

PERCEPTION AS PROCESS IN THE POETIC THEORY
AND PATERSON OF WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to identify the philosophical arguments behind William Carlos Williams' constant attack upon accepted patterns of thought, behaviour and art. The first chapter outlines Williams' belief in the necessity of a continual process of renewal in order to prevent traditional approaches to experience from decaying individual perception into unconscious habits of preconception. The thesis then debates the possibility and value of pure perception in contrast to preconception, of objectivity in contrast to subjectivity, of the need for artistic impartiality to prevent biased perception. This line of inquiry develops into a discussion of Williams' doctrine of change as essential to clear perception: Williams' advocacy of the new, of the perception of present, local reality is a struggle against the traditional habitual concentration upon the past, the foreign and upon future abstractions. By Chapter Four, the thesis has evolved into a detailed inspection of the poetic techniques necessary for the clarifying expression of a continually renewed awareness. An attempt is made to show how poetry must change to keep reflecting a changing reality that is perceived now as a world of process rather than as a static and definable quantity. Underlying the whole thesis is the central interpretation that Williams' objection to established doctrines is a rejection of that tradition of man's egotistical

aloofness from the ground and of his urge to control nature by destruction which has alienated him from his consciousness of his environment and from his source of self-discovery. The second half of the thesis tries to reveal the poem Paterson as the assimilation of Williams' organic philosophy in a poetic form whose construction releases beauty from its abstraction in the mind into a living sentient experience. The thesis evolves towards an attempt to reveal Williams' call for man to rediscover a primal awareness of himself through an interpenetration with nature, a sympathetic appreciation of and yielding to the unopposed objects of his environment. The method of approach used is apocalyptic, rather than purely analytical.

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PREFACE

It is quite easy to interpret Williams' statement "no ideas but in the facts"¹ as a declaration that Williams is not interested in ideas at all. This is, of course, nonsense, for Williams' fear of abstract concepts and abstruse arguments (as displayed at the end of Paterson, One) arises from his notion that in an urban and industrial society the ideas men have are divorced from their daily activity. And it is the living daily reality that Williams wishes to reveal, not the ideas about it.

The problem in writing about Williams, then, is that one is in danger of imposing on Williams an abstract philosophical or descriptive interpretation which his work denies and seeks to undermine. Nevertheless, I do in this thesis seek to trace the steps of what can be called Williams' argument. This leads necessarily into acts of definition, analysis and interpretation which taken by themselves can be viewed as essentially static, abstract, lifeless, in Williams' terms. I have attempted to avoid this pitfall as much as possible by trying not to proceed analytically nor abstractly towards the identification of a final philosophy that could be pigeon-holed as "Williamsism." Instead, I found it necessary and helpful to proceed towards a developing sense of

Williams' reality. It is a state of being, of consciousness, of imagination, of vision, which finds its fullest apocalyptic presentation in the final Book of Paterson: it is a sense of unity in living that is a process, not a final state that is no sooner defined than it ceases to be utopian. It is with respect for this approach to being, and with sympathy for Williams' love of the organic harmony which he seeks to reveal and to rediscover human life within, that I have attempted to present Williams' thought and art through a critical structure that is a process not a product of understanding. I hope that the effect of this journey into his world is more revealing than a discursive analysis would have been. The process of arriving at a sense of the interpenetrated unity of man and nature is, I hope, a gradual enlightenment. I do not pretend to hide evolving changes of opinion, inevitable contradiction of definitions, or repetition, if only to emphasise that the world I have tried to reveal is a world of process. To Williams, it is a process of living, of searching continually for awareness and for love against tremendous social and internal blockages.

CHAPTER I

Perception

The past above, the future below
and the present pouring down: the roar,
the roar of the present, a speech--
is, of necessity, my sole concern

The language cascades into the
invisible, beyond and above : the falls
of which it is the visible part--

Not until I have made of it a replica
will my sins be forgiven and my
disease cured-- . . .

I must
find my meaning and lay it, white,
beside the sliding water: myself--
comb out the language--or succumb

--whatever the complexion. Let
me out! (Well, go!) this rhetoric
is real!²

Williams' main concern is the process of perceiving present reality. His aim is to achieve in art a transformation of that natural, concrete reality which is completely accurate in its imitation of the particular details of that local and contemporary world. He hopes to create in art a mirroring structure which releases his perception of beauty and truth from their abstraction in the mind into a living, sensual reality. He wants to inspire a vivid perception of present reality. He continually struggles to understand and evaluate this basic human apparatus for the consciousness of reality. Nothing is more vital to especially human life than an actively conscious ability to perceive clearly the nature of one's surroundings. No character--

istically human capability--love, reason, trust, social harmony--is more than vaguely attainable unless people possess a process of accurately viewing their whole environment. Small horizons, provincial attitudes, party politics, emotional nationalism, religious prejudice, bigoted racism, ideological pride and any other form of egotistical self-righteousness are all expressions of the same partial and incomplete perception. They are, that is to say, fixed products of a narrow perception, and not evidence of an adaptable, processal perception. Whether the false vision is the result of simple ignorance (i.e. lack of education, naïve lack of understanding, a retarded perceptual capability) or of compound ignorance (the wilful denial of one's vision, the hypocritical disregard of the truth) is not the point. Although the former is an amoral incapability and the latter a selfish denial, the net result is identical: a partial perception precludes the possibility of achieving a full consciousness or an accurate awareness of the nature of reality. All evil--injustice, inhumanity or violent criminality--is the product of a selfishly biassed and partial interpretation of the real truth.

The obverse achievement is an awareness of reality and a living according to that impartial perception. The discovery of what is, of reality, is not the discovery of goodness. Finding the real truth does not guarantee rightness in any sense, but it does provide a basis of accurate perception from which to conceptualize, from which to conceive values and on which to base moral attitudes. The vision of the ideal, what we wish were real, cannot be used to measure or value reality if it is a superimposed conception that is based upon a weak, partial perception. The recognition of the

real--through consciously impartial perception--must precede abstract value judgments for action in life to be right and relevant. Everything that interferes with that accurate perception and results in unconscious perception, thought or action, everything habitually or blindly conceived, must be extirpated. All interfering unrelated pre-conceptions which blind people to an accurate perception of reality, and which impose an artificial, biassed and ideal interpretation upon anything, are harmful. They deny the possibility of attaining the full humanity of impartial awareness.

Williams struggles as a man for that humanitarian impartiality which will enable him to perceive the human reality from a universal perspective. As an artist, that critical perception must be purged of prejudicially impure preconceptions. All selfishness and all possible subjective misinterpretation must be overcome by an objective impartiality if his verbal expression is to reveal the reality of his objective vision, and not his partial vision of reality. A study of Williams' philosophy and aesthetic must attempt to evaluate his moral reasons why, and literal explanations of how, our perception must be stripped of all non-essential preconceptions, and must revitalize a fully human consciousness of reality.³

Williams observes man's attitude to his environment, and distinguishes two mutually exclusive kinds of men. One kind accepts his environment and adjusts himself to its peculiar demands. This is the aboriginal, natural man or the courageous pioneer who accepts the land on its terms, and either learns to live with it or perishes. He relates to the natural cycle, is open to its lessons, and perceives the reality surrounding him as it impresses itself upon him. The other defies the environment and tries to adjust it to his personal will.

He is the frightened and insecure foreigner who, ignoring the natural consequences, either manages to control the land and impose his artificial order, or perishes. He alienates himself from its reality, and conceives the real world around him as a hostile force which he must dominate: he cannot live in the real world. Though it clearly constitutes a redefinition of these terms, it might be useful to think of the man who relates to the environment in spatial and temporal terms as 'romantic' man, and the man who divorces himself from the earthly reality by 'perceiving' the world on his own terms as 'classical' man. The 'romantic' yields in marriage to an orderly organic harmony greater than himself, while the 'classical' man's selfish separatism springs from an egotistical desire to subjugate the environment and impose his artificial human ideal upon the real world. "Lear" depicts this egotistical self-alienation:

Today the storm, inescapable, has
 taken the scene and we return
 our hearts to it, however made, made
 wives by it and though we secure
 ourselves for a dry skin from the drench
 of its passionate approaches we
 yield and are made quiet by its fury

Pitiful Lear, not even you could
 out-shout the storm--to make a fool
 cry! Wife to its power might you not
 better have yielded earlier? as on ships
 facing the seas were carried once
 the figures of women at repose to
 signify the strength of the waves' lash.⁴

Williams evaluates human behaviour in terms of 'romantic' involvement as I have defined it. He approves the sacrifice of the ego to the greater process of life as presented in the power of the storm. He attacks the arrogant refusal to accept the nature of reality. "Time is a storm in which we are all lost. Only inside the convolutions of the storm itself shall we find our directions."⁵

Williams' understanding of the division in early American society is an awareness of the simple but profound distinction between the New World and Old Europe. In "The American Background," he recounts the psychological shock of the massive American continent to the perceptions of the feeble handful of dejected Pilgrims escaping from civilized Europe. They were a pathetically small group of isolated foreigners struggling in every way against the wilderness. His acceptance of their necessary isolationism overlies a basic sadness at their blindness to the new reality: "they saw birds with rusty breasts and called them robins. Thus, from the start, an America of which they could have had no inkling drove the first settlers upon their past."⁶ From the start, a false preconception blinded their perception. Williams sympathizes with the early hardships that were felt by the original settlers, and he stresses the New World's threat to their survival:

The land was from the first antagonistic. The purpose must have been in major part not to be bound to it but to push back its obstructions before the invading amenities--to drive them before one. To force them back. That these transplanted men were at the same time pushing back a very necessary immediate knowledge of the land to be made theirs and that indeed all that they possessed and should henceforth be able to call their own was just this complexity of environment which killed them, could not become at once apparent.⁷

Yet, having forgiven the destructive defensiveness of these settlers, Williams condemns the same attitude when it becomes the approach to the New World by a new society that is strong, virile, almost independent from the repressions of the old world at the time of the Revolution, and does not need any pity for its unjustified acts. In In The American Grain, Williams vents his bitterness and

anger in a succession of logical and vehement denouncements of the destruction of the new continent by the now established Puritan society of New England that is as repressive as the old order in England which the immigrants sought to escape. Williams criticizes Puritanism for its failure to breathe the life of the new continent, its self-righteous assertion of imported European civilized consciousness to the denial of the physical reality surrounding it, its mental and spiritual concentration upon self-denial and denial of the body in preference for an abstracted future world of immortal and non-physical idealism. Williams' sympathy for the Indian, whose whole being was attuned to his physical environment, shows his desire to re-establish a harmony between man and nature. Williams wants man to become one with the spirit of the land, to feel the nature of the life of the continent, to submit to the all-ruling creative force of She in "De Soto and the New World;" rather than to mold the landscape to fit man's world, puritanically "mashing Indian, child and matron into one safe mold,"⁸ bending the continent to the will of man.

To respond to the life of the land and to become part of it like Columbus or Boone is healthy and creative, it is to activate life. To use the land and abstract its life into the mental consciousness of the social, traditional, moral preconception as the Devil's last stronghold, is to selfishly destroy human life by alienating it from its roots. Meanwhile, the human separation from the land makes men careless of their physical dependence on the earth. Justifiable homicide of the environment for survival becomes ruthless rape for personal gain. The aggression had been against the old restrictions for the new freedom, against the old European ways and ideas and for

the new absence of ways or ideas in a land of untouched things. But once the habits had overruled the imagination, the people still puritanically denied the original quality of New World life and hypocritically continued to impose a rigid old world religious culture upon it.

The habit continues to this day with North American society's self-destructive, anti-originality importation of European culture for its old 'civilizing' power. North Americans flock to Europe for tradition, mystique, art, fashions and excitement. The travellers then return to overlay their own continent's tradition with suicidal European ideas that they cultivate for their self-glorification by sophistication and pomposity. Williams attacks "the desire to have 'culture' for America by 'finding' it, full blown--somewhere:"⁹

Longfellow was the apotheosis of all that had preceded him in America, to this extent, that he brought over the most from "the other side." In "Longfellow and Other Plagiarists," Poe looses himself to the full upon them. But what had they done? No more surely than five hundred architects are constantly practicing. Longfellow did it without genius, perhaps, but he did no more and no less than to bring the tower of the Seville Cathedral to Madison Square.¹⁰

The result of this grafting on of a foreign culture which is unrelated to the "new locality"¹¹ is the denial of self-discovery possible through knowledge of one's environmental origins:

It is NOT culture to oppress a novel environment with the stale, if symmetrical, castoffs of another battle. . . . Poe could look at France, Spain, Greece, and NOT be impelled to copy. He could do this BECAUSE he had the sense within him of a locality of his own, capable of cultivation.¹¹

But, meanwhile, all the imaginative, original creativity of the New World is denegated and often repressed by frustrated conformists.

This continual repression inevitably arouses aggression: it taunts people to violent rebellion. However, "the constrictions of vile habit"¹³ have more disastrous effects: they repress the development of consciousness in each new generation of any society. It is naïve to expect each new generation to revoke all their roots, all their past connections with the cultural patterns of yesterday and of European civilization. Such a change would revolutionize society continually, disrupting any order. But it is a denial of the newly evolving reality to argue that there is no way that man can adapt to, not being able to adopt, the new environment. It is also blindly destructive of living growth and development to continue to impose one's unrelated ideas upon the changed continent.

The primitive destiny of the land is obscure, but it has been obscured further by a field of unrelated culture stuccoed upon it that has made that destiny more difficult than ever to determine. To this latter nearly all the aesthetic adhesions of the present day occur. Through that stratum of obscurity the acute but frail genius of the place must penetrate. The seed is tough but the chances are entirely against a growth.¹⁴

Man must adapt to his continually changing world, or lose conscious contact with his origins. He must keep acute his consciousness by noticing and avoiding the dying social patterns, the deadening linguistic habits, all existing structures which draw him back into an unreal past which has no relation to the new world. Continually active attempts must be made to change attitudes to fit the evolving environment, or the death of his acuteness will necessarily destroy his awareness of reality and of life.

The old and the new, habit and imagination, are two variations upon a deeper psychological suicide that has been

continually inculcated into each new generation of the New World. The choice for each generation has always been--fresh horizons or indoctrinated imitation. Encouraged by their elders, they followed blindly along. Williams carefully separates the alternatives:

The two divergent forces were steadily at work, one drawing the inhabitants back to the accustomed with its appeals to loyalty and the love of comfort, the other producing them to face very often the tortures of the damned, working a new way into a doubtful future, calling for faith, courage and carelessness of spirit. It was, be it noted, an inner tension, a cultural dilemma, which was the cause of this.¹⁵

Of course, his words do not indicate a new discovery about human nature if one wishes to interpret them merely as evidence of man's love of safety and as proof of his laziness. The vital thing that Williams is persistently trying to communicate is that such action is suicidal. The suicide of awareness is the deadening habit of unconscious acceptance:

If a man die
 it is because death
 has first
possessed his imagination.¹⁶

We must take notice and consider the far-reaching moral consequences of a conservatism that inflicts such a heavy loss, that sacrifices the original life of the continent and the awareness and vision of its people to an unrelated and foreign idea of tradition. "The war over, the true situation, raised into relief by patriotic fervor, would flatten out as before into the persistent struggle between the raw new and the graciousness of an imposed cultural design."¹⁷ We must carefully understand the consequences of the "retreat to safety,"¹⁸ not just in the Puritan or American context, but the whole effect to the human being of holding back, of protecting the status quo, of

hanging on to the old. We must be aware of the consequences to man's life on earth of ignoring the changing reality. Man loses consciousness of his existence relative to the world around him. The loss of self-awareness prevents the conscious attainment of understanding and pleasure.

So, to gain full knowledge of ourselves, to appreciate our being, and not just our animal existence, we seek a full consciousness at this moment, in this place. We require for any such awareness, a real ability to perceive things as they are. It is the faculty of perception that we have sacrificed in the suicidal retreat to safety. Ears and eyes closed, we have sacrificed the art of perception, our capacity to see and be conscious of our actual living experience. We have substituted the art by habitual conceptions. We have forsaken our possible perception of things for mental conceptions, preconceived ideas, accustomed frames of reference that are tried and safe but not true, habitual ways of looking at things and always generalizing to the same conclusion: if it hurts, displeases or does not match, it is foreign, threatening, radical, different. It threatens our safety and must be destroyed regardless of cost, justice, legality or humanity. What has been habitually accepted, what is the ethical code, the moral standard, is held supreme. Safety of this sort is an abominable constipation of the imagination; a comfortable, monotonous, but easy and habitual grave for the spirit. When past ideas predominate unchallenged for safety's sake, and things are not what they used to be in 'the good old days,' the traditional destroyers of the new, imaginative and real perceptions use their old ideas of safety, comfort, tradition and 'law and order' to ease the rebellion, pacify the mobs and destroy the spirit. Again, the

new is not inevitably better than the old. But on the basis of recognizing the changed reality, new and relevant codes of law and morality must be devised. As the situation alters, the old values lose their relevance and cannot be habitually imposed without unjustly destroying the new order of society, without tyranny. Like the old safety first puritans, the present leaders of the young, those people in power striving to hold on to that power at all cost, will be judged:

They retreated for warmth and reassurance to something previously familiar. But at a cost. For what they saw were not robins. They were thrushes only vaguely resembling the rosy, daintier English bird.¹⁹

They could not see the real and the new. Their perception was blurred by ideal conceptions of order that destroyed and disfigured the real, natural face of the world. They lied. They chose not to see. They committed spiritual suicide, giving up the challenge of the truth, the fight to preserve the new reality, for some comfortable god of traditional apathy and physical ease. We stand ready to be condemned for our selfish and destructive blindness to the new and different world; while we compound the ignorance by indoctrinating the young in a like manner for our egotistical satisfaction, taking the art of perception for visual, mental and spiritual awareness from their lives. Yet all we must do to correct the ill is to forsake the petty god of self, and look to human nature, human beings in nature, and to learn to perceive without preconceived ideas to become aware of what is actually, really going on--to become alive. How?

From the previous argument, we already have a definite direction for our perception to pursue. In knowing the old habits that make us

blind, we know what to look for: "the new and the real, hard to come at, are synonymous."²⁰ Reality only exists in the present moment. Our relatedness to life and reality is our awareness of that present moment, and in that 'here and now' the relevant and necessary primary culture is determined. The natural landscape--barren, wild or rural--determines the primary organic culture; it must be treated naturally to be really lived in and not artificially warped just to suit human goals. Williams cites the primitive Hopi Indian and those outcasts, Boone, Houston and Crockett, as examples of man being involved in an earth-rooted sense of his environment. "They in themselves had achieved a culture, an adjustment to the conditions about them, which was of the first order, and which, at the same time, oddly cut them off from the others."²¹

Williams sees the modern city as an imposition of a false and foreign abstraction upon the natural, organic, concrete environment. Cities are very real and very present, but their reality is only a human creation, the presence of an artificial and mechanical order. One cannot deny cities, nor the magnitude of technological achievement that they represent, but one must be concerned about the influence that they exert to alienate the people from the land. Consider first Williams' account of the magnificence of Tenochtitlan, the native city whose temples preserved the primitive mystery of the wild:

Decorated with curious imagery in stone, the wood-work carved in relief and painted with figures of monsters and other things, unpaved, darkened and bloodstained, it was in these chapels that the religious practices which so shocked the Christian were performed. Here it was that the tribe's deep feeling for a reality that stems back into the permanence of remote origins had its firm hold. It was the earthward thrust of their logic; blood and earth; the realization of their primal and continuous identity with the ground itself, where everything is fixed in darkness.²²

The city need not divorce people from their origins: but this primitive culture is rejected by modern man. Tenochtitlan is invaded and destroyed: "the instigation to invasion is apparent: ready profit. The excuse also is apparent: progress."²³ Modern cities, as the imposition of an artificial order on nature, force an unnatural separation of man from the earth, from the source of life. The result is a loss of awareness of one's origins and being. It is naïve to call for an unlimited return to nature in a world of urban living, and particularly naïve to claim this quaint, mythical rusticity to be 'reality'. But man must not avoid his organic responsibilities just because his mechanized city life is so many technological removes from the earth. Man's contemporary urban abstraction from the natural encourages a disinterested attitude to his environment. To regain consciousness of himself through his physical whereabouts, man must realize his urban denial of nature. He must rediscover a respect for the elemental source of his survival and of his civilization, else he will lose control of everything. It is for this reason that Williams' Paterson tries to re-establish mythology in modern life.

Still, how? do we perceive the truth without any interference from outside, now a heavy word signifying not simply preconceived ideas and prejudice, but the extraneous imposed cultural fashion and its pattern of civilization that is masking over the native reality, the truth, the natural world and the eyes of the people. Is it enough to state the desire as the achievement? Is it sufficient to become aware of the blindness, to be fully aware of how it is caused, and to avoid it? Once one is tuned in psychologically,

it can be argued, one's dissatisfaction with that self-blinding way of 'seeing' will prevent increasing or even continuing the maiming process. One's absolute disgust with such a way of 'life' will force one back to the roots of physical life, shying away from any unreal, all ideal, preconceived order of events: back, like Houston, to involved environmental living, away from imposed controlling power. And then, one must remain persistently, keenly aware of seeing clearly, and understanding one's method of interpretation as individual and not as a clichéd idea. Perceiving clearly without the interference of outside, idea-deified immaculate conceptions is achieved when, in recognizing the problems, one reaches a frame of mind fortified with anger, distrust and dissatisfaction within which every effort will naturally be made to perceive reality without habitual interpretation.

Yet, even with such determination, the method of perception is not clear. Surely all that we perceive is based upon previous experience. How else do we perceive a sycamore tree but by recognizing it as similar to (like) many such trees that we have been accustomed to regard in the sycamore tree category? True and False: true in regard to the simplistic recognition of type and name; false in regard to perceiving every individual thing's own life form, separate beauty, different looks, private shape, colour, texture, smell, independent existence and reality. Look at a "Young Sycamore:"²⁴

I must tell you
this young tree
whose round and firm trunk
between the wet

pavement and the gutter
(where water
is trickling) rises
bodily

into the air with
 one undulant
 thrust half its height--
 and then

dividing and waning
 sending out
 young branches on
 all sides--

hung with cocoons
 it thins
 till nothing is left of it
 but two

eccentric knotted
 twigs
 bending forward
 hornlike at the top

Only in the most vague and general sense are any two things similar.

Williams tries carefully to present an authentic imitation of the thing itself. He tries to display in the structural shape of his poem the shape of this sycamore tree. The trunk occupies half the tree and so it fills the first half of the poem. The spatial equivalence is complemented by both a temporal and a tonal balancing in the poem: the trunk's "one undulant thrust" is imitated in the language's strong and unopposed flow to the middle of the poem.

"And then/dividing and waning," the poem, like the tree, spreads out in separate asides. The tree develops into thinner branches, into cocoons, to the last twigs; while the poem disperses into isolated, divisible presentations of each part of the tree in language that is only weakly joined together. Williams' words describing the tree are complemented by a structure that attempts to present a visual and aural sense of this particular sycamore. His attention to the tree's individual detail, even to its "two eccentric knotted twigs," encourages the perception of the thing's real and irreplaceable identity. One can therefore understand Williams' strong distaste for

similes: he objects to their implied forcing of disparate things into uniformity and likeness. But it is this habit of recognizing solely the category of a thing by its likeness to another thing that is the customary extent of most people's perception. Beyond this weak imitation of a poor camera out of focus, human perception of the greater differences between every single object on earth is minimal. We have not even begun to mention moving things, nor interrelations between all static and mobile, passive and active, life forms that make up the real world--all the changing, exploding, imploding consequences of the touching of things against other things. Yet the perception of most people reaches its height of vision, and so the limit of its understanding, when it looks at its colour postcard of the world--'a nice big lake, a row of tall trees, some brown grass, and aren't those hills lovely and round and purple-like.' That is their high notion of natural beauty, and that is all they want to see--what custom and fashion predict: it is comfortable, or it reminds them of home, or of Hollywood, or of everything their friends like also. They too choose not to see anything but that which they are expected to see by their whole mental world of preconceived, biassed notions of natural beauty. They try to avoid everything disagreeable or different because it threatens their pleasant safety. Aversion and hatred are inevitably aroused when anything or anybody different and uncomfortable challenges the narrow-minded, 'nice' safety of their preconceived status quo. Their glazy vision can only reproduce what they want to see, what suits them, what matches their taste, what is the same. Everything different is intentionally averted, unthinkingly rejected or automatically attacked--places, animals, people, all things. Yet it is only

by its difference alone that each thing in life has its own identity, its privacy, its own reality, its beauty, its value. Williams writes,

Much more keen [than] . . . the coining of similes [which] place together those things which have a common relationship. . . is that power which discovers in things those inimitable particles of dissimilarity to all other things which are the peculiar perfections of the thing in question.²⁵

To consciously strive to perceive each object's individual uniqueness from all other things is to break the pattern of cultural habit--to forget prior mental conceptions of things:

(breathing the books in)
to acrid fumes,
 for what they could decipher
warping the sense to detect the norm, to break
through the skull of custom²⁶

It is the way to discover--fresh, new, real and alive--the moving process of life between all things. There may be no name for it, and giving it one only encourages everyone to call it that unthinkingly, but it is there, and you may see it, appreciate it, understand and enjoy it, for its unique beauty. The ever-conscious search for newness, uniqueness and difference must be the way, the method of a true perception that operates without interference from the habitual ideas of prior conceptions. It is vital to question everything, in order to be able to perceive the real world from the accepted, so-called real, world:

To be an artist, as to be a good artisan, a man must know his materials. But in addition he must possess that really glandular perception of their uniqueness which realizes in them an end in itself, each piece irreplaceable by a substitute, not to be broken down to other meaning. Not to pull out, transubstantiate, boil, unglue, hammer, melt, digest and psychoanalyze, not even to distill but to see and

keep what the understand touches intact--as grapes are round and come in bunches.

