THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Toward Spring and All:

The Gestation of William Carlos Williams' Poetic

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Summary of Thesis submitted for PhD degree by Sean Edward Figgis on 'Toward Spring and All: The Gestation of William Carlos Williams' Poetic'

This thesis argues that Williams struggled against the spectres of national and personal influence in order to make his poetry both original and relevant to the modern American condition. He worked in a context of great cultural upheaval during the first wave of Modernist experimentation, toward self-definition in a state of existential anxiety. It was the defensive strategy he adopted to combat both the threat of insignificance, and imposed European cultural value, which shaped his mature poetic.

Section One introduces Williams' quest for identity, working against what he called "the traditionalists of plagiarism". There is also a brief discussion of other texts which have examined this phase of Williams' development.

Section Two investigates the cultural milieux, including movements such as Imagism and Dada which had a profound affect on Williams. It examines such figures as Pound, Eliot and Stein whose influence he was unable to avoid.

The availability of a native tradition in the work of Whitman and Dickinson is encountered in Section Three, which also provides the opportunity to develop further the argument that Williams' need to disguise the evidence of influence in his work actually shaped his art.

Section Four introduces the surfacing of American Modernism in the pages of such little magazines as Camera Work, Poetry, Others and The Little Review. It presents Williams' growing confidence in the company of such innovative contemporaries as Mina Loy, Marianne Moore and Alfred Kreymborg (editor of Others).

Williams' maturity is linked, in Section Five, with the publication of Spring and All in 1923. The collection is examined as a culmination, a confident and conscious exhibition of the poetic as having come of age.
Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations

When referring, in this thesis, to the standard editions of William Carlos Williams' work, the following abbreviations have been adopted for convenient reference:


**IWW**  I Wanted to Write a Poem, Boston: Beacon Press, 1958.

**IAG**  In the American Grain, New York: New Directions, 1956.


**Interviews**  Interviews with William Carlos Williams (Ed. Linda Wagner), New York: New Directions, 1976.


**Yes**  Yes, Mrs. Williams: A Personal Record of My Mother, New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959.

In 1986 New Directions published the first volume of a definitive collection of Williams' work. This invaluable book was, unfortunately, not available to me during the writing of this thesis. I was able to use new information contained in the book during revisions. It is referred to in the text only once as follows:

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Plates

I have found it necessary to refer to various examples of visual art which had particular significance for Williams or for the ambience in which he worked. Six of these pictures have been included (Plates 1-6) and can be found between pages 213 and 214. They are as follows:


Plate 2  Marcel Duchamp, Nude Descending a Staircase, 1912, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Plate 3  Marcel Duchamp, The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even, 1915-23, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Plate 4  Francis Picabia, Titlepage of Dada, 4/5, Zurich, 1919.

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Plate 6  Charles Demuth, Tuberoses, 1922, Williams Collection, Rutherford, New Jersey.
Section One

Against the 'Traditionalists of Plagiarism': Diversionary Tactics.

William Carlos Williams' insistence in 'The Prologue' to Kora in Hell that "nothing is good save the new" is, as has often been pointed out, central to an understanding of his process of maturation as a poet. However, the orthodox interpretation of this and his various other maxims ("no ideas but in things", "a poem is a small [or large] machine..." etc) have resulted in the misleading picture of a poetic, half formed through a process of hit-and-miss experimentation, in lyric evocations of minute particulars. It is the intention of this thesis to re-read the early poetry in order to identify the various textual strategies which informed the first major phase of Williams' career. These strategies will be identified with a quest for identity, and an anxious struggle against the gravitational pull of influence, both individual and cultural. It is important to clarify at the outset that, while various of his influences were of positive value to Williams' development, it was the process of struggle against influence which contributed most to the recognisable idiosyncrasies that define the mature poetic. It was Ezra Pound who first pointed out, in his review in 1913 of The Tempers, that when Williams showed signs of reading, it acted more as "a
snare against which he struggles, rather than a support to lean upon".1

Where this study deviates significantly from its predecessors is in its concentration upon the inflow of material, mainly textual, which was absorbed and reshaped by a process of sometimes wilful appropriation. Williams began writing just after the turn of the century, during a period of considerable cultural upheaval. His first book of sub-Keatsian odes, Poems (1909), sank without trace during a year which saw the publication of Pound's third book, Personae. Pound, an expatriate, and Williams' junior by three years, had been publishing impressively modern verse and critical commentary for almost a full decade by the time the stay-at-home American bourgeois physician finally began producing consistently original work. His book, Al Que Quiere!, published in 1917, was produced out of a matrix of modernist experimentation in the arts, and while it contains and displays its debt to other writers, it is significant in its demonstration of the poet's redeployment of the various appropriated elements, to form a coherent collection of poems, the first success in an obsessive search for poetic identity.

Pound was Williams' first significant poetic mentor. He recalled in an interview, "before meeting Pound is like B.C. and A.D." (IWW p.5), but his lifelong relationship with the great impresario of literary modernism was problematic. While he learned as much from Pound as from anyone
else, he suffered his greatest insecurity because of the other poet's proximity as a successful and constantly visible innovator. Williams employed various diversionary tactics (such as grouping Pound with Eliot and labelling them traitors to American letters) in order, by contrast, to define significant territory for himself. In this way he found himself fighting a rearguard action in a one sided conflict of his own devising, in defence of the American ground. As a result of the struggle, however, Williams was able to produce some of the most vigorously innovative lyric poetry of the twentieth century.

It is a truism to say that all poets are, to a large extent, the descendants and inheritors of their precursors. As Harold Bloom puts it, rather cryptically, in his book The Anxiety of Influence, poets write out of an obsessive need for "intensification and ...self realization...accomplished only through language, and no poet since Adam and Satan speaks a language free of the one wrought by his precursors". Bloom's theory is valuable in that it probes the question of poetic development as a process of competition with strong influence, from which, if the poet displays sufficient strength, the inherited poetic is taken on and distorted to accommodate the demands of the latecomer. The theory is dependent upon notions of 'belatedness' and the phenomenon of subconscious misreading in the struggle between the precursor (probably deceased) and the inheritor (or ephebe).
Where Bloom's idea becomes unwieldy is in its monolithic insistence upon the line of descent from one strong male poet to another, in a lineage which includes Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Yeats and Wallace Stevens, but excludes Chaucer, Donne, Hopkins, Pound and Williams. Bloom traces a development of Oedipal conflict in literature, beginning with Satan's expulsion from heaven and Adam's fall from grace, without approaching the dissident power of the struggle which began with the first miscarriage of justice whereby Eve was blamed and women subjugated in exchange for the marketable concept of original sin. Since strength as a quality has been most valued and most continually defined by the male establishment, its function in the cultural marketplace has been to exclude those elements of struggle which have sought to introduce alternative value systems. Bloom taps into the currency of self-justifying power and dismisses all activity outside this aristocracy of letters when he says that his concern "is only with strong poets, major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors". His study concentrates upon "how one poet deviates from another" but with little reference to those immediate pressures of ideology and tradition which distort the individual's concept of place and commitment. In the late twenties Williams wrote that Shakespeare's version of Romeo and Juliet "was set off in a strong northern light by the Italian's account....His own version of the the old story
took on a special coloration, a certain contour....It was less delicate, less tender, more sentimental, wordier" (Embodiment, 76). This description of the difference between two accounts of the same story, brought about by differing climatic conditions and national characteristics, can be read as a thinly disguised plea, characteristic of Williams, for a new critical approach to his own writing. During the 1920s, in spite of a new found sense of 'contact' with his chosen location, both geographical and conceptual, a residual insecurity, surfacing as fear of the spectre of plagiarism, haunted his texts. He tried therefore to distract attention from his influences by constant reference to his locality, especially in terms of an alternative, or new world (wilfully denying thereby the American Indians' prior claim to the continent). There can be little doubt that Williams suffered deeply from "the anxiety of influence" but it is the contention of this thesis that Williams' anxiety was engendered by the concept of influence as plagiarism, and was not finally the result of his relationship with any one or other of the individuals whose work affected his.

Williams' obsessive need to avoid the accusation of plagiarism may have stemmed, in part, from the trauma inflicted by Ezra Pound's response to his earliest published work. According to Pound, who wrote to Williams after receiving a complimentary copy of Poems (1909), the book was "proof that W.C.W. has poetic instincts". 5 He
followed this faint praise with a devastatingly damning (and accurate) critique. "Individual, original it is not. Great art it is not....There are fine lines in it, but nowhere ...do you add anything to the poets you have used as models." Williams' desire to avoid the issue of his poetic immaturity at this stage is illustrated in a statement from his *Autobiography*. Recalling this first book he claimed that "Ezra was silent if indeed he ever saw the thing" (*Auto* 107).

While Pound, Eliot, Stein, Hemingway and others following in the footsteps of Henry James sought cultural stimulation in Europe, Williams remained at home, economically and socially secure in his identity as a medical practitioner in 'bourgeois' Rutherford, a satellite of New York. He made various trips to Europe, where he encountered such daunting cultural heroes as Yeats, Stein, Joyce and Hemingway, but, as he recalled of one occasion in Paris, "I felt out of place, self-conscious and alone in that mob. My clothes were dull, my manners worse" (*Auto* 215). Whatever his reasons for staying at home, Williams felt ill at ease in his relationship with the other contributors to the avant garde. They seemed to exude confidence and, at the very least, as far as he was concerned, to complement one another to the exclusion of himself. Williams felt keenly the problem of his identity as one who had not embraced the insecure bohemianism of artistic activity in Europe, and he tended to compensate by an exaggerated Americanism which at
times bordered on the jingoistic. In an article for _trans-
ition_ written in 1929, for example, he claimed:

> And this is the opportunity of America to see large, larger than England can.

> An appearance of synchrony between American and English literature has made it seem...as if English criticism could overlay the American strain as it does the English. This cannot be so. The differences are epochal. Every time American strength goes into a mold [sic] modeled after the English it is wholly wasted. (Essays 86-87)

Williams lost no opportunity of championing the American cause in literature, especially against that of England. In articles like that just quoted (reminiscent of Emerson's celebrated essay 'The Poet') he argued passionately for a new critical approach to American letters, and while the argument is rational, the emotional pitch at which it is delivered is further evidence of the extent of his personal investment. English poetic tradition loomed as an ever present reminder of its own accumulated wealth and power. America, having rapidly achieved economic status and international influence, had not, at the turn of the century, established a cultural identity of commensurate power. In the world of letters Americans were still seen as undeveloped and unsophisticated. European culture was the evidence and product of centuries of political conflict, inherited wealth and shifting power. Britain, of all the European nations, had most recently dominated (and continued to dominate) international affairs, particularly through the maintenance of an empire which had once included the eastern colonies of America. English was the language of
American literature, and of the dominant tradition. In his gradual awakening to the need to achieve his own identity as a writer, Williams took it upon himself to define thereby an American state of consciousness, and to do that through an antagonism toward the English language and its poetic traditions. For the purpose of this thesis, Bloom's idea of the anxiety of influence will be applied (in a revisionary fashion) to the notion of a broader anxiety; that engendered by a Quixotic struggle against the language of poetry, evident in these lines from *Spring and All*:

> How easy to slip into the old mode, how hard to cling firmly to the advance— (Imag 103)

For the purpose of his struggle Williams consistently placed himself in competition with the conventions of English poetic tradition (as defined by himself) and against all who might support it, whom he labelled "THE TRADITIONALISTS OF PLAGIARISM" (Imag 94).

In his attempt to gain an American vantage from which he might face the world in greater cultural security, Williams recruited various, mostly American, champions to his cause. The first, and most obvious figure of stature was Walt Whitman, "one of the roughs" whose break with regular rhyme and metre provided a starting point. Whitman's transcendent, post-Emersonian Americanism gave Williams a direction and the seed of a tradition, but his presence was so subsumingly apparent that it brought its own problems of 'influence anxiety'. There was at least one other, though
less obvious innovatory model available from the American past. Emily Dickinson's compacted lyrics provided, not only a contrast to Whitman, but also a tightening influence in terms of the control of language, and an existential vision which complemented Williams' own perspective on an indifferent, objective world.

Although there is very little direct reference to Dickinson in Williams' prose, this thesis will argue that by the time he had rejected the English tradition, and moved counter to Pound's gravitational pull, her work had established a high profile among the American modernists. She had been praised by various prestigious experimentalists, some of whom were Williams' friends (Harriet Monroe, Conrad Aiken, Marsden Hartley) as a remarkable innovator. Whether or not Williams acknowledged her work as a valuable model, analysis of specific works by both poets, will show that they shared many poetic and linguistic tactics, most of which surfaced in Williams' work after December, 1914 when Monroe, as editor of Poetry (Chicago) labelled Dickinson "an unconscious imagiste".  

Williams was, during this early phase in his career, convinced of the notion that women writers were inescapably alienated by a male-defined context of functions in literature, evident in his many statements in support of such as Gertrude Stein, Marianne Moore, Mina Loy, Kay Boyle, and Dora Marsden. His recurrent identification with just such an alienation adds credence to the idea of Dickinson's
presence as a counter-balance for Whitman's phallocentrism within his poetic.

The availability of Whitman and Dickinson in an American historical context provides the foundation for construction of a New World tradition, dependent upon the adaptation of an existing cultural framework, a transplanted language, to fit a different physical location with different imperatives. There was an obvious gap between New World experience and Old World expression highlighted in Williams notion of 'separation', a structural plank integral to the fabric of his first major modernist success, Spring and All (1923). He wrote:

The cleavage goes through all the phases of experience. It is the jump from prose to the process of imagination that is the next great leap of the intelligence--from the simulations of present experience to the facts of the imagination--the greatest characteristic of the present age is that it is stale--stale as literature--

To enter a new world, and have there freedom of movement and newness. (Imag 133/4)

In his pursuit of novelty as a means of self elevation, Williams assaulted the citadel of English literary tradition with the sticks and stones of a mythic 'frontier' experience. Using his considerable prosodic power (developed, ironically, at least partly through his extensive reading of English poetry) he wrought the fiction of a sophisticated language in dialectical conflict with the rude exigencies of the 'new world', evident in this poem from 'Descent of Winter' (1928):

I make really very little money.
What of it?
I prefer the grass with the rain on it
the short grass before my headlights
when I am turning the car—
a degenerate trait, no doubt.
It would ruin England. (Imag 262)

The synthetic product of this stage managed collision is
the language, renewed in its separation from both parents.
For Williams the poem was neither a clear window through to
experience, nor an abstracted sacrifice of experience to
the great god 'culture'. Instead, the poem was experience,
essentially human, in consciousness as language. He came
to believe that the poem should be its own justification as
an object which could take its place alongside others in
the world. However, poetry could not be static, and its
objectness could only surface through the consciousness of
the reader as its various mechanisms were activated. This
notion separated poetry from the 'real' world and from its
traditional role as decorative text, and placed it in a
transcendent category which seems almost spiritual. How-
ever, in an essay written in 1923 Williams wrote:

there need be no stilled and archaic heaven, no
ducking under religiosities to have poetry and to have
it stand in its place beyond "nature." Poems have a
separate existence uncompelled by nature or the super-
natural. There is a "special" place which poems, as
all works of art, must occupy, but it is quite defin-
itely the same as that where bricks or colored threads
are handled. (Essays 125)

Bricks and coloured threads are handled in order to func-
tion as buildings and cloth, but the function should not
disguise the quality of the medium. In architecture as in
fabric production, the elements can be manipulated into
design which transcends both medium and function, while it
remains fully dependent upon them. Design is possible only through the operation of cognisance and only in relation to other design which takes "special" place in human consciousness. In other words poetry separates from its medium and its subject as it takes shape as design in consciousness. Williams' contention was that this locality could not be achieved in verse which borrowed its medium and function from an alien and exclusive tradition. Separation would only occur when the language, cleansed of outworn associations, was brought into contact with its material origins. The New World was an ideal location, a timely opportunity for linguistic rebirth. The reader, deprived of well-traveled routes into a consciousness hitherto circumscribed by those routes is forced to contend with a wilderness of possibilities which have to be explored anew. This process of exploration sets into motion the capacity of the human consciousness to make fresh choices. In his obsessive avoidance of the plagiaristic snare, Williams set himself the heroic task of opening up a new world in poetry, specifically in defiance of an old one which, he claimed, was being face-lifted by American expatriates like Eliot and Pound.

Williams' many antagonistic references to Eliot and Pound may well stem from his early dependence on Pound, both as a friend and as a fulcrum by which to lever his immature poetic into the twentieth century. Following Pound's harsh criticism of his first little book in 1909,
Williams refrained from publication altogether until 1912, when poems from his proposed second book appeared, selected and introduced by Pound in a London magazine, The Poetry Review. The Tempers, published the following year in London (again at Pound's instigation) by Elkin Mathews, contains poems which, in Williams' words, show "...a big jump from the first book....The lines still begin with capitals...and there is rhyming, very definitely, but the rhyme schemes are quite complicated..." (IW 15). The tone and diction of the poetry, the lineation and vocabulary are all very close to Pound's current verse (and that of his protege H.D., the quintessential Imagiste) as in this, entitled, 'An After Song':

So art thou broken in upon me, Apollo,  
Through a splendor of purple garments—  
Held by the yellow-haired Clymene  
To clothe the white of thy shoulders—  
Bare from the day's leaping of horses.  
This is strange to me, here in the modern twilight.  
(CEP 22)

The fact that the magazine selection was accompanied by the first published critique of Williams' poetry was a significant stage in his evolving identity as a writer. Even as late as 1958, however, he was unwilling to acknowledge the obvious, preferring to obfuscate with misleading casualness the true nature of his debt. He said: "The poems in this period, short, lyrical, were more or less influenced by my meeting with Pound, but even more by Palgrave's Golden Treasury. I was budding, had no real confidence in my power, but I wanted to make a poetry of my own and it began
to come" (IWW 16). Williams had been influenced by Palgrave, but the publication of The Tempers is an early indication of his escape from the orthodox gravitation of the Golden Treasury. His association during the following two years with Pound and the Imagists brought him into contact with the world of experimentalism, and into an arena which included some formidable talents. In 1914 he wrote, in a letter to his friend Viola Baxter Jordan:

A letter from Ezra--he tells of a sojourn in Sussex with W.B. Yeats--praises me--tells me I am a Catullus--tells me to subscribe to The New Freewoman, the organ of his "gang"--...--says he has discovered the coming sculptor, a Russian, Gaudier-Brzeska. It is a male. Tells me of a publisher who should do my American edishun--Tempers plus new masterpieces, better & fuller--this same pub. is doing Ezra's anthology of Les Jeunes [Des Imagistes]--I am in it--Wants me to go to England in the spring--perhaps. A la Steerage!! (Letters 27)

As John Thirlwall has pointed out, "This is the first but not the last letter to mirror Pound's eccentric spelling and punctuation" (Letters 27). Williams was deeply dependent upon his friend's praise, as this excited letter shows. Indeed, the level of Pound's actual response to Williams' poem 'La Flor' has been somewhat exaggerated therein. However, Pound was sufficiently convinced of his friend's worth to be instrumental in Williams' poetry appearing in The Egoist, The Poetry Review and Poetry (Chicago), all of which, until the appearance of Rogue and Others in 1915, provided his only outlets for publication. It was, however, in the pages of these magazines that Williams encountered the formidably innovative talent of T.S. Eliot, intro-
duced and unequivocally supported by Pound. Williams, following several years during which he had struggled to impress his friend, appears to have become convinced of Pound's indifference to his work. The subsuming brightness of Eliot's star, and his obviously close association with Pound prompted the New Jersey poet to seek alignment elsewhere. He wrote, "I wish that I might here set down my "Vortex" after the fashion of London..." (Imag 16), and later in the same piece ('Prologue' to Kora in Hell), with pointed irony:

I praise those who have the wit and courage, and the conventionality, to go direct toward their vision of perfection in an objective world where the signposts are clearly marked, viz., to London. But confine them in hell for their paretic [medical term meaning unable to move, whilst able to experience sensation] assumption that there is no alternative but their own groove. (Imag 27)

In his crisis of confidence Williams superimposed his self-doubt onto the utterances of others, particularly Pound and Eliot, neither of whom had ever suggested that "there [was] no alternative but their own groove". Pound, in fact, continued to encourage writers (including Williams) on both shores of the Atlantic whose verse he believed had anything to contribute to the avant garde.

It was, ironically, with Pound's introduction that Williams was able to attach himself to the group around Alfred Kreymborg, which included two of the most vigorous of contemporary experimentalists, and whose work he was able to use, initially, for the process of disguising Pound's presence in his poetic. Mina Loy and Marianne
Moore provided Williams with alternative strategies by which he could continue his struggle away from what he saw as traditional verse forms. He could relate to each as a fellow traveller rather than as a mentor, thus at least superficially avoiding that anxiety which is commensurate with conspicuous fealty. All three began publishing around the same time, were contributors to the same group of little magazines and were resident, during the emergence of an American avant garde, in the New York area. In his Autobiography Williams recalled:

These were the years just before the great catastrophe to our letters—the appearance of T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land. There was heat in us, a core and a drive that was gathering headway upon the theme of a rediscovery of a primary impetus, the elementary principle of all art, in the local conditions. Our work staggered to a halt for a moment under the blast of Eliot's genius which gave the poem back to the academics. We did not know how to answer him. (Auto 146)

Between 1915 and 1920 Williams was involved with Moore, Loy and others in contributing to the magazine Others, which emerged in response to the increasing orthodoxy of Poetry. Williams' insistence, however, that Eliot's genius was a "great catastrophe" for American artists was uncorroborated by others in the group. Indeed, the first publication of Eliot's 'Portrait of a Lady' was in the third issue of Others, in September 1915. It seemed that wherever Williams might turn for refuge from the spectres of cultural influence, Eliot or Pound would appear to remind him of his own insignificance. The cultural position threatened by Eliot was one which Williams had constructed, defined as
American, and was maintaining as the only available space within which he might give himself distinction. If we read the personal pronoun 'my' in place of 'our' in the following statement we are left in little doubt as to Williams' very fragile self image: "Then out of the blue The Dial brought out The Waste Land and all our hilarity ended. It wiped out our world as if an atom bomb had been dropped upon it and our brave sallies into the unknown were turned to dust." (Auto 174)

During the decade leading up to this "catastrophe", Williams had adopted various strategies by which to distract attention (mainly, one suspects, his own) from the direct textual influences which shaped his work. As well as conscripting lesser known poets like Loy and Moore, and obscuring his poetic technique behind a barrage of statements about New World culture and the primary importance of the local, he joined the general post-Armory Show infatuation with (mainly French) modernist painting. Notwithstanding Williams' various claims to a special understanding of the art of painting (based it seems mainly upon the fact that his mother had been an art student in Paris, and on his friendship with American painters such as Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley and Charles Sheeler), his critical pronouncements are generally those of an informed amateur. However they have succeeded in distracting much critical attention from the textual nature of his work. Indeed, five books, William Carlos Williams and the American Scene
by Dickran Tashjian, *The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech* by Bram Dijkstra, W. Marling's *William Carlos Williams and the Painters*, C.J. McGowan's *William Carlos Williams's Early Poetry: The Visual Arts Background*, and H.M. Sayre's *The Visual Text of William Carlos Williams*, have concentrated upon Williams' involvement with avant garde artists. This critical debate has reached saturation point without really questioning the extent of, or the motivation behind Williams' engagement with the visual arts.

What was of vital importance to him at this time was the availability of a matrix of artistic expression, and particularly of opposition to the cultural status quo. The movement exemplified in Marcel Duchamp's irreverent art, and later dubbed 'New York Dada', provided Williams with a broad aesthetic and a vortex of experimental activity with which to identify, as distinct from the all too audible cultural dissonance generated by Pound and Eliot. He recalled:

Here was my chance, that was all I knew. There had been a break somewhere, we were streaming through, each thinking his own thoughts, driving his own designs toward his self's objectives. Whether the Armory Show in painting did it or whether that also was no more than a facet—the poetic line, the way the image was to lie on the page was our immediate concern. For myself all that implied, in the materials, respecting the place I knew best, was finding a local assertion—to my everlasting relief. (Auto 138)

Williams was relieved of the responsibility of carrying American culture, single handedly into the Twentieth Century. Having constructed an untouched American ground upon which he might make his mark, he could join with others,
either equally little known or engaged in non textual art, who would help him break the soil. However, no matter how readily he included them in his American 'Vortex', Williams never lost his sense of insecurity, his neurotic anxiety that their successes were always likely to throw his own creative struggle into shadow. His recollections include various occasions when he felt he had been snubbed, insulted or misunderstood by such cultural allies as; Monroe (Letters 28/9), Duchamp (Auto 137), Stein (Auto 254), Kreymborg (IWW 31/2) and Stevens(IWW 52). His pleasure at being recognised by a fellow artist was equally intense, as in this response to Marianne Moore on being offered The Dial award for poetry:

Surprise and delight have so upset me after the unexpected announcement in your letter just received that I really do not know how to frame a letter that would properly convey to you my feelings and thoughts at this time and it would be too childish even for your friendly eyes and there would be too much to say and no satisfaction, were it not all said, so please accept this note of thanks as an Esquimo might perhaps out of gratitude present his friend with a bone fishhook or the like. (Letters 70)

In both his Autobiography and I Wanted to Write a Poem Williams drew attention to an occasion when, after a poetry reading, Mina Loy pronounced him "the best of those on the programme" (Auto 136, IWW 34).

As the frequency of positive responses to his work increased, Williams' utterances, and especially his poetry, became more confident in tone, less abrasive, using less confrontational strategies. With Al Que Quiere! (To him who wants it!) published in 1917, however, he was still
struggling in his wilderness, convinced that no-one was listening. In a poem significantly entitled 'Apology', for example, he wrote:

Why do I write today?

The beauty of
the terrible faces
of our nonentities
stirs me to it: (CEP 131)

doggedly displaying his anti-culture to an indifferent world. In 'Pastoral' ("When I was younger") he ended with a grumble:

No one
will believe this
of vast importance to the nation. (CEP 121)

Williams' most constant obstacle to writing (and one which might explain to some extent the brevity of his early lyrics) was his insistence upon novelty as a primary consideration for modern poetry. He laboured under Pound's imperative, "Make it new!", to the outward exclusion of all inherited strategies. To some extent, however, this was not a problem exclusive to Williams' development. As Bloom explains it (in revealingly phallocentric language), the poet

cannot initiate himself into a fresh chaos; he is compelled to accept a lack of priority in creation, which means he must accept also a failure in divination, as the first of many little deaths that prophesy a final and total extinction. His word is not his own word only, and his Muse has whored with many before him. 8

Williams had realised this by the time he came to write his first published long poem, 'The Wanderer' (1914) in which the persona addresses his muse:
"To you, horrible old woman,
Who know all fires out of the bodies
Of all men who walk with lust at heart!
To you, O mighty, crafty prowler
After the youth of all cities, drunk
With the sight of thy archness! All the youth
that come to you, you having the knowledge
Rather than to those uninitiate--
To you, marvelous old queen, give me always
A new marriage--"

The poem did not, however, provide the means of escaping or revitalising what Williams (and Bloom) have characterised as an ageing though manipulative muse. It appeared in Al Que Quiere!, a book which dealt with this problem, largely through the assumption of a defensive pose, turned antagonistically against the forces of cultural stagnation.

In the period which followed this book, Williams went through a process of consolidation, during which he became aware of the reciprocal dimension of language as consciousness. His poetry appears less pugnacious, less the expression of an isolated psyche muttering defiance into an indifferent wind. While it retains, even develops the notion that linguistic articulation merely temporarily disguises an inhuman void, it begins to participate in a shared consciousness of a consequent human need for systems of definition and exchange. Williams came to realise his position (as one among others who were party to the struggle) as a result of the trickle of responses to his published work from such as Pound, H.D., John Gould Fletcher, Conrad Aiken and Marianne Moore. Although all responses were not as positive as he might have liked, they were informed, and produced by people moving generally in the
same direction. Some of the poems in his 1921 collection Sour Grapes show signs of a greater control of diction and a carefully paced approach which signals a growing confidence in the existence of a sympathetic 'reader'.

Winter Trees

All the complicated details
of the attiring and
the disattiring are completed!
A liquid moon
moves gently among
the long branches.
Thus having prepared their buds
against a sure winter
the wise trees
stand sleeping in the cold. (CEP 201)

However, this is a transitional book, and many of the poems in it present the same petulant expression to the reader.

It is with Spring and All, 1923, with its complex dialectic of prose and poetry, implicitly demanding the investment of another active human consciousness, that Williams achieved his first sustained success; arguably a Bloomian state of 'strength'. "Even the strongest poem", Bloom has claimed, "particularly the strongest poem, costs us too much, but without that cost the poem is only so many words, and not human action." 9

Hugh Kenner has pointed out that the collection Spring and All emerged shortly after the initial publication of Eliot's The Waste Land and might well have been conceived in response to it. Kenner claims that "what goaded Williams into much cerebration--and helped him for the first time to write poem after poem as if he knew what he was trying to do--was the presence and celebrity of The Waste--
land". 10 If so, this adds weight to the argument that Williams' poems at this time were produced out of profound anxiety. With the shock of recognition that here was an unquestionably modern poem of sustained strength, would have come the realisation that his own struggle for significant novelty would be thrown into subsequent shadow. In this context it is ironic that Williams was able to produce, for the first time, work of consistent brilliance, characterised by a new-found control of diction and line. However, as Bloom explains the phenomenon, "poems, we can speculate analogically, may be viewed (humorously) as motor discharges, in response to the excitation increase of influence anxiety". 11 Williams was able to read Eliot's success in the context of an irrelevant culture, and working from a new-found security in touch with others (particularly women like Moore, Loy and Stein) who appeared to have rejected that culture, was able to translate the energy derived from accelerated anxiety into a book that presented the struggle between old language and new conditions (in the prose sections) and offered a New World synthesis cleansed in the process (in the twenty-seven lyrics). According to Kenner, "making all things new, American poets had the obligation to disentangle a native tradition, even if that meant setting word after word as though there had never been poetry before". 12 He continues:

In the offense The Waste Land gave by its novelty, Williams saw (accurately enough) a novelty of the
surface, giving scandal by jagged transitions between passages as Websterian or as Tennysonian as academics might please. He intuited the ease with which, once gotten used to, it would take its place (as it has) among older poems in anthologies that commence with Chaucer. But Williams wanted the new American poetry to open a new anthology entirely.

Much has been made by critics of the Dadaistic trickery of the prose sections in *Spring and All*, perhaps to avoid giving it serious consideration. The poems, on the other hand, have been subjected to close scrutiny, among the most rewarding of which can be found in Kenner's *A Homemade World*, but this treatment of the lyrics as little gems of poetic completion is in direct conflict with the essence of the book. Williams had been fascinated and in some cases impressed by the products of the New York Dadaists, but by 1923 he had come to believe that whatever value they might have had was dissipated. His own experiment in Dada, the prose poetry of *Kora in Hell*, had gone too far down the path of literary anarchy and formlessness, but it had retained a residual structure, a dialectic (between lucid and idiosyncratic prose pieces) which he repeated in *Spring and All* and in 'The Descent of Winter', published by Pound in his magazine *Exile* in 1928. With *Spring and All* Williams finally succeeded in wrenching his poetic away from the demands of completion. The *Waste Land* could take its place among the other triumphs of an imperial culture because of its grand gesture of inclusion, as a statement of strength, laying claim to its appropriations and reshaping them to conform to its overall structure. But, for all its ref-
erence out, Eliot's poem hankers after closure, in that it has been pushed towards completion. The result is an artefact of consummate craft, controlled and schematically self-contained like others of the genre (such as Stevens' 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction' and Bunting's 'Briggflatts'). Williams' Spring and All is an early example of a sustained work of a different order. Like his own Paterson, Charles Olson's The Maximus Poems and, to a certain extent Pound's Cantos (especially the later books), incompleteness is written into the text. Looseness of form, like visible brush strokes in painting, is not evidence here of inferior technique, but is included as a means of drawing attention to the medium, and to the process as human action with its demand for conscious response from the reader.

Williams was able to accommodate the concept of an ideal reader, an interactive intelligence, following the increasing number of statements about his work which appeared after the publication of Al Que Quiereel and Sour Grapes. Even as unlikely an ally as John Gould Fletcher (the confidante of Amy Lowell) contributed to the composite exterior intelligence addressed in Spring and All. His review of Al Que Quiereel for The Egoist in 1918 may have appeared to damn with faint praise, but at least it acknowledged what no one but Pound had done hitherto; that here was a conscious poet whose method was "surer than many poets whose names are far more loudly trumpeted in the United States than his". 13 At this time Williams was
vulnerable to any critical comment his book might attract, as this extract from a letter of March 1918 (to Moore) suggests: "I send you my book, fearing your friendship as much as anything else. It is easy to speak well of a work--so hard to say anything of clear enough outline for an author--lost as he is in his own crooked roads--to grasp with good effect" (Letters 42). Given this state of anxious suspense, it must have come as something of a surprise to read Fletcher's comment, that the poem 'Spring Strains', was "packed concentrated observation." 14 He added that "Williams makes use of his mind when he sits down to write poetry....the clear result of what he has seen and experienced. Catullus and Villon did no more". This comparison with Pound's poetic heroes can only have been balm to the sore exterior of a poet expecting nothing but abuse from the critics, as this excerpt from the publisher's preface to Al Que Quiere! suggests:

You, gentle reader, will probably not like it, because it is brutally powerful and scornfully crude. Fortunately neither the author nor the publisher care much whether you like it or not. The author has done his work, and if you do read the book you will agree that he doesn't give a damn for your opinion. 15

This confrontational statement heralds poetry such as this, which begins with the line, "You sullen pig of a man":

Well--
all things turn bitter in the end
whether you choose the right or
the left way
and--
dreams are not such a bad thing  (CEP 134)

The process through to a more tempered energy, a more
directional impetus, begins in the seed of greater personal security sown by the few reasoned responses this book elicited. Along with Fletcher's, one of the first, published in *Poetry* in April 1918, came from a little known critic, Dorothy Dudley.

It seems a pity that Mr Williams' indifference should have extended quite to this introduction. Just a slight remonstrative damn might have escaped him, to save a delightful volume from a foreword that hangs too oppressively over it and deprives one of the intrinsic pleasure of the poems. Unavoidably they appear for judgement in the heavy light of this challenge; which has the further fault of being misleading. 16

Dudley perceived what many more illustrious commentators have missed; that Williams' perspective on his own work, while illuminating the author's uneasy relationship with the texts, can be grossly misleading so far as the structural processes are concerned. Critics looking for poetry which was "brutally powerful and scornfully crude" have often been persuaded that this was indeed the nature of Williams' poetic. They explain the *successful* individual lyrics as arising out of an *ad hoc* process employed through necessity by a busy general practitioner, for whom poetry was a fortunate pastime. Many of those who were most sympathetic, even influenced by Williams (such as the Northumbrian modernist poet Basil Bunting), were often convinced of the authenticity of this characterisation. Bunting, in the final interview before his death, described Williams' successes as, "very sharp observations - little - perfectly clear observations". 17 He recalled from a visit to Williams' home during the early 1930s:
He had a great study at the top of his house, and this was surrounded by a desk - just at the height for writing on when you're standing up...and the desk had papers pinned to it all over - and he'd just walk round from one to the other - these were the poems under construction at the moment. He'd add a word here - cross out a word there - look at the next one a bit further on - leave that - go on to another one - cut it RIGHT out...he had this as a regular routine.

This may well have been the vigorous persona Williams wanted to impress upon the younger poet (and Pound's protégé) at a time when he was approaching old age. Similar descriptions are offered by Creeley and Ginsberg, both of whom made the pilgrimage to Williams' home and were suitably impressed by the poet's twentieth century version of Whitman's pose as "one of the roughs". But like Whitman, Williams' insistent stand against the language of literature was a disguise. He told the interviewer Edith Heal in 1958:

The rhythmic pace was the pace of speech, an excited pace because I was excited when I wrote. I was discovering, pressed by some violent mood. The lines were short, not studied. Very frequently the first draft was the final draft by the time I reached the third book, Al Que Quiere! (IWW 15)

Certainly, by the time he came to write the poems in The Clouds (1948) his process was one of careful composition and painstaking selection of words, phrases and line endings, with extensive revisions, indicative of a highly developed and conscious poetic technique. Karl Shapiro's short 'Study of "Philomina Andronico"' in J Hillis Miller's William Carlos Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays illustrates the care with which Williams constructed his poems. Unfortunately, critics have tended to pay lip
service to the idea of Williams as a serious poet whose confrontation with the language of poetry was profoundly dependent upon his ability to control that medium for his own ends. They have plumped rather, as does Charles Doyle in his *William Carlos Williams and the American Poem*, for the orthodoxy of an aggressively crude poetic which, by sheer force of energy and proliferation, produces some fine lyrics.

Doyle's study (1982), like most of those which have preceded it, treats Williams' poetic as having sprung out of an ill-defined American context, thus subscribing, without question, to Williams' self-created mythology of a unique New World consciousness. There has been little attempt to locate his verse as having emerged in a milieu which was primarily textual. Doyle accepts the quasi-spiritual geographic and objective myth in his analysis of the poems. He claims that "genuine contact is made through concentration on the object with great intensity to 'lift it' to the imagination". 19 Williams' terms these, and applied without question so that the poet's peculiar perspective goes unchallenged. This does no favours for the work. Doyle continues:

An object lifted to the imagination yields up its 'radiant gist'. Sometimes this is simply discovered, while at others (given that the field of energy does not stop at the skin or outer envelope of the human being), the process is completed by the poet by means of invention or structuring.

There is no indication here, or elsewhere in the book, of where Williams had found the techniques and strategies
which informed that "invention or structuring" or of what the structuring consists. The reader is left with an impression that these things arose naturally and inevitably, like native flowers, from the New World soil; precisely the impression Williams wanted to project, in his eagerness to distract attention from such dangerous areas as the profound activity of textual influence. Doyle is content to promote the vague notion that "it is natural that he should have rejected traditional forms and measures, since these are not local, nor have Americans direct access to their sources". This ignores the lineage of sources which informed the work of Pound, Eliot, Moore, Loy, even Whitman (the King James Bible), all of whom contributed to the structural integrity of Williams' verse. It ignores also Williams' early dependence on Keats and Shakespeare, who supplied his initial perspective on poetry, and his vital process of struggle away from the gravitational pull of English prosody.

Among the various book-length studies of Williams' poetic development, Vivienne Koch's William Carlos Williams (1950) is interesting only in that it is the first. There are various others which achieve little more than an introduction to his work. Rod Townley's The Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams (1975) is more valuable in its presentation of otherwise untapped sources and manuscripts. Where it falls short, however, is in its failure to live up to its own standards of criticism. Townley justly casti-
gates those who have subscribed to "the sort of oversimplification to which Williams' early career has been subjected". 21 He comments that "the insensibility imputed to the poet is only in the mind of the critic". The problem arises in the many statements which reveal Townley's real position: bang in the centre of the critical orthodoxy he claims to eschew. He locates Williams' poetic:

rooted in the American frontier, the real one: the exact place (on the page) where the mind and the continent meet, edge to edge. In that wild locale, where the world roars before one's eyes like a waterfall or a locomotive, words like "masterpiece" are not wrong or offensive. They are simply inaudible. 22

Townley tends to confuse, as do various other critics, the 'voice' of the poetry with the voice of the author, thus avoiding the possibility of a fictive voice. Through his intensely personalising approach to the poetry, Townley is able to claim for the book Kora in Hell that it is the author's "primal scream". While acknowledging here and there that the author is not necessarily the most trustworthy source of information, Townley appears to accept without question Williams' claim to have written while at high school a little free verse poem that pre-empts Imagism by about ten years:

A black, black cloud
flew over the sun
driven by fierce flying rain

(Auto 47)

The possibility that this claim is just one of many strategies (like the chosen sequence of poems in Collected Earlier Poems) adopted to suggest an earlier than actual
breakthrough, is not discussed.

