher's clownish talk", offering the possibility that he saw the matter of the leaflet (P 90, 91) as a practical alternative to the preacher's exhortations. This is supplemented by part of a second leaflet (P 92), "Tom Edison on the Money Subject".

Pound had more than once urged Williams to read
one item on the brief reading list of "The Attack on Credit Monopoly", Brooks Adams's *The Law of Civilization and Decay* (1895 edition). Adams put forward a theory that the differences between races was at bottom due to variable distribution of energy, while wealth was equivalent to stored energy. Usury of the common people, draining economic resources towards a small class, was a leading cause of debilitation of national vitalities. One side effect in this economic theory of history is that commerce is antagonistic to the imagination. The relation of such theories to both Pound and Williams is obvious enough (a listing of the Adams title in a notebook offers the possibility that Williams once had a copy). Pound also sent Williams reprints of *Social Credit* essays from *The New Age* (letter of April 3, 1934, Yale).

These anti-monopolist Social Credit passages frame two paragraphs on the development of S.U.M. (Society for establishing Useful Manufactures) and a verse passage evoking defect and disgust in the figure of the eagle making himself "small - to creep into the hinged egg". Within five years S.U.M. failed in its intended purpose, as did Hamilton's dream of a "federal city". Edison's attack on usury
perpetrated through the Federal Reserve Banks is juxtaposed to Hamilton's ability, when S.U.H. was in financial difficulties, to raise a large loan at low interest rate.

Next follows a verse passage addressed to "the eternal bride and/ father" (P 92) (God, in UB draft) the true focus is Paterson's sense of the earth. In the passage as a whole it is as if Williams were stating "God and the imagination are one".

The Himalayas and prairies

of your features amaze and delight— (P 93)

This recognition of "godness" in the world, connected as it is with Williams's interpenetrative faculty, implicitly is dependent on the favours and workings of imagination, through which the "reduction to one" is achieved. At this point Williams allies his localism to a conviction that experience of a number of places feeds only the "multiplicity":

knowing

how futile would be the search

for you in the multiplicity

of your debacle. The world spreads

for me like a flower opening—... (P 93)
Such passages show the true significance of his later phrase, "only the imagination is real". In the present instance the cyclical nature of life and recurrent power of imagination are suggested simultaneously:

wither and fall to the ground
and rot and be drawn up
into a flower again. But you
never wither - but blossom
all about me. In that I forget
myself perpetually - in your
composition and decomposition
I find my . .

despair! (P 93)

The notion of "despair" here is a difficult one, but appears to be a statement of his resignation in the world. One facet of it is regret at the "composition and decomposition" of mortality, which must be accepted as part of a whole process, another is "despair" at not being able fully to realize the world in imagination. The experience, or emotion, closest to imagination is love (a position clear through Williams's late poems, but implicit as a positive in his work from the early 1940s). Thus his
celebration of the world has also a sexual connotation: "The world spreads/ for me like a flower opening ...". The whole passage should be balanced against I, ii:

colder than stone,

    a bud forever green,

    tight-curled upon the pavement, perfect

    in juice and substance but divorced, divorced

    from its fellows, fallen low—  (P 28)

Growth, fulfilment, cannot occur when bud is cut off from source. It must partake of the process of "composition and decomposition". Only in the sense that it does not achieve its cycle is it "forever green", divorced from reality. Rejecting the mere artifact, this may be read as rebutting romantic implications such as those in Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn".

Once more the disturbing nagging of the poetess intervenes. Again she insists on the importance of self when compared with writing, but even the ultimately negative expression of her desire contains in it potential artistic process. Her phrase, "my own thoughts and ideas and problems which were turned into dry sand by your attitude" (P 94) anticipates the symbol of the bottle in the fire in Paterson III, where metamorphosing fire is the dominant metaphor.
II, iii opens with a tight lyric on the negative nature of woman, who nonetheless is the necessary ground of existence. Woman as such is a universal, part of the "mathematics" from which the "particulars" of experience (p 13) are derived. Both "mathematics" and "particulars" confirm the cyclical nature of man's experience. A rhyming couplet (satirical in intent) leads into the famous verses "The descent beckons". Much light may be afforded this difficult passage by referring to the notion of "descent" at earlier points in Williams's work.

One aspect of it is suggested by part of a paragraph in AH:

In middle life the mind passes to a varied October. This is the time youth in its faulty aspirations has set for the achievement of great summits. But having attained the mountain top one is not snatched into a cloud but the descent opens its blandishments quite as a matter of course. (AH 25)

The third sentence quoted here reads as if it were a source for the opening lines of the Paterson passage. Another relevant point in Williams's early work is the chapter of IAG titled "Descent". There he shows
that General Sam Houston is a significant figure in American history precisely because he "took the descent once more, to the ground" (IAG 213), just as Whitman "had to come from under", having returned to source, to the beginning (vide P 11). This descent to the ground is for Williams essentially the same as immersion in the Passaic - at once return to source and self-abnegation. Memory itself is a kind of return, in its recoveries occurs an invention/discovery of "new places". Thus memory (as imagination) is

a sort of renewal

even

an initiation (P 95)

In being an "accomplishment", memory partakes of imagination ("the whiteness of a clarity beyond the facts"), "and no whiteness (lost) is so white as the memory/ of whiteness". The "new awakening" (through imagination) is "a reversal/ of despair", but:

a descent follows

endless and indestructible (P 97)

Relevant here is a small earlier poem,

"The Descent" (CEP 460):
From disorder (a chaos)
order grows
- grows fruitful.
The chaos feeds it. Chaos
feeds the tree. (CEP 460)

Just as the lyric ending on P 89, referring to a
"fresh budding tree", may suggest the poem itself,
in creation from the world's multiplicity, so here
the tree stands for reality integrated and the
poem's whole orientation is towards Stevens's,
"A great disorder is an order". A Paterson joke:

the pouring water!
The dogs and trees
conspire to invent
a world (P 97)

epitomizes a creative act deriving from language
(and note the sense of "conspire" - "breathe with",
"breathe together"); but because "no poet has come",
the dogs being just ordinary dogs, the language
remains untransformed ("Bow, wow!").

Darwin's name, included with those of three
economists in the short prose snatch at this point,
may suggest another reading for, "The descent beckons/as the ascent beckoned", that is, to use Stevens's terms, that the "great poem of earth" now beckons (asks to be written) as the poems of heaven did in the past. We may note that Williams more than once stresses that his father persuaded him, as a young man, to read The Descent of Man. (Autob 15).

The "descent" passage also deals overtly with love and particularly with the rediscovery of pure love in old age (a major theme of the PB volume). Now as Faitoute/Paterson leaves the closing park his sense of the falls is of a great poem. His presence in the passage is multi-level and what emerges is a "despair" at the divorce between poem and "great beast":

Love is no comforter, rather a nail in the skull

(P 99)

while Faitoute

shakes with the intensity of his listening.

Only the thought of the stream comforts him, its terrifying plunge, inviting marriage...

(P 100)
She (here unidentified) replies that "stones" (the female, source, "invented upon") do not invent, which a man does. Faitoute's responsive musing about "the new" is interrupted by the poetess's accusing pointing to the divorce between "sensibility" and man's lot. Cold and angry in the "weather", Faitoute now physically encounters the dwarf, figure of the poet and of man-as-he-is compared with man-as-he-could-be. Momentarily Faitoute is metamorphosed into the "fresh budding tree" (p 102), which will be blotted out unless the poet sing his songs quickly:

He all but falls ... 
And She -
Marry us! Marry us!

Such a marriage would be the achievement of full reality, the joining of man/woman into poem, the antithesis of divorce. Williams had made the point in "The Simplicity of Disorder" (1929): "What is pure in marriage unless it be the actual?" (SE 99). And in the present context:

Be reconciled, poet, with your own world, it is the only truth! (p 103)
Refusing the marriage, fleeing the falls' roar,
"Faitoute grind his heel/ hard down on the stone". The weather report here and the ensuing "belly...cloud" verse passage is illuminated by reference to the suppressed lines concerning Ymir (see above, p. 261) but these hints at possible fecundation cease, for an abrupt return to "descent"; but the theme is now transformed, concerning self-destruction and disintegration as a means of achieving "the sun kissed summits of love" (P 104), and including surrealistic and allied approaches to language ("in to scribble").

At this point is interpolated a lyric celebrating the "full octave" of love. This is followed by a repetition of the "belly...cloud..." simile, which may be collated with "The Clouds, Iv", at the close of which the clouds are "the flesh itself (in which/ the poet foretells his own death) (CLP ). For Faitoute there is no consummation, however. The poetess now takes over the poem for eight pages of close print. Continuing to complain, she notes that she and her relationship with him "could be turned by you into literature, as something disconnected from life" (P 106). By attacking the poet's desire to make a poem out of her, C. attacks an aspect of herself; but this is not all. Some of what she says
is, of itself, eminently sensible ("Only my writing (when I write) is myself..." P 106) - otherwise there would be no point in Williams's using the material at such length. He is admitting that her charges are based in truth, but she unconsciously admits similar charges true of herself when she speaks of her aim "to return to writing from living" (P 110), as though the two were antithetical. She also robs the letter of much of its point by relenting at the end, weakening, adding a covering note in which she once more resorts to pleading.

Book III is dominated by natural disasters, 51 - cyclone (I,i, was titled at different stages, "Cyclone", "Tightrope"), fire, flood - and individual murders and suicides. Centred on "The Library" (the Danforth Memorial Library), III is prefaced by a quotation from Santayana's The Last Puritan reiterating Paterson's central metaphor, its gist that, "cities are a second body for the human mind". Its opening song sets "A fortune bigger than/Avery could muster" (P 117) against the pricelessness of the locust tree in flower. This tree embodies the theme of "Beautiful Thing" which pervades the book. In tension with the parallel "search for the redeeming language" and for love 52 are man's ambivalent response
to beauty, his urge to possess and destroy it. Thus beauty is set over against the destructive elements.

The Library first suggests itself as "echoing the life" and therefore having some merit; but it is a mere echo of a roar. Books are the "ghost of a wind" in a context full of the wind's roar, roar of the falls, of fire, of the mind, and even of silence. (P 119). Woven into the text, the repeated group of monosyllables, "So be it. So be it" (P 120) asserts things, against fear, destruction, breathlessness. The isolated prose line noting the killing of "the last wolf" (P 119), itself almost certainly book-garnered, emphasizes destruction of a "beautiful thing" (equal importance to both aspects, the beauty, the object) from fear of it. In the library, in old files of newspapers, may be found stored cyclone, fire and flood, ready for reactivation in the mind; but the mind "starts back amazed from the reading . . . So be it" (P 120).

Against such fear there can be "knowledge/ by way of despair", but the manner in which we live our lives is to destroy all that is not obviously useful, hence the destruction of Lambert's Castle. Built by an immigrant mill-worker who became a silk manufacturer, the Castle was "a Balmoral" (P 122), "rococo Victorian", with stained-glass windows, ornate ceilings and gas chandeliers the height of
which could be adjusted, since they were hung by machine-made telescoping brass tubes. Like Williams's Joe Stetzer, Lambert was an anti-union man. Having spent a fortune on his dwelling he was ruined by his intransigence in industrial relations. These facts, social and economic, are presented in the poem and simultaneously accepted and yet observed to be "incomprehensible" (p 121). They modulate into a direct statement on "the poem":

The province of the poem is the world.
When the sun rises, it rises in the poem.
and when it sets darkness comes down
and the poem is dark (p 122).

These lines face both ways, taking part in the Stevens dialectic, allowing the same degree of reality to poem and world. Both word order and the connotations of "province" allow ambiguous reception, a possible version of the opening sentence being, "The world is the province of the poem". Similarly the double play of "When the sun rises", etc. (and the double antithesis in the phonic water/sun). This all concerns process, finding a related chord in Stevens's:
Placed, so, beyond the compass of change,  
Perceived in a final atmosphere;  

For a moment final...  

(CP 163, "The Man with the Blue Guitar").

Neither Williams nor Stevens perceived the poem as an "ideal" entity, but it is by no means obvious that, as Glaucce Cambon suggests, Williams "cannot subscribe" to any theory of "the metaphysical autonomy" of poetry. We have, after all, such statements as "The poem alone focuses the world" (SE 242), "Who are we anyhow? Just man? Rime is more", (SE 262) and, of a somewhat different order, "Poetry is a rival government" (SE 199).

Roar of books tells Paterson nothing, but as his mind "begins to drift" he has some sense of the "beautiful thing". The library contains "Dead men's dreams, confined by these walls" (P 123), whereas Paterson is concerned with living dreams. The building smells of "stagnation and death" and shelters no redeeming language, merely silence. This silence brings only intimations of Thalassa, the sea of death. The windows and outlets which might afford escape "shriek/ as furies" (P 125). The parenthesis here may suggest a reference
to the poetess, or even to Muse and Venus, or rocks and sea, but the passage is obscure.

It is followed by an excerpt describing a mid-seventeenth-century clash between Indians and white men, relating some details of Indian economics, their mistreatment and persecution at white hands, and the death dance of two taunted, wounded and tortured Indians. These paragraphs relate to several of Williams's deep concerns. The Indians are figures of native America wantonly and brutally destroyed. The incident also epitomizes lack of contact with their environment on the part of the early settlers and lack of communication (shared language) between them and the native Indians.

This instance of alienation (divorce) is followed by a brief account of a hasty, crudely arranged marriage (P 126) and then a return to the motif of walking across the falls on a tightrope (included in drafts for Book II - Yale) and then by:

The place sweats of staleness and of rot
a back-house stench . a library stench.