To discover and separate these things from the amorphous, the conglomerate normality with which they are surrounded and of which before the act of "creation" each is a part, calls for an eye to draw out that detail which is in itself the thing, to clinch our insight, that is, our understanding, of it.²⁷

Reality, or the realization of things, is found not by dissection into broken parts divorced of and from life like the Gradgrind horse, but by selection of that unique particularity that distinguishes a horse, each single horse, from every other thing. One real local horse, acutely perceived in its environment, gives an understanding of the generic quality of horses: "the local is the universal."²⁸ Both the particular and the general realization are prevented by destructively abstracting generalizations. Williams always seeks illumination from the haze. He separates things to restate their particular reality, but as each thing is real only at the present moment, the thing is also an event in time. Williams' expression of the real thing requires that the event of the thing be held and discovered, but not isolated from everything else at that moment which pervades the reality of each thing: Such is the meaning of his poem, "Bird--"²⁹

Bird with outstretched
wings poised
inviolable unreachings

yet reaching
your image this November
planes

to a stop
miraculously fixed in my
arresting eyes

Williams' "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus"³⁰ 'realizes'

Icarus by presenting him as just a part of his local and spacial

environment, and as just a part of his temporal, contemporary and spring moment:

According to Brueghel
when Icarus fell
it was spring

a farmer was ploughing
his field
the whole pageantry

of the year was
awake tingling
near

the edge of the sea
concerned
with itself

sweating in the sun
that melted
the wings' wax

unsignificantly
off the coast
there was

a splash quite unnoticed
this was
Icarus drowning

Williams attempts to reveal reality by recreating the event of the thing. Compare Auden's description of Icarus' fall in "Musée des Beaux Arts;"³¹

In Brueghel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure;. . .

Auden analyzes people's reactions: he talks about the event rather than recreates it. Auden provides an interpretation of the events surrounding Icarus' fall as activity aimed intentionally at ignoring or being indifferent to Icarus' predicament. He depicts the whole scene's activity from Icarus' ego, as if the world is subordinated to the individual's importance. Thus, it is totally contradictory

for Auden to claim, as he does, that other beings and things are truly indifferent to each other, that their natural reaction is unconscious indifference, if their averting from involvement is a conscious reaction. This contradiction is perhaps most apparent in Auden's 'sub-title' "In Brueghel's Icarus:" the human sufferer predominates. Williams, trying to present---not discuss---the indifferent relationships between the objects in the scene, writes a "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus:" Icarus is just one object in nature. The indifference that Williams describes is careless, non-rational and arbitrary: it is natural. The indifference that Auden interprets from the scene is deliberate, unsympathetic, cruel or callous; a human design. The same contrast appears in the poems' structures. Auden defines the scene. Carefully and methodically, his poem reorders the events that happen in the scene, captures them and twists them into an abstracted, unnatural, rational and subjective opinion of their meaning. Auden grasps the events in nature and subjects them to a preformed, fixed idea about the portrayal of suffering. Inevitably, his expression of that idea is through a clearly methodical, fixed structure of rational and abstract prose. The actual sense of the scene, the careless, unintended and unplanned indifference of the participants is distorted beyond recognition. Williams, seeking an uninterrupted imitation of the happening, recreates it in the structure of the poem. He feels that there is no rational explanation of the indifference, and so he allows no single interpretation to predominate. There are a number of possible meanings left undecided by the poet: the referents of "near" and of "unsignificantly" are vaguely indefinite, either word having possible ties with both the

preceding and the following descriptions. Helped by the unpunctuated flow of the description, the close involvement of the farmer, his field, the sea and the sun is thus presented. And the natural absence of a fixed system is indicated in the unfixable structural meaning of "unsignificantly" (=meaningless)! This indecipherability is further suggested by the continuity of the poem. Everything is continually happening as the successive active endings of the verbs show. There is only the continuing clashing friction between things in nature, not a meaningful order or predictability. Williams' technique catches one up with the event of the thing--instead of abstracting it for rational contemplation in the mind. The natural order--a chaos to human symmetry--is thus appreciable in Williams' poem, and one is brought down to earth like Icarus, falling, moving with the movement of the poem, with each stanza's visually and aurally decreasing lines imitating the sensuous feeling of the fall itself. Auden interprets to abstraction: Williams imitates for revelation.

Looking back at these pages, so argumentative or hyper-critical a point of view, a harangue if you like, is indicative of two desires. First, it imitates the urgent, insistent tone that matches Williams' perspective, a very diffuse criticism of the fundamental corruption of the modern man's attitude to his whole environment. Second, it is the result of a wish for an 'apocalyptic'³² criticism which reveals the substance of the work studied by its imitative tone, while still being critical, and while avoiding the hitherto established, and less effective, mode of analytical criticism.

Just as Auden's poetic way of analyzing Brueghel's painting destroys the natural movement within the landscape, so the detailed abstract analysis of poetry destroys the poem's vital reflection of that natural rhythm. An apocalyptic criticism, as Williams says, is "the revealing, perhaps what Randall Jarrell calls the 'romantic' as against the classical approach, the leap to the answer as against lapidary work."³³ Applied now to style and the process of writing is Williams' idea of 'romantic' as an immediate involvement with the environment. The object of the somewhat polemical tone is not to annoy and antagonize, uselessly. Hopefully, the angry reaction that is likely to be generated will serve the essential purpose of at least displacing concretized preconceptions. However, I am wary of generating that unthinking emotional enthusiasm which can equally blind one's mental consciousness to new directions. At any rate, having overtly and perhaps over-zealously presented Williams' repeatedly asserted desire for direct perception without the use of any prior knowledge, that desire can now be objectively re-examined and fully criticized. Meanwhile, all preconceptions about perception must be fully re-examined in the following discussion of the values and possibilities of pure objectivity.

However Williams tries to overlook the fact, he does not explain the particular source of direct, immediate or pure perception. Williams tries the impossible when he argues that such a state can be reached. He praises the artist who reports reality impartially: "he, the poet, saw a specific action, he experienced and he recorded, as a man of sense, directly after the deed without preconception."³⁴ He admires his mother for "seeing the thing itself without forethought

or afterthought but with great intensity of perception."³⁵ But Williams reveals an awkward psycho-linguistic naïveté about the mental origin of the words themselves. He is suggesting the perfection of a state of automatic writing, or he is failing to remember that however impartially the words may be used, they are themselves verbal symbols of mental preconceptions. That is, however objective and unprejudiced the perception and expression of the poet, both the mental interpretation of the experience and its transference into words require an initial mental process of abstract categorization. Without previous conceptions about experience and meanings, the poet would resemble an ignorant child as he saw an action, and would neither be able to understand it nor give it expression. Without having the basic tools to identify a thing, it would be bewildering. Some initial preconceptions are essential to provide the most basic analytical methods of experiencing reality, rather than being mystified; and of expressing the reality experienced in words without calling a chair a tree simply because it is made of wood. The impossibly pure perception of a man might be that of an object with different sized extensions sticking out which frayed at the ends! or it might be of a space interrupted: i.e. the 'pure' is sheer anarchy of perception. The basic perception and expression of a man requires the initial category 'human being,' a preconception of man as distinguished from animal and vegetable. It also requires the preconception of male rather than female characteristics, if what he sees is to be at all accurate. One might say that this is all trite and obvious, "the simplistic recognition of type and name,"³⁶ the recognition of the very basic similarities between things which,

as we saw in "Young Sycamore," has little to do with the perception of a particular realizable thing. However, it establishes a precedent that denies the possibility of any direct perception.

We must acknowledge that our understanding and verbal interpretation of a thing relies upon our prior knowledge of the basic categories into which we classify the thing before we can conceive, or be aware of our perception of, a particular thing. To perceive a chair, one must first have a conception of chairness. At the least, one must realize that a chair is something that one can sit upon, having thus a shape that is dependent upon the shape of the human body, and having something of a separate identity. These preconceptions must exist before a chair, or any freshly perceived object, can be even remotely realized as anything concretely knowable as a particular thing. The chair becomes recognizable, conceivable, expressible and perceivable as a particular thing as it resembles, that is, is found similar to, an established generic category. In this context then, Williams' call for the perception only of a thing's particularity or uniqueness is a request for a literal impossibility. Man's natural tendency is to categorize a newly perceived object into similar groupings. His native need is for preconceptions to exist before perception can be meaningful or communicable. One must inevitably question the accuracy and thus the value of any perception and its expression that disregards or purports to ignore this fundamental mental sorting system which is essential for mental consciousness.

An elementary preconception is vitally necessary. Some knowledge must exist in the mind prior to perception. Some established pattern must exist for making the crudest identification of a thing

into an approximate genre so that its properties may then be scrutinized in their relationship to the similar and divergent objects of that genre in order to bring out the particular uniqueness of the thing. All this may seem too elementary, but it is essential to realize that automatic sensory perception of an unknown quantity without any method of knowledge is impossible. Preconceptions that carry out the basic identifying process necessary for accurate perception, conscious understanding and true expression of that interpretation, are vital, unavoidable and healthy.

Having established this, we can look at the particular motives that underlie the objectivist temper of poets like Williams, Olson, and to some extent, the early imagists. In his writing, Williams has not amply distinguished these unavoidable necessary preconceptions in man's thinking from the interfering, biassed preconceptions of man's refusal to think again. It is this latter kind of preconception that poets and philosophers have attacked for its ignorance of reality. The objectivist ideal being just that, an unattainable goal, the objectivist reality has been to oppose the harmful characteristics of biassed thinking in all its forms. In Charles Olson's writings, "objectism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the 'subject' and his soul,"³⁷ in the interpretation of reality. D.H. Lawrence's attack upon "idea, concept, the abstracted reality, the ego"³⁸ is aimed at the subjective misinterpretation of objects as much as it is antagonistic to mental rather than sensory perception. Williams' desire for impartiality is close to the centre of his philosophy. He attacks the selfish inconsideration of partial or

party politics: he rejects the sectarian self-righteousness of particular religious institutions for their partial view of mankind: he condemns the arrogant partiality of bigoted racism: he undermines the biassed self-pride of men who lord themselves over the earth and the animal world with unfounded snobbish superiority.

It is extremely valid to quote Olson's whole statement at this point:

Objectism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the 'subject' and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature (with certain instructions to carry out) and those other creatures which we may, with no derogation, call objects. For a man is himself an object, whatever he may take to be his advantages, the more likely to recognize himself as such the greater his advantages, particularly at that moment that he achieves an humilitas sufficient to make him of use.

It comes to this: the use of man, by himself and thus by others, lies in how he conceives his relation to nature that force to which he owes his somewhat small existence.³⁹

Olson's underlying attitude is remarkably similar to Williams' though his sarcasm is not shared by Williams. Both writers call for man to curb his egotistical, proud superiority, that preconception of vain self-importance that alienates man from nature and from other things, and which vainly attempts to circumvent man's dependence upon the earth. Both Olson and Williams view and value man's existence from a perspective dependent upon our primary acceptance of the whole earth in which man plays a leading but subservient role. Within this full perspective, Williams struggles to achieve and encourage the artist's all-encompassing understanding of humanity as a whole; life on earth as a complete, not a partial, cycle. The attempt to acquire this universal perspective is the attempt to get beyond partial, selfish attitudes. The quest for a loss of self must

not be misinterpreted as an emotional longing to lose control for cowardly, escapist satisfaction, nor as an anti-intellectual frustration. It is a heroic attempt to yield the petty, partial ego that blinds man to his wider horizons. It is a fully conscious act committed with emotional and intellectual control which is designed to help man approach a complete or impartial perception of the whole earthly reality in its full perspective.

As a prerequisite to this objective, Williams insists upon the stripping away of all partial preconceptions. Using Marianne Moore's poetry as an example of the best modern work (1931), Williams argues that its value lies in its shattering effect on the reader's preconceptions:

He will perceive absolutely nothing except that his whole preconceived scheme of values has been ruined. And this is exactly what he should see, a break through all preconception of poetic form and mood and pace, a flaw, a crack in the bowl. It is this that one means when he says destruction and creation are simultaneous. But this is not easy to accept.⁴⁰

Williams stresses the need not to let the methods of classifying a perceived object impinge upon the object's essential uniqueness. The necessary processes of identifying a thing by classifying it according to its similarities to an established pattern must not crush the thing's unique beauty or private entity into a restrictive mold of belief. One must perceive as impartially as possible after having established the barest classification necessary for conscious identification. Only those preconceptions that help to orientate the simplest understanding of the object are valid; just those categorizing roots of awareness, the basic tools of recognition. The damaging influence of established ideas is felt the moment that extraneous classifications are added as analytical tools. Superficially added

and unnecessary classifications begin to dissect the thing to be perceived into pieces and to destroy any consciousness of its whole individuality. Even the initial and barest essential designation of the jagged object fraying at the ends as 'human being' can carry with it the partial prejudice of snobbish superiority over the animal world: it often arouses an egotistical pride in the human capability to reason, and it leads to an unjustified exertion of power and vanity in the destructive domination of the animal and organic worlds. The simple classification of 'male' almost always carries with it a biased opinion for or against that role depending upon the sex and/or personality of the viewer. Only the appeal to a greater power, to a fuller perspective, can cure the blinding power of preconception. The prejudiced perceiver extends his restrictive classification to non-essentials, damaging the uniqueness of the thing and his own possible perception of its individual beauty and reality. A blue perspex cube topped with a tall inflated plastic crescent would remain unrecognizable as a chair to a person whose preconceived notions of chairness had been extended to require something made intrinsically of wood, having a number of legs and a solid back.

The damaging effect of interfering preconceptions is reached when the addition of non-essential criteria for classification blinds the perceiver from accurate observation, from gaining a realistic understanding of the world, and from being able to express his awareness of reality in communicable, unbiased language. Even though one must stress the impossibility of Williams' absolutist doctrines of perception and anti-preconception, as one must also admit the inevitable failure of attaining absolutely full conscious-

ness of reality, Williams' pleas for increased impartiality, clarified perception, and a broader perspective must be viewed both as sincere and as relatively possible steps towards a clearer awareness of reality. Williams' aim is to reveal the reality masqued by the blind preconception, and to encourage people to discard all opinionated, prejudicial and partial criteria that they have allowed to accumulate until their perception has been distorted, until they are incapable of realizing the nature of their environment. It is revolution from within.

CHAPTER II

The Perspective for Creation

Williams can be seen, then, as proceeding towards the requirements for fully conscious human 'being.' The quality of human nature that is required is totally dependent upon an unbridled perception of the widest possible horizons. A narrow perspective, one bound by religious, racial, national or ideological belief, can only prevent the perception of the larger reality of human life. Any factional belief inevitably creates a partial idea about something, and being only part of the truth, part of the whole reality, it is not the whole truth nor is it fully realistic. Any party's claim to being right is false: it is a partisan, self-righteous bias that challenges the total truth of the 'universal' reality. Acquiring the truth, which equals full awareness of the whole reality at that moment, requires complete and continual openness to all experience, to all opinions: it requires the unbiassed, unselfish objective perception of everything. As such, 'total' understanding, total impartial wisdom, is an impossibility in one human's life. Yet what is attainable is a relatively wholistic perspective of the earth and of humanity. The whole truth, and anything less is a lie, is only attainable through a universal perspective to which all partial considerations are subordinated. To get to the truth, to observe the reality, to have the true knowledge and awareness necessary

to reason with correct impartiality, and by that ability are we distinctively human, we require the widest possible perspective of the global affair. Otherwise, our criteria for the reasoning capability by which we are human is partial and false: our judgment and our action is in no way wholly right or wrong, true or false. Human civilization seeks justice, humanity and fairness to satisfy its moral aspirations. None of these balanced states is possible if the basic mechanisms for determining correct human action have been fabricated in a partial and narrow mold. The right and the true act or judgment comes from an understanding of the whole reality, each part seen in that perspective. Similarly, conscious human 'being' is arrived at when man's ethical detachment can observe the whole reality, evaluate it from that universal perspective, and act upon it according to the needs of the highest priority, the welfare of man as a whole. It is this universal, humanitarian perspective that Williams is forwarding as the way to the true human reality for man and for the artist.

It is vital at this stage to re-emphasize the fact that no idea may be allowed to interfere with the attempt to gain a universally broad perspective. The acquisition of a global perspective requires that the perception be free of all ideal perceptions that offer a mentally simplified but false vision of reality. The awareness of the whole reality can be achieved if man's attitudes to his surroundings is stripped of all narrow, unconscious and preconceived notions of reality and morality. But the process of developing this attitude to life depends upon the continual re-evaluation of one's opinions and philosophy

in relation to the whole human experience, its actuality, its needs and its priority over all private or partial objectives. Nothing must interfere with the higher authority of humanity, and even that must not interfere with the highest authority: the survival of life on earth. As we have seen, this global perspective is a recognition of one's subordination to the whole process of nature, rather than a political ideal of united nations.

A man's recognition of this organic rather than man-made hierarchy of values in life, and his sacrifice of interfering ego-goals which makes possible his acceptance of his insignificance as an object in life, are dependent upon an intelligent understanding of changing reality. This understanding is in turn dependent upon an accurate perception of what is real. But the true quality of that perception is determined by the impartiality of the perspective that is used to interpret reality. The impartiality of a man's perspective is, therefore, for Williams, the measure of his artistic vision. The clarity of his perception or vision of the world, and the value of his philosophical understanding to mankind, rest upon the extent of a man's artistic impartiality. The optimum perspective requires total self-denial and total ethical detachment. Yet to experience reality, a man must be involved in its changing circumstances: he must not lose contact with the present. Artistic impartiality must subordinate the necessary perception of and involvement in a particular environment, or judgment will be coloured. This perspective is only reached by a necessary detachment from the normal, narrow happenings of society. The full man, the artist, must be closely related to

society to enable his perception of it, but be dissociated ethically from it to preserve his impartial judgment. His state must be a necessary alienation for objectivity:

[The artist] must maintain his independence----
Which amounts to a divorce from society.
--in order to be able to perceive their needs and to act
upon the imperative necessities of his perceptions.
Independent and dependent! you make me laugh.
Independent of opinion, dependent of body. The
artist had better be a poor man.⁴¹

Williams repeats the necessity of suffering to the poet:

Some exposure to the sharp edge of the
mechanics of living--such as blindness,
political exile, a commercial theatre to
support and be supported by, a profession
out of necessity, dire poverty, defiance
of the law, insanity--is necessary to the
poet. It doesn't matter what the form is,
these are all of a class, to give the poet
his sense of precision in the appreciation
of values, what is commonly spoken of as
"reality."⁴²

Williams' prerequisite of poverty and suffering to be an artist has limitations. The common effect of this idea is to encourage suffering as an intrinsic part of being creative. If not pathetically masochistic, this fallacy frequently causes an egotistical martyrdom. The martyr's desire for incessant nonconformist antics that are the antipathetic vogue to society's norm often displaces the creative act with selfish ego-trips that, even if genuinely critical of society, are destructive of the artist's perspective. Williams recognizes this danger. The fugitive state of the artist provides the opportunity for clear perception. It separates him from society's coercive pressure to uniformity, to fashion, to habitual living. But, the alienation may also destroy the possibility of artistic creation:

If [poets] permit themselves to be caught in the snare of their own lives and let that affect their decisions touching their workmanship in the faintest possible manner--they are lost. It is a balance as to the push of reality's either stimulating them to excellence or killing them outright.⁴³

Nevertheless, Williams still insists on suffering as necessary to the poet. He cannot simply mean that something is necessary to involve the poet with reality: that much is truistic. He must mean that some kind of restricting encumbrance is necessary to tie the poet to reality. Admittedly, the freedom gained by financial security may well distract the artist from his task, but many artists who have been dedicated to humanity have also been rich and have not had to need distress to remind them of reality. A fully satisfied man is a failure: he ceases to strive. But economic security does not automatically prevent the artist from being poorly satisfied with life, nor with the state of humanity. His satisfaction must be dependent upon satisfying the needs of the people. His necessary poverty must be his dissatisfaction at the people's lack: this is psychological and emotional suffering enough. Any other need for pain is highly suspect for its threat to the perspective needed for artistic creativity.

In an artist it [the need] must come from a sense of totality; the whole; humanity as a whole. How can a man be satisfied when he sees another man lacking----

But he doesn't lack if he doesn't need a thing or want it.

He doesn't know he lacks and needs it but I know he needs it. I know what he needs better than he and I cannot ignore it.

That is pure arrogance.

That is the source of aspiration, a need which the poet sees and devotes to his small life to find and to delineate. You know, He watches the sparrow fall.

Everything happens within everything else,
 There can be no satisfaction to the poet
 otherwise. What can he be without the mob?⁴⁴

The artist must be involved in the total organic process as a part of his life. His involvement is necessary for his healthy vision. The alternative of alienation is not practical when it only leads to the insanity of a "Lear:"⁴⁵

Pitiful Lear, not even you could
 out-shout the storm--to make a fool
 cry! Wife to its power might you not
 better have yielded earlier?

The sane submission to the power of the natural process is the means whereby the artist also finds his place and his origin in the environment, and so gains strength. His fulfilment depends not only upon satisfying the wants but upon clarifying the needs of other people and other creatures. Yet his effectiveness requiring impartial objectivity, the artist must also be independently apart from society, unless his satisfaction of one faction prevent his concern for the whole.

The artist's clearer perspective gives him a greater understanding of the needs of the people to fulfill themselves. While their lack of perception and thus of awareness interferes with their understanding of reality, their attitudes will necessarily be partial and selfish. Such attitudes prevailing as a social norm determining action can only worsen the conditions of each man in this vicious circle of blinding preconception, and decrease even further the possibility of acquiring a better quality of conscious living. The artist's impartial perspective is directed towards helping people become conscious of their shortcomings, towards improving their lives without any biased motive. Humanitarian

action is self-sacrifice, but it is not necessarily egotistical or vain. It is not even arrogant if it is the artist's unselfishly realistic acceptance of his small capabilities, and a use of them to benefit others without that egotistical satisfaction whose partial nature will destroy his clear perspective. I am distinguishing here between the self-assurance that an artist working alone must have to do creative work, and the egotistical pride that some people masquerading as artists project from their aloofness, a self-important opinionated subjectivity which destroys the impartial perception required to produce a realistically whole understanding. Every artist must believe in himself. It is a realistic and natural belief if his concern is for improving the human capability to understand and enjoy life. It is a false and dishonest belief if his desire is only to create public admiration for his ostentatious self.

Living fully as a man, having a clear understanding of what is really going on outside one's self, are essential to the artist's being, but they do not specify how he must express his vision. If the artist's function is to clarify the world to other men less perceptive and impartial than himself, then he must do so through expressive channels that will enlighten other men. He must stimulate their imaginations, surprise their established misinterpretations, shock their ingrained biases, shatter their decayed habitual ideals. Williams claims

The rose is obsolete
but each petal ends in
an edge, the double facet
cementing the grooved

columns of air--The edge
cuts without cutting
meets--nothing--renews
itself in metal or procelain--

whither? It ends--⁴⁶

In "The rose is obsolete;" Williams attempts to transplant 'the rose' into modern earth. He tries to give new roots to an old traditional flower which has become almost totally abstracted into a cultural symbol of love; until the rose is bereft of its tangible reality and is only a mental counter about an emotion. The symbol has become a meaningless habit; the rose is unnoticed; and the love symbolized in the giving of a rose is a sentimentalized repetition of duty. To disrupt the habitual associations that are attached to the rose, Williams pulls the rose down from its pedestal and describes it on the broken crockery of a real, modern junkheap. He gives it new roots in a modern landscape, struggling visibly and aurally with his language as the language struggles with the idea of a rose being replanted in reality, while our fresh glimpse of the rose is closer to the actuality of the flower itself.

The man seeking new life out of old unconscious habits is an artist sucking fresh expression out of old materials. The artist's clear, fresh insight must be conveyed in a fresh and unfettered medium: new structure; new language; new images. The expression of the new perception of new life needs new words. His ability with language, or colours or forms, must not be damaged by a superimposed social indoctrination into believing the supreme efficacy (and ultimate monopoly) of normal habitual style. When that is the case, his vision is blurred in customary form and in habitually dulling rather than awakening language. Habit is the weight of the desire

for oblivion:

The rose carried weight of love
but love is at an end--of roses

It is at the edge of the
petal that love waits⁴⁷

The pressure upon the rose of carrying the symbol of love has deadened the love for and the consciousness of the rose itself. The pressure of habit towards the insensitive repetition of old ideas is what quashes one's possible closeness with the living thing. Language must break through this insensitivity by avoiding habits. Of another man whose artistic innovations were always designed to rekindle the imagination in the mind dulled by habit, Williams writes:

cummings is the living presence of the drive to make all our convictions evident by penetrating through their costumes to the living flesh of the matter. He avoids the cliché first by avoiding the whole accepted modus of english. He does it . . . to lay bare the actual experience. . . . He does it to reveal, to disclose, to free a man from habit. Habit is our continual enemy as artists and as men. Practice is not a habit though it must be watched lest it become so.⁴⁸

The artist's purpose and value is enlightenment. His method is the imaginative use of his materials to surprise the reader and awaken a fresh realization:

The real purpose [is] to lift the world of the senses to the level of the imagination and so give it new currency. . . .

The imagination is the transmuter. It is the changer. Without imagination life cannot go on, for we are left staring at the empty casings where truth lived yesterday while the creature itself has escaped behind us. It is the power of mutation which the mind possesses to rediscover the truth.

So that the artist is dealing with actualities not with dreams.⁴⁹

The artist is trying to realize, to reawaken the drugged world of the senses from the restricting habits imposed by a past order.

"It is the artist's business to call attention to the imbecilities, the imperfections, the partialities as well as the excellence of his time."⁵⁰ The artist's purpose is to keep people conscious of reality. At the same time, he must use his own mind's power of changing to keep himself conscious. In "Against the Weather," Williams insists that this is achieved by working against the grain of all customary approaches to perception that have become unconscious. He goes on to attack all institutional impositions, all restrictions to liberty that enslave the mind to their codes of behaviour and the body to their regimentation of action, scope, feeling and sense. All pressure to conformity threatens the safety of man--the capitalist's greedy economic control; the state's fearful bureaucratic impingements on imaginative movement away from the desired norm of a static uniformity; the churches' indoctrinal slavery of souls and of their monies; the politicians' ideological 'isms' used to coerce people into agreement by exaggerating foreign threat and instilling suspicion. The truth and reality are always falsified by any institution bound pragmatically by its 'necessary' self-survival. Any narrowly institutional belief--religious, national or ideological--is a lie. It is less than the whole nature of man, the whole world view; it must compete by attacking its 'foreign' counterparts, be it militarily or ideologically. It does so to appear righteous in its self-justifying partiality. Nevertheless, this intrinsic partiality necessitates falsehood. The whole man wants the truth, the reality of all mankind, the actual truth of humanity, the discovery of his own nature,

no lesser partial 'truth' or 'morality' manipulated into power. He must seek beyond the institutional method of claiming truth or morality as its private property. To be a whole man, he must acquire the principled ethics of the artist and let go all pragmatic politicking of nationalism, church schism or egotism: Williams insists that "no matter what the propaganda and no matter how it touches him, it can be of no concern to the poet."⁵¹ He must see for himself, without mental preconceptions based upon a false and limiting order. Free from any bias or interfering narrowness, he can see the world for what it is, man for what he is. Objective perception is the vision of things focused through the full reality of the universal perspective: looking at things from outside the whole earth. The artist must escape from so-called reality, hereafter designated 'social normality,' being necessarily independent in his ethical detachment, observing the whole reality, perceiving the larger, actual truth.