Williams' anxiety seems to have been infectious, carried through into the analytical processes adopted by many of his supporters in their attempts to prove his credentials as a member of the modernist front line. Unfortunately this imprecise partisanship can lead to the avoidance of specifics like those influences from writers who were, at certain times, ahead of him in the experimental vanguard. Townley offers a quasi-transcendent approach which does Williams no favours. He claims for *Spring and All* that it is "essentially for other writers, for those who already have the clues", thus removing the need for structural and formal analysis. In a similar vein he suggests that the ideal reader for *Kora in Hell* would be an "eight year old child" and continues:

To read it as a critic, noticing this and that but not surrendering, is not to read it at all, but to compete with it...a source of delight for anyone capable of responding to language in "a state of emergence," where reader and author stand together without preconceptions in a place of pure beginning. 24

This response to language in "a state of emergence" denies the value of analytical reading, a ludicrous suggestion in a book-length critical reading of the work of a critical writer. It denies the essential evolution of the language - a system informed substantially by its own history. It also carefully avoids the necessity of acknowledging the element of competition that surfaces in all intelligent reading, particularly in the case of one writer reading another. If there is any mileage in the statement that
Spring and All was written for other writers, it is not because they have access to "clues" but because it contains an awakening to the probability that critical reading is a necessary element in the competitive process of composition. It takes form out of a growing awareness that the poem is structured in the intelligent consciousness of the reader, as a linguistic activity, reconstructed or rewritten from the intelligent reader's point of view. In this way medium and process achieve precedence over theme and content, and the poem becomes dependent upon the reader's willingness to deconstruct and replay the activity of construction. According to Bloom:

Criticism teaches not a language of criticism...but a language in which poetry already is written, the language of influence, of the dialectic that governs the relations between poets as poets. The poet in every reader does not experience the same disjunction from what he reads that the critic in every reader necessarily feels. What gives pleasure to the critic in every reader may give anxiety to the poet in him, an anxiety we have learned, as readers, to neglect to our own loss and peril. This anxiety...is the anxiety of influence. 25

Notwithstanding Bloom's own late transcendentalism, this approach allows us to probe the human insecurity that prefigures the need for creative expression. It can be used further to assess the poet's growing confidence that this insecurity is shared and the consequent opening within the creative process to the concept of reciprocal intelligence.

This process, for Williams, was enhanced by the responses his work elicited from his contemporaries; figures like
Moore and Loy who were similarly struggling for self-definition. Some of the responses were problematic, however, like Wallace Stevens' preface for Williams' *Collected Poems 1921-1931*. He described Williams' "passion for the anti-poetic [as] a blood passion and not a passion of the ink-pot. The anti-poetic is his spirit's cure. He needs it as a naked man needs shelter or as an animal needs salt". 26

It is the tone of this passage and the use of emotive phrases, especially "the anti-poetic", which has made it so attractive to the critical orthodoxy which has haunted Williams studies ever since. In a letter written in 1948 Williams complained, "Frankly I'm sick of the constant aping of Stevens' dictum that I resort to the antipoetic" (Letters 165). But Williams was himself as much to blame as any individual for promoting this image of his art. However, as mentioned above, Dorothy Dudley had challenged his churlish preface to *Al Que Quiere!*. She pointed out that "one looks in vain...for enormous violent shapes and finds instead poetry of the sparer, more meticulous sort - at its best fibrous, marvelously observant, delicate, haunting, then at moments stilted, confused, obtuse". 27

While pointing out the evidence of an obviously crafted art, Dudley had also hinted at the "separation", the inchoate dialectic which was to emerge in *Kora*, and with more control in *Spring and All*. She described the poems as displaying "fragmentary strength" and "the effect of hardness, of fine reality", and continued, "but when the thought..."
becomes too bold, too intricate or too emotional to manage prettily, evidently rather than mar the surface of the poem Mr. Williams has resorted to the obscure and the cryptic". Here Dudley has noted, with admirable perception, that the poet's occasional retreat into opacity has more to do with the conflict between poetic structure and thematic concern than with a spiteful desire to outrage. She perceived further that the poems 'M.B.' and 'Keller Gegen Dom' are "insecurely elliptical". Without seeking to identify the nature of that insecurity, Dudley was able to recognise the element of anxiety which engendered moments of retreat in some of the poems. Eliot, Pound, Loy and others were breaking new ground at this time, and Williams, detecting elements of their work in his own, was in constant defence of the ground he was clearing for himself. He wrote in his poem 'Gulls':

My Townspeople, beyond the great world,  
are many with whom it were far more  
profitable for me to live than here with you.  
These whirr about me calling, calling!  
and I for my own part I answer them, loud as I can,  
but they, being free, pass!  
I remain! Therefore, listen!  
For you will not soon have another singer. (CEP 126)

The hortative tone of this poem is inescapably Poundian, while the sense of bitter claustrophobia, of being cornered while others move freely and visibly betrays a creative intellect struggling for definition. In another poem from Al Que Quiere!, 'Sub Terra', we read the following expression of self-exile:
Where shall I find you,
you my grotesque fellows
that I seek everywhere
to make up my band?
None, not one
with the earthy tastes I require;
the burrowing pride that rises
subtly as on a bush in May, (CEP 117)

In June 1915, Eliot's 'The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock' had appeared in Poetry, one of Williams' few outlets from obscurity. This was a poem which had the look of "vast import to the nation" (CEP 121) and which had the unqualified support of Pound. Williams, in spite of his many statements condemning Eliot, had not escaped the effect of his influence. Compare:

Let us go then you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table;
(Eliot Collected Poems 13)

with the opening lines from Williams' 'To a Solitary Disciple', first published in Others in February 1916, just six months after 'Prufrock':

Rather notice, mon cher
that the moon is
tilted above
the point of the steeple
than that its color
is shell pink. (CEP 167)

This poem calls into question the genuine modernity of Eliot's poem. But its use of devices such as an assumption of dialogue to coax the reader quietly into the poem's movement, and the explicit disruption of a literary tradition of figurative language, place it in uncomfortable proximity to its precursor. Williams countered this by relocating the activity of his poem so as to escape the
powerful attraction of metaphoric troping, moving into the field of metonymy. The poem attempts a careful, even geometric scrutiny of the physical exigencies of a particularised scene, falling only once into an obviously metaphoric figure:

--sepals
that guard and contain
the flower!

an irrelevance, symptomatic of Williams' transitional insecurity, which signals 'poetry' in an otherwise unadorned structure.

Mike Weaver has pointed out in his indispensable study, *William Carlos Williams: The American Background*, that this poem can be read as "a lesson in appreciation given by a Frenchman ('rather notice mon cher') on a Cubist-realist painting". He identifies the Frenchman as Albert Gleizes and the painting as one "such as Demuth painted....Thus Gleizes explains Demuth to Williams. Since Cubism represents historically a reaction against Impressionism the stylistic element stressed was design or composition at the structural level of line rather than at the formal level of colour".

It may also be the case that this poem acts carefully to dislocate itself from the magnetic attraction of Eliot's 'Love Song'. It could be a recommendation, engendered by 'influence anxiety', that, 'rather than go to where the evening is spread out against the sky like a patient etherised upon a table, notice simply and clearly that the moon is
tilted above the point of the steeple'. Pay rigorous attention to the particular demands of the poem under construction, avoid the easy slope into poetic expression and the 'poetry' will occur as a result of the process. At this stage, the last thing the poet needed was to be compared with Eliot. It is arguable that various of Williams' strategies, elements which have become identified with his mature poetic, were originally deployed to obscure the presence of influence by writers such as Eliot and Pound. Thus his path to maturity was punctuated by deviations and blind alleys which contributed significantly to the shaping of a recognisable, original poetic.

The theory that Williams' poetic was grounded in an anti-intellectual concentration on the objective, concrete incidentals of human experience has been fed by his supporters even more than by such critical detractors as Ivor Winters. Winters' early conviction (1939) that Williams was "one of the two best poets of his generation" (the other was Stevens) was modified by 1965, two years after the poet's death, to the extent that he considered Williams' best work "very minor indeed". He continued, scathingly, that "to say that Williams was anti-intellectual would be almost an exaggeration: he did not know what the intellect was. He was a foolish and ignorant man, but sometimes a fine stylist". However, in both pieces he was careful to point out that the poems were the product of rigorous construction, the best coming "close to perfection
In execution. In this respect he was of greater value as a critic than were many of those who championed Williams as a cause. For example, in a 1935 review for *Commonweal*, Raymond Larsson wrote that "saints on the one hand, and bums on the other, would understand his poems, his heart: people with rules and formulae to apply are likely to understand neither....These poems of his are direct, simple, lacking in 'fine' writing, full of pure song." 31 Here Williams is being celebrated for an instinctive, unstructured spontaneity, and in terms which are so vague as to be of no value in elucidating the poetry. Larsson's commentary includes an evocation of poetry which "speaks commonly the speech of common love" but which is so imprecise as to represent, "something of spring's kept for remembrance". This calibre of analysis abounds within the canon of critical appraisal of Williams' work. In 1963, the year Williams died, John Malcolm Brinnin claimed that "among the poets of his own illustrious generation...Williams was the man on the margin...the embattled messiah....[attempting] quite by himself...to impart to poetry a new substance and a violent new orientation". 32 While Williams' eventual contribution to the development of a modern tradition was major, at no time can it be claimed for him that he carried out his work "quite by himself". Even at the very beginning of his career as an experimental writer, he functioned alongside other like-minds, many of whom were to be profoundly influential in the formation of his poetic. Critics have been
reluctant to acknowledge this, preferring to swallow whole Williams' version of himself as an American frontiersman, breaking new ground in a cultural wilderness. Brinnin is correct, however, in pointing out that "his dismissal of entrenched forms of English poetry...should not blind his readers to the fact that his searching and his concerns were exclusively directed toward formal solutions". As to what these solutions were, what they solved, and where they operated, Brinnin and the other Williams critics seem reluctant to explain. Williams work is labelled 'anti-poetic', 'imagistic', 'laconic' and so on and the particulars of form and structure are effectively glossed over. Brinnin claims that the poetry cannot be studied "with the expectation of tracing gradual changes in structure and diction that signify successive methods. He did not so much develop a technique as he exploited a general attitude which determinedly avoided the repetitions on which technique is based." This thesis will argue emphatically that such a study is necessary, to refute the damaging orthodoxy here presented, that Williams avoided poetic structure and technique.

Some critics have attempted to place his work within a carefully researched cultural milieux. Weaver's study is invaluable in its presentation of background information, which is not, however, specifically related to the texts. In The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech, Bram Dijkstra broke new ground (which has since become somewhat crowded) in
relating the first phase of Williams' career to the activities of those visual artists associated with Alfred Stieglitz. Dijkstra appears to have accepted Williams' various claims to a profound understanding of painting. As support for his argument he quotes Williams' rather specious suggestion that, were it not for the fact that "it was easier to transport a manuscript than a wet canvas" he might have become a painter. 35 Like many of the critical studies, this one accepts Williams' pronouncements at face value, without probing for ulterior motivation. Dijkstra claims that Williams was "without doubt the one who attempted most literally to transpose the properties of the new forms of painting into poetry". 36 Williams' response to the work of the Stieglitz group, his "solution to the problem of how to achieve such a reduction and sharpening of focus", according to Dijkstra, "was to limit the length of his poems and to pair their brevity with the deceptively simple mode of observation which would carefully emphasise the one or two most salient features of the object". 37 This, of course, is to blatantly avoid another and more plausible source of influence. Williams had published with the Imagist group (among poets experimenting with such compacted forms as Japanese Haiku) in 1914, and Pound's 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste' advocating "direct treatment of the 'thing'", the use of "no superfluous word" and composition "in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome" had appeared in the March 1913 issue of Poetry. Thus a
model for the paring down of Williams' technique was available in the advice and practice of his most immediate literary mentor. Dijkstra appears to have been infected by the poet's anxiety syndrome in his attempt to distract attention from this obvious link. He points out that the stripping back of the poems becomes most apparent in the 1921 book *Sour Grapes*, by which time, "Williams showed enough confidence...to allow such very short poems to stand on their own, and in some of these he manages to catch the structural precision of a Stieglitz photograph, an O'Keefe, or a Demuth". The link with Imagist poetry is, however, much more obvious. Williams had become increasingly disaffected with the European-oriented modern writers since by their apparent success, and their presence at the hub of experimental activity, they tended to overshadow his own activities. The book, significantly entitled *Sour Grapes*, contains various petulant sideswipes at the precisiosity of Imagist verse. Compare Williams' 'Spring':

O my grey hairs!
You are truly white as plum blossoms
(CEP 205)

with Pound's 'Fan Piece, for her Imperial Lord':

O fan of white silk,
clear as frost on the grass-blade,
You also are laid aside. 39

A poem like Amy Lowell's 'Autumn Haze'-

Is it a dragonfly or a maple leaf
That settles softly down upon the water? 40

can be seen as a target for Williams' rather heavy handed burlesque:
To Be Closely Written On A Small Piece
Of Paper Which Folded Into A
Tight Lozenge Will Fit
Any Girl's Locket

Lo the leaves
Upon the new autumn grass
Look at them well. I

There is credence in the suggestion that Williams found
much to fascinate him among the considerable achievements
of the Stieglitz group, and that his interest in the visual
arts affected his development as a modern writer, but to
claim for them priority in the process is simply misleading.
Dijkstra asserts:

Certainly painting was by no means the only determinant
in the development of his poetry, but it is by far the
most important source for the structure and themes of
his work. Ezra Pound, Whitman, and Gertrude Stein, to
name just a few, undoubtedly contributed to Williams'
development, but their part must be considered second-
ary to the role played by painting in general, and by
figures such as Alfred Stieglitz in particular. 41

It is precisely this kind of tactical avoidance of the
activity of textual influence within Williams' developing
poetic which has characterised the critical approach thus
far. This thesis offers an alternative argument, partic-
ularly regarding the influential models provided by figures
such as Pound, Whitman and Stein.

Harold Bloom, in his study Figures of Capable Imagin-
ation, continues his theme of rivalry and strength in
literature, particularly poetry. He points out, however,
that the anxiety of influence syndrome, "like most fears,
is a cover or mask for something else, the horror of orig-
ins that seems to be one of the most basic of human anxieties. To adapt that statement for the purpose of this thesis, it is arguable that Williams' poems, arising out of personal insecurity, find their motivational energy in influence anxiety. They communicate at a fundamental level an existential panic, and a human response fabricating design and measure in a world of oblivious objective phenomena. Williams developed antagonistically as a poet, through a self-defined campaign against an inexorably indifferent dominant culture. Throughout this formative stage of his career he foregrounded this struggle, perhaps to distract attention, his and ours, from the continuing dialectical confrontation between consciousness and material being, synthesised in the human compulsion to name, to describe, and to communicate definitive human identity. In 'The Descent of Winter' (1928) this inevitable conflict pierces the surface in a passage which combines unpunctuated prose, expression of cultural alienation, and the human apprehension of the objective world, in such a way as to signal the pain of mortality:

...idiots are like leaves and excellence of any sort is a tree when the leaves fall the tree is naked and the wind thrashes it till it howls it cannot get a book published it can only get poems into certain magazines that are suppressed because because waving waving waving waving waving waving waving waving waving waving tic tack tic tock tadick there is not excellence without the vibrant rhythm of a poem and poems are small and tied and gasping they eat gasoline, they all ate gasoline and died, they died of--there is a hole in the wood and all I say brings to mind the rock shingles of Cherbourg (Imag 239)

There is a powerful element in Williams' poetry (and
one which is constantly threatening to burst through the veneer of control) of what Bloom identifies as "the dark mirror of our egoism and our fallen condition". 43 Having launched himself into the role of writer, Williams' first and lasting obsession was to signify to the world the individuality of his 'self'. Blocking that goal at every turn, he found a self-generated image of the importance of other writers. In order to counter these he had to construct the myth of the New World artist, exactly that frontier figure his followers and detractors have accepted, mostly without question. Williams succeeds, however, in communicating his existential anxiety by activating the competitive element in his reader, whose intelligence and capacity for reciprocative activity he wove into his texts, increasingly, from the early twenties onward. He found his maturity in Spring and All in 1923, a book which combines a complexity of vision with a clarity of form in an integrated and sustained work which includes, however, a radical combination of conflict and incompletion as structured elements.

The following chapters will proceed in an attempt to examine the processes which informed Williams' growth to this point, a point at which he had become both a major innovator and a major poet. The former was a product of his struggle against the concept of plagiarism, and the latter grew from his vertiginous communication of the fragility of human triumph over mortality, in consciousness as language.
Section Two

'Doctor Williams' Position'

"Poetic History," according to Harold Bloom, "is held to be indistinguishable from poetic influence, since strong poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves". Bloom's 'strong poet' appears in a direct line of descent from Eliot's 'mature poet' whose major strategy in this context is to borrow "from authors remote in time or alien in language, or diverse in interest". While Bloom is offering a subtle shift in perspective on the development of a powerful tradition in post-enlightenment English language poetry to accommodate his idea of tactical misreading, he is dependent, like Eliot, upon a tacit acceptance of the value of 'strength' in culture. Eliot's orthodoxy is revealed in the statement: "Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different". Imitation is evidence of weakness, whereas stealing is simply the process by which a superior system makes use of others. Colonialism has been justified in similar terms, as has racism and the subjugation of women. Bloom's "strong poet" emerges, out of an oedipal conflict with authoritative cultural father figures. He focuses exclusively on "major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their
strong precursors, even to the death. Weaker talents idealize: figures of capable imagination appropriate for themselves". ⁴ Within this aggressively delineated area of definition, it is logical to categorise Williams, as Bloom has done, as a major innovator, but one who "may never touch strength at all". ⁵ In 1952, in a rare reference to Williams' poetry, T.S. Eliot wrote, as an executive for the publishing company Faber and Faber: "I have never been an enthusiast for his poetry, and I think it is a sound rule for publishers not to publish a poet unless at least one member of the firm is an enthusiastic believer in his work". ⁶ Paul Mariani, in his survey of critical responses to Williams' work, The Poet and His Critics, reports Eliot as having dismissed Williams as being merely of "some local interest perhaps". ⁷ These statements are symptomatic of the way in which Williams has become marginalised, simply because his work does not fall in with that orthodox evaluation of creativity in terms of a hierarchy of strength, the ability to make cultural forays and to plunder for the sake of self enrichment. While there is little doubt that various of Williams' poems, like Eliot's, appropriate elements from past cultures (e.g. 'March', CEP 43-46), these are achieved at the great risk of heightened anxiety. For Williams, the cultural achievements of the past loomed constantly as impressive reminders of his own potential insignificance.
European culture in the early twentieth century was museum focussed, promoting the notion of cultural value, necessitating an enrichment process through aggressive appropriation from the past. Pound and Eliot, with their energetic archaeological imaginations and their impressive critical prowess, enjoyed an apparently unproblematic ease with the culture of value. Williams' poetry, on the other hand (perhaps with the exception of Paterson, with its attempt to tap into the architectural grandiosity of the 'modernist long poem') is much more problematic, less easy to evaluate in the cultural market place. The small lyrics with which he made his early advances lack an obvious historical perspective. They lack the authority of continuity, and their frequent reference to the anxiety of human cognisance continually renewing its dialectical conflict with inhuman nature can be seen as evidence of insecurity, even weakness. They have been placed, therefore, in that annexe, outside the main literary museum, normally reserved for talented women.

Stephen Spender's book, The Struggle of the Modern, appeared in 1963 which was both the year of Williams' death, and the year in which he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Spender's appraisal of the state of the game in modernism was concluded, however, without mention of Williams' contribution. The American poet had avoided being pulled into the mainstream of English literary activity, but in so doing had marginalised himself and his work.
Williams established what was to be a lifelong process of avoidance when he refused, or failed to join those others of his generation in their search for a European perspective (rooted in the European culture of value) on the emergence of American cultural identity. The major problem he encountered as a result and, paradoxically, a major contribution to his burgeoning poetic, was that of personal alienation. Whether or not there is any justification for the paranoid accusations Williams made, throughout his career, against Eliot and Pound as traitors to the American cause for cultural significance, the emotional strength with which they were made contributed to his status, self-elected, as its champion. He was, in his own eyes, a lone fighter for the American present against the European past.

What Williams was fully awake to was the weight of tradition and the legacy of 'genius' against which all contemporary artists must contend. As Bloom points out in A Map of Misreading, "only the overcoming of genuine difficulties can result in poems wholly adequate to an age consciously as late as our own". The lateness of our age has become a constant preoccupation of twentieth-century artists, who have arrived with the inherited problem: what is left to be done? "Nothing is good save the new" insisted Williams in the 'Prologue' to Kora in Hell. Novelty itself became the central concern, since subject as content had been exhausted, or so it seemed. And the very process of struggling for modernity presented prohibitive problems of
identity and self-respect for the developing poet. How is it possible to be convincingly modern while acknowledging one's debts to previous writers, and this while working alongside other writers currently displaying dazzling evidence of their own novelty? Williams' struggle was not only with such 'strong' precursors as Keats and Whitman, but also with the impressive achievements of such contemporaries as Pound, Eliot and Joyce. In his vigorous campaign to avoid being swept into this current, he brought his verse into contact with other, less obvious influences, such as Alfred Kreymborg (editor of Others) Marianne Moore, Mina Loy and Gertrude Stein. There are others, including non-literary figures like Marcel Duchamp and Charles Demuth, and there is Emily Dickinson, with whose lyrics Williams' work, post 1913, begins to show some remarkable affinities. Harold Bloom suggests, revealingly that "more than ever, contemporary poets insist that they are telling the truth in their work, and more than ever they tell continuous lies, particularly about their relations to one another, and most consistently about their relations to their precursors". 9

Williams' poetic, then, is partly the product of a struggle, during the first phase of his career, against the subsuming spectre of influence. It is possible to identify short periods when his work shows remarkable affinities with that of Pound, Whitman, Eliot, Dickinson, Loy and Moore. This pattern of development, with its contingent
danger of plagiarism, though contrary to Williams' obsessive pursuit of novelty in his work, provided an edge of anxiety which pushed him constantly toward resolution of his own stylistic problems. Having achieved this resolution, by the mid 1920s, Williams felt an urgent need for recognition of his success, particularly, it might be argued, from those of his contemporaries who had been similarly engaged in the campaign for modernity.

Tentative Statements

In November 1928, Ezra Pound, with his characteristic mixture of penetrating critical insight, generosity and idiosyncratic condescension, summed up Williams' contribution thus far. His essay for The Dial, 'Dr Williams' Position', was the longest appraisal of his friend's work that Pound ever offered. His main contention was in respect of Williams' integrity as a writer and his unwillingness to embrace ready-made solutions. Pound suggested at the close of this essay that Williams was at his best, "retaining interest in the incommunicable or the hidden roots of the consciousness of people he meets, but confining his statement to presentation of their objective manifests". In other words, because of his inability to cut through the clutter of experience with any real discernment, Williams should best concern himself with the presentation of the clutter. The roots were, to him,
incommunicable, and his response, as Pound had commented elsewhere, was remarkably opaque. This is perhaps a tactful way of suggesting that Williams was confused in the face of a complex world because of his proximity to it and his lack of erudition. A year later, Williams offered 'A Tentative Statement' in the Little Review, which can be read as a response to Pound's appraisal. He wrote:

Paraphrasing the young Jefferson: All literatures are created free and equal—each in its place. The later differences are modifications of the original character by erudition which increases the surface, involving it, twisting, fanning it out, caving it in but never changing the unique plasm, never superceding the original character and vigor or lack of it. 11

This is central to one of Williams major defensive tactics, the notion of 'contact', a 'new world' aesthetic imperative which he and his friend Robert McAlmon had championed in a short lived magazine of that name. In the first issue of Contact (which they jointly edited), in December 1920, when Williams was making his first steps toward establishing for himself a definitive American position, he asserted that, "For native work in verse, fiction, criticism or whatever is written we mean to maintain a place, insisting on that which we have not found insisted upon before, the essential contact between words and the locality that breeds them, in this case America". 12 Contact appeared initially as a typewritten attempt by Williams, after the demise of the infamous Others (to be examined in a later section), to create for himself a new sense of belonging. He was offering an aggressively American justification for home-grown
culture, seeking others like himself who had decided to remain at home rather than join the impressive and expanding band of expatriates. Williams' insecurity was engendered partly by the ever present possibility that his motive for refusing to join his compatriots in Europe was an overriding need for domestic and economic stability. Unlike his peers, he stayed at home in a city suburb, married, had children and maintained a steady job, thus excluding himself from the bohemian internationalism which informed the avant-garde. Perhaps he was simply seeking an aesthetic justification when he concluded in his Contact editorial statement:

We do not seek to "transfer the center of the universe" here. We seek only contact with the local conditions which confront us. We believe that in the perfection of that contact is the beginning not only of the concept of art among us but the key to the technique also. 13

Despite the probability that Williams' notion of contact emerged out of intellectual insecurity, it became a pivot for his poetic, a strategy he deployed to distance his work from the powerful examples offered by Pound and Eliot. It is during this period that Williams was able to produce the kind of stripped back lyric, essentially American in its adherence to American vocabulary and local observation, which is exemplified in 'The Great Figure' (from Sour Grapes, 1921):

Among the rain
and lights
I saw the figure 5
in gold
on a red
firetruck
moving
tense
unheeded
to gong clangs
siren howls
and wheels rumbling
through the dark city. (CEP 230)

In his 'Tentative Statement' Williams touched on the
work of both Pound and Eliot in a way which betrays his
intellectual insecurity:

Without a place, erudition, scholarship, present an
unsolvable problem that has been a torment to me my
life long with correlative associations and relation­ships which I have resented and resisted. For if the
place given be new so that it must compete with advan­ced culture in its rivals, its character itself will
often be threatened. 14

With this statement Williams was attempting to justify his
position as an American poet, tapped into his newly defined
American ground. He was well aware of his debt to Pound,
but Pound appeared to be rooted in more established soil,
and Williams was also aware of how others might view their
relative positions. He attempted to put the record straight
without appearing to be too defensive:

I watched Ezra Pound go through college. I was in the
Medical School without academic degree, studying phys­ics, chemistry, anatomy, physiology, pathology. I
watched Ezra--by direct effect--suffering the thrusts
of his professors. That was the difference between
us....I was placed differently yet I was as absorbed in
poetry and the problems of verse as he. 15

The message is plain. Williams and Pound began their lit­erary apprenticeships at the same time, but from different
points of view. Pound's educational training led him into
the museum culture of Europe, while Williams' grounding in
the medical sciences prevented him from taking that route.
At this time, of course, Pound was one of the brightest lights on the modern horizon, while Williams was still struggling to be seen. He had illustrated this tenuous position in a poem, 'El Hombre', first published in Others in 1916:

It's a strange courage
you give me ancient star:

Shine alone in the sunrise
toward which you lend no part! (CEP 140)

This small poem comes as close to the existential insecurity of Emily Dickinson's lyrics, or the remaining fragments of Sappho's songs as it does to the condensed rhetoric of the Imagists. The little morning star is subsumed by the power of the sun, a simple observation, the metaphysical implications of which are such as to provide space for the obscured talent of a literary pioneer. Even in close proximity with the dazzle of others' successes, the single pulse of energy continues, hopefully, eventually, to be recognised and rewarded. Discussing his relationship with Pound in an article for Briarcliff Quarterly in 1946, he commented, "We parted years ago, he to move among his intellectual equals in Europe, I to remain at home and struggle to discover here the impetus to my achievements". 16

From very early on in their relationship Pound attempted to persuade Williams to improve and increase his reading. In a letter dated 21 May 1909 he advised:

If you'll read Yeats and Browning and Francis Thompson and Swinburne and Rossetti you'll learn something about the progress of English poetry in the last Century. And if you'll read Margaret Sackville, Rosamund Watson,
Ernest Rhys, Jim G. Fairfax, you'll learn what the people of second rank can do, and what damn good work it is. You are out of touch, that's all. 17

Pound had recognised, even this early in Williams' career, his susceptibility to the influence of individual writers. He suggested that the too obvious presence of Keats in Williams' work (Poems, 1909) might be countered if only he would read more widely.

Read Aristotle's Poetics, Longinus' On The Sublime, De Quincey, Yeats' essays.

Lect. I. Learn your art thoroughly. If you'll study the people in that 1st lecture and then reread your stuff—you'll get a lot more ideas about it than you will from any external critique I can make of the verse you have sent me.

Pound's ideas on writing and reading were based on his faith in the continuing cycle of greatness, approachable only through significant cultural investment. He saw Williams as subject, unconsciously, to the unmediated effects of strong influence. In 'Dr Williams' Position', for example, he wrote of Williams inability adequately to 'orchestrate' the activity of other writers in his work. He claimed that:

...it is undeniable that part of my time...has been put into orchestral directing. Very little of Dr Williams' energy has been so deflected. If he did some Rimbaud forty years late [Kora in Hell, 1920] it was nevertheless composition, and I don't think he knew it was Rimbaud until after he finished his operation. 18

The implication here is that Williams' lack of reading left him unable to judge when he was being derivative. Whether or not Kora in Hell is "Rimbaud forty years late" is, of course, questionable; the important thing is that Pound, even in an essay basically praising Williams' work, and
even at this late stage, still insisted on pointing out what he considers to be his 'pupil's' intellectual shortcomings.

Williams had always to reconcile two conflicting elements in his world. His days were filled with the clutter of suburban life, as a family man and a general practitioner, while his intellect was invested in the struggle to become a modern American poet, involved in the metaphysics of language and consciousness. The concept of 'contact' arising out of a personal re-alignment of cultural expression with local 'reality' provided, for Williams, a plausible justification for the avoidance of erudition, and a linkage between his practical and creative roles. He commented:

The thing is that you cannot get erudition except at a cost. Either it will be slow, laborious, the laboring with a place, or you will be driven out like Ezra Pound and invent a whole world of persons for the Cantos, or you will quietly walk into a ripe world of England like Eliot. 19

Williams' one-sided, lifelong feud with Eliot was already well under way by this time (1929). Eliot was the greatest single threat to his own rightful place in the vanguard of the struggle for American modernity. And, to compound the situation, Williams' old friend Pound, unable to recognise the rooted value of his work, had transferred loyalty to this more obvious talent. The fact that both Pound and Eliot were American, and both were achieving critical acclaim in Europe and America, must have been a hard pill to swallow. Williams complained:
With learning in my own place, I should have succeeded better. That's why I am impressed and sorry that Eliot, who is a splendid poet, has gone British. It may mean nothing but convenience to him. To me it is a serious and damaging loss. I am sorry, damned sorry. Something has been taken away that I wanted to use and I'm not to be let to use it. 20

Williams' rejection of Pound and Eliot, by consigning their successes to the status of European erudition, allowed his own efforts much greater prominence in the forefront of the American cultural awakening. This is made clear in his 'Tentative Statement':

It has been to place myself as the offshoot of an unerudite locality that my major struggle has taken form. What I have wanted to do has been to place my beginnings, now to discover that it is in "place" itself that I get my chief relief that allows me to stand up and use what is about me. Contact (which name I did not invent though I accepted it with enthusiasm) --contact is at the bottom of the conal source from which erudition branches. 21

By 1929 Williams' anxiety was qualified by his own recognition, and that of a few others, that he had produced some first rate experimental work. Pound's appraisal had acknowledged Williams' contribution as a vital (if insubstantial) counter to the general dilution he saw taking place in American letters. He endorsed the inclusion of Williams among those who deserved attention with the comment: "For fifteen or eighteen years I have sighted Williams as sole known American-dwelling author who could be counted upon to oppose some sort of barrier to such penetration; the sole catalectic in whose presence some sort of modification would take place." 22 The "penetration" Pound mentioned was geographic, whereby ideas were accepted without thought in
a cultural void, diluted, and spread thinly like a wood veneer disguising some insubstantial base. He recognised that Williams was providing a blockage in this ease of flow, around which some kind of indigenous creativity might begin to accumulate. Since America was a country defined by its lack of culture, perhaps what was needed there was an energised anti-culture (a more valuable phrase than 'anti-poetic'), and perhaps this actually was 'Dr Williams' Position'. With the security of hindsight, Williams was able to see his position calmly, and to evaluate his contribution in an American context. In 1946 he wrote a fairly clear definition of his ideological stance as a democratic non-expatriate:

The forms of the past, no matter how cultivated, will inevitably carry over from the past much of the social, political and economic complexion of the past. And I insist that those who cling basically to those forms wish in their hearts for political, social and economic autocracy. They think in terms of the direct descent of great minds, they do not think in terms of genius arising from great movements of the people--or the degeneracy of the people, as known in the past. 23

In his poem 'A Morning Imagination of Russia' ('Descent of Winter' 1929), Williams suggested that one way forward for America was on a route similar to that taken by Soviet Russia. The old values of Europe, resplendent in the cities, were rejected (counter to Williams' modernist obsession with New York):

Cities are full of light, fine clothes delicacies for the table, variety, novelty--fashion: all spent for this. Never to be like that again: the frame that was. It tickled his imagination. (Imag 249-252)
This poem offers a late American transcendentalism, the moral superiority of the natural land -

...a few flowers were lying forward on the intense green grass where in the opalescent shadows oak leaves were pressed hard down upon it in patches by the night rain. There were no cities between him and his desires...

- over the insubstantial temporality of cities ("delicacies", "novelty", "fashion"). This is mingled with a personal view of Russian sovietism, advocating collective decision making based on local conditions, with a vital role for the local poet:

He would go to the soviet unshaven. This was the day—and listen. Listen. That was all he did, listen to them, weigh for them. He was turning into a pair of scales, the scales in the zodiac.

Here Williams set out his claim for the place of the poet in society. The poet would become the medium through which experience and language were weighed, one against the other in a dialectic from which each could achieve definition. There was a sense of imperative:

But closer, he was himself the scales. The local soviet. They could weigh. It was not too late. He felt uncertain many days. But all were uncertain together and he must weigh for them out of himself.

This self-elected role as people's champion functioned in two important ways for Williams. He could use it first, to define himself in opposition to the "traditionalists of plagiarism", and second, to justify poetry on a cosmic
scale. He invoked, in this poem, the American poet, a post-
Emersonian figure, the medium through which language and 
experience were synthesised as art. In the Briarcliff
Quarterly article Williams suggested that modern genius, in
a democratic context, should be seen as "arising from great
movements of the people" a phrase which recalls Whitman's
original 'Preface' to Leaves of Grass. In this way he
accepts the inherited task of forging anew an indigenous
American poetic, while deflecting attention from his other
great inheritance: the wealth of European literary trad-
ition. He wrote:

I look for a direct expression of the turmoils of today
in the arts. Not about today in classical forms but in
forms generated, invented, today direct from the tur-
moil itself--or the quietude or whatever it might be so
long as it is generated in form directly from the form
society itself takes in its struggles. 24

Of course society contains and displays elements of its own
history, as must literature. A poem cannot be written
which is not indebted to the formal development of poetry
as a stylised means of expression.

For Williams the raw material of poetry was language.
He saw poetry as the product of a conscious struggle by the
poet to objectify language, to bring human consciousness
into the foreground as object. As the medium for discourse,
language loses its materiality in meaning and the arbitrary
imposition of definitions and connectives. As poetry,
however, the various non-referential components of lan-
guage - phonics, rhythms, syntactical articulation, connot-
ative ambiguities, etc. - draw attention to the dislocation
of the language from the subjective plane of association in the so-called 'real' world. As Williams said of Marianne Moore's verse, "Miss Moore undertakes in her work to separate the poetry from the subject matter entirely" (Imag 313). In other words, what identifies a piece of writing as poetry has little to do with the subject and almost everything to do with the medium, language. For Williams, where prose was the imposition of order upon the arbitrary world, giving definitive order to the landscape, poetry was the articulation of just one more element, language, in the complex of existence. It operated separate from, but in contact with its context.

Williams' poetic, no differently from that of any other poet, derived its shape in the abstract medium of language, and the craft required to arrange the language into poems was learned mostly from other poets. What made Williams unique as a poet has less to do with what Rod Townley identifies as "the American frontier" than with his eclecticism, his ability to write himself free from the effect of strong influence while retaining (subtly altered) the valuable components he had appropriated in the process. The frontier which Williams inhabited in his poetry was that created in language by American poets, and during his formative period his achievement was in pushing the frontier back far enough to create a space which was uniquely his. But he accomplished this by expanding into territory
already travelled by other pioneers; by Whitman, Dickinson, Pound, Loy, Moore and others.