The "back-house stench" derives from the destructive
stripping of the Indian's flesh, but also the library's stakeness and corruption, though it has the potential to engender ("sweats"). It hints also of "composition" (literariness, artificial arrangement), which is "running away" as opposed to embracing the "foulness", walking the tightrope of daily experience, "- the being taut, balanced between/ eternities", living as Harry Leslie did, kindling a fire or dancing the Washermen's Frolic in mid-ropes.

Now the "Beautiful Thing" (in person, the young negro girl beating the rug) becomes involved in the "reck of it" (of destruction). Paterson tries to win her to "marriage" as a means of countering death:58

But it is true, they fear it more than death, beauty is feared more than death (p 129)

Only love, marriage of a man and a woman, the Joycean riddle, can stare death "in the eye". In the dry summer of no love there is "no water among the stones", while the "deathless song" to "allay our thirsts" is marriage of rock and river, man, woman and the redeeming language of love.

An inner voice prompts self-doubt in Paterson,
urging him that to attempt separate the "radiance" from the "inert mass" is too difficult a task. In a resistent environment he is advised:

Give up the poem. Give up the shilly-shally of art. (p 132)

Nonetheless, there to be mined from the common experience is:

The radiant gist that resists the final crystallization (p 133).

As common living comes at a cost, so also does full experience of the "Beautiful Thing":

Say I am the locus where two women meet.

This is a node for the whole interwoven "Beautiful Thing" poem, relating as it does to the "innumerable women", the "first wife" and the other wives, Old World and New, the grandmother Muse and "Venus from the confused sea". Among many "flowers" Toulouse Leutrec
(on his crippled legs) witnessed and recorded the
dance, "the tendons/untensed" (i.e. relaxed, but
also immortal). "Beautiful Thing" is to be discovered
in any kind of circumstance, among all kinds of
people and material. The whole role of the artist
is to recognize it. At the end of III, i, Paterson
is again the city, suffering the tornado; but he is
also Paterson/Fairoue: "Seeking" (P 136), for whom
"Some things can be done as well as others".

III, ii, taking the Paterson fire of 1902 as
its central "incident", is the physical and actual
core of the poem, the focus presaged by the
"red-shouldered hawks" (III, i, P 136). It concerns
the act of creation, relationship between creation
and destruction. The "flame" is woman and also a
by-product of the grossness of living, but chiefly
an agent of metamorphosis. The opening poem centres
on the proposition that, "to write, nine tenths of
the problem/ is to live" (P 138). Here at least,
suggesting that writing "should be a relief", Williams
appears to subscribe to Freudian theory he elsewhere
rejects. The insight modulates into a series of
colloquial responses to Paterson's role as writer,
responses which are fatuously hobbyist. Next follows
an account of an Indian fire ceremony taken from
Nelson. This account contrives to show at once the Indians' innate dignity and Nelson's detached amusement, demonstrating again the "divorce" among peoples through lack of shared language and customs. In other circumstances the library books are equivalent to fire, objects of propitiation. In time of great danger the Indians huddle in their tepees, prostrate, offering tobacco to the fire to appease its hunger. Books and tobacco, each is source of unreal dreams. These passages culminate in a brief paragraph describing the start of the Paterson fire, and then another (P 140).

The second is preceded by a key passage, echoing the "clearly" from the "redbreast" passages of I, ii:

Clearly, they say. Oh clearly! Clearly? What more clear than that of all things nothing is so unclear, between man and his writing, as to which is the man and which the thing and of them both which is the more to be valued (P 140)

This offers tacit rejection of the merely logical, but besides indicates Williams's repeated wish to assert the primacy and importance of art.
"What is man? Time is more!" This has the validity not so much of dogma as of vivid paradox. Behind such an attitude there is obviously the sense of interpenetration, a mental accord with propositions such as Whitehead's, "we cannot tell with what molecules the body ends and the external world begins". 60 Whitehead argues that there are facts of nature (Williams's things), that these are part of a process just as our observation of them is, that they are variously relevant and relative to any observer, - it might be said that he would define experience as a series of "momentary absolutes" (true, as we have seen, both of Williams and of Wallace Stevens). Elsewhere Whitehead observes that "a man defined as an enduring percipient is a society", "personal existence...is a society of occasions". Thus, for both Whitehead and Williams, man is simultaneously conscious of himself as himself and of himself as part of a process. Since he could not be the first without being the second, the suggestion is ruled out that Williams ever conceived the whole of experience as being mind-dependent. Yet because of this relational consciousness of man and thing, as their interpenetration is one possibility so another is the question of their relative values. Thus Randall Jarrell's conclusion from the "redbreast"
passage, that:

The subject of Paterson is: How can you tell the truth about things? - that is, how can you find a language so close to the world that the world can be represented and understood in it?  

may be usefully amplified through Whitehead's observation that:

Language was developed in response to the excitement of practical actions. It is concerned with the prominent facts... entering into experience by means of our sense organs.

Williams would have claimed that the fullness of human existence came about only through the correlation of the "prominent facts" with a language and measure appropriate to them. Even for a people existence depends on the achievement of a "new" form which is uniquely theirs.

To return directly to the Paterson text, now (p. 141) is introduced "an old bottle/ mauled" by
the fire, central image of both fusion and metamorphosis. This fusion is a figure of merging of male and female in procreation, and of the relation of artist to materials, the bottle achieving "a new glaze". Williams is intent here on making an action from the processing of the bottle. One draft of this passage (Yale) includes the reiterated "So be it", which is ultimately omitted presumably because its insistence on stasis works against the fluidity which is his focus of attention. His, "an investment of grace in the sand/ - or stone" (P 143) includes the poetess as a potential source of creativity (see P 94). Not only the thing, but the actual making is beautiful:

The glass splattered with concentric rainbows of cold fire (P 143).

Artist and materials are protagonists in a struggle, which the artist ultimately wins,55("Poet Beats Fire at its Own Game!"), the contact similar to that of man and woman "deflowered" and then "reflowered" (P 143). (The poetess, C., bemoaning her creativity lost through Paterson's indifference, has now been
"reflowered" by inclusion in the poem Paterson)

"Beautiful Thing" is now identified with the flames. In its original context, "Paterson: Episode 17" (CEP 436) it is "a colored girl beating a rug in the yard of the Episcopal rectory in Rutherford" (ND 17, 262) — thus an action towards an end, but in itself an embodiment of beauty. Maid and bottle are examples of "the vulgarity of beauty" (i.e., its commonness) but they are also, as implied earlier, "rainbows/ of cold fire":

Beautiful thing

- intertwined with the fire. An identity
surmounting the world  (P 145)

Just as the coloured maid is beautiful, so (even more so) is her action, and so here is the "intertwining", the process of reshaping and glazing the bottle. Language also is relevant in this way. Momentarily, in celebration of the "Beautiful Thing", the fall is reversed, process completed, consummated:

Rising with a whirling motion, the person passed into the flame, becomes the flame — the flame taking over the person  (P 146)
but the spontaneous roar, upsurge, cry is answered by silence (p. 147, and answered again superbly in Williams's great poem of love, "Asphodel, that Greeny Flower", p. 155.)

The library (SILENT) is set over against the vitality of the living person, "Beautiful Thing". As the person has risen in the "upwind", "submerged/in wonder, the fire become the person . " (p. 147) so, in contrast, the "pethetic library" "must go down" (p. 148). Then the whole fire "episode" is brought into focus (p. 148-149). Even though books are largely irrelevant and unnecessary, they are what we have, the remains of experience. They are all we can have, thus the paradox of Williams, ordering his own experience in a book, shaping a "momentary absolute" from his own life, a "white hot man become/ a book". Ironic extension of this is located in the semi-literate letter from D J B (""Dolly" - Yale draft), the "Beautiful Thing", whose effort to express herself finds its furthest reach in a postscript: "Tell Raymond I said I bubetut hatche isus cashutute Just a new way of talking kid..." (p. 150).

To encounter her later, Doctor Paterson must go down(to Hades) where they meet "in silence". This
scene dissolves into a tapestry (a motif which is later the basis of Paterson V). This complements the encounter with the sick negro woman in the dirty basement. They are not a contrast. In each is the "radiant gist", which is the core of vital experience. The section closes with a long passage of the "Beautiful Thing" lyric resolving into an explicit statement of love:

    I can't be half gentle enough,  
    half tender enough  
    toward you, toward you,  
    inarticulate, not half loving enough  

    (P 154)

 Appropriately this is directed towards a specific person and the universal sense of "Beautiful Thing".

 In Yale draft, III, iii, is titled "Flood" (another draft has "Flood: Blood"). As with III,i, its opening is directly concerned with the act and role of writing, conviction that a "chance word, upon paper, may destroy the world" (P 155) is accompanied by the injunction: "write carelessly so that nothing that is not green will survive", 
advice followed in the ensuing surrealistic passage ("Boney fish bearing lights/ stalk the eyes") evoking the presence of the contemporary world, yet its transience, hinting backwards through an evolution. Instruction and illustration cast light once again on the relation, for Williams, between form and process. He is not after realized entities but the "vividness" of life itself.

The flood which follows the fire is like the flood of explication, emendation and commentary which follows original invention. It is also the drowning flood of Noah, of the Homeric "wine dark sea", "the wine of death" (P 158), drowning even the harmless dogs.

A prose excerpt recounts the death of Pogatticutt, Grand Sachem of the Delaware Indians, including the sacrificial death of a dog (and these dog incidents implement a motif noted earlier). The two dog killings, one pointless and one loving, make the same contrast as the whole of IAG. Henry's reaction (P 157) is the Puritan resentment of contact; Wyandach's sacrifice is a thanksgiving for loving contact. Yet both killings may exemplify the "peace that comes of destruction" (P 159), the "peace" here being in their metamorphosis into the poem.
There follows an account of the killing of a "spectral cat" seen by Herselis Van Giesen, a lady of a prominent Paterson family. Paterson/Williams is using his source (Nelson) to show the limitations of earlier American society, but he is also momentarily casting doubt on the validity of his own poem. Asserting the facts, repeating them — "...assessed in 1807 for 62 acres of unimproved land, two horses and five cattle" (p 161), making over part of the list into his own verse, he notes parenthetically, "(that cures the fantasy)". Referring to the belief in witches, re-presenting the same phrases made over, he is also enacting the removal of the fantasy. Invention, form, does this. As he had observed in "The Poem as a Field of Action", "the subject matter of the poem is always phantasy — what is wished for, realized in the "dream" of the poem — but...the structure confronts something else" (SE 281).

Immediately after the Van Giesen anecdote there is a reference to The Book of Lead, which Thirlwall interprets as a reference to atom bombs. While there is nothing against this interpretation, it is also possible that this is one of the number of apparently unsystematic alchemical/mythological references throughout the poem. Lead is one version of the arcane substance" (prima materia, world-egg) of the
ancient philosophers, associated with Saturn. In descent to the underworld the first gate was a leaden gate. In Jung's account, Hermes can succeed in his search for Mercurius "only through the rite of the ascent and descent, the 'circular distillation', beginning with the black lead, with the darkness, coldness, and malignity of the malefic Saturn..."66.

With the flood the momentary rising has changed to a falling. Paterson too is falling, failing to communicate, failing in love, but with a degree of self-awareness: "But somehow a man must lift himself/again" (P 162). Prose description of a Prohibition days' dance follows, linking back to many actions, such as the dance as observed by Toulouse Lautrec, the old Italian woman in the park, Leslie going over the falls, the dying Indians dancing the kinte kaye. All these dances are the endowment of form on chaos, but the differing dances appear to suggest that the particular form they take is inherent in the chaos embodied. All dances hold in common that they are a celebration.

Throughout this passage is opposition between seeing and doing. Paterson's doubt about his poem has extended to, "None wants our ayes" (P 162), to an externalization in the poem itself: "He feels he
ought to do more (p 162); and the flat, "I see things" (p 163). Drafts of the reference to Puerto Plata in this passage (p 163, Yale 138/1) illustrate Williams's methods of elision. In the Yale manuscript a certain symbolic symmetry is attempted by inclusion of a letter purportedly written to a ship sailing on Columbus Day, 1877. What we have, what "things" he sees are the flood ("no lullaby but a piston") continuing, undermining the railroad, smashing apart the text of the poem, its language, lining, paging (p 164). He is driving against the completion of his own poem. Thus Paterson's world, Paterson himself, are on the point of disintegration.

This juncture is presented physically in the text and also through a typical letter of Ezra Pound's, which is dated the day after Columbus Day. Pound wants to send Paterson back to the library and, at least in part, his advice is sound. Insisting on selectivity, he offers a brief reading list. Each item on it has profoundly influenced The Cantos either in thought or form. Williams, of course, rejected Pound's cultural eclecticism (of which Leo Frobenius is a source, or reference locus) but used
in his own way the method Pound developed from it (juxtaposition). Williams offers his own sources, geological, the stratifications of the American ground. His tabulation of substrata closes with a sentence (from the early pages of Nelson), which is his rejoinder to Pound: "...The fact that the rock salt of England, and of some of the other salt mines of Europe, is found in rocks of the same age as this, raises the question whether it may not also be found here" (P 166).

One draft of the table concludes with the single local geographical reference: "Dublin spring!", which would have afforded the clue that the deep descent is to "spring", rebirth, return to the beginning of a new civilization with new energy and a new-found language, the pattern indicated by Brooks Adams.