Partiality makes a man only part an artist, and therefore not an artist. He is partially an indoctrinated machine programmed by his narrow religious, national or ideological preconceptions. And if so, he is so structured from beyond his control as to be unable to express his vision clearly. But once a whole man with clarified vision, his ability to express his observations is freed from any institutional control, any traditional and partial rules of structure, any blind unconscious agreement with a past, deceased and habitual form. He can set the pace and the shape of his verse, sculpture it to the measure demanded by what he sees, never having to bend the actual truth to the requirements of a

false imposed order. Williams argues:

How then can a man seriously speak of order
when the most that he is doing is to impose
a structural character taken over from the
habits of the past upon his content? This
is sheer bastardy.⁵²

If he sees anything real, it is new: no old structure representative of a past reality can carry the present truth. His finished work, the art form that carries the fresh reality of his objective perception, is the poem, the sculpting of words into a tensility that suggests the object, the painting of words into the lines and colours that re-present the thing he sees, the composing of words into a measure that carries the pulsing rhythm of the actual thing. The poem is the final recreation of the truth; it must be fresh to be created and real, and not a cheap copy of a dead thing remembered from the past. The poem's structure is the finished work of the artist and the first thing that the viewer sees. Any traditionally imposed order constitutes a lie. And so the lie hits the reader immediately if the structure is bound by preconceived, partial ideas that were operating at the moment of perception and during the artistic reconstruction of the object seen. Only fresh structure, new form, new art, original work, creative writing, painting, sculpting, composing is of value--is true to the reality of life, is basically tied to live things, and not bound and falsified to dead ideas.

The whole process of perception, through conception, imagination, to expression requires an absolute discipline of conscious liberty from preconceived ideas about life. Anything else

just is not the real truth. Two statements now illuminate the whole creative process:

The real purpose [is] to lift the world of the senses to the level of the imagination and so give it new currency.⁵³

and,

A work of art is important only as evidence, in its structure, of a new world which it has been created to affirm.⁵⁴

CHAPTER III

Poetic Value of Change

The artist's concern is to bring new life
to the dulled consciousness of the people.

That statement must be able to stand on its own. The artist must intensify people's awareness of reality by awakening their imaginations. The materials he uses must be revived from habitual use so as to have the necessary startling effect. The poet must continually revive the language and the structure of his work to this purpose. But the need for change should not be misinterpreted, as it so often is, as a justification for extremist over-reaction. It is inevitable that a new era will try to justify its position--its opinion as to the rightness of its form and content--by reacting against the opposite values held by the preceding order. But what is destructively fallacious is not the absolutist statements of the radicals, usual in the process of change, but the misunderstanding and the mistaken teaching that follows--the absolutist opinions as to the eternal verity of particular schools, and, therefore, of kinds of poetry. So much time, so much argument has been spent justifying the absolute superiority of Classical or Romantic poetry, the rightness of reason or of emotion. The issue is more specifically one of opposing philosophical outlooks, on life, or of differing approaches to experience. The damaging effect of the total confusion of art with these contradictory life-

styles has been the repeated self-righteous and self-justifying over-reaction of each school to the preceding era. The anti-romantics exaggerated their desire for change into a denial of what was valid in the previous era. As a result, they and, to a greater extent, the followers who worshipped them and who were taught by them, became too enamoured by reason, too restrictive in their field of poetic experience, too denotative in their language, and prone, too, to too idealized notions of order, scientific mechanism, tradition and "civilisation" in Sir Kenneth Clark's narrowed use of the word: the grossly elevated regard of sophistication, aesthetics, conservatism and the mind, to the disparagement of organic sensibility, truth, radicalism and sense-awareness. The anti-rationalists rebelled in the next era, again disregarding the possible value of any existing poetic, and they became too sentimental, too vague and ethereal in their content, unspecific in their language, enamoured by sensation, idealism, the primitive and the ego.

Wallace Stevens argues against the extremism of both schools. The basic fault of both is a characteristic unreality that deadens the vitality of the imagination. The extreme limitation of classical denotation is a rigid asceticism that confines meaning and denies suggestive associations. "The necessary angel"⁵⁵ is the power of the imagination to provide an escape, a powerful human need to survive the pressures of reality. Rationality must not overpower this freedom by imposing artificial limitations on the imagination. Conversely, the extreme license of romantic connotation is a vague mysticism that gives so much freedom to associations that meaning

is lost. "The angelic imagination"⁵⁶ must not overpower its human roots and become dissolved in the worship of intellectual power. 'Sensationality' must not be permitted to deny freedom by abstracting language and dehumanizing it beyond the base of human emotional experience and beyond intellectual understanding.

Neither conservative nor anarchic values will do. The "conscious restriction to prescribed form,"⁵⁷ the ideal, retreatist, classical, ordering, traditional prejudice destroys life--by imposing its habitual, fixed code upon the living and the young.

We are stopped by the archaic lingering in our laboring forms of procedure--which interested parties, parts, having or getting the power will defend with explosives--seeking to prevent the new life from generating in the decay of the old. . . . Those who see it one way call it the defense of tradition. Others see tradition belied in that tradition once was new--now only a wall.⁵⁸

These others believe in what Williams calls the "unconfined acceptance of experience."⁵⁹ They claim, along with Bernard Leach, that "we live in dire need of a unifying culture out of which fresh traditions can grow."⁶⁰ They would agree with Williams that

Formal patterns of all sorts represent arrests of the truth in some particular phase of its mutations, and immediately thereafter, unless they change, become mutilations.⁶¹

The process of change is an essential ingredient to bring new life that will prevent the static decay of a rigid ideal order, a human mental order imposed on changing reality. But total change destroys a base from which to grow: negative reaction is not constructive

change. The old must not be completely disintegrated, lest the new, fresh and young shall not have a chance to be born out of the old. Neither extreme will suffice: only constructive change will do. The method, the style, the structure, the traditional mode (or mold) of expression must change:

It must change, it must reappear in another form, to remain permanent. It is the image of the Phoenix. To stop the flames that destroy the old nest prevents the rebirth of the bird itself. . . . This is the essence of what art is expected to do and cannot live without doing.⁶²

Williams is much more antagonistic to the repressive extreme of conservatism than to the effect of anarchistic extremes:

We live under attack by various parties against the whole. And all in the name of order! But never an order discovered in its living character of today, always an order imposed in the senseless image of yesterday--for a purpose of denial.⁶³

The poet must be concerned with the present. There is no eternally absolute right or wrong kind of poetry: the nature of poetry, as of truth and value, changes as man and the universe change. Each extreme is as bad as the other in its prescriptive value judgments, its self-inflicted narrow scope of perception and expression, and its lack of the imaginative means of relating closely with reality and of expressing that communion. What is right is what is right for now, that poetry which will be most effective in awakening the imagination of the people of the age, in revealing the reality of the time. Each age needs that poetry which will make the most sense to the understanding, and carry emotion most effectively to the feelings of the reader. No

permanent system of expression can achieve this, for the minds and emotions of the readers will become dulled by habit, their reactions subconscious, their minds and their emotions automatic. Poetry cannot, therefore, have permanent rules; yet in any particular era, poetry is something definite rather than anything free. Its nature changes to fit the present necessities of the poet to express himself anew in the changing social climate. Change should come as a process of continual recreation, rather than as a product of destructive reaction. But the failure of poets to continue this change causes poetry to slump into conventionality and to elicit stereotyped responses. When people are reduced to dullness, and stupidity, the course of evolutionary change is barred. New poets must inevitably re-enliven the art and battle habit: revolution will destroy to recreate. One can justify revolution when the process of peaceful evolutionary change has been barred: biologically, politically or artistically, this stoppage poses a threat to survival and necessitates violent outbreak. But artistically, this outbreak takes the form of antagonistic 'pop culture' which thrives on the worship of anything radically new. It is an insensible extremist revolution that is as partial as the preceding conservative or succeeding reactionary trends. All extremes are delusions in their escapist hyperemotionalism which blinds their participants to the realistic solution. What is required is a continuing evolution in art, and often a radically fast evolution verging on revolutionary change through the imagination not the prejudices: it is an inner revolution--the shock of suddenly

waking up! Williams writes:

We should have a revolution of some sort in America every ten years. The truth has to be redressed, re-examined, reaffirmed in a new mode. There has to be new poetry.⁶⁴

Only the continual re-evaluating revelation of reality and of the truth can preserve impartial artistic integrity. And only the objective expression of this reality in new ways determined by the requirements of the whole seen from a detached perspective can foster a locally orientated and truly valid artistic environment free of factionalism.

It is the poet's "duty to render the image of man as he is in his time,"⁶⁵ "to make known and conscious what is subconscious to all,"⁶⁶ to use the imagination's "power to possess the moment it perceives,"⁶⁷ the present real moment that a poem snatches before it can be dissolved in time and space. Everything alive is "here and now."⁶⁸ Williams continually claims the exact present to be of the highest conscious value. It is the only physical, actual reality, and it is eternal in its ever present reality. "A life that is here and now is timeless. That is the universal I am seeking: to embody that in a work of art, a new world that is always 'real.'"⁶⁹ It is this present, active reality that the valid poem recaptures in art, movement moving at one remove from the tangible--time and space fixed--that the poem intensifies into an awareness that the senses fleetingly miss as they are distracted on in their continual reaction to temporal and spacial experience. "It is because of the element of timelessness in it, its sensuality. The

only world that exists is the world of the senses. The world of the artist."⁷⁰ The importance of the poet's involvement with the present is paramount. He is an artist; he is to describe life, life that changes and is active; and that activity is what he actually feels and thinks in the present, not memories of what has been. The "world of the senses" means the present reality of the physical senses. Williams praises Lorca for having a consciousness of basic earthly reality, for being a "realist of the senses"⁷¹, for being instinctive rather than intellectual. But, again, anti-intellectuality must not be misinterpreted, as it so often is, as hyperemotionalism or anti-rationality. Williams also compliments Lorca's balanced impartiality: "[he displays] the same ethical detachment and the same freedom from ethical prejudice."⁷² The artist's audience is present too. So he describes the present particulars that he feels and knows, that he and his audience can relate to, and the universal significance of his art takes care of itself, for the emotions and thoughts of human beings do not change so significantly that they become unrecognizable. The poet will therefore be rooted in the present place and time of his existence, and his poems will reflect that reality, and they must change too if they are to reflect changing reality, and if they are to awaken the reader's sense of that reality.

Poetry must surprise. It must surprise immediately, either for the reader to bother with close scrutiny, or for the poetry to be worthy of the intellectual thought needed to solve the difficulty. Sufficient stimulus of pleasure or of truth, emotion or reason, must exist on the surface to awake the reader's

desire and his imagination. An immediate sense of the feeling of the poem (even if partial) must be available, or the experience is only hard labour. "[Poetry] must appeal to emotions with the charm of direct impression, flashing through regions where the intellect can only grope."⁷³ To succeed in this, the poet must struggle against conventional habits of perception and expression, so that he can describe his experiences, physical and mental, with clarity and in his own words,⁷⁴ and with an apocalyptic sense of their reality.

If a poet use the established form and fit standard diction to it, he shall find it almost impossible to say anything especially valuable (that is, of worth to the reader's sense of truth or beauty, with the connotation--of singular importance), and he shall find it extraordinarily difficult to say anything extraordinary but he be too 'difficult.' The beauty or truth of his poem will be unrecognizable in tired doggerel and clichéd diction. Habitual use must deaden all creativity and all active response. Language that is traditionally habitual and commonplace must elicit the same traditionally habitual and commonplace feelings and thoughts in the reader as it always has done. No feeling or understanding will occur: all reaction will be subconscious. No participation will exist between the poet's emotion (which is questionable) and the reader's awareness of that emotion (which is non-existent). To transfer the emotion, the poet must awake the reader's intelligence, he must stimulate the reader's intellect into actively seeking an understanding of the poem, not just casting it into a pre-existing conventional category of response. And to make the reader feel the

emotion, the poet must sharpen the reader's 'sensitivity,' (his "exceptional openness to emotional impressions"⁷⁵). He must use language--format, meter, diction and image--that will strike the reader's feelings as surprisingly real to his experience.

This does not necessitate limiting poetry to contemporary content. There is no more sense in restricting content to contemporary experience than there is in arguing for the adoption of a particular poetic diction-ary. But there is much sense in insisting that poetic content today must relate to the context of contemporary experience for it to be understood and felt by the modern audience. Poetry must reflect the age: twentieth century poetry must reflect this age of revolution in society and in art, of mass and massive violence, of industrialism, amazing material luxury and vast poverty, of mobility, of the collapse of traditional authority, of the dominance of the middle class, of pollution, of anxiety and alienation. Past experience--the horse-and-cart and the knight-in-armour--is meaningless except in relation to the present reality. Their respective sing-song lyric and alliterative ballad forms are meaningless and unfelt outside their historical context. The poet who records the age he inhabits, lives in the present; he tries to awake people's minds and emotions to his vision of the present reality. The poet who describes the past, lives in the past in preference to the present; his subject matter is often alien and unrelated to present conditions. The past determines his form and endangers his expression to being habitual and his reader's reaction to being automatic. The poetry is customarily an appeal to an old order, to a stability that is not present. At

the same time, it reflects an idealistic escapism. The poetry thus tells us much about the poet, the sentimentalist who prefers an abstract dream of the dead past to his present, physical existence. It cannot even be argued in the poet's favour that he is an 'inhabitant' of that past era he recalls, for the sentimental tone and escapist attitude reveal a fundamental bitterness which is alien to the glory and security of the past age he bemoans, and which the poet of that time would not have had. This poet's world is alien to all--an abstracted dream, a self-deception. The poetry is lost in the reader's rejection of the poet's personality, and the poetry's unreality makes its images meaningless and unfeeling.

In "The Poem as a Field of Action," Williams has reached that stage in his advocacy of the 'new' where he need no longer be so vehement against the blinding effects of status quo mentality-morality. Much has already been said criticizing the arrogant selfishness of the establishment in their traditional reactionary will to control the advance of any new (revolutionary) trends that do not add to their private well-being. In "The Poem as a Field of Action," the criticisms of secular, religious, moral, educational, ideological and perceptual systems that attack all doctrines of the new are left unsaid, almost as if already understood by his audience. Williams does not even bother to 'digress' into the implications of his doctrine to the closely tied world of the artist generally, the painter and the sculptor. His focus is fixed on the problems of the poet in particular and the poems by themselves. But the discussion

is not just a technical or aesthetic analysis of the course necessary for the creation of continually modern poetry; that is, of the way to find all freshness or modernism for any poem in the future. All the philosophical implications of the battle between the revolution and the establishment are present, but applied specifically to poetry: "the continued necessity for reappraisals in the arts"⁷⁶ versus the blindness that attempts to prolong a static ideal.

The frustration and disgust has dissipated into a cool assertion of the new as the only possible means of poetic growth. Thus, all examples of traditional, established poetry being presently written become copy by default, and are almost automatically dismissed as irrelevant and useless. The point of Williams' argument may be simply stated. We have evolved beyond that world which has been strictly interpreted by Europeans within an ordered, man-centred, Christian and classical context. And though extended onto the New World through English and European settlers, the Old World civilization is not relevant to the North American experience of life. This irrelevant imposition stifled poetic and perceptual evolution, prevented change and adaptation, and drugged the imagination and liveliness of the people. Williams pleads for the

bedeviled spirit of man, bedeviled by the
deadly, lying repetitiousness of doctrinaire
formula worship which is the standard
work of the day. In my young days it was
"English." In your young days it was
"Greece," "Rome." But the mind is merely
enslaved by these ideals, these ideas,
unless we can relate them, here, now, in
our environment, to ourselves and our day.
This require invention.⁷⁷

Williams uses Auden's 'defection' to America as an example of "a distinguished poet's"⁷⁸ acceptance of the New World's active changing language and rejection of the tired, rigidly restrictive language of England today. So the accent is continually upon action and America. The Old World's rigid hold upon the lives and minds of the new continent has finally collapsed. And in the language of the new inheritors of English on the new continent is the living proof of adaptation to the American environment. It is this total and irreversible change in the American language, with little English about it, that must liberate the New World and its poets from the establishment's traditional code of poetics. Poetry has changed; its subject matter has changed, as Williams argues, from dreams of aristocratic wish-fulfilment to observations about life in a technological age; and now the final barrier must be broken--orthodoxy in form and language.

There are new things to see, and to be seen afresh without the interference of traditional prejudices (= pre-judgments, pre-conceptions). So these things must be expressed through a fresh medium--and in poetry, this fresh medium is the local and present language as it relates to its usage "here and now." The need for present usage refers to both the contemporary, local speech and the active rather than passive tense of the language.

CHAPTER IV

The Creative Process of Revealing the Process

The particulars of the poems--the words--must be carefully prevented from being used habitually. Clichés must be avoided, or used in a striking context to prevent the reader's sinking into a subconscious response to a pre-conditioned meaning. Words that have become imprecise or shoddy through too frequent use must be purged or used in such a way that they preserve their intrinsic meaning and impact.

Let the snake wait under
his weed
and the writing
be of words, slow and quick, sharp
to strike, quiet to wait,
sleepless.⁷⁹

Tired, common words must be refined to exact use to have fresh and definite meaning: words must be used "carefully"--⁸⁰

As the cat
climbed over
the top of

the jamcloset
first the right
forefoot

carefully
then the hind
stepped down

into the pit of
the empty⁸¹
flowerpot

Williams is one of a distinct group of modern poets who have demanded that the diction must reflect the active, changing nature of reality; the transitive must be used to carry the transitory flux of life. "The one necessity, even in our own poetry, is to keep words as flexible as possible, as full of the sap of nature."⁸² The verb must be primary to stress motion. Charles Olson picks up Fenellosa's cue, and incorporates it into his poetic of process--of immediacy and action: nothing may be allowed to "sap the going energy of the content to its form."⁸³ And Pound suggests the same idea, disliking "painted adjectives impeding the shock and stroke of it."⁸⁴ He advocates a purge of tired diction. Williams insists that the re-awakened vision can only be expressed through language which awakens imaginative thought and which, through its originality, prevents the reader from sliding into thoughtless, pre-constructed linguistic habits. "Unbound thinking has to be done with straight, sharp, words. . . . It's the words, the words we need to get back to, words washed clean."⁸⁵ Of Pound's words in the first XXX Cantos, Williams writes: "linguistic use has entirely passed out of them, there is almost no use of simile, no allegory--the word has been used in its plain sense to represent a thing--remaining thus loose in its context--not gummy--(when at its best)--an objective unit in the design--but alive."⁸⁶ Book Three of Paterson ends with the flood that washes the words clean of their encumbering burden of traditional meanings, pre-conceived meanings which provide habitual interpretations without conscious precision of thought. Fresh understanding and "a fundamental regeneration of thought in our language"⁸⁷ necessitate a purification of the word

from the clichés of habit.

the roar of the present, a speech--
is, of necessity, my sole concern

Not until I have made of it a replica
will my sins be forgiven and my
disease cured--

I must
find my meaning and lay it, white,
beside the sliding water: myself--⁸⁸
comb out the language-- or succumb

Consciousness of reality, of the process of life, of the song of the water falling, can only be expressed by words that are themselves purified of debris in imitation of that reality; the words, like the stones under the falls, are scoured of decayed thought and convey fresh and precise meaning. But precision must not sterilize language of connotations, suggestiveness and flights of the imagination. Clear language must expand imaginative thought, not mechanize it. The purging of habitual methods of thoughtlessly stringing words together allows the poet to construct images that startle the perception into a sudden awareness.

It is the new images which must renew the imagination of the reader. The search for an image that exactly describes a thing is the search "to make you continually see a physical thing, to prevent you gliding through an abstract process."⁸⁹ Even abstractions must be realized in the imagination by some concrete representation. The image must be meticulously exact to insist upon its own reality, its physical existence. Its freshness must surprise the reader, so that he does not think the poet is mechanized into an automatic reaction to his experience. Any image that the poet makes is only going to be recognizable if it is related to the present context of

reality. Williams praises Lorca's work for revealing "the very essence of today. Reality, immediacy; by the vividness of the image invoking the mind to start awake."⁹⁰

Williams creates images combining the ideal and the base, the myth and the fact,

--the virgin and the whore,
 an identity,
 both for sale
 to the highest bidder!⁹¹

While observing the two extremes dispassionately, and reversing the roles of good and evil, Williams reveals the hypocrisy of "the age of shoddy"⁹² where "love is begrimed;"⁹³ where the natural desires of man are devalued by the public façade of highly moral sexlessness, and debased by an indulgence in private eroticism to release frustration. The image is effective because it shocks both the reader's intentionally blind moral evasions and his drowsy sensibility. It awakens his imagination. "A Negro Woman"⁹⁴ is another 'brilliant' poem because its startling image jars our preconceptions. In the character sketch of a common, contemporary sight, the poem unifies the ideal of liberty and the reality of ignorant servitude.

A Negro Woman

carrying a bunch of marigolds
 wrapped
 in an old newspaper:
 She carries them upright,
 bareheaded,
 the bulk
 of her thighs
 causing her to waddle
 as she walks
 looking into
 the store window which she passes
 on her way.
 What is she
 but an ambassador
 from another world

a world of pretty marigolds
 of two shades
 which she announces
 not know what she does
 other
 than walk the streets
 holding the flowers upright
 as a torch
 so early in the morning.

An image is a concentrated flash of insight. Here, in the image of one person, two ambassadors meld: one public, the promised dream of white freedom, the generous foreign and unrelated gift of enthusiastic hope and illusion; the other private, the bleak reality of black inequality. The image heightens our sense of reality by augmenting our scope of feeling towards and understanding of, the state of man. It is this intensification of reality that the image gives, that the image must give to be effective, and that the image will give if the words, images, form and rhythm are all working in original and changed ways to startle the reader's imagination and his sensibility.

Does this intensification of reality in the reader require the poet to use images in a particular way? If it is the real we seek in poetry, we must again distinguish between actualizing objectivity and abstracting subjectivity. T.S. Eliot's "objective correlative" theory uses outside reality to express emotion. Eliot discovers what mood he is in, and then searches for images to elaborate and describe his emotional state; which is, in the following stanza from "Rhapsody on a Windy Night,"⁹⁵ an empty bitterness upon observing the "automatic" nature of human action:

Half-past two,
 The street-lamp said,
 'Remark the cat which flattens itself in the gutter,
 Slips out its tongue
 And devours a morsel of rancid butter.'
 So the hand of the child, automatic,
 Slipped out and pocketed a toy that was running along the
 quay.
 I could see nothing behind that child's eye.
 I have seen eyes in the street
 Trying to peer through lighted shutters,
 And a crab one afternoon in a pool,
 An old crab with barnacles on his back,
 Gripped the end of a stick which I held him.

Eliot's images remain outside objects to be interpreted by and used in the description of the subjective ego. And so Charles Olson makes the charge that "Eliot's root is the mind alone, . . . and that, in his listenings he has stayed there where the ear and the mind are, has only gone from his fine ear outward."⁹⁶ Eliot himself states that he uses the outside reality as "the formula of that particular emotion"⁹⁷ that he wishes to express in a poem. Wallace Stevens believes in the clarification of the conscious realization of a thing through the imaginative recreation of sensory impressions. Despite Stevens' attempt to transcend his physical isolation and rise into union with other things, it is a mental struggle: in "The Snow Man" he seeks to expand his consciousness into an understanding of physical nature. His achievement is a reasoned revelation of emotional and sensual realities, of intuitive rhythms between man and nature. It remains a harmony of the mind--an abstraction. Stevens' imaginative escape from the pressures of reality is achieved by the transcendence of his mental abstractions. Stevens looks at reality, not to make us more aware of it, but to help us escape from it.

The opposing approach to experience may be witnessed in the poetry of Pound and Williams. Both poets seeks the "direct treatment of the thing,"⁹⁸ avoiding as much as possible any interpretation about the thing. They look at outside reality first: the emotion it creates is secondary. Williams' exact description of the structure and substance of the thing tries to touch "the thing itself." Without abstracting nature into a mental construct, without commenting upon the thing, Williams re-presents just the total thing. If he succeeds, his words convey everything that can be said about the thing without saying it. The thing is everything itself: the only ideas are in "the thing itself." In bringing man to as close a relationship with the intense reality of natural objects as he can, in returning to the nature of the object, Williams tries "--through metaphor to reconcile/ the people and the stones,"⁹⁹ But even the intense description of real things is shallow without imaginative as well as exact portrayal:

The instant
trivial as it is
is all we have
unless--unless
things the imagination feeds upon,
the scent of the rose,
startle us anew,¹⁰⁰

The prime importance of the image is to make reality more vivid. Any largely subjective interference with this revelation is opinionated partiality. Even "the rose," here symbolizing tradition itself, must be renewed to be more than trivial.

The expression of reality "requires invention." All relevant creative work of the imagination must be fresh, new,

contemporary and inventive. All the materials at the poet's disposal must change dramatically to reflect the poet's present awareness--to incandesce reality. New vision requires new expression through a new form:

Without invention nothing is well spaced,
 unless the mind change, unless
 the stars are new measured, according
 to their relative positions, the
 line will not change, the necessity
 will not matriculate: unless there is
 a new mind there cannot be a new
 line, the old will go on
 repeating itself with recurring
 deadliness: . . .

without invention the line
 will never again take on its ancient
 divisions when the word, a supple word,
 lived in it, crumbled now to chalk.¹⁰¹

One poet's form is more than an independent and idiosyncratic system of punctuation. Habit has reduced the reader's reaction to traditional punctuation signs to a pre-conditioned response that is subrational. Punctuation is for pause and emphasis. It provides the means of indicating when a thought or word group should be emphasised by isolating it or by reflecting tonal deviations from the norm. But when traditional signs are glossed over, the poet has relatively little control over the reader's interpretation of the poet's pause and emphasis.