"The Pure Products of America"

Williams was born in 1883 in Rutherford, New Jersey, a spill-over from New York, where he remained, after qualifying as a doctor, for the rest of his life. His father was English and his mother Puerto Rican. Pound's account, in "Dr Williams' Position", is colourful and revealing, if somewhat inaccurate. He wrote:

Carlos Williams has been determined to stand or sit as an American. Freud would probably say 'because his father was English'.... His mother as ethnologists have before noted, was a mixture of French and Spanish; of late years (the last four or five) Dr. Williams has laid claim to a somewhat remote Hebrew connexion, possibly a rabbi in Sargossa, at the time of the siege. He claims American birth, but I strongly suspect that he emerged on shipboard just off Bedloe's Island and that his dark and serious eyes gazed up in their first sober contemplation at the Statue and its brazen and monstrous nightshirt. 26

Where Pound is most illuminating is in his insistence that Williams' aggressive Americanism is in essence defensive. In 1917 he wrote to Williams demanding, "wot bloody kind of author are you save Amurkun (same as me)?" 27 The irreconcilable gulf between them is defined, however, in his qualifying statement, "don't expect the world to revolve about Rutherford". He penetrated to the core of Williams' insecurity with the comment, "if you had any confidence in America you wouldn't be so touchy about it". He went even further:
What the hell do you a bloomin' foreigner know about the place?...you've never been west of Upper Darby, or the Maunchunk switchback. Would Harriet, with the swirl of the prairie wind in her underwear, or the virile Sandburg recognize you, an effete Easterner, as a REAL American? INCONCEIVABLE!!!!
My dear boy, you have never felt the whoop of the PEERairies. You have never seen the projecting and protruberant Mts. of the Sierra Nevada. Wot can you know of the country?
You have the naive credulity of a Co. Claire emigrant. But I (der grosse Ich) have the virus, the bacillus of the land in my blood, for nearly three bleating centuries.
Williams quoted a large part of this letter in his 'Prologue' to Kora in Hell which, first published in the Little Review in 1919, was in part an attempt to define the basic difference between himself and Pound, and thereby to justify his position. Pound's notion of what is American is concomitant with his ideas on cultural identity generally. One is more American the longer one's roots are in American history. For Williams, however, the nature of American experience (for the European latecomer as opposed to the Indian population) was the need to be seen as American now. The history of America since colonisation, in comparison with the history of civilised Europe, was remarkably brief and its roots, like Williams' roots, were European. Williams' immigrant consciousness and his aggressive desire to be recognised as American, his "naive credulity of a Co. Claire emigrant", was his most important credential. Williams' America was an immigrant nation, an eclectic nation, a nation whose deracinated momentum made it an ideal locus for acceleration into the twentieth century. It was a place in which the English language could be
approached freshly. For many first generation Americans English was simply a new language. In America it was being moulded and adapted to deal with new contingencies, a different landscape, a greater sense of space, a vigorous optimism, a new technology. Williams lacked Pound's secure hold on history and the tradition of cultural heritage, and he engaged his energy in a search for a different kind of security. He fixed on the idea of engagement with the language of the moment, seeking a system which might be more compatible with the modes of American speech. In the Briarcliff Quarterly article he explained:

So you see, when my friends went abroad I stayed here pitting myself against a chaos in my attempts to do what to me was the artist's greatest and most difficult task, to wrest from society, the politics and the economic phantasm before me, new worlds of art. New forms. 28

The use of the word "phantasms" here is interesting. Its suggestion of illusion and absence foregrounds the notion of a void in the American consciousness, a void which when confronted gave rise, as Williams here implied, to a chaotic complex of conflicting possibilites. America provided the receptive observer with a uniquely unmediated view into the potentially unsettling nature of the objective world. A highly developed, sophisticated system, linguistic consciousness, was taken out of its historic context in Europe and applied to a culturally infant environment. Williams was a latecomer to the tradition of American writers who tried to tackle the awesome problem of reconciling the language with their experience. This is the basis of both
the idea of the local, and the concept of contact which Williams applied, as aesthetic props, to his uprooted poetic. In his 'Tentative Statement' he asserted that "the only universal is the local as savages, artists and--to a lesser extent--peasants know". 29 Post-colonial America in its cultural infancy had no recognisable embracing identity so the only way that identity could be approached was locally, at ground level. Savages and peasants (Indians and poor rural immigrants) were, Williams condescendingly believed, more profoundly in touch with that ground than were those of his own class and educational advantage. From this late-Romantic stance, Williams superimposed onto his poetic the myth of a common speech, language in touch with the common ground, as a means of cosmetically democratizing his art. Fortunately his poems rarely suffer from this grossly sentimental posturing. Indeed, in those poems where he examines the gap between European notions of culture and the demands of American experience, the results, as in 'For Elsie' can be remarkable, despite the condescension:

and young slatterns, bathed
in filth
from Monday to Saturday

to be tricked out that night
with gauds
from imaginations which have no

peasant traditions to give them
character
but flutter and flaunt
sheer rags--succumbing without emotion
save numbed terror
under some hedge of choke-cherry
or viburnum--
which they cannot express-- (Imag. 131/2)
The poem presents the American, ironically, as culture-starved; imprisoned by received cultural prejudice, and thus unable to seek expression within local conditions:

and we degraded prisoners
destined
to hunger until we eat filth

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

Williams convinced himself that the problem was exacerbated by the abandonment of America, for Europe, of Eliot and Pound. It was their high profiles which attracted attention, leaving true native art to languish in their shadow. This notion, however, had intrinsic flaws. The energy for change had been fomented by the post-Victorian generation in Europe, looking for alternatives to the well worn traditions they found themselves rejecting. Their revolution in the arts took form during the first decade of the new century, and modernism, fully fledged in painting and sculpture, came to New York (later Boston and Chicago) with the Armory Show in 1913. Perhaps it was in recognition of this European surge forward into modernism, that Williams, insisting on a native strain, began investing in the legacy of innovation which was available in the American past, in the models supplied by Whitman and Dickinson.
The revolution in the arts in Europe was not, however, something that took place dramatically and in the space of a few years. Paris provided a geographic focus for aesthetic shifts which took place during the second half of the nineteenth century, although significant contributions were made to the build-up of energy for change by non-French artists. However, it is mainly toward France that American avant-gardists looked for aesthetic support and inspiration during the ten years following the Armory Show. And of course it was not only from the painters that French influence found its way into the modernism of English language poetry. Pound and Eliot were profoundly influenced by the writing of Jules Laforgue, a French innovator whose poetry moved increasingly against a tradition in verse which was much more stringently formal than the English. Laforgue, like the other late nineteenth-century French experimentalists, Baudelaire, Mallarme and Rimbaud, was dead by the turn of the century, but the introduction by them of new possibilities in poetic subject matter and point of view contributed much to the foundations from which modern literature was constructed. The importance of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* in the gestation of Eliot's *The Waste Land* has been well documented, and Laforgue's importance as a model for modern writers was the subject of many statements in essays by Pound. Williams too acknowledged Laforgue's place in the complex of modern writing. In an editorial essay, 'Yours, O Youth', published in *Contact* in
1921 he wrote, "Kenneth Burke's Laforgue article in the present issue of Contact gives me the sense of an American critical attitude working with foreign material" (Essays, 36). He claimed not to have read Laforgue until then (in case some reader should make comparisons perhaps) and continued:

I begin to feel that there is in Laforgue a something, a very simple and direct thing, without which his ironic talent would have gone for nothing. It is his clear use of sensation. It is a building upon the basis of what is observed, what is proved, what is of value to the man in the welter as he found it, and a rigid exclusion of everything else.

Williams saw in Laforgue's example the availability of usable material in a poet endorsed by the enemy, Pound and Eliot, and he used the occasion to issue a strategic attack on them:

Eliot or Pound might say to me today: "Read Laforgue!" I might even be tempted to read because I had respect for their intelligence. But their words could not tempt me, force me, accompany me into the reading. I object to appreciative articles on foreign works being written at me from Europe. (Essays, 37)

This is a very suspect statement in an article which tries, ironically, to recruit Laforgue for the struggle against European domination of modern culture. Williams implied that it is only Americans in America who can assess Laforgue's value to American literature. For him, the real importance of Laforgue and the French art which constituted the Armory Show, was its applicability to the American ground, and he continued, in this article, by attempting to link this idea with his theory of 'contact':
Criticism must originate in the environment it is intended for if it is to be of fullest value. Laforgue in America is not the same man he is in France. Our appreciation recreates him for our special world if it be genuine. His ability to exist under universal conditions is the proof of his genius. Burke has taken what he wanted from the master in order to satisfy his own needs and his needs are the product of his world. (Essays, 37)

Burke's essay in Contact (Spring 1921) is an appraisal of the poet based on an assessment of his personality, and contributes little to the American perspective on French poetics. Williams simply appropriated what was of value to him, a discussion on a fashionable French precursor, and manipulated it into the shape he required. It was Williams himself who took "what he wanted from the master in order to satisfy his own needs". This was at a time when Williams felt most keenly the need for American allies, and he recruited them with little regard to their actual position, interpreting their writing in whichever way suited his thesis best.

Pound and Imagism

Throughout his career, Williams found identity for himself as belonging, at various times, to identifiable groupings of dissident writers and artists. The first, and one of the most important for his development, was that casual gathering of dissatisfied poets identified initially by Pound as Des Imagistes. Imagism is something that took place largely in various of the little magazines, partic-
ularly *The Egoist* (in London) and *Poetry* (Chicago). It is also something which took form in Ezra Pound's mind, to be applied, sometimes arbitrarily, to the work of these British and American experimentalists, some of whom had very little in common.

The word 'Imagiste' was first used in the second issue of *Poetry* (November 1912) to contextualise the work of Richard Aldington. In the following issue, (January 1913) it appeared again to give coherence to three poems by H.D. (Hilda Doolittle). Hugh Kenner's chapter on Imagism in *The Pound Era*, although sometimes characteristically idiosyncratic, is interesting for its insight into the energy and charisma with which Pound provided the focus for this short-lived group. He comments:

"Imagisme" (in pseudo-French) was a name coined to describe a quality of H.D.'s verse: by one account in the British Museum tearoom, where Pound with a slashing pencil made excisions from her "Hermes of the Ways" and scrawled "H.D. Imagiste" at the bottom of the page before sending it off (October 1912) to Harriet Monroe at *Poetry*:

The hard sand breaks
And the grains of it
Are clear as wine.

Far off over the leagues of it
The wind
Playing on the wide shore,
Piles little ridges,
And the great waves
Break over it....

"It is in the laconic speech of the Imagistes," ran his covering letter. "Objective--no slither--direct--no excess of adjectives. etc. No metaphors that won't permit examination.--It's straight talk--straight as the Greek!"
No matter how the word was originally coined, or for whom it was originally intended, it soon became a focus, even perhaps a justification, for many young writers attempting to experiment in English language free verse poetry. For Pound it was an attempt to cash in on all the other movements and isms and thus to draw attention to a few people who were struggling, as he later wrote in 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley', "to resuscitate the dead art / Of poetry". He commented elsewhere that, "the commonest verse in Britain from 1890 was a horrible agglomerate compost, not minted, most of it not even baked, all legato, a doughy mess of third hand Keats, Wordsworth, heaven knows what, fourth-hand Elizabethan sonority blunted, half melted, lumpy". 32

As with the other arts, poetry was in need of a general overhaul to align it with the age, and Pound saw himself as the man for the job. It is out of this evangelism that he conceived the three basic premises of Imagism. They were:

1. Direct treatment of the "thing" whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome. 33

These maxims were quoted in a short essay by F.S. Flint in the March 1913 issue of Poetry, along with Pound's 'A Few Don'ts By An Imagiste'. In 1918, somewhat annoyed at the way the term had been misused, Pound attempted to clarify the issue. He wrote:

In the spring or early summer of 1912, 'H.D.', Richard Aldington and myself decided that we were agreed upon the three principles....
Upon many points of taste and of predilection we differed. But agreeing upon these three positions we thought we had as much right to a group name, at least as much right, as a number of French 'schools' proclaimed by Mr Flint in the August number of Harold Monro's magazine for 1911.

This school has since been 'joined' or 'followed' by numerous people who, whatever their merits, do not show any signs of agreeing with the second specification. Indeed vers libre has become as prolix and as verbose as any of the flaccid varieties that preceded it. 34

Harold Monro's magazine, The Poetry Journal, did not commence publication until January 1912, but F.S. Flint's preoccupation with the recent French schools was a crucial initial element contributing to the formation of the London group which became the Imagists. As Noel Stock pointed out in The Life of Ezra Pound:

As far back as 11 July 1908 Flint had written in The New Age of a similarity between Mallarmé and Japanese poetry and of the possibility of a poetry composed of suggestions rather than complete pictures; and he had declared: "To the poet who can catch and render like these Japanese, the brief fragments of his soul's music, the future lies open." 35

In The Egoist, May 1915, Flint gave his own account of the founding of Imagism, beginning with the statement: "Somewhere in the gloom of the year 1908, Mr T.E. Hulme... proposed to a companion that they should found a Poet's Club. The thing was done there and then." 36 Flint here drew attention to the importance of Hulme, whose poem 'Autumn' he offers as "one of the first 'Imagist' poems". The poem is interesting as an early example in English of a short, non-discursive, free verse lyric based on appositional images:
A touch of cold in the Autumn night -
I walked abroad,
And saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge
Like a red-faced farmer.
I did not stop to speak, but nodded,
And round about were the wistful stars
With white faces like town children. 37

If the second basic principle of Imagism, "to use absolutely no word that [does] not contribute to the presentation" is applied to this poem, then the line, "I did not stop to speak, but nodded" is superfluous. It detracts from any impact there might have been in presenting the moon in conjunction with the image of "a red-faced farmer". The poem is basically flawed, and control falters in the tenuous simile of stars (pin-points of glimmering light) as having "white faces like town children".

Hulme's importance to the group was not as a poet, but as a link with contemporary French aesthetics, particularly those espoused by Remy de Gourmont and Henri Bergson. Hulme tailored ideas by both theorists, in the words of A.R. Jones, "in order to provide himself with a suitable language in which to express his conception of poetry". In his essay, 'Imagism: a Unity of Gesture', Jones commented:

Hulme was quick to seize on Gourmont's emphasis on visual imagery, on the fact that vision is the basis of all art, that style must not evoke but present the objects of reality as physically as possible, that subject and style cannot be differentiated....Poetry involved the total sensibility, Gourmont considered, but first it was necessary to the life of poetry to find new images in order to resuscitate the language which was always on the point of dying....Gourmont returned the responsibility for the life of language directly to the poet. The business of the poet was to coin new images, for only by the fusion of images could he present the object of his vision faithfully....In the same way that an electric current will be seen
passing from one pole to another, so a poem can exist in the tension existing between two images. By the juxtapositioning of two images the mind is surprised out of its habitual responses and creates a third image which is the 'meaning' of the poem. 38

For Hulme then, de Gourmont's most important contribution is his notion of the resuscitation of the language as the responsibility, especially through the coining of new images, of the poet. The fact that, as Kenner puts it, "Hulme used to tell his 1909 associates that images were essential, not decorative", especially in the context of an emphasis on the tension that exists between images, suggests, however, the traditionally metaphoric nature of the poem as he conceived it. For those poets who became involved with Hulme, Pound included, the language of poetry, even in its reinvigorated form, was essentially metaphoric. The image created in the mind of the reader, the "third image" necessitated a leap of the imagination, a response solicited by the subterfuge of the poem.

For Hulme, it was Henri Bergson who provided the locus in which poetry and reality merged. Bergson suggested that there were two ways of approaching reality; analytically, through the intellect, and instinctively through intuition. "No image", said Bergson, "can replace the intuition of duration", although, "many diverse images borrowed from very different orders of things may, by the convergence of their action, direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to be seized". 40 This leading of the consciousness through a linkage of images
suggests a contiguous movement which is anti-metaphoric, and one which was to characterise Williams' post-Imagist poetry more than that of any other member of the group. It is a notion which is very close to Eliot's idea of the 'objective correlative' by which a precise emotion can be arrived at given the exact required formula. This preoccupation with precision in form can be seen as a concerted attempt, by writers whose work was open to the criticism of formlessness, to justify their experiments.

Hulme and Flint, and later Pound and Aldington (as the main explainers of Imagism) were involved primarily in a campaign against the tedious, static complacency of those producing verse at the turn of the century. De Gourmont wrote:

Tradition is a great power opposing the originality of writers. That is why the present so strangely resembles the immediate past, which again resembles the preceding past. The subjection, which is always very oppressive, even in epochs of apparent literary innovation, tends to become a real yoke when the fashion is obedient to tradition. 41

The fashion, they insisted, was most certainly that of obedience to tradition, and the first step in unyoking, in order to progress, was to make some noise about writing which was outside that tradition. However, it was necessary to underpin the inchoate efforts of the new generation of dissidents with some identifiable system of alternative craft and erudition. Bergson supplied a prototype formula; intuition precisely arrived at, the mystical element of art sublimated (but still there) beneath the 'modern' obeisance
to dialectics and process. Gourmont gave back a heroic status to the poet, whose mission it was to relocate language, to re-establish the lucidity from which it had been diverted through what Pound called, "the period of funny symbolist trappings, 'sin', satanism, rosy cross, heavy lilies, Jersey Lilies, etc" by those who, "had mislaid the light of the eighteenth century". According to Pound, "Gourmont prepared our era; behind him there stretches a limitless darkness". Imagism was a largely successful attempt to shine a beacon onto alternative possibilities previously hidden in that "limitless darkness". It carried with it, however, imperatives of rigorous craft and precision. In his Poetry directive of 1912 Pound warned: "Don't imagine that the art of poetry is any simpler than the art of music, or that you can please the expert before you have spent at least as much effort on the art of verse as the average piano teacher spends on the art of music." It is, perhaps, this defensive insecurity which, following rejection of the excesses of the Romantic era, impelled the Imagists to look further afield and further back for their structural and thematic raw material. In his 1915 essay, 'The History of Imagism', Flint recalled:

I think that what brought the real nucleus of this group together was a dissatisfaction with English poetry as it was then (and is still, alas!) being written. We proposed at various times to replace it by pure vers libre; by the Japanese tanka and haikai; a sacred Hebrew form;...by poems like Hulme's 'Autumn' and so on. In all this Hulme was ringleader. He insisted too on absolutely accurate presentation and no verbiage....There was also a lot of talk and practice among us...of what we called the Image.
With the arrival of Pound, "on April 22, 1909" (according to Flint), was added the example of Chinese and Provencal poetry and with H.D. and Richard Aldington, the Hellenic. Aldington's first appearance in Poetry, November 1912 (the second issue), was accompanied by this note:

Mr Richard Aldington is a young English poet, one of the "Imagistes," a group of ardent Hellenists who are pursuing interesting experiments in vers libre; trying to attain in English certain subtleties of cadence of the kind which Mallarmé and his followers have studied in French. 46

Later, as a footnote to Flint's 'Imagisme' and Pound's 'A Few Don'ts...' a brief qualifier was added to the effect that, "it will be seen from these that Imagism is not necessarily associated with Hellenic subjects, or with vers libre as a prescribed form". 47 As it transpired, the coherent aesthetic and formal strategies outlined in the main Imagist manifestos were not what identified this group. There are certain poems by certain Imagists (Pound and H.D.) and by certain poets not officially part of the group (Williams and Charles Reznikoff) which adhere to these strategies. However, most of the poetry written by Lowell, Fletcher, Aldington and others, as actual members of the group, repeatedly breaks with the Imagist code. For example: Imagist theory insists on "direct treatment of the thing"; whereas most Imagist practice depends upon simile to compare one thing (actual) with another (associative).

The definition and focus supplied for this loose association of experimentalists by Ezra Pound was replaced,
following the arrival of Amy Lowell, by complacency and the loss of any real discipline. Her preface for the second anthology, *Some Imagist Poets* (1915), explains that "differences of taste and judgement...have risen among the contributors to that book [the first anthology, *Des Imagistes*]; growing tendencies are forcing them along different paths".  

It is Pound's judgement which was coming under attack, especially with the statement that "instead of an arbitrary selection by an editor, each poet has been permitted to represent himself by the work he considers his best".

The Imagists after Pound seemed concerned that their work be seen as distinct from those trends of contemporary poetry which were challenging the dignity of verse. As early as January 1914 Richard Aldington had stated the case for good taste in modern poetry with an essay published in *The Egoist*. A reactionary strain among the Imagists was beginning to emerge then, even before the first anthology appeared in March that year. Aldington's particular anxiety was connected with the emergence of a more vigorous, more iconoclastic contingent within the experimental arts. His essay 'Anti Hellenism' was written, in his own words, as a "pleading on behalf of the new unfashionable and unstudied Hellenic ideal of art".  

When Pound dissociated himself from the group he named 'Amygists', Aldington and H.D. remained. But the essential Modernist element of dissidence was no longer present to
energise the group. Williams' association with them had been dependent upon Pound's presence, and now he found himself obliged once again to function outside the security of group activity.

In his plea for Hellenism, Aldington identified two distinct choices in art:

...there is the art which is in sympathy with its time, which seeks to express the whole life of its time--that of Shakespeare, for example--and there is the art of Ben Johnson or of Theocritus, the art of men who run counter to the spirit of their time, or rather to the accepted artistic notions of their time. (I have nothing but praise and admiration for the artists and poets who are striving "to render their times in the terms of their times" but I would have them recollect the other kind of art which seeks to create those things which the time has not.)

Many years later, in his Briarcliff Quarterly article of 1946, Williams looked back on these poets, categorizing them as, "in effect, 'translators'" and continued:

They are great so long as they stick to their trade--of bringing down the riches of the ages by direct translations from the classics...forever dragging in the accomplished works of the ancients....

Even when such translators compose it is in the forms of the past and when they deviate from the fixed classic forms it is nevertheless precisely the established and accepted work of the masters from which they consciously deviate, by which they are asserting their greatest originality. 50

This 'conscious deviation' is very close in emphasis to Bloom's notion of wilful misprision in the competition between a poet and a strong precursor. Williams might have been describing himself, since he asserted his own greatest originality by consciously deviating from what he wilfully and reductively defined as the route of traditional verse. In his Autobiography he described Imagism as "useful in
ridding the field of verbiage" although it "had no formal necessity implicit in it" (Auto 264). At the time of his involvement, however, he was excited by the apparently radical nature of the group, and he was deeply flattered by Pound's inclusion of his poem 'Postlude' in the first anthology. The poem was derivative of Pound, with its studied archaisms and classical references, as this extract shows.

Now that I have cooled to you
Let there be gold of tarnished masonry,
temples soothed by the sun to ruin
That sleep utterly.
Give me hand for the dances,
Ripples at Philae, in and out,
And lips, my Lesbian,
Wall flowers that once were flame. (CEP 16)

_Temper_ is the book in which Williams' work shows most affinity with the other Imagists. Pound's influence, however, is obvious in the tone and diction of some of the poems from _Al Que Quiere!_ Indeed, Pound is discernible as an important influence, initially as mentor and subsequently as a powerful force around which Williams' poetry had to manoeuvre, throughout his career. And, significantly, it is with Pound's rejection of the non-dynamic complacency of 'Amygism' that Williams was able to dissociate himself from their ranks, creating a vacuum which had to be filled by another group.

His first book, _Poems_ (1909) had opened with the lines:

Innocence can never perish;
Blooms as fair in looks that cherish
Dim remembrance of the days
When life was young, as in the gaze
Of youth himself all rose-yclad,
Whom but to see is to be glad... 52

Pound recognised the overall lack of originality in this book but in spite of this he remained loyal and continued to encourage Williams. He provided Williams' first significant outlet by arranging for him to be published in Poetry and negotiated a publisher in London, Elkin Mathews, for The Tempers. Most important, he introduced Williams to Alfred Kreymborg whose magazine, Others was to provide the opportunity and locus for his aesthetic coming of age.

It is Pound's example and generosity of spirit that provided the bedrock of motivation and support for the development of Williams' poetic during this early phase. The Imagism which influenced him was not that of H.D., Flint, Lowell or Aldington; it was the enthusiastic and hortative evangelism of Pound. Lines like those just quoted were a liability in the face of even the most archaic of the poems in Pound's first book. In 'Na Audiart' for instance, the diction is anachronistic, but the tone of the poem is lively, and the rhythm adheres more to the sound patterns set up dynamically within than to orthodox metrics:

Nay no whit
Bespeak thyself for anything.
Just a word in thy praise, girl,
Just for the swirl
Thy satins make upon the stair,
'Cause never a flaw was there
Where thy torso and limbs are met
Though you hate me...  (Pound Collected 17)
When Williams first saw Pound's *A Lume Spento* in 1908 he responded in a letter (still unreleased) containing, judging from Pound's reply, some strongly expressed disapproval. He had reacted against what he saw as "preaching poetic anarchy" too strong for the "eyes of too ruthless a public". He had a fixed idea of what a poem should look and sound like (presumably Keats as opposed to Whitman) in order to succeed in the "ultimate attainments of poesy". Pound's definition was much less orthodox in four prescriptions, as detailed in the letter:

1. To paint the thing as I see it.
2. Beauty.
3. Freedom from didacticism.
4. It is only good manners if you repeat a few other men to at least do it better or more briefly. Utter originality is of course out of the question.

Apart from the second point, which is a devalued platitude, these maxims go some way toward introducing Pound's position as a theorist for Imagism. He went on to say: "Also I don't want to bore people. That is one most flagrant crime at this stage of the world's condition." It is this restless energy which eventually alienated Pound (and Williams) from the remaining Imagists.

The modern age was characterised by changes which were leaving the old order, already unstable on its foundations, in disarray. It is not surprising, therefore, that there should have been a rearguard action of artists seeking security in those values most commonly associated with a more stable past. In his defense of Hellenism, Richard Aldington wrote:
And the upshot of all this somewhat incoherent writing is that though I admit as I have admitted before the great value of, say, the sculpture of Mr. Epstein and the painting of M. Picasso and the latest poems of Mr. Pound and even the works of Signor Severini, M. Barzun and so on, I find that there is still a strange allure about these ordinary uninteresting things which the Greeks loved—health and beauty and youth in the midst of friends. 54

There is a vaguely odious foretaste here of the Romantic, neoclassic obsession which characterised German and Italian Fascism, and a cloying sentimentality which refers nostalgically to the simple values of a society which was largely maintained through the exploitation of defeated cultures and slaves. Aldington continued:

I would wish to see the art of to-day, if there is to be an art of to-day, growing out of those things, and I should not object if it repeated things which have been already said, provided it re-assured me beautifully and conclusively that flowers are still elegantly coloured, and girls' lips very good to see, and the scent of hayfields and of the ocean very cordial.

Aldington's concept of the elegant, his "health and beauty and youth" along with the attractiveness of "girls' lips" is not so far removed from the decadent nostalgia of late Victorian painters like Lawrence Alma-Tadema with his elaborate canvases (pre-figuring Cecil B. de Mille) of sexually alluring young women amid clean, well lit marble architecture. The result is poems like this:

A Girl

You were that clear Sicilian fluting
That pains our thoughts even now.
You were the notes
Of cold fantastic grief
Some few found beautiful. 55
Although Williams was associated for a short time with the Imagists, their influence on his work waned with his introduction to the Others group at Grantwood, New Jersey in 1915. Geographical proximity made this group a much more accessible focus for his art, and their less than reverential attitude to tradition made them particularly attractive. As he commented in the 'Prologue' to Kora in Hell, "Hellenism, especially the modern sort, is too staid, too chilly, too little fecundative to impregnate my world" (Imag 12). Dr Williams, the obstetrician, lived in a world of necessities in which men impregnated women and babies were born. His own very immediate involvement in that world, whether by choice or by default, demanded that his art show some connection with the exigencies of human survival. The modern American world appeared to be dynamic, constantly presenting the artist with new problems, to be solved by a suitably adaptable imagination. What good to him, then, were the polished echoes of redundant civilisations? He wrote:

It is to the inventive imagination we look for deliverance from every other misfortune as from the desolation of a flat Hellenic perfection of style. What good then to turn to art from the atavistic religionists...from a philosophy tangled in a miserable sort of dialect that means nothing if the full power of initiative be denied at the beginning by a lot of baying and snapping scholastics. (Imag 13)

What Williams learned from his involvement with Imagism was an early lesson in avoidance. Having deviated from Keats, he could now deviate from Pound, H.D. and Aldington. He learned from Pound what not to do in the pursuit of rele-
vant modern poetry. Williams, unlike most of the other Imagists, listened and showed in a few of the stripped down lyrics of *Al Que Quiere!*, and increasingly consistently thereafter, that he had understood the lessons. In 'Canthara' for example, he presents in a contiguous apposition, two conflicting images. The disturbing connection between an old negro in a public toilet and the intrusive eroticism of six women dancing the can-can, creates the essential tension of the poem:

The old black-man showed me how he had been shocked in his youth by six women, dancing a set-dance, stark naked below the skirts raised round their breasts: bellies flung forward knees flying! --while his gestures, against the tiled wall of the dingy bath-room, swished with ecstasy to the familiar music of his old emotion. (CEP 143)

Williams' achievement in this poem is based on Imagist prescriptions. "Use no superfluous word", Pound had exhorted, "go in fear of abstractions" and never mix "an abstraction with the concrete". 56 This is the basis of good writing. Pound and the other Imagist propagandists never claimed that what they had to offer was new; simply that there were important techniques, fallen into disuse, which constituted the craft of the poet. "Don't tell in mediocre verse what has already been done in good prose". There was no longer any excuse to play pretty tunes with language, sliding off
into the easy, self-rewarding sweetness of orthodox good
taste. Pound's message was that good poetry is the result
of the poet's experience and understanding of the intricate
qualities of the medium, language. Williams' poem, 'Canth-
ara' presents two conflicting images, allowing the dynamics
of the poem to be generated by juxtaposition, and the
combinations of words and phrases. There is no reliance on
prescribed rhythm or rhyme; the music of the poem has a
spontaneous feel. Closer examination shows, however, that
the deployment of verbs and word sounds gives this very
short poem an articulated movement, slower and quieter in
the first and final parts (dealing with the negro) than in
the active middle section. Since the musical structure of
the poem is internally developed, the reader has no need to
distort any of the words or phrases to maintain a phonic
pattern. In addition, this is an early work by Williams
which utilises the run on line, leading the eye of the
reader more immediately from one line to the next in a poem
which depends for its effect upon impetuosity. Pound had
demanded:

Don't chop your stuff into separate iambs. Don't make
each line stop dead at the end, and then begin every
line with a heave. Let the beginning of the next line
catch the rise of the rhythm wave, unless you want a
definite longish pause, ...

Naturally your rhythmic structure should not destroy
the shape of your words, or their natural sound, or
their meaning. 57

There is nothing particularly esoteric about this advice.
Unlike the manifestos issued by the Futurists or the Dada-
ists, Pound's 'A Few Don'ts' was an attempt simply to
reintroduce a sense of professionalism and craftsmanship into the art of poetry. The Imagists offered a catalogue of techniques and one or two examples of how the system worked. Here, for instance, is the oft cited Imagist poem par excellence: H.D.'s 'Oread':

whirl up, sea -
whirl your pointed pines,
splash your great pines
on your rocks,
hurl your green over us,
cover us with your pools of fir. 58

"That is all," wrote Harold Monro for The Egoist in May 1915, "it can be said in the one minute before lunch". 59

Monro's bemusement can be understood. H.D.'s poem is the result of a concentration, both in terms of language and of the imagination, to produce what Pound referred to in 'A Few Don'ts' as "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time". The energy field is generated between the evocation of sea and trees, operating in controlled apposition to create a separation which is the activity of the poem itself. Here is Bergson's "certain intuition" arrived at through the "convergence" of "diverse images", and conveyed by language stripped back to its barest essentials, and activated by phonic effects directly dependent upon the sound and shape of the words. For Monro, however, this was simply not enough. He wrote: "It is petty poetry; it is minutely small: it seems intended to be. Such images should appear by the dozen in poetry. Such reticence denotes either poverty of imagination or needlessly excessive restraint". 60 The restraint is perhaps excessive,
certainly it is stringent, but given the state of current verse, the Imagist experiments were far from needless. Monro commented further that H.D.'s poems were "as fragile as sea shells. If I came too near them I should be afraid of crushing them into the sand with my clumsy feet". The fragility of H.D.'s poems, however, has less to do with their size or their power than with the expectations of the reader. And their importance is as example; in showing how accuracy and faith in the innate musicality of language can produce poetic movement. As far as Monro's statement is concerned, H.D., like one or two other of the poets associated with Imagism, was to go on developing, producing poetry which, although evolving from her Imagist period, would transcend that phase.

Imagism had succeeded, if not as Williams claimed, at "ridding the field of verbiage", then at least at drawing attention to that verbiage and making available alternative techniques for those for whom originality and relevance in poetry was of some concern. It gave a semblance of formal necessity to the apparent amorphousness of free verse and it focussed on language as the medium of poetry in such a way as to make available current idiom and the innate rhythms of speech. Through Pound and the Imagists Williams managed to exorcise the poetic inversion, the archaism and the iamb.

In December 1913 Pound wrote to Williams commenting on the improvement in his poetic vocabulary. He added, "Your
syntax still strays occasionally from the simple order of natural speech". Good advice indeed, and accompanied by the encouragement: "I still think as always that in the end your work will hold. After all you have the rest of a lifetime." To Williams, slogging away in the pre-Others cultural vacuum of Rutherford, New Jersey, this was great praise from the 'divine Ezra'. In a letter written to Harriet Monroe the following year, however, he revealed his continuing insecurity, and his need for encouragement:

My dear Miss Monroe: certainly I can work for any imaginable period at the work I choose without the encouragement of recognition--but actually to have work of mine prove valuable to your purposes or to another's --doubles all my brilliances.

Not that alone--good, bad or stupid, what I have done clings to me horribly until someone relieves me by ridicule, praise or any positive action. Poetry cuts the rope between the ox and his dung. Pardon the coarse illusion. (Letters p. 27/8)

The "coarse illusion" is precisely what is most revealing about this letter. In his anxiety about the poems he sent for publication, Williams threw them down with a gesture of bravado. That there might be a reader for them was far too dangerous an assumption for him to confront at this early stage in his development, and the position he adopted, as usual, was defensive.

By 1917, however, with the security of reinforcements recruited during his time with the Others writers, he was able to capitalise on the lessons he had learned from the Imagists. In one or two poems which were written initially for Others and which were later included in Al Que Quiere!, the tone is more relaxed than previously, the vocabulary is
unforced and the syntax is stripped back in an attempt at exploiting, in a novel way, the potential rhythms of spoken language. In the poem 'Love Song', Williams has attempted to combine Imagist technique with his perennial obsession; the problem of locating human consciousness in an indifferent world. The poem is quoted in full:

Daisies are broken
petals are news of the day
stems lift to the grass tops
they catch on shoes
part in the middle
leave root and leaves secure

Black branches
carry square leaves
to the wood's top.
They hold firm
break with a roar
show the white!

Your moods are slow
the shedding of the leaves
and sure
the return in May!

We walked
in your father's grove
and saw the great oaks
lying with roots
ripped from the ground. (CEP 125)

This poem, originally published in December 1916 in Others, is among Williams' first to use a minimum of punctuation, and to drop the capital letter at the beginning of each line. The pace of the poem is dictated by the slight pause at the end of each line. Pound had warned, "Don't make each line stop dead at the end, and then begin every next line with a heave", and Williams had responded accordingly. The tone is quiet and the images, thus conveyed, camouflage their subversive intent. The content of the poem is sand-
wiched between an image of broken daisies and another of oaks ripped out by the roots. The introduction of human activity through "shoes" which trample the petals of flowers causes only temporary disruption of the natural order of growth. "Petals are news of the day / [which] stems lift to the grass tops" and "Black branches / carry square leaves / to the wood's top". Thus nature continually thrusts its products, with no need for consciousness, into the field of activity. The third stanza draws attention to the huge gulf between human consciousness, "mood", and the automatic cycle of natural regeneration. This is a blueprint for a major theme that Williams would explore in Kora in Hell and, more successfully, in Spring and All and 'The Descent of Winter'.

"Use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something," advised Pound. In this poem, Williams has responded to the maxim largely successfully, apart from having his branches "roar" (presumably the sound of the wind) at the end of stanza two. The one obviously metaphorical trope, "petals are news of the day", can be read metonymically as 'petals are new elements of the day', cleansing the word "news" and returning it refreshed to the contiguous movement of the poem.

The poem has not, of course, escaped the trap of orthodox symbolism. While the father figure in the final stanza is arguably located firmly within the logic of the poem, there is no mistaking his symbolic importance as the repre-
sentative of authority. His authority is evoked, however, simply in order to subvert it. He may claim ownership of this grove of trees, but he cannot finally prevent the natural and totally indifferent action of the elements. "Great oaks" with no attempt to convey a sense of loss, lie "with roots / ripped from the ground".

It is important to note here that the "we" who inhabit this poem do so (superficially) as observers. Williams has attempted to present the activity of the poem as detached from the futile relationship between the father who assumes ownership, and the land which exists unmoved by the claim.

In his 1946 **Briarcliff Quarterly** article, Williams placed Pound and the Imagists in a cultural tradition of "political, social and economic autocracy". He had parted from them largely because of his own concept of genius engendered by "great movements of the people". He wrote, referring to the evolution of American democracy during the "first quarter of the nineteenth century" that the process was, "of world importance in determining not only the destiny of democracy in this country but in redefining the basic meaning of political democracy the world over". 62

He continued:

*It was new and moving in the spirit. Those years with the bitter struggles between an aristocracy of whatever sort holding the economic power as well as the votes as opposed to universal suffrage and an economic power resident at least theoretically in the mass of the people, were among the most important in the history of America.*
The development of political democracy in America was important to Williams in that it was a historic equivalent of what he had experienced during his early years of struggle toward a poetic voice which was both uniquely his and representatively American. Pound and the Imagists had provided him with some valuable technical advice but their position was too far removed from Williams' local space. Part of the Whitman legacy (to be discussed in the following section) was to equate America with democracy. Consequently, an obvious strategy with which to distance the Imagists (and all other impressive individuals who operated outside the American continent) was to label them as antidemocratic and therefore reactionary. This tendency was modified, however, especially during the second decade of the twentieth century, when confronting the impressive activities of non-textual artists, particularly those painters whose work was associated with French experimentalism.

Gertrude Stein and Cubism

European Experimental painters had made their break with orthodoxy significantly earlier than the writers. Williams was able to claim a special affinity for their work without risk, however, since the difference in media separated them. But by claiming a greater than average understanding of Cézanne, Gris or Duchamp he was able to tap into a source of innovative energy. He wrote in 1928:
French painting...escaping the cliché of the predominant ism of the moment can be highly instructive to the writer--and has been to me--being as I believe it to have been for a hundred years one of the cleanest, most alert and fecund avenues of human endeavor, a positive point of intelligent insistence from which work may depart in any direction. (Embodiment 22)

In 1958, in an extended interview with Edith Heal which was published as I Wanted To Write A Poem, Williams claimed that he "might easily have become a painter...except that the articulate art of poetry gave a more immediate opportunity for the attack". (IWW 3)

Williams' mother had, in her youth, spent three years as an art student in Paris, and her link with the world of painting was an early influence on her son's view of the world. In his impressionistic portrait of his mother, Yes Mrs Williams (1959), he wrote:

I know now that Mother was not aware of the great names, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin, or anything of the rumors of the great exhibitions at the galleries of those years. She was no more than an obscure art student from Puerto Rico, slaving away at her trade which she loved with her whole passionate soul, living it, drinking it down with her every breath-- (Yes 5)

Williams' strategy here, and in other references he made to his mother's talent and training as a painter, was to stake his claim to territory which had by then become of primary importance to the development of twentieth-century aesthetics in the arts. His mother was an art student in Paris during the time when Impressionism was laying the foundations for the modernist revolution. What is more important is the way he described her non-involvement with the new movements. She is depicted as "slaving away at her trade",
thereby excluding the possibility of shallow attachment to currently fashionable movements.

The Armory Show brought French (and other European) experimentalism in art to the attention of the American people in 1913. The impact was immediate, disrupting American perspectives on cultural value, and providing a new context of possibilities for American artists searching for access to the avant-garde. Williams offered himself as the son of a French-trained painter and as a poet who had chosen not to pursue his own talent as a painter. Thus he could claim a significant understanding of the medium and techniques of painting, and having convinced himself of this, could feel a new and rewarding sense of collaboration in the movement forward which was not only taking place on his home ground, but was relatively free from influence anxiety.

The Armory Show was the largest exhibition of modern work ever to have been staged, and, as far as the American establishment was concerned, it was the first wave of an aesthetic invasion which was to revolutionise American art. There had been, however, several small exhibitions of individual European innovators which took place in New York, beginning with a selection of drawings by Auguste Rodin in 1908. There is much to be said for the claim that the man whose combination of critical insight and evangelical energy contributed most to the introduction of Modernism into America was Alfred Stieglitz. Bram Dijkstra has
mapped out in his book *The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech*

Stieglitz' significance as an impresario during the formative years of the New York avant-garde, and his subsequent availability as a focal point for the restless energies of young and frustrated American artists of all kinds. He claims:

Stieglitz was already known as the most daring experimenter in photography, and in the magazine he edited, *Camera Work*, he had recorded the development of photography in detail. Now he became the mentor of the experimental artists in New York, no matter in what medium they chose to express themselves. 63

While it is true that Stieglitz offered sanctuary at his little gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue, and encouraged the activities of many young artists, there was another figure without whom the picture might have been very different. Walter Conrad Arensberg's circle included such painters as Marcel Duchamp, Charles Demuth, and poets such as Mina Loy and Wallace Stevens, figures of similar stature to those of the Stieglitz group in the development of a native avant-garde. It is toward Arensberg's group that Williams found himself gravitating during the years immediately following the Armory Show.

It was Stieglitz, however, who provided the initial impetus that brought European experimentalism into the American consciousness. Through his exhibitions at 291, he wedged the Modernist foot in the door of American cultural complacency. As Dijkstra points out, after the exhibition of Rodin's drawings in January 1908, several exhibitions of European artists, including Matisse (1908 and 1910), Toul-
ouse-Lautrec (1909), Rousseau (1910), Cézanne (1911) and Picasso (1911) were held. He comments:

For all these artists this was their first comprehensive public showing in the United States. It is easy to imagine what kind of impression they made on young artists and writers searching for a way in which to express the incoherent sense of difference they felt between them and all that had gone before. 64

Stieglitz was important also for having provided space for many struggling American artists. Marsden Hartley (a close friend of Williams), John Marin, Arthur Dove, Max Weber and Georgia O'Keeffe are among those whose work was championed by Stieglitz. Camera Work was among the first, and was certainly one of the most influential of the alternative magazines. Under Stieglitz' editorship it offered experimental expression in opposition to the stale orthodoxy of the establishment.