Momentarily there is a "FULL STOP" of language (P 167), and of seeing, and any possibility of affirmation. What sputters out instead is a hackneyed line of verse from Gray’s "Elegy", from the tradition Williams is refusing, and what is encountered is formless mud, "a detritus...a choking lifelessness. Merely blackened (opposite to "white as a clarity..."), the stones are not invented upon,
the sand is not fused into a bottle but is gluey. From this mud the problem is how 'to begin to find a shape'? Taking a jeering comment on the supposed paucity of American poetry, Williams in effect (and perhaps surprisingly) agrees with it, accepting it as basis for his often-repeated claim that what is needed is "the new". This now derives from the destruction of the old. The fragments are not "shored against my ruins" but "made piecemeal by decay" until "a/digestion takes place" (p 168).

A figure of his muse, the cancerous, broken-jawed woman is here offered a song by the poet, but his mood for the moment at least is recalcitrant. In an apparent reference to Europe and Eliot, he seems to contradict the cyclical position with which he opened the poem:

Who is it spoke of April? Some insane engineer. There is no recurrence.
The past is dead. (p 169).

Yet this is true for him, concerning the past as history. In its place is "the testament of perpetual change", which is a recurrence, but a recurrence of the new, the law of civilization and decay. Paterson,
the poet (largely overt at this stage, more of commentary and less of action) now observes that "the flood has done its work". Repeated in new form, the injunction to write carelessly suggests also Williams's "concrete indirection" an approach (presentation of concrete things without accompanying comment, like Stevens's "a minimum of making in the mind"):

Let the words
fall any way at all - that they may
hit love aslant

(\textit{P 169}).

Just as he is rejecting the European past, Paterson/Williams hints at the betrayal of America's possibilities by Americans themselves, ironically naming a figure from Roman history to do so. For this cryptic reference to Vercingetorix (\textit{P 170}) he provides his own gloss:

If there will ever come a prince to wake us from our modern utilitarian sleep, he may be from under a gray stone roof of Dijon, snelling of the grapes of the Cote d'Or where lived Vercingetorix, the last of the gauls to hold out against
Caesar. He was betrayed by his own tribesmates, as we all are in the end.

(Autobiography 210)

The broken-jawed woman becomes the old deaf woman who will mistake the canary's hiss for singing. This is a way of saying that the available language cannot fully cope with reality and it gives way to a prose account of African ritual, which should recall to the reader's mind the African wives of Book I, and the theme of "divorce". In this paragraph, as in the earlier, the women are involved with a tree, performing in song and gesture a fertility ritual. Its crux is: "Only married women, who have felt the fertility of men in their bodies, can know the secret of life" (P 171).

The "sweet woman" contrasts with the old woman (Muse) to whom Paterson has offered songs, the Venus figure, beautiful, but opposing the Muse: "Either I abandon you/ or give up writing" (P 171).

Book III closes with a lyric in which the falls' roar becomes very immediate, "the roar of the present". All the action of the poem to this point has been Paterson's "stream of consciousness", while these
are, in some sense, an externalization of "The
descent beckons". Paterson is explicit: "a speech/
is, of necessity, my sole concern" (P 172) and from
it he intends to make a replica which will counter
the effect of "the modern replicas". Making a repli-
ica involves rejection of the past (tradition) and
future (heaven, some kinds of ambition) in favour of
that precise moment "beside the sliding water". The
past has a special limited relevance, noted in the
essay on Charles Sheeler, for the artist who "is the
watcher and surveyor of that world where the past is
always occurring contemporaneously and the present
always dead needing a miracle of resuscitation to
revive it" (p. 232).

As for "la capella di S. Rocco" (P 172), the poet,
Williams writes to Reed Whittomore, "is the Jesuit
of his own mind, the end always justifies the means
if he produce a good poem" (SE 239). Should these
views appear to be over-subjective, he is not so simple.
Book III concludes, "this rhetoric is real" (to "comb
out the language" is as real as the man's combing
his Collie dog). He balances his own account in the
Kenneth Burke essay, declaring that: "Writing is
made of words, of nothing else. These have a contour
and complexion imposed upon them by the weather, by
the shape of men's lives in places" (SE 132). In such a context, of present fact, Paterson seeks his "meaning", to "lay it, white" beside the water, seeking through the facts "a clarity beyond" them.

One version of Book IV begins, "Paterson or a slave to Passion" and is followed by vernacular "details" of couples parting. Another note hints that here is to be discovered "a miracle of resuscitation". It reads: "A calm lies over the whole of this book -- an effete calm at the beginning but revived by a 'transfusion' at the end. The river, the foulest glinter in the world, next to the severn (?) but a river, a to and from river" (Yale). IV, i, is set mockingly as "in Ityl"67, including two traditional English pastoral figures, Corydon and Phyllis. Corydon being a lesbian whom Dr Paterson rivals for Phyllis's favours.68 Phyllis, for her part, is unable to respond to any man sexually.

Phyllis comes from Ramapo and was trained in Paterson as a masseuse. "This section is a dialogue between the two women," interrupted by Phyllis's semi-literate letters to her father, which reveal both her crudeness and the only love-relationship of which she is capable. They show her "failure to untangle the language" and the "perverse confusions which
follow". Corydon, who links Paterson city with the politician Nicholas Murray Butler and "his sister, the lame one", is herself a physical cripple.

Phyllis's father is a drunkard. One set of drafts (Yale 185) has the cryptic note "Silenus— recurrence". Later (in IV,ii) there are a number of references to Apollo, and the two successive sections may be built to some degree on Dionysian/Apollonian opposition. References to drunkenness occur at various points throughout the complete poem, while Phyllis's father may well be "Silenus", described by Edith Hamilton (whose work Williams consulted, according to Yale drafts, while he was making Paterson) as, "a jovial fat old man who usually rode an ass because he was too drunk to walk. He was associated with Bacchus...".

As Williams made clear (in letters to Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell, vide SL), Corydon is much the more sensitive of the two women. Among other matters, this is true of her response to language, but her language has become disconnected from "the shapes of men's lives in places", a fact conveyed in Williams's adroit play with the word "silly", used both in its earlier, Elizabethan pastoral, sense and its
current meaning. For Corydon, however, it is merely "semantics, my dear" (P 177). Even her proposed relationship with Phyllis is detached from reality ("Let's play games!" P 187).

The introductory exchange between Phyllis and Paterson is nervous. Paterson is "married man", while Phyllis has a boy friend (a short poem which may be related to this context is "Eternity", CLOP 36-38). All the relationships are abortive, with several references compounding Cupid's dart, the arrows of Artemis and the word "shot" (P 173, P 187, P 190). There are other repeated references to fertility symbols such as fish.

Paterson's relationship with Phyllis has some affinities with the "Beautiful Thing" section of Book III, even to "take off your clothes" and the repeated suggestion that Phyllis's dress is sweaty (hinting fertility, fruitfulness.)

Corydon reads Phyllis a poem, the introduction to which is mock early Pound and remains a flat parody of Eliot, using his subway motif from Four Quartets, his connection with Dante's Inferno, Shakespeare and Milton, and culminating in a jibe at his use of De Profundis in "Ash Wednesday". Her poem's title also suggests a work by André Gide and
further ramifications of the "divorce" theme. Paterson is Corydon's "rival", but Williams's own attitude to the lesbian is compassionate. He accepts her as part of his world and noted in a letter to Robert Lowell: "...I started writing of her in a satiric mood - but she won me quite over. I ended by feeling admiration for her and real regret at her defeat" (SL no.193, p.302).

Just as Phyllis's command of language is limited, so, too, is Corydon's, but in a different way. Hers is a "literary" language, divorced from reality. The contact between the two women is restricted by Phyllis's lack of insight and by Corydon's special tastes. Similarly, the relationship between Phyllis and Paterson is hedged in on one side by his being "married man" and on the other by her having a "boy friend", but ultimately because of the nature of their expectations of each other, what they want of each other.

In direct contrast is IV, ii. Draft notes (Yale) read: "(Curie: a different type of woman from the one just told). The 'gist'"; and:

The lecture on uranium (Curie) the splitting of the atom (first time explained
to me) has a literary meaning — in the splitting of the foot (sprung meter of Hopkins and consequently is connected thereby to human life or life — .[7]
(Yale; also UB autograph notebook, p.48)

Paterson/Williams takes his schoolboy son to the Solarium to hear a lecture on atomic fission. In an aside he recalls Norman Douglas's stoical remark that the "best thing a man can do for his son, when he is born, is to die" (P 201). The point is not irrelevant, as it may seem, since the whole section is rooted in Paterson's concern for his son's future.

Paterson suggests that the Solarium may be interpreted as a temple to the sun, IV, ii, having Apollo as "a kind of presiding deity"72. Although it is not carried a great deal further, the point is a useful one, on a plane moving back to The Book of Lead and forward to "Carry Nation as Artemis". On the evening of the lecture, "The moon was in its first quarter" (P 203), when Paterson's son, the future doctor, was born to his role. Apollo's son, Asklepios, was a doctor, the physicians' archetype, while Asklepios's mother, Coronis, the "crow maiden", is associated with the new moon. Daughter of Fire,
sister (or niece) of the murder-rapist Ixion, Coronis was herself murdered by Artemis.

Alchemical/mythological allusions occur in Paterson apparently intermittently, but enrich the text's active possibilities. The points just mentioned, for example, may offer the "unhatched sun" (P 202) as Paterson's sun or even as the future world with a true language, or cast light on the description of the tapestry in Book III:

... a docile queen, not bothered to stick her tongue out at the moon, indifferent, through loss, but queenly, in bad luck, the luck of the stars, the black stars (P 152)

Against the fact of Madame Curie's discovery of radium, (on which Williams's views had changed since his Poetry "notes" of 1919), is set the Gantryish preaching of Billy Sunday, contrast also to the park preacher, Klaus Ehrens. Sunday is hired by the "bosses" (United Factory Owners' Association) to break the Paterson strike, circumventing the strikers "by calling
them to God!" After his effort, Sunday is paid at the Hamilton Hotel.

A long letter from the young poet, A.G. (Allen Ginsberg. The initials were originally A.P. - suggesting Allen Paterson, "son" of Paterson) is now interpolated. A.G., more positive and enthusiastic, fills the vacancy left by the disillusioned poetess. Paterson and A.G. are also a contrast. In this Apollonian section, Paterson's actions are clear and deliberate, while A.G. tells him: "I ran backstage to accost you, but changed my mind, after waving at you, and ran off again. Respectfully yours,..." (P 206). A.G.'s "enthusiasm" is at odds with the "human objectivity" for which he is striving, but (even in this letter) his is a vital speech. Like Paterson, unlike C., he is searching for a "redeeming language".

Similar in spirit is Madame Curie's search. Williams uses Pierre Curie's secondary role in it analogically, with Eve Curie as the Virgin bearing Christ (the Redeemer):

But she is pregnant!

Poor Joseph,

the Italians say. (P 207)
He introduces Eve Curie in her own local setting, evoking the smells and sights of Paris. Paris, too, is "a woman waiting to be filled" (P 206) and the correspondence between Paris, Paterson, Madame Curie and A.D. is completed in the young poet's letter, where, speaking of himself, he claims that, "one actual citizen of your community has inherited your experience in his struggle to love and know his own world-city" (P 205).

"Dissonance...leads to discovery" (P 207). Williams uses his concept of dissonance here in a number of different ways. By citing the Curie experiments he indicates the conversion of mass into energy (metamorphosis). Such conversion had been predicted by Einstein?3, hence the scientist's fascination for Williams. As an outcome of extending the initial discovery physicists can now, with the aid of Mendelief's table of molecular weights (P 210) change elements at will.

Williams's way of describing the experimental process:

- to dissect away
the block and leave
a separate metal: (P 207).
relates it to sculpture, but also to the artist’s method of “discovery” generally, and Williams’s own experimental search for the “new measure” (vide SL p. 242-243).

He turns overtly to the theme of love (P 208), referring to Chaucer’s “Tale of Sir Thopas”, as a parody of a type of English metrical romance which employed typically jingling rhyme and the language of cliché.

Adapted from an actual one, the case report appears to be a private joke at the expense of the poetess, the “intestinal disturbance” linking it back to the Sir Thopas passage, which also conceivably be a judgment on the poetess. These two passages are an answer to the question, “Love, the sledge that smashes the atom?” (P 208).

Returning to Madame Curie, Williams depicts the difficulties of her material situation (like Pound’s Villon’s) and her actual discovery of radium, “LUMINOUS!”, the “radiant gist”, an inspirational discovery (vs. “knowledge the contaminant” – P 209) comparable with Columbus’s first landfall in the Western hemisphere. A passage from the Journal of Columbus’s first voyage, already quoted in IAG, is used again here, ending with the key phrase, “the
most beautiful thing which I had ever known" (P 209). Uranium, containing as it does the "radiant gist", is "a city in itself" (P 209), but has also the characteristic of "always breaking down / to lead", the prima materia.

A phrase (top P 210) continues the conversations of IV, 1, and is followed by the sexual cloud image taken up from earlier (P 104):

waiting for the sun to part the latia of shabby clouds , but a man (or a woman) achieved (P 210)

Woman, "the weaker vessel", is capable of "mathematics" or "murder", creating or destroying, "Sappho vs. Elektra!" Eve Curie is Sappho, the creator. But our civilization has decayed to such an extent that Carrie Nation is our Artemis, protectress of the young, anti-contact.

Perhaps an ironic answer to Horace Greeley's, "Go West, young man!", the young woman photographer, having been to Denver "to study chiaroscuro" (the white clarity and black lead which are life?) returns "with the baby/ openly" (P 211), in this respect being counterpart to Coronis and the child
Asklepios.