Modern poetic alterations in the method of visual layout thus have a number of effects. The novelty of the variation from the norm shocks the reader from his laziness or complacency, and forces attention (through the poet's particular 'difficulty') onto the new format. Broken from habit, the consciousness of the reader is directed onto the special emphasis required by the poet:

Listen! --

the pouring water!
 The dogs and trees
 conspire to invent
 a world--gone!¹⁰²

The placing forces the reader's concentration onto the content's eccentricity: the pausing separates the meaning of the images to stress the relationships that are singular to this description. The poem takes the form demanded by the content--thing, concept, feeling: there is the danger, though, that the imitative visual form may be over-emphasised at the neglect of rhythmic or tonal representation. Contemporary graphic and concrete poetry often suffers from this narrowness.

If the removal of standard forms emphasises the use of deviant--new, original--forms of expression, then the spare but pointed use of standard punctuation (capitals, italics, signs, underlining, etc.) reinvigorates their value and attracts attention:

If this were rhyme, Sweetheart
 such rhyme as might be made
 jaws would hang open .
 But the measure of it is the thing . None
 can wish for an embellishment
 and keep his mind lean,
 fit for action .
 such action as I plan¹⁰³

Variety shocks into activity the mind which habit had dulled.

The need for change and modernity has had its effect on the poetic form of each era. The sonnet was originally a new form that had its awakening effect on the reader's imagination as it departed from the old alliterative ballad form. The sonnet reflected the renewed sense of order and unity of the Renaissance understanding of the Ptolemaic chain of being. So the form reflected the tight com-

parison being drawn by the poet--the octet's general theme, the sestet's particular application of that theme, with the closing couplet's unification of the generally natural description and the particularly personal analogy. Rhyme schemes and syllabic counting, were thoroughly original and startling. They required a great deal of intricate work to perfect if they were not to break the backs of the words. Nevertheless, many words were used expressly for the formal requirements, and the poet's rigid metrical form, though it twisted words, was still paradoxically true to his geometrical meaning of the order of the universe. However, one is never sure whether the word used was the sonneteer's exact meaning or the nearest rhyming synonym available--and as such, a prostitution of the content to the artificiality of the structure. Such judgments are made on all forms, but with less justification on those that are not bound by the necessities of rhyming and syllabic meter, such forms that are thus closer to recording the object's actuality, that reflect life more freely than they show artifice. Williams writes of Ezra Pound:

He has not "modified" it [the meaning] to fit his preconceived--or any preconceived metrical plan. He has kept his own plan fluid enough to meet his opportunities. He has taken, laudably, the speech of the men he treats of and, by clipping to essentials, revealed its closest nature--its pace, its "meaning." . . .

The line must be measured to be in measure--but this does not mean disfigurement to fit an imposed meter.¹⁰⁴

No form can last indefinitely without destroying itself, since it must become a habit in the poet and in the reader, and the meaning lost in the scheme of presentation. No form is best. To

communicate something, new ways must continually be found to keep the imagination active: their merit does not lie in their particular nature or novelty per se, but in the effective shock value of their strangeness of difficulty to the passive reader. Creativity must extend to the mode of expression as to the mode of perception, else the value of the insight is lost in a tired musical scheme, where all the words mean the same old thing--nothing in particular--when sung to a worn-out tune:

The sea runs back against itself
 With scarcely time for breaking wave
 To cannonade a slatey shelf
 And thunder under in a cave

Before the next can fully burst.
 The headwind, blowing harder still,
 Smooths it to what is was at first--
 A slowly rolling water-hill. . . .

Here where the cliffs alone prevail
 I stand exultant, neutral, free,
 And from the cushion of the gale
 Behold a huge consoling sea.¹⁰⁵

The poem's form fits the content to an imposed meter, rhyme scheme and uniform stanzaic pattern: it is a rigid, symmetrical, clichéd mold. But the content is also a cliché: the self-pitiful, subjective use of outside reality to describe the poet's emotional ego. It is an escapist perception that retreats from present reality. "Winter Seascape" was written by John Betjeman for publication in 1966. Williams insists that continual control is necessary for one to be aware of the unconscious use of established structures, so that one can avoid "good safe stereotype"¹⁰⁶ that dulls the effective expression of the words, just as good safe pre-conceptions dull imaginative perception. He condemns

the fracture of stupidities bound in our thoughtless phrases, in our calcified grammatical constructions and in the subtle brainlessness of our meter and favorite prose rhythms--which compel words to follow certain others without precision of thought.¹⁰⁷

To prevent habitual perception and customary response, the content must not be restricted by the form. Does this necessitate that each object (as the subject of a poem) determines the formal expression? The feeling or thing described affects the form, as does the poet's determination to express accurately his mood or thought. The poet might find one form which will suit all his poetry, and still have the original--startling--qualities needed to shock the reader from his normal subconscious response to language. But it might be a contradictory limitation of the content to allow the poet his own, but the same, form for all his poetry, however original the form may be. Can the relatively small quantity of one poet's work exhaust a form? What amount of use is considered sufficient to render the form common and thus over-worked? This might the form's adoption into the everyday mode of expression, and thus of the sub-rational use of language, yet many poets (Wordsworth, Whitman, Williams) have argued for the poetic use of the common idiom. Williams claims that "the dialect is the mobile phase, the changing phase, the productive phase."¹⁰⁸ Listening to the fresh growth of language uninhibited by tradition, he finds "hints towards composition."¹⁰⁹

It is there, in the mouths of the living, that the language is changing and giving new means for expanded possibilities in literary expression and, I add, basic structure--the most important of all.¹¹⁰

The speed, tone, stress, pitch, emphasis, rhythm and lilt of the common language spoken today provides the idiomatic relation which modern poetry must approximate for realism and relevance. These variables must be listened to and resonating within the mind of the poet to enable him to give the relevant idiomatic form to this poetry. They constitute a meaningful modern structure that the poet must create so that his perception is not disfigured by restrictive rules of outmoded poetic form. Thus, the poet can have the means of expressing his objects in the actual, accurate reality of the present dialect, which is a natural consequence of both the contemporary and the local experience. The language will be fresh. Its music will ring with its local and present sound of action. In "The Gossips," Williams' poetic structure imitates the linguistic structure of gossiping:

Blocking the sidewalk so
 we had to go round
 3 carefully coiffured
 and perfumed old men
 fresh from the barbers
 a cartoon by Daumier
 reflecting the times were
 discussing with a foreign
 accent one cupping his
 ears not to miss a
 syllable the news from
 Russia on a view of
 the reverse surface of
 the moon^{lll}

Through the structure of the poem, Williams has captured the nature of gossiping: the air of hurriedness, of thrill, of exaggeration, of pride in the telling, and of the unimportance of the tale. The rushing excitement is depicted by the lack of punctuation, and by the way that the reader is continually reaching into the next line to grasp the meaning. This provides a sense of secrecy and

expectancy too. The poem is a mass of many quick digressions used to puff up the exaggerated thrill of the gossiping. But the most important structural deviation from the norm is the displacement of the last word of semantic phrase groups to the beginning of the next line:

. . . were
discussing/ with a foreign
accent/ one cupping his
ears/ not to miss a
syllable/ the news from
Russia

By this unusual device, Williams actually gives a closer representation of the phrase division of common gossiping. These gossips pause slightly before the key word; then, hurl it out followed rapidly by the necessary syntactic words. Williams imitates this common speech rhythm by breaking the line before the key word, letting the line trail off so that the beginning of the new line receives the emphasis required to fit the rhythms of gossiping.

Only by responding attentively to contemporary speech rhythms can the structure imitate accurately the phraseology, emphasis and uniqueness of the locality. The structure must be relevantly modern and alive, related to the lives of the people it records (and who read it), and who recognize the true nature of the locality through the structure. It must gain fresh life, shocking the prejudiced preconceptions from their expectations of normality, shocking the reader to awareness and to an active participation in "the poem as a field of action;" live words for live things in live forms.

The world has changed, the language has changed: outmoded poetic forms of expression must change. There is an inseparable relationship between social and poetic structure; "our lives also have lost all that in the past we had to measure them by, except outmoded standards that are meaningless to us."¹¹²

The very grounds for our beliefs have altered.
We do not live that way any more; nothing in
our lives, at bottom, is ordered according to
that measure; our social concepts, our schools,
our very religious ideas, certainly our understanding of mathematics are greatly altered.
Were we called upon to go back to what we believed
in the past we should be lost. Only the
construction of our poems--and at best the
construction of a poem must engage the tips
our intellectual awareness--is left shame-
fully to the past.¹¹³

Williams attacks the conservative rigidity of poetic conventions of measure: "there is nothing interesting in the construction of our poems, nothing that can job the ear out of its boredom."¹¹⁴ But he also insists that progress towards a relevantly modern structure cannot be achieved by deserting the notion of order. While the representation of modern reality requires a profusion of description--"ill-assorted--quite breathless-grasping at all kinds of things"¹¹⁵--it also requires a controlling device to preserve it from the anarchistic non-sensicality of 'free verse.' "The abstract idea of freedom, [is] an idea lethal to all order, particularly to that order which has to do with the poem."¹¹⁶ The poem is a construction, words welded into a living machine, disciplined into imitating nature, neither rigidly structured nor crashing freely. Either extreme destroys the creative process. The art of living is a discipline to create satisfaction,

awareness, happiness, possibility out of the same two extremes--chaos and slavery. In creating, artists must avoid the fearful "retreat to safety:" the "return . . . to the classics for their models"¹¹⁷ prevents any new mode of poetic creation. The wild wish to escape from order also fails because the art form succumbs to license, anarchy and unintelligibility:

Satyrs dance!
all the deformities take wing
centaurs
leading to the rout of the vocables
in the writings
of Gertrude
Stein--but
you cannot be
an artist
by mere ineptitude¹¹⁸

The expression of the chaotic nightmare may not be achieved through absurd disorder. The creation of unusual images expressive of torment or schizophrenic frustration requires a disciplining control over the chaos of the mind. Through art, but through a measured art form of capturing the reflections of life, the frightening destructive obsessions are themselves destroyed:

and there came to me
just now
the knowledge of
the tyranny of the image
and how
men
in their designs
have learned
to shatter it
whatever it may be,
that the trouble
in their minds
shall be quieted,
put to bed
again. 119

Between the extremes of chaos and enslavement lies the true liberty of poetic structure and social structure. Disciplining laws protect individual liberty from violent anarchy, while the discipline of a poetic measure ensures that the poem is both readable and intelligible.. Williams seeks "a new measure by which may be ordered our poems as well as our lives."¹²⁰

No verse can be free, it must be governed
by some measure, but not by the old measure,
. . . We have to return to some measure
but a measure consonant with our time and
not a mode so rotten that it stinks.¹²¹

The nature of "our time" determines the measure. The present reality, the present relative order of society, the present measure in the speech dialects of the people, and the present musical rhythm of speech all offer "hints towards composition"¹²² for poetic constructions to be meaningfully relevant. They require

a new measure of a new way of measuring
that will be commensurate with the social,
economic world in which we are living as
contrasted with the past. It is in many
ways a different world from the past call-
ing for a different measure.¹²³

The relative liberty and relative security of our world is alien to both absolute liberty and absolute slavery. To relate to this world, poetry must abandon ideal or absolute extremes of rigidity and chaos. "We have today to do with the poetic, as always, but a relatively stable foot, not a rigid one. That is all the difference."¹²⁴ Williams' object, as always, is to re-awaken the dulled imagination; so he is trying to restore the measuring of poetry to the conscious mind.

The foot has to be expanded or contracted in terms of actual speech. The key to modern poetry is measure, which must reflect the flux of modern life. You should find a variable measure for the fixed measure; for man and the poet must keep pace with this world.¹²⁵

Williams' search for a "relatively stable foot" is an attempt to simulate the rhythm of American speech. He is trying to revitalize the unconsciousness of either habit or chaos, syllabic counting or chaotic verse, by appealing to the modern measure of American speech. He tries to approximate the rhythm of that speech in the music of his poems. The rhythm of the music must surprise, it must "jog the ear out of its boredom."¹²⁶ It must stimulate the ear's sensibility to the activity it carries. Lines must bounce onto and off each other in a growing sense recreation of "the flux of modern life." The rhythm must capture some essence of the constant active pulse of changing reality. In earlier poems, Williams' rhythm changed in tempo as the semantic weight of the line varied. The formal significance of the words was equated with their semantic importance. A word ~~important~~ to the theme stood alone--emphatic--with a pause for digestion and emphasis. A jumble of rapid images was given quick representation by a close and packed line:

Anthony,
trees and grass and clouds.¹²⁷

The musical measure was thus in tune with the natural activity of reality, with the weight of the content, the gravity of the meaning, yet the measure provided a rhythmical base without restricting content.

However, after the complete adoption of the triadic stanza, Williams' line measuring takes a new direction. The measuring of

a line in length of time is no longer determined by the semantic importance of the content: Williams does not try to equalize the weight of significant meaning in the words of each line. To express his understanding of the truth, Williams tries to reveal how something is said. He needs to structure his lines in syntactic approximation of the American idiom. The structure is now measured in his poems according to the stress and intonation patterns of the spoken description. Any words, those indicating the semantically prime subject or those 'merely' acting as syntactic connectors can hold an entire line:

The neat figures of
 Paul Klee
 fill the canvas
 but that
 is not the work
 of a child¹²⁸

What is important to Williams is to create an impression of the rhythm of the spoken language, of the intonation and mood, and therefore the perspective, of the speaker. Without having an impression of that perspective, the true meaning of a statement is uncertain. The way something is spoken is more important to reveal the nature of the person speaking than just what is said. The words could mean anything: the intonation and emphasis of the speech determines and isolates which of many possible meanings is really intended. So, in imitating the speech rhythms through the structure, Williams can reveal how a statement is really meant, how the exact meaning is obtainable, or how meanings may be possible. He can indicate, in a relevantly identifiable rhythm, the inference and tone of the spoken language, and so minimize the danger of

ambiguity and misunderstanding that arises with both rigid and uncontrolled verse. Williams' 'line measure of emphatic intonation' does not pervert meaning by the superimposition of an artificial rhythm, nor does it fail to grasp meaning by a lack of control, nor crush the rhythm under semantic necessities.

The implementation of the variable foot in the triadic stanza marks the significant achievement of Williams' desire to bring all the contemporary elements of poetic construction into one stanzaic unit whose mode of expression is the subject of the poem. The basic reality that is revealed in the triadic stanza is both the real meaning of the content, and the expression's imitation of reality, of "the flux of modern life." Regardless of the semantic content, the rhythm of the triadic stanza is also itself, aesthetically, Williams' imitation of the pulse of changing reality, of the speech rhythms of contemporary reality.

Why does Williams choose a three-part structure to reflect life? Why are the lines, which are newly measured so carefully to allow exact representation of any modern content, collected into groups of threes? In "Against the Weather," subtitled 'A Study of the Artist,' Williams compares Dante's The Divine Comedy to Hita's Book of Love. He goes back to them to exemplify the origins of the two mainstreams of artistic expression, now loosely called 'classical' and 'romantic'. The two men are philosophical opposites. Dante's acceptance of Christian doctrine leads him to espouse the church's formal belief in heavenly love, and to condemn all unconsecrated love as evil. Hita celebrates earthly and physical love as a living ultimate that supercedes Christian doctrine. They are aesthetic

opposites too. Hita, philosophically the romantic, uses a symmetrical "flat-footed quadruple rhyme scheme: . . . in the Book of Love four rhymes are continuous, one piled upon the next four in the manner of masonry."¹²⁹ In other words, Hita uses a rhythmically even, humanly symmetrical, and mechanically designed structure. But even if his meaning is to praise human love and to attack the rigid doctrine of Christian ethereality, Hita's poetic structure has no intrinsic relation to the nonconformist beliefs that he holds: his orthodox form is a blatant anachronism in his philosophical attack upon orthodox belief. His theme, the acceptance of a more human, emotional, romantic and freer kind of love than his society condoned, is falsified in the rigid structure that carries it.

The moral good and bad approach the good
and bad of the arts. Formal patterns of
all sorts represent arrests of the truth
in some particular phase of its mutations,
and immediately thereafter, unless they
change, become mutilations.¹³⁰

Dante's moral formalism, his philosophy of love in life, mutilates, while Hita's celebrates, human being. Yet Hita's aesthetic formalism mutilates the truth, while Dante's reveals the truth about love. Hita's attempt to reveal love is mutilated by his lifeless, rigid form: the medium destroys his ability to convey the feeling of love through his poetry. Dante's orthodox understanding of life denies the natural human love in consecrated passion, but his sensual structure enhances the impression of love obtainable through the poem. As the artist, Dante's beliefs were suppressed: "it is only as the artist has clung fast to his greatness in sensual

portrayal, without influence from the content of his work, that he has been able to give the content whatever secondary value it possesses."¹³¹ Williams praises Dante's aesthetic independence from his philosophical beliefs. Dante's artistic detachment lets him break away from the symmetrical "conscious restriction to prescribed form."¹³² His ability to create outside the strict formulas for art allows a freed structure to portray the sensual feeling of love:

Dante was a craftsman of superb skill,
his emphasis upon a triple unity is an
emphasis upon structure. All his elements
are in threes. In the solid structure of the
Spaniard, far less skillfully made, it is
important to note the flat-footed quadruple rhyme
scheme as opposed to the unfinished three of the
Italian dogmatist. The emphasis is upon structure, the
sensual structure of the verse.¹³³

The essential value of the terza rima in The Divine Comedy, and of the triadic stanza in Williams' poetry, is "the unfinished three" of the structure. The three-part structure prevents the poetry being read in an unconscious, 'sing-song', habitual rhythm, just as the variable foot avoids mechanical syllabic counting. Even if variable in length and unrhyming, couplet or quatrain structure can produce an unnatural and methodical rhythm. The three-part structure is the only remaining choice for Williams as he attempts to depart from man-made symmetry. The triadic stanza, like the variable foot, is both relatively stable and fittingly loose: both characteristics imitate an assymmetrically ordered and unutilated natural rhythm. Whether Williams wishes to record the flow of a continually changing natural scene or to "reflect the flux of modern life" 's "incessant new beginnings,"¹³⁴ the unfinished rhythm of the

triadic structure carefully imitates the evolving nature of reality. That reality is changing, alive, and sensual, mysteriously unfixable, asymmetrical and unmathematical. Williams' structure can illuminate reality from every angle. It allows the unconfined description of reality in its content: its own musical phrase is an impressionistic recreation of the process of reality; and it permits an idiomatic representation of the present speech rhythm. Not only does the variable foot imitate the pause and emphasis of the everyday language, the triadic structure reflects the phrasal construction rhythm of the spoken language. The suggestion is that we speak in groups of threes. There are hundreds of exceptions, but there is also a frequent use of the triadic stanza to reflect whole semantic and syntactic units:

And I am not
 a young man.
 My love encumbers me.
 It is a love
 less than
 a young man's love but,
 like this box odor
 more penetrant, infinitely
 more penetrant,¹³⁵
 in that sense not to be resisted.

In this, but more particularly in the following, the triad also indicates whole breath groups, and is thus another method of representing realistically the rhythms of the spoken conversation:

All about them
 on the lawns
 the young couples
 embrace
 as in a tale
 by Boccaccio.¹³⁶

Perhaps "The Lady Speaks" is the clearest example of the triadic stanza's structural representation of reality and of speech:

A storm raged among the live oaks
 while my husband and I
 sat in the semi-dark
 listening!
 We watched from the windows,
 the lights off,
 saw the moss
 whipped upright
 by the wind's force.
 Two candles we had lit
 side by side
 before us
 so solidly had our house been build
 kept their tall flames
 unmoved.¹³⁷

Here, the triadic structure accurately conveys the pause,
 emphasis, phrasal pattern and semantic independence of each thought.
 The loose fabric of the structure can reflect with precision the
 intonations of the spoken idiom. It can also carry the content of
 the poem, as it moves to a different object perceived in each
 stanza, without mutilating the nature of the thing observed and
 while revealing the actual rhythm of the moss or the candles.

To summarize, the individual poet's form must itself be
 variable or loose enough----to permit the description of all things
 without inhibiting their meaning: to allow for variations in theme:
 to allow for changes in the poet's mood and mind: to make possible
 the equivalence of form and content, modern structure and present
 reality. But how loose can a form become without losing its
 control--when does the music stop and the discord begin? Free form,
 license and pure sensation are different modes of the same irrational
 unintelligibility: rigid form, autocratic authority and extreme
 reason will destroy individual creativity. As freedom requires law,
 form requires a musical rhythm to hold the sway. "Poetry atrophies
 when it gets too far from music."¹³⁸ What the music must actively

reflect is the activity of real life perceived by the poet. To stay conscious of reality, it is the active, changing nature of life that must continually be observed. And it is the function of form to provide a basis for this variation, not to impose a yoke.

The value of this function is the measure of intensity of the experiential process available in the expressed product. The best poetry is the most intense artistic re-presentation of life. The most effective poetry is that which first surprises the reader into activity, and which, through the brilliance of its images, of the imaginative perception of the poet, enlightens the insight and enlivens the emotions of the reader into understanding and feeling the intense reality, the real nature, of the object. The primary effectiveness of the poem depends upon the ability of the language to surprise. To be continually (that is, universally) effective and valuable, the expression must be continually surprising, the language must be extraordinary: some intelligible difficulty and strangeness from habitual speech is essential. The secondary (sequential, not less important) effectiveness of the poem requires the shock value of the images to hyper-sensitize the reader's awareness--to clarify and expand the reader's consciousness and sense of a thing. To transfer his intense awareness of a thing, the poet's language must have denotative clarity. He must attempt to record the object with precise sincerity--as Pound insists, with "accuracy and vividness."¹³⁹ The word must be used with specific intention, while the images may extend awareness by elaborating meaning and feeling.

Good Christ what is
 a poet--if any
 exists?
 a man
 whose words will
 bite
 their way
 home--being actual

 having the form
 of motion

At each twigtip

new

upon the tortured
 body of thought

 gripping
 the ground

a way
 to the last leaftip¹⁴⁰

Objectivity, howsofar it can be achieved, becomes essential, if the subjective approach, abstraction and partiality of the poet are not to give a false interpretation of reality. The poet can look and record and instill his emotion without interpreting or abstracting the thing. The effectiveness of the intensification of reality, not of the poet's emotion which will show anyway, depends upon the fullness of the description. It depends upon the poet's mimetic integrity, his faithfulness to the exact representation of the reality he experiences, his sincere reproduction of the concrete object: imitation, not a bland copy. And his intensity depends upon his skill in creating poetry in which the sound (diction, measure) and sight (format, image) correspond with the object, and so extend the means of intensifying the process of realization. The test of the poem's effectiveness in recreating the emotional

intensity of the poet as he observed the object will be the poem's awakening effect on the reader; the poem's power to reveal reality, active life, and to stimulate the reader's thoughts and feelings by that revelation.

Good poetry does more than transmit something, it transfers the poet's communion with something "in a new and illuminating intensity of awareness."¹⁴¹ Poetry provides liberation from dullness and ingrained habits of perception and expression, and a freedom in sharing the poet's intense experiences, the freedom of discovering a new awareness. This is not a negative and escapist "retreat to safety" for man, but an escape to reality from the pressures of "the commonplace unreality which want[s] to absorb him,"¹⁴² from the social normality of unreal delusion and illusion. The intense saturation of the self in an object and in another's emotions is a deep involvement in outside life, a full experience beyond the self. Involvement necessitates the subjugation of a measure of the self, that measure which interprets experience through the abstracting, egotistical mind. Any poetry is good which forces this total intellectual and emotional involvement in outside reality. Only the continual destruction of habits of perception and expression can produce a fresh awareness of reality to intensify this involvement. Williams writes

The objective in writing is, to reveal.
It is not to teach, not to advertise,
not to sell, not even to communicate
(for that needs two) but to reveal,
which needs no other than the man
himself.¹⁴³

The revelation of reality has the moral, sociological purpose of awakening people from the blindness of those idealized preconceptions which warp the faculty of objective perception, those abstract parasites which destroy consciousness and prevent the natural growing changes of society. Williams asserts, "I am speaking of the necessity for revelation that we may achieve morality."¹⁴⁴

The morality he seeks is both global and social. In the first place, it is that perspective, aesthetic and moral, of the reality of humanity on earth that is total, not a selfishly partial vision. Socially, it is also an acceptance of priorities greater than the self. It is an honest acceptance of reality in contrast to the ruinous role-playing caused by inadequacies bolstered by fear and pride. The artist must reveal the reality of man beneath the façade; his real feelings--love, lust, hatred--below the polite, emotionless toleration taught by social decorum that hides the essentially intolerant and selfish apathy. He must reveal the desire to escape that everybody feels, but hides; and the paradoxical, frustrated reaction of the ego to try and control everybody else. All the conforming reactionaries who oppose revelation, revolution, evolution, change of all sorts, do so for fear of discovery--especially self-discovery--which is a fear of losing control.¹⁴⁵ To them, the cry for freedom from restriction, for the revelation of reality, is a threat to their selfish existences. The vicious circle of social alienation has, as the revenge for being restricted, the power to restrict others. Such a perverted fabric of society only increases selfishness, alienation and the egotistical craving for the Malvolion power of revenge. In Paterson, more than

in any other of his works, Williams is intent on revealing the disastrous effects of all the egotistical variations of pre-conceived blindness to the broader reality, the social calamity of the lust for power. In Paterson, Williams reveals that the fundamental fault with people's perception, with their language, with society and its morality is the perverted worship of the ego. The essential correction of the fault lies in man's efforts to achieve a universal perspective with the higher priority of a humanitarian morality. Paterson seeks to reveal the reality of nature. Williams reveals our roots in nature through Paterson's re-creation of a living mythology tied to contemporary reality. He seeks to provide a dynamic belief in the earth that can replace the idolatry of a destructive egotism and restore consciousness, creativity, humanity, and an elemental harmony between man and the earth.