Significantly, it is in Camera Work that Gertrude Stein first appeared in print in the United States. As John Malcolm Brinnin points out in his biography of Stein, The Third Rose, "when her word-portrait of Picasso appeared in the American periodical Camera Work, the composition went into history as the first public appreciation of the painter to be published anywhere". 65 The 'portrait' was published in 1912, and was an attempt at an equivalent in words of a cubist composition. What it reveals of Stein's structural objectification of language in sentence organisation must have seemed particularly bizarre at the time, and would doubtless have captured the interest of the New Jersey poet. A short extract is enough to reveal the
overall texture, its main strength emerging through repetition and a subtle modulation of key phrases, pushing away from the comfort of reference and into the confusing activity of words, the constituents of language:

This one was one having always something being coming out of him, something having completely a real meaning. This one was one whom some were following. This one was one who was working. This one was one who was working and he was one who was needing this thing, needing to be working so as to be one having some way of being one having some way of working. 66

Stein's insistent use of the verbal participal and gerund suggests a foregrounding of process, both in her portrayal of the artist Picasso and his work, and in her attitude to the language of creative writing. There is an essential element of continuation of the moment, pushing forward through experience in such a way as to avoid the intrusion of history as memory. This is manifest in her use of words like "being", "following", "working", "needing" and "having", a tendency which would find further expression in Williams' poetry. One of the more successful poems from Al Que Quiere!, 'Spring Strains', first published in Others in December 1916, functions by pushing the elements of the poem to the surface in an agitated impetuous diction which, like Stein's 'portrait', avoids the ordering tendency of memory:

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two blue-grey birds chasing
a third struggle in circles, angles,
swift convergings to a point that bursts instantly!
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Vibrant bowing limbs
pull downward, sucking in the sky
that bulges from behind, plastering itself
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It must be said here, that Stein's 'portrait' was published in 1912, while Williams was still involved with the rather less challenging precepts of Imagism. Indeed, his 'Spring Strains' retains a dependence on syntactical elegance which Williams was never to discard. Hence, Stein's work will always appear to be more strikingly experimental than his. Williams, however, was to take the radical experimentalism of Stein (and others) and to mould it for his own purpose into poetry which was both radical and finely wrought. Her importance is that she appeared alongside the dazzling achievements of the French painters, a year before the Armory Show, and in a medium which was immediately applicable to Williams' work. In 1928 he wrote:

What is the meaning of Gertrude Stein's work? Language being made up of words, the spaces between words and their configurations. Gertrude Stein's work means that these materials are real and must be understood, in letters, to supe rcede in them all ideas, facts, movements which they may under other circumstances be asked to signify. (Embodiment 17)

Stein's work drew attention for Williams to the non-referential axis of language, making available an approach to the medium of poetry which concentrated on its innate properties as material. He saw her as having provided a timely example of a new approach to language in "a valuable record" which "permanently states that writing, to be of value to the intelligence is not made up of ideas, emotions, data, but of words in configurations fresh to our senses" (Embodiment 17). The freshness of Stein's config-
urations leads to possibilities normally considered outside the bounds of good prose. As in a cubist painting like Picasso's 1910 *Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler* (Plate 1), the cumulative effect of the verbal faceting allows a compacted, non-sequential field to develop, into which the reader/observer must move with intelligence activated in order to engage the whole. There is no sense of being led or instructed as in orthodox prose. The first sentence in Stein's Picasso 'portrait' is not necessarily the only access point, if indeed, the text is conventionally accessible. Like the portrait of Kahnweiler, Stein's 'Picasso' depends on pushing to the surface, in a way which deflects mnemonic intrusion, the elements used in the process of construction. As Williams commented in an essay on Stein first published in January 1930:

Having taken the words to [sic] her choice to emphasise further what she has in mind she has completely unlinked them (in her most recent work) from their former relationships in the sentence. This was absolutely essential and unescapable. Each under the new arrangement has a quality of its own, but not conjoined to carry the burden science, philosophy and...law and order have been laying upon them in the past. They are like a crowd at Coney Island, let us say, seen from an airplane. (Imag 349)

Stein's example was to show the potential in sentences for movement away from referential logic. The absence of this associative and sequential reassurance leaves the reader with the movement of design, moving in more than one direction. But to smother the denotative function of words beneath all that accumulation was to introduce a disquieting closure whereby the reader lost contact with an assumed
centricity in language as consciousness and suffered the contingent loss of status. The common response; "this repetitious drivel is an insult to my intelligence!" so often expressed in confrontation with modernist painting, is, paradoxically, an extremely valid one. The kind of intelligence which requires reassurance, from the arts, of its primacy in the hierarchy of values will recoil in horror from the implications of Stein's fragmentary deconstructions.

Williams' close friend and co-editor of Contact, Robert McAlmon, was among those who reacted badly to Stein's writing. In a vitriolic piece which appeared in The Exile in 1928, he cited Leo Stein as having said, "Gertrude can't think consecutively for ten seconds". The point is, of course, that thinking is rarely a consecutive process, whereas orthodox prose is a medium which tends to suggest that it is. Stein's writing, on the other hand, was an attempt to disconnect language as words and phrases from the authoritative myth of narrowly sequential thinking. Her work makes available a new perspective on language, re-aligning it with meaning on a more dynamic basis by demanding a higher level of activity in the consciousness of the reader. For Williams, in his search for an appropriate system of language construction for application to the raw exigencies of the American ground, Stein's break with orthodoxy was ideal. As Hugh Kenner has pointed out; Stein once described America as the "oldest country in the
world...because it has been living in the twentieth century longer than any other country". Stein's was a language cleansed of association, which could be taken and applied to the conditions of the twentieth century as they were most dramatically manifest, in the United States. Kenner described the style as monotonous in the way that electricity is monotonous, "like Morse Code":

Pressed flat into ritual symmetries, that was how Miss Stein intuited twentieth-century language; and when she told Hemingway that remarks were not literature, she was enjoining him not to let a sentence escape from the system, and acquire a trajectory, and claim to be "about" something. She was the Mondrian of prose, and her intuitions were often profound, even as her prose was often unreadable. Her prose was resisting a drag toward lyric nostalgia.

It is just this movement away from nostalgia, in the opposite direction from Pound and Eliot, which makes her prose "often unreadable". As a system, her language is perhaps too self-contained, denying the basically referential, even metaphoric nature of writing. A cubist painting like Picasso's Kahnweiler looks aggressively toward abstraction in a way that writing cannot. The adult human being has so deeply invested consciousness in language as the only medium of meaningful exchange, that to move counter to that creates a disturbing closure. No matter what the intent of the author, the reader will construct a pattern of association in order to make some kind of coherence appear as the end product. Williams recognised this. In an article on the work of Marianne Moore (originally written in 1923) he probed the problem of identifying "which is poetry and
which the impost" when "only its accidental colours make it
tolerable to most" (Imag 313). People's expectations of
poetry tend to embrace all work which conforms, which
offers recognisable meaning couched in familiar structure.
He continued:

Good modern work, far from being the fragmentary,
neurotic thing its disunderstanders think it is, is
nothing more than work compelled by these conditions.
It is a multiplication of impulses that by their sev­
eral flights, crossing at all eccentric angles, might
enlighten. As a phase in its slightest beginning, it
is more a disc pierced here and there by light; it is
really distressingly broken up. But so does any attack
seem at the moment of engagement, multiple units crazy
except when viewed as a whole.

The enlightenment which results from "good modern work" is
something which emerges as a structural part of the work
and not as the point de repaire, the subjective focus, and
that enlightenment can only be properly realised when the
work is "viewed as a whole". If one looks for the normal
features one associates with the painted portrait, e.g,
nose, mouth, eyes etc., Picasso's Kahnweiler yields up
little as reassurance. However, the emergence of the
portrait through an engagement with the overall design
appears with a freshness and humour which involves, even
constructs as integral, the assumed intelligence of the
observer. It is one of Stein's achievements to have offered
an equivalent strategy in language as a usable technique
for modern writers. This may well be due to her associ­
tion with such innovatory talents as Picasso and Matisse.
Like Pound she showed an astonishingly incisive critical
insight by which she recognised elements of real value in
unknown and often prohibitively esoteric talents. McAlmon offers Leo Stein's explanation, in the 1928 article, that it was only after he had discovered Picasso and the paintings had been hanging in their flat for two years, "that Gertrude began to think that she sensed a quality". He also quotes Leo as having said repeatedly: "Gertrude does not know what words mean. She hasn't much intuition, but thickly she has sensations". Of course it matters little how long it took Stein to appreciate the quality of the painters. What matters is that her involvement with them, and her concurrent, equivalent experiments in creative prose have drawn attention to her work as of similar value to theirs in the advance toward the establishment of a modernist tradition in the arts.

In his 'portrait' of Stein, McAlmon included an oblique reference to the occasion of Williams' only meeting with her. In September 1927 Williams appeared with McAlmon at Stein's studio apartment not long after Pound had visited there. There was some antipathy between Pound and Stein, and, as Paul Mariani has pointed out, Stein's uncomplimentary comments on Pound's writing and social graces put Williams on the defensive. His nervousness caused him subsequently to make a tactical faux pas. While showing him a considerable quantity of unpublished manuscripts, Stein asked for his advice. Williams advised: sort out the best, burn the rest. McAlmon took up the story:

"No, oh no, no, no, no; that isn't possible. You would not find a painter destroying any of his sketches. A
writer's writing is too much of a writer's being; his flesh child. No, no, I never destroy a sentence or a word of what I write. You may, but of course writing is not your métier." 72

Stein's snub, like others Williams felt he had received at the hands of contemporary artists, would have added, no doubt, to the insecurity he already felt in confrontation with the more established members of the avant-garde. Stein, Joyce, Marcel Duchamp, Pound, even McAlmon who had been Williams' protégé, were among the bright lights of the expatriate scene, whose lifestyles were markedly unconventional in comparison with his own bourgeois existence. He was a securely married, securely employed suburban physician, one who could be labelled an amateur writer. However, he was not so wounded by her treatment of him that he was unable to respond with intelligence to her work. The following year he wrote:

Her genius is in that, primarily she has been one of the discoverers of the place where writing is to be attacked, a new plane—or as I say polarity. It is very primitive, very crude—but it is placed in the right location.

Naturally she cannot be expected to be read—yet. (Embodiment 118)

Here Stein was being recruited into Williams' crack unit of avant-gardists, to be brought into action, to the attack, as in this salvo from 'The Work of Gertrude Stein', published in Pagany in 1930:

It [Stein's writing] is a revolution of some proportions...whose basis is humanity in a relationship with literature hitherto little contemplated.

And at the same time it is a general attack on the scholastic viewpoint that medieval remnant with whose effects from generation to generation literature has been infested to its lasting detriment. (Imag 348/9)
Scholasticism and the cultural tradition to which so many of his generation of writers had been attracted was a ground from which Williams had excluded himself. His isolation brought with it a need for allies, and here again (as with Burke's essay on Laforgue already quoted) he felt compelled to superimpose his own tactical theories onto the work of another experimental writer. It is difficult to see a humanistic element in much of Stein's persistently exclusive prose, especially those books which, like Tender Buttons (1914) are most experimentally innovative. It was her eccentricity, her stubbornly meticulous attention to the interaction of words in their immediate physicality (as opposed to their orthodox literary associative or symbolic function) which made her attractive to Williams as a potentially impressive ally. Perhaps her most attractive attribute in the post-Armory Show years was her association with artists such as Picasso and Matisse, paintings by whom Williams would have seen on the walls of her apartment in Paris. Through Camera Work and by word-of-mouth among the New York bohemians her name, linked with the painters, must have taken on a mythic quality. As Mabel Dodge commented in the issue of Camera Work which appeared just after the Armory Show: "Gertrude Stein is doing with words what Picasso is doing with paint. She is impelling language to induce new states of consciousness and in doing so language becomes with her a creative art rather than a mirror of history." 73 Williams, in his eagerness to include Stein
in his fight against the 'scholiasts', displayed a crude inconsistency of argument. While castigating Eliot and Pound for retreating to Europe and for taking on European cultural values, he implicitly absolved Stein of identical treasons. He shows the same tendency in various of his statements in support of Joyce, McAlmon and Picasso. What this indicates is that the basic motivation for his defense of American values in the arts was more to do with personal anxiety than with cultural ideology. However, notwithstanding his convoluted motivation, the fact is that he brought his developing poetic into contact with her innovative work at a time when he was able to gain much at very little risk to his personal security. Stein was not seen as a 'poet', but her linguistic techniques were directly applicable in their foregrounding of the medium of construction, and their sublimation of meaning.

The Armory Show and 'New York Dada'

Stein came to America with the Armory Show, and her work was picked out, with that of the more audacious of the painters, for ridicule and abuse. The Chicago Tribune of February 8, 1913 quipped:

I called the canvas Cow with Cud
And hung it on the line,
Altho' to me 'twas vague as mud
'Twas clear to Gertrude Stein. 74

Stein's writing, like the European and European-influenced painting which appeared at the show, was too radically
removed from the norm for the American establishment to stomach easily. While the revolution in the arts had to some extent been gradually acknowledged in Europe, apart from the relatively few visitors to Stieglitz' 291 gallery, most Americans had been unaware that any real change had taken place. Stieglitz had made the exciting innovations of Modernist painting available to those, mostly artists themselves, who really wanted to see it. The Armory Show thrust it into the public gaze. Williams recalled that it:

shocked New Yorkers into a realization, a visualization, that their world had been asleep while the art world had undergone a revolution. In Paris painters from Cézanne to Pissarro had been painting their revolutionary canvases for fifty or more years but it was not until I clapped eyes on Marcel Duchamp's Nude Descending a Staircase that I burst out laughing from the relief it brought me! I felt as if an enormous weight had been lifted from my spirit for which I was infinitely grateful. 75

The real importance of the show for Williams was that it lent a wider definition to what he believed he was attempting to do by forcing the American cultural establishment at least to notice that a revolution in the arts was taking place. By defining the area of opposition as modern, a new field was created wherein young dissatisfied artists might function.

Barbara Rose has described the Armory Show as "the most important event in the history of American modernism". 76 Contemporary critics were somewhat less complimentary. Richard McLanathan, in his study, The American Tradition in the Arts, has drawn attention to the problems facing American critics unused to such departures in painting. The
exhibition was described as, "degenerate, insane, diseased, lurid, vicious, anarchistic, and a leering effrontery". 77

McLanathan comments:

But from reading the serious critics, one must sympathise with the shock felt by men who, without preparation, were suddenly brought face to face with the facts of the art of their own day; but with very few exceptions, the critics knew as little as the people in general of what had been going on, not only in Europe, but also in the studios of many of their own countrymen. 78

The exhibition, organised by a group of practising artists, presented some 1300 works of art, about one third of which were European. However, although dominated numerically by American exhibits, the Armory Show was projected into the history books by the European. The bias of the selectors assured the non-representative nature of the show. There was an unavoidably Parisian flavour which persisted in dominating American perspectives on modernist art. There were only two German Expressionist paintings, and, because they were refused their own space in the show, the Italian Futurists refused altogether to exhibit. There were other notable exclusions such as Robert Delaunay, the founder of Orphic Cubism, and Max Weber, described by Barbara Rose as, "the single American painter in America at the moment whose works could stand comparison with European Cubism". 79

It was following the shake up of American arts achieved by the Armory Show that dazzling figures, important to the development of an American vortex, such as Duchamp, Picabia, Mina Loy, the Baroness Elsa von Freytag Loringhoven,
Man Ray and many others began to surface in New York. These figures formed the nucleus of what became New York's equivalent of Dada.

To proceed any further it is necessary here to identify the aesthetic qualities and the impact of Dada within the modernist context. The Roumanian Dadaist Marcel Janco has warned that "however much may be true of dada, the historian qualified to write about it does not yet exist. Dada is by no means a school and certainly not a brotherhood, nor is it a perfume. It is not a philosophy either". 80

It is generally agreed among those who have bravely attempted such history, and among those involved, that Zurich was the proper birthplace of Dada activity. But there is some truth in the proposition that energy generated concurrently in post-Armory Show New York contributed somewhat to the movement. America was a neutral country during the period 1914 to 1917 when Europe was in the throes of the most terrible war ever experienced by humanity, so New York became an ideal oasis for those artists whose disgust for the war had forced them out of their own countries. In a letter to The Egoist in 1916 Williams recalled:

In New York in the spring of 1915, one was feeling a strange quickening of artistic life. It seems that due to the preoccupation of Paris and London in cruder affairs, New York has taken over those spiritual controls for which no one had any time in the war-swept countries. Here was a chance to assert oneself magnificently. (Letters 30)

The Armory Show had introduced European art to New York and had stimulated interest among some discerning collectors
for the work of innovators. The aesthetic of the day, championed by Duchamp with his 'readymades', was one which tried to draw attention to the nature of art by undermining traditional cultural values. Since art and culture were aspects of European intellectual hegemony (against which Williams was becoming entrenched), America, with its younger generation of dissident artists, searching for new modes of expression, proved an ideal testing ground for this latest phase of modernistic iconoclasm. The roots of New York Dada, however, were firmly embedded in Cubism and Italian Futurism. Duchamp's notorious painting, Nude Descending a Staircase (Plate 2), was a multi-faceted composition, painted in 1912, showing the influence of multi-frame photography, very similar to that surfacing in paintings by such Italian Futurists as Giacomo Balla and Umberto Boccioni. However, since the Futurists were not represented at the Armory Show, it was Cubism that appeared in New York as the most avant-garde of the European movements. The analytical approach and careful balancing of compositional elements betrayed a basic faith in the tradition of art; and these were aspects which fed most profoundly into the American field. The finely structured paintings of Morton Schamberg owe much to Duchamp and Picabia, and through them to the work of Picasso and Braque. Even Duchamp's The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even (Plate 3), painted on glass in New York between 1915 and 1923 (when he abandoned it as "definitely un-
finished") was, in essence, a mixed media paint and collage piece, scrupulously planned and executed, enlivened by tricks of perspective and associative reference to machine parts, which places it firmly in the tradition of cultural inheritance. No matter how much dissident artists might preach about art as process, the end product was invariably ownable. Duchamp, Man Ray, Schamberg, Demuth, Picabia, all made pictures which ended up in museums, or in the private collections of the successful bourgeoisie. Hans (Jean) Arp claimed:

The bourgeois regarded the Dadaist as a dissolute monster, a revolutionary villain, a barbarous Asiatic, plotting against his bells, his safe-deposits, his honours list. The Dadaist thought up tricks to rob the bourgeois of his sleep....The Dadaist gave the bourgeois a sense of confusion and distant, yet mighty rumbling, so that his bells began to buzz, his safes frowned, and his honours list broke out in spots. 81

Accordingly the New York exponents of post-Futurism were, on the whole, not Dadaists.

Perhaps New York, removed as it was from the realities of the war, was simply too comfortable a place for artists to engender the kind of energetic disgust, not only with the artistic tradition, but also with the socio-political milieux, which characterised European Dada. In America's equivalent of Dada the jokes were for fun. In Europe they were deadly serious attempts at subversion, and a re-align-ment on international grounds of artists against tradition. Arp recalled:

Revolted by the butchery of the 1914 World War, we in Zurich devoted ourselves to the arts. While the guns rumbled in the distance, we sang, painted, made colla-
ges and wrote poems with all our might. We were seeking an art based on fundamentals, to cure the madness of the age, and a new order of things that would restore the balance between heaven and hell. 82

This considerable degree of commitment and revolutionary fervour was energised by the unconventional wit and irreverence of such figures as Tristan Tzara and George and Marcel Janco. Tzara was soon to become the driving force of Dada activities and the main propagandist. He contributed to non-collectable artistic activities such as the simultaneous poem 'L'Amiral cherche une maison a louer', described here by Alan Young: "In the version printed in Cabaret Voltaire [Richard] Huelsenbeck speaks in German, Tzara in French, while Janco croons an American popular song, rendered into print in a strange phonetic spelling." 83

The principal aesthetic position from which the Dadaists directed their energy in this and other 'works' was, ironically, anti-aesthetic, anti-culture. Their medium, art, was also the primary target for the attack. Their various statements and manifestos were interestingly reminiscent of those made by the Futurists several years earlier. In 1909 the 'Founding and First Manifesto of Futurism', largely the work of Marinetti, proclaimed that "the essential elements of our poetry will be courage, audacity and revolt. We wish to exalt too aggressive movement, feverish insomnia, running, the perilous leap, the cuff, the blow". 84 This frenzied tone has an element of immature insecurity turning to the aggression and novelty of speed as an alternative to bourgeois boredom. The Futurists pledged further to "des-
troy museums and libraries, and fight against moralism, feminism, and all utilitarian cowardice". The post-war dissidents were, understandably, somewhat less infatuated with the language of violence, but their proclamations are remarkably similar in effect. In 1918 Tzara's Manifesto offered its message of disgust, and its demand for change:

Every product of disgust capable of becoming a negation of the family is dada; protest with all the strength of one's being in destructive action: DADA; knowledge of all the methods rejected up to this time by the prudish sex of easy compromise and civility: DADA; abolition of logic (the dance of those who are creatively impotent) ...DADA; abolition of memory: DADA; abolition of archæology....Freedom: DADA DADA DADA, howls of thrilling colours, interlacing of opposites and all contradictions, utter absurdities, inconsistencies; LIFE. 85

Also in 1918, Picabia had returned to Europe and added his energies to the efforts of the Zurich group. This new alliance, especially between Picabia and Tzara, heralded a move away from Zurich so that the focus shifted once more to Paris. Gabrielle Buffet, Picabia's wife, described the initial outcome of the union:

The meeting of 391 and Dada was celebrated in new issues of 391 and The Dada Review. 391 appeared on bright pink paper. Arp, Tzara, Picabia and myself contributed to the two magazines, not only with individual work but by the execution in common of an illustration for Dada Nos. 3 and 4. [Actually Dada 4/5 (Reveil Matin)] Every detail of this illustration is still fresh in my mind. The medium was an old alarm clock which we bought for a few cents and took apart. The detached pieces were bathed in ink and then imprinted at random on paper. All of us watched over the execution of this automatic masterpiece. The magazine was printed in the awe-inspiring lair of a revolutionary Swiss printer who happened to be out of prison, and who at last restored my conception of the anarchist type, which had been quite upset by my experience of the anarchist club in New York. 86
Interestingly, the cogs and flywheels in the illustration described by Buffet are distributed in a way which is far from random (Plate 4). They connect in sequences which suggest their operational value, and are set among geometric shapes which suggest both the pictorial frame and a mechanistic equivalent of facial features, not so far removed from Picasso's Kahnweiler. Even in the hands of the most radical of artists, the vocabulary of association ironically undermines attempts to undermine. Art is invariably tamed by the consumer. Perhaps New York, with its material consumption rampant, its acquisitiveness in lieu of culture, was ripe for the relaxed humour of 'subjectism' whereby art was in the recognition, not in the making. Williams wrote in his 'Prologue' to Kora in Hell that "according to Duchamp...a stained-glass window that had fallen out and lay more or less together on the ground was of far greater interest than the thing conventionally composed in situ" (Imag 8). This, reported from a conversation with Arensberg, was in answer to Williams' earnest enquiry into the nature of the new aesthetic. He continued:

We returned to Arensberg's sumptuous studio where he gave further point to his remarks by showing me what appeared to be the original of Duchamp's famous "Nude Descending a Staircase". But this, he went on to say, is a full sized photographic print of the first picture with many new touches by Duchamp himself and so by the technique of its manufacture as by other means it is a novelty. (Imag 8/9)

Novelty had become the obsession of the avant-garde.
Williams was caught up in the feverish excitement of novelty for art's sake. In his own quest for a space uninfected by tradition, the idea that untrod routes had opened up that might lead to a frontier of American creative significance was too great an opportunity to miss. The Dadaistic energy of New York in the post-war years stimulated Williams' creativity, and while it had no lasting measurable effect on his mature poetic, it provided him with a stimulating ambience and contact with a group of experimental writers who would. Meanwhile the dazzling radicalism of various artists, and the superficial dazzle of many others, presented the somewhat bemused poet with a web of possibilities, but a web which was sticky with contingent distractions, one of which was the eccentricity and aggression of the Baroness Elsa Von Freytag Loringhoven. Her puzzling work (in various media, occasionally mixed) appeared sporadically, along with that of other anarchic artists, in the little magazines that were struggling, during the early twenties, to stay in circulation. Williams met 'The Baroness' probably in the spring of 1920. He had become an established contributor to The Little Review, a magazine which, as Alan Young commented in Dada and After, "laid claim to having encouraged a Dadaist spirit in New York". John Rodker, writing in The Little Review in August 1920 remarked that "it is possible that Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven is the first Dadaist in New York and that The Little Review has discovered her". 88
That same year, in March, a Dadaist 'poem' by the Baroness appeared in the magazine, including the lines:

Klink--Hratzvenga  
(Deathwail)

Narin--Tzarissamanili  
(He is dead)

Idrich mitzdonja--astatooch  
Ninj--iffe kniek--  
Ninj--iffe kniek!  
Arr--karr--  
Arrkarr--barr  
Karrarr--barr--  
Arr--  
Arrkarr--  
Mardar  
Mar--doorde--dar-- 89

In his Autobiography Williams recalled visiting Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, editors of The Little Review:

At their apartment I...saw for the first time, under a glass bell, a piece of sculpture that appeared to be chicken guts, possibly imitated in wax. It caught my eye. I was told it was the work of a titled German woman, Elsa von Freytag Loringhoven, a fabulous creature, well past fifty, whom the Little Review was protecting. Would I care to meet her, for she was crazy, it was said, about my work.

I wrote, fatally, to Margaret or Jane, saying I wanted to meet the woman. (Auto 164)

Williams, the bourgeois family man, was obviously flattered by this attention from one who was so obviously a member of the bohemian avant-garde. He saw the eccentric activity of the European Dadaist as exciting and confusing and he struck up a relationship with her which was to cause him some personal anxiety. She had expressed admiration, however, for Williams' 'Improvisations' which had been appearing in The Little Review, and he could find comfort in her response, which acknowledged his inclusion among the
experimentalists currently working in New York.

The 'Improvisations' were gathered together for the book *Kora in Hell* (1920), a work which Williams would always cherish, a serious attempt by him to break loose the chains of nineteenth-century poetic tradition. He has described the book as, "the first piece of continuous prose I remember writing" (*IWW* 31). Pound was, as usual, uncomfortably close to the mark when he drew Williams' attention to the French prose-poem tradition, and to Rimbaud in particular. The 'Improvisations' are constructed around the potential for design in language rather than the overtly referential activity of orthodox prose. In this way Williams has responded to the model provided by Gertrude Stein. They are essentially disjointed and fragmented in classic modernist form, but they betray a superficial involvement in the avant-garde preoccupations of the day. Hans Arp's description of Dadaistic "automatic poetry" is of interest here:

Automatic poetry springs directly from the poet's bowels or other organs, which have stored up reserves of original material....The poet crows, curses, sighs, stutters, yodels, as he pleases. His poems are like Nature. Unregarded trifles, or what men call trifles, are as precious to him as the sublimest rhetoric, for in Nature, a tiny particle is as beautiful and important as a star. Man was the first who presumed to judge what was beautiful and what was ugly. 90

It may be of interest to note here that, while Williams displays his debt to Stein, the Dadaists and to late nineteenth-century French poets like Rimbaud, his concentration on automatic writing as a means of accessing elements of
the unconscious to some extent anticipates Surrealism. In Kora in Hell the unconscious is equated with the hellish underworld, constantly threatening to erupt through into the conscious world. Williams attempts to activate the sub-surface potential of human existence by improvisation, forcing the language into contact with experience without giving time for consideration, tact or convention. In the immediate recess of these fragments, one finds a repressed sexuality struggling for expression against an unsophisticated morality, an element which is comparable to Stein's sublimation of lesbian sexuality in a work like Tender Buttons. Williams wrote:

To you! whoever you are, wherever you are! (But I know where you are!) There's Durer's "Nemesis" naked on her sphere over the little town by the river--except she's too old. There's a dancing burgess by Tenier and Villon's maîtresse--after he'd gone bald and was skin pocked and toothless; she that had him ducked in the sewage drain. Then there's that miller's daughter of "buttocks broad and breasts high." Something of Nietzsche, something of the good Samaritan, something of the devil himself,—can cut a caper of a fashion, my fashion! Hey you, the dance! Squat. Leap. Hips to the left. Chin--ha!--sideways! Stand up, stand up ma bonne! you'll break my backbone. So again!—and so forth till we're sweat soaked. (Imag 56)

This impetuous prose strains away from the normal sequential syntax of reference. The tone is aggressive and the movement is constantly disrupted in a way which draws the readers' attention to the sound and to the connotative variants available in words and phrases as they separate from the whole. Williams equated the problems of expressing the sub-conscious with the repressive way that modern poetry was being treated by the establishment. He wrote an
(italicised) extension for the piece just quoted, in lucid narrative prose:

Some fools once were listening to a poet reading his poem. It so happened that the words of the thing spoke of gross matters of the everyday world such as are never much hidden from a quick eye. Out of these semblances, and borrowing certain members from fitting masterpieces of antiquity, the poet began piping up his music, simple fellow, thinking to please his listeners. But they getting the whole matter sadly muddled in their minds made such a confused business of listening that not only were they not pleased at the poet's exertions but no sooner had he done than they burst out against him with violent imprecations. (Imag 56)

Williams edited the 'Improvisations' from writing carried out daily over one year. Many of the resultant prose pieces were utterly unintelligible; "pure nonsense" is how he described what was rejected. They emerged from Williams' expressed need to write out of the conscious (and sub-conscious) experience of living in the (new) world. The poet's departure from the conventions of recognisable verse can be interpreted here as a radical wrench away from all 'poetic' constraints. In the 'Prologue', written last, he explained:

By the brokenness of his composition the poet makes himself master of a certain weapon which he could possess himself of in no other way. The speed of the emotions is sometimes such that thrashing about in a thin exultation or despair many matters are touched but not held, more often broken by the contact. (Imag 16)

The process of writing, although not quite 'automatic writing', is unrestricted here by any conventional concept of verse, including free verse, and is therefore, presumably, less restricted in its trajectory. Given such breadth of latitude, however, Williams experienced a kind of cultu-
ral vertigo, and this led him to cast around for something with which to anchor himself. He wrote, again in the 'Prologue', somewhat revealingly:

Together with Mina Loy and a few others Duchamp and Arensberg brought out the paper The Blind Man, to which Robert Carlton Brown, with his vision of suicide by diving from a high window of the Singer Building, contributed a few poems.

In contradistinction to their south, Marianne Moore's statement to me at the Chatham Parsonage one afternoon --my wife and I were just on the point of leaving--sets up a north: My work has come to have just one quality of value in it: I will not touch or have to do with those things which I detest. In this austerity of mood she finds sufficient freedom for the play she chooses. (Imag 10)

The language of this passage is interesting. The first group; Loy, Duchamp, Arensberg, Brown, come together with the magazine The Blind Man and are encompassed in the phrase "vision of suicide" in an attempt to touch on the energy and romanticism of the Dadaists. To counter this we have, "my wife and I" on a polite afternoon visit at the parsonage at Chatham, where Marianne Moore clearly places herself outside what she detests. The point is that Williams, in his anxiety as to the soundness of either position, hedges his bets and oscillates in his tentative contact with both. As to the 'Improvisations', many of them have a tendency to slip away from the Steinian model into a strained, heightened prose. And, to add closure to indirection, many of the pieces are halted by the addition of explicatory passages. In his attempt to relocate and re-originate those myths which had, in some cases, become excuses for empty rhetoric, what Williams described in
Eliot as "attenuated intellectuality", he occasionally felt it necessary to provide such connectives as he would later reject as redundant. An example from the 'Improvisations' (XVI [2]), followed by the clarification, will illustrate the point:

Giants in the dirt. The gods, the Greek gods, smothered in filth and ignorance. The race is scattered over the world. Where is its home? Find it if you've the genius. Here Hebe with a sick jaw and a cruel husband, --her mother left no place for a brain to grow. Herakles rowing boats on Berry's Creek! Zeus is a country doctor without a taste for coin jingling. Supper is a bastard nectar on rare nights for they will come--the rare nights! The ground lifts and out sally the heroes of Sophokles, of AEschylus. They go seeping down into our hearts, they rain upon us and in the bog they sink again down through the white roots, down--to a saloon back of the rail-road switch where they have that girl, you know, the one that should have been Venus by the lust that's in her. They've got her down there among the railroad men. A crusade couldnt rescue her. Up to jail--or call it down to Limbo--the Chief of Police our Pluto? It's all of the gods, there's nothing else worth writing of. They are the same men they always were--but fallen. Do they dance now, they that danced beside Hellicon? They dance much as they did then, only few have an eye for it, through the dirt and fumes.

When they came to question the girl before the local judge it was discovered that there were seventeen men more or less involved so that there was nothing to do but to declare the child a common bastard and send the girl about her business. Her mother took her in and after the brat died of pneumonia a year later she called the police one day. An officer opened the bedroom door. The girl was in bed with an eighteen year old fellow, a young roaming loafer with a silly grin to his face. They forced a marriage which relieved the mother of her burden. The girl was weak minded so that it was only with the greatest difficulty that she could cover her moves, in fact she never could do so with success. (Imag 60/61)

It must be pointed out here that Williams' major strategy in this piece is to combine ancient Greek myth and contem-
porary material in just the way that he criticised so
vigorously in Eliot, Pound and others. Joyce's *Ulysses* and
Pound's *Cantos*, currently emerging in serial form, fore-
grounded the self-same contextualising strategy, typical of
modernist technique.

The abrupt, eccentric style of the first piece, along
with its darting back and forth from the past to the pres-
ent, from myth to 'reality', bringing them into enforced
co-existence as text, is in marked contrast with the narra-
tive orthodoxy of the second. This strategy, transparently
ambivalent and insecure, suspends the consciousness of the
whole precariously somewhere between the two extremes.
What emerges is a search pattern, but one which does not,
on the whole, culminate in the solution of realised design.
The real value of this experiment was that it resulted,
accidently or otherwise, in a crude dialectic, a fact which
Williams recognised, perhaps toward the end of its process
of composition. In one of the inserted sections he wrote:

> Between two contending forces there may at all times
> arrive that moment when the stress is equal on both
> sides so that with a great pushing a great stability
> results giving a picture of perfect rest. (Imag 32/33)

This ambivalence is symptomatic of Williams' poetic during
his development toward *Spring and All* (1923), and resulted
in compromise passages, statements to justify the element
of anti-culture in his work. For example, in *Al Que Quiere!*
there is a poem, 'Pastoral' (CEP 124), first published in
1915, which attempts to equate "little sparrows" and an old
man "who goes about / gathering dog lime" with an "Epis-
copal minister / approaching the pulpit / of a Sunday". By shifting the accepted hierarchical perspective, anxiety is generated and the poem falters through defensive phrases like, "we who are wiser" and "these things / astonish me beyond words." Language, for Williams, was still the means by which he, among those "who are wiser", was able to construct systems of connectives and justifications at the centre of which was the subjective human consciousness. As Hans Arp commented: "Man was the first who presumed to judge what was beautiful and what was ugly." 91 For Williams at that time, this element of arbitration was essential to the focus of poetry. The language remains as a lively formal display, probing at, but never quite transcending its basic referential core. There is evidence in various individual poems from Al Que Quiere!, however, that he was occasionally breaking free from the gravitational pull of subjective reference in the language of poetry. But the subjective dazzle of so much that was happening around him masquerading as 'the new' must have increased his anxiety and confused his own progress toward a poetic medium cleansed of crude association. In 'Sub Terra', the opening poem, the question is posed: "--God, if I could fathom / the guts of shadows!" (CEP 118). 'The Wanderer', a long Whitmanesque poem which appeared in the same volume, asks, "How shall I be a mirror to this modernity?" (CEP 3) betraying a poetic flaw as the major barrier to what is sought. All around Williams 'modernity' was flowering in a con-
fusion of varieties such as Cubism, Fauvism, Futurism, Imagism, Vorticism and Dada, all with their heroic proclaimers pushing through a welter of definitive statements claiming particular relevance to the age. From outside this activity must have appeared chaotic, and only after the hubbub had subsided could the real value of each be assessed and their proper relationships be established.

Williams was a microcosm of his age, whose eclecticism periodically clogged his developing poetic. He tended to respond to the surface excitement of various of the 'movements' in his anxious need to be a "mirror to this modernity", instead of concentrating upon what was to become a major strength, his engagement with the "guts of shadows", or, to be more accurate, their eventual 'gutlessness', the withdrawal of the human consciousness as judgement on the hierarchy of things. Williams, then, as the "man in the welter" had to contend with the confusing necessity of 'novelty' and his search for definition involved him in a lengthy process. As Hugh Kenner put it in A Homemade World: "Keats was Keats by 24;...Williams became Williams only at 40; in the great deal he had written before Spring and All we discover a few interesting anthology pieces". 92 Although this statement is a gross exaggeration, Williams having achieved a number of remarkably impressive poems in Al Que Quiere! (1917), Kora in Hell (1920), and Sour Grapes (1921), its basic premise is accurate. During the years between his first publication, Poems (1909), and Spring and
All (1923), Williams had to drag his poetic out from under the weight of the English tradition (as exemplified in Keats), through the marketplace of bright influences on offer during the surfacing activity of Modernism with all its contingent excitement, and into a space he had claimed and staked out for himself.

T.S.Eliot

The year 1915 was a watershed year for the development of Williams' poetic. It was the year in which he first encountered Kreymborg and Loy, Arensberg and Duchamp. It was the year in which he began appearing with his new found allies in Others, producing poems which were evidence of his breakthrough. Poems like 'Pastoral' and 'The Ogre' showed him turning his back on the polished metaphoric strategies of the Imagists, moving into a more flattened, conversational contiguity which would increasingly, and often ironically, characterise the surface of his work. It was also the year in which Eliot first collided with the American avant-garde with the genius of his 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' which appeared in Poetry in June. As if this trespass were not enough, Eliot invaded the haven of Others later that same year with another 'masterpiece' entitled 'Portrait of a Lady'. He very quickly became the focus of attention as the most accomplished of the modern English language poets, and he remained so
virtually for the rest of his career. As such he became, as far as Williams was concerned, the arch enemy of American poetry, having diverted attention from William Carlos Williams as the pioneer destined to take the language (like a waggon train) to the untamed interior of American reality. In the 'Prologue' he wrote:

It is convenient to have fixed standards of comparison: All antiquity! And there is always some everlasting Polonius of Kensington forever to rate highly his eternal Eliot. It is because Eliot is a subtle conformist. It tickles the palate of this archbishop of procurers to a lecherous antiquity to hold up Prufrock as a New World type. (Imag 24)

This statement was provoked by an essay by an English critic, Edgar Jepson, which appeared in The Little Review in March 1918 (to be discussed in more detail in the next section) and caused something of a controversy through its damnation of such established figures as Masters, Lindsay and Frost. The essay offered as an example of what American poets should be aiming for Eliot's 'La Figlia Che Piange', a poem which moves on an iambic, pentametric foundation, ending with the lines:

I should have lost a gesture and a pose.  
Sometimes these cogitations still amaze  
The troubled midnight and the moon's repose  
(Eliot Collected Poems 36)

It is important to point out that this was Jepson's choice as a paragon of modern poetic excellence, not Eliot's (or Pound's as Williams suggests in his 'Prologue'). Williams' own struggle to free himself from the weight of the iamb had been instigated by Pound, and the bitter irony was, as Williams saw it, that having invested his creative muscle...
in Pound's push for modernity, his mentor was now championing an impressive individual who appeared to stand for the very cultural values they had been fighting to succeed. It seems likely that Williams, his expectations thwarted, hurt and disappointed, wilfully closed his eyes to what was valuable in Eliot's work, in order to concentrate on what he decided was evidence of the poet's dependence upon the great tradition of European (as opposed to American) cultural heritage. However, Jepson had praised 'La Figlia Che Piange' and Williams, seeking an opening in his adversary's defense, leapt to the attack. He wrote describing the poem as:

...just the right amount of everything drained through, etc., etc., etc., the rhythm delicately studied and--IT CONFORMS! ergo, here we have "the very fine flower of the finest spirit of the United States."