At various points in the Paterson text are hints of concern at the materialism of the church. The break between the reference to Abbess Hildegard (apparently a reference to a painting or drawing. One draft has "1462, at Bonn") and the "Advertisement" (p. 213) may have been filled with a suppressed section among the Yale drafts, on:

FOR SALE
This Desirable Church Property
IDEAL
as BUSINESS SITE.

As it stands, the remainder of the section is a Poundian attack on usury. Money is the "brain tumor" of Paterson (p. 214) (also the cancer of p. 210). The prevalent use of money creates a situation in which the ship (the Santa Maria, for example) is leaky.

Money : Joke
could be wiped out at stroke
of pen (p. 217)
A "joke" because it is in practice a meaningless fiction. The "surgeon" (financier) should not get all the benefit (credit), the patient should. In this context, Credit is the "radiant gist", the radium luminous in its uranium, the wind which drives the ship before it to safety and "discovery", or, in Williams's version of himself as summarized by Pound:

IN

vershun.

OKAY

In vershun (☞ 218)

Williams's graphically epitomizes the problem:

What is credit? the Parthenon
What is money? the gold entrusted to Phidias for the statue of Pallas Athena, that he "put aside" for private purposes

(☞ 216)

His solution is the Poundian one, "i.e. LOCAL control of local purchasing/ power" (☞ 218).

IV, iii, is the final section of Paterson as the poem was originally conceived and is an attempt to
resolve all the various themes which are woven through the whole work. It offers a number of paradoxes. In the opening conversation, She (the Mountain) says: "The past is for those who lived in the past" (p. 219), but later the old man reminiscing extols the Paterson (city) of earlier days, a pastoral scene markedly different from the world of Corydon and Phyllis.

The sea is a sea of blood, - living, murder, death, and also the waters of birth and "the sea of objectivity" (UB notebook, p.53) and memory. In addition the sea as memory has double significance, for in the old man's account of Paterson's past memory is an enhancement, richer than the present. Besides this it is a confinment, a chaos from which we move to escape.

To implement his account of life's "dissonances", Williams follows Nelson's version of the murder of a Dutch settler in his bed with a story told him by "an old friend, now gone" (Nathaniel West) of "a tall and rather beautiful young woman" (p. 221) encountered as a kind of epiphany, an incident recounted in a tone of generosity, "credit", self-giving, of an epitomization of the Venus figure. This leads to the symbol of the ash-tray, "a glazed/
Venerian scallop...A sea-shell" (P 221). The glazing links back to the bottle in the fire, while the motto on the ash-tray, "La Vertus est toute dans l'effort" is not to be taken as common moralizing, but refers to the effort of making, living, process. At one level, the ash-tray may be read as a metaphor for the poem. Or, rather, what is implied in the motto and particular shape of the ash-tray, implications amplified in the short prose paragraph (P 222), "Kill the explicit sentence...", another oblique statement of Millian's interest in "the bloody loam and not the finished product", in the action of making rather than the made object.

A memory of one of his "innumerable women" includes a variation in the definition of virtue:

Virtue, she would say

(her version of it)

is a stout old bird,

unpredictable (P 223)

an important attribute of process. Therefore of itself the "brain is weak", unable to "focus the world" or fertilize man's "marriage" to it. A sense of the physical world is much more real than mere knowledge.
Recollections of many women friends are preceded by the expressed desire for unity, to "hold together wives in one wife", park, rock, women, wife merge:

All these and more — shining, struggling flies caught in the meshes of Her hair (p. 225).

Historical Paterson, and the women, are, however, no more than reminiscences. In Yale drafts (185) the women are counterpointed against a creston-mathy of flowers, which follows a brief account of the discovery of the grave of Peter van Winkle, the dwarf. Elsewhere (Yale 189/5) this account is followed by Whitman's:

We level that lift, to pass and continue beyond...

Ages, precedents, poems, have long been accumulating indirected materials, America brings builders, and brings its own styles.

Yellow (p. 226) is the colour of the sun, the radiant gist and the "stain of love", and against these is set the serpent, the river of time, whose drink is sand (compacting the clouds — belly, the river sand, the dry sand in the bottle, — these
together may clarify the homophone, "the clouds resolved into a sandy salve" - P 10). This beautiful passage gives way to a brief "song" celebrating an approaching birth (in one draft referred to Williams's grandchild, Suzie) and also the sexual union of its progenitors:

And here's to the peak
from which the seed was hurled! (P 226).

From P 226 to P 232 the text is largely the old man recalling an earlier Paterson. This is based on a nine-page typescript at Yale, paragraph 2 of which reads:

A little story of Paterson: as told by an old man - The city of Paterson owes much of its importance to its historical associations. So to the past this little volume is dedicated. Although it is not written simply to give facts, it does give the correct facts about what it says.

The very fluidity of this account suggests that there is an unreality about it, and it is juxtaposed with
the young A.G.'s "inadequate" telling of his own attempt to realize the present Paterson, and with two accounts of past murders - the Goodell murder (p. 229) to set against the approaching birth, and John Johnson's murdering for money of the aged van Winkle couple.

A.G's promise is of life, to continue the search in which Paterson himself has been engaged, while the murders bring to the forefront an immediate concern at the time the poem was being written, war. In an earlier passage, concerning David Lilienthal, Williams has connected war with the capitalists. Now, in a telling reversal, he cries, "War! A poverty of resources . . ." (p. 233), dismissing it as a viable way of solving man's problems, "guts on the black sands of Iwo" convincing no one.

Ultimately the sea is chaos, carrying both weeds and seeds, wrack and words, and "I warn you, the sea is not our home" (p. 235). This negative is a denial of the final descent in the falling process which has taken Paterson out to the Passaic estuary. The outcome is not death, rather a new birth or a rebirth, but the point is disputed, voices at argument.
Among the chaos of the sea, however, the Venus figure may be realized:

Seed
of Venus, you will return . to
a girl standing upon a tilted shell, rose pink . (P 236)

This figure against Thalassa:

the blood dark sea!
nicked by the light alone, diamonked
by the light.

The Venus is metamorphosed into the original image
of lame-dog man, which is Paterson, reborn
and emerging from his dream of the falls. Scattering
seed, rubbing "the dry send off", he heads inland
followed by the dog (his thoughts, his enduring self,
his "faithful bitch" Muse) "toward Camden where Walt
Whitman, much reduced, lived the latter years of
his life" (Audob 392).

A dissonance closes the poem (rather, the poem
as originally planned). The prose excerpt of John
Johnson, an Englishman, hanged for murder amid a
"sea" of people is deliberately juxtaposed to the closing lines, which "sing". These are an enactment of Johnson's end, "the blast" of the last trump, the drop through the trapdoor; but Paterson has, an Odysseus, risen from the waves, born again to the ever-present now, the final somersault into birth. An earlier contents summary makes explicit what is implied here. In this (Yale) plan Book IV is titled "The River" and a seasonal schema has for IV : "Winter. The conserver of life, solver - forgetfulness - conserver and progenitor (summer imagined)." As "the beginning is assured,/the end", so the end itself coincides with a birth, and so the poem has no "final" end, but merely stops. Paterson, which is "ANY/EVERY PLACE" (Yale 189) is also every man, always returning home and starting out.

2. An unpublished letter to Viola Baxter Jordan dated June 11, 1914, contains a passing remark on "Handsome Mr Toune - or any other city..." (Yale Collection).

3. Included in the annual *New Directions*, 1937.


5. *SL* no. 113, p. 163

6. *SE* 94

7. UB typescript, headed "NOTES FOR A HYRIO DRAMA" reads:

   These are studies to be used in plays - if they can be written - or operas - if the music can be found. Love is the theme
through most of them, more or less formally treated. As contrasted with that there are bits of conv(x)esion studied for the rhythmic regularity of the words according to current colloquial conversation—more or less.

No particular play is intended. All that is intended is to try out the language for its sound. It's (sic) appeal to the ear is object enough in most cases—

Or something else—it doesn't matter;

something unforeseen (sic). The pleasure is in the abandon of the writing to its—to the sensitivities of the ear and the imagination, playing. Therefore a play.

An important amplification of this (UB) is included as Appendix II to Thirlwall's essay in MB 17, op. cit., p.305-306. See also SI no.161, p.251 to Kenneth Burke in 1947 and SL no.215, p.353-354 to Henry Wells, especially para.4, which includes a possible definition of what it is to "write carelessly".


12. See above, Chapter Ten, on "Chorel: The Pink Church". Whithead is mentioned at least twice in drafts related to Paterson IV (Yale 189/3). See also letters to Kenneth Burke and Horace Gregory on Dewey (SL nos. 95, p. 145 and 133, p. 224) and Autob 591.
13. In the late nineteen-thirties and early nineteen-forties Williams associated with and corresponded with David Lyle. At one stage he intended to adapt many of Lyle’s letters for use in the text of Paterson. Perusal of a Yale file of the letters reveals a definite kinship between the tone and method of Paterson and Lyle’s epistolary manner. Broadly interested in sociology, philosophy, economics and mathematics, he tends to use his findings in these fields somewhat unsystematically, though keeping in mind certain of his own central attitudes.


15. Quinn, p. 90.

16. Quinn, p. 90, and Thirlwall, op. cit., p. 275, who connects this with the spelling "Patterson" ("patters on", "chatterer") in An Early Martyr. The following passage occurs in Lyle’s letter
dated November 30, 1932: "Schiller defines a per - son as continuity. Person (L. persona (sic))...mask. Per, through plus L. sonare to sound".

And on December 11, 1940: "Paterson... which is as good as a CITY OF THE SUN".

17. A cancelled passage in Yale 186/3 supports this, expressing the cyclical view implicit in Williams's echo of Whitman/Eliot (p. 11, bottom). (Also relevant, closing paragraph of "Descent", 1AG 215). The draft reads:

- today is tomorrow is yesterday
- is time reversed, circuitous.

Metempsychosis, closely related, is illuminatingly discussed in Quinn's opening chapter.


19. Williams himself wrote about Whitman, but it is not my purpose here to attempt a direct linking of the poets' work. Points made in David Daiches's essay, "Walt Whitman's Philosophy",
(Literary Essays, New York, 1957, p.52-33) seem also to relate to Williams. Daiches writes of "dispersal" in Whitman, but the term is differently defined.


22. Iyle letter of December 1, 1938 (expanded April 9, 1939) (Yale), p.6.


25. The name "Pischek" is given various forms, this one occurring in "Notes in Diary Form" (BE) . Discussed by Thirlwall. It is noteworthy that Williams earlier habitually associated woman
and city. In "The Flower" (CEP 236) the city is the flower, but also woman. One title considered for Autoch was Root, Branch and Flower (SL no. 188, p. 295).

26. Jung, in his *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, (London, 1963; translated by R.F.C. Hull) cites a source which claims that the first men were made from the sweat of Ymir (p. 40, ins. 223, 229). Several instances are given there of sweat as a generative source.

27. R.S. Lynd, *Middletown*, (New York, 1929) and *Middletown in Transition*, (New York, 1937). In a letter dated November 10, 1957, Mrs Florence H. Williams noted that: "Muncie is a small city in Indiana that was chosen in a nationwide contest every year - as outstanding on various grounds. The cleanest, the most attractive - etc., etc. - there are various classes...I think Bill just liked the sound of the name - Muncie!"

28. Suggested by Sister Bernetta Quinn. Exact source not located, but a number of close resemblances, e.g., *National Geographic*, XVII (1906), p. 344, and XLIX (June 1926), p. 716: "The 'Better Halves' of a Mangebetou Chief, Lined Up in Order of Preference". The women are crouched as if seated on a log.

30. See Quinn, p.99 on "source" and "genesis", also for the text of Patch's brief speech which is taken from Jenny Marsh Parker, *Rochester a Story Historical*, (Rochester, New York, 1884).


32. In a notebook draft of *Paterson III* (UB) there are variants of this motif: "the aversion of scientific men to learning something new" (attributed to Freud), and, "as Anatole France put it, in Freud's time, 'Les Savants ne sont
"pass curium": Williams remarked to Harvey Breit, "But isn't poetry, at its most significant, the very antithesis of the academy?" - SI no. 130; p.194.


34. A number of small, private or semi-private jokes are hidden in the *Paterson* text. For this letter in the first edition of *Paterson I*, Williams used the initials T.J., possibly echoing Pound's "Canto XXXI", where a number of Jefferson's letters are quoted, Jefferson himself referred to throughout as "T.J.".

35. A parenthesis on p.40 of UB manuscript notebook, which contains drafts for *Paterson III* and *IV*, reads: "(Pound's story of my being interested in the loan whereas he wanted the finished product)".

36. UB draft sheet: "End with the monastery in the country as compensation or correlative (sic) of (to?) the city and its draggle."
37. This complements the passage from Edith Hamilton which Wagner, Weatherhood and others have applied to Williams, to the effect that the Greeks believed in simplicity, clarity and the beauty of common things. See Edith Hamilton, The Greek Way to Western Civilization, (New York, 1948), p. 50-51.


39. Yale drafts show that, while working on Paterson, Williams read, or at least consulted Henry Basford Parkes, The American Experience, (New York, 1947). Source of this exchange may be found in Parkes's Chapter Three (Vintage paperback edn., New York, 1959), p. 49. The original source, quoted by Parkes, is Benjamin Franklin's "Information to those who would remove to America" (1782). Williams adapts it to suggest criticism of America, possibly by an expatriate American.

41. "...Hamilton, at a New York dinner, replied to some democratic sentiment by striking his hand sharply on the table and saying, 'Your people, sir, - your people is a great beast!': Henry Adams, History of the United States of America During the first Administration of Thomas Jefferson, (New York, 1890), vol. I, p. 85.