Fear deformed us and we reveal to you the
depths of our deformity. We do not like our
deformity. Look what might have been!¹⁴⁶

CHAPTER V

PATERSON, One & Two: Despair

An analysis of Paterson is essential in the context of this discussion. First, Paterson is Williams' grand design, and it seems impossible to discuss his philosophy without giving close attention to the apotheosis of his poetry. Second, Paterson is a later work which occupied Williams until his death, and is therefore a suitable poem through which to test the effectiveness of the poetic and philosophic theories which were largely developed earlier in life. Third, it reveals Williams' perspective through his perception of the contemporary state of civilization: the accuracy of that vision of humanity provides a test of the artist and of the man. Fourth, Paterson not only discusses in depth the present state of social understanding and of the language, it contains a broad range of linguistic usages which an adequate study of Williams' poetic cannot afford to by-pass. Paterson is both the later evolution and the test case of Williams' poetic philosophy.

The Preface to Book One re-argues Williams' central message to man and the artist: freshness. "Rigor of beauty is the quest. But how will you ever find beauty when it is locked in the mind past all remonstrance?"¹⁴⁷ How will you ever find beauty when it

is a fixed, established quantity? How will you live alive when your life is molded to a pre-established social pattern of uniform mimicry?

It is the ignorant sun
rising in the slot of
hollow suns risen, so that never in this
world will a man live well in his body
save dying--and not know himself
dying.¹⁴⁸

It is mere existence to follow the trend unconsciously, accepting social, religious, human and artistic forms--formal structures--of belief, and calling that life. That does not provide separate conscious control over one's destiny: "lost in the flux and the mind, / distracted, floats off in the same / scum,"¹⁴⁹ unaware. The mind becomes reduced to dulled, habitual repetition, and its energies are wasted:

and the craft,
subverted by thought, rolling up, let
him beware lest he turn to no more than
the writing of stale poems . . .
Minds like beds always made up,
(more stony than a shore)
unwilling or unable.¹⁵⁰

The artist, the creative and imaginative possibilities in every man, has a choice: live by his own ever-renewed perceptions or exist according to established preconceptions.

At the beginning of Paterson then, Williams' has outlined his desire to break the temptations of habit--the easy route of established normality which does not require any thought, courage, effort or danger, just a following of established preconceived patterns without vitality like the hollow men: "the ignorant sun rising in the slot of hollow suns risen." Williams wants to

burst out anew, to actually and freshly see what is there now and new, not what the mind's eye glazed over by established conceptions (= falsely traditional conventions) of beauty and truth enslaves one to 'think' is there, 'tired and true'. He wants to look again with fresh vision from a new angle without pre-established ideas--at the thing itself. Any absolute vision of reality is impossible. But Williams is seeking to encourage an awareness of what is going on around one, of the legendary illusions being indoctrinated every day into the minds of the people. He wants people to learn how to live more fully aware lives by breaking through the standard formula interpretations that require no imaginative understanding of one's surroundings, only a mechanical parrotry of unconscious response to repeated stimulæ. Williams cannot present us with a knowable package called 'reality', but he can provide imaginative and intensifying versions of the world of Paterson that will increase our awareness of our perceptions, our understanding of our experience, and thereby make more vital the process of living. His object is not only to present the most vivid revelation of reality. Williams wants to activate the means of discovering reality, to inculcate an enlivening process of realization as a better way of life.

The Preface to Paterson makes it clear that Williams has set himself the task of reawakening a fresh awareness in man. He wishes to explain the nature of the sickness that blocks man's perception of his environment, and he wishes to propose a cure. How he translates this task into art is another problem.

Paterson is an aesthetic task, as well as a 'philosophical' one, the attempt to create an art work whose separate form releases beauty from the mind--both in theory and in practice. Again, "Rigor of beauty is the quest. But how will you find beauty when it is locked in the mind past all remonstrance?" Williams' quest is not just to feel beauty, but to discover how to bring that beauty of the natural, physical world that is appreciated in the mind, out of that mind and into an art form without diminishing the beauty's quality. Williams is faced with the technical artistic problem of how

To make a start,
out of particulars
and make them general, rolling
up the sum, by defective means-- 151

How can one reveal the whole beauty through the particular details examined if the means of that revelation are inadequate for a perfect imitation? Art is not life, but it is the closest imaginative recreation of life, an imitation, a substitute for the original, but not for the real, because the artifice is as real in concrete if less natural terms. The poet is presented with

(What common language to unravel?
. . . combed into straight lines
from that rafter of a rock's
lip.) 152

As the waterfall combs out the natural chaos of the river, the poet's art tries to translate clearly the disorder of life. But that removal of the thing from its natural place in life into its artificially ordered place in art must be careful and delicate, or

the thing will be distorted beyond recognition and its beauty remain locked in the mind.

The method that Williams outlines in the Preface, a solution already examined in theory, is the precise perception of the world of the senses until the mind has a full understanding which is then imitated through the use of the native language, local dialects, local images, present music, all techniques freshly perceived. Williams is

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.
Only the lame stands--on
three legs.¹⁵³

Williams is "just another dog," a single poet, a small maker (a small god?), not creating life, but recreating an imitation of life in art. And it is the beauty of life felt in the mind that must be released, not a false copy suffering from a translation that abstracted it, or sophisticated it beyond its natural counterpart. Such foreign and unrelated art produces false copies of life by "the rest" who have "run out." Williams attacks the American poets who have deserted their native habitat: Pound and Eliot had run out, run away to Europe, to foreign languages. Williams criticizes the hypocrisy of the ex-patriate poet:

that the poet,
in disgrace, should borrow from erudition (to
unslave the mind): railing at the vocabulary
(borrowing from those he hates, to his own
disfranchisement) .¹⁵⁴

In Paterson, Williams moulds "a reply to Greek and Latin with the bare hands."¹⁵⁵ They had run out after the rabbits, an image of a

pack that is only strong together, running out to more established and traditional structural forms: and so Williams warns,

and the craft,
subverted by thought, rolling up, let
him beware lest he turn to no more than
the writing of stale poems . . .
Minds like beds always made up,
(more stony than a shore)
unwilling or unable.

Perhaps from this last statement one can interpret "run out" as run out of steam, exhausted. "Only the lame stands" against the foreign infiltration, the lame being unable to run away, but having to stand alone against the denial of the native, against the exodus:

The dogs and trees
conspire to invent
a world--gone!

Bow, wow! A
departing car scatters gravel as it
picks up speed!

Outworn! le pauvre petit ministre
did his best, they cry,
but though he sweat for all his worth
no poet has come .156

The indigenous poet continues amidst the flight of those who could have revealed beauty in their art. Williams thus prefaces Paterson with a determined will to reveal natural beauty through native means, local life through local art. By such an artistic process of preserving natural freshness, Williams tries to ensure the survival of "the multiple seed, / packed tight with detail, soured."¹⁵⁷ Beauty, extracted from particular things in life, is soured by its confinement in the mind, in abstract symbols, and must be released in fresh art, radiating beauty and vitality.

Book One of Paterson, "the elemental character of the place," relates the historical and social past, but not just to provide a history. It is intended, rather, to refix the nature of the present by rediscovering and revealing the past roots of the present. The re-established facts, broken free and dusted off, clinically examined with an archeologist's patience and meticulous care for the revealing particulars, are clearly charted and returned to their original shape. Williams again and again expounds his doctrine of the new--for what? but the awakening effect of new styles on old fashions, the resurrection of life out of a fixed stasis, the revitalizing of awareness by new expression of and approaches to old clichés and habits. But, he is also in love with the real tradition, the proper past!, the men who then challenged the established backward-glancing customs, ideas and status quo of their times. He praises the courageous and imaginative new thinkers of any age: their antagonism to rigid, archaic structures unites them in a long tradition of explorers (Columbus, Eric the Red, Daniel Boone); pioneers (Bonne, Crockett and the frontiersmen); origin-ators (Whitman, Poe and the local perspective); revolutionaries (Jefferson, Washington). Williams values the old that is passed for its history of people who have struggled through the repressive conservatism of a hesitant and easily satisfied populace. He values the long line of creative, novel, revolutionary and imaginative thinkers. He attacks the false aura or mask of stable, conservative, rigid traditions that has been affixed to their legends in order to lend

authority to those living repressive status quo conservatives whom they would have denounced. The conflict is not really between the new and the old, for the really new and the best men of the old actually agree in many respects.

Williams' lifetime battle, and Paterson is central to his struggle, is between the creative (new and old) and the destructive copiers. This dichotomy again means recognizing the imaginative from the dull, revolutionary and evolutionary change from the establishment and static rest, genuine original artists from the long stream of mimicking followers, the individual struggle to realize one's possible capability in life from the mass ethic of uniform majority trends, personal awareness from automaton ignorance. And the most important struggle, because it is the prerequisite to any success, is the struggle between a man's fresh and new perception and society's withered and habitual preconceptions. The establishment, the established code of ethics and level of morality, is what presently stands for 'good' and 'right'--the technique for so convincing us is that all change is wrong and dangerous, that all exponents of the new want to destroy the old. This is hypocritical and fallacious. Williams wants to renovate the old, to realize it anew, stripping off from it the hypnotically glorifying aura of pageantry, patriotism, and reverence that rubs off from the great men of the past onto the present profit controllers. The old leaders were great--revolutionaries in America: they opposed the imposition of a foreign culture upon their new land; they wanted new growth, modern laws, acclimatization to the new land, not confinement to

old customs. The great old men of history wanted change because it was just, and because life is deadened without continual rebirth.

So Paterson, One begins to re-establish the past in a proper, eternal perspective of the ever-present struggle between the truly new and the false façade of plastic imitation, and between the true, original old and the sham, historical hoax perpetrated by vote-enticing politicians. What Williams seeks to establish is the vitality and intensity of really living, to renew life in a dulled, mediocre people. The new establishment is a renaissance of man, a re-establishment of love and imagination, emotional and mental capability repowered to inspire humanity. Williams' appeal to the new is the appeal to that real tradition of artists' desiring to better man's state, the long history of revolutionary critics of the dulling system of the status quo mentality. One thinks (as Williams has done in Paterson) of Blake's condemnation of the establishment Church, and of Milton's violent attack upon a ruling and enslaving powerful minority. Williams wants to reveal the harm done by the ignorant indoctrination of people into a false and hypocritical vision that is aggressively self-protective as it condemns by unconscious bigotry those who think differently. Any self-righteousness that becomes an active policy threatens life while it destroys the individual human potential for awareness, self-realization, love, harmony. Something like this frustration was present in Williams' mind as he came to write Paterson. He came to portray the wilfully evil enslavement of the minds and feelings of the people into dullness. He wanted to inspire man's capability for love and awareness, his capacity for real living.

Williams' aim in Paterson is to enliven man's existence by making him aware of the present and of the real, but intentionally disguised, nature of the past. He is always seeking to reveal what is blinding people's vision, to show up the indoctrinated preconceptions that prevent personal perception of reality--built-in delusions and illusions. At the same time, he is trying to express in a stunning and startling way the things that are there of beauty and of truth to see for oneself, so that one can come to one's own understanding rather than merely mirroring established views.

In the first lines, we find:

a thousand automatons. Who because they
neither know their sources nor the sills of their
disappointments walk outside their bodies aimlessly
for the most part,
locked and forgot in their desires--unroused.¹⁵⁹

The people are dulled. They have no vision, no understanding, no language:

They do not know the words
or have not
the courage to use them .
--girls from
families that have decayed and
taken to the hills: no words.
They may look at the torrent in .
their minds
and it is foreign to them. .

They turn their backs
and grow faint--but recover!
Life is sweet
they say: the language!
--the language
is divorced from their minds,
the language . . the language!¹⁶⁰

They have no ability to perceive nor to communicate. They are, and it is the central WORD of the poem, "divorced" from everything--life, understanding, action, impetus. Awareness is dead.

A false language. A true. A false language pouring--a
 language (misunderstood) pouring (misinterpreted) without
 dignity, without minister, crashing upon a stone ear. . . . 161

The word had been drained of its meaning. 162

The people are oblivious to the meaning of the landscape, unaware
 of their natural roots and origins, unable to understand the
 language of the Falls--divorced, and cut off from involvement.

There is potential, but no germination:

a bud forever green,
 tight-curved, upon the pavement, perfect
 in juice and substance but divorced, divorced
 from its fellows, fallen low--163

They are unrelated to their environment,

The giant in whose apertures we
 cohabit, unaware of what air supports
 us--the vague, the particular
 no less vague 164

Nobody knows what they are nor where they have come from: "lost
 in the flux and the mind, / distracted, floats off in the same /
 scum." Yet, "Everybody has roots," 165 and may retain consciousness
 of their development in life. Williams describes the African chief's
 awareness of the natural continuity of his life, his nine wives,
 nine lives, all in a row, new backing onto old, growing out of
 the old--

and then . . .
 the last, the first wife,
 present! supporting all the rest growing
 up from her--166

the withered original wife the root of the fresh and new wife,
 signifying continual change and the "rekindling" 167 of vitality.

There is no divorce, literal or metaphorical. There is no
 separation from the past. By contrast, modern man is divorced from

life and consciousness, divorced from his natural environment, divorced and alienated from his fellow men and women: "Divorce is / the sign of knowledge in our time."¹⁶⁸ The many long passages of historical extracts serve to reunite man with his past, to reveal the origins of the society and so give man roots to grow from. Meanwhile, the married unification of natural men in primitive societies stands to remind men of their divorce and dissociation.

Williams is always searching for the particular facts to reveal life, present and past, to the people, to make them aware of their origins and of their present state: "No ideas but / in the facts." Nobody knows what is, for they cannot see things clearly and they do not reach to the particular reality:

He descried
in the linoleum at his feet a woman's
face, smelled his hands,

strong of a lotion he had used
not long since, lavender,
rolled his thumb

about the tip of his left index finger
and watched it dip each time,
like the head

of a cat licking its paw, heard the
faint filing sound it made: of
earth his ears are full, there is no sound¹⁶⁹

Through careful perception, through a minutely, meticulously examined and detailed perception of particular objects, anybody could see. Those who cannot see are those who believe (take for granted) the words of those who teach them not to see, those who divorce knowledge of things from their sensual reality into abstract theorizing:

the university,
 a green bud fallen upon the pavement its
 sweet breath suppressed: Divorce (the
 language stutters)¹⁷⁰

those "clerks . . . spitted on fixed concepts like / roasting hogs,
 sputtering, their drip sizzling / in the fire."¹⁷¹ Williams

condemns the blinders in detail:

Who restricts knowledge? Some say
 it is the decay of the middle class
 making an impossible moat between the high
 and the low where
 the life once flourished . . . knowledge
 of the avenues of information--
 So that we do not know (in time)
 where the stasis lodges. And if it is not
 the knowledgeable idiots, the university,
 they at least are the non-purveyors
 should be devising means
 to leap the gap. Inlets? The outward
 masks of the special interests
 that perpetuate the stasis and make it
 profitable.

They block the release
 that should cleanse and assume
 prerogatives as a private recompense.
 Others are also at fault because
 they do nothing.¹⁷²

The obliviousness of the dulled people is caused by the façade of
 knowledge. Their emptiness, unconsciousness, indirection, suspension
 in frustrating nada is the direct consequence of a stifling of natural
 development and change, an unnatural holding back or blockage
 that finally dulls the mind, the feelings and the spirit of the
 people. That resistance to an awareness of life comes from a
 wish to hold time and motion still while it is profitable to the
 powerful. Their unnatural control over life takes the form of fixed
 and rigid preconceptions, ideas designed to stabilize society in
 its profitable pattern, ideas which in fact kill society and destroy

the potential for full human being by holding things stationary-- knowledge, wealth and power. The result is "a thousand automatons," slaves who 'think' themselves free and right. Meanwhile, their efforts produce the inevitable modern trash, "plaster saints, glass jewels,"¹⁷³ mass-produced goods lacking originality and value. Insensitive to the effect of their efforts, alongside the junk they produce lies "the ravished park,"¹⁷⁴

Half the river red, half steaming purple
from the factory vents, spewed out hot,
swirling, bubbling. The dead bank,
shining mud .¹⁷⁵

The deliberate philosophical statements of disgust in Book One emphasise the search for truth. The vehemence of the reasoning is only mildly tempered by beautiful passages of natural description. Williams' angry polemic is caused by despair caused by sadness at seeing the stupidity caused by ignorance caused by the blockage of education by a selfish minority of aristocratic leaders--churchmen, politicians, teachers. This antagonistic vehemence, the contrasting pathos of the poet's appreciation of a beautiful place and his occasional escapist sublimation into moments of aesthetic joy in nature are all that really matter. The imagination of anthropomorphic qualities in the spirit of the place--the Falls, its "voice," the human description of Paterson--provides an aesthetic pleasure, but does not contribute philosophically to the argument attacking dullness. The sociological didacticism is so insistent that the few beautiful images of the place are tenuously thin: the transformation of history into art is not complete. Thus, awakening to a realization of one's terrible situation is not enough. There

must be a positive effect to sudden awareness, and, for Williams, the beauty of the land can give reason for being. The love of the organically interpenetrated world of man and nature is all the more available through Williams' creation of a new mythology surrounding the local scenery. The modern, local mythology unites sensual and spiritual hopes of harmony with a reverence for awareness of the particular reality. A belief in a myth that has developed out of the present place is the strength needed to offset the disillusionment of divorce. Paterson and the Falls, male and female, city and river, man and nature, are married in communion with each other, not divorced and alienated in mutual antagonism. It is the relatively simple reason for needing the mythology that is vitally important, not the different details of its occurrence and workings. Awareness of the particular place, of oneself through the place, of oneself through the history of the people of the place, of nature and oneself through oneself and nature interpenetrated and "by multiplication a reduction to one,"¹⁷⁶ united; results in a marriage in sense and mind to a loving understanding of one's living roots.

So the people are not just dull, but dulled by being blocked out of experience, restricted in knowledge, and thus in creativity, energy, hope. They are

--roots, for the most part, writhing
upon the surface

(so close are we to ruin every
day!)

searching the punk-dry rot¹⁷⁷

The trees barely sustain themselves on the barren rock: the people

just succeed in surviving in a social world that is as bare as the rock, as un-nourishing to the spirit which is repressed into ignorance, blocked into apathy. The creative person who wants to express himself is also thwarted. Trusting in others, relying upon others for help in self-discovery, for growth in understanding, he finds himself neglected, refused and ignored. The lack of mutual co-existence or even of the beginnings of deep relationships destroys the trust, blocks the out-going, giving generosity of the seeker by the rebuttal and painful destruction of that part of one that is given: "That kind of blockage, exiling one's self from one's self."¹⁷⁸

Book Two's "modern replicas"¹⁷⁹ is an objective record of the actual modern counterparts to the disease diagnosed in Book One: there is more factual observation of present life than theoretical observations about the past. The deformity caused by the destructive blockage of people's lives is particularized in a detailed description of the mass trying to enjoy themselves on "Sunday in the Park."¹⁸⁰

Williams presents the people en masse, the gross, coarse, rough, boisterous, occasionally spontaneous, inevitable working-class. The detail resembles Brueghel's massive paintings of the people, only less happy. They are dull and bored; exhausted in spirit, so mesmerically enslaved to the routine of their city lives; having just enough time to laze and doze, sleep, dream, try to forget everything about their monotonous lives before the holiday ends. They are aimless, escaping, wishing oblivion as they are so

bewildered, thoughtless, careless, dangerous.

It is all for
 pleasure . their feet . aimlessly
 wandering¹⁸¹

They are hopelessly lost, escaping their ignorance and insecurity by running away, hoping for ignorance even of that, a suicidal flight into final nothingness. And the landscape, whose beauty Paterson appreciates, is missed or misused by most. The mass-- "the great beast"--¹⁸² saddens Paterson as he walks through the park. Their apathetic indifference to their surroundings and to each other signals the collapse of their lives--"a flame, / spent,"¹⁸³ In their escapist mass inertia, "walking indifferent through / each other's privacy,"¹⁸⁴ their lives are both pitiful and revolting. The careless sexuality of the white girl in the bikini is obscene to Williams--"frank vulgarity."¹⁸⁵ His rather biassed antagonism is checked--"Let us be reasonable!"¹⁸⁶ With the portraits of the energetic dance of Mary through the inert bodies and of the Eisenstein peon, the bitterness felt at the ignorant indifference exuded by the peasants is tempered by the raucous, jovial simplicity of their pleasures. Their hedonism is easier for Williams to accept as uninhibited laughter than as "flagrant"¹⁸⁷ vulgarity. Another flagrant and careless courtship is witnessed, but now Paterson can accept it as an overt fact, being sympathetic to their escapism because of their crushing burden of boredom. This dullness does not change: "Minds beaten thin / by waste--among / the working classes SOME sort / of breakdown / has occurred:"¹⁸⁸ Williams concentrates on the crippling blockage of the people:

Blocked.

(Make a song out of that: concretely)

By whom?

In its midst rose a massive church . . . And it all came to me then--that those poor souls had nothing else in the world, save that church, between them and the eternal stony, ungrateful and unpromising dirt they lived by

Cash is mulct of them that other may live
secure

. . . and knowledge restricted.

An orchestral dullness overlays their world

I see they--the Senate, is trying to block Lilienthal and deliver "the bomb" over to a few industrialists. I don't think they will succeed but . . . that is what I mean when I refuse to get excited over the cry, Communist! they use to blind us. It's terrifying to think how easily we can be destroyed, a few votes. Even though Communism is a threat, are Communists any worse than the guilty bastards trying in that way to undermine us?

We leap awake and what we see
fells us .

Let terror twist the world!¹⁸⁹

The long passage opening the second part of Book Two provides an identification of and a justification for resenting "the special interests." The blockage of the people is caused by certain guilty parties. Williams' sympathy goes out to the weak and enslaved people: his anger settles on those who use their power to control and manipulate the people.

The church dominates and finally usurps the lives of the people. The "massive church" is a huge controlling structure which takes over future life by threatening death and damnation, and overtakes present life by 'simplifying' the lives of the people, removing the dangers to their 'salvation'--wealth, property, self-confidence. It controls their souls--for whatever good reason or excuse--by

enforcing an indoctrinated enslavement to an idea, by forcing poverty and self-sacrifice to the church, by demanding absolute obedience and subservience. The method used is one of force. The children are held "under duress," "prodded,"¹⁹⁰ forced to sit still and be mesmerized by the preacher:

--with monotonous insistence
the falls of his harangue hung featureless
upon the ear, yet with a certain strangeness
as if arrested in space¹⁹¹

The falls of his harangue usurp the Falls' natural voice. The church's motive is to prepare men for an afterlife. Its effect is to destroy their consciousness of the present, and to deny their present lives in nature.

The politicians dominate the physical life of the people, compelling them to agreement by weak but sufficient rhetoric that easily convinces a poorly educated mass, and gaining popular support by finding scapegoats for social ills. They skillfully manipulate the dissatisfaction, anger and suffering of the people into a hatred of everything foreign, unseen, unknown and dangerous. The motive is the retention of power, and the wealth that can be gained thereby. The result is injustice, inequality, usury, and hypocrisy, all of which Williams keeps returning to, and all of which are made easy by an automatic subservience.

The full result is the use of terror to control the world. Terror can only arise from the unknown. Knowledge conquers it; a knowledgeable people would be free from fear, but then free from control. The power of the masters is guaranteed by fear: the lion-tamer's control is ensured by the lion's fear of the whip; the

church's control is preserved by man's fear of death; the politician's control is greatly assisted by the people's fear of foreigners. In fact, it is by frightening the people that the institutions in power preserve control and guarantee popular support and obedience. Insecurity makes slaves of everyone. Terror twists human freedom, distorts, controls and forces an unnatural life of frustrated slavery to guarantee the profits of the powerful. And the terror only increases alienation: secret guilt and despair pulls people back into shells of silence, frustration and illusion.

Williams records more particularly the technique of mass-manipulation. The politician, Hamilton, had nationalistic desires for independence through the development of industry in Paterson. Hamilton wanted American self-sufficiency and freedom from the power of an imposed British-ruled economy. His separatist desires hope for and seek a happier state, freed from imperial England with her colonial slave-market and forced tax policies. But after the revolution, the power that had enslaved the people only passed into the hands of a few monopolistic businessmen who gave money to the government which was paid for by a high interest rate--the people's taxes. This is the "Legalized Federal Usury System."¹⁹² The net result is not only greater division in the world through a process of splintering separatism, but the loss of hope and benefit. The same power enslaves the people: the same ignorance, apathy, dullness and alienation remains.

Meanwhile, the harangue of the Evangelist, calling for purity and poverty, wants only to control the human fear of death.

While fanatically trying to bring God's kingdom of peace, he advocates a denial of life on Earth. His desire for separatism and independence can only cause more division on Earth. Williams' longing for unity is threatened from another quarter: "And is this beauty-- / torn to shreds by the / lurking schismatists?"¹⁹³ The evangelist, the coercing con-man, tries to boost his following by the threat of death and damnation. Each private faction thinking itself almighty succeeds in increasing the separations that alienate people. Their action can only cause more alienation of men from the whole body and thought and language of the people, making more people unaware and unrelated to their larger environment as the private formulas for perfect conduct increase and conflict. Division spreads in the city, in the nation, into world conflict, destroying desires for a world community, for a universal perspective, for any harmony. The hope is again lost in the slavery of the people to an indoctrinated unconscious belief that dictates their actions. Knowledge restricted, fear maximized, slavishly subdued into a realm of divorced ethereality, abstraction and denial of life, the people are blinded and blocked.

Williams perceives the dulled, utterly crushed spirit of the people. The final sequence to Book Two begins despairingly in a mood of suicidal pessimism: "Look for the nul / defeats it all . . .

Look
for that nul

that's past all
seeing

the death of all
that's past

all being .¹⁹⁴

Yet with, "But Spring shall come and flowers will bloom / and man must chatter of his doom,"¹⁹⁵ relief comes. Perhaps Williams seriously thinks for a moment that we worry too much: life will go on, that's all that matters, etcetera. But I am distinctly reminded of the songs of the clowns in Shakespeare's plays, where the carefree nonsensical mood of the childishly insane is blended with unbroken hope for recovery. The hint of rebirth is present even at the lowest depth of despair and final degradation, even if hope takes the form of hysterical laughter at man's absurdity.