Examined closely this poem reveals a highly refined distillation. Added to the already "faithless" formula of yesterday we have a conscious simplicity:

"Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand."

The perfection of that line is beyond cavil. Yet in the last stanza this paradigm, this fine flower of U.S. art is warped out of alignment, obscured in meaning even to the point of an absolute unintelligibility by the inevitable straining after a rhyme, the very cleverness with which this straining is covered being a sinister token in itself.

"And wonder how they should have been together!"

So we have no choice but to accept the work of this fumbling conjurer. (Imag 25)

This attack, altogether undeserved, must be seen as defensive in its bitter intensity and inconsistency. On the same page Williams has described Eliot as producing lines of "highly refined distillation", not to mention "perfection", and, in utter contradiction, as a "fumbling conjurer". No
fumbling conjurer could have produced in Williams such vehemence. Eliot's obvious power as a poet became apparent just at the time when Williams was making his first real breakthrough, but what the latter achieved with a few short lyrics was vastly overshadowed by the monumental impressiveness of 'Prufrock' and 'Portrait of a Lady'. Williams' self-confidence as a writer, fragile at the best of times, was swept out from under him, occasioning a moment of profound crisis, and necessitating the painful business of reconstruction. And this time Pound had deserted the resistance fighters and joined the enemy, had become, in fact, "the best enemy United States verse has". (Imagen 26)

Williams continued his vitriolic attacks on Eliot throughout his career, and it is in Eliot's favour that he never publicly responded. The silence, however, may have been more irritating, placing Williams, as it appeared to, beneath notice. On one occasion, in 1923, Williams sent an essay to Eliot, in praise of Marianne Moore, to be considered for inclusion in the magazine Criterion. It appears that Eliot never replied, and the essay was eventually published in The Dial in 1925. 93 This snub may have coloured Williams' attitude to 'The Waste Land' which had been published in The Dial the previous year. In his Autobiography, which appeared in 1951, Williams described the poem as the "greatest catastrophe to our letters" and Eliot as having given "the poem back to the academics" (Auto 146). In 1958 he told Edith Heal, "I had a violent
feeling that Eliot had betrayed what I believed in. He was looking backward; I was looking forward. He was a conformist, with wit, learning which I did not possess" (IWW 30). In 1962, the year before he died, in an interview for the Paris Review, he repeated that Eliot "was a conformist. He wanted to go back to the iambic pentameter; and he did go back to it, very well; but he didn't acknowledge it" (Interviews 63).

Throughout his career, then, Williams was haunted by the spectre of Eliot and, especially during the years leading up to his own maturation, Eliot provided the focal point against which he could strive in his search for significant ground. Eliot had gone to Europe, Williams would discover America; Eliot sought poetry in the history of culture, he would excise history and concentrate on the moment, the present; Eliot's poetry depended on erudition and the meeting of diverse traditions, his would rise out of 'contact' with the local. Even at this early stage in his development, Williams' antipathy for Eliot must have been stimulated somewhat by a desire to excise from poetry those specific strategies which Eliot's poetry relied upon. His verse was articulated through the use of personae, the iambic pentameter, end-stopped lines, conventional typography, the dramatic monologue, classic language and symbolism. In his anxious proximity to Eliot, Williams pushed his poetic in the opposite direction.

It is important, however, not to lose sight of various
inconsistencies. His anti-European stance is frequently contradicted in his poetic practice. Even when his poetry displays the qualities he espoused, it occasionally teeters at the brink of ideological crudity. For example, his poems of immediacy, concentrating on the fleeting moment, depend on a de-historicising of the present, and of the language, which is potentially highly reactionary. His sentimental equation of women, peasants and Indians with nature, his privileging of speech over text, and sensory over intellectual perception, reveal an attitude at odds with his insistence upon a language cleansed of association to form a link between the material world and its signification in consciousness. Williams' work is filled with inconsistencies and contradictions, a characteristic which, ironically, was to contribute significantly to the shape of his mature poetic. What most critics have missed in the past is that his poetry is often most successful when it deviates (as in Spring and All) from the assumed simple coherence of the 'objective' lyric poem. As Pound had commented in his essay 'Dr. Williams' Position', Williams was at his best presenting the "objective manifests" of the "incommunicable or hidden roots of the consciousness of people". 94
In his 1929 essay for *The Little Review*, 'A Tentative Statement' Williams commented:

T.S. Eliot's work will be English, relating to a definite English classicism, so to be understood and its exact effects noted, to be kept within bounds, since the more able their exposition the more dangerous they become to a culture to which they are perhaps antagonistic, such as American poetry since Whitman. 95

The antagonism is, of course, all Williams' in an essay profoundly influence anxiety. He offers Eliot's position, and to a lesser extent Pound's, as a means of giving definition, by contrast, to his own. Arguably, in his anxiety not to be like Eliot (or Pound), Williams became himself. This is only one element, of course, in a complex which included his relationship with such figures as Kreymborg, Loy and Moore, who were developing too, with less dazzle than Eliot, and in more or less the same direction as Williams. Their availability as innovative writers, within driving distance of his home, relieved Williams of his feeling of cultural isolation. It is from this matrix (which was not without its own problems of artistic insecurity; many of those with whom he associated were producing alarmingly impressive work) that Williams drew the energy and the raw materials with which to construct his first fully realised modernist work.

It is ironically one of those inconsistencies that haunted Williams' career that *Spring and All*, following (and containing) Williams' attack on American expatriation
in modern literature, was published by an expatriate in Paris! It was issued in an edition of only 300 copies by Robert McAlmon's Contact Publishing Company in 1923. While it did not set the literary world alight, it foregrounded a structural departure which was to have profound repercussions in the development of American verse. Williams emerges as a mature writer with confidence enough to push to the surface the contradictory elements with which he was dealing. A similarly structured dialectic provides the pattern for his subsequent work, 'The Descent of Winter'. The contradictions are integrated with more control in this work, and some of the colliding energy is therefore lost. Interestingly, however, although 'Descent' was never published as a book, Pound was sufficiently convinced of Williams' value to allow it a considerable space in the autumn 1928 issue of his magazine Exile.

It was during the years which saw publication of Spring and All, In the American Grain (1925), which was so well received by D.H.Lawrence, and 'The Descent of Winter' that Williams defined his ground and rooted his art therein. The decade began with Contact, the magazine with which he staked his claim. It included his growing confidence through regular publication alongside such impressive names as Joyce, Pound, Eliot, Stevens, Moore and Loy in magazines like Poetry, The Little Review, The Dial and Exile. In 1926 he was honoured with the Dial Award, a prestigious prize of $2,000 (impressive enough to cause the newspapers
to hail him as a poet). The award was a great boost to his confidence, and he wrote to Marianne Moore as editor: "Had such news come from anyone else than you the pleasure of it could not have been so complete" (Letters 70). In many respects Moore had replaced Pound as an example of poetic excellence. She was a fastidious writer of great craft, but with a profile low enough not to create too much of a distraction. This is not to suggest that Williams did not really admire her work, or that she was anything less than essential to him in his evolution as a poet. Indeed, Williams was among her most consistent advocates throughout their long and complementary careers. However, during this formative period, Williams needed a steady and reliable ally, and one who would not rise up to deflect attention (particularly his own) from his poetic achievements. Moore was an ideal ally, though probably largely unconscious of her role.

Finally, near the end of the decade, the 'divine Ezra' acknowledged Williams' importance with his substantial essay 'Dr. Williams' Position' published in The Dial, arguably the most prestigious of the current crop of American literary magazines. He commented on the singlemindedness of such writers as Joyce and Eliot, relying "on wholly unfounded assumptions", and compared Williams with them in the favourable light of his "temporal intellectual circumjacence". He continued:

Very well, he does not 'conclude'; his work has been 'often formless', 'incoherent', opaque, obscure, obfusc-
cated, confused, truncated, etc [This almost a definition of the classic modernist text].

I am not going to say: 'form' is a non-literary component shoved on to literature by Aristotle or by some non-litteratus who told Aristotle about it. Major form is not a non-literary component. But it can do us no harm to stop an hour or so and consider the number of very important chunks of world-literature in which form, major form, is remarkable mainly for its absence.

Great praise indeed. Pound compared Williams to Homer, Aeschylus, Montaigne and Rabelais, commenting that "the component of these great works and the indispensible component is texture; which Dr Williams indubitably has in his best, and in increasingly frequent passages of his writing". Pound had supported Williams, even at the beginning when he showed very little promise. And now, twenty years on, it was Pound once again who had the insight and generosity to identify Williams' achievement, and to give it the much appreciated stamp of his approval. In November 1928 Williams wrote to Pound:

Dear Ezrie: Nothing will ever be said of better understanding regarding my work than your article in the Dial. I must thank you for your great interest and discriminating defense of my position. Without question you have hit most of the trends that I am following with the effect that you have clarified my designs on the future which in turn will act as encouragement and strength for me. (Letters 108)
Section Three

An American Tradition

In the two decades leading up to 1908, no American poet had succeeded in making significant ground on the firm advances made by specific nineteenth-century innovators. In spite of (or perhaps even because of) the disturbingly radical models supplied by Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson, early twentieth-century American verse adhered grimly to the comfortable and reassuring support of the genteel tradition of English prosody. Of course, to attempt the construction of a radically different kind of aesthetic superstructure requires a tougher motivation (whether from isolated and painful rejection or from self-confident messianic zeal) than to engage in the maintenance of a crumbling, but impressive edifice. Whitman's 'barbaric yawp' had challenged the authority of the American literary establishment. A Boston critic responding to Leaves of Grass in 1856, described it as a "heterogeneous mass of bombast, egotism, vulgarity, and nonsense", and suggested that the author be rewarded with "the lash for such a violation of decency". 1 The Criterion commented the same year that "it is impossible to imagine how any man's fancy could have conceived it, unless he were possessed of the soul of a sentimental donkey that had died of disappointed love". 2

Poetry for these critics was the product of "man's
fancy", a male flight from the tactile world of phenomena. The accepted medium, 'poetic' language, was the product of systematic dislocation from 'common' discourse, reducing poetry and defining it so that it might function as a viable currency in the cultural marketplace. The value of a poem was implicit in its structural and thematic acceptance of a continually dominant tradition. Unable to deal seriously with Whitman's challenge, since his product contained elements foreign to their exchange system, they were reduced to the level of abuse in their haste to reject it.

Despite her rather less obvious surface radicalism, Dickinson was no more acceptable to the critical establishment than Whitman. Glibly explaining away her radical strategies as stylistic infelicities an eminent New England critic accused her of being, "not so much disdainful of conventions as she seems to be insensible to them. Her ear had certainly not been susceptible of training to the appreciation of form and melody or it is inconceivable that she should have written the way she did". 3 The critic went on to describe Dickinson's work as showing "the insight of the civilized adult combined with the simplicity of the savage child". Obviously that which is not containable within the currency of cultural exchange must be an unconscious residue of savagery, here described in quasi-genetic terms as "the blood of some gentle and simple Indian ancestress in her veins". That which has not polish is not gold and, being thus without significant value,
Significantly, the nineteenth-century poet who achieved the greatest critical and popular acclaim, both sides of the Atlantic, was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. His success was based largely upon his assimilation of European cultural models, and his considerable talent for converting these for expression in a comfortable American bourgeoise context. His translation of The Divine Comedy and his six sonnets to Dante are all highly Italianate; his Tales of a Wayside Inn are Chaucerian English; Evangeline is Latinate and French in derivation; some of the shorter poems harken back to German Romanticism; while his most famous work, 'The Song of Hiawatha' owes much to the metric construction of the Finnish epic, Kalevala. Longfellow was steeped in European tradition, and his obviously rigorous scholarship was reassuring to a newly fledged cultural hierarchy in need of a respectably erudite laureate. I.A. Richards described his success in terms of a "social, urbane, highly cultivated, self confident, temperate and easy kind of humour". Geoffrey Moore commented, "Like Tennyson, he... worked within the public morality of his day; like Tennyson he was a superb craftsman". Public morality commonly underpins the status quo, and the cultural expression of it tends to include a tacit acceptance of existing socially and politically structured hierarchies. Public morality, operating as social convention imposes a behavioural grid within which people are expected to direct their lives.
The language of public discourse operates in a similar way and, like imposed morality, it has little to do with the way most people cope with their common problems of exchange. Longfellow never seriously questioned the dominance of American letters by a foreign cultural hegemony. His acceptance of this paternalism is explicit in the sonnet 'Chaucer':

He is the poet of the dawn who wrote
The Canturbury Tales, and his old age
Made beautiful with song; and as I read
I hear the crowing cock, I hear the note
Of lark and linnet, and from every page
Rise odors of ploughed field or flowery mead.

When Longfellow attempted to engage a specifically American theme in 'The Song of Hiawatha' what emerged was a romantic idealisation of the noble savage set in an idyllic past, in a fantastic landscape, and in the metres of a foreign epic. In his essay on Poe in In The American Grain, Williams offered a critique of Longfellow as simply an artist in thrall to the conventions of his age. He categorised Poe as one who was not.

Unwilling to concede to the necessity for any prop to his logical constructions, save the locality upon which originality is rested, he is the diametric opposite of Longfellow—to say the least. But 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. (IAG 224)

Williams' interest in Poe as a model of excellence in terms of the Americanness of American literature is something of
an anomaly, given Poe's dependence upon regular metrics, rhyme, and Romantic subject matter. Williams was characteristically associating certain qualities he aspired to, rather arbitrarily, with a poet with whom his poetry had very little in common. This way he could avoid the accusation of plagiarism, while fabricating for himself an American tradition with which to identify. Poe, unlike Longfellow, was something of a dissident, and it was this side of him that attracted Williams. He could join forces with the eccentric, Poe, in an attack on the establishment figure of Longfellow who had accepted so readily the forms and themes of a dominant tradition.

In his book, De la démocratie en Amérique, published in 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville commented:

American authors may truly be said to live more in England than in their own country, since they constantly study the English writers and take them for their own models. But such is not the case with the bulk of the population, which is more immediately subjected to the peculiar causes acting upon the United States. It is not then to the written, but to the spoken language that attention must be paid if you would detect the modifications which the idiom of an aristocratic people may undergo when it becomes the language of a democracy.

Of course in 1835 many different kinds of people from vastly differing cultural traditions were attempting to come to terms with the American language, modifying it for their own needs, giving it remarkably differing characteristics depending on location and ethnic mix. In an essay entitled 'The English Language in America', written in 1855, Charles Astor Bristed, a New England academic, argued the case for a scholastic study of "the course of a great living lang-
language, transplanted from its primitive seat, brought into contact and rivalry with other civilized tongues, and exposed to various influences, all having a *prima facie* tendency to modify it". 8

American writers seemed, on the whole, unwilling to take advantage of this new dynamism in the language. James Russell Lowell suggested in 1848 that this was due in part to a residue of insecurity in the face of a powerful and dominant tradition:

Very few American writers or speakers wield their native language with the directness, precision and force that are common as the day in the mother country. We use it...not as if it belonged to us, but as if we wished to prove that we belonged to it, by showing our intimacy with its written rather than with its spoken dialect. And yet, all the while our popular idiom is racy with life and vigor and originality. 9

Lowell, Bristed and de Tocqueville identified the necessity for American writers to locate their craft in the best available medium; the American language. Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his celebrated essay, 'The Poet', related this impulse specifically to the need for a native American poetry. "We do not" he lamented, "with sufficient plainness, or sufficient profoundness, address ourselves to life, nor dare we chaunt our own lives and social circumstance." 10

This essay highlights the need for courage; to take advantage of the American ground in the face of "five centuries of English poets". Such a weight of tradition gave credence to the notion that poetry was *English*, which could be dispelled only by an American genius "with tyrannous eye,
which knew the value of our incomparable materials". The word "tyrannous" here is worthy of attention, with its connotations of autocratic egotism. In the same passage from this essay, Emerson envisaged a remarkable, iconoclastic individual who could take on the establishment single handed, one who would "not shrink from celebrating" the American experience:

Our logrolling, our stumps and their politics, our fisheries, our Negroes and Indians...the northern trade, the southern planting, the western clearing, Oregon and Texas, are yet unsung. Yet America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination and it will not wait long for metres.

Leaves of Grass: Walt Whitman

With the publication in 1855 of *Leaves of Grass*, Emerson's demand seems to have been answered. Whitman's rejection of current assumptions regarding the metric construction of English language poetry, and his insistence on pushing his verse into contact with the American present, were sufficient to alienate him from the cultural elite. As he wrote in the preface to *Leaves of Grass*, "of all mankind the great poet is the equable man". However, unlike those already mentioned, Whitman was a writer who attempted to practice what he preached; the democratisation of American poetry in an American context, and as such he was bound to be treated as a maverick. "Nothing out of its place is good", he claimed, "and nothing in its place is bad. [The great poet] bestows on every object or quality its fit
proportions....He is the equalizer of his age and land...."

Whitman's real value to the modern American poet was in his creation of space and place. Before Leaves of Grass American verse was tied down by its reliance upon a language dislocated from the roots of an awakening culture. In 1909 Ezra Pound wrote, "Like Dante he wrote in the 'vulgar tongue', in a new metric. The first great man to write in the language of his people". One year after the publication of his own first slight book, Pound was on the verge of his mission, "to scourge America with all the old beauty". He pointed out that, "Whitman is to my fatherland ...what Dante is to Italy and I at best can only be a strife for a renaissance in America". It is not simply that Whitman represented "old beauty" but that he exemplified, like Dante, that new departures are necessary to keep poetry in touch with people. Pound concluded that, "it is a great thing, reading a man to know, not 'His Tricks are not yet my Tricks, but I can easily make them mine' but 'His message is my message. We will see that men hear it.'"

For the critical establishment Whitman remained, in his own words, "one of the roughs", and it is this uncut aspect of his art which troubled the youthful and idealistic Williams. Prior to meeting Pound, his notion of the poetic, typical of nineteenth-century orthodoxy, was dominated by "Palgrave's Golden Treasury ...Shakespeare and the romantic poets" (IWW 8).

Williams was nineteen when he met Pound at the Univer-
sity of Pennsylvania in 1902. "He was impressed with his own poetry", Williams remembered, but he was decidedly unmoved by Williams' "quick spontaneous poems". There were, he claimed, eighteen notebooks filled with "little poems, bad poems... more Whitmanesque than Keats" (IWW 5). In his Autobiography Williams recalled that the notebook poems were kept secret. They were "Whitmanesque 'thoughts', a sort of purgation and confessional, to clear my head and my heart from turgid obsessions" (Auto 53). For him they were not really 'poetry' and as such were a potential source of embarrassment and insecurity. From the beginning of their relationship, Williams felt somewhat overshadowed by Pound who was "writing a daily sonnet", and who "even then used to assault me... for my lack of education and reading". Here Williams appears to be equating his lack of education with these early attempts to make advances upon the model provided by Whitman. He was plainly more secure with the formal and thematic capital which he could borrow from Keats, an established English poet with a recognisable niche in the cultural hierarchy. It was only in Williams' second phase of development, after he had shaken himself free from what he saw as the stranglehold of English prosodic authority, and when he was consciously seeking a dissident position, that Whitman began to surface in his 'public' poetry. By this time, of course, Whitman was beginning to feed back into the newer current of American verse by an irregular route. His work had been welcomed by
various late nineteenth-century French writers; particularly Baudelaire and Laforgue. Laforgue worked on a French translation of *Leaves of Grass* and it is arguable that Whitman's prosody was a considerable influence in freeing Laforgue's work from the strictures of French verse tradition. Pound and Eliot were both deeply influenced by Laforgue, and Mina Loy, who was to have a profound influence on Williams' maturing poetic, was another who was indebted to the French symbolists, and to Laforgue in particular.

Williams, like Pound, was unable to avoid acknowledging the great debt owed to Whitman, but also like Pound, he tended to couch his comments in phrases which highlighted the poet's rough cut and undisciplined process, as in this from 'America, Whitman, and the Art of Poetry', an essay published in *The Poetry Review* in 1917:

> He destroyed the forms antiquity decreed him to take and use. He started again naked but built not very far....His poems fall apart structurally but the sweep of his mood, the splendor of his pigment blends his work into some semblance of unity without which no work of art can be said to exist....He is our rock, our first primitive. We cannot advance until we have grasped Whitman and then built upon him. 15

Williams consistently argued that the term "free verse" was self-contradictory, but in an effort to define it for the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* 16 (published after his death, in 1965) he illustrated his comments with a quote from Whitman's 'Song of Myself'. He pointed out that Whitman's poem was based, "not on the recurrence of stress accent in a regular, strictly measur-
able pattern, but rather on the irregular rhythmic cadence of the recurrence, with variations, of significant phrases, image patterns and the like". This poetic strategy was used extensively by Williams in such poems as 'Virtue' (from Al Que Quiere!), which includes the following stanza:

Why--
it is the smile of her
the smell of her
the vulgar inviting mouth of her!
It is--Oh, nothing new
nothing that lasts
an eternity, nothing worth
putting out to interest,
nothing--
but the fixing of an eye
concretely upon emptiness! (CEP 152)

Williams was careful to stress that the irregularities of 'free verse' must be justified in terms of the poem's internally constructed form. He went on to assert that:
"whenever and however, either by the agency of the eye or ear, a persistent irregularity of the metrical pattern is established in a poem, it can justly be called f[ree] v[erse]".

Williams placed Whitman's name, in this essay, at the beginning of a list of poets (which includes himself) who contributed significantly to the development of a form which "has become so common as to have some claim to being the characteristic verse form of the age". Whitman's example had created a space into which Williams could move, and without which his development would have been entirely different. In an essay on Leaves of Grass written in 1955 Williams claimed for the book that "at the beginning it
enunciated a shocking truth, that the common ground is of itself a poetic source". Williams' initial attempt at poetry was characterised, however, by a marked lack of desire to 'shock'. On the contrary, he seemed eager to offer his 'Keatsian' pieces as a contribution within the accepted tradition. It is out of a sense of futility and isolation, and in the shadow of Pound's example that the New Jersey poet was forced to step into the turbulent space Whitman had provided. However, having shaken loose the shackles of a dominant culture, he was risking domination by alternative influences. He was most concerned at this time to create his own space and location from which to project his verse. In the first section of 'The Wanderer' completed in 1914 he wrote:

But one day, crossing the ferry
With the great towers of Manhattan before me,
Out at the prow with the sea wind blowing,
I had been wearying many questions
Which she had put on to try me:
How shall I be a mirror to this modernity?
(CEP 3)

Williams' muse, in this poem, is the ageing spirit of poetry, an old woman, corseted "to give her age youth", whose inclusion betrays a nineteenth-century Romantic egocentricity. She presides over a ritualistic initiation during which the narrator is baptised in the polluted Passaic river. The central ego of this poem assimilates the river as symbolising 'Industrial America' - "And I knew all--it became me" - in a remarkably Whitmanesque, transcendental gesture. If Emerson's call for a significant
American poet was answered by Whitman's powerful example, then Williams, here, is simply caught up in the slipstream. More than fifty years before publication of 'The Wanderer' Whitman had written:

Others will enter the gates of the ferry and cross from shore to shore,

Others will watch the run of the flood-tide,

Others will see the shipping of Manhattan north and west and the heights of Brooklyn to the south and east

Others will see the islands large and small;

Fifty years hence, others will see them as they cross 18

Fifty-nine years hence Others would be the little magazine most instrumental in Williams' maturing poetic.

In this poem Whitman's tone is that of the all embracing ego, the inclusive but transcendent personality at the centre, implied by the word "others", operating in a broad dimension that includes generations, linked by the magnanimous "I".

It avails not, time nor place--distance avails not, I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence, Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt...

Williams' preoccupation in 'The Wanderer' was with the symbolic nature of his baptismal river, with the way its flow encompassed both time and space. He could simply be responding to Whitman's poem in the lines following the initiation:

But she lifted me and the water took on a new tide
Again into the older experiences, And so, backward and forward, It tortured itself within me
Until time had been washed finally under, And the river had found its level
And its last motion had ceased And I knew all--it became me. (CEP 11/12)
The romantic ego at the centre of this poem is all embracing, the wandering bard ('The Wanderer') and the figure of Whitman (as constructed by Whitman for 'Song of Myself') looms large.

Whitman's transcendental vision provided another focus for Williams' burgeoning poetic. The concept of a new American culture detaching itself from an abstract structural order, and taking root in the phenomenological complex of localised, democratised experience was expressed by Whitman in his 'Preface' to Leaves of Grass. He wrote:

Other states indicate themselves in their deputies... but the genius of the United States is not best or most in its executives or legislatures, nor in its ambassadors or authors or colleges or churches or parlors, nor even in its newspapers or inventors...but always most in the common people. 19

Concentration upon the local as a means of approaching the universal was a consistent facet of Whitman's work. Commensurate with his romantic notion of the poet's function within an elevated perceptive dimension, is his idea that through the poetic imagination phenomenological data is ordered into a system of concentrated meaning. He wrote of the American poet: "To him enter the essences of the real things", prefiguring Williams' "No ideas but in things" by some seventy years. Whitman saw himself as the first in a line of American poets whose success would depend on their contact with the material realities of their cultural ground. He described: "the well-beloved stonecutter...[who] plans with decision and science and sees the solid and beautiful forms of the future where there are now no solid
forms\textsuperscript{15}. 20 The stonecutter's function is to take the most enduring natural material and to carve from it solid units from which useful buildings can be built which are substantially part of their locality. Likewise, the poet's functional medium is the local language, shaped by its cultural past (like the stonecutter's craft) but associated with the local ground (although Whitman's verse is shaped as much by the prosody of the King James Bible as it is by American vernacular). Ideally, the resulting cultural fabrication, the poem, will thus be more relevant and more enduring.

One way in which to capture the texture of the common language (something that can only ever be \textit{approximated} in poetry) is to locate it firmly in observation of common people. The result, however, is almost always tainted by condescension, as in this early piece from \textit{Al Que Quiere}:

\begin{verbatim}
You exquisite chunk of mud
Kathleen--just like
any other chunk of mud! (CEP 157)
\end{verbatim}

The word "exquisite" betrays a privileged vantage point. The "chunk of mud" here is being scrutinised from the outside, for a specific rhetorical purpose. Kathleen, presumably, represents the common people, that locus in which Williams was struggling to involve his poetic. What is patently clear is that the narrative voice comes, not from a participant, but from an observer.

\begin{verbatim}
Curl up round their shoes
when they try to step on you,
spoil the polish!
I shall laugh till I am sick
at their amazement.
\end{verbatim}
There is an uncomfortably triangular relationship set up in this poem, arising from the intrusion of the narrative "I" into the dynamic confrontation between "you" (Kathleen) and "them". Kathleen is the ground (mud) from which a more relevant and tactile cultural expression is emerging, but for the establishment (they) this expression behaves like mud. The irony is that mud (soil mixed with water) is the matrix from which human life is sustained. The regenerative property of the soil is central to Whitman's unifying metaphor in 'Song of Myself', but unlike Williams' poem the narrative "I" is closely associated with it:

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your boot soles. 21

The scope of Whitman's poem is epic, and broadly inclusive. "I am large," he wrote, "I contain multitudes". In the more Whitmanesque poems published in Al Que Quiere!, Williams has appropriated for his own use elements of the tone and technique but without the expansiveness, and this can lead to a dislocation of narrative voice from the substance of the poem which reveals the narrator 'slumming' in a world of discomforting experience:

Why do I write today?

The beauty of the terrible faces of our nonentities stirs me to it: (CEP 131)

This is contrary to what Williams later suggested in I Wanted To Write A Poem. "I have always had a feeling of
identifying with nature, but not assertive; I have always believed in keeping myself out of the picture" (IWW 21).

The essential difference, even at this stage, between Williams' poetic and Whitman's is that his process is generally voyeuristic while Whitman's is inclusive. One way of pushing back the daunting presence of Whitman (and, coincidentally, Pound) in his poetic was, for Williams, a gradual writing away from the egocentric narrative voice, thus giving the poem a more objective, self contained veneer. Williams was struggling to become his own poet, and having taken what he needed from Whitman, the last thing he wanted was to be branded a mere disciple.

Williams projected for himself a position of cultural significance very early in his career. In 1906 he wrote to his brother Edgar: "The truth is I am troubled with dreams, dreams that merely to mention is too daring, yet I'll tell you that any man can do anything he will if he persists in daring to follow his dreams" (Letters 13/14). At this stage he was convinced that the route to significance lay in a direction counter to his experience. The self-consciously elitist romantic bard can be plainly seen in the assertion that, "if a man fail in attempts too great for him he is a better man than the whimpering weakling who is frightened away by obstacles". In a letter to Harriet Monroe seven years later he wrote, "anyhow I'm a great poet, and you don't think so and there we are, and so allow me to send you a revised 'Postlude' (when it is done),
hoping to gain your good favour in that way --for I must succeed you know" (Letters 25).

Having used Whitman as a lever to prize himself loose from the weight of orthodox 'measure', Williams must have been aware of the suffocating possibilities of his new model. His primary objective was to take the initiative, to use Whitman's example as a launch toward his own American objective. Whitman's influence is detectable in his work at all stages, but its presence is fairly soon assimilated into Williams' poetic. This is well illustrated in various of the poems from Spring and All.

In this book, and in subsequent work, one element which graphically obscures the Whitman connection is the brevity of Williams' lines. The poet Robert Creeley suggests that this might have had something to do with the limitations on time and materials for the busy physician. He recalled in a recorded conversation with Allen Ginsberg that on a visit to Williams' home, "he showed me the desk that had been in his office when he was in active practice; and he showed me his typewriter...and the way it fitted under the desk; and he showed me the prescription pads that he used to use". Williams himself maintained that his short line was the product of a nervous disposition; and both of these are possible elements in shaping the poems. But another equally probable motive for the shortening of line is that out of anxiety, to avoid being subsumed by Whitman, he was obliged to modify the appearance on the page of his poem.
Williams has admitted (in an interview with Walter Sutton in 1960) that he was, at this early stage in his poetic development, in a position that demanded specific choices.

But I wanted to get rid of using inversions of phrase—Latinizations—and so, taking a backdoor approach, I was forced to consider a variation of the phrase in the manner of Whitman. If I'm going to use my language, my own language, I had to have the dignity, the effrontery, to follow a new pattern. (Interviews 45)

Just as he was forced to consider the direction opened up by Whitman, he was equally obliged wilfully to misread, and to adapt this appropriated strategy in order to make it his own. Pound's example from his first book _A Lume Spento_, published in 1908, though at first somewhat shocking to Williams, provided an early model for a more controlled line. As Williams acknowledged in the above interview, Pound was of primary importance, standing, with Whitman at the point where American poetry begins to achieve cultural significance. His contribution was essentially different from Whitman's, however, since, "Pound was disciplined. He was a scholar. He was following the scholarship of Europe" (Interviews 45). At this early stage, then (and continually throughout his career), Pound's magnetic proximity provided an alternative pole toward which Williams could move away from the danger of any currently powerful influence. Williams developed, therefore, through a process of complex input, often encompassing contradictory elements, against which activity he was able to shape his individual poetic. The first poem, (number 1) from _Spring and All_, was produced out of this complicated matrix, as
were most of the poems published since The Tempers, but its successful assimilation of Whitmanesque elements is worth discussing, especially in relation to Whitman's 'This Compost' first published in 1856. Whitman's poem begins: "Something startles me where I thought I was safest, / I withdrew from the still woods I loved", 23 establishing the central ego as its unifying locus. The narrative "I" is conspicuously absent from Williams' poem, but a prose section which precedes it in Spring and All proclaims that, "in the imagination, we are from henceforth (so long as you read) locked in a fraternal embrace, the classic caress of author and reader. We are one. Whenever I say 'I' I mean also 'you'. And so, together, as one, we shall begin" (Imag 87). 'Spring and All' is only one fragment of a sequence containing poems and prose (to be discussed in the final chapter) in which the narrative "I" occasionally appears qualified by this statement. The statement is remarkably Whitmanesque. Phrases such as "locked in a fraternal embrace", "caress of author and reader" and "we are one" convey a distinctly transcendental bias. This is much more evident in the prose passages than in the poems, which have been stripped, for the most part, of overt narrative intrusion. The poem begins:

By the road to the contagious hospital
under the surge of the blue
mottled clouds driven from the

northeast - a cold wind. Beyond, the
waste of broad, muddy fields
brown with dried weeds, standing and fallen
(Imag 95)
The poem is "driven" by the dynamics of its tautly integrated parts and its mechanism is at no stage interrupted by a distracting narrative centricity. Centric narrative tends toward a linear movement, a movement out from the centre. Without the predictable support of a vantage point, the reader has to cast around in a way which is more diffuse, depending upon the contiguous bonding of the poem to provide the necessary movement. Even the syntax of this opening movement is constructed to decentralise and depersonalise the effect. The "cold wind" is presented starkly, without a verbal clause (e.g. 'there is') to politely introduce it.

The use of the word 'contagious' is interesting, both for its rather contrary activity within the poem and for its specific connections with Whitman's 'This Compost'. The dynamics of this poem are activated in the objectification of natural things as they struggle for regeneration "by the road to the contagious hospital". Why should this particular institution figure in a poem about the first stirrings of spring? Firstly, Williams' main preoccupation in this book, and to some extent throughout his career, was with the myth of Persephone and Demeter, which illustrated the cyclic nature of existence: the regeneration of life out of death. To suggest semantically, relying on the connotation of the word 'contagious', that regeneration must be preceded by degeneration conveys the main intent of this poem in a metonymic equivalent of the metaphysical
conceit. In this context, perhaps not coincidentally, the figure has much in common with Eliot's "patient etherised upon a table".

Whitman's poem is entitled, 'This Compost'. The natural world is a compost, a culture of degenerate matter from which life can be coaxed. The second stanza begins:

O how can it be that the ground itself does not sicken?
How can you be alive you growths of spring?

Further on the narrator exHORTS:

Behold this compost! behold it well!
Perhaps every mite has once formed part of a sick person--yet behold!
The grass of spring covers the prairies
chanting the paradox of the necessity for death in life's continuous cycle, leading the reader through the conflict between sickness and spring. Williams' use of the word contagious is a specific echo of Whitman's line, "the winds are really not infectious", winds which convey the contagious seed to the earth which "grows such sweet things out of such corruptions". Williams' essential progression from his mentor's position is in his presentation of the stuff of the poem unmediated by a personalised voice. As he wrote in one of the prose sections:

Whitman's proposals are of the same piece with the modern trend toward imaginative understanding of life. The largeness which he interprets as his identity [my italics] with the least and the greatest about him, his "democracy" represents the vigor of his imaginative life. (Imag 113)

Whitman's is essentially a nineteenth-century vision, the romantic bard in collision with the realities of his time.
Williams was able to combine what he found of value; the vigorousness of expression, the courageous break with prosodic orthodoxy, and the adoption of the American locus as poetic ground, with techniques he was able to pick up from his association with various modernist movements. The result is, on the whole, a successful objectification of the poem so that it is able to operate without reference to a personalised central ego. Like modern painting, the poem calls attention to the medium from which it is constructed, requiring no 'real world' subjective justification. For example, 'Spring and All' is not about the season of new flowers, warm breezes and birdsong. Rather it conveys metonymically a linguistic equivalent of the struggle through to rebirth. In the context of the book, this strategy has a much wider range of possibilities than if it had been constructed as a traditionally subjective evocation of conscious human centrality mediating between nature and meaning. The hortative excitement in Whitman's poem is conveyed in lines like these:

The grass of spring covers the prairies,
The bean bursts noiselessly through the mould in
the garden,
The delicate spear of the onion pierces upward,
The apple-buds cluster together on the apple branches,
The resurrection of the wheat appears with pale
visage out of its graves....

The anthropomorphic nature of the last line betrays the egocentricity of the strophe. In a section which reveals a strikingly similar theme, Williams has succeeded, however, in crystallising the objective core of his poem:
Now the grass, tomorrow
the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf
One by one objects are defined -
it quickens: clarity, outline of leaf

But now the stark dignity of
entrance - Still, the profound change
has come upon them: rooted they
grip down and begin to awaken

The diction is harder, textured in such a way as to slow
down the movement of the piece in accordance with the
poem's intent. Syntax and lineation (coupled with a very
unusual use of punctuation) work against a straightforward-
ly interpretative response. The poem can be read as an
implied metaphor for the process by which poems are constr-
ucted. It is as much about language as it is about nature.
Language, being the medium by which we are able to approach
the problems of natural phenomena and meaning, must be
brought into sharper contact with the operation of, and
relationship between things in the world. Williams wrote
in the prose piece preceding this poem that, "there is a
constant barrier between the reader and his consciousness
of immediate contact with the world". He went on to de-
cribe the problem, claiming that

nearly all writing, up to the present, if not all art,
has been especially designed to keep up the barrier
between sense and the vaporous fringe which distracts
the attention from its agonized approaches to the
moment. It has always been a search for "the beautiful
illusion." Very well. I am not in search of "the
beautiful illusion." (Imag 88/9)

For Williams, then, in his struggle toward a secure
American position, Whitman's existence as an unavoidable
precedent acted both as a reassuring pointer toward, and an
obstacle against his own poetic evolution. In 1960 he told Walter Sutton, "Whitman was the first American poet that I was interested in" (Interviews 42). He spoke of an "instinctive drive to get in touch with Whitman," who appeared to be "throwing away any hold the classics had on him". The problem was that "he didn't know where to go, and he wrote the way he felt". Williams felt that Whitman had broken through to an important phase of poetic activity but without any profound understanding of his medium, language, which "was not studied because he didn't know how to study it".

In Whitman's work, language is almost always fluid, carrying the reader (or listener) forward with the current of the poem. Notwithstanding the cumulative, hypnotic effect achieved through syntactical parallelisms and word or phrase repetition, there are no specific tactics that block the reader's direct route to the world of 'reality'. Williams was looking for techniques which would more graphically draw attention to the structural interaction of the component parts. There was an obvious precedent in American poetry, contemporary with the achievements of Whitman.

Emily Dickinson: The Structural Warping of Lines

A neglected aspect of Williams' poetic and ideological development is the profound influence women had in the early stages. A more detailed discussion of this occurs
elsewhere in this thesis, but for the moment the names of some of the most immediate influences will suffice. They included his mother, his wife, the poets H.D., Mina Loy and Marianne Moore, the expatriate innovator Gertrude Stein, the German Dadaist Baroness Elsa von Freytag Loringhoven and the magazine editors Harriet Monroe, Margaret Anderson and Dora Marsden. This list is not exhaustive. Throughout his career he repeatedly made statements to the effect that in his search for a newer perspective, the female point of view provided one distinct and often radical alternative.

As early as 1908 he was beginning to realise the innate potential for novelty in the current focus on 'liberated' women. Having seen a performance by the dancer Isadora Duncan, he wrote to his brother Ed that he had enjoyed the "most perfect, most absolutely inspiring exhibition" he had ever seen. What impressed him most was how this free-form dancer had achieved a national spirit in her performance, inspiring him "to accomplish my part in our wonderful future". In a letter to Viola Baxter in 1911 he asserted, "I am not a man; they, men, disgust me and if I must say it fill me with awe and admiration. I am too much a woman".

By 1925 Williams had assimilated into his poetic the important element of dissidence turned against the stretched cultural resources of an irrelevant and anachronistic tradition. The problem was that by setting his voice against the weight of tradition, he was excluding himself
from the privilege of being heard. He recognised that there was one identifiable category of writers who usually suffered the same fate. In a 1929 review for *transition*, of a collection of short stories by Kay Boyle, he wrote: "Nearly all the noteworthy women writers of the past that I can think of...have been men, essentially. Perhaps I should have said, all the women writers acceptable to the public" (Imag 345). One of the exceptions, Williams suggested in this review, was Emily Dickinson.