42. UB draft locates the particular church in Spain, seen (it is not clear by whom) "going by bus from Arenas de San Pedro...to Avila".

Williams is not so much attacking industry as such. His target is uncontrolled private enterprise. Lilienthal had regarded TVA as both an experiment in decentralization and as against private monopoly. He was subsequently, during the period when U.S.A. was the only country with a viable A-bomb, first Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission.

Williams remarked in a letter to Srinivas Rayaprol that, "after all a bomb isn't unique and has existed in our wishes for centuries". (SL no. 181, p. 232).
43. UB draft: "The birds and the trees listened or didn't listen - not even the dog. Understand by that what was meant when it said St Francis spoke to the creature, going (?) about him".


46. Writing to Thomas Edward Francis in 1961 (letter on file at Yale, unpublished), Williams said: "This poem from the viewpoint of the complete art is the finest I have ever made since my discovery of the American idiom and the variable foot. That ends the theoretical controversy as to the structural poem..." (dated typewritten sheet 1/4/61). See also *Paris Review*, 32, p. 117, 113, 119, 120, and *IWP* 80-82.

48. The "She" is closely related to the figure in the De Soto essay in IAG (see above).

49. Note in Yale 186/1:

The poet's weapon is metaphor (sic) his strength is marriage. Marry us, the stream cries. Marry us, give us blood. We are cold, we are prone, we crawl (sic) and have prickles - give us the warmth (sic) of your invention we are prone. Honor us with metaphor (sic) closely fastened to our inerstness - or else! Marry, marry, marry, marry! the water pours down. She was married with empty words and at the magic sound of my stream threw herself upon the bed - a pitiful gesture of a tuned mind - lost among the words:

Invent, discover or nothing clear will surmount the drumming in your head. Nothing clear. There is nothing clear, He fled! pursued by the roar!

To this is added the pencil note: "End of Part II".
50. Compare Lynd, Middletown, op. cit., p.252.

51. Lyle's letter of November 30, 1938: "To be... healthy and whole...depends on what we can truly believe of a superhistorical...or Atman...or great (ether) wind...and the various immovable spaces, immovable ethers...nets or webs or Middletowns of material...or thatstuff".

Other points in the letter: mention of Lawrence's "dark otherness", of the hurricane wreckage of a telephone system in N.E. U.S.A., and of what can be achieved by walking, dancing.

52. "Book III/ the theme is love...tenderness" (Yale draft).

53. "Lambert castle, the lookout and pleasure spot where the Ryerson girls used to go for their great parties - fresh from painting school: now the public convenience center: where the preacher has pulled a few benches together for Sunday service"  (Yale 135). See also P 21.

55. Lambert appears to contribute to the character of Joe Stecher in In the Money, while Gurlie's name may well derive from Elizabeth Gurley Flynn of the I.W.W. (mentioned p.122).


57. While Williams was working on Paterson III, Iyle wrote to him (April 2, 1948) of a book salesman who had said: "There is dead silence all over this country". (Yale).

58. Jung (see fn.26, above), p.42, fn.229 - "they conceive in the baths" (p.128,129).


64. The passage beginning with the last two lines on p. 142.

65. See KH, 11, italicized paragraph.


67. "The form, an idyl of Theocritus, a perverted but still recognizable 'happy' picture of the past, is there" - SL no. 195, p. 305.

68. Thirlwall suggests that Phyllis is Dolores Mary Fischak, MD 17, p. 257.

69. Karl Shapiro, In Defense of Ignorance, (New York, 1952), p. 149, suggests that Williams's definition of "divine" is near "drunken".

70. Edith Hamilton, Mythology, (Boston, 1942), p. 41.

72. Peterson, op. cit., p.195

73. Quinn, p.121

74. Levy (Peterson suggests Carlo Levi) could well be Williams's contemporary, the German economic historian Hermann Levy, whose *Monopoly and Competition*, (London, 1911) is a study of English industrial organization. Another of his works, *Economic Liberalism*, (London, 1913) discusses the shift from laissez-faire to "social" economic liberalism at the end of the nineteenth-century. The phrase "antagonistic co-operation" could well derive from such a context, but so far has not been traced. Peterson (p.195) suggests that the "co-operation" is between poetry and prose.

75. In UB rough draft of a talk, "The Attack on Credit Monopoly" - Williams speaks of credit control as "the gist of the economics of the power age". Williams's attitude is largely that of Walters's "Advertisement" (p.213), for government control rather than private exploitation. He proposes Social Credit as guard against Labor or Fascism.
His brief analysis of the pro-social to anti-social trend of completely uncontrolled individualism is similar to Hermann Levy's in *Economic Liberalism*.
CHAPTER TWELVE

PATERSON FIVE

Williams apparently intended the original Pater son as a unity. The major difficulty in accepting it as such is the way in which the poetess's letter takes over a very long stretch at the end of Pater son II. Many critics (Randall Jarrell and Marianne Moore among them) have found each successive book less satisfactory than its predecessor. Some of these critics see in Pater son V a lifting of the poem, but even Williams himself was forced to see, with its publication, that, as for Pater son, "there can be no end to such a story" (p. 7) in the terms he had laid down for himself in I-IV. This statement alone shows that he saw a qualitative difference between Book V and the earlier books.

Pater son V is set not by the Passaic River but by the Hudson. Having turned back towards Camden, Doctor Pater son found himself at the
Cloisters, overlooking the New Jersey Palisades, contemplating the Unicorn Tapestries. His attention to these, a flower of late mediaeval Europe, may seem an abandonment of concern with the local, but since in fact the tapestries are located at a branch of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, this is not strictly so. They are but a short distance from Paterson.

In his note to the complete Paterson Williams remarked, "I had to take the world of Paterson into a new dimension if I wanted to give it imaginative validity" (P 7-8). An important aspect of the poem as a whole is its concern with the separation between life and art, or learning. Williams seeks to discover a fusion. In Book V we have his clearest celebration of the imagination. Formally we may regard this book as enclosing or containing the earlier four (a sixth might have either fitted into the container or made a further container). There is some evidence that Williams may have planned to go further even while he was working on Book IV. Some lines in Yale 122/6 read:

the clustered violet without odor - and without residual meaning
the clarity, sacrificing nothing — like a woman who is beautiful without affectation — the clarity, retain the clarity: which is a mind made up

These lines may be related to points in the poem expressing desire for clarity in man's relation to thing (P 140, P 32). Contrasting with "the din of fracturing thought" we here have "a mind made up". Enclosed at the end of these lines is the phrase: "The Fifth Act and Book". Elsewhere in the same set of drafts is written: "Maybe even a 5th book of facts. / Recollection".

With reference to the odorless flower, early version of "Of Asphodel, that Greeny Flower" were apparently intended as Paterson V, which was to have no prose but "to embody whatever I have learned of form (with variants)" (Yale 190/1). A provisional title for Book V was "The River of Heaven", and a complete page of autograph draft reads:

Of asphodel, without color, a sort of buttercup/ ragged but a/ flower — a/ stringy, odorless ghost/ a sort of mental/ flower, a sort of/ buttercup/ ranunculosa
a rumour of a flower/like a priest in/
hell/ like a lecturer on the/ Lord, a
Thomist/. blossoms in those fields

This summary, and much of the other material, suggests
death-preoccupation, but also a sense of an attempt
to encompass what has gone before. If the fifth
was to be a book of "facts" then these facts were
to be "a sort of mental flower".

From one point of view this accounts for the
dedication to Lautrec's memory (the painter is
mentioned briefly in III.i). Like Breughel, who
could discover the "radiant gist" amid grossness,
Lautrec was like Williams also, in this and in their
common fascination by women. Williams is to make
of the "whore and the virgin an identity", (P 245),
while Lautrec notoriously sought and found beauty
among the whores of Paris.

Williams explained to Thirlwall, "When the
river ended in the sea I had no place to go but back
in life...I had to take the spirit of the River up
in the air" (MD 17, p.290). His opening lines
imitate a bird's flight, directing a specific
reading (as he told Stanley Koehler)^2. The casting
off point is "Paterson/-its rocks and streams" on a
"cloudy morning" - weather with feminine associations throughout the poem. He reasserts his key position:

Not prophecy! NOT prophecy!
but the thing itself! (P 242)

in favour of what Hillis Miller calls, "a subtle theory of poetry which rejects both the mirror and the lamp, both the classical theory of art as imitation, and the romantic theory of art as transformation."³

Himself as Don Perlimplin, Lorca's "aged bridegroom", Paterson/Williams opens a complex meditation on erotic love, art, and human morality. His figure for the human soul is the unicorn of the tapestries. In The Cloisters there are six of these tapestries and the remnants of a seventh. These date from the late fifteenth and very early sixteenth centuries, the first and seventh being later than the others.⁴

Characteristically the unicorn (which appears in early Indian and Near East folklore) is a swift, powerful animal, the medieaval belief being that it could be caught only by a virgin. When she confronted him the unicorn would lay his head in her lap and be taken by the hunter. Allegorizing the Incarnation, this legend also became associated with courtly love.
The seventh tapestry in the series, showing the unicorn alone, symbolizes Christ incarnate (the enclosed garden symbolizes both the Virgin and the Incarnation), but, in Rorimer's words, "Since the unicorn is leashed with a golden chain, symbol of marriage, to a tree bearing pomegranates, symbols of fertility, this tapestry is also to be interpreted as the consummation of marriage" (p. 38).

In Paterson V Williams comes nearest to the overt Poundian method, effectively combining local and mythical. Williams allows himself to draw his full range of experience towards his own locus and, indeed, remarks in the relevant drafts that, "all places remain the same: all are 'Paterson' to me if I make them so / ... whether Hong Kong or the past: their details are interchangeable if I have the eyes for it" (Yale 190/1). Thus he expands himself when he refers back to his thirty year-old translation of Philippe Soupault's The Last nights of Paris, a work relevant in a number of ways: Soupault's Dadaist method, intense interest in certain aspects of America (sports, fashions, jazz, movies), his picture of the decline of European society including a sympathetic evoking of fin de siècle whores and prostitutes. Against Paris's decline is set:
A WORLD OF ART
THAT THROUGH THE YEARS HAS

SURVIVED!  (P 244)

Its art makes the museum real, art itself being "la réalité". The letter which follows, from a woman writer friend and contrasting with the poetess's complaints, tells of the flower-laden Pennsylvania countryside. In its joyousness, the letter is a bouquet for the poet, sharing his own sense of place, echoing the opening lines of "The descent beckons": "a place is made of memories as well as the world around it" (P 245).

It is succeeded by a single line which focuses the poem as a whole and is also central to Williams's whole career: "The whore and the virgin, an identity". The Venus figure, in its apparent contradictions, its "disguises", is located as the core of Williams's response to the world, both "Beautiful Thing" and "your virgin purpose, / the language" (P 219), and also the Pink Church. Venus, all man's whore and yet the virgin in whose lap the unicorn lays his head, the ordering faculty and so the Muse seen from one aspect.

Now the "walking" motif is resumed, here related to Audubon, in whom art and nature (imagination and
chaos) are reconciled, figured in the "horned beast among the trees/ in the moonlight" (p 245-246).
Throughout these passages Williams uses the metamorphic technique to great effect, fusing actual accurate observation of flowers with the tapestry's "millefleurs background". This background is, in fact, the grounding of the narrative of the tapestries in multitudinous actuality.

At this point in the text occur the words "circled" and "sphere", an undertone of Book V, suggesting the world's multiplicity, the shadowings of subconsciousness and, later specifically, cyclical renewal. All is to be encompassed by "indirection", presentation of objects without explicit comment, allied to a particular sense of locality and reality: "Here/ is not there,/ and will never be" (p 246). Parallel to this, "the artist/ has no peer". A legendary beast "in a field crowded with small flowers", the unicorn is also a figure of the artist, both being regal.

The unicorn, in the seventh tapestry, is both dead and reincarnated. Thus he states Williams's implied belief in the cycle, but the fact of death is not denied, for "Death/ has no peer" and
death is a hole
in which we are all buried (p 246).

Finally ambiguous, Williams states his belief that
death, after all, has a peer, a hole in the bottom
of the hole:

It is the imagination
which cannot be fathomed.
It is through this hole
we escape . . . (p 247).

Interpolating Ginsberg's letter here allows
reiteration of Williams's own non-parochial sense of
locality: "In any case Beauty is where I hang my hat.
And reality. And America...I mean to say Peterson
is not a task like Milton going down to hell, it's
a flower to the mind too" (p 247). Ginsberg and his
mentor have the same idea, looking to "big sad poppa"
Peterson for a new language, whose (in a phrase of
Lyle's) "grammar is inherent structurally in the
universe". Contrary to any suggestion that Williams
finally came to perceive all experience as mind-dep-
dendent, the precise interaction between universe and
observer is one in which the latter invents, but also discovers, this being the precise nature of:

Pollock's blobs of paint squeezed out with design!  (P 248)

Chance and design together, the unknown and the known, another subtle figuring of virgin and whore, and the question and answer,

which most endures? the world of the imagination most endures  (P 248)

The "world of the imagination" is not merely the unknown, but the concatenation of the two, "squeezed out...pure from the tube". Thus it is necessary to "WALK in the world", to have direct contact with it. Speeding through it or over in car or airplane, this is not true contact. Still less so is to attempt to see it "from the moon", out of any kind of real contact. There must be "a 'present'/world", but to complete it:
a secret world,
a sphere, a snake with its tail in
its mouth

(249).