The defeat, despair, descent is final. This is the age of "the slow complaining of a door loose on its hinges,"¹⁹⁶ unfixed, unrelated, out of place, neither open nor shut, "without accomplishment,"¹⁹⁷ vacuous, chaotic, the spirit of the people sunk to an aimless base note of bored hopelessness:

. . . accomplish the inevitable
poor, the invisible, thrashing, breeding
. . . debased city . . .

. . . reversed in the mirror of its
own squalor, debased by the divorce from learning,
its garbage on the curbs, its legislators
under the garbage, uninstructed, incapable of
self instruction .¹⁹⁸

The stifling of knowledge has finally corrupted the system, and the fixed edicts of the schools prevent the evolution of new understanding. Understanding has been degraded to a clichéd unconsciousness, and the result is "a thwarting,"¹⁹⁹ suicide, drowning. It is not just the religious and political institutions that are guilty of this failure. The society's intellectual growth

has been stagnated:

And if it is not
the knowledgeable idiots, the university,
they at least are the non-purveyors
should be devising means
to leap the gap... .

You might as well take all your own literature and
everyone else's and toss it into one of those big garbage
trucks of the Sanitation Department, so long as the people
with the top-cream minds and the "finer" sensibilities
use those minds and sensibilities not to make themselves
more humane human beings than the average person, but
merely as means of ducking responsibility toward a
better understanding of their fellow men, except
theoretically--which doesn't mean a God damned thing.²⁰⁰

Everything is chaotic: there is no control, and Faitoute
(Paterson) "discovers, still, no syllable in the confused / uproar."²⁰¹
Life has been dulled and suppressed. The old slavery has destroyed
the new, evolving, growing, living things;

Clearly, it is the new, uninterpreted, that
remoulds the old, pouring down

It has not been enacted in our day!²⁰²

The natural course of evolutionary change has been thwarted by a
fixed and rotting social order that has destroyed it. The people have
been drained of enthusiasm, of energy, of life,

--divorced

from the insistence of place--
from knowledge,
from learning--the terms
foreign, conveying no immediacy, pouring down.²⁰³

The foreign nature of the language embitters Williams. He is
depressed by the usurpation of art by commercialism, but he is
incensed by the snobbish escapism of American poets towards
foreign importations and "erudition."²⁰⁴ Once again, Williams is

voicing his basic belief in a native art form and a native culture as he attacks the foreign abstraction from immediate reality. Williams opposes foreign languages and sophisticated erudition in modern poetry as part of a larger failure to communicate that beauty which is "locked in the mind." Indeed, trying to capture and reveal a sense of the local reality, he is drawn closer to the American actuality in his form, and so he desires all the more to employ the native materials, "out of itself / to form the colors, in the terms of some / back street."²⁰⁵ It is the local roots that he wants: "he sees squirming roots trampled / under the foliage of his mind by the holiday / crowds as by the feet of the straining / minister."²⁰⁶ The people are careless and ignore their roots. The evangelist--looking up--ignores the source which he destroys, the physical base of his climb. And Williams is incensed at the disregard of the natural dwarf who is tied organically to his root, half foliage, involved with nature. The roots of the trees are crushed by the ignorantly clambering crowds, by the aggressively ignorant preacher, as the memory (root) of the mind (knowledge) is stamped under. A tremendous sense of urgency rises to a climax at the end of Book Two: "Nothing clear,"²⁰⁷ all vague, dulled, "the language worn out,"²⁰⁸ murky, pouring down in tumbling cadences out of control, helpless. The situation is similar to the filth and insanity depicted as social normality in the poem "To Elsie,"²⁰⁹ which begins "The pure products of America / go crazy--," and which describes the dulled

imaginations which have no
 peasant traditions to give them
 character
 but flutter and flaunt
 sheer rags--²¹⁰

Yet the hint of rebirth is still there. The Falls still
 offer a new course back to the roots: "Marry us! Marry us! /
 Or! be dragged down, dragged / under and lost."²¹¹ The quest
 for and the hope of an indigenous consciousness continues. There
 is "no immediacy," no relation to the local, present, natural life,
 but it must come. Even at the moment of despair, new hope begins.
 In the discarding of dreams that have failed, hopes that have not
 materialized, the real possibilities of what one is left with
 insist on their presence, the actuality out of which the new can
 be formed:

No defeat is made up entirely of defeat--since
 the world it opens is always a place
 formerly
 unsuspected. A
 world lost,
 a world unsuspected
 beckons to new places.
 and no whiteness (lost) is so white as the memory
 of whiteness ²¹²

The return into the past mind is a trip into a new world: the memory
 can rejuvenate hope. The loss of a present thing, or of a state of
 being that was hoped for, causes despair; but Williams argues
 against the despair becoming death-in-life--"If a man die / it
 is because death / has first / possessed his imagination."²¹³ The
 imagination can resurrect past life out of the memory and flush it
 into bright significance. "The Descent" acts as an affirmation of
 the rejuvenating value of a consciousness of past roots upon a

presently disillusioned and despairing spirit or people.

The structure of Paterson helps to reveal the poem's full meaning. The structure of Paterson, One follows the river above the Falls. It describes the early life of the area. It is a young river, gathering speed and size; a young community which literally gathers steam and power in the nineteenth century; a young man looking with enthusiasm at the history of dare-devil pranks and exciting tales. The small river, quick and fresh like the early settlers, slows down into a steadier, calmer, more settled river town, a mood that matches the more thoughtful observations. But this is the calm before the thunder, the welling, rippling, weighty stillness before the fall. Book One is reflective of the past, meditative over history, darkly deep like a full river, with dangerously swift undercurrents, unseen and unfelt, but ominous.

Book Two is the arrival of the catastrophe, the sudden leap over the brink into the empty air. "The modern replicas" burst into the twentieth century without the least knowledge of what will happen next. The river crashes down, broken and diffuse: society falls apart. The descent of the Falls is in tune with the division and descent of the society. Only shattered remnants of the smooth river remain, broken fragments of the working society that has gone over the brink and collapsed, destroying its human potential in order to make a profit, despoiling it human processes for inhuman products, leaving the people enslaved and aimlessly falling. The activity and noise of the Falls and of the people are interchangeable. The mass in the park rest on the brink of the falls. They are boisterous: they shout, laugh,

dance, sing; cars are honking their horns, children shouting, dogs barking, cops ordering, evangelists haranguing, music blaring, girls cajoling. Conversation, monologue, speech, sermon, chorus, a maze of words fall aimlessly. Words fail. At the brink, the controlling, blocking forces of separatism that alienate and divide the people lead the community to its downfall. At the final crash, knowledge blocked, the word descends to meaninglessness, the people to ignorance, impotence, futility, and the river to the ruptured, chaotic maze at the base of the falls. Everything is confused, and the city descends to a pattern of endless, useless repetition, the people to despair, loneliness, apathy and the null.

The water falls only so far down before it is forced back up by the water following afterwards: despair can only become so real and realized before the knowledge of it signals victory over it. "The descent follows the ascent--to wisdom / as to despair."²¹⁴ There is rebirth in the fall. Beyond the symbolic structure of the natural elements, "The Descent" provides a structural key. The letter is included as an added example in its content of the torrentious collapse of justice and equality; and in its structure as another descent into hell for rejuvenation. The whole Book's delineation of the breakdown of the working classes, of the wearing out of the language, the destruction of knowledge and instruction, the corruption of democracy, the false promises and hypocrisy of religion, and the private despair of "The Descent," culminates in the final letter of almost suicidal futility. Yet the pattern is clear--out of bitterness comes knowledge, out of despair comes

a new awakening :
 of despair.²¹⁵ which is a reversal

The struggle to overcome the torment brings new growth, strength and the determination to override the anguish. The letter is included, not as an example of hatred, but to reveal suffering, bitterness, unequal economic opportunity, the conflict between society's expectations and the individual's necessary course of action, unequal rights between the sexes, the conflict between the artist and the man, and the personal feuds, loves and loathings. Most prominent is the argument over the woman's social position. Her female body is an advantage to advancement in a male-dominated world: it is an inequality over men. But her femininity becomes a disadvantage when the woman's mind is her attribute and her sex appeal is declining.

Beyond the letter's content, it reveals the benefit to be had by pouring out, writing out, explaining, clarifying and destroying the terrors, the misery and frustration facing individuals. As in the "Tribute to the Painters," the artist's genius is his ability to capture his devils, to delineate their terrifying aspects, and so to quell their attack upon the unsure mind, now secured by their discovery. Out of the awareness, the honest acceptance and expression of the terrors, comes the self-completing victory, the rebirth of spirit, and an artistic creation as testament of the purgative process. The irony of this long letter's expression of despair is that the writer was unaware of her involvement in this process of cathartic creation. She complained of her living,

and was bitter against art: she asked for honesty to life, else art is hypocritical and again "doesn't mean a God damned thing." Yet, by thinking out her torment, if not art, then at least the honestly expressed free thought that goes into the artist's unfettered perception, is released. By elevating the terror of living to art, the danger of despair is passed. Out of the final letter of frustration and lost pride arises an anger that gives strength and energy. The descent to bitter dejection and failure causes anger and aggression, the energy of which rejuvenates creativity as it replaces the terror with wisdom and vitality:

Gently! Gently!
 as in all things an opposite
 that awakes
 the fury, conceiving
 knowledge
 by way of despair that has
 no place
 to lay its glossy head--²¹⁶

CHAPTER VI

PATERSON, Three: Imagination

Book Three begins with concrete proposals learned from nature to remove the chaos, to brighten the ignorance, to enliven the dullness. But first, the learning process of marrying the elements requires the elevation of the mind from the torment of its frustrated delusion and disillusion. The mind goes to the library for inspiration. There is no escape from reality involved, for the world of the city has itself lost its grip on reality, its consciousness of sensual activity. The dulled people of the city live on illusions foisted upon them by church, state and business, and on their own delusions designed to escape reality, to deny the fact of their misery. But once despair is realized, and accepted without evasion, new life can begin. The Library is the place in which the mind can escape back to reality. Books "lead the mind away" from emptiness and illusion and the social façade, lead the mind to self-discovery, and on to recovery:

Drawn from the streets we break off
our mind's seculsion and are taken up by
the books' winds, seeking, seeking
down the wind
until we are unaware which is the wind and
which the wind's power over us .
to lead the mind away²¹⁷

to recover a vision of reality from the customary blur of
normality:

Spent from wandering the useless
streets these months, faces folded against
him like clover at nightfall, something
has brought him back to his own
mind . 218

There, in the library, in his debased mind,

a roar of books
from the wadded library oppresses him
until
his mind begins to drift .

Beautiful thing:

--a dark flame, 219
a wind, a flood--counter to all staleness.

Out of the tumbling rot, the desperate man seeks a beautiful
thing, an imaginative mind freed from the monotonous, binding
corruption of city life. The library stimulates the imagination,
inflating the mind with vivid images of conscious understanding,
refreshing the normal, dull and blind preconceptions of the ego:

"not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!"²²⁰

The beautiful thing is the design of the whole Book--"a
dark flame, / a wind, a flood--counter to all staleness." Wind, Fire,
Flood are the three natural agents of sudden change--of revolutionary,
rather than evolutionary, alteration--of high speed recovery, not
of slow regrowth. Violent surgery is needed to correct the
sickness of a diseased, deflated and destroyed mind. Each element
plays a shocking part in the three sequences of Book Three as a
"counter to all staleness." Each is a sudden eruption that trans-
forms the established nature of things, that consumes--by whipping
away, burning away, washing away--the existing, stale state of things!

"All changed, changed utterly: / A terrible beauty is born."²²¹

The revolution destroys the old corruption, the useless confining structures, the old habits and customs; it obliterates the façade; it allows a renewal.

The structure of Book Three is of the river at the base of the falls, of reshaping and renewing, the turmoil of creation; and in the river's bubbling maze of reconstitution is the analogous suggestion for the violent regeneration of life by the whip of the wind, which then stirs up the fire, which is only quenched by the roar of the final flood, the river flowing on. The wind has the power to "break through / the dry air of the place,"²²² of the stale structures. The tornado

pours

over the roofs of Paterson, ripping,
twisting, tortuous :

a wooden shingle driven half its length
into an oak
(the wind must have steeled
it, held it hard on both sides)²²³

The fire can destroy everything:

--the whole city doomed! And

the flames towering

Ah!

rotten beams tum-
bling,²²⁴

The flood scrapes things clean:

A broken car

is found by the searching waters. Loosened
it begins to move. So be it. Old timbers
sigh--and yield. . . .²²⁵

--the water at this stage no lullaby but a piston,
cohabitous, scouring the stones .²²⁶

It washes away every single loose thing on earth. Such are the literal effects on the land of the natural agents, but there are intrinsic counterparts of action in the mind and on the language. The force of the elements stirs up life anew, it revitalizes the mind and renews the language, all the time breaking through barriers to regenerate a new cycle of growth.

Wind, fire, flood, and the earth on which they operate, comprise the range of variables that make up the environment. The degree of each determines the state of nature. With each one successively dominating the earth, there is a purification process by excessive erosion. The wind removes all loose debris or inadequately rooted matter: the fire burns everything combustible into its elemental root--glass bottles to molten silica, wood to carbon: the flood washes the land clean to the solid rock, to the root of vegetation. Origins are rediscovered.

The same purifying process is figuratively enacted upon the mind's mental environment. There, the four elements, like the medieval humours, determine the psychological aspect or landscape of a character's personality. From the beginning to end of the long decree near the start of Book Three, the psychological effect of the elements is felt:

Blow! So be it. Bring down! So be it. Consume
and submerge! So be it. Cyclone, fire
and flood. So be it. Hell, New Jersey, . . .

Shield us from loneliness. So be it. The mind
reels, starts back amazed from the reading .
So be it.²²⁷

The purification is a mind-shattering, mind-reducing extermination of static thought patterns, and is thus a mind-expanding release of

the imagination. Taken literally, the elemental devastation of the existing, established mind pattern is extreme and bewildering; and so it must be. The extreme mental exposure to the utmost power of fire and water, air and earth, offers the mind the necessary opportunity for a Phoenix transformation into new, imaginative consciousness. This enables new perception, and consequently changed conceptions and ideas about reality and morality; new perspectives dependent upon an uncluttered realization of the new world. Awareness is renewed.

At the same time, the purification of the language is taking place:

unless there is
a new mind there cannot be a new
line, the old will go on
repeating itself with recurring
deadliness: without invention . . . 228

The elements remove, refresh and recompose the materials of communication. The excessive purification annihilates the cluttered thoughtless uncommunicating habits of expression--the clichés, the habitual thought and grammatical patterns, the traditional unconsciously used sentence models, the repetitious formulas of meaningless jargon and meaningless trivial formalities like empty 'thankyou's.'

The total effect of Book Three is to leave the landscape--and thereby, the mind and the language--clear, lean, conscious and active, simply and unconfusedly repaired to effective working order for the better realization and expression of life. The mind of Paterson is re-envigorated by the winds and fires and floods that stir fictionally and metaphorically in the books of the

library. But once their elemental strength is drawn into mind, "his mind begins to drift." The awakening, refreshing influence lasts in the mind beyond the reading, so that the wind, and fire, and flood keep stirring up free imaginative thoughts and suggestions from one's own life and experience, the mind's capacity for understanding and vision expanded outside the vicarious experience of books. Wind, fire and flood are metaphors for the destruction of a dead cycle and the insemination of living new growth in the mind of Paterson. Their power, taken into the mind, devastates the old mental structures of habits and customs, of unconscious preconceived response.

The counterpart of the wind's movement of things on earth is the mind's movement both away from the fixed body and away from its own fixed ideas. The wind blows the mind into new imaginative realms. The mind enters the land of dreams, where in library books, "dead men's dreams, confined by these walls, risen, / seek an outlet."²²⁹ Williams wants to expand his mental potential by the use of dreams.

--the cost of dreams,
 in which we search, after a surgery
 of the wits and must translate, quickly
 step by step or be destroyed--under a spell
 to remain a castrate (a slowly descending veil
 closing about the mind
 cutting the mind away .

SILENCE! . . .

And as his mind fades, joining the others, he
 seeks to bring it back--but it
 eludes him, flutters again and flies off and
 again away .²³⁰

The waking from the meaningful hyper-reality of dreams is the destructive return and relapse into dull, ignorant normality, dulling illusion and delusion, divorced despair--normally called, reality! To escape back to life, to fly for one's life, the wind stirs the imagination.

Escape from it--but not by running
away. Not by "composition." Embrace the
foulness

--the being taut, balanced between
eternities . . .

And as reverie gains and
your joints loosen
the trick's done!²³¹

The mind must be let loose to travel at the same speed as the dream-associations. The attempt to force analytical control is disastrous. By the same token, the expression of this state of mind must reflect the activity, "embracing the foulness" by an imitative looseness of form that does not divorce the natural dream from its source by trying to structure it into analytical "composition." The imagination does not provide just a temporary relief from the 'real' world--that is, the normal world--of illusion and self-delusion from monotony. It is an escape to a condition of continual change, of successive rebirths, of continuous understanding, of a permanently refreshing wind in the mind, of changing life. It is an 'escape' TO face the reality by accepting and thus overcoming the despair and torment of living. To start living and reliving freshly, the wind is the imagination in the mind. It is the power of the artist's imagination that enables the vivid perception of a clarified reality. "By virtue of works

The riddle is solved by Williams' broad meaning of 'divorced.'
 Beauty is feared: fear results from the unknown, from ignorance,
 from a mind divorced of knowledge and the power to help itself.
 But the attempt to gain that knowledge, to 'know' a thing, as to
 know sexually is to be one with it, to marry it, is usually a
 fearful and greedy reaction. The attempt is possessive, not
 sacrificial; it is destructive, not creative. Marriage is
 attempted, but to grasp, dominate and kill in the knowledge--
 to destroy by possession. The creation of a full marriage, of
 full knowledge, requires the careful holding of the thing in the
 mind until it is acquired peacefully. The clue is love: "What
 end but love, that stares death in the eye?" Only by loving the
 thing will it become known. Only by being gentle and allowing the
 thing (the partner, the equal object of one's desire to know)
 an equal freedom to be itself, can that thing become known as
 itself. To hate the thing, to fear it and attempt to grasp it
 unlovingly, is to destroy it and transform it before it can become
 known. Knowledge, according to Williams, comes by way of love.

For what is there but love, that stares death
 in the eye, love, begetting marriage--
 not infamy, not death²³⁵

Love is that behaviour which allows the discovery of knowledge.
 Only through love can the marriage of man and nature, man and his
 environment, man and his awareness of himself through known space
 that is not a meaningless vacuum, come about. Yielding to the
 imagination of the wind offers a loving marriage prospect: a reunion
 with reality after the ignorance and divorce of normal existence.
 Had Lear in Williams' poem yielded in marriage to the storm, he

might have known the nature of his environment and of himself. Instead, his aggressive resistance left him fighting the wind, exiled from power and family, and finally, insanely, from knowledge of himself. Yielding to the imagination releases the mind from its ego's destructive urges to possess. For Williams, the imagination is the self-sacrificing path to love, for it releases the mind's potential to perceive without preconceived desires to destroy. A freed imagination allows the mind to understand and know a thing objectively, instead of it being destroyed as it is subjugated into control. There is no enslavement. The imaginative, loving mind can 'marry' a thing with absolute respect for its individuality, and thus gain full knowledge of its intrinsic beauty, its individual worth. Close knowledge of a thing without its destruction is possible. It is also Williams' objective. The wind whips up the imagination whips up the mind whips up the understanding:

(in the up-draft)

and the poor cotton-
 spinner, over the roofs, preparing to dive
 . looks down
 Searching among books; the mind elsewhere
 looking down

Seeking.²³⁶

The imagination, up and away, can give a clearer, fresher focus to an elevated, enlightened mind, whose destructively dominating methods of acquiring knowledge have been yielded in favour of an unselfish receptivity.

The process of purgation requires the test of fire. The fire in the mind is not of the imagination, but as fire reduces matter,

the fiery mind burns up the waste material of thought, the rotten piles of confining thought structure. The fire reduces the mind to its bare, purified essentials, scorches away the superficial excretia, the dead layers of crusty, accepted and established ideas that prohibit fresh perception. The mind is on fire

(breathing the books in)
the acrid fumes,
for what they could decipher .
warping the sense to detect the norm, to break
through the skull of custom²³⁷

All the old, worn-out structures are consumed; the objects, the fixed ideas, the dead letters

Ah!
rotten beams tum-
bling,

. an old bottle
mauled

The night was made day by the flames, flames
on which he fed--grubbing the page
(the burning page)
like a worm--for enlightenment²³⁸

The image is clearer. The darkness of the mind, dimmed by the unconscious ignorance of habitual thinking, is lit up, burned, purged, purified; the rotten, pre-set thoughts tumble as they are discovered, giving way to new perception: "a chastity of annihilation."²³⁹ The essence is recovered in the ashes, Phoenix-like, the mind cleansed and left only with its capacity to see and understand, all the disguises and evasive techniques singed off.

The mind's vision is again awoken to dreams, realizations more vivid than normal:

As though
it were wholly out of our dreams, as
indeed it is, unparalleled in our most sanguine
dreams .

The person submerged²⁴⁰
in wonder, the fire become the person .

The dream is the purified mental essence of reality. It is vivid and bright. The dream allows quick, uncluttered associations of thought without guilt, without the fearful habit of hiding one's self from others by a socially moral public façade, without "exiling one's self from one's self." The darkness of the mind is enlightened. The knowledge of the reality revealed in the dream is not ignored. The mind is receptive to the experience of the fire, is attentive to the object as it is, not as it can be possessed. The fire becomes internal. But it is the dream itself that one must experience, feel fierily in the imagination, not in the methodically interpreting and abstracting mind.

There is a further interpenetration of man and the elements. The flood and the man and the mind are fused, "Again is the magic word . / turning the in out :"²⁴¹ says Williams with a pun, but more seriously meaning that there is no end product of this purification, just a continual process of recreation, of avoiding habit, dullness, unconsciousness and the safety of static rest. The flood drowns the earth, extinguishes the fire, and washes away the loose material:

And there rises
a counterpart, of reading, slowly, overwhelming
the mind; . . .

The stream
grows leaden within him, his lilies drag.²⁴²

His resistance to change holds him back; he hangs on to his established

nature. The flood continues the purification of the mind by the elements. The fire had burnt off the excess, reducing the mind to its essential uncluttered mass: the bottle was transformed, but 'essentially' the same. The flood now removes the scum, the impure residue. The flood washes away the damaging influences, carving out all the loose material, leaving hopefully "--fertile (?) mud."²⁴³ It cleanses the mind, washing out the rot:

Heavy plaits
tumbling massive, yellow into the cleft,
bellowing

--giving way to the spread
of the flood as it lifts to recognition in a
rachitic brain²⁴⁴

The brain, ricketty, soft-centred, is drowned; the poisonous excess, the blinding, blocking, deforming pus is drained off.

The flood is painful, but it must be yielded to and allowed in. From the flood, "an acrid, a revolting stench . . . fouls the mind . . . How to begin to find a shape--to begin to begin again, turning the inside out."²⁴⁵ A final cleansing process is essential to put out the fire and to wash away the debris. Yet, purified within, the mind must now use its refreshment and reveal itself, turning its inside out, eternally opening to the purification process; continually seeking new ways to bring beauty out of the mind:

Does the pulp need further maceration?
take down the walls, invite
the trespass. After all, the slums
unless they are (living)
wiped out they cannot be re-
constituted .²⁴⁶

This is the final cleansing process, the opening and revealing of the mind. All the old ideas have been drowned with their roots, and the new growth of the fresh and imaginative perception can take place.

The force of the elements renews the language--the expression, as it does the mind--the perception, by blowing, burning and cleansing the language to reveal the words clearly. Book "Three will seek a language to make them vocal."²⁴⁷ The world of Paterson, freshly discovered and perceived, must be freshly expressed. The new language that will give expression to this world is found by listening to the Falls, by listening to the speech of the world around Williams, the speech of the wind and the fire and the flood--until the language takes on the sound of the elements themselves. And the language actually comes to possess the 'essential' quality of the agents for their expression.

Without repeating the whole tripartite process of cause and effect, the elements refresh the language. The words have lost their meaning, have been driven down into rigid patterns of sentence construction, into unconscious channels of interpretation. The words have been mixed by habit into unimaginative, senseless clichés; "the terms / foreign, conveying no immediacy, pouring down. / --divorced . . . without a / language, tongue-tied / the language worn out ."²⁴⁸ But there is a new imaginative language learned from the elements:

What language could allay our thirsts,
what winds lift us, what floods bear us
but song but deathless song ?²⁴⁹ past defeats

The song of the wind comes:

--the voice rises, neglected
(with its new) the unfaltering
language. Is there no release?²⁵⁰

Can nobody hear the message, hear the language of the wind? "So much talk of the language--when there are no ears."²⁵¹ The song of the wind is a reproach, a despairing voice, a pitiless savage whipping reminder of freedom and corruption.

Breathless and in haste
the various night (of books) awakes! awakes
and begins (a second time) its song,²⁵²

The song of the fire is a laughter, a flame to burn up the waste
dull clay words and fire them anew:

Voiceless, his
action gracing a flame
--but lost, lost
because there is no way to link
the syllables anew to imprison him
No twist of the flame
in his own image : he goes nameless
until a Nike shall live in his honor--
And for that, invention is lacking,
the words are lacking²⁵³

that would capture the perception of the man and the fire fused in
language that is also fused to and by the fire. But the fusion
of fiery language melts things together, capturing the perception
in the structure of the expression, "cohabitous:"

Rising, with the whirling motion, the person
passed into the flame, becomes the flame--
the flame taking over the person

--with a roar, an outcry²⁵⁴

The meaning of interpenetration is captured by an imitative
structure in which the phrases are repeated until they fold musically
into each other, and then burst into flames. More graphically

flickering, the language can pictorialize the perception and/or the language be formed to emphasise the actual perception's sound, sight, sense. The fire suggests a more sensual language to loosen it from its normal linear unrelatedness to a non-linear natural world: the beauty is freed from the strict linear mind:

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

BRIGHTen

the cor
ner
where you are!

--a flame.
black plush, a dark flame.²⁵⁵

The inarticulation has become intrinsic to the structure--articulated inarticulation! The flame burns the language, which now flickers visually and aurally to portray to the imagination the sensual quality of the flame in the mind shuddering in inarticulate tenderness, too lovingly hesitant to touch firmly.