The title of the review is 'The Somnambulists', announcing Williams' attitude to "the public" and, in particular, the American public which he characterised as resistant to the problems of consciousness, contentedly oblivious of the enforced boundaries defined by its social and cultural condition. He compared the anxiety of cultural dissidence with the dangers of drinking alcohol during a time of enforced abstinence (the repeal of the 'Eighteenth Amendment' would not take place for another four years). But for the American people the availability of alcohol posed more than a mere legal or moral dilemma. Williams wrote: "Alcohol is the specific for their condition, thus they fear it: to drink to excess breaks the shell of their lives so that momentarily, when they drink, they waken" (Imag p.340). It is relevant to note here that Dickinson had used a strikingly similar configuration of ideas in her poem, 'I taste a liquor never brewed', first published in *Poems* (1890). Williams would have been familiar with this
celebrated poem in the version as edited by M.L.Todd and T.W.Higginson, quoted below. The second and third stanzas convey a particularly contrary individualism turned against the morality of the day:

Inebriate of air am I,
And debauchee of dew,
Reeling, through endless summer days,
From inns of molten blue.

When landlords turn the drunken bee
Out of the foxglove's door,
When butterflies renounce their drams,
I shall but drink the more! 26

Williams saw Dickinson's achievement as having breached the boundaries of cultural constraint. She had transgressed, as Williams did after her, against the canons of good taste. He wrote that in a democracy there is "a limit beyond which thought is not expected to leap. All men being presumed equal, it becomes an offense if this dead limit be exceeded" (Imag 340). This offense, Williams consistently reiterated, was necessary in order to bring poetry out of the doldrums of accepted practice. In 1920, in the 'Prologue' to Kora in Hell he had made his position clear. He wrote:

...nowadays poets spit upon rhyme and rhetoric.
The stream of things having composed itself into wiry strands that move in one fixed direction, the poet in desperation turns at right angles and cuts across the current with startling results to his hangdog mood. (Imag p.17)

In her poem 'I taste a liquor...' Dickinson did cut across the current, leaving the reader with a startling, almost surreal image, her narrator, "the little tippler / Leaning against the sun". The poem places its dissenting narrator
in contradiction to the sober current of contemporary morality, leaning (like Whitman's persona, 'leaning and loafing') defiantly in contact with the illuminating energy of the sun.

Acquiescence and sublimated curiosity are complementary elements of the 'somnambulistic' syndrome of American culture. Wrestling free from this condition, Williams argued in his review, is a painful process, but poetry must contribute to the struggle. He wrote:

When one wakes from that sleep, literature is among the things which confront him, old literature to begin with and finally the new. In the United States let us say first Emily Dickinson....To waken is terrifying.... Awake, Emily Dickinson was torn apart by her passion; driven back to cover she imprisoned herself in her father's garden, the mark of the injury she deplored, an opacity beyond which she could not penetrate. (Imag 340)

This "opacity" was, presumably, a similar quality to that which Pound had identified in Williams' work. The injury was inflicted by the impenetrable and automatic rearguard defense of a sleepwalking critical establishment. It was an unwillingness to acknowledge the vitality of Dickinson's innovations, he suggested, which prevented her from making even greater strides forward. But what was even more frustrating was that contemporary critics (circa 1929) were making the same crass mistakes. He continued:

In literature, since it is of literature that I am writing, it is the mark of our imprisonment by sleep, the continuous mark, that in estimating the work of E.D., still our writers praise her rigidity of the sleep walker---the rapt gaze, the thought of Heaven-- and ignore the structural warping of her lines, the
rhymelessness, the distress marking the place at which she turned back. She was a beginning, a trembling at the edge of waking--and the terror it imposes. (Imag 34)

The place at which Dickinson turned back, Williams suggested, was the boundary between traditionally metric and rhymed verse and a more fluid, less constrained form, something akin to the free verse currently exploited by post-Imagist poets. Her contribution, within these constraints, and emerging from the distress which was thus created, was "the structural warping of her lines, the rhymelessness".

American poetry was still, almost a century after Emerson's demand for an American genius, struggling to define itself in opposition to the English model. In his 1934 essay dedicated to Alfred Stieglitz, 'The American Background', Williams offered Emerson as a flawed writer whose "genius as a poet remain[ed] too often circumscribed by a slightly hackneyed gentility....His spiritual assertions were intended to be basic, but they had not--and they have not today--the authenticity of Emily Dickinson's unrhymes. And she was of the same school, rebelliously" (Essays 154).

Dickinson, like Whitman, wrote into her work a tacit opposition to the accepted exchange values of poetry. With Whitman the opposition took place in his break from traditions of regular line and rhyme. Dickinson's distortion of rhyme and metre, in conjunction with her eccentric manipulation of syntax and punctuation, tended to obstruct interpretative reading and to draw attention to language as the
medium of her art. It is not that she was unconcerned with meaning; rather that she was concerned to exploit the physiological possibilities of words and phrases, to shape them into intense locutions as approximations of, for instance, heightened emotional experience. It is this difficult innovation, Williams argued, which turned the critical establishment against her work (as it would later turn against Gertrude Stein). Since they could not 'understand' her poems, critics tended to place them outside their value system, categorising them as "unschooled" and even "primitive". Williams commented:

Simply, the person who has a comprehensive, if perhaps disturbing view of what takes place in the human understanding at moments of intense living, and puts it down in its proper shapes and color, is anathema to United Statesers and can have no standing with them. We are asleep. (Imag 341)

Williams was something of an evangalist for the cause of modern verse, and in both his prose and verse (and those collections like *Spring and All* and 'The Descent of Winter' in which he combined the two) he made consistently specific demands on modern writers. The most consistent of these was that contemporary poetry must rid itself of the iambic constraint; that it must substitute a more flexible measure for the dead weight of fixed metre. Whitman had taken the first courageous step in this direction. Almost as consistently, and more significantly in terms of the Modernist aesthetic, Williams demanded that writers focus their attention more closely on their medium, words, as a functioning element in their art; an end as opposed to the means
to an end. But tradition had created a monolithic corpus of influence which seemed inescapable to young or dissatisfied writers. In Spring and All he accused:

The man of imagination who turns to art for release and fulfilment...contends with the sky through layers of demoded words and shapes. Demoded, not because the essential vitality which begot them is laid waste...but because meanings have been lost through laziness or changes in the form of existence which have let words empty. (Imag 100)

The language of literature has, through an abstracted usage, lost contact with the actual ground from which it was formed and to which, to remain viable, it must continue contiguously to relate. He added: "The word must be put down for itself, not as a symbol of nature but as a part, cognizant of the whole--aware--civilized" (Imag 102), thus suggesting a move away from the outreaching metaphoric thrust of poetic language, toward a more lateral, metonymic field.

All phenomenological elements, emotional states and operations of consciousness, when brought into the sphere of poetry, are equalised by the medium, language, through which they are allowed significance. The word "sky" is no less substantial than the word "tree" or "pain" except by association. By presenting the parts of a poem in traditionally accepted language, the emergent quality is not that of the poem itself. Indeed the poem becomes merely vehicular, sublimated by content and association. If, however, the equalizing qualities of language are recognised, the elements can be presented freshly, dissociated from their
accepted referential veneer. In Cubist painting, trees and sky can appear on the same canvas, but referred to without clear delineation and with the same substantiality of paint. The point is that the painting is as much about paint as it is about the exterior phenomena referred to. Likewise in modern poetry, the interaction of word-shapes, word-sounds and word-linkage lends a new and often vibrant texture to the fabrication of the whole. The expectations of the reader can be blocked periodically by the appearance of queer locutions or seemingly illogical combinations. As a result, straightforward understanding on the level of received information has been halted, and the closer scrutiny necessary forces the reader into contact with the linguistic process which is being enacted on the page. This difficulty, requiring an alteration in reading technique, is one of the most widely acknowledged aspects of Dickinson's poetic. In one short poem (first published in Poems: Second Series, 1891) she offered this strategy with remarkable concision. The poem has been distorted by the editors, but even in its adulterated state the linguistic muscularity survives.

It can't be summer, --that got through;  
It's early yet for spring;  
There's that long town of white to cross  
Before the blackbirds sing.

It can't be dying,--its too rouge,--  
The dead shall go in white.  
So sunset shuts my question down  
With clasps of chrysolite. (E.D. Poems 327)
The thematic subject is elusive, pushed into obscurity by the word game which is the poem. Like the aforementioned Cubist painting, the parts of this artifact have to be carefully scrutinised and the code unravelled before the 'subject' is identified. As usual with Dickinson, the first statement is the most clear, inviting the unsuspecting reader into the game. However, in the first line there is the odd colloquialism "that got through" to signal a shift from orthodox prosody. Brita Lindberg-Seyersted, in The Voice of The Poet refers to Dickinson's linguistic idiosyncrasies as contributing effectively "to the colloquial tone of the poems. They are conspicuous signs of a poetic language that refuses to be tamed and leveled". 27

The third line moves through an image, typical of Dickinson, out of a unique category of imagery described by Archibald MacLeish as "so strangely abstracted as to be almost transparent". 28 Through what system of experience, either literary or sensory, does the reader evaluate, "There's that long town of white to cross" in order to make sense of the poem as a whole? The word "town" suggests that "long" must operate as distance rather than the passage of time. Just as the reader is beginning to penetrate the seasonal concern, a problematic spatial dimension as journey is inserted to interrupt progress. The second stanza introduces a claustrophobic struggle which takes place in the language as opposed to the content. The restrictive nature of mortality, as inevitable as winter,
is held at bay by the imperative, "It can't be dying", spoken as a way of traumatising the reader out from the comfort of a traditionally poetic theme, the passage of the seasons, and into a threatening existential closure. Through a systematic process of rejection a brink is reached beyond which emerges, revealed by the process, a potentially satisfactory arrival; autumn. But the satisfaction is momentary. Having triumphantly decided that autumn is the subject of this poem, the solution to the riddle, the reader encounters the probability of a more threatening area of concern. Autumn is a semantically created figure, and simply works as another means of obfuscating "It" which is the centre of this poem. The engagement is with language and the manipulation of its links with the phenomenal world in a struggle to order and articulate a space or a silence, identifiable only in terms of what "it" is not. It is the word "sunset", at least as much as the effect of the evening sky upon the retina, or the temporal close of a day, which "shuts [the] question down". The poem justifies the inclusion of seasons, white town, blackbirds, death, rouge, sunset, inquiry and articles made from semi-precious stone, not through a thematic empiricism, but through their existence in one unifying gesture in language. And it is because of the absence at the core of the poem that the linguistic dance around it is left as the focus; process as subject, poetic activity as object.

The figurative tropes in the poem appear as metaphors
but move in a direction oddly contrary to that normally associated with the symbolic activity of metaphors. The gap between "that long town of white to cross" and the temporal span of winter is so problematic that the reader is forced to look for some connective logic in order to reconcile the tenor with the vehicle. The only shared characteristic is 'whiteness', and consequently the reader has to look for other clues to provide the bridge. This is made possible only through the internal sequence of the poem, placing the long white town between the possibilities of 'summer' and 'spring'. If the whiteness of the long town is an oblique reference to snow, then snow as a feature of winter gives the trope contiguity, suggesting metonymy as opposed to metaphor. The reader, involved in the linguistic process of the poem, has to construct a sequential linkage in order to progress. The fact that in the second stanza 'white' is associated with death tends to extend this linkage and introduces a further possibility. Silence, or the absence of meaning, threatens the articulated surface of the poem. The "long town of white" is mercifully terminated by blackbirds singing, although the song, like the poem, does not replace the silence, it simply holds it temporarily at bay. But the claustrophobic inevitability of silence, its ever presence behind the activity of language struggling to create meaning and space ("there's that long town of white to cross") exerts, at the close, an almost tactile pressure, literally interrupting
the poem's process and abnegating its basis of enquiry:

So sunset shuts my question down
With clasps of chrysolite.

The poem is the "question", a linguistic stratagem enacted on the page, regulated and unified by an internally constructed lateral contiguity, and finally linguistically 'shut down'. The "clasps of chrysolite" (in Dickinson's original these were much more effectively "Cuffs of Chrysolite!") cannot function associatively as a metaphor. Their functional relationship with the effects of "sunset" are tenuous to say the least, and they remain, finally, detached from symbolic signification, a physical part of the objective organisation of the poem, looking forward in effect to Eliot's:

   I should have been a pair of ragged claws
   Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

Like Eliot's dismembered "claws" the "clasps" exist within the queer, surreal logic of the poem, carrying threatening but vague associations of physical closure. As in her manipulation of line, rhyme, metre, punctuation and syntax, Dickinson recast the elements of her figurative tropes in a mould which alters their capacity to function for the reader in the expected ways. Ease of association is removed so that a structure of contiguous linkage has to be imposed, leading to the closer involvement of the reader in the process of linguistic enactment. The subtle shift (in conventions which appear to be in operation) forces a greater scepticism from the reader who must then fill in
the gaps or acknowledge them as integral. David Porter has pointed out in his book *Emily Dickinson: The Modern Idiom* that "absences and omissions, in instances of striking artistic evasiveness, constitute Dickinson's deepest identity. Her freedom and her attitude reveal themselves in these customary acts not performed, conventions rejected, and discursive shapes unfulfilled". 29 This kind of strategy can be categorised as tending toward metonymic as opposed to metaphoric construction. As David Lodge explains it in *The Modes of Modern Writing*, metonymy takes place through a condensation of contexture. The figure is achieved by deletion of information, leaving a clue to that information in the text. Lodge suggests that "metonymy and synecdoche...are produced by deleting one or more items from a natural combination, but not the items it would be most natural to omit". 30

There is a sense in which, throughout much of her work, Dickinson appears to have been perversely avoiding the possibility of straightforward referential, associative or empirical progression. In spite of the misleading 'plain talk' surface tone she adopted, there is what Porter describes as a "disappearance of reality into language [in] a large number of poems which are unabashed word displays." 31 In his idiosyncratic essay 'How to Read and Why', first published in *New York Herald Tribune Books* in January 1929, Ezra Pound identified this kind of writing as "logopoeia":

...'the dance of the intellect among words', that is to say, it employs words not only for their direct mean-
ing, but it takes count in a special way of habits of usage, of the context we expect to find with the word, its usual concomitants, of its known acceptances, and of ironic play. It holds the aesthetic content which is peculiarly the domain of verbal manifestation....It is the latest come, and perhaps the most tricky and undependable mode. 32

Eleven years earlier (Little Review, March 1918), reviewing an anthology which included work by Williams, he used the word to categorise the work of Mina Loy and Marianne Moore.

Writing which seeks outside of the linguistic interactive system for associative justification is metaphoric in essence, whereas that which builds up continguously, relying on the bonding properties which are, "peculiarly the domain of verbal manifestation" betrays a metonymic ground. Williams, in various comments he made on the work of Moore, Stein and Dickinson, and in his acceptance of the orthodoxy offered by Otto Weininger's fashionable but shallow study, Sex and Character (1906), appears to have associated the use of non-metaphoric language with 'female psychology'. He found it expedient to claim that male writing (that which has formed the basis of the literary establishment) in its quest for self justification (deracinated from the living cycle) seeks comparisons and associations. Dissident female writing, having rejected the metaphoric tradition against which it must struggle, reverts to a more tactile relationship with words and the way they can be made to interact laterally as opposed to vertically. The lateral axis of literary language, as Roman Jakobson has described it, is "syntagmatic" and "combinative", relying on "metony-
my", whereas the vertical axis, being largely "selective" and "associative" is "metaphoric". 34

There is some justification in suggesting that all words depend for their denotative function on the vertical "associative" axis, that words as symbols for extra-lingual phenomena must, therefore, operate metaphorically. This is certainly the case with words operating singly. For instance, the unmediated word "smile" will activate in the reader familiar with that word a process of association probably terminating with the mental construction of a particular human facial expression. There is an early poem by Williams, however, in which the word/phenomenon association is thrown into temporary confusion, requiring a linguistic re-alignment based on the internal verbal structure. In 'Winter Quiet' (Al Que Quiere!) the line "the big tree smiles and glances / upward!" requires of the reader just such a shift in reading technique. The normal associative function of the word "smiles" is undermined by its relationship within the poem to the word "tree". It is only by paying close attention to the structural contiguity of the figure that any kind of logical solution can be reached, and this is dependent upon the activity of the trope within the poem as a complete movement.

Winter Quiet

Limb to limb, mouth to mouth
with the bleached grass
silver mist lies upon the back yards
among the outhouses.

The dwarf trees
pirouette awkwardly to it--
whirling round on one toe;
the big tree smiles and glances upward!
Tense with suppressed excitement
the fences watch where the ground
has humped an aching shoulder for
the ecstasy. (CEP 141)

As in Dickinson's 'It can't be summer', the engagement here is with language, a systematic articulation around a problematic centre; emptied by the vortex of activity generated through the turbulence of frustrated expectation. Looking for an alternative activity for the word "smiles" the reader becomes involved in the motion of the poem, its structural tactics. And once again, using a strategy strikingly similar to that of Dickinson's seasonal sophistry, apparently reassuring resolutions simply camouflage the threatening exclusion at the centre.

There is a sense in which this poem functions successfully as an extended Imagist figure. Like Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro'-

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough. (Pound Collected)

- Williams' poem emerges through the association of natural phenomena with human characteristics, but it is because of the withdrawal of hierarchic assurance that a dynamic tension is generated. In Pound's poem, despite its brevity, the "apparition of these faces" has been given contextual ascendancy (having been precisely located "In a Station of the Metro") and the reader is obliged to reach out of this context in order to associate the "faces" with the metaphoric vehicle; "Petals on a wet, black bough". That
reaching out process confirms an ongoing relationship with the world of fulfilled expectations. The remarkable thing is that such a structural reinforcement of traditional poetic value could be conveyed in such a seemingly insubstantial vehicle. Pound had stripped his poem back to its primary skeletal metaphoric gesture, ridding his field of verbiage in order to reinvigorate the rhetorical ground. Out of this would grow the subsuming accomplishment of The Waste Land and The Cantos which reclaimed and articulated space for this kind of cultural ambition. Williams' own late long poem Paterson (1946-63) contributes more architecture to this re-alignment of Modernism with the specifically monumental, phallocentric, outreaching emphasis of traditional poetry. There is, however, in his lyric poetry, a positive movement away from the phallic rhetorical thrust of Pound and Whitman. In Spring and All he returns again and again to the need for separation from the symbolic tradition. "Crude symbolism", he wrote, "is to associate emotions with natural phenomena such as anger with lightning, flowers with love" (Imag 101/2), drawing attention to the crassness of equating phallic lightning with anger and vaginal flowers with love. "Such work is empty," he added, since it relied on standard usage and association. Interestingly it is a female contemporary he chose to offer as having avoided the temptation of easy rhetoric. He wrote: "The incomprehensibility of her poems is witness to at what cost (she cleaves herself away)
as it is also to the distance which [most other writers] are from a comprehension of the purpose of composition" (Imag 101).

In an essay on Moore's work, written in 1923, Williams offered more lucid explication, with particular reference to her poem 'Marriage':

There are two elements essential to Miss Moore's scheme of composition, the hard and unaffected concept of the object itself as an idea, then its edge-to-edge contact with the things which surround it...and without connectives unless it be poetry, the inevitable connective,[my italics] if you will. (Imag 317)

In other words, poetry should be capable of establishing its own system of bonding, relating the elements within to each other without the need to refer out (beyond that normally demanded by language) for connectives. In the same essay, Williams compared Moore's tactics with Dickinson's in terms of "rapidity of movement" and a pleasure that can be held firmly only by moving rapidly from one thing to the next. It gives the impression of a passage through. There is a distaste for lingering, as in Emily Dickinson. As in Emily Dickinson there is too a fastidious precision of thought where unrhymes fill the purpose better than rhymes. (Imag 313)

Unrhyme, that particular element which orthodox critics had seen as evidence of a flawed "appreciation of form and melody" in Dickinson's verse, is here singled out as tactical, as conscious artistry. Of course Williams is not precise in his use of the term 'unrhymes' and it is likely that he was alluding to any near rhyme, assonantal or consonantal, which showed her struggling against the orthodox demand for elegant prosody. It is of interest, how-
ever, to point out that Dickinson tended toward consonantal rhyme, as opposed to the more acceptable assonantal. This is a predeliction echoed in much of Williams' work.

Williams compared her achievement to that of Moore who "undertakes to separate the poetry from the subject entirely--like all the moderns". In 'Winter Quiet' Williams had attempted precisely this, to "separate the poetry from the subject" through the act or process of "poetry, the inevitable connective."

As in 'It can't be summer' the poem opens with a disarmingly clear, although perhaps somewhat unsettling first line. "Limb to limb, mouth to mouth", conveys immediately the probability of human love making. The difficulty arises with the realisation that the poem is remarkably empty of people. The next stage is to assume the figure to be metaphoric and the following three lines would seem to justify this:

with the bleached grass
silver mist lies upon the back yards
among the outhouses.

With some difficulty one can reach out for a comparison which brings this unruly figure to the brink of resolution, but then, as with Dickinson's "long town of white" Williams has stretched the trope too far and the associative bonding breaks down:

The dwarf trees
pirouette awkwardly to it--
whirling on one toe;
the big tree smiles and glances
upward!
"It" as in Dickinson's poem, can be identified as the elusive centre. The superimposition of an incongruous, dramatic movement unhinges the connection between human and inanimate life and their counter pulling force vacates the centre for a different, more integral activity, a linguistic ballet which is the poem. The anthropomorphic imposition is stretched further in the lines:

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

Language, the essence of humanity, must always operate to impose a human claim on all phenomena. The very act of description tends to sublimate disparate parts into a constructed system for the sake of reassurance. The human being is the slave of consciousness, from which is engendered the imperative: to make sense, to find similarities in order to categorise, and, most important, to locate self as indispensable within the hierarchy of things. In this poem Williams has superimposed certain idiosyncratically human characteristics (such as formalised dance and sexual voyeurism) onto an empty landscape, but in a way which overtly calls the association into question. In spite of the eccentric activity which is taking place, the poem is remarkably still and silent. The title 'Winter Quiet' and the silence, like that in Dickinson's poem, is specifically that of a landscape which is emptied of people. If traditional literary language is the imposition, by association, of order upon the possibility of disparity in the world of
objects, Williams is attempting to re-objectify this world by undermining "crude symbolism" in the poem. In his 'Prologue' to Kora in Hell he wrote that,

before any material progress can be accomplished there must be someone to draw a discriminating line between true and false values.

The true value is that peculiarity which gives an object a character by itself. The associational or sentimental value is the false. (Imag 14)

This comment was made in response to Wallace Stevens' criticism of the book Al Que Quiere!, the main thread of which is contained in this statement:

My idea is that in order to carry a thing to the extreme necessity [sic] to convey it one has to stick to it;...[sic] Given a fixed point of view, realistic, imagistic or what you will, everything adjusts itself to that point of view....But to fidget with points of view leads always to new beginnings and incessant new beginnings lead to sterility. (Imag 15)

To assume in this way the fixed centrality of the permissible point of view is to place the cognisant subject in a traditionally privileged position, dating, in this context, from the Italian Renaissance and linear perspective. The world is flattened and subordinated by the imposed structural order (e.g. poetry, which Stevens called "The Supreme Fiction"). The result is essentially Romantic, depending upon the unification of all phenomena through the consciousness of the central ego, not so far removed from the Transcendentalism of Whitman and Emerson. This need to make associative justification of the coexistence of things Williams saw as sentimental, emotionally immature. He wrote: "It's imposition is due to a lack of imagination" (Imag 14), or of that ability to move, as displayed by
Dickinson and Moore, "rapidly from one thing to the next" with "precision of thought". That rapidity and precision had become very much part of Williams' own strategy. He wrote: "The attention has been held too rigid on the one plane instead of following a more flexible, jagged resort. It is to loosen the attention, my attention since I occupy part of the field, that I write these improvisations" (Imag 14). The improvisations are, of course, those from Kora in Hell which began to appear in The Little Review in 1917, but the comment applies also to the lyric verse Williams was producing at this time. The important part of the statement just quoted is, "since I occupy part of the field", decentralising the position of the poet in such a way as to assume equal (or lack of) status for all things, including the perceived, the perceiver and the perceptive medium, in this case, language as the prerequisite of human intelligence. These three elements do exist outside their relationship with one another, but singly, without contiguity, they are void of significance. The human consciousness in isolation, a closed book, unperceived phenomena, these contribute nothing to hierarchic categorisation, and so there can be no resolution in meaning. The arbitrary condition of meaning and its tenuous, temporary hold on things is exacerbated by its very dependence on those things. For Williams the construction, using words, of mechanisms, depended upon the coexistence in the human consciousness of the cognisant subject, the object(s) and
the language. The word-mechanisms could then take their place as phenomena in their own right, operating to "separate the poetry from the subject entirely". In *Spring and All* he wrote:

> The value of the imagination to the writer consists in its ability to make words. Its unique power is to give created forms reality, actual existence. This separates [sic] (Imag 120)

In 'Winter Quiet', separation results from the disparity between the associative impulse, reaching for human, sexual connotations, and the extractable 'reality' of cold, static and silent indifferences. What takes place is Pound's "dance of the intellect among words", or what Porter described in Dickinson's work as "this disappearance of reality into language". The reader is forced, as with the Dickinson poem, to cease casting around for reassuring analogies or similarities with which the world of experience might be engaged. The figures linguistically expose the absence of humanity in a system constructed ironically in human terms: "limb to limb, mouth to mouth", "the big tree smiles", "tense with suppressed excitement / the fences watch". This activity temporarily obscures, but in no way contains the anarchy of external phenomena whereby human beings as things, unsignified, are devalued against the co-existence of all other things. So the condition obscured by this particular linguistic dance is silence, perhaps pre-consciousness, the futility of naming the differences in an indifferent world. The essential twentieth-century existential dilemma is here; i.e. the problem of
identity and status in a godless universe, for which, perhaps the only relief is in the process of enquiry and its medium, language, as continuous definition. This process, however, is necessarily temporary, and will always be made void, 'shut down' as Dickinson put it. Porter's summary of her position might just as well be applied to Williams' during this first major phase of his development:

Her texts display the three major aspects of the modern poetry dilemma: the question of the material of poetry (its realm and subject matter), the crisis over the conceptual tissue of poetry (its perspective and coherence), and the crisis over its function, that is the great modern question of the relationship of language and artistic imagination to reality. 35

Williams believed the imagination to be primarily a functional operation, a refined mode of selection dealing with the assorted constituents of art. By selecting and organising these constituents into designs based on the qualities and properties inherent in each, the imagination makes possible a synthesis which is neither abstract nor concrete but a finely balanced dependence upon each. The real value in a work of art is the fact that it is worked, wrought, enacted, the artefact itself being merely evidence that the process has taken place. The most successful works display most effectively an articulation which is always current because it actively engages the imagination of the consumer in the process. This has to be accomplished, however, using a problematic medium. As Williams put it:

"...the author and the reader are liberated to pirouette with the words which have sprung from the old facts of
history, reunited in present passion [my italics]" (Imag 149).

Words must always spring "from the old facts of history" since they make up the language which both conveys history and is contained by it. The history of language is most significantly the history of its exploitation, the manipulation of its mechanisms to articulate whichever ideological currency is ascendent. For Williams, in his anxiety, struggling for a position outside the status quo, a shift away from currently dominant literary practice was imperative. The Imagists had cleared some of the ground with their expressed intention of sharpening the focus and rescuing the means of poetry from orthodox decoration. In order to justify his position, writing against the grain, Williams needed a firmer anchor, an identifiable formal system of bonding.

In 1913 he wrote of the poem as "creative action", "an assembly", attempting to explain the process of poetry as dependent upon the interactive operation of its parts. He wrote: "No part in its excellence but partakes of the essential nature of the whole". A tradition which systematically privileged such elements as the associative function of metaphoric language provided one specific front on which to dissent, thereby giving definition to his own process. He responded by offering an alternative, more contiguous relationship between the parts as ordered by the imagination which,
creates an image, point by point, piece by piece, segment by segment - into a whole, living. But each part as it plays into its neighbor, each segment into its neighbor segment and every part into every other, causing the whole - exists naturally in rhythm.

In the poems written after The Tempers (1913), his most Imagist inspired collection, Williams can be seen to have moved conspicuously away from metaphoric usage, in a direction tangential to that taken by Pound, seeking significance in the local, both in geographical and in linguistic terms. In both of these aims, Dickinson's work provided an available American precedent. This is not to suggest that Williams was not concerned with the wider issues available to the poet, but that he claimed a more immediate and tangible access to them through the particulars of the locality. The American experience was one which had resulted from voluntary dislocation from the old world, so there was little justification in the American artist relying for materials on that rejected and depleted matrix. It was not that Williams was convinced of the particular virtues of America over all other cultural states; rather that he perceived the value of creative process which stemmed from those processes of existence which had informed the artist's developing consciousness. In every action or observation, no matter how trivial or crude, the poet could find a radiating significance. In a letter to Viola Baxter Jordan written in 1914 he attempted to explain:

I disdain nothing. I expect to reach heaven over a bridge of cobbled stones. My whole life is a cleaving to the very nearest thing I can lay hand to with a
re-enforcing determination to give up nothing without a completely convincing reason....

I am here for one clear reason and that is that I cannot see how I can be anywhere else and do what I have determined to do. 37

The phrase, "I expect to reach heaven over a bridge of cobbled stone", is an early reference to Williams' lifelong insistence upon the disparity between poetry's means and its objective. In the opening lines from *Paterson* he put it succinctly. "Rigor of beauty is the quest" he wrote, "But how will you find beauty...?" The only available way was:

To make a start
out of particulars
and make them general, rolling
up the sum, by defective means (*Paterson*, 3)

By concentrating on particulars, using a language made out of particulars, Williams was aiming to intrude upon the metaphysical. He believed that the poet's necessary understanding of the arbitrary and untranslatable pre-existence of the un-human provides for the poetry. In *Spring and All* he wrote describing:

"a world detached from the necessity of recording it, sufficient to itself, removed from [the poet] (as it most certainly is) with which he has bitter and delicious relations and from which he is independent--moving at will from one thing to another--as he pleases, unbound--complete

and the unique proof of this is the work of the imagination not "like" anything but transfused with the same forces which transfuse the earth--at least one small part of them. (Imag 121)

The poet's "bitter and delicious" relationship with the phenomenal world is the metaphysic of poetry, but it is too far removed to be approachable using the defective means
language provides. However, language has a physiological dimension which puts it alongside the other "things" in the objective world, and just as the world of concrete relationships and proximities is evidence of what Gerard Manley Hopkins called "inscape", language attached contiguously rather than associatively with the phenomenal 'outside' can be "transfused with the same forces which transfuse the earth". The dialectical problem for the poet working to activate the field between language and experience is presented in the same passage from Spring and All:

Nature is the hint to composition not because it is familiar to us and therefore the terms we apply to it have a least common denominator quality which gives them currency--but because it possesses the quality of independent existence, of reality which we feel in ourselves. It is opposed to art, but opposed to it.

This "least common denominator quality" is implicit in the use of traditional poetic language with its comfortably associative inevitability contributing to the terms of exchange, giving to them value or "currency" whereby a rose can stand for love. The problem is that through overproduction the metaphoric trope becomes devalued, drained of both its intrinsic and symbolic vitality. A closer focus on how things interact in nature is necessary, Williams insisted, before the language can begin to operate in a revalued system of exchange. By introducing a metonymic bias into his poetry, Williams was, in Roman Jacobson's terms, bending his Modernism toward Realism, toward the language of prose. He countered this by manipulating syntax, enticing the reader into textual puzzles which
required intelligence to resolve.

Like Dickinson, Williams believed that "Nature is a Haunted House - but Art a House that tries to be Haunted". It is not possible to capture the ghost linguistically, but through a sincere contiguous attention to particulars, "rolling / up the sum" in language, "defective means", a separation is achieved and the poem becomes an equivalent contiguity of parts, similarly "haunted". Explication is removed from the function of the poem which becomes convoluted, reduced to its process as language. Before the appearance of Williams' short lyrics, this kind of activity took place (as far as American poets are concerned) only in Dickinson's poems, which remain more radical in this respect than most of Williams' poems. Her lyrics are commonly more abstract and discontinuous than his, in a way which Porter describes as functioning "at a threshold state of organization...signaling the end of anecdotal poetry".

He continues:

In the place of narrative and reference that would systematically direct, a reader encounters language distorted by defects in syntax and grammar, unreasonable transpositions, extreme ellipses and lost connectives, and many other types of contortions or excisions. In poems made indistinct by such problems, a careful reading will take a willing reader to significance in Dickinson's work which is not only new and startling but which indicates about her work the greatest consequence of all, her role as a language founder.

For Williams, this kind of prosodic infelicity (the structural warping of lines) occurs most systematically in Spring and All, a book which has with some justification been linked by critics with contemporary experimentalism,
particularly New York Dada. There are, however, various significant similarities between the poems in this book and the 'local' American example available in Dickinson's eccentric lyrics. In addition to the intrinsic value of her experimental techniques, she offered a compacted counter-balance for the sprawl of Whitman and the weight of Pound.

When comparing those particular textual strategies which have shaped the work of both Dickinson and Williams, it is important to remember that the poems available to Williams during his early development had been mutilated by Dickinson's editors. Even in their adulterated state, however, it is surprising how many of her idiosyncrasies had survived. This is particularly true of the poems collected in The Single Hound, published (significantly for Williams) in 1914. The texts in this book are, on the whole, somewhat more faithful to the original manuscripts (where the originals still exist) than were the first three books, published in the 1890s. There is, for example, a higher incidence of dashes and internal capitalisation, contributing to a graphic textual dynamic which was more acceptable in the post Imagist period. Take for example this short and irregularly arranged version of "I fit for them" (Johnson 1109):

I fit for them,
I seek the dark till I am thorough fit.
The labour is a solemn one,
With this sufficient sweet--
That abstinence of mine produce
A purer good for them,
If I succeed,—
If not, I had
The transport of the Aim-- 40

The poem, though metrically regular, has been reshaped, resulting in "the structural warping of her lines", and giving the whole a shape rather more interesting than the two quatrains it might have been. The rhymes are "unrhy-mes". Dickinson uses both the traditionally acceptable assonantal rhyme ("seek", "sweet") and the less common consonantal rhyme ("fit", "sweet"; and "seek", "dark"). In this way she is straining away from the gravitational pull of English prosody in a poem which, most fascinatingly of all, is almost abstract. There are an inordinate number of intangibles for a poem so short: for instance, who is the "I"?, who are "they"?, what is "the labour" and "the Aim"? In other words, what is the poem about? Perhaps its most radical aspect is that it is about what it is, what it does on the page. It is a struggle with language to achieve "a purer good", while acknowledging the ambiguity, even the unruliness of words; seeking beauty, perhaps, "by defective means". But does the second line indicate an achievement, 'thoroughly fit', or a shape, 'a thorough fit'? Lack of connectives and incomplete punctuation (forshadowing Mina Loy) demands of the reader a closer attention than might otherwise be the case. Compare this with the opening lines from poem "VI", Spring and All (which contains also echoes of Eliot, and Hamlet's celebrated monologue):
No that is not it
nothing that I have done

nothing
I have done

Is made up of
nothing (Imag 103/4)

Both poems are engaged thematically with process, even specifically with poetry, and both signal their intention by specific omissions which beg questions, the solutions to which are not explicit in the text. In Williams' poem the insertion of punctuation, subtly altering the behaviour of the syntax, could offer various alternatives in terms of meaning. The very act of omission in both poems allows for more space, admitting the existence of ambiguity in language, and accommodating the active consciousness of the reader. Of the two, Williams' poem is slightly less opaque:

everything
I have done
is the same

if to do

is capable
of an
infinity of
combinations

The poet is always involved in the same process, and an awareness of that contributes to the paradox presented in this poem as "confusion / which only to / have done nothing / can make / perfect". Any attempt at expression must always end in ambiguity, but a recognition of the active field of language as a continuous process, into which the writer taps, provides for a vast range of connotations, so
that "everything / and nothing / are synonymous", if reached by very different routes.

As with Dickinson, paradox surfaces as a vital element in Williams' short lyrics; paradox made active in the tightest, most convoluted locutions. Dickinson's poems will often thrust the paradox forward in the first statement, as in this tiny poem from The Single Hound (J. 1456):

So gay a flower bereaved the mind
As if it were a woe--
Is beauty an affliction, then?
Tradition ought to know.

The brevity of this tight lyric, and its sardonic debunking of traditional attitudes to certain categories of imagery would have appealed to Williams. Consider his tactics in the opening statement from poem "VII" from Spring and All:

The rose is obsolete
but each petal ends in
an edge (Imag 107-109)

Paradox arises here from the juxtapositioning of the reader's predictable rose imagery associations with the opposing strategy of the language. The old order of roses is dismissed.

wither? It ends--
But if it ends
the start is begun
so that to engage roses
becomes a geometry--

This currency of language re-claims the tired image and gives it immediacy. In The Single Hound Williams would have found this strategy consistently in use, as in this seventeen word poem (J. 1248):
The incidents of Love
Are more than its Events--
Investments' best expositor
Is the minute Per Cents 41

Both poets seem to have been continually preoccupied by the oddly ambiguous position of the writer, involved in the operation of an abstract system, language, but insistently upon the primacy of "things", "fact" as a means of verifying or authenticating the act of poetry. Writing from the insecurity of the poet working alone and against the grain, Williams produced various very short lyrics collected in the volume Sour Grapes in 1921. Williams' linkage of natural phenomena and human mortality to produce a metaphysical shock in the twenty-word poem, 'The Soughing Wind':

Some leaves hang late, some fall before the first frost---so goes the tale of winter branches and old bones.

could almost be a response to the twenty-one word poem from The Single Hound which, slightly less objectively addresses the same issue (J. 1215):

I bet with every wind that blew, till Nature in chagrin Employed a Fact to visit me, and scuttle my balloon. 42

Both poems conspicuously use consonantal rhyme, "fall" "tale" and "first", "frost" (WCW) and "bet", "Fact" and "chagrin", "balloon" (ED).

The enactment of the poem as temporary refuge from the existential panic of mortality is a primary concern of Williams', and while a similar preoccupation crops up from time to time in the work of Wallace Stevens and Marianne Moore, in no other American poet's work before Robert
Creeley does it arise so often and so succinctly as in Dickinson's. Nowhere in Williams' work is the balance more precise than in his poem 'XXIV' from *Spring and All*:

so much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow
glazed with rain
water
beside the white
chickens (Imag 138)

This listing of objective phenomena set in conflict with the abstract statement which opens the piece is remarkably similar in its strategic articulation to a poem first published in *The Single Hound* (J 663):

"Nature" is what we see,
The hill, the afternoon,
Squirrel, eclipse, the bumblebee,
Nay, nature is heaven.

"Nature" is what we hear,
The bobolink, the sea,
Thunder, the cricket,
Nay, nature is harmony.

"Nature" is what we know
But have no art to say,
So impotent our wisdom is
To her simplicity. 43

Williams' strategy is a reverse image of Dickinson's, whose abstract statement occurs at the end. The very existence of human "wisdom" "depends upon" the pre-existence of things and upon the relationships which "wisdom" can then construe. Once again, for both poets, the activity is generated by the presentation of a paradox; the incompatibility and interdependence of consciousness and objective
phenomena.