Besides figuring the other aspect of the world of imagination, the symbolic snake, tail in mouth, both destroys itself and nourishes itself by feeding on its own body. It is therefore cyclical, "rolls backward into the past".

Next is an excerpt from a prose piece by a young poet, Williams's disciple, describing events in a South American whorehouse, one of the whores seen against a white door, "...snow, the virgin, O bride" (250), a chaotic language set against a refrain of the word "FOUR" (the alchemical quaternity, for order, completeness). The passage's design closes on a repetition of the colour, white, lifting the whole experience into the world of imagination and then the circling snake figure is repeated, transformed: "A lady with the tail of her dress/on her arm" (apparently a detail from the damaged fifth tapestry), emphasis also on her "round/ head".

The tapestry king (Francis I of France) is also Paterson "the king-self", creator king, both in imagination and erotically:
V, i. closes in a compounding of erotic love and imagination, where the satyr’s role (that is, the artist’s) is to guard Venus in the water. Casting our minds back to the fate of the aged Don Perlimplin, the poet finishes with an item of frankly sexual advice, "Loose your love to flow/ while you are yet young" (P 252), but the phrasing contains his larger urgency, of the need for love, and to express it.

Sappho provides the opening antithesis of V, ii. A professorial pronouncement which makes her seem vapid is set against a "broken" translation of four Sapphic stanzas telling of the creative fire and sexual, generative sweat. This gives way to a typical Poundian pronunciamento on economics, towards which Williams’s attitude is by no means unequivocal, placing it as he does between Sappho and her "modern replica".

Pound’s insistence on "something as simple as 2 plus 2 makes four" (P 254) echoes the refrain in the passage about the Rio whorehouse, therefore contrasting with it. The sum may also be read as his
rejection of part of himself, pointed if we recall Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, his insistence on having two and two equal five and his description of the rational sum as "a piece of insolence". Pursuing his method of "indirection", Williams allows Pound's tone and vocabulary to make their own impression.

Paterson/Williams longs to relate to (or name, or conceive) the "woman in our town", figure of his Muse: "It is all for you" (P 257); but the "you" includes (Audubon's) birds and the jazzman Mezz Mezzrow, from whose *Really the Blues* a paragraph is taken, momentarily fixing on the unreal, racial white/black opposition (the "Beautiful Thing" sequence having shown already its unreality for Williams himself), holding that if black and white could find a common language (Rapp, rap, — talk) — "you could dig the colored man's real message and get in there with him, like Rapp" (P 257), wholeness would be achieved. Mezzrow himself effected reconciliation through the art of a coloured woman (Bessie Smith).

Art is seen as a satyr's dance, with an element of the child, but "not the work/ of a child" (P 259). Even, "the shark that snaps/ at his own trailing guts" (P 234), an inversion of the snake symbol, becomes
a figure of the artist, in one of his creations, "fish/swallowing/ their own entrails" (P. 259). This three-tiered line passage resolves into a series of epiphanic moments, first the emergence from a chrysalis, then moments of mythology, of art figuring love, and all these reduced in scale by a factual account of a heroic Jew murdered by the Nazis. Yet in some sense the shot Jew and Beethoven's music are given equal value by being there together in the poem.

The moment of tragic grandeur offered by the massacre of the Jews in the pit is played down by means of the "fashionable grocery list" offered to interviewer Mike Wallace as a poem and defended as rhythm. It is no accident that the E.E. Cummings poem cited contains a series of movements vastly important in Paterson (presumably part of the reason why Williams uses the whole passage) - fall, leaps, float, tumble, drift, whirl - not to mention the cat! (P. 261). True Williams in the interview professed not to "understand" the poem, to "reject it as a poem", but that is in the interview. His use of it in Paterson is indirection, not rejection. It is a thing and, like his own "grocery list", stresses the important primitiviting, a piece of reality given value by its location.
V,iii, turns to another painter, Breughel, to a Nativity, with Virgin and Baby (linking with IV, Curie), some emphasis being placed on Joseph, the foster-father, pitied by the Italians earlier in the poem and here his fellows: "butt", cause of their "amazement". Throughout this passage Williams is seeing the Muse as mother of art, with the artist as foster-father. Making a rapid shift he considers the shoddiness of modern "morality" and the paucity of modern government (through Dahlberg's letter P 267).

Older, Paterson, although "the dog of his thoughts/ has shrunk" (P 268) ponders his memories. His imagination is also a "flight of birds, all together", a tapestry "woven/in his mind" centred on the artist-satyr\(^9\). The shrinking consists in his feeling that "the river has returned to its beginnings" (P 271). A reconciliation, always potential, has been accomplished, summed up in a phrase (slightly modified) from "The Wanderer": "and 'I knew all (or enough)/it became me . " (P 271).

He confronts the idealist possibility:

- shall we speak of love
  seen only in a mirror
- no replica? (P 272)
He rejects this again, again stressing the need for both mirror and touch:

- every married man carries in his head the beloved and sacred image of a virgin whom he has whored.

Thus the "marriage" theme as presented earlier is modified, for here the whoring of the virgin implies the virility of the married man (Paterson). For "King-self" Paterson, "Anywhere is everywhere" (P 273).

This implies all possible metamorphoses, including the "young man/ sharing the female world" (P 276). Drafts (Yale 190/3) include a five-stanza poem addressed to Sappho and concerning the artist's self-love, which modulates into a memory of his English grandmother (the "china doorknob" an echo from KH, p.11).

Finally, Williams chooses not to adopt Lyle's aphorism from Protagoras that "man is the measure of all things", but takes instead an important modification of it - man as measurer, choosing his measure in the dance of life. As he had written many years earlier, the poem, the artist's creation is "a new
object, a play, a dance which is not a mirror up to nature" (SE 91). Dance and ground, with the latter uncertain in quality, changing its nature; and the dance ultimately signifying complete marriage of substance and form, balance between chaos and the deathly rigidity of fixed form. The "infinite particles of dissimilarity" are recognized in the dance which is our "hidden desire" (SE 16, KH Prol) and it is for this that the "poet transforms himself into a satyr and goes in pursuit of a white skinned dryad" (KH 50).

Deliberately moving to a new location in Book V, poet as eagle has indeed cast off "rebelliously... from its crag", viewing all earlier antitheses, as it were, from above. Book IV ended in a counterpointing of dissonances, but in the contemplative fifth book Williams has not been confined by his earlier adherence to the thing. Moving into his "new dimension" has afforded resolutions, even though it becomes clear (if only through the existing fragment of Book VII) that Paterson is, of its very nature, open-ended.

The wholeness of the poem rests in its thorough-going engagement to reality, its commitment to process rather than completeness.

2. Paris Review 32, op. cit., p.127. The identical shaping had been used in a periodical of the 'twenties with which Williams was familiar. Tony Palmer's poem, "Crinky Coeur", contains the lines:

   1

   1

   1

   1

   1

   1

   2

   - swagger aslant slew of wind.

   In the same issue, Eugene Jolas's poem, "Immigrant", is made with a three-tiered line.


7. Gilbert Sorrentino, "Bordertown" (ms. Williams Collection, Yale).

8. In American, "horn" has not the sexual significance it has in English, but these lines correspond to an unquoted phrase of Sorrentino's; "a woman's face serene in the anal violation".

9. Hidden in this passage may be a reference to the fact that in his early St Elizabeth days Pound needed medical attention for his big toe over a considerable period.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CONCLUSION

By the time Williams published *Paterson IV* his position as one of the foremost American poets was assured, a situation not in any way affected by his difficult, ultimately abortive, relationship with the Library of Congress in the early nineteen-fifties. From that time on he gathered a host of followers and admirers, most notably among the Black Mountain group, which today seems to be the true lifeline of the American poem.

During the 'fifties, in a very short span of years, he published the important *SEP* (1951), *Autob* (same year), completed the Stecher trilogy with *The Build-Up* (1952), (least successful of the trilogy because he relinquishes close attention to Flossie's childhood to show the family's assimilation into middle-class culture. In so doing he loses tension and clarity of line and makes Gurlie and Joe
mere sketches. Concentrating on the young girls and
the Bishop boys he alters the pace and density of the
narrative, which has a somewhat anecdotal lack of
cohesion). OEP heralded the collected (or selected)
gathering of all Williams' work - short stories (1950,
augmented in 1961), essays (1954), letters (1957),
plays (1961), OLP (1950, revised 1963), "lost poems" (1957), besides a translation and a memoir of his
mother.

Autob, letters and essays are of auxiliary
interest, although it is certainly true that further
collections of letters and essays of equal value
could be made. Evidently written "carelessly",
exhibiting the characteristic lack of completeness,
Autob is both a useful and vivid account of the life.
McAlmon, in a letter (Yale) claimed that some of its
facts are inaccurate, while Winifred Bryher responded
to its account of her by attacking Williams in her
own autobiography. 1 Casual in construction, having
the perspective only of the immediate moment, Autob's
true value occurs in moments of splendid insight.

The great interest of the last fifteen years or
so of Williams's life is to be found in his preoccu-
pation with measure, and in his immense achievements
in the poem after he had apparently finished Paterson
in 1951, *The Desert Music and Other Poems* (1954) and *Journey to Love* (1955), the two books which preceded *Paterson V*, consist almost entirely in poems in the three-tiered line, the measure he believed he had always been searching for (but which he modified in various ways for much of the work in his final book, *Pictures from Brueghel* (1962)).

His late involvement in two concepts, measure and "the variable foot" is anticipated in a sentence of KH: "A thing known passes out of the mind into the muscles" (KH: 71). This is the basis of his often repeated claim that structure, not subject-matter, is the poet's contact with reality, the one way in which he can modify it. "Structure" is the presentation of reality with the aid of invention (and/or discovery). In his essay, "The Poem as a Field of Action" (worked on at the same time as *Paterson III and IV*), he observes: "Now we have come to the question of the origin of our discoveries. Where else can what we are seeking arise from but speech? From speech, from American speech..." (BE 289), but he had expressed the same idea many years earlier in remarking that "Pound's line is the movement of his thought", which is its measure. Elsewhere: "The only reality we can know is MEASURE" (BE 283),
which is itself relative.

Its relative nature is evident in his concept of the "variable foot", the working of which he described quite clearly to Richard Eberhart in a letter in 1954 (the poem cited are (see PR 75 and PR 63), from The Desert Music, published that year):

By measure I mean musical pace....

By its music shall the best of modern verse be known and the resources of the music. The refinement of the poem, its subtlety, is not to be known by the elevation of the words but - the words don't so much matter - by the resources of the music.

To give you an example from my own work - not that I know anything about what I have myself written:

(count) -- not that I ever count when writing but, at best, the lines must be capable of being counted, that is to say, measured - (believe it or not), -- at that I may, half consciously, even count the measure under my breath as I write. --

(approximate example)
(1) The smell of heat is boxwood
(2) when rousing us
(3) a movement of the air
(4) stirs our thoughts
(5) that had no life in them
(6) to a life, a life in which
(or)
(1) Mother of God! Our Lady!
(2) the heart
(3) is an unruly master
(4) Forgive us our sins
(5) as we
(6) forgive
(7) those who have sinned against

Count a single beat to each numeral... Over
the whole poem it gives a pattern to the meter
that can be felt as a new measure. It gives
resources to the ear which result in a language
which we hear spoken about us every day.

(SL no. 211, p.326-327).

This and other pronouncements, such as the late
long essay on "Measure"², suggest that there is little
difference between the "variable foot" and Charles Olson's
conception of a "breath unit" or "cadence unit"³. In
each case the measure has two characteristics: (a) it is a unit of natural speech, and (b) the unit as such is dependent on the individual speaker at least as much as on the requirement of making communicable sense. It follows from this that an American poet, using the American idiom, will have American speech-rhythms. Poets such as Gary Snyder have gone further, to suggest that the measure of a poem depends on the dominant psycho-physical activity of its maker at the time when it is made. For Williams (and others, such as Zukofsky, Creeley) this is almost the whole explanation of measure, but not quite. Williams himself mentioned to Eberhart the connection with music, and "music" in the poem is the continuing relation between the poet and the world about him. Syntactical groupings apart, Williams's other chief requirement for measure is "vividness", direct unselis-erilying contact with each object in the world. True measure depends on it. 4

In the essay "On Measure - Statement for Old Woman" (38) Williams makes direct connection between measure and morality, as when he says, "The very grounds of our beliefs have altered. We do not live that way any more; nothing in our lives, at bottom, is ordered according to that measure..." (38 337). This is of a piece with
rejection of traditional measure, and forms such as the
sonnet, use of which appeared to him either foolish or
even reprehensible.

Reprinting "The descent beckons" from Paterson II
as the opening poem of *The Desert Music and Other Poems*
("The Descent"), he did so because he thought of it as
"my solution to the problem of modern verse" (MD 17,
p.278). Obscured in Paterson because of the very
nature of that poem, "The Descent" is a characteristic
example of Williams's late tendency towards discursiv-
ness, first pervasively evident in some of the less
successful poems of *The Weise*.

By this late stage his devotion to things has rec-
eded to become part of a larger approach, a discussion
of life, expression of a view of life in which love is
central and necessary:

Love without shadows stirs now
beginning to awaken
as night
advances          (PE 74, 8M)

The change from the early 'fifties onward is due in part
to the simple fact that he had become old and ill, and
as a result his physical surroundings were more restricted.
As fits his own theory of measure, his late lines is less rapid, more contemplative, sometimes even (the point is Kingsley Weatherhead's) "faltering".