The song of the flood enters the mind and is released in a form imitating flood in which the words themselves occasionally gush forth.

Texts mount and complicate themselves, lead to further texts and those to synopses, digests and emendations. So be it. Until the words break loose or--sadly hold, unshaken.²⁵⁶

The language is cluttered and stodgy, stuck in the mud, and will remain so until the words break loose utterly from their stiff linear regularity that is not related to the flood; until the words capture graphically and rhythmically the form of the flood;

until the flood effects a new flooding language-

--a red-butted reversible minute-glass
 loaded with
 salt-like white crystals
 flowing
 for timing eggs²⁵⁷

Williams selects from anywhere, haphazardly, often meaninglessly. but the descriptions are structurally important as contrasting formal examples. Nonsensical data, rigid verses of semi-phonetic conversation, a detailed scientific report of a well-drilling vertically spaced, all combine awkwardly, crash together carelessly, like debris in a flood. But what is much more meaningful than the mere visual graphics of a written language is a new language of speech fused with the object perceived, with its song and sound. Remembering that Williams' objective is to reverse the pattern of despair and divorce,

How to begin to find a shape--to begin to begin again,
 turning the inside out : to find one phrase that will
 lie married beside another for delight . . . ?
 --seems beyond attainment

 Let the words
 fall any way at all--that they may
 hit love aslant. It will be a rare
 visitation. They want to rescue too much,
 the flood has done its work²⁵⁸

The flood invokes a language of flood: "the roar of the present," once heard, enters the form of the language.

The past above, the future below
 and the present roaring down: the roar,
 the roar of the present, a speech--
 is, of necessity, my sole concern

The language cascades into the
 invisible, beyond and above : the falls
 of which it is the visible part--

Not until I have made of it a replica
 will my sins be forgiven and my
 disease cured--in wax:259

Williams' "sole concern" is to find a new language that will exactly represent--"a replica" of "the modern replicas" of "the elemental character of the place"--the intrinsic reality of a place as it reveals itself to the enlightened mind in its own voice. No ghostly past, nor ethereal future, expression will work:

I must
 find my meaning and lay it, white,
 beside the sliding water: myself--
 comb out the language--or succumb
 --whatever the complexion. 260

Williams must purify the language by wind, fire and flood. He must find the exact words to present a replica of the present, essential, elemental reality clearly perceived--or be drowned in inarticulate, ignorant silence. There must be the perfected expression of a language married to the real perception--or divorced, wordless torment. Williams tries to reform the language to marry a nascent perception of a changing reality. The 'dream' world of the imagination must penetrate the mind's perception and its expression of increased understanding.

CHAPTER VII

PATERSON, Four: Love

Part I is an idyl of Corydon and Phyllis, a supposedly charming story of pastoral warmth and rustic simplicity. In reality, it is a distressing account of urban alienation and the complex disorders of city living: mental confusion and physical perversion. On the surface, the section describes a young country girl's arrival in the big city in search of excitement and adventure. Underneath, her experiences reveal that everybody is searching for an escape, an illusion, an idyl, and though she is sometimes unaware of it, sometimes indifferent to it, she is being used by the people she meets to satisfy their desires. Paterson has expanded to the city: it is a broadening of experience into a larger and more modern social environment. At the same time, the mind of Paterson encompasses larger, if only equally valid, intellectual concerns which are the effect of a greater social contact--the torment of alienation, schizophrenia, the questionable value of virtue, the degeneration of intellect, of sensitivity and of love. As the previous Book had recorded the decline of the imagination and thereby called for its recovery, Book Four records the decline and debasement of love. Williams calls for the rebirth of love and tries to undermine love's enemies.

City life is unnatural. The presentation of a pair of traditionally rural lovers in a city environment invites all kinds of interpretations about the 'displaced' nature of the individuals. Corydon and Phyllis are, as shepherds, alone and alienated in the city: yet while shepherds are alone but a part of the natural environment, these two rustics are alone and utterly divorced from the source of their livelihood. The city has displaced the landscape and left the pair rootless: Phyllis has left her home and is reminded by Corydon "never [to] be ashamed of your origins:"²⁶¹ Corydon, pastorally romanticising the remnants of the natural landscape, bemoans "all that's left of the elemental, the primitive / in this environment. I call them my sheep."²⁶² Her sheep represent an imaginative idyllic escape from what are really islands covered in white crap.

The unnaturalness of the big city is further shown by the contrast between the appearance of idyllic love and the reality of the unproductive relationships. Phyllis is separated from her drunk father: there is no love lost and no trust. Corydon is not a youthful shepherd who is enamoured by a comely milk maid: she is a loveless old maid. She purchases Phyllis' company with money and the temptation of luxury, and her sensual appreciation of Phyllis' massaging verges on homosexuality. Phyllis' real lover is a frustrated married man whose erotic desires Phyllis refuses to satisfy, and for whom she has no love. Meanwhile, a suicide of Phyllis' age and sex hints at the fruitless futility of life, love and communication in the big city. The 'problem' is not so much a question of perversion, of unnatural alliances, as these are evidence of the failure of any

kind of successful communion between people in this environment.

The environment is the city where everyone seeks an escape
from the reality of

Unfit for human habitation . houses placarded:
etc etc

Oh yes .

Condemned

Necessity gripping the words . scouting
evasion, that love is begrimed, befouled

begrimed
yet lifts its head, having suffered a sea-change!²⁶³

As the poem has moved structurally from the river to the sea;
as Phyllis, the country girl, has run to the big city at the mouth
of the river; love--simple, rural, pastoral--has become urbanized
into erotic, masturbatory dreams. The sea-change of love is
towards impotent relationships in a loveless, emotionless city.
Williams' depiction of the elevator inhabitants is a bitter vision
of human animals riding a continually moving commercial machine that
drains them of life. Existence in the phallic high rises is an
incessant repetition of automatic mental, physical and emotional
masturbation until the city dwellers remain "without recognizable /
outline, fixed in rogers, adipose or sclerosis / expressionless,
facing one another, a mould / for all faced (canned fish) this ."²⁶⁴

They stand torpid in cages, in violent motion
unmoved

but alert!

predatory minds, un-

affected

UNINCONVENIENCED

unsexed, up
and down (without wing motion) This is how
the money's made . using such plugs.²⁶⁵

Their minds, their bodies, their feelings, their whole lives have become a string of negative activities, of the self-negation of capability, while they are still selfishly alienated into futile emptiness--"I feel so alone."²⁶⁶

The selfishness, lust and frustration is equally clear in Phyllis' dual roles. She and her love are also condemned:

If I am virtuous
condemn me
If my life is felicitous
condemn me
The world is
iniquitous²⁶⁷

There is a tone of exhausted finality in these lines, a suggestion of the post-hysteria of the failure, as if only laughter would cover over the despair. This is Corydon speaking, yet Phyllis' blatant confessions to Paterson reveal the same masochistic schizophrenia. She chastises herself in his mind by slandering her own reputation, which excuses her refusal to make love by pretending respect for him. Then she chastises herself for not gratifying him enough, again trying to gain his sympathy. By her self-accusation, Phyllis ensures her lover's entrapment: she takes all the blame for their failure and he pities her. She refuses to gratify his desire because she says that she is too whorish. Then she claims to have been shocked by a sexual proposal, and that because she cares for him so much, she cannot satisfy his desires. Her chastity now blocks his gratification. Either way, nothing happens; yet Phyllis appeals to both his erotic dreams for a whore and his idealistic worship of the virgin.

"Love is begrimed" as the river flows into the larger social sphere. Love and sex become ineffectual castrates in an automated existence. All values are upended. All goodness is undermined, as good and evil become interchangeable in a social context of schizophrenic perversion, ineffectual communication and unconscious amorality. Virtue, the moral value of virginity, has become a whore, a saleable commodity to attract a jealous old maid. Virginity remains a useless birthright to be displayed for sale to the market of eligible bachelors. While whoredom becomes a virtue to gratify the frustrations of a married man. The mind boggles. Love is impossible.

The idyl is a fairly peaceful framework that compliments the message of impotence. Part II's framework is a lecture on atomic fission, a violent eruption that acts as an image of power. The loss of power in the city dwellers is a sign of their sterility and of their inability to love. But Williams insists that the great mental power of some individuals is also disabling: it is the power of mind that has grown like a cancer to the denial of other human potentialities and responsibilities. For these people, "knowledge, the contaminant"²⁶⁸ has been allowed to become the overridingly important objective in life. It overrides the natural side of man, the sensual, sexual, familial, emotional, non-rational experiences of life. It destroys the physical side of man, the natural possibilities for emotional experience, for the experiences of love. The mind becomes a disease in the body, a machine to dominate the flesh, a Moloch to annihilate the heart. The mind attacks love. Whether, through loneliness and pain, the mind becomes

schizophrenic and weak, or, through determined power, the mind bloats into fanatical strength, the crushing defeat of love is the result. The mind is crushed by the vast commercial machine, and becomes a skeletal home for erotic dreams and perversion. Or the mind is inflated by the power of knowledge that reduces the body to an unproductive sterile shell. In both cases, a disease has incapacitated man's ability to love, his ability to form healthy interpersonal relationships, and it has seriously prevented his understanding of morality in the social system.

The framework of the lecture provides the structural clue about the subject of study--knowledge. A man's knowledge determines his social occupation. His social function decides his power. However, in discussing the more powerful people in society--the scientist, the banker, the manufacturer--Williams consistently uses images of disease, division and separation. The knowledge held by those people in powerful positions is the knowledge of the means of destruction, disintegration, and the 'divorce' of the individual.

Williams uses the metaphor of atomic fission to unite a variety of occupational power structures. Whether the power held is scientific, economic or political, the goal is the same--progress, advancement, success. The means of attaining that goal in the new technological age of scientists and their banking backers is destructive according to Williams. They all split the atom. They all increase--reproduce cells or money--by dividing cells into new cells. Madame Curie breaks down uranium and releases powerful energy by the spontaneous disintegration of radioactive elements.

The evangelist Billy Sunday divides the striking workers from their cause and conquers them for the factory owners. The banker operates a system of usury to separate money from value, the people from owning their surroundings. The power is thus socially and individually destructive. What Williams is trying to establish is that the people become separated from power, from the levels of planning, decision-making and benefit that determine their destiny. This statement is an adaption of Williams notion of 'divorce' to the particularly crucial area of each person's occupational activity or importance in society. We have seen Williams' desire to rediscover consciousness of oneself, and of oneself through an awareness of the local reality: Ginsberg's letter contains the phrase, "his struggle to love and know his own world-city."²⁶⁹ We have also monitored the attempt to perceive with accuracy what is really going on. Now, Williams is calling for man to gain mental and physical control of the system from the foreign or outside special interests that attempt to dominate the people--

i.e. LOCAL control of local purchasing
power
? ?²⁷⁰

The Curie metaphor also points out that the power is held by those who use it destructively. It is exercised by self-destructive individuals who harm the people at the same time. This is an internal destruction, a separation of the mind from the body. Madame Curie's determination to succeed in her research is lauded as a literal self-sacrifice for the discovery of radiation. At the time, it was no more than an obsessional search for knowledge at the denial of her life. She denied her husband, her unborn child,

their search for love. It is love that Williams recognizes as the highest power in life. "Love, the sledge that smashes the atom?"²⁷¹ is fragile and must be carefully searched for and then cared for and protected. Love is Williams' only defense against the dis-integrating, dissolving, myth-destroying power of mind on the offensive.

It is either ironically coincidental or intentionally imitative that the most difficult passage in Paterson for me to grasp, the most illusive and disjointed, the most pedantically intellectual, occurs in the middle of this whole 'lecture' upon the intentional overdevelopment of the powers of the mind. The few pages following "knowledge, the contaminant" are decidedly 'difficult.' They suggest much about the polarities of mind and love, but I offer the following only by way of escape from exhausted indecision. Within the framework of a sense-perspective that is naturally suspicious of any extremely intellectual awareness, the preference for love makes logically clear sense of the material. Meanwhile, it is quite possible that the confused and confusing nature of this portion is intended by Williams to serve as an example of the doubtful validity of abstruse and scattered intellectual profundity.

The mind, as the "most powerful connective,"²⁷² can manipulate the wild assortment of discordant data that bombards it until there grows an understanding that unifies reason and emotion in one ordered reality. "But there may issue, a contaminant"²⁷³ that will infect the reasoning and pollute the understanding if the acquisition of knowledge, like the acquisition of radiation, breaks down the balanced nature of the receiver and inculcates only intellectual values:

And love, bitterly contesting, waits
that the mind shall declare itself not
alone in dreams .

A man like you should have everything he wants .274

This last statement had been Phyllis' apology for not giving (or for not being able to give) satisfaction to Paterson: it is penitently self-sacrificing, yet it gains sympathetic forgiveness in the process. It acts here as a reminder of a person's higher obligation to love and human relationships than to knowledge as the enslavement to a career. The mind, as the instrument of occupational knowledge, must not be permitted to distract a person from his loyalty to human love--sensual, marital, brotherly. Career knowledge must not contaminate the human bonds of feeling and friendship.

When the quest for knowledge becomes the highest priority, the mind's power destroys the balance within a human being, disregards the non-rational elements. This leads to a denial of love, of the body, of feeling for other human beings. And this leads Williams to a succession of images of love being denied by the callous minds of those obsessed with power. Carrie Nation, divinely obsessed with her puritanical mission of abstention from drink, became violent and destructive at the expense of Artemis, goddess of the wild, the natural, and by extension, of natural human functions like sex and childbearing. The mind of Madame Curie killed her body. It is at this point that knowledge becomes a destructive obsession that infests vital moral judgments with abstract ideals, that causes a moralistic craving for the sophisticated restriction and denial of natural behavior in man. The mind then seeks only to discover more knowledge, more tools for disintegration,

more power that is then directed against human 'being.' Williams is critical of the whole atomic chain reaction within the mind: inspiration--knowledge--mind power--control--domination--usurpation of the rights and minds of others, and usurpation of the other senses by the mind. It is a mental disease that obsesses the individual until the mind has disintegrated all distinctively humanistic qualities; until a variety of scientific, economic and political power structures have succeeded in destroying the joy of living,⁸¹ "'the radiant gist' against all that / scants our lives;"²⁷⁵ until the mind has destroyed love.

Williams is bitter because the mere tool for understanding and communion--the mind--has become a machine so deadly and powerful that "love is begrimed" by "knowledge, the contaminant."

As Carrie Nation
to Artemis
so is our life today . 276

Or, as Kenneth Patchen portrays it,



Kenneth Patchen

The third section is both another part of Book Four and the conclusion, if only temporary, of Paterson. Its dual nature does not conflict, however, for the final images of "all that any one man may achieve in a lifetime"²⁷⁸--historical images juxtaposing the birth and growth of the city with the continual violent deaths of its inhabitants--have a fundamental connection with "this dream of / the whole poem's "²⁷⁹ bitter criticism of the poverty of mind that perpetuates such a system.

Structurally, Williams depicts the final arrival of the river at the sea. The mood is of repose, a deathly hush:

Shh! the old man's asleep

--all but for the tides, there is no river,
silent now, twists and turns
in his dreams .

The ocean yawns!

It is almost the hour

--and did you ever know of a sixty year
woman with child . ?²⁸⁰

Paterson is now a quiet old river drifting out to sea, an old man lapsing into death. But right at the beginning, there is this hint of a phenomenal, even a miraculous, rebirth of man: an old woman with child. The sea-change metaphor already hints at rebirth, through the physical cycle of river, sea, evaporation into cloud, rain and river all over again. The unity of the organic cycle, as a reminder of natural rebirth, is central to the poem. In the Preface, Williams has outlined his desire to recreate in art the revolving unity of the organic cycle of life:

Rolling in, top up,
 under, thrust and recoil, a great clatter:
 lifted as air, boated, multicolored, a
 wash of seas --
 from mathematics to particulars--

divided as the dew,
 floating mists, to be rained down and
 regathered into a river that flows
 and encircles:²⁸¹

The structure of the poem, as well as the subject, is fashioned to reveal the organic cycle in art. This cyclical sense of rebirth permeates the whole section, and impregnates each aspect of Williams' thought: artistic and poetic recreation, the reawakening of individual consciousness, the rebirth of social unity and humanity. Rebirth and regeneration is the objective, the re-activation of a balanced, healthy and active life. The technique that Williams uses, true to his poetic of change, is shock treatment.

"The brain is weak,"²⁸² we are reminded. It is weak because it has been crushed and tormented and blinded by false illusions and delusions. It is weak because the old man's consciousness, man's awareness of his state, is subsiding. It is weak because it is split apart from love, lacking the strength of the spirit.

Weakness,
 weakness dogs him, fulfillment only
 a dream or in a dream. No one mind
 can do it all,²⁸³

And it is weak because sensual and sexual knowledge, the arrival at a unified sense of communion with another being, has been divided from intellectual knowledge, the possessively destructive acquisition of abstract facts divorced from reality.

--to convince whom? the sea worm?
 They are used to death and
 jubilate at it . . .

Murder.²⁸⁵

Williams recognizes that the people are living with murder and violence; they crave the macabre. He is trying to make them sick of murder, to waken them from a way of life that loves killing, that is killing itself like the shark. He wants murder to revolt them--to convince them of the waste and insanity of killing. He realizes that the old man/river's craving for the sea as a home, a final end, a conclusion! is suicidal, that the society similarly is dying to get to the sea, to drown in "a sea of blood."²⁸⁶

I say to you, Put wax rather in your
 ears against the hungry sea
 it is not our home!

. . . draws us in to drown, of losses
 and regrets .²⁸⁷

The attraction of the sea is a suicidal love, a desire on the one hand to escape from the pain of living a normal dull existence, and a lust on the other hand for killing and murder which corrupts the whole society. Williams pleads for "some modern magic"²⁸⁸ of strength sufficient to vitalize a suicidal, drowning people.

At the same time, Williams accepts the drowning as only a process of rebirth, one that provides a sea-change for new life. The drowning in the sea is an image that combines essential contraries--death and life; love and hate. The arrival at the sea is the death of the river, yet Oceanus is also the mythical source of rivers. The sea is "not our home,"²⁸⁹ but the sea-dog that jumps up out of the surf is a "hell-diver,"²⁹⁰ returned alive from the dead. The image pulls together the same paradox proposed

by Blake in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. There, the Hell envisioned by the Angel, obsessed with the fear of death and enslaved by a dogmatically fixed mind, is "a sea of blood." But Blake sees only a vision of human joy and unabashed pleasure in the form of a pleasant stream in a pastoral landscape. Here in Paterson, Williams presents one perception of the sea as a sea of blood, of death and murder, evil and Hell, and another of the sea as a purifying process which it is necessary to pass through to be reborn. Blake argues for the arrival at virtue through the purging by excess. Williams offers the shocking murders as an excess to burn out the diseased perversion of the mind.

Williams seems to agree with Blake's essential acceptance of both the good and evil principles in living. Blake writes, "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence."²⁹¹ Williams attacks the dogmas of conventional goodness, Blake's Urizen, the angelic virtue of virginity, the excessive mechanical rationality. Like Blake, he uses the imagination to free the mind to its energetic and instinctive desires. Like Blake, Williams recognizes the whoredom of virginity as a market value: "nor pale religious litchery call that virginity that wishes but acts not!"²⁹² Virginity is evil if it is only a physical deprivation of "unacted desires"²⁹³ masking erotic thoughts. They both call for antagonistic new growths of new standards of behaviour to enliven a restricted ethical code. Both Williams and Blake accept the reality of a world of hate and of love. Neither is

satisfied with a static dream of heaven, with rigid codes of morality, nor with the hypocritical static death of a suicidal hell, with blind immorality.

But Paterson originally ended here with this vision of renewal, of rebirth in death, of the swimmer walking with difficulty out of the sea as a metaphor of life and animal creation out of the ocean, of hope through despair, of renewed energy through sensible disillusion, of the desire for love out of the desire to hate. This rebirth in death is a marriage of contraries, the acceptance of which conflict as reality brings harmony. Book Five's apocalyptic marriage of contraries, of the virgin and the whore, is an even greater resolution of conflict towards unity. There is a continued reassessment of society's rigid notions of virtue and morality as they are seen to deny love by self-alienation or to destroy love by debasement and self-abuse. Good and evil continue to be reversible abstracts of hypocritical pretentiousness when it is clear that both 'values' ignore the vital and superior importance of love as the creative value that enhances life and brings unity to man and woman, that draws man closer to a respect for his small environment and his human significance, and that, blended with consciousness, unites mind and body in one soul, ego and id subordinated to anima.

CHAPTER VIII

PATERSON, Five: A Unifying Mythology

The last Book of Paterson tries to do two main things. Its design is calculated to create a sentient experience of the multifarious shape of reality: as such, it reveals the art of the creative imagination transcending the confining dullness of social normality. But this apocalyptic rediscovery of a sense-awareness is balanced by a parallel growth of conscious intellectual understanding as Williams expands the notion of rebirth to the creation of a whole new mythological world. Williams tries to relocate the real world of Paterson in a surreal world of wish-fulfilling dreams of unity between man and nature, between the real and the imaginary, between purity and sex--all in contrast to the divided desires and divorced nature of the normal social world. The surreal ideal is the world of the unicorn where love is perfected. But, the intellectual purpose of this recreation of mythology is to re-establish man's faith within an organic sensibility. Thus, in a design of impressionistic beauty and in an intellectual framework of the return to primordial reality through mythology, Williams tries to direct man towards a continual process of reawakening awareness and recreating love.

By its mythology, Book Five augments our understanding of rebirth in Paterson. The poem has already delineated the successive

rebirths of mental consciousness in the dulled people, of an awareness of one's roots in time and the place, of the language from clichéd abuse, of the river itself in its sea-change. Now, the sense of reawakening is strong again: "--remember . . . with a smile of recognition reawakening the world / of Paterson . . . from their long winter sleep."²⁹⁴ The text is cluttered with the insistent repetition of renewal. Williams assimilates our new knowledge of the present state of Paterson, a knowledge advanced by a sense of the roots of the place, with an elemental mythologizing of the particular environment into a belief. Somewhat paganistically, Williams is returning through the imagination to the primordial reality of this world: he is seeking to rediscover the lost source of the spirit of the place--the essential, elemental origin of Paterson. One motive for this quest is perhaps a desire to 'elevate' his realization of the importance of the natural source to the level of faith or belief. He is delving to a basic spiritual level of understanding to provide a bonding force to his argument for reawakening the world which has so far been proposed by secular didacticism rather than faith. The mythology he creates to enhance the attraction of yielding one's self to the spirit of the place and to the vital supplicating reverence of the earth is the belief in the Unicorn.

Williams has been searching throughout for ways of increasing human awareness. He believes that a man can discover himself by knowing his part in the environment in the present time and place, and the course of the past that has determined the

present reality. To ensure a continual path for consciousness, he must devise a myth that will link the modern reality with the original source. Modern life is the city world of Book Four. It is the world where "love is begrimed" amongst impotent 'lovers;' where power corrupts until the mind confines love; where virtue is cheapened until normal morality is no more than a hypocritical façade. In such a world, the virgin and the whore are joint prostitutes, "both for sale / to the highest bidder,"²⁹⁵ while moral inhibition enforces the division of mind and body, sex and love, civilized morality and animal sexuality. In his desire for his own marriage of heaven and hell, for a unifying belief that will repair the divorced modern man, Williams selected the unicorn. The unicorn is the mythological creature by whom Williams returns man's mind to his body. Man's socially moral denial of his animal nature is refuted. Released from his inhibited frustrations, his mind accepts the body's impulses: love becomes possible when the mind and body are free to give.

The unicorn is naturally ferocious, but is made gentle by the sight of a virgin. Upon seeing a virgin, he will come and lay his head in her lap, and only thus, is caught. The unicorn is a symbol of masculine fierceness. His savage strength is an exaggerated compliment to the proud animal ferocity of the male. But he becomes gentle at mating time, no doubt to ensure his sexual gratification--an obviously human interpretation, since animals become more violent. The allegory to the male is clear, and, I would argue, the allusions to masculine virility are also

intentional. Borges recounts the Unicorn's capture: "How it is captured. A virgin is placed before it and it springs into the virgin's lap and she warms it with love and carries it off to the palace of kings."²⁹⁶ On the one side is a fierce lustful unicorn; on the other, a virgin with open arms. But by using her virginity to advantage, she profits by the capture of the unicorn, the submission of the male. Without having to commit any overt sexual act, the virgin has prostituted her body to gain reward: "the whore and the virgin, an identity."²⁹⁷

The moral
 proclaimed by the whorehouse
 could not be better proclaimed
 by the virgin, a price on her head,
 her maidenhead!
 sharp practice
 to hold on to that
 cheapening it:
 Throw it away! (as she did)

The Unicorn
 the white one-horned beast
 thrashes about
 root toot a toot!²⁹⁸

The unicorn thus erodes the distinction between the virgin and the whore, between good and evil, between social morality and unabashed sexuality.

The unicorn unites heaven and hell. The two are contrasted again and again. The Mexican whore described in the letter from Gilbert Sorrentino sells her body openly. She is amoral; and she practises unashamedly honest sexuality faced with the real squalor of poverty. Yet she gives herself in passion: her man of the moment satiates his passion "deeper than death."²⁹⁹ In contrast, the medieval

virgin in the tapestry sells her purity openly. She is traditionally chaste and can refuse all immorality amongst the idyllic pastoral luxury of her rich, ideal world. We are expected to condemn the whore as evil and to praise the virgin for her virtue. But Williams has gradually reversed the whole moral system. Already we have seen that the virgin has prostituted her body for a reward, even if it is a non-sexual reward, though that also is doubtful in the case of the thrashing unicorn. In either case, the lust of the unicorn is satiated: one is sexual, the other abstract (only to become sexual!). The socially moral viewpoint is irrelevant and hypocritical.

However, the idealized worship of the virgin persists, and Williams undermines it. He questions the virtue of the Virgin Mary. This is an extreme challenge to society's fearfully moralistic worship of virginity as a symbol of heavenly purity--the denial of the flesh. Williams considers virginity a sin if it is held at the denial of love:

. . . no woman is virtuous
 who does not give herself to her lover
 --forthwith³⁰⁰

Virtue is in giving love, not in holding off for some frightened, proud reverence of sterile un-use, otherwise called innocence, which becomes a false virtue when it is a selfish alienation from the natural expression of love and desire by sexual communion. In effect, Williams is claiming that the virgin's value, even her virtue, is increased by deflowering, as the blossom is sacrificed openly as a gift of love.