In Dickinson's poem there is evidence of a stubborn preference for the right word or phrase, as opposed to acceptance of the correct metric or phonic effect. By imposing a crude stress on every second syllable, countering the innate rhythm of the words and phrases used, the poem can be designated as metrically regular. Even so, lines seven and eight obstruct that regularity. The rhymes, moreover, are rather loose, a concession perhaps to orthodoxy, symptomatic of what Williams described as Dickinson's "distress marking the place at which she turned back". If, on the whole, her poems demonstrate this reluctance to reject entirely the prosodic structures of her day, there are some which overstep the mark sufficiently to have pricked the aesthetic sensibility of her mentor T.W. Higginson. As co-editor of her first volume, published in 1890 he commented in the introduction, "such verse must inevitably forfeit whatever advantage lies in the discipline of public criticism and the enforced conformity to accepted ways". 44 The fact that she refused to allow editors to alter her work while she was alive meant that publication was out of the question. She was, it would seem, fully aware of the problem and was prepared to remain anonymous, specifically in order to preserve the designed shape of her poetry.

Higginson's introduction is adapted from an essay which expressed more strongly his ambivalence. He wrote: "It is
with some misgivings, and almost with a sense of question-
able publicity that it has at last been decided...to print
a small selection from these poems", poems which he des-cribed as "plucked up by the roots...with earth, stones, and
dew adhering....Wayward and unconventional in the last
degree; defiant of form, measure, rhyme and even grammar". 45
There are poems included in the second volume co-edited by
Higginson (1891) which display a remarkable freedom, even
in their adulterated form. Since they are not readily
available in the edited versions it is necessary to quote
one in full. This poem is interesting for its use of
varied line lengths (each of which constitutes a syntac-
tical unit) and the subtle modulation of vowel sounds so
common in Williams' verse. Note the subtle pattern set up
through the words highlighted in the first six lines:

Victory comes late,
And is held low to freezing lips
Too rapt with frost
To take it.
How sweet it would have tasted,
Just a drop!
Was God so economical?
His table's spread too high for us
Unless we dine on tip-toe.
Crumbs fit such little mouths,
Cherries suit robins;
The eagle's golden breakfast
Strangles them.
God keeps his oath to sparrows,
Who of little love
Know how to starve! (ED Poems 207)

This poem is one of several by Dickinson which refuse to be
shaped by any metric or phonic rubric. The language is
laconic, arguably anti-poetic in its steadfast avoidance of
rhetorical elevation, its refusal to relinquish its 'con-
tact' with the 'local' plane from which the imagination has to approach the metaphysical. The rhymes are largely consonantal. Williams used surprisingly similar tactics in his poem 'To Waken An Old Lady' (Al Que Quiere!) in which the crisis of mortality is approached through the metonymic presentation of the activity of a "flight of small / cheeping birds". The fragility and temporality of life is apparent equally in the act of awakening an old lady and in the observation of winter birds in flight:

skimming
bare trees
above a snow glaze.
Gaining and falling
they are buffeted
by a dark wind--
But what?
On harsh weedstalks
the flock has rested,
the snow
is covered with broken
seedhusks
and the wind tempered
by a shrill
piping of plenty. (CEP 200)

These two poems display many shared tactics, not least of which is their nervous progression through a series of short lines, and a use of consonantal rhyme (highlighted). Both start with an abstract proposition: "Victory comes late" (ED), "Old age is / a flight" (WCW), locating the activity of the language in a winter setting: "Too rapt with frost" (ED), "above a snow glaze" (WCW). Both use birds as examples of delicate, temporal physicality in thrall to a powerful force: "Gaining and falling / they are buffeted / by a dark wind--" (WCW), "God keeps his oath to
sparrows, / Who of little love / Know how to starve!" (ED).
Both poems convey the paradox of moments of plenty (using the motif of food) in an existence constantly threatened by absolute deprivation. It is in this casual articulation, this deployment of the particulars of daily life, to obfuscate the constant threat of ___ ___ ___ ___ that Williams displays his deepest affinity with Dickinson.

For the construction of poems, the most convenient raw material from daily life is conversation, or 'speech acts', a source which Dickinson exploited skilfully throughout her verse. As Porter so revealingly comments:

Dickinson interrupted nineteenth-century discourse with a vernacular so direct it seemed crude to her first public. She disarming called it in poem 373 "my simple speech" and "plain word". It was in fact flattened speech, a talking that was depoeticizing [my italics] and an escape from pomposity. Into her poems and particularly into those outrageous first lines came a natural breath and diction that created the illusion and impact of real speech acts. 46

This struggle for "the illusion and impact of real speech acts" in poems which significantly begin "with the vernacular claim of intimate conversation" are equally apparent in a large number of lyrics written by Williams from about 1915 onward. Here are some opening lines, first from Al Que Quiere!: "Well mind, here we have / our little son beside us" (CEP 132), "You sullen pig of a man / you force me into the mud" (CEP 134), "Sweep the house clean, / hang fresh curtains" (CEP 137); from Sour Grapes: "Go to sleep--though of course you will not"(CEP 192), "Well, Lizzie Anderson! seventeen men--and / the baby hard to find a
father for!" (CEP 205), "I bought a dishmop--" (CEP 219); and from Spring and All: "What about all this writing?" (CEP 253), "Somebody dies every four minutes / in New York State--" (CEP 282).

With both poets, this achievement of the illusion of real speech acts in a poem will often be interrupted by eccentric combinations both figurative and adjectival. Dickinson's remarkable success with this kind of figure is explained by Porter in relation to her poem, 'Safe in their Alabaster Chambers' (first published in Poems, 1890). Porter quotes from the original version (J 216):

Diadems - drop - and Doges - surrender -
Soundless as dots - on a Disc of Snow -

The problem with the image "dots - on a Disc of Snow" takes the form of a paradox: while no exact image will form in the mind's eye (what sort of dots? what sort of disc?), the figure works superbly as poetry. It works "as poetry", specifically because it is not designed to work as anything else. The final stanza of this poem offers a subtle sound pattern, and a contiguity of shapes and movements as highlighted in the following:

Grand go the Years - in the Crescent - above them -
Worlds scoop their Arcs -
And Firmaments - row -
Diadems - drop - and Doges - surrender -
Soundless as dots - on a Disc of Snow -

The curve of the earth in the universe links with the shape of the "diadems" as a symbol for temporal earthly power, which links also, phonically, as part of this marvellously controlled lyric, with the intrinsic sound pattern. As in so many of her poems, Dickinson is concerned with the
function of the words and phrases as language, how they interact and how that interaction can open rather than close the field of connotative activity.

It may be helpful at this point to list a few of the most obvious of the obstructive figures displayed in Dickinson's work, and which were available to Williams circa 1915. From The Single Hound there is: "seraphic cupboards" (J 61), "ducal showing" (J 312), "nimble mansion" (313), "maritime conviction" (1302) and from Poems: Second Series one finds: "druidic differences" (1068), "neighborhoods of pause" (1159), "Scarlet experiment" (861) and many more. In thematic context these combinations are only marginally less perplexing, whereas in the surface context as language, the medium of the art, their suggestive function as sound, cueing echoes from the reader's sub-conscious, works at a level just outside the capacity of intellectual appraisal. Critics attempting to understand her images simply found them odd, and a remarkably similar tactic in Williams earned him the accusation in 1923 of "putting up a barrage of words to show that he - by Jove - is no lily-livered ninny singing of love". Marian Strobel was objecting here to the poems from Spring and All which were published as a pamphlet that year. The ten poems in Go Go (an issue of the little magazine Manikin ['Number Two'] devoted to Williams' poems) were, according to Strobel, the utterances of a "frightened spirit" in the form of "smart, tiresome, intricate, swaggering phrases" to cover the embarrassment
of "a little beauty". The irony is that she has discerned the true nature of these poems. They are the product of a "frightened spirit", awed by the futility of signification in an impermanent world. They are "smart" because they are the product of conscious artistic intelligence attempting to display that intelligence. They are "tiresome" because they demand reciprocal intelligence in the reader to unravel the linguistic "intricacies" which are forced up to the surface in typically modernistic fashion as "swaggering phrases".

The poems in Spring and All are liberally endowed with these Dickinsonesque "swaggering phrases", for instance: "dovetame winds" (Imag 99), "columns of air" (107), "faucet of june" (109), "skyscraper soup" (113), "agonized spires" (125), "voluptuous water" (132) and "excrement of some sky" (132). The phrase "death's long promised symphony" (141) could almost have been written by Dickinson.

It is often through locutions like these that Williams' and Dickinson's poems move from the deceptively plain surface of vernacular expression into a kind of opacity which typifies them both. In a letter to Williams dated November 1917, Pound commented, "the thing that saves your work is opacity and don't you forget it. Opacity is NOT an American quality". 49

In 1914 he had been irritated by one or two critics who had described Dickinson as an early Imagist, and in a letter to Harriet Monroe he complained: "Imagism consists
in presentation of the Image, it certainly does not consist in talking about abstractions like 'Finite infinity.' That sort of thing is precisely what we are avoiding with greatest intensity". 50 There were, according to Pound, only two previous American poets worthy of attention: "Poe is a good enough poet, and after Whitman the best America has produced...." 51

Williams claimed that Poe was "a genius intimately shaped by his locality and time"(IAG 216). He claimed for Poe an Americanness which is hard to reconcile with lines like these:

Helen, thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicean barks of yore,
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
The weary, way worn wanderer bore
To his own native shore. 52

His characterisation of Poe's position rings more true when applied to his own (or Dickinson's) endeavours:

The local causes shaping Poe's genius were two in character: the necessity for a fresh beginning, backed by a native vigor of extraordinary proportions,—with the corollary, that all "colonial imitation" must be swept aside....and second the immediate effect of the locality upon the first, upon his nascent impulses, upon his original thrusts; tormenting the depths into a surface of bizarre designs...(IAG 219)

Poe's work was sufficiently distant from Williams', struggling as he was for novelty by which to define himself, to point to an American tradition which could contribute weight to his position without obliterating it. In his comments on Whitman, Williams, like Pound, managed to consign his contribution to the catalogue of history. Whitman was a pioneer, a breaking away from the old world in form,
but without the control of language which the modern poet, in competition with past masters, must acquire. But by 1929 Williams had to concede to Dickinson her precision, her attention to particulars which appeared cleanly and unadorned by rhetorical fuss, her fastidiousness with words which meant that she was able occasionally to discard regular rhyme and metre, making of her work, "a beginning, a trembling at the edge of waking--the terror it imposes" (Imag 341).

This "terror", the modern existential dilemma of waking into possible chaos and meaninglessness, is at the centre of those of Williams' poems which are most reminiscent of Dickinson's. Both poets approached this terror by moving from a plain opening toward a linguistic closure. Compare the opening of Dickinson's 'There's a certain slant of light' (this version published in Poems, 1890) with Williams' 'VII' from Spring and All:

There's a certain slant of light,
On winter afternoons,
That oppresses like the weight
Of cathedral tunes

The sunlight in a yellow plaque upon the varnished floor
is full of a song inflated to fifty pounds pressure

(ED Poems 106)

(Imag 109/10)

In both poems the effect of light is given a metaphysical significance, activated in the field created by a complex interdependence of conflicting elements. Light is visual, but the effect it can have, dependent upon certain conditions (i.e. season) is analogous to the almost physiological
response (weight or pressure) people experience listening
to music (religious tunes or just song). "Cathedral tunes" can no more have "weight" than can a song be "inflated to fifty pounds pressure", but the appropriateness of the imagery is carried by both poems.

The light behaves geometrically in both poems, Williams following Dickinson's "slant of light" with "the triangle of the air". Both poems deal with the insoluble problem of definition. Dickinson's approach was quiet:

We can find no scar,
But internal difference
Where the meanings are.

Williams had to contend with similar conflict in a faster world in which J.P. Morgan, the industrialist, attempted
to solve the core
of whirling flywheels
by cutting
the Gordian knot

but the twentieth century linguistic dilemma -

Impossible
to say, impossible
to underestimate--
wind,...

is a reiteration of the earlier -

None may teach it anything,
'Tis the seal, despair,--
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the air.

The most remarkable shared tactic here is the progression into language as articulated connotation rather than language as reference. The separation begins to take place as the language loses grip on image and begins to turn in upon
itself as the matrix of human consciousness. The final utterances in both poems are reintroductions of imagery, but so dislocated as to create more problems than are solved. Once again the poetry slips over into the dim region of extra-human phenomena which, outside the struggle of language, shrugs off meaning entirely:

When it comes the landscape listens, ...earthquakes in Manchuria, a partridge from dry leaves
When it goes, 'tis like the distance On the look of death.

What have these things to do with human existence? Without language humanity becomes as marginal and as arbitrarily subject to cosmic forces as all other phenomena. It is definition which orders and creates significance, hierarchy, hope, difference, problems and solutions. And definition is linguistic, as is humanity. Language is the system which creates the difference between people and things, and for both of these poets, language was a continuous process of delineation, pushed into contact with things and experience in order to reflect relevance upon itself. In the modern era, new modes of expression were available, but whatever their source, the human imagination provided linkage by which they achieved their effect. Poetry had to take into account the physicality of words in order to activate them beyond their simple denotative function. In Spring and All Williams wrote:

Imagination is not to avoid reality, nor is it description nor an evocation of objects or situations, it is to say that poetry does not tamper with the world but moves it--It affirms reality most powerfully and there-
fore, since reality needs no personal support but exists free from human action, as proven by science in the indestructability of matter and of force, it creates a new object, a play, a dance which is not a mirror up to nature... (Imag 149)

The human world is that defined in language and so, in a sense, the human world of interrelated phenomena is necessarily linguistic. If language makes subjects out of all phenomena, then language makes of itself a subject. Put another way, if definition is, in the human consciousness, the reality of the object described, then the description becomes an object, taking its place, as Williams consistently insisted, alongside all other objects in the phenomenal world.

Poems which avoided holding "a mirror up to nature", which relied least on connectives and association through "crude symbolism" but which acknowledged the separation of language from denotation were the true goal, according to Williams, of modern poets. Dickinson was the one poet from the American past who had made significant progress in this direction. She was a local New England writer who appropriated the vernacular of New England speech for her compacted linguistic acts. In addition, she was widely read in spite of the fact that, like Williams she was a dissident who refused to compromise her art for the sake of easy consumption.

Publication of The Single Hound in 1914 was followed by two reviews which offered her work as prefiguring Imagism, with many of that movement's essential characteristics.
The New Republic reviewer, Elizabeth Shepley Sargeant, commented that the collection "throws a searching light on the revolutionary volumes of 1915. For starkness of vision, 'quintessentialness' of expression, boldness and solidarity of thought, [Dickinson]...might give the imagists 'pointers'". 53 Significantly, like Williams, "she did not go abroad for [her daring inspiration] but dug it out of her native granite". Here was an example of the radical poet working alone to create a distinctive new American voice against the current of literary orthodoxy.

Perhaps the most significant review of this volume, as far as Williams is concerned, was that written by Harriet Monroe, editor of Poetry (Chicago). The notice appeared in the December issue of the magazine and stated categorically that Dickinson was

an unconscious and uncatalogued Imagiste...[who] had the visual imagination, the love of economy in line and epithet, the rigorous austerity of style, and the individual subtlety of rhythm, demanded by the code of the contemporary poets who group themselves under that title. 54

Williams was, during this period, eager to be recognised as attached to this group (see Letters 27) and had been involved in correspondence with Monroe who had accepted a group of poems from him for publication. He wrote to her in May 1914, accepting some minor changes she had suggested, saying, "I respect your choice of the 3 out of 6 & listen with attention to your remarks" (Letters 28). Monroe was an influential figure in the new world of American poetry, and Williams was keen to be accepted (where Dickinson appeared
already to be a member).

One of those to whom Williams turned at that time for artistic support was the painter Marsden Hartley, a member of the 291 Group. This was the time, just after the First World War, when the avant-garde in America was most closely associated with the painters. In 1918 Hartley, who punctuated his painting with an occasional, rather whimsical foray into literary criticism, wrote a lengthy essay for The Dial extolling the virtues of Dickinson's poetry. The piece is somewhat hyperbolic and sentimental, but Hartley's position as a positive force in experimental American art and as a respected friend made his opinions of considerable interest to Williams. In his essay Hartley drew attention to Dickinson's localism:

One feels everywhere in her verse and in her letters an unexcelled freshness, a brightness of metaphor and of imagery, a peculiar gift that could have come only from this part of our country, this part of the world, this very spot....Her genius is in this sense essentially local, as much the voice of the spirit of New England as it is possible for one to be. 55

This essay highlighted Dickinson's dissident inclination to "point her finger at all tiresome scholasticism" and to her engagement with the inherent possibilities in language for poems in which "one finds a multitude of playful tricks for the pleased mind to run with". Hartley might have been writing with Williams in mind when he claimed for her "evasive genius" that "those who care for the vivid and living element in words will find her, to say the least, among the masters in her feeling for their strange shapes
and for the fresh significance [my italics] contained in them".

It seems, then, that there were various individuals known and respected by Williams, important contributors to the American avant-garde, for whom Dickinson was a significant force. Williams' tendency to avoid acknowledgement of her position among such early American experimentalists as Poe and Whitman (his first appraisal was written in 1923) is therefore somewhat conspicuous. The similarities in their approach to poetry (detailed above), suggest a connection which demands investigation. This combines with her availability as a less publicised dissident model than (e.g.) Whitman and Pound, her use of the American vernacular in compacted lines which pushed language into the foreground, and the fact that she was a woman and consequently marginalised by male orthodoxy.

Williams' obsessive avoidance of the accusation of plagiarism led inevitably to a parallel reluctance to acknowledge the activity of influence in his work. For example, his debt to Mina Loy is rather obliquely referred to and only then, one suspects, because his association with her during the Others period was well documented elsewhere (if subsequently played down). He was a generous spirit where unknown and struggling young writers were concerned, but his commentary on his influences (Whitman and Pound included) reflects as much on their weaknesses (adjusted in his own work) as their strengths.
Dickinson's tight lyrics acted as a nineteenth-century counterpoint to the sprawling innovations of Whitman. Where Williams laboured under the anxiety of Whitman's hold over his tone, an influence which was reinforced by another proximate force in Pound, Dickinson offered a quieter control and a much closer focus on the "minute particulars", either words or the objects they adhered to, which were so vitally part of the work of both poets.

Williams moved into the first important phase of his poetic, which engendered two of his greatest achievements, Al Que Quiere! and Spring and All, having rejected the possibility of following Pound and Eliot to Europe in search of cultural stimulation. He doggedly restricted his 'vortex' to the American ground, positively extolling the virtue of adherence to its soil and the inchoate culture which he claimed was beginning to emerge therefrom. From about 1913 onward, following the Armory Show in New York, an exciting interchange of ideas and ideologies would feed his hunger for a local acceleration, but the energy for that was already available, for those alert enough to recognise it, in the legacy of Whitman and Dickinson. The shape of Williams' early poetry is a testimony to that legacy, and it is largely his 'influence anxiety' during this stage which kept him from the easy acknowledgement of his debt. He saw his own position, however, marginalised by the critical establishment, tottering on the edge of obscurity, in terms which might be applied to Whitman and Dick-
inson in their previous struggle for significance. In the 'Prologue' he wrote:

A man of note upon examining the poems of his friend and finding there nothing related to his immediate understanding laughingly remarked: After all, literature is communication while you, my friend, I am afraid, in attempting to do something striking, are in danger of achieving mere preciosity. (Imag 20)
Oil on canvas, 39 5/8 x 25 1/8" (100.6 x 63.2 cm)
Zervos II, 227; Daix 368. The Art Institute of Chicago.
Gift of Mrs. Gilbert W. Chapman in memory of Charles B. Goodspeed

PLATE 1
Picasso
Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler
PLATE 3
Duchamp
The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even
Francis Picabia. Titlepage for *Dada, 4/5*. Plate 4

Picabia

Title Page of *Dada 4/5*
PLATE 5
Fra Angelico
Annunciation
Tuberoses. 1922. Watercolor, 13½ x 11½". Collection Mr. and Mrs. William Carlos Williams, Rutherford, New Jersey.
Section Four

An American Vortex

In 1916 Williams submitted his poem 'March' to The Egoist. The poet H.D. wrote to him, as assistant editor, complaining about "all the flippancies". She wanted to adapt the poem for publication in what Williams ironically described as "a purified form" (Imag 12). He published an extract of her letter in 'The Prologue' to Kora in Hell, presumably to illustrate the gap that had opened up between himself and the remaining Imagists. She wrote reminding Williams that "this business of writing is a very sacred thing!" and that in spite of his "derivative tendency", a comment which would have stung, he was, when he spoke "direct", "a poet". She made her position clear as to the direction she believed his poetic should take when she wrote:

The reason I want to [delete all the flippancies] is that the beautiful lines are so very beautiful - so in the tone and spirit of your Postlude--(which to me stands, a Nike, supreme among your poems). I think there is real beauty--and real beauty is a rare and sacred thing in this generation--(Imag 12/13)

She had detected in Williams' newer poetry a dissonant note which was at odds with her notion of the nature of beauty, and the sacredness of literature. She complained: "It is as if you were ashamed of your Spirit, ashamed of your inspiration!--as if you mocked at your own song. It's very well to mock at yourself--it is a spiritual sin to mock at
your inspiration" (Imag 13). Williams responded by writing into his 'Prologue' a crude personal manifesto.

There is nothing sacred about literature, it is damned from one end to the other. There is nothing in literature but change and change is a mockery. I'll write whatever I damn please, whenever I damn please and as I damn please and it'll be good if the authentic spirit of change is on it. (Imag 13)

This unilateral declaration of independence derived its energy from insecurity. H.D. had accused Williams of being derivative, unaware (perhaps) that this was quite the most hurtful thing she could have said. She was one of the 'elite' who had been approved by the 'divine Ezra', and her criticism must have compounded his feeling of exclusion. She had objected most to those passages in the poem (excised from all later printings) which were most energetic in their contrariness, such as:

Yes, blow—sneak in you common dirt winds!
Blow, you miserable senators!
Blow, you pot-bellied congressmen!
Blow you deadly preachers of the gospel! (CP1 494)

Williams was becoming convinced of the absurdity of a twentieth-century American poet attempting to project his voice into a 'sacred' dimension which hovered somewhere between nineteenth-century London and ancient Greece. In the disputed poem he wrote:

March,
   you are like a band of young poets that have not learned the blessedness of warmth (or have forgotten it).
I am moved to write poetry for the warmth there is in it and for the loneliness--
a poem that shall have you
in it March. (CEP 43-46)

Williams' association with the Imagists had helped him break free from the powerful grip of traditional figurative language and metrical regularity. Pound and the Imagists offered him the possibility of a new perspective on the processes of poetic composition. Pound wrote:

There is a sort of poetry where music, sheer melody, seems as if it were just bursting into speech.

There is another sort of poetry where painting or sculpture seems as if it were 'just coming into speech'.

The first sort of poetry has long been called 'lyric'....The other sort of poetry is as old as the lyric and as honourable, but until recently, no one named it....The 'Image' is the furthest possible remove from rhetoric. Rhetoric is the art of dressing up some unimportant matter so as to fool the audience for the time being....

Williams was able, in his most successful works, to combine the two elements here mentioned. The poem 'March' was perhaps his first published example of this combination and it probably appeared (circa 1916) to be an improvised, undisciplined text.

In 1913 Williams submitted an essay for publication in Poetry in which he asserted: "I do not believe in vers libre, this contradiction in terms." Despite the fact that Harriet Monroe turned it down as incomprehensible, the essay, as presented in Mike Weaver's The American Background, is fascinating as an early attempt by Williams to forge a systematic approach to his art. He began his essay by trying to identify the elusive underpinning structure of modern poetry.
No action, no creative action is complete, but a period from a greater action going in rhythmic course, i.e. an Odyssey is rightly considered not an isolated unit but a wave from a series from hollow through crest to hollow. No part in its excellence but partakes of the essential nature of the whole.

Here Williams appears to have the embryo of the 'composition by field' concept developed later, which became central to the 'Projectivist' poets of the Black Mountain group (associated with Charles Olson in the 1950s) who related to Williams as a primary influence. The imagistic element in his conception is conveyed in the following:

In the other direction, inward: Imagination creates an image, point by point, piece by piece, segment by segment -- into a whole, living. But each part as it plays into its neighbor, each segment into its neighbor segment and every part into every other causing the whole -- exists naturally in rhythm, and as there are waves, there are tides...

In other words, the image is not the controlling factor in a poem, but simply a structural unit contributing to the ebb and flow of the rhythmic whole. In the poem 'March' Williams was attempting to present, in a series of sharpening images, a sense of the current state of art, its traditional dependency, and the relationship of the individual artist to culture and history. Its use of the spring motif as an equivalent of artistic renaissance looks forward specifically to Spring and All. March is the month of inchoate promise, when a sudden frost can nip the flowers in the bud. All attempts at new forms in art during this transitional period amount to:
...--a flower or two picked
from mud or from among wet leaves
or at best against treacherous
bitterness of wind...

The image is precisely drawn: "a flower or two" in stark relief against the "mud", and depicted in plain language, devoid of archaisms, inversions and with figurative devices under control. This is an early example of Williams using his skill to co-ordinate all of the poetic techniques at his disposal. With no pre-designated shape his 'fluid mechanism' can adapt to the conditions of this particular piece of writing in "ripples of greater and lesser rhythmic particles, regularly repeated or destroyed..." He suggested that the poetic unit should be "of a convenient length, such as may be appreciated at one stroke of the attention. It must not be so small as not to tax the attention". The poem opens with one unit, an eight line stanza, one sentence with hung over lines and the images therein pared down to their barest essentials. The overall picture here is one of struggle, awakening, pushing through to life out of barrenness (and this six years before publication of Eliot's "April...breeding / lilacs out of the dead land"). While the whole poem is characteristically balanced on the border between Symbolism and Imagism, the contributing parts are constructed contiguously, building up the whole out of minute particulars archaeologically retrieved:

Natives cursing and digging
for pay unearth dragons with
upright tails and sacred bulls
Williams was employing for the first time in his career a highly complex time structure, presenting three distinct eras superimposed in a compressed simultaneity. The poem offers in an inclusive gesture an alternative time/space in which the common concept of linear chronology becomes irrelevant. Winds and archaeological curiosity have unearthed evidence of a past culture, presented graphically in the present tense:

See!
Ashur-bani-pal,
the archer king, on horse-back....

"I think there is real beauty", H.D. had written in her letter to Williams, "in all the pyramid, Ashur-bani-pal bits...." She compared these images with Williams' 'Postlude', although in fact the writing in 'March' is much more under control, and the images are more hard edged and concrete. The archer king, for example, is brought into the currency of the poem, out of the dim past, as an exciting archaeological find, a ceramic object

in blue and yellow enamel!
with drawn bow--facing lions
standing on their hind legs,
fangs bared! his shafts
bristling in their necks

The unearthing of this ancient civilization reveals objective evidence of the dawning of culture as we have come to understand it: a culture which offers tangible proof of its progress in the sciences, arts and crafts as accumulated wealth.

Williams introduced the Italian religious painter Fra
Angelico as personifying a second cultural awakening. Fra Angelico's work contributed to the early flowering of the Italian Renaissance, a "second spring-- / passed in a monastery / with plaster walls--in Fiesole". The imagery here is calmer, painterly, in keeping with the subject and the cultural context.

My second spring--painted
a virgin--in a blue aureole
sitting on a three legged stool,
arms crossed--
she is intently serious,
and still

watching an angel
with coloured wings
half kneeling before her--
and smiling--

Williams' choice of the artist Fra Angelico to personify his second cultural awakening is interesting for several reasons. First, it reveals, ironically, a tendency in Williams' to be drawn to the European masters (he would subsequently plunder Botticelli, Brueghel and moderns like Juan Gris and Paul Klee) while damning similar activity in the work of Eliot and Pound. Second, Fra Angelico was among the very earliest painters to employ the innovatory techniques associated with the Italian Renaissance. Williams could very easily identify his own position with that of the old master. Thirdly: the popular concept of Fra Angelico had been that of an intuitive, and sometimes divinely inspired, but essentially amateur artist. This notion was promoted by the sixteenth-century art historian Vasari who described the painter as "...a simple man and
most holy in his habits ...[who] never retouched or repair-
ed any of his pictures, always leaving them in the condi-
tion in which they were first seen, believing...that this
was the will of God". 4 This is at odds with the evidence,
as shown by modern cleaning techniques, of underpaintings,
let alone the obvious structural balance and the carefully
worked out linear perspective in his work. As John Pope
Hennessy has pointed out:

...the author of these paintings is uncompromisingly
professional...[whose] schemes have the appearance of
resulting from close thought and of having been subjec-
ted to scrupulous analysis....The works...show Angelico
to have been a painter of great formal inventiveness...
whose work was the expression not so much of his own
mystical experience as of a trend in the religious
thinking of his time.5

Here was a similar assumption to that with which Williams
had to contend in the critical response to his own work.
His preoccupation with formal innovation and his fastidious
process of composition were ignored by even the most posit-
ive of commentators who characterised his work as laconic,
intuitive, or just plain crude. Williams' passion was for
the art of poetry, poetry which, like Fra Angelico's paint-
ings, attempted to express the structural necessities of a
new age. The Annunciation identified by Williams in this
poem (Plate 5) is an investigation of pictorial tensions
set against architectural order and harmony. In the poem
Williams has captured the coiled tension of the painting in
the lines:

--the angel's eyes
holding the eyes of Mary
as a snake's hold a bird's
So far this poem has developed through four main phases. The first phase is introductory, setting the stage. The second introduces the characters: the ancients, the painter and the "band of / young poets". These characters are sketched in briefly, among flowers which are menaced by the threat of a late frost; the mood is expectant. In the third phase, the archer king is given more substance, accompanied by a clamour that accelerates the tone of the poem:

Sacred bulls--dragons
in embossed brickwork
marching--in four tiers--
along the sacred way to
Nebuchadnessar's throne hall!
They shine in the sun,
they that have been marching--
marching under the dust of
ten thousand dirt years.

These images coincide with "natives" employed as labourers by archaeologists. The artefacts which they unearth are transformed by discovery and redefinition into valuable cultural relics. Williams offered these labourers:

lining the way to an old altar!
Natives digging at old walls--
digging me warmth--digging me sweet loneliness
high enamelled walls.

The enamelled walls, the dragons and sacred bulls were the stuff from which Imagist poetry was constructed. Their cold, hard cultural significance for the "band of / young poets" simply acted to alienate the detached American poet. Williams moved the activity of his poem into the fourth phase in search of a more meaningful cultural context and a
more relevant means of expression.

The clamour of the previous movement is muted, and a new kind of dynamic is created. Exclamation marks, which abounded in the previous section, are conspicuously excluded from the suspended mood of this "second spring". The images are carefully drawn, the sinister relationship between Mary and the angel minutely observed to set up the conflict between moralistic rhetoric (the religious dogma of the age) and artistic innovation in an era of cultural fruition:

--the angel's eyes
holding the eyes of Mary
as a snake's hold a bird's.
On the ground there are flowers,
trees are in leaf.

But this is also an era which is past, which has lost its relevance for the modern artist, and the mood must be broken. Now is the time for "battle!", for "murder" and for the "real thing!" In this fifth phase Williams introduced the concrete reality of his day. The time was past for symbols of ancient achievement and for rhetorical moralistic didacticism in art. It was time to push the activity of art into 'contact' with the world of objective phenomena. The final phase is relentlessly active, driven by verbs and adverbs like "approaching", "seeking", "roar", "twine", "whirl", "cut", "spring", "strike" and "fling". The emphasis is on action, the unavoidable repercussions of social and cultural change leading to the need for the individual artist to respond. The "wind" of change must
necessarily strip away the conventions and traditions in which artists have begun comfortably to wallow; and left out in the cold they must, if they are to survive, seek out those formal solutions which will be regenerated out of the barrenness.

they—the winds—snakelike
roar among yellow reeds
seeking flowers—flowers

I spring among them
seeking one flower
in which to warm myself!

Here Williams expressed his conviction that the act of writing should itself be directed at the uncovering of new and relevant formal solutions. The old "flowers" of cultural tradition no longer generate warmth and have to be removed to provide space and light for the inchoate new ones:

But though you are lean and frozen—
think of the blue bulls of Babylon.
Fling yourself upon
their empty roses—
cut savagely!

The rejection of old values provides part of the impetus toward formal regeneration, although this is not to suggest that nothing can be learned from the successes of the past:

But—
think of the painted monastery
at Fiesole.

This was particularly appropriate for Williams when the chosen representative of the past had something to teach the modern artist about dissidence, or formal experiment- alism, or both, as in his characterisation of Fra Angelico.
Marginalised even further than previously (at least in his own mind) by his exclusion from the Imagist group, Williams looked to recruit figures, even from the distant past, to swell the ranks of his resistance partisans. At the same time, he was able to draw some reassurance from his temporary, and rather loosely defined alliance with those writers who became associated with the magazine Others.

Others

"I have just had an unpleasant passage of arms with William Carlos Williams," wrote Amy Lowell to John Gould Fletcher in a letter dated 11 October 1916. "Amy-gism", a clique which was more fashionable than experimental since the withdrawal of Pound, was in the ascendancy, and Others appeared to be heading for the rocks. She continued: "You were right in suspecting that 'Others' had gone to the wall....art which is not sincere has no chance. It may make a splash for five minutes, but counts for nothing in the long run". 6 Lowell's accusation that those involved with Others were not "sincere" in their art echoes H.D.'s comment, quoted above, that "it is a spiritual sin to mock at your inspiration". H.D. had aligned herself with Lowell and the post-Pound Imagists in defending the "sincere" element in modern poetry against the disrespectful front of the dissident factions. In a letter to Williams, Lowell had objected to the excesses present in Mina Loy's 'Love
Songs' (analysed in some detail below) which had been published in the first issue of Others, stating this as the reason for her own refusal to contribute. Ezra Pound, she accused in her letter to Fletcher, was merely a "liar" and Williams was "terribly bitter over the failure of 'Others', and utterly bamboozled by Ezra." Here we have an early example of that assumption about Williams that he was emotional, an acolyte of Pound's and consequently not to be taken seriously as a thinking poet in his own right. He wrote to her on October 16, 1916, saying: "To you...one who thoroughly believes in another must be of course a 'henchman.' How then can you have had the vaguest notion of what Others meant to me?" (Letters 38). Fletcher, replying to Lowell's letter, dismissed Williams as one who "has the Ezra trait of considering himself of immense importance to the universe". On the following day (1st November, 1916) he wrote to Conrad Aiken about Others and its contributors:

They all seem to have been imbued—Williams especially—with the desire to shock the public at any price and to proclaim their own infinite importance in the scheme of things. This is the old Ezra game, and I am too wary to be caught by such tricks...Harriet [Monroe] and Others can perish for aught I care. 8

It is ironic that Fletcher should have associated Others with Monroe's Poetry, a magazine which had displayed an antipathy similar to that of the later Imagists for the likes of Williams, Loy and Kreymborg. Monroe did accept work by associates of this group, but only on condition that their 'eccentricities' be ironed out for publication. This editing evangelism was particularly annoying to Wil-
liams, since he saw her changes to his texts as reversing those very steps forward which had been so painful for him to make. In October 1916 he wrote to her:

I cannot understand the feeling that wants to change and rearrange according to some yardstick which has not the slightest application to the work of some person who has spent time and attention and even more important substances to bring that piece of work into the exact mould in which it is presented. (Letters 39)

Largely through his association with Others Williams had made his breakthrough into a poetic process, the operation of which depended on his departure from traditional notions of form. To impose any "yardstick" on his verse was to deny its intention as modern experiment. Since that intention was Williams' current means of self-signification, Monroe's actions were guaranteed to stimulate the anxiety which lay constantly just below the surface of his bravado.

He continued:

As long as the poem in question is read aloud as intended [my italics] it makes no difference how it is written, but it will be physically impossible for anyone to guess how I intended it to be read the way you have arranged matters.

It seems that only with Others was Williams able to consolidate his small, but significant advances, innovations which Monroe and Lowell felt unable to sanction. He concluded:

I believe with my whole soul that the policy you have evidenced even in such a slight matter as the elimination of my small letters at the beginning of lines...is of the stuff that more than anything eats the stuff out of honest expression.

Williams' first publication with Others had taken place with the second issue of the magazine in August 1915, and
all four of the works included have their line beginnings capitalised. But between then and February 1916, with his second Others exposure, Williams had made that significant step forward. Such an obvious and arbitrary dismissal of an experimental element in the poems must have been acutely felt. In a Poetry review of the first Others anthology (June 1916) Max Michelson compounded the condescension with the assumption that "even Miss Monroe, whose editorial ideal evidently is for poems of more artistic permanence than many in this volume are, will agree with me that every lover of art, no matter what his own tastes are, should encourage the more experimental work too". 9 The review is really a careful statement of the solid superiority to Others of Poetry in the field of art and aesthetics. "W.C. Williams", he commented, "is not represented by as good work as he has had in POETRY" and "Pound's Shopgirl is lovely; the beginning is as good as some of the Chinese masterpieces he has recreated for us". Even Pound, when tainted by the prosaic influence of Others, could not sustain his best form. Michelson's most damning criticism was that poets associated with this group tended to use modernism as a means of disguising their formal and intellectual superficiality.

Under the thin or thick veil of obscurity some of these poets are tempted toward a more or less delicate charlatanism, poor workmanship, vulgar smartness, etc.; then there are also the newest clichés, which save the writer real thinking; and one can only be grateful that poets do not more often and more fully take advantage of these opportunities.
It is somewhat ironic that comments like this can have been made about a volume which included work by Williams, Pound, Loy and Wallace Stevens, in a magazine, the same issue of which carried this poem by H. Thomas Rich:

YOU CAME AND WENT

All as a bird sails through the silent night,
On swift wings bent,
Leaving a wake of music in its flight,
You came and went. 10

This, presumably, is that poetry "of more artistic permanence" and the product of "real thinking". This brand of quasi-imagistic writing is the very stuff against which Williams and others had deployed themselves. The previous edition of Poetry (May, 1916) had carried a selection of poems by the reviewer, Michelson, from which the following has been extracted as typical:

Suns: now dead
Have tucked away of their gold for your hair:
My buried mouth still tastes their fires.

A tender god built your breasts--
Apples of desire;
Their whiteness slakes the throat;
Their form soothes like honey. 11

There are nine poems in this selection, significantly more exposure than was ever offered to Williams during this period, an implied judgement (Williams must have felt) on their relative value.

The language is archaic, the imagery sloppy and the tone naively portentous. The poem, entitled 'Love Lyric' is reminiscent of Williams' 'Postlude' first published in Poetry in 1913:
Give me hand for the dances,
Ripples at Philae, in and out,
And lips, my Lesbian,
Wall flowers that once were flame. (CEP 16)

There is little wonder that the new literary establishment, represented by figures like Monroe, Lowell, Fletcher, and H.D., having struggled to establish Imagism as the most current form, should be so antagonistic to the dada-istic irreverence of the newer American avant-garde. But there was more to this than simple iconoclasm, and there was a greater variety and value in their experiments than the critics liked to imply. Furthermore, there was no single purpose, no Others manifesto, and no obvious spokesperson for the group.

Michelson had identified Pound and Eliot among the experimentalists in his review, simply on the grounds that they had published in the magazine, but their involvement was tenuous, and not without an element of condescension. Pound complained: "While I concede this to be the liveliest sheet that has ever come out of the States, quite a few exhibits are frankly impossible." 12 Having conveniently forgotten the trouble he had had persuading Monroe to accept Eliot’s 'Prufrock' for publication in Poetry in 1915, Pound wrote to her: "It was a great waste to let the 'Portrait of a Lady' go to Others but I was in a hurry for it to come out...." 13 In a letter to his protege Iris Barry he wrote: "Others is a harum scarum vers libre American product, chiefly useful because it keeps 'Arriet (edtr Poetry) from relapsing into the nineties." 14
Perhaps you are unfamiliar with this 'new poetry' that is called 'revolutionary'. Perhaps you've heard that it is queer and have let it go at that. Perhaps if you tried it you'd find that a side of you that has been sleeping would come awake again. It is worth the price of a Wednesday matinee to find out. By the way the new poetry is revolutionary. It is the expression of a democracy of feeling rebelling against an aristocracy of form. 15

Of course, Williams' practice showed him to be no great advocate for the democratising of poetry. His developing preoccupation with the local and the 'common ground' as available poetic sources had as much to do with the situation in which he found himself as with any ideological purpose. In 1915 he wrote:

I will express my emotions in the appearances, surfaces, sounds, smells, touch of the place in which I happen to be.