In "To Daphne and Virginia" (E 75, DM), the poem he cited to Eberhart, addressed to his daughters-in-law, he reasserts his view that "the poem alone focuses the world" (E 242). He claims, asking the women be patient that he talks to them in a poem:

there is no other
fit medium.

The mind
lives there.

He adds, later: "A new world/ is only a new mind". It would be a misjudgment to read this as Williams making the world over in his own image. What counts is the focus. He stresses what he has always known, that each person's contact with reality is peculiarly his own. This becomes quite explicit when he combines a natural fact with a figure of speech (which may also be called a "psychological fact"), simultaneously subscribing to the world of phenomena and revitalizing the figure:
We are not chickadees
on a bare limb
with a worm in the mouth.
The worm is in our brains...

Meditating on the stresses of sexual love, the irrational urge to destroy love (and perhaps marriage, too), he is troubled a little by recollection of sexuality and even the tinge of it he still feels for these younger women. Yet there is a "healing odor" abroad, in which he can write a poem. Part of the same world is a pair of robins nesting and, an analogy for himself,

a heavy goose
who waddles, slopping
noisily in the mud of
his pool (PB 79, DM).

"The Orchestra" (PB 80, DM) also concerns love, suffering, making poems. The orchestra moves from a cacophony, through a twittering to a design. As he regards each instrument separately so also the poet is conscious of all sorts and conditions of people — old, children, sick, dying — "together, unattuned/ seeking a common tone", which is love. This common tone,
which is also the "design", is sought by means of the ordering principle (i.e., the orchestra). This design is to be carried through despite the "wrong note", expressed in a prose quotation: "Man has survived hitherto because he was too ignorant to know how to realize his wishes. Now that he can realize them, he must either change or perish." (IB 82, BM). Here ignorance is in direct contrast with man's innocence, the ground of his love, the means by which he can change his wishes rather than perish.

"For Eleanor and Bill Jonasen" (IB 83, BM) (the other poem quoted to Eberhart) is also a meditation on love and old age, no longer "a flight of small cheeping birds":

Now,

in the winter of the year,

the birds who know how
to escape suffering
by flight

are gone. Man alone
is that creature who

Cannot escape suffering
by flight

Here the poet is both man and woman, not inclusively as
at the end of Paterson IV, but dependently, so that his wife has become an essential part of his very existence. The poem’s "she" could as well be his Muse, the "flower" to whom he clings in fear, in old age, offering up this prayer to Mary, apotheosis of his Venus, "the female principle of the world".

Similarly age, his pain, allows him to identify with the injured, dying dog ("To a Dog Injured in the Street" - *PE* 86, E1). He feels the finality of his own situation, as he does that of the dog, resulting in his ultimate detachment regarding the world’s fate, which had been one of his nearest concerns. He ponders Keats, master-poet of his youth, slightly misquoting him (to rid the context of any air of pretentiousness) and his friend René Char all of whose suffering is concentrated into poems of "sandy rivers, of daffodils and tulips". Williams's own pain reminds him of his kicking a puppy in childhood, and of the dead rabbit "on the outspread palm/ of a hunter's hand", memories almost too strong for "the power of beauty/ to right all wrongs". Yet memory serves to focus beauty, his ultimate belief, assuaging his cry.

Now, for him, "Memory/ is liver than sight". It is the dominant of the "two worlds" (the other "the rose in bloom") and serves largely as a substitute for action, but even so it is a continuation of process.
Looking back, he is able to affirm that the fact of living, of having lived, is in itself the "virtue". As he puts it in "Deep Religious Faith":

All that which makes the pear ripen
or the poet's line
come true!
Invention is the heart of it. (PB 95, DI)

Invention is his main effort as a poet, for without it "the paralytic is confirmed/ in his paralysis".

"The Yellow Flower" (PB 89, DI) is deliberately kept out of full focus, so that in it we may gain from all the richness of Williams's earlier treatment of flowers - the direct, flower as woman, flower as poem. Here also the flower's crookedness is his own pain and sickness. From a mustard flower it becomes the "odorless flower of Paterson V: "some recognized/ and unearthly flower", His central question here is of life's purpose:

But why the torture
and the escape through
the flower?

Able to see clearly his own mortality, the "ruin" of
"all that I hold dear", he has through the eyes and through the lips and tongue the power to free myself and speak of it (FB 91, DM)

But why does "the tortured body of my flower" exist? This is answered by implication, the "crooked and obscure" flower is also "sacred" because it exists for me to naturalize and acclimate and choose it for my own

This sense of sacredness is amplified in "The Host" (FB 92, DM):

It is all (since eat we must) made sacred by our common need.

A more explicit, conventional religious sense, a quality of these late poems, is stated here:
There is nothing to eat,
seek it where you will,
but of the body of the Lord.

Context shows that this is anything but a subscription to orthodoxy. These lines precede a statement which has become controversial: "Only the imagination/ is real?", which, to Roy Harvey Pearce for example, is read as a statement of some form of "idealism". In fact, yielded to the imagination as the Lord's body are the "blessed plants/ and the sea". Through force of these the imagination "becomes real". The world has "otherness", made real to the perceiver by being transformed in his imagination, as various products of plants and sea make the host which, however, attains its complete nature only in the imaginations of the religious. In "The Pink Locust" (FB 140, JL), taking a famous Gertrude Stein proposition, he states the case from a different viewpoint:

A rose is a rose
and the poem equals it
if it be well made.

In the specific instance Williams remains unconvinced by the host produced in priestly imaginations, more inter-
ested in the priest with whom he might "carry on a conversation". Close enough to Stevens, he ends the poem by suggesting that he as poet could have offered them "the food" of real present imaginings, as Mr T does in achieving his entrechat (FN 101, DM, "The Artist").

The artist in "The Mount Hospital Garden" (FN 97 DM) is St Francis of Assisi. The garden is a metaphor for the restrictions of a life in which the imagination is limited or distorted. Another theme woven into the poem is that of "bawdy" love; but the active distinction between this bawdy love and "Holy love" is not kept clear throughout. Love (of whichever sort) is both terrifying and revelatory. Bawdy love is the "first folly", after which one may discover "in the full sunlight" the summer realization of Holy love.

In the long title poem "The Desert Music" (FN 106-120) Williams's concerns are akin to those in Paterson V "The dance" in the poem centres on a decrepit cripple who sleeps on the international bridge between Juarez and El Paso. His physical presence suggests both life ("Egg-shaped") and death, the life-cycle. What is to be said about the area inhabited by this creature, the border between human and inhuman, life and death? By what means can anything be said:
Only the counted poem, to an exact measure:
to imitate, not to copy nature, not
to copy nature

NOT, prostrate, to copy nature

but a dance: to dance

(PB 109)

Conscious of the Aristotelian concept here (a matter
discussed with Cid Corman over these very lines, Corman's
was letter/ at one stage apparently to be included in
Paterson V. See Yale drafts) Williams insists on the
subtle distinction between "representation" and "re-present-
ation", the latter implying an action of the imagina-
tion rather than mere copying of nature. The dance is
the act of re-presenting. Its music is the poem and,
while the dance continues, the desert itself.

Opposed to the dance (of life) is the law, whose
product is a corpse. Poem, poet and locus are all
simultaneously subject and object:

an agony of self-realization

bound into a whole

by that which surrounds us.

Fully encountered, the desert is that otherness which
could become fertile if it were watered by the poem.
The poet's desire is to give himself to the scene,
identify with it, its "Texas rain" and begging children.
Also the poem is exactly identified with the actions
in it, even to the initial impulse of retraction.

Entering the strip joint, they observe its dancer:
"She's no Mexican. Some worn-out trouper from/ the States";
but he feels, "I like her. She fits/ the music". She
has her own dance, her own music, but:

There is another music. The bright-colored candy
of her nakedness lifts her unexpectedly
to partake of its tune  (pp. 116)

This other music is the power and measure of the poem,
lifting the local dancer and her place to another level
of expression. Once again whore and virgin are identified:

  Andromeda of those rocks,
  the virgin of her mind    .    those unearthly
greens and reds

  in her mockery of virtue
  she becomes unaccountably virtuous  .

In the poem's reality she is transformed from a worn-out
trouper, yet the poet wonders at his urge to celebrate
"an old whore in/ a cheap Mexican joint", and at "so sweet a tune, built of such slime".

This situation is "the world writ small", while the poem itself represents the Eternal Virgin set over against it. Yet the poem is in the world, "there to be written", both elements, slime and poem, having a common source. Williams is rejecting the possibility that the dance here is lifting the anti-poetic to a higher level. Rather slime and poem are simultaneous, even co-terminous, just as unexpected qualities in the whore lift her. The lifting is at once in the situation and in the poet's imagination, a focus, "relief from that changeless, endless/ inescapable and insistent music" (EB 119).

Cyclical movement is enacted in the return to the figure on the bridge. The theme's birth aspect is made explicit. The music of reality is the "bag" surrounding child in womb, and also poem, born in the affirmation, "I am a poet I/ am I am." (with its Cartesian echo). At the birth moment "the dance begins" and "The verb detaches itself/ seeking to become articulate".

Structurally, this poem poses an interesting problem. Not employing the three-tiered line, Williams returns to a
texture more like that of the main body of Paterson. Here his factual details correspond to the prose passages of his epic (though the one time he uses prose is to put a question which is a compromise between fact and meditation, v. PB 115). Long as it is, he regarded this as less "important" than the other poems in BN because of his technical reversion (JTP 39). His approach here, to some extent, allows a split between his "facts" and his "ideas". The three-tiered line, which lends itself structurally to the oblique forward movement of meditation is not here to assist, so his responses to the facts encountered, made of a "cloth" not unlike the facts themselves, seem self-conscious. Yet, if all details are not "lifted" to a unity, the central metaphor of virgin/whore poem/world does succeed.

Technically the poems of Journey to Love (1955) are closely related to those of the 1954 volume, the preoccupations much the same, culminating in the masterly "Asphodel, that Greeny Flower". In "The Ivy Crown" (PB 124, JL) Williams continues to meditate on the contrast between:

whatever the heart
fumbles in the dark

to assert
toward the end of May
and the summer roses, which say for him, "I love you/ or I do not live/ at all", causing his realization that "You cannot live/ and keep free of/ briars". Children's love is careless and carelessly cast aside, but the love of age is compounded of will (thorns accepted) and imagination:

We will it so

and so it is

past all accident.

Some briefer poems in this volume have an epiphanic quality, the negro woman wandering along with a bunch of marigolds, the Swiss church glimpsed on a calendar, the sergeant at Belleau wood shouting, "Come on! Do you want to live/ forever?" Such poems are "To a Man Dying on his Feet", "A Smiling Dane" and a number of others.

"Asphodel, that Greeny Flower" dominates the collection. Here not only the line but use of metaphor and image are so integral as to be the "movement" of Williams's thought. Used both symbolically and objectively, the asphodel is death, the foreboding of death and descent to the underworld. As elsewhere "Time is a green orchid" (CP 190), the asphodel is "green and wooden". Setting off the poet's meditation, the flower
has been part of his consciousness since:

When I was a boy
I kept a book
to which, from time
to time,
I added pressed flowers
until, after a time
I had a good collection.
The asphodel
forebodingly,
among them. (FR 155, JL)

This passage of itself serves to show the control, both
of line and emotion, Williams had over his material.
Another early reference enhances the context: “One has
emotions about the strangest things...heads bowed over
the green-flowered asphodel” (NH 32). Young, there was
that death-consciousness; now he looks back upon
"a life filled, if you will, with flowers", a reference
both to the quality of what he has shared with his wife
and, with irony, to his own lifelong interest in women.
Association allows him to move back and forth among various
preoccupations: the nature of his love for his wife,
his response to youth so that, "The whole world/ became
my garden!" (156), his sense of the actual sea, of the sea as metaphor for life's inclusiveness, as source of life, and the nature of consciousness. Quite naturally he moves to ponder, "I have learned much in my life from books", another source from which he has discovered the nature of love, love's force exemplified in "Helen's public fault", told in the Iliad.

The sea alone
with its multiplicity
holds any hope (FH 153, JL)

Personal crisis, involving poet and "you", is a storm on the sea, but also the storm in the mind (imagination) to be cured only by the will. The will is the mode and ultimate form of their love, so "the will becomes again/ a garden", which reverberates from lines at the end of "The Orchestra":

I love you. My heart
is innocent. And this
the first day of the world!

In his response to the world, looking back, he discerns an all-embracingness, a love of love, which he has also
recognized in her. Love's message, he tells her, is to be found in the poem. He brings "news" of love (reminding the reader of Pound's definition of a poem as "news that remains news"). Difficult as it is"to get the news from Williams poems" men die for lack of it. With this claim closes "Book 1", having presented the flower(s) of experience as two kinds of love - *eros* and *caritas*, now pleading for and offering the latter.

"Book 2" declares that "the particulars/ of place and condition" have at last become unclear enough to appear "waver[ing] through water" (162). Particularized recognition is not the same as understanding. This realization leads to the conclusion that to understand "our time" one cannot go to recent Western history, but must search "in earlier, wilder/ and darker epochs...". He recollects the responses of an artist chiefly interested in "the abstractions of Hindu painting" (163), who liked his poem, therefore clarifying for him his sense of his own work.

Next his mind turns to a shared experience of the Jungfrau, then to an encounter with gipsies in the hills above Granada. Part of our presence in the world, our relation to it, he perceives, depends on how we relate to other people;
The deaths I suffered
began in the heads
about me (PS 194, JL)

Partly through relating to others he had discovered his own necessity, the poem - but the poem must do more than merely reflect "the glint of waves".