As if it were not enough to condemn the prolongation of virginity as a selfish, alienating refusal to love, Williams questions the virtue of the motives for worshipping virginity. He claims that the praise of purity is only a social façade. The worship of purity is still a desire, and as a desire, it is a wish for possession:

--every married man carries in his head
the beloved and sacred image
of a virgin
whom he has whored .³⁰¹

Remember the impotent schizophrenia of Phyllis and Paterson: "she refuses to gratify his desire because she says that she is too whorish. Then she claims to have been shocked by a sexual proposal, and that because she cares for him too much, she cannot satisfy his desires. Her chastity now blocks his gratification. Either way, nothing happens; yet Phyllis appeals to both his erotic dreams for a whore and his idealistic worship of the virgin."³⁰² The whole ideal of virginity as moral goodness is perverted, while the social repugnance of whoredom is a façade. The virgin and the whore are both desirable, both lusted after, both worshipped, but never more so than when the two desires settle on one object--the desire for ideal beauty coupled with the desire for really free sexual expression. The ultimate mate for a man's love to be satisfied is this one woman who can polarize all his craving for spiritual sublimity--purity, beauty, perfection, innocence; and all his lust for sensual satisfaction--uninhibited, passionate consummation by experience. The longing is for mind and body to be jointly satisfied, and the unicorn can make their satisfaction mutual: "The Unicorn roams

the forest of all true lovers' minds"³⁰³ until they finally discover her.

The expression of her face,
 where she stands removed from the others
 --the virgin and the whore,
 an identity,
 both for sale
 to the highest bidder!
 and who bids higher
 than a lover? Come
 out of it if you call yourself a woman.³⁰⁴

Williams also tries to make the poem stand as an equal satisfaction for mind and body. The task he set himself in the Preface was to make our intellectual awareness blossom through an imaginative structure into a sensually appreciable beauty.

The mythology of the unicorn is a trick to unite the best of both worlds, the two opposite highest values or desires--one selling her spiritual purity, the other her physical passion. Both are virtues for man, both are available whores, both are desired by man. The trick is in uniting the divorced desires of man, and in returning man to that harmony with nature which was germinated in the Preface:

rolling up out of chaos,
 a nine month's wonder, the city
 the man, an identity--it can't be
 otherwise--an
 interpenetration, both ways. Rolling
 up! obverse, reverse;
 the drunk the sober; the illustrious
 the gross; one.³⁰⁵

Williams has filled the final pages of Paterson with images of unity. The flight of birds, and the whole family working on their tapestry-- "all together, working together-- / all the birds together"³⁰⁶--are metaphors for a community with a united direction. And the cyclical

image of death and rebirth points to an underlying unity in the continual rhythm of nature: for the third time, Williams describes the structural unity of the organic cycle,

The (self) direction has been changed
the serpent
its tail in its mouth
"the river has returned to its beginnings"
and backward
(and forward)³⁰⁷

Nothing is final, yet everything dies. Man and matter are reunited with nature upon their death, and are reborn. There is a miraculous rebirth of love, the unity of two beings; along with the reawakening of primordial consciousness, the unity of man's and nature's souls. Both unifying rebirths are made possible by the unicorn, the unifying myth that is sought,

--the hunt of
the Unicorn and
the god of love
of virgin birth³⁰⁸

The supreme object is the recreation of love, not as an idealized notion to escape from reality, but as a mythological representation of how man can learn to live with the warring factions inside his own being. Love can only be fully realized, Williams argues, when man accepts the desires of his body and unites them with the ideas of his mind. Williams' object is fundamentally similar to the spiritual-sensual notion of unity and marriage sought by D.H. Lawrence in The Rainbow: "the Sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair."³⁰⁹ The search for a sensual awareness united with a spiritual consciousness is Paterson, Five's quest too. Both employ full circle symbolism of unity as man finds a paganistic

appreciation of his environment and, in that sympathetic understanding, a primal awareness of himself.

There is, however, a drawback to the growth of understanding about the nature of one's surroundings. Becoming aware of the obliviousness of normality, the normal repetitious impotence and ignorance of "the great beast," the normal brutal dominance of those in power, is a painful experience. Social normality is made bearable by the soporific dullness that is its worst aspect. But it is too depressing to remain impotent, enslaved by traditional morality and social heirarchies, and, to be conscious of one's state. One has to escape from the depressing state of an unimaginative world where "habit is a great deadener;"³¹⁰ where, since Williams directs us to "Sunflower Sutra," mechanical corruption deadens the flower of nature and the spirit of man. The most common escape route is planned failure; inviting self-delusion by accepting the customary illusions. But, eventually, this only increases the misery, for it makes hypocritical the values one upholds against the dulling institutions for whom illusion is the common tool. Illusion is an escape, but it cannot be a viable route for anybody who seriously does not **want** to hide from reality. Suicide is a more positive and decisive action that protests one's depression, but it is hardly a cure. Art remains as the only living escape from despair which is not an escape from the knowledge of reality. The imaginative world of art is the key to survival. "It is through this hole / we escape . / . . . So through art alone, . . .

Through this hole
 at the bottom of the cavern
 of death, the imagination
 escapes intact.³¹¹

It is the second task of Paterson, Five to impress, by example more than by discussion, the value of art as a mental design that can attack and overtake the pain of consciousness. As a surreal vision of the imaginary world of the unicorn, the design of Book Five is an attempt to transcend the confines of death and rise into the creation of an aesthetic structure which captures the torment of normality and so vanquishes the depression. Thus, the key point in this plan is the poem "Tribute to the Painters" in Part II, the final lines of which have been omitted because they explain the vision, because they abstract the torment into an analysis rather than present a synthesis of the reality of the struggle itself. One must be aware of the unfortunate, but necessary, awkwardness in writing about Williams' avoidance of writing about the purpose of the design. He has chosen instead to present impressionistically the reality of a mind searching for peace and unity out of bitterness and division, a mind which we can readily see is distracted from all sides and liable to any number of digressions and associations. This is the associative approach in Paterson, Five to the portrayal of a vital, mental reality. Williams omits the "Tribute"'s dream-interpretative conclusion:

and there came to me
 just now
 the knowledge of

the tyranny of the image
 and how
 men
 in their designs
 have learned
 to shatter it

 whatever it may be,
 that the trouble
 in their minds
 shall be quieted,
 put to bed
 again. 312

In the reawakening of the minds of the dulled to consciousness comes the painful knowledge of reality: the pressures of reality, the pressures to conformity and uniformity imposed by moral and ethical standards which deaden the spirit, the pressures that frustrate an enslaved mind into neuroses and hypocrisy. These are the social forces that indoctrinate slavery to ideas which are far from the real or the true: to the ideal traditional worship of the virgin as the symbol of perfection, however far from the true desires; to "the tyranny of the image," both in moral philosophy and in aesthetic practice, the stifling effect of meticulous order in polite behaviour and in mathematically exact art copies, however far from the internal reality, the innate desire to escape from the claustrophobia to the dream-producing activity of the imagination that constructs new worlds out of dulled ones.

The artist, Williams says, can surmount the tyranny of the pressures and fears that trouble him. "The dream / is in pursuit:"³¹³ the dreams of improvement, of love, unity, rebirth and faith, haunt the tortured mind of the conscious man. The dreams of the recreation of love fill the whole of Book Five. The reconstruction of the imagination's actual dreams into art is the surrealistic presentation of Paterson, Five that conquers the torment. Art conquers the agony

of being conscious of a miserable normality by the creation of the imagination's designs into structures whose beauty appeases while it reveals the nightmare of normal existence. The nightmare reality cannot be ignored: "WALK in the world / (you can't see anything / from a car window, still less / from a plane, or from the moon!? Come / off of it.)"³¹⁴ Williams insists on facing the nature of reality, however bleak, rather than sliding into an illusory escape. The acceptance of reality is a descent into hell for Williams, in spite of Ginsberg's criticisms: "Paterson is not a task like Milton going down to hell, it's a flower to the mind too."³¹⁵ Paterson is a task like Blake going down to hell with the angel. What is seen is a bleak reality, a modern, dusty, dying, degenerated society. But what is also seen is vital life still remaining in the living, giving, grasping for rebirth:

A reel house, a real house? Casa real? Casa de putas? and then the walk through the dark streets, joy of living, in being drunk and walking with other drunks, walking the streets of dust in a dusty year in a dusty century where everything is dust but you are young and you are drunk and there are women ready to love for some paper in your pocket.³¹⁶

The flower to the mind is the recreation by the imagination of the immediate experience of the real world. The imagination translates the depression and the degeneration into an artistic structure whose intrinsic beauty blossoms forth to regenerate vitality. Finally, then, Williams has succeeded in his quest; he has perfected a way of bringing beauty out of the mind into a vivid, artistic reality.

But this surrealism is more than a form containing beauty and truth, music and meaning. There is an intrinsic value to the design itself, to the music of the form, the musical phrase itself

that provides a feeling of the things along with the intellectual sense about it. The design of the poem is itself the thing recreated, imitating its form, expanding abstract intellectualization to a sentient awareness of the essence of the reality. It is because of this desire for an apocalyptic insight into and presentation of reality that Williams' Book Five is structured loosely, grasping at all kinds of detail, to give an impressionistic revelation of reality. But the whole technique of "an elucidation by multiplicity"³¹⁷ has been well exercised by the Whitman-Ginsberg line of 'profuse' poets, those all-inclusive writers seeking thus to capture the total reality of a scene. Book Five does have more spontaneity and immediacy than the earlier parts of Paterson. It does have more irrational inclusions and digressions, more careless abandon and automatic tendencies. But this careless profusion is intended to be a revelation of the free mind as it grasps or is grasped by what attracts it. Book Five's form is indicative of its meaning: the mind searching for satiety in full flight. While the earlier Books usually talk discursively about reality, about the language, about the mind, Book Five is a sustained moment of apocalyptic revelation. The structure's looseness indicates the highly unstable, but highly imaginative and unconfined mind. Admiring Joyce's stylistic representation of the workings of the human mind, Williams wrote, "much that he must say and cannot get said without his brokenness he gets down finally with it."³¹⁸ In Williams' own structural imitation of the mind, there are the same jagged flashes of perception, streams of consciousness and inexplicable digressions. Surrealism is the technique needed to free

language from the mind-blinding common formulas for expression, to impregnate the language with new intensity and cause a rebirth of meaning and stylistic vitality. In Book Four, Williams had asked: "Kill the explicit sentence, don't you thing? and expand our meaning--by verbal sequences."³¹⁹ The dream associations of the mythic world are only occasionally approached in Books One and Four: the final Book is the surrealistic portrayal of the whole dream--the relaxation of laws opening the mind to a conscious vision of unaverted reality blended with aspiration and love.

Despite all this 'carelessness' and poetic license, Williams never releases control of Paterson. Book Five is a meditation which tries to modernize Williams' vision of reality. It tries to refresh the imagination with more current examples. It is a well-planned selection of images that have been chosen for a conscious and intentional intellectual purpose--Williams' vision of love and unity. One must therefore reject the arguments that Paterson, Five is an attempt not at mimicking but being unthought of: it is not automatic writing. Surrealism remains for Williams a method of revealing the dream longings of the imagination: it does not become strict surrealism, art almost indistinguishable from the reality of a dream, a full-blown, uncontrolled presentation of the dreams of the sub-conscious. There are too many carefully chosen and interwoven associations that fit the intellectual design, however spontaneously the work of art appears to have been created. The control and measure within the poem's structure is always consciously designed to reflect the surrounding reality, and to bring us into closer participation with it: it is always an artifice. "The measured dance"³²⁰

at the end is an image of control and order, while it is an order larger than ourselves, an order in nature to which man must submit or go mad like Lear.

We know nothing and can know nothing .
but
the dance, to dance to a measure
contrapuntally,
Satyrically, the tragic foot. 321

The "but" is all we need to know, to dance as a final active participation in unity, live minds in fresh love, recreating love. Right to the end, Williams insists on exploding restricting preconceptions: "unless the scent of a rose / startle us anew," then it is useless. Williams tries to reawake the perceptions from dullness to consciousness, refreshing ideals into live myths that are refound and related to contemporary reality. One dances "contrapuntally," in individual active counterpart to social movement, indifferent to crass habits and ideals, but not anti-social, just actively "against the weather" of the social institutions whose pressures harm the state of humanity. "Satyrically, the tragic foot:" The pun is too relevant to miss, the pagan sympathy is clearly a reverence for the wood nymph who has thoroughly adapted to his environment, a symbol of harmony like the unicorn. "The tragic foot" reveals Williams' final determination to struggle on: the measure of the verse, like the measure of the artist's vision, is a bitter knowledge, but the active, imaginative, heroic and therefore tragic, reaction to the pain of consciousness is to dance in defiance of despair---

When the snow falls the flakes
 spin upon the long axis
 that concerns them most intimately
 two and two to make a dance

the mind dances with itself,
 taking you by the hand,
 your lover follows
 there are always two,

yourself and the other,
 the point of your shoe setting the pace,
 if you break away and run
 the dance is over

Breathlessly you will take
 another partner
 better or worse who will keep
 at your side, at your stops

whirls and glides until he too
 leaves off
 on his way down as if
 there were another direction

gayer, more carefree
 spinning face to face, but always down
 with each other secure
 only in each other's arms

But only the dance is sure!
 make it your own.
 Who can tell
 what is to come of it?

in the woods of your
 own nature whatever
 twig interposes, and bare twigs
 have an actuality of their own

this flurry of the storm
 that holds us,
 plays with us and discards us
 dancing, dancing as may be credible. 322

FOOTNOTES

¹William Carlos Williams, Paterson (New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 39.

²Paterson, pp. 172, 173.

³One must admit from the start that these goals--full consciousness, pure perception, impartiality, reality--are human and not ideal, relative not absolute: Williams' search is for the keenest perception and most vital realization that is relatively possible.

⁴William Carlos Williams, "Lear," Selected Poems (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 126. (Hereafter cited as Poems.)

⁵William Carlos Williams, "Preface," Selected Essays (New York: New Directions, 1969), p. xii. As we shall see later, when Williams' romantic man views the objects in nature, the relationship between him and the object defines him, the relationship of his being within the environment defines him.

⁶Williams, "The American Background," (1934), Essays, p. 134.

⁷Ibid., p. 137.

⁸William Carlos Williams, "Père Sabastian Rasles," In The American Grain (New York: New Directions, (1925) 1956), p. 112.

⁹Williams, "Edgar Allan Poe," In The American Grain, p. 224.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 224.

¹¹Ibid., p. 216.

¹²Ibid., p. 225.

¹³Williams, "The Basis of Faith in Art," (1937?), Essays, p. 181.

¹⁴Williams, "Descent," In The American Grain, p. 212.

¹⁵Williams, "The American Background," Essays, p. 138.

¹⁶Williams, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower (Coda)," Poems, p. 152.

- ¹⁷Williams, "The American Background," Essays, p. 138.
- ¹⁸Ibid., p. 134.
- ¹⁹Ibid., p. 134.
- ²⁰Ibid., p. 143.
- ²¹Ibid., p. 141.
- ²²Williams, "The Destruction of Tenochtitlan," In The American Grain, pp. 33-34.
- ²³Williams, "Descent," In The American Grain, p. 214.
- ²⁴Williams, "Young Sycamore," Poems, p. 39.
- ²⁵Williams, "Prologue to Kora in Hell," (1920), Essays, p. 16.
- ²⁶Paterson, p. 139.
- ²⁷Williams, "Introduction to Charles Sheeler--Paintings--Drawings--Photographs," (1939), Essays, p. 233.
- ²⁸Ibid.
- ²⁹Williams, "Bird," Pictures from Brueghel (New York: New Directions, 1962), p. 41.
- ³⁰Williams, "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus," Pictures from Brueghel, p. 4.
- ³¹W.H. Auden, "Musée des Beaux Arts," A Pocket Book of Modern Verse, ed. Oscar Williams, (New York: Washington Square Press, 1960), p. 473.
- ³²I am convinced that criticism should illuminate as much as it analyzes. See Ihab Hassan, "The Literature of Silence," Encounter, vol. 28 (1967), 74-82. On page 79, Hassan writes:

I suspect that lucidity may no longer be wholly adequate to the ambitions of criticism. We increasingly feel that criticism should do more than clarify; it should also possess the wisdom of the senses and of the spirit. We want it to endanger itself, as literature does, and to testify to our condition. We even hope that it can sustain the burden of revelation. This hope has led me to suggest that criticism may have to become apocalyptic before it can compel our sense of relevance.

- ³³Williams, "Revelation," (1947), Essays, p. 269.
- ³⁴Williams, "Against the Weather: A Study of the Artist," (1939), Essays, p. 200.
- ³⁵Williams, "Prologue to Kora in Hell," Essays, p. 5.
- ³⁶above, p. 14.
- ³⁷Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," Selected Writings (New York: New Directions, (1950) 1966), p. 24.
- ³⁸D.H. Lawrence, quoted by Wayne Burns in The Panzaic Principle (Vancouver), p. 4.
- ³⁹Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," Selected Writings, pp. 24-25.
- ⁴⁰Williams, "Marianne Moore," (1931), Essays, p. 121.

CHAPTER II

- ⁴¹Williams, "The Basis of Faith in Art," Essays, p. 186.
- ⁴²Williams, "A Letter," (1940), Essays, p. 238.
- ⁴³Ibid., p. 239.
- ⁴⁴Williams, "The Basis of Faith in Art," Essays, pp. 192-93.
- ⁴⁵Williams, "Lear," Poems, p. 126.
- ⁴⁶Williams, "The Rose is Obsolete," Imaginations (New York: New Directions, (1923) 1970), p. 107.
- ⁴⁷Ibid., p. 108.
- ⁴⁸Williams, "Lower Case Cummings," (1946), Essays, pp. 265-66.
- ⁴⁹Williams, "Against the Weather," Essays, p. 213.
- ⁵⁰Ibid.
- ⁵¹Williams, "A Letter," Essays, p. 239.
- ⁵²Williams, "Against the Weather," Essays, p. 217.
- ⁵³Ibid., p. 213.
- ⁵⁴Ibid., p. 196.

CHAPTER III

- ⁵⁵Wallace Stevens, The Necessary Angel (New York: Vintage Books, 1951), pp. 21-23.
- ⁵⁶Allan Tate, The Man of Letters in the Modern World, Selected Essays: 1928-1955 (New York: Meridian Books, 1955), p. 97.
- ⁵⁷Williams, "Against the Weather," Essays, p. 203.
- ⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 204.
- ⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 203.
- ⁶⁰Bernard Leach, A Potter's Book (London: Faber and Faber, (1940) 1967), p. 10.
- ⁶¹Williams, "Against the Weather," Essays, pp. 205-6.
- ⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 208.
- ⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 210.
- ⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 217.
- ⁶⁵Allan Tate, Man of Letters, p. 15.
- ⁶⁶Wallace Stevens, The Necessary Angel, p. 35.
- ⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 61.
- ⁶⁸Williams, "Against the Weather," Essays, p. 196.
- ⁶⁹*Ibid.*
- ⁷⁰*Ibid.*
- ⁷¹Williams, "Federico García Lorca," (1939), Essays, p. 228.
- ⁷²*Ibid.*, p. 227.
- ⁷³Ernest Fenollosa, "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry," Prose Keys to Modern Poetry, ed. Karl Shapiro, (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 147.
- ⁷⁴T.E. Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism," Prose Keys, p. 100.
- ⁷⁵Concise Oxford Dictionary.
- ⁷⁶Williams, "Lower Case Cummings," Essays, p. 267.

⁷⁷Williams, "The Basis of Faith in Art," Essays, p. 179.

⁷⁸Williams, "The Poem as a Field of Action," (1948), Essays, p. 288.

CHAPTER IV

⁷⁹Williams, "A Sort of a Song," Poems, p. 108.

⁸⁰By 'carefully,' I take Williams to mean that writing must not become a habit that is carelessly rigid and stale. To consciously keep his words loose and alive, he is carefully careless of habitual styles; for it is with an ironically determined care that Williams says in Paterson, p. 155, "Only one answer: write carelessly so that nothing that is not green will survive."

⁸¹Williams, "Poem," Poems, p. 54.

⁸²Ernest Fenellosa, "The Chinese Written Character," Prose Keys, p. 145.

⁸³Charles Olson, Selected Writings, p. 20.

⁸⁴Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect," Prose Keys, p. 111.

⁸⁵Williams, "A 1 Pound Stein," (1935), Essays, pp. 163-64, 163.

⁸⁶Williams, "Excerpts from a Critical Sketch: A Draft of XXX Cantos by Ezra Pound," (1931), Essays, p. 111.

⁸⁷Williams, "A 1 Pound Stein," Essays, p. 162.

⁸⁸Paterson, pp. 172-73.

⁸⁹T.E. Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism," Prose Keys, p. 101.

⁹⁰Williams, "Federico García Lorca," Essays, p. 226.

⁹¹Paterson, p. 276.

⁹²Ibid., p. 266.

⁹³Ibid., p. 194.

⁹⁴Williams, "A Negro Woman," Pictures from Brueghel, p. 123.

⁹⁵T.S. Eliot, "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," Collected Poems 1909-1935 (London: Faber and Faber, (1936) 1961), p. 25.

- 96 Charles Olson, Selected Writings, p. 26.
- 97 T.S. Eliot, "Hamlet and his Problems," The Sacred Wood (London: Methuen, 1960), p. 100.
- 98 Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect," Prose Keys, p. 104.
- 99 Williams, "A Sort of a Song", Poems, p. 109.
- 100 Williams, "Shadows," Pictures from Brueghel, p. 152.
- 101 Paterson, p. 65.
- 102 Ibid., p. 97.
- 103 Ibid., p. 191.
- 104 Williams, "Pound's Eleven New 'Cantos,'" (1935), Essays, p. 169.
- 105 John Betjeman, stanzas 1, 2 and last of "Winter Seascape," High and Low (London: John Murray, 1966), p. 9.
- 106 Williams, "The Basis of Faith in Art," Essays, p. 177.
- 107 Williams, "A 1 Pound Stein," Essays, p. 165.
- 108 Williams, "The Poem as a Field of Action," Essays, p. 291.
- 109 Ibid. p. 290.
- 110 Ibid., p. 291.
- 111 Williams, "The Gossips," Pictures from Brueghel, p. 41.
- 112 Williams, "On Measure--Statement for Cid Corman," (1954), Essays, p. 337.
- 113 Ibid., p. 337.
- 114 Ibid., p. 338.
- 115 Williams, "The Poem as a Field of Action," Essays, p. 284.
- 116 Williams, "On Measure--," Essays, p. 339.
- 117 Ibid., p. 338.
- 118 Williams, "Tribute to the Painters," Pictures from Brueghel, p. 135.
- 119 Ibid., p. 137.
- 120 Williams, "On Measure--," Essays, p. 340.

- 121 Ibid., p. 339.
- 122 Williams, "The Poem as a Field of Action," Essays, p. 290.
- 123 Ibid., p. 283.
- 124 Williams, "On Measure--," Essays, p. 340.
- 125 Williams, quoted in "Ten Years of a New Rhythm," (1953), afterword by John C. Thirlwall to Pictures from Brueghel, p. 183.
- 126 Williams, "On Measure--," Essays, p. 338.
- 127 Williams, "To Mark Anthony in Heaven," Poems, p. 51.
- 128 Williams, "Tribute to the Painters," Pictures from Brueghel, p. 135.
- 129 Williams, "Against the Weather," Essays, p. 207.
- 130 Ibid., pp. 205-6.
- 131 Ibid., p. 206.
- 132 Ibid., p. 203.
- 133 Ibid., p. 206.
- 134 Wallace Stevens, criticizing Williams, and quoted by Williams in "Prologue to Kora in Hell," Essays, p. 12.
- 135 Williams, "To Daphne and Virginia," Pictures from Brueghel, p. 77.
- 136 Williams, "The Mental Hospital Garden," Pictures from Brueghel, p. 98.
- 137 Williams, "The Lady Speaks," Pictures from Brueghel, p. 134.
- 138 Ezra Pound, ABC of Reading (New York: New Directions, 1934), p. 61.
- 139 Ibid., p. 66.
- 140 Williams, "The Wind Increases," Poems, pp. 69-70.
- 141 Allan Tate, Man of Letters, p. 19.
- 142 D.H. Lawrence, The Rainbow (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 26.

¹⁴³Williams, "Revelation," (1947), Essays, p. 268.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 271.

¹⁴⁵This is reminiscent of the Puritans' fear of losing control which Williams records in In The American Grain.

¹⁴⁶Williams, "Revelation," Essays, p. 271.

CHAPTER V

¹⁴⁷Paterson, p. 11.

¹⁴⁸p. 12.

¹⁴⁹p. 12.

¹⁵⁰p. 13.

¹⁵¹p. 11.

¹⁵²p. 15.

¹⁵³p. 11.

¹⁵⁴p. 99.

¹⁵⁵p. 10.

¹⁵⁶pp. 97-98.

¹⁵⁷p. 12.

¹⁵⁸p. 3.

¹⁵⁹p. 14.

¹⁶⁰pp 20-21.

¹⁶¹p. 24.

¹⁶²p. 27.

¹⁶³p. 28.

¹⁶⁴p. 34.

¹⁶⁵p. 44.

¹⁶⁶p. 23.

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- 209_{Williams, "To Elsie," Poems, p. 28.}
- 210_{Ibid., p. 28.}
- 211_{Paterson, p. 102.}
- 212_{p. 96.}
- 213_{Williams, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," Pictures from Brueghel, p. 179.}
- 214_{Paterson, p. 104.}
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- 216_{p. 121.}

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- 218 pp. 118-19.
- 219 p. 123.
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- 221 W.B. Yeats, "Easter 1916," Selected Poetry (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 93.
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- 233 Paterson, p. 129.
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277 Kenneth Patchen, Hallelujah Anyway (New York: New Directions, 1967), cover picture-poem.

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289_{p. 236.}

290_{p. 236.}

291_{William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.}

292_{Ibid.}

293_{Ibid.}

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294_{Paterson, p. 241.}

295_{p. 276.}

296_{Jorge Luis Borges, The Book of Imaginary Beings (New York: Avon Books, 1970), pp. 229-30.}

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