Thinking of the sea, multiplicity, change, he now turns to another preoccupation of the last two decades of his life: the bomb, which is also, in form and figure, a flower, a destructive flower. Against the bomb, insistent death, he posits love and the poem (in its lyric and epic possibilities):

Death is no answer,
no answer -
to a blind old man
whose bones
have the movement
of the sea,
a sexless old man
for whom it is a sea
of which his verses
are made up.

There is no power
so great as love
which is a sea,
which is a garden -
as enduring
as the verses
of that blind old man
desired
to live forever.

(PB 166, JL)

Opposition between clear speech and silence, so important in Paterson, is also an aspect of the present poem. At this point silence is embodied in the Communist fellow-travellers the Rosenbergs, executed for spying, going to the electric chair "incommunicado". Set over against this are the discoveries of Darwin and Columbus:

It was a flower
upon which April
had descended from the skies!

How bitter
a disappointment

....

a new measure!

Soon lost.  (PB 167, JL)
As a result, "we come to our deaths/ in silence./ The bomb speaks", the bomb now figuring as every kind of suppression or exploitation. Here Williams's tone becomes quite distinctly that of Whitman:

Every drill
driven into the earth

for oil enters my side

also (EB 168, JL)

This modulates into contrast between wanton destructiveness and the artist's creativity, so that "Book II" also concludes in affirmation of the poem.

"Book III" opens by asserting that the true character of love is caritas, including forgiveness. In this respect it is the spring flower returning after winter's harshness, or (looked at in another way) like the asphodel it can blossom in unlikely places. A barrier to love is self-pride, epitomized in memories of prideful horses in sculpture and painting, "pictures/ of crude force" (171). This leads to an epiphany of power, an incident at a railroad station:

a fast freight

thundered through
kicking up the dust.

My friend,
a distinguished artist,
turned with me
to protect his eyes:
That's what we'd all like to be, Bill,
he said (PE 171, JL)

Meeting another man, a stranger, in the subway, the
poet observes and describes in detail the man's shabby
flair, his intelligent presence, then suddenly realizes:
"I am looking/ into my father's/ face!" (173). Having
the urge to speak with the subway stranger he does not
do so, feeling the occasion "a flower/ whose savor had
been lost", or

some exotic orchid

that Herman Melville had admired

in the

Hawaiian jungle (174)

or as exotic to him as draftsmanship of some Pyrenees
cave artist. Nevertheless the encounter is some sort
of epiphany, rewarding the poet with a sense, "a picture/
of all men".

Observing his wife's "kindness" to the winter
flowers, he feels encouraged that she will be kind also to him. He expects of her a forgiveness, a largeness of spirit, which he sees otherwise as characteristic of the artist. Intuitively, he is aware that the flowers know their "proper season" for pride, while men are cupiditious unless they be "the flowers of the race" (176).

Recalling more shared experience of their younger life, he now offers his wife "a last flower", each "fact of the thing itself" being also a flower, as are the works of the imagination, "Which proves/ that love/ rules them all" (178). Keeping in pattern, "Book III" also ends with a statement on the poem, now seen as dominated by love.

In the "Coda" the metaphor of thunder and lightning brings together all Williams's concerns:

In the huge gap
between the flash
and the thunderstroke
spring has come in
or a deep snow fallen.
Call it old age. (178, 41)

The spring season and old age are in some quasi-mystical sense allied. The "thunderstroke" is also the bomb, but
"the heat will not overtake the light./ That's sure./ That gels the bomb..."

Repeating his claim that "only the imagination is real", he later qualifies, giving an equal place to love:

But love and the imagination
are of a piece,
swift as the light
to avoid destruction. (PB 180, JL)

Even eternity is held in the poet's imagination. He can declare:

If a man die
it is because death
has first
possessed his imagination,

if he "refuse" this death, the worst that can befall him is the death of love. Love and imagination combined in us enable us to "watch time's flight/ as we might watch/ summer lightning". Reconciled to physical death, he celebrates the light, which is also a ceremonial, turning to "Medieval pageantry", remnant of priests and savage chieftains, pomp and circumstance of weddings. He thinks of a snatch of Spenser (used by Eliot ironically)
which is for him a point of celebration. Now he is ending his song. His memory turns back through a whole lifetime to his own wedding. The odour of that "sweet-scented flower" convinces him that he can accept death:

Asphodel
has no odor
save to the imagination
but it too
celebrates the light. (PB 182, JL)

but it is the "odor/ as from our wedding", which finally affords him a sense of affirmation, suffusing his whole world.

In the poems of his last book, Pictures from Brueghel, Williams uses the three-tiered line, but departs from it at will. He also treats the "variable foot" variously, even including a demonstration of some humour, "Some Simple Measures in the American Idiom and the Variable Foot" (PB 47). A number of the poems show that the concept goes beyond the relatively simple idea of a "breath unit" towards emphasis (sense):

knees
lithely built
in their summer clothes
show them
predisposed toward flight
or the dance (p. 50).

What I got out of women
was difficult
to assess Flossie

the third line makes nonsense of a purely breath-controlled
"variable foot", making more point as an attempt at am-
biguity. Other poems (an example is the first one in
the book) offer similar difficulties, so it is evident
that the scope of Williams's new measure goes beyond
speech phrases to a more abstract music, which includes
speech rhythms but also unexpected departures from them.
For example, the lines,

In a red winter hat blue
eyes smiling

have a distinction and concreteness which is lacking in
the more predictable alternative:

In a red winter hat
blue eyes smiling
The title sequence, "Pictures from Brueghel", simultaneously presents, as poem, the world, the dance of life which Williams and Brueghel share, and is a series of exemplary descriptions of the contents of Brueghel's canvases. These poems do not falsify their subject paintings by infusing their presentation with tones or ideas having nothing to do with Brueghel. Where, once or twice, Williams does comment his remarks are part of the poem's action. Rather than falsifying Brueghel they serve to illuminate Williams. In the third poem, for example, "The Hunters in the Snow", he concludes the detailed concreteness of the hunt picture:

Brueghel the painter
concerned with it all has chosen

a winter-struck bush for his
foreground to
complete the picture  (Par 5).

Williams is recognizing a fellow perceiver of "things others never notice". He may not merely fix on the detail, but resolve his poem with it, as in "V Peasant Wedding":


a trundle made of an
unhinged barn door by two
helpers one in a red
cost a spoon in his hatband (RB 7).

To highlight the deliberate sparseness of Williams's
method, it is well worth comparing "IV The Adoration
of the Kings" with Auden's "Musée de Beaux Arts".
Williams is "the chronicler", Auden allows himself a
more or less overt moral perspective. Williams's
interest is, as always, in the "bloody loam", and so
in "VI Haymaking" he concentrates precisely on this
quality in Brueghel, mastery of detail and the need for
it. "IX The Parable of the Blind" demonstrates how
this sense of detail is the sense of a world, and how
Brueghel's relationship with his world is inevitably
concerned with form. For example, the gaiety and
warmth of many Brueghel paintings are expressed both
in choice of subject but also in the colour and organ-
ization of the paint.

The concerns of Pictures from Brueghel are very
much those of Williams's whole career: beauty,
process, the poem. He can move freely from object to
subjectivity, into personal concern or reflection and
out again, without losing detachment. At moments his
fascination by the spoken word is readily apparent. Evident also is a certain natural polarization, between poems concerned with children (chiefly his grandchildren) and those preoccupied with old age and death.

In "Elaine" (first of "3Stances" – PP 18) there is a muted contrast between the observer, passive, old, but affectionate, and a young girl poised to move on to a new stage of her existence. This (and the other two sections of the poem) renders an action which is its own comment on the children, their grandfather's sense of them, and his sense of the world. Permitting himself a "wish" at the end of the whole poem he does not, and does not need to, intrude further. Successfully here Williams has made his line organization, syntax and punctuation carry the nuances of comment.

A more directly reflective group of short poems is "Suzy" (PP 20-21). Openly asserting the contrast between "a girl your age" and "an old man", he allows his personal emotion, his sense of loss, of the actual tragedy of human life, to dominate the second and third poems of the sequence. Nor is he afraid to use a language inviting sentimentalism ("trembling", "timorous", "protectively", "cherishes"). He does so successfully by control of tone and line.

A corresponding group of small poems, to Paul,
interests itself in the boy's pastime of catching blackfish. His catch affords the boy satisfactions of gutting and eating it. Such typical activity is "that language you'll understand" (p. 22), but an additional experience is gained, more private because more individual, momentary contact with the beauty of the fish's "glistening body":

however you divide and share that blackfish heft and shine is your own (p. 23)

Such satisfaction results not merely because the fish must be intrinsically beautiful, to anyone. It is a product of the boy's being involved in the action.

Everywhere in this last book, even when his mind is gripped by death, Williams remains acutely conscious of the world's beauty, although he sees it as "no more than a sop" in the face of death. Beauty seems to him often the crucial expression of a person, as the "blue stoneware" is of the unnamed man at the back of "The Stone Crock" (p. 28). It has for him in his surroundings
the old Imagist quality:

winter

woods hang out the snow as if it were gay
curtains \( \text{(PB 24)} \)

or the iris

\[ \text{a blue as} \]

of the sea

struck

startling us from among

those trumpeting

petals \( \text{(PB 30)} \)

or Flossie's garden roses, kept on ice \( \text{(PB 45)} \).

This acute awareness of beauty, the need for it, is a sense of joy, a grounding of ultimate celebration - the poignant, tentative joy of "Asphodel, that Greeny Flower", or the small, joyful "satisfaction" of "Portrait of a Woman in Her Bath", who, although, "no/Venus", is life itself, to which he responds vitally, so that
the sun is

glad of a fellow to
marvel at
the birds and the flowers
look in

Here Williams uses a domestic incident to lead his mind to the world outside the restricted environment of his last years. Naturally this is a period of many poems of old age, such as "The Woodthrush", "To a woodpecker", "Suzy", the "Song" on the Carolina swamp (PB 25), "The High Bridge Above the Tagus River", "The Snow Regina" and "The Rewaking". Closed in though he is, the fear of death manifest in journey to love has all but gone from these poems, although in "The Woodthrush" he speaks of his "tragic/ winter thoughts", and laments elsewhere:

but I have forgot beauty
that is no more than a sop
when our time

is spent and infirmities
bring us to

eat out of the same bowl! (PB 25)
Yet the death lamentations of "To a Woodpecker" become the "gay curtains" of snow on branches. In a mood of acceptance, snow's softness becomes the figure for death:

before

this benefice all the garden's wounds are healed white, white, white as death.

Against death, for an old man, there are dreams and memory, "a kind of accomplishment", or as in "The High Bridge Above the Tagus River", the dogs which in his youth seemed of "savage appearance", in old age

walk in the old man's dreams and still walk in his dreams, peacefully continuing in his verse forever. (PB 53)

"The Rewaking" (PB 70), which concludes this final collection, sees love ("your love") as the source of a new spring, a new beginning: "by your love the very sun itself is revived".

Few moments in these late poems need suffer the
burden of exegesis. Almost everywhere they are achieved by simplicities and sure tone. By and large they are a triumphant flowering of Williams's genius, justifying his ultimate reliance on the ear for a discovery of music and on "things" rather than intellectual subtleties for giving body and presence to the poems. Thus he is able to declare, naturally and truly:

All men by their nature give praise.
   It is all
   they can do.

The very devils
   by their flight give praise.
   What is death
   beside this? (EB 62).

This praise is the poem, focus of the world, - no substitute reality but a parallel plenitude:

The rose fades
   and is renewed again
   by its seed, naturally
   but where
save in the poem
shall it go
to suffer no diminution
of its splendor

Supremely, the poem is the instance when "the mind dances with itself" (FB 32), but it is not completeness, for "there are always two/ yourself and the other". The dance of life is something we participate in because we live, but we should also make it "our own", the only thing "sure". In "the storm/ that holds us,/ plays with us and discards us" we dance as well as we know how. The dance's gaiety, the gaiety of things as they are, of what we can know, is expressed in the movement and action of the dance-poem, "Calypso":

Love the sun
comes
up in

the morning
and
in

the evening
zippy zappy
it goes

(FB 57)
Zest, concreteness, imagination, this is the height of the dance of life, so Gagarin's triumph as the first man in space is an ecstasy, with an eternal quality:

...neck and toe he felt
as if he had
been dancing (PP 69)

Thus everywhere in the book, awareness of "tragic winter", but also of the dance of living, of words, of creatures, the bird planing to a stop "miraculously" before the poet's very eyes, the "coiffured/ and perfumed old men", Deaunier-like figures, gossiping about

the news from Russia or a view of
the reverse surface of
the moon

until "the ear and the eye lie/ down together in the same bed" (PB 15). At the core of all this:

beauty is a shell
from the sea
where she rules triumphant
until love has had its way with her
The great universal Williams sought, timeless, was a "life that is here and now". His belief was that only the artist could apprehend the now, the present thing in all its "vividness", only he could invent "today". It is in this sense of full realization that, for him, the "only world that exists is the world of the senses. The world of the artist". (SE 196).

2. "Measure", Spectrum (Fall 1959), 152-153

3. Charles Olson, Projective Verse, (Brooklyn, 1959); Reprinted in Olson's more readily available Selected Writings, (New York, 1966) and partially in Autob.

4. The physiological approach to versification in America goes back as far as Oliver Wendell Holmes's essay on "The Physiology of Versification". See Michael Weaver, "Measure and its Propaganda", Cambridge Annual, 1964, p.15.


6. Wagner, op. cit., p.128-129, has an excellent discussion of this poem's structure. Note also the activation of "the flowers", both backward and forward through the text.
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