I will not make an effort to leave that place for I deny that I am dependent on any place. (Recog p.58)

This posthumously published statement was written in direct response to Henri Gaudier-Brzeska's 'Vortex' which appeared in the impressively offensive *Blast* (edited by Pound and
Wynham Lewis in July of that year. Pound's position as a primary member of the vorticist group emphasised once again his energetic role as an iconoclast. He claimed in the same issue that "BLAST alone has dared to show modernity its face in an honest glass". The common person he renamed, "homo canis" and commented, "of course the homo canis will follow us. It is the nature of the homo canis to follow". Pound contemptuously presented the artist as unquestionably superior to the common person. "Does anything but the need of food," he demanded, "drive the artist into contact with the homo canis?"

In the same article Pound accused all other periodicals of moral and aesthetic spinelessness, just at the moment when Others was getting under way. For Williams there was a lot at stake. He had no regular medium through which to present his work. Poetry's elitist editorial policy meant that for the most part his own tentative experiments were unsuitable. The Egoist was dominated by the very people whose work tended to make the brightest impression; Pound, H.D., Aldington and Eliot.

Paradoxically it was Pound who made it possible for his old friend in Rutherford to experience, temporarily at least, that warmth which is the reward of group solidarity. Williams' American vortex came about as a direct result of a letter from Pound to Alfred Kreymborg.
Kreymborg had met the experimental painter and photographer Man Ray and the painter Samuel Halpert in 1913, and shortly afterwards the three of them had begun plans for a radical American periodical to function as an alternative to the established magazines for literary and artistic experimentalis. John Cournos, an acquaintance of Kreymborg's, acted as a link with Pound in London. In December, 1913, Pound wrote to Williams:

Have just bought two statuettes from the coming sculptor, Gaudier-Brzeska. I like him very much. He is the only person with whom I can really be 'Altaforte'. Cournos I like also. We are getting our little gang after five years of waiting. You must come over and get the air—if only for a week or so in the spring. 17

Williams, in fact, would never again be a member of a Pound 'gang'. Pound acknowledged this likelihood, conceding somewhat condescendingly: "You may get something slogging away by yourself that you would miss in The Vortex", and influencing Williams' direction yet again suggested, "take my introduction to Alfred Kreymborg".

Kreymborg, with Ray and Halpert, had begun publication of The Glebe. It was through this magazine that the first collection of Imagist verse (including Williams' 'Postlude') was published in America. Kreymborg recalled:

One day...a bizarre, special-delivery package, post-marked London, arrived in Grantwood...[containing] a sheaf of manuscripts of various dimensions, edited with bold marginal notes and caustic instructions....A vigorous letter, in a large confident scrawl, warned [Kreymborg] "that unless you're another American ass, you'll just set this up as it stands!" 18
Pound demanded that the collection should be published intact and entitled, *Des Imagistes, An Anthology*. It contained examples of work by experimentalists such as Joyce, Ford, H.D., Aldington, Flint, Cannell, Pound and Williams who, Pound explained, "is my one remaining pal in America - get in touch with old Bull, - he lives in a hole called Rutherford, New Jersey". 19

The *Glebe* was short lived, appearing only intermittently between September 1913 and November 1914, but Kreymborg's enthusiasm, enhanced by the influential and talented contacts he was to make from his editorship of that magazine, led directly to the much more influential appearance of *Others*.

In March, 1915, the magazine *Rogue* made its brief appearance on the scene, bringing to light such names as Walter Conrad Arensberg, Wallace Stevens and Mina Loy. Gertrude Stein made one appearance in this magazine. Kreymborg himself was published in *Rogue* and this led to his first meeting with Arensberg. They discovered a common admiration for Pound and a shared enthusiasm for the experimental arts. Kreymborg recalled:

*Arensberg had a beautiful studio on West Sixty-Seventh Street. It was the rendezvous and he the idol of his friends. He had been collecting paintings, drawings and sculpture by Picasso, Duchamp, Gleizes and Brancusi, and thanks to the presence of Duchamp and Gleizes in New York at the time, developed into an authority on Modern tendencies*. 20

Arensberg was wealthy and could afford to court such exciting European experimental artists as Duchamp and
Picabia, the prime movers of New York Dada. He could also afford to buy their work and he had acquired perhaps the most notorious European modernist painting in America at that time, Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* (Plate 2). In his *Autobiography* Williams recalled his sense of awe on encountering the painters in the post-Armory Show period.

There were parties, mostly of painters, at Arensberg's studio. These were of a different sort from the usual "broke" goings on...You always saw Marcel Duchamp there. His painting on glass, half finished, stood at one side and several of his earlier works were on the wall along with one of Cézanne's "Woman Bathers," the work of Gleizes and several others. It disturbed and fascinated me. I confess I was slow to come up with any answers. (*Auto 136*)

Williams was intimidated by the avant-garde scene in New York. He admitted, "most of us were beginners in matters of art no matter how we might struggle to conceal the fact" (*Auto 137*). However, there was no longer any reason to feel that powerful sense of exclusion fostered by Pound's London "Vortex". Here was a local glass to hold up to the face of American modernity. And there appeared to be room for all new ideas. Williams wrote:

Everything was not by any means reflected upon that surface. Here was my chance, that was all I knew. There had been a break somewhere, we were streaming through, each thinking his own thoughts, driving his own designs toward his self's objectives...the poetic line, the way the image was to lie on the page was our immediate concern. For myself all that implied, in the materials, respecting the place I knew best, was finding a local assertion--to my everlasting relief. (*Auto 138*)

A vortex had been formed in America, and to compete with names like Gaudier-Brzeska, Wyndham Lewis and Pound, there were brilliant new figures such as Duchamp, Picabia, Loy,
Kreymborg: and Williams himself, unsure at first, but moving steadily and with growing self-confidence into his first phase of maturity as a writer. All that was required was a suitable outlet. Williams wrote, "Walter Arensberg and Alfred Kreymborg had, together, inaugurated a small poetry magazine called Others" (Auto 135). The title came from a statement printed in the first issue: "The old expressions are with us always and there are always others." The magazine was intended "to print the work of men and women who were trying themselves in the new forms".

The editors were convinced that the magazine could not be profitable, and they had no scheme worked out as to how to distribute the five hundred copies printed. For most of the magazine's life three hundred was its average circulation, although once or twice it approached one thousand.

Kreymborg launched into the project with great energy and enthusiasm, and with the first issue in July 1915, his home in Grantwood became a focus for most of the group, hungry for aesthetic and intellectual stimulation. "Before the second issue came off the press", Kreymborg recalled, "'the little yellow dog' as someone hailed the paper, had earned a reputation bordering on infamy". Infamy was just what the doctor ordered, providing those involved with an image of themselves as radicals but, more importantly, giving them a collective identity. They revelled in their new found society. It was, however, a strange new departure for most of them, having emerged from their creative
isolation into a new critical arena. According to Kreymborg:

Like most every other cultural activity of the new soil, the intercourse of these people was a novel experience....It was not a lack of self-confidence which dictated so shy a contact, but a joyous bewilderment in the discovery that other men and women were working in a field they themselves felt they had chosen in solitude. 25

The most assiduous of the visitors was Williams who, almost every Sunday, drove from Rutherford to Grantwood, swapping his role as urban family practitioner for that of modern poet. He also took upon himself the task of assistant editor. Kreymborg recalled that "among the first contributors to Others no person gave as much of himself as Bill Williams...[who] aided critically in the onerous task of choosing and rejecting manuscripts". 26 Williams had quickly become emotionally caught up in this little New Jersey Bohemia, but, characteristically, confronted as he was by people who were just as lively and innovative as himself, retained an undercurrent of anxiety. He wrote:

I was hugely excited by what was taking place there.... Several writers were involved, but the focus for my own enthusiasm was the house occupied by Alfred and Gertrude Kreymborg to which, on every possible occasion, I went madly...to help with the magazine which had saved my life as a writer [my italics]. (Auto I35)

What was taking place in and around New York was the emergence of a variety of radical approaches to art, the most outrageous of which was New York Dada. Through the Arensberg connection Duchamp himself appeared at Grantwood from time to time. Williams wrote, "I'll never forget my rather awed delight at meeting Duchamp, the great Marcel,
who would be there now and again" (Auto 135). Duchamp had shocked the American cultural establishment and had subsequently been embraced by the New York avant-garde as a radical hero. But even to the initiated he remained a contentious figure with his apparent determination never to take art seriously. In fact, Duchamp is quoted as having said, "I wanted to put painting once again at the service of the mind". 27 He claimed that since Courbet European painting had been almost wholly retinal, concerned with appeal to the senses and with little regard to the re-creation of ideas on canvas. He said that, "that kind of painter who just puts down what he sees is stupid. In my case I was thinking a little too much, maybe". There is no avoiding, however, the characteristic, in Duchamp's work, of opposition to the artistic mainstream, whatever it may be. He was diametrically opposed to all ideas of the 'high seriousness' of art. In 1943 Andre Breton wrote, "The unique position of Marcel Duchamp at the spearhead of all 'modern' movements for the last twenty five years" derived directly from the fact that "never has a more profound originality appeared more clearly to derive from a being charged with a more determined intention of negation". 28

Before arriving in America Duchamp had already been at the centre of an art world controversy. In February, 1912, he submitted his Nude Descending a Staircase to the Salon des Independents where the Cubists were exhibiting. The picture, which he later described as an "expression of time
and space through the abstract presentation of motion", 29 was rejected by, among others, Gleizes and Metzinger, to whom it appeared to be a mockery of Cubist theory. He recalled this as a "turning point" in his life. He felt that he "would not be interested very much in groups after that". 30 This may be so, but there would certainly be groups interested in him, especially in America, beginning with the 291 group associated with Alfred Stieglitz, and many of the writers who made Others interesting.

Duchamp's friend Francis Picabia was closely involved with the Stieglitz group, contributing regularly, both illustrations and essays on art, to the magazine 291. Their relationship in Paris had already developed into a lively dialogue described by Gabrielle Buffet as "forays of demoralization" in which they "pursued the disintegration of the concept of art". The attitudes they expressed, she claimed, "seem to have contained all the germs of what later became Dada". 31

The place where these irreverent artists were most likely to be encountered in New York was in Arensberg's studio apartment. The parties and intellectual meetings were both confusing and stimulating for Williams. Most of the time it seems from his writings on the subject, he felt marginalised, not quite a member. He recalled in his Autobiography being snubbed by Duchamp while he was admiring one of the painters works. He commented:

I realized then and there that there wasn't a possibility of my ever saying anything to anyone in that gang
from that moment to eternity....I bumped through these periods like a yokel, narrow eyed, feeling my own inad­equacies, but burning with the lust to write.(Auto 137)

Williams' response here was no doubt exaggerated by his sense of isolation and anxiety in the face of the successes of other, more flamboyant artists. He reacted similarly to the successes of Pound and Eliot whenever they appeared to pose a threat to his own identity as an innovator. However, whatever the problems of insecurity these figures provoked in him, Williams was able to benefit as a writer from his association with them. He wrote:

What were we seeking? No one knew enough to formulate a "movement." We were restless and constrained, closely allied with the painters. Impressionism, dadaism, surrealism, applied to both painting and the poem. What a battle we made of it merely getting rid of capitals at the beginning of every line! (Auto 148)

Taking cue from the many aggressive manifestos which proliferated at the time, Williams went on to claim, "we were destroyers, vulgarians, obscurantists to most who read". This kind of categorisation was frequently applied to Duchamp whose activity sometimes even offended the other contributors to the avant-garde. For example, despite his position as one of the organisers of the "Independents Exhibition" of April 1917, he placed himself at the centre of yet another 'modern art' controversy. He submitted a urinal entitled Fountain and signed "R.Mutt". Williams described the situation of the committee, unaware of the identity of the culprit, faced with

a magnificent cast iron urinal, glistening of its white enamel. The story then current of this extraordinary and popular young man was that he walked daily into
whatever store struck his fancy and purchased whatever pleased him—something new—something American. Whatever it might be, that was his "construction" for the day. The silly committee threw out the urinal, asses that they were. (Auto 134)

Williams had had to suffer many such rejections, and this incident must have provided a source of ironic relief. The event was publicised, most pointedly by the magazine The Blind Man, edited largely by Duchamp himself. The second edition carried a photograph by Stieglitz of the urinal and a poem by the painter Charles Demuth (a close friend of Williams) entitled "For Richard Mutt". The editorial was perhaps the first aesthetic statement on the justification of 'readymades'. It stated: "Whether Mr Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under a new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object". 32

Duchamp was not the only dissident at the "Independents Exhibition" to create a major scandal. Arthur Cravan, Swiss born iconoclast, of English parents, reputed to be the nephew of Oscar Wilde, had been asked by Duchamp and Picabia to give a lecture on modern art. Cravan was notorious in Paris for his anarchic behaviour. He had launched, in 1912, a violently polemical, dadaistic journal called Maintenant, in which he used to print insulting attacks upon members of the French avant-garde.

In January, 1917, Cravan landed in New York, and immediately took up with other Parisian expatriates who had made
New York their refuge from the war. He met, and later married Mina Loy, whose notoriety had earned her the title "The Modern Woman". The New York Evening Sun claimed that, "like Columbus she was discovered by America", and that "she has seen so many new movements that she has decided to [initiate] one herself and call it 'Vitalism.' This woman is halfway through the door into To-morrow". 33

Cravan's lecture at the "Independents Exhibition" was a sensation, in front of an audience consisting mostly of society people attracted by the publicity generated at the time by 'modern art'. He was reputedly drunk on arrival, and as his 'lecture' progressed he began to take off his clothes. Before he had time to strip completely, he was rushed by plainclothes policemen, handcuffed and taken away.

It was this kind of event which characterised the mood of the New York scene. It certainly impinged upon the direction that Others was taking, through the influence of Arensberg and Duchamp, but much more directly through the influence of Mina Loy who had quickly become one of the magazine's 'star' attractions.

Mina Loy

In 1926, Yvor Winters placed Mina Loy alongside William Carlos Williams "as one of the two living poets who have the most perhaps to offer the younger American writers." 34
Thirty-two years later, in an introduction to her collection *Lunar Baedeker* and *Timetables*, Williams attempted to explain why her work had been all but ignored by the critical establishment. He wrote: "When she puts a word down on paper it is clean; that forces her fellows to shy away from it because they are not clean and will be contaminated by her cleanliness." Loy appeared to be aware of the problem, even from the outset of her career. In a letter written in 1914 to Carl Van Vechten she ironically commented: "I have a fundamentally masculine conceit that ascribes lack of appreciation of my work to want of perspicacity in the observer." However, it is perhaps misleading to suggest that her poetry was too difficult for the reader *per se*: rather that as a woman poet, her aggression, definable then only in terms of "masculine conceit", formed a barrier to those with prefabricated expectations of the 'gentler sex'.

While resident in Paris Loy had been introduced to many of the leading experimental artists there, and had struck up a relationship which was to contextualise her own innovative perspective on the arts. Much later she was to describe Gertrude Stein's influence as "the innate tempo of a life poured in alert refreshment upon my mentality." Loy's work is shaped by a concern for the rejuvenation of poetic language and the re-focusing of poetic concern. Both preoccupations were incubated during her association with the Futurists in Italy, particularly through her rela-
tionship with the poet and propagandist Marinetti, whose typographic experiments and manifestos appeared to flaunt the youth and technological dynamism of the present in the face of an effete nostalgia for the nineteenth century.

In 1916 Loy set sail for New York, subject to the same magnetism which had attracted Duchamp, Picabia, Gleizes and others. Three of the most notorious of the current avant-garde periodicals, Rogue, Trend and Others, had already included examples of Loy's verse. Indeed, her reputation was such that Kreymborg and Arensberg had insisted on launching the inaugural issue of Others on the strength of her bitterly ironic sequence 'Love Songs' (discussed below).

Loy's published contribution to the groundswell of modern English language poetry had begun in 1914 with the appearance in magazines of several impressively innovative poems, including 'Parturition' which appeared in Trend, a short-lived periodical edited by Loy's friend and literary agent Carl Van Vechten. Earlier that year she had signalled her arrival on the scene with a volley of statements entitled 'Aphorisms on Futurism', in which she accused: "To your blushing we shout the obscenities, we scream the blasphemies, that you, being weak, whisper alone in the dark". 38 Williams, having published nothing more radical than 'Postlude' at this point, must surely have felt that he was 'whispering alone in the dark' while this mysterious woman's voice (Loy had not yet appeared in New York) was shouting "obscenities" and "blasphemies" in perhaps the
most prestigious of the little magazines. The 'Aphorisms' appeared in Alfred Stieglitz' Camera Work, which was a focus for American writers such as Stevens, Williams and Moore struggling at the brink of their arrival among the more strident voices of the avant-garde.

'Parturition' centralises a woman's unique experience of childbirth in a way which Virginia Koundis has described as detailing "an area of femaleness rarely thought suitable for literature". The poem, however, has as much to do with female consciousness, constrained within a world conceived by men, as with the event of childbirth:

I am the centre
Of a circle of pain
Exceeding boundaries in every direction
The business of the bland sun
Has no affair with me
In my congested cosmos of agony
From which there is no escape

Koundis identifies in this poem a process of self-definition, an egocentric intrusion, the identification of which assumes a complex of authorial motivation which is difficult to tie down. If, however, the poem is read with a slight shift of emphasis from the 'I' as individual self-hood to the 'I' as delegated cognisance (the 'eye' of female experience in a world dominated and defined by men) then the engagement is broadened to confront the circumscription of human consciousness in language. Experience in language is generally reduced by the male perspective, even experience which is exclusively female. To take such an experience, in this case childbirth, and to use it as
the focus for an assault on reductive attitudes, was a direct challenge to the status quo. To construct a persona that provided an essentially dissident, alternative point of view for the reader added an element of iconoclasm that signalled the impetus of this poem. The poem strikes out in language against the a priori assumptions which language continually writes into unsuspecting human consciousness. In parturition, the woman endures pain, thereby to ensure a tangible future for humanity. The man, meanwhile, remains detached, without responsibility, free to play games of manipulation and quest. As a result of this basic demarcation of functions, perhaps, the male finds time to develop elaborate structures through which women can be effectively contained. And in this moment of physical definition, the poem's persona gives birth to:

The conception Brute
Why?
The irresponsibility of the male
Leaves woman her superior Inferiority

He is running upstairs
I am climbing a distorted mountain of agony
(LLB 68)

Kouidis provides an interesting series of connections between the content of Loy's early poetry and the philosophical writings of Henri Bergson (so central to the development of Imagism). With reference to 'Parturition' she quotes, from Creative Evolution, Bergson's suggestion:

Let us seek, in the depths of our experience, the point where we feel ourselves most intimately within our own life. It is into pure duration that we then plunge
back, a duration in which the past, always moving on, is swelling unceasingly with the present that is absolutely new. 41

But this goes only so far in illuminating the obtuse activity of the poem. If "pure duration" were the key to its treasure, the reader would be rewarded with the evocation of physical or emotional experience, the fulfillment of expectations. However, as with the poetry of Emily Dickinson, the reader is subjected to something far more problematic. The images of experience and observation are presented in such a way as to open up possibilities, the probing of which moves the reader into an area of consciousness shaped by contingent uncertainties.

Relaxation
Negation of myself as a unit
Vacuum interlude
I should have been emptied of life
Giving life
For consciousness in crises races
Through the subliminal deposits of evolutionary processes

Have I not
Somewhere
Scrutinized
A dead white feathered moth
Laying eggs? (LLB 69)

The engagement here is with the human consciousness and its tendency to include, in contiguous flow, a variety of disparate images, as echo, projection; the seemingly random operation of the memory, organised through syntactical construction. Personal history is mingled with the history of the species, all species, the inexorable and mindless "subliminal deposits of evolutionary processes". Childbirth on this level is reduced to an instinctual occurrence,
devoid of human reason (a function of consciousness which is expressed in language). The language which Loy had to contend with, especially the language of literature, was reinforced with structural assumptions which both underpinned, and were underpinned by the status quo. Within this exchange system women as writers (or as characters) were expected to contribute decoration, wit, pathos, fulfilment as the prime motivation for male quest. They were not expected overtly to take part in the quest (since this would challenge the pre-structured fabric of literary activity). Loy offered a challenge in 'Parturition', focussing on aspects of childbirth which were un-tactful, even, for a contemporary readership, shocking. But, paradoxically, it was the medium, not the content of the poem, which posed the greatest threat.

It is no mere coincidence that the male figure identified in the poem is a "fashionable portrait painter", or that he appears "Running upstairs to a woman's apartment" singing. Successful (fashionable) artists were usually male, and their art was designed to flatter and reassure their patrons, the wealthy members of society. Their art, then, is invariably celebratory and often trivial. The fashionable portrait painter sings:

"All the girls are tid'ly did'ly
All the girls are nice
Whether they wear their hair in curls
Or---"  

(LLB 68)

Meanwhile the female persona is coping with the rigours of
giving birth. The implication is that although the painter is probably the father of this unborn child, his "irresponsibility" or inability to connect with the event leaves him playing games with language (the song) as literature, and questing once again ("running upstairs to a woman's apartment"). Their different roles within the birth process are analogous to their disparate involvement in art. The ease with which the orthodox artist can lapse into accepted forms and themes is contained in the image of the "fashionable portrait painter / Running upstairs". The serious female artist, meanwhile, forced into a more rigorous approach by her need to define herself in opposition to the claustrophobia of an inflexible, prefabricated system of definitions, has a more rigorous ascent:

Incidentally with the exhaustion of control
I reach the summit
And gradually subside into anticipation of
Repose
Which never comes
For another mountain is growing up
Which goaded by the unavoidable
I must traverse
Traversing myself (LLB 68)

The portraitist's song is lilting and assonantal, but its comforting mindlessness is interrupted abruptly by an irregular flow of utterances, in language wrenched by paradoxes, elipses, elisions, ambiguities. This wrenching of language takes place here, in effect, for its own sake as a gesture of rejection. Williams can be seen to have responded to this kind of example in many of the poems of the Others period. Consider, for example, these lines from
his poem 'Virtue' from *Al Que Quiere*, with its rejection of orthodox punctuation and syntax, causing ambiguity, paradox and the obstruction of an easy route through to meaning:

```
Now? Why--
whirlpools of
orange and purple flame
feather twists of chrome
on a green ground
funneling down upon
the steaming phallus-head
of the mad sun himself--
blackened crimson!
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(CEP)

Loy constructed an alternative kind of syntax and deployed words in incongruous contexts thereby to draw attention to their intrinsic qualities as shape and sound before slipping inevitably into denotation. This is most often achieved by her linking of words in unlikely combinations such as, "bland sun", "superior Inferiority", "vacuum interlude", "cosmic initiation", a choice of conjunctions and vocabulary remarkably reminiscent of Dickinson and Williams.

Loy's presentation of babies as "subliminal deposits" and "stir of incipient life" may not seem so radical now, post-Sylvia Plath, but it is worth remembering that the poem appeared in 1914, one year before the first publication of Eliot's 'Prufrock', at a time when the most innovative experiments in English language verse were being offered by the Imagists, in poetry such as 'Hermes of the Ways' by H.D. which included the lines:

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Hermes, Hermes,
The great sea foamed,
Gnashed its teeth about me;
But you have waited,
Where sea-grass tangles with
Shore-grass. 42
```
This kind of verse signalled a decisive break from orthodox forms, but its engagement is with a literary language and thematic concern which sits, not uncomfortably, with Swinburne or Rossetti or Browning. There is no argument here with the structure of poetry, only with its decorative facade. Loy's poetry, on the other hand, with its distortion of syntax, punctuation and lineation, called into question the very basis of poetry. Syntax, for example, is simply one of a variety of strictures in language imposed by a culture at whose centre was a masculine, bourgeois preoccupation with material self reassurance. A syntactically elegant, regularly rhymed poem in regular metre was the equivalent of a neo-classical architectural structure, in that it reinforced the idea of continuation, of an order which was continuous, comfortably predictable, and most important of all, appraisable, realizable, part of a currency of exchange in the cultural market. With 'Parturition' Loy began her process of devaluation in that currency.

The trajectory of this fairly long poem is fragmented in a way which suggests the author's familiarity with collage and montage, coincidentally close once more, in texture, to Eliot's 'Prufrock', and pre-empting also Williams' 'March' which used the same layering techniques. It is distinctly possible that this is the first published poem by an English language poet to use montage as a structuring technique. The expanding and contracting rhythms (dependent largely on lineation) are interrupted on five
occasions by images which are dislocated in time and space. There is the fashionable portrait painter "running upstairs to a woman's apartment", "a dead white feathered moth / Laying eggs", "Impressions of a cat / With blind kittens / Among her legs", "Impressions of small animal carcass / Covered with bluebottles" and the flashback to a comment overheard in church and presented as a final irony: "God made them". The only link between these disparate images and the main thematic concern of the poem is by contiguous association through the operation of a homogenising consciousness, contributing an accumulation of word pattern and image pattern to the overall design. The various images here included are either logically part of the sequence of event, or they intrude as part of the flow of consciousness which accompanies the central drama. They draw attention to the automatic cycle of procreation, dehumanising it in effect, subordinating content in favour of response so that the activity as event, and the activity as cognisance separate, leaving only cognisance as significantly human, moving, as Loy expressed it in another poem, "from the palpable to the transcendent". 43 The poem does not offer satisfaction to the reader as re-enactment of material experience, but as the dramatising of the mental response to it. No poem can give the reader the experience of childbirth. What it can do, however, beginning with an acknowledgement of its basis in consciousness as language, is to offer a designed reconstruction of the outreaching
activity of the mind during the event. The human consciousness is constructed and constantly modified in response to material being. For a woman, childbirth offers an exclusive drama, an event which occurs outside the power structures written into consciousness. The new life is brought into this world of definitions via a woman's struggle and pain. Hers is the only signifying consciousness involved in the drama, since the baby arrives without language:

Stir of incipient life
Precipitation into me
The contents of the universe
Mother I am
Identical
With infinite Maternity
Indivisible
Acutely
I am absorbed
Into
The was-is-ever-shall-be
Of cosmic reproductivity (LLB 70)

In the event of parturition (one cannot call it an act since it occurs independent of conscious decision and implementation) the woman becomes an agent of evolution. She is briefly connected through her experience with the "was-is-ever-shall-be / Of cosmic reproductivity". The hyphenating of these little words gives the impetus of inevitability to the phrase, enacting in language an equivalent to the event in experience. And here is the crux of the matter. The poem is created as an act, a human response to an extra-human experience. And it is created in language, systematised as design so as to fill a void which is left by female experience. To achieve this Loy's poem
works against the structuring tyranny of male literary language.

One of the major strategies in the construction of poetry that had traditionally delineated it from prose was its dependence on what Roman Jakobson labelled "equivalence". He wrote:

The principal of similarity underlies poetry; the metrical parallelism of lines, or the phonic equivalence of rhyming words prompts the question of semantic similarity and contrast....Prose, on the contrary, is forwarded essentially by contiguity. Thus, for poetry, metaphor and for prose, metonymy is the line of least resistance....44

In this poem Loy has cut across the line of least resistance, scrupulously avoiding obviously metaphoric tropes throughout, a characteristic of her poetry which prefigures one of Williams' major verse strategies. She has assembled a sequence of images and locutions in language, on the page, the progression through which is essentially contiguous. In other words, she has pulled into the poem the strategies of prose (with its claim to objectivity and accuracy) in a way which relocates its activity as sprung from experience or 'contact'. As Williams wrote two years later in his 'Prologue':

...before any material progress can be accomplished there must be someone to draw a discriminating line between true and false values.

The true value is that peculiarity which gives an object a character by itself. The associational or sentimental value is the false. Its imposition is due to lack of imagination, to an easy lateral sliding. The attention has been held too rigid on the one plane instead of following a more flexible, jagged resort. (Imag 14)
Loy's recent association with the Futurists had left her inclined toward aggressive identification with the twentieth century: the problems and excitement associated with current experience. She wrote, in her 'Aphorisms on Futurism', "TODAY is the crisis in consciousness", and, "IN pressing the material to derive its essence, matter becomes deformed". In this poem, the matter is language and deformity results from the struggle against orthodox form:

On infinitely prolonged nerve vibrations
Or in contraction
To the pinpoint nucleus of being
Locate an irritation without
it is within
Within
It is without (LLB 67)

The reassuring inclusiveness of fulfilled expectation, that weaving together of association and sound pattern (or metaphor and regular metrics and rhyme), has been usurped by line and word play resembling (as in Dickinson's verse) not so much poetry as puzzle. The reader is caught up in a linguistic tangle which requires some effort of the intelligence to unravel. The poem involves the reader, thereby, in the choices made during its process of construction, foregrounding 'poem' as distinct from 'experience'. For example, the subtle availability of differing emphases of meaning in the unit just quoted depends on the various possible syntactical links between lines which, without punctuation, depend to a great extent on the reader's response to the sound, shape and positioning of the words. The first occurrence of the word "without", for instance,
could denote an absence or loss, but the fact that it is placed in linear isolation conveys its essential exteriority.

In a short piece for The Little Review in 1917 Ezra Pound discussed briefly the work of Marianne Moore and Mina Loy. He commented that while Marianne Moore's verse showed "traces of emotion", he was able to detect "no emotion whatever" in Loy's work. He added that, "both of these women are, possibly in unconsciousness, among the followers of Jules Laforgue." To detect "no emotion whatever" in Loy's work, which is characterised by an attempt to achieve emotional moments structurally rather than simply to convey them thematically suggests a somewhat superficial reading on the part of the reviewer, perhaps due to some extent to his preconceived expectations regarding female poets. He went on to claim that,

without any pretences and without clamours about nationality these girls have written something which would not have come out of any other country and (while I have before now seen a great deal of rubbish by both of them) they are, as selected by Mr Kreymborg, interesting and readable (by me that is....)

This review is characteristic of the kind of response which Loy's work received during those early days of her development, and is particularly interesting for two reasons: its inaccuracies and its assumptions. First: Pound claimed American nationality for Loy, in spite of the fact that she had not set foot in that country before 1916, and almost all of her published material had been written prior to that date. As to the "great deal of rubbish" which Pound
claims to have seen: Loy had published twelve poems by then, all of which were vigorously experimental, seriously conceived and scrupulously wrought. There are weaknesses of course, mostly to do with the imbalance set up in the tone through an occasional overworking of vocabulary, but to call it "rubbish" suggests that Pound had either not read it, or was in some way antagonised by it. His attitude to women as poets is revealed in a letter of 1920 written to Williams in which he described H.D. as a "narrow minded she-bard" and Moore as showing "spinsterly aversions" in her work. 47 The narrow mindedness and aversions are faults directly associated with gender. To refer to Loy and Moore as "these girls" is similarly dismissive, and to suggest that it requires a male editor (Kreymborg) to sort out their "interesting and readable" stuff from the "rubbish" is a little suspect. Finally, to claim that their good work is appreciable by the kind of receptive intelligence displayed only by such as himself completes the process of attempted recolonisation by a quintessentially male cultural ideology.

Pound was most helpful in this review in his reference to Laforgue. He identified the major strand connecting her work to Laforgue's as "logopoeia, or poetry that is akin to nothing but language, which is a dance of the intelligence among words and ideas and modification of ideas and characters". 48

One significant element in the work of Laforgue which
Loy exploits in this poem is what N.C.de Nagy describes as his delight in "playing with words...the frequent occurrence in his poetry of so called 'contaminations' like 'eliphantaistic', 'sexiproque' or 'ennuiversal'." 49 Modernism in all the arts worked to draw attention to the medium, forcing to the surface those aspects of construction which blocked easy access to any external reference or subject. For example a Futurist painting might display a pattern of coloured facets or planes across the canvas which had to be carefully deconstructed by the observer so that a subject, perhaps the movement of a car, might take shape in the consciousness. It is the observer's consciousness that constructs the subject as a result of its involvement in the process displayed on the surface of the canvas. In Loy's case the medium of construction was language and she employed a 'Laforgian' word play to engage her reader in the linguistic surface of her artifact.

It was not long after he met her in 1915 that Williams began using similar techniques. Loy expressed particular admiration for his 'Overture to a Dance of Locomotives' first brought to light at a public reading in 1917 at the 'Independents Exhibition' (the same one that had rejected Duchamp's urinal, and at which Cravan was arrested). Williams' lineation, punctuation and word-play are remarkably close to those employed by Loy in 'Parturition'.

Poised horizontal on glittering parallels the dingy cylinders packed with a warm glow--inviting entry--pull against the hour. But breaks can
hold a fixed posture till--

Not twoeight. Not twofour. Two!

Gliding windows. Colored cooks sweating in a small kitchen. Taillights--
in time: twofour!
In time: twoeight!

--rivers are tunneled: trestles
cross oozy swampland: wheels repeating
the same gesture remain relatively
stationary: rails forever parallel
return on themselves infinitely. (CEP 195)

This is one of many subsequent poems by Williams which display a fine combination of two contesting activities in language. Language as denotation is set off against language as sound, a tactic he developed after being exposed to Loy's innovative verse.

In 1924, in an idiosyncratic article published in The Transatlantic Review (although written several years earlier) Loy once again pre-empted Williams by focussing on Gertrude Stein's contribution to modern writing. "Modernism", she wrote, "has democratized the subject matter and la belle matièре of art". 50 She continued:

through cubism the newspaper has assumed an aesthetic quality, through Cézanne a plate has become more than something to put an apple upon, Brancusi has given an evangelistic import to eggs, and Gertrude Stein has given us the Word, in and for itself.

Stein's example, as suggested in Section Two, had been to show the potential in sentences for movement which was divorced from the referential imperative. The absence in her work of associative and sequential reassurance leaves the reader only the movement of design, as in this
fragment from Tender Buttons (1914):

A BOX

Out of kindness comes redness and out of rudeness comes rapid same question, out of an eye comes research, out of selection comes painful cattle. So then the order is that a white way of being round is something suggesting a pin and it is disappointing, it is not, it is so rudimentary to be analysed and see a fine substance strangely, it is so earnest to have a green point not to red but to point again. 51

The movement through this piece is achieved through modulated sound patterns and through a series of verbal trajectories which encounter resistance and then closure. The first sentence, for example, derives its energy from the repetition of the word "out", but why redness should result from kindness or "painful cattle" from "selection" defeats the intelligence, with its dependence upon associative, referential logic. The whole unit begins in direction, "out", which is contained in colour, "redness", and ends in direction, "point", but this time to be frustrated, "point not to red", in futility, "to point again". Words have been deployed, not to describe a box, but to convey the essential quality of a box, its function as enclosure, as the frustration of all attempted movement "out".

Stein described Tender Buttons as poetry and defined poetry as "concerned with using with abusing, with losing with wanting, with denying with avoiding with adoring with replacing the noun." 52 As Terry Eagleton has suggested, in his discussion on Lacan in Literary Theory, language operates through a "metonymic chain of signifiers":

This potentially endless movement from one signifier to
another is what Lacan means by desire. All desire springs from a lack, which it strives continually to fill. Human language works by such lack: the absence of the real objects which signs designate, the fact that words have meaning only by virtue of the absence and exclusion of others. To enter language, then, is to become a prey to desire: language, Lacan remarks, "is what hollows being into desire". To enter language is to be severed from what Lacan calls the "real", that inaccessible realm which is always beyond the reach of signification. Stein's pronouncement on poetry, then, can be seen as an attempt to explain an activity in language which takes place through a struggle against designation. If the language of prose "hollows being into desire" because its very function as reference presupposes the absence of the signified, modern poetry is characterised by the abandonment of the struggle for signification or "abusing...the noun" in order to objectify itself. The poem usurps the desired object, replacing the noun (or word) as symbol with the noun as an integral part of the mechanism. This is another way of saying that the modern poem works to focus attention on its medium (language) as opposed to its subject (exterior reality) as its justification.

This was not, in itself, particularly radical. After all, those devices and conventions such as phonic and rhythmic repetition which traditionally delineated poetry from prose worked to draw attention to the musical as opposed to the referential properties of language. However, these had become so familiar that the reader would be likely to find them predictable and reassuring, and poets would have found it tempting simply to impose them on
language as prefabricated components signalling 'poetry'. Having lost the need to construct, each time, a 'poetic', verse began to rely on decorative language, especially metaphor and symbolism as reference out. The modernist poets felt the need to re-establish the medium as an essential component of their art, and one way to achieve this was to block easy access to meaning. By threading together the various elements of her compositions in incongruous proximity, Stein was able to obscure their tendency to act as signifiers. For example, the "painful cattle" refuse to yield to normal denotative logic. But when the piece is reconstructed as a whole in the reader's consciousness there is a resolution of the puzzle. Although the unit works to disrupt individual avenues of meaning, as a whole it has a metonymic function, mimicking "A BOX" rather than describing it. Stein was preoccupied with the physiological aspect of language, arranging it so as to highlight the interactive nature of its constituent parts. The logical conclusion of this particular avenue of experiment emerged in the Dadaistic products of such writers as Elsa von Freytag Loringhoven. Loy, however, like Williams, developed along this route of experimentation without sliding all the way into verbal anarchy. She recognised that poetry depended on the meticulous bonding of the two conflicting activities of language: language as sound and language as meaning. The lesson she had learned from Stein was that the way you said something could actually be the
thing you had to say. Williams at this time was under the sway of Weininger's reductive study of the difference between male and female psychology, *Sex and Character*. Men had dominated cultural activity thus far, he believed, because dislocated male consciousness in search of identity had created those structures, such as politics and philosophy, which had informed the development of society. In contrast to this, the female psyche, in reassuring contact with the cycle of origins, offered a position which was implicitly opposed to the status quo, a position that Williams could read into Loy's poetry.

Later in the same year that Loy's 'Parturition' appeared in *Trend*, Williams published a group of poems in *The Egoist*. One of these, entitled 'Transitional' is interesting because of its shift away from Imagism and the culture of traditional value. The original version is here quoted in full (the CEP version has various changes):

First he said:
It is the woman in us
That makes us write:
Let us acknowledge it,
Men would be silent.
We are not men.
Therefore we can speak
And be conscious
(0' the two sides)
Unbent by the sensual,
As fits accuracy.

I then said:
Dare you make this
Your propaganda?

And he answered:
Am I not I--here? 54
The propaganda which this poem 'dares' to offer is largely thematic. Unlike Loy, Williams had not yet broken the prosodic habits that had been weakened by his association with the Imagists. There is, however, one 'Williamsism' operating in this poem, significantly, perhaps, for the first time, in the authenticating device of the first line. Those familiar with Williams' work will recognise such openings as: "This is just to say...", "I must tell you..." and "Rather notice mon cher..." as characteristic of his style. To begin a poem thus is to attempt to convince the reader of a kind of urgency which raises it to the level of spoken imperative.

The reader is hustled along into the paradox of a "he" who claims femaleness as the motivation for his art. Identifying the speaker in the second person rather than the first allows the poem an objective facade, an air of authority which gives weight to its content. There is not the experimental verve of Loy's work, but 'Transition' develops almost in mitigation for this deficiency. The established culture is male, and to be a female writer (not simply a woman who writes) implies an intrinsic state of opposition. The male experimentalist may find that the female element of his psychology stimulates dissent against the mainstream of masculine complacency: "It is the woman in us / That makes us write". Writers who sublimate the female impulse are, in effect, sustaining the status quo, and as a result their writing adds nothing. Only dissid-
ence, because of its difference, adds substance and alters its context.

Men would be silent.  
We are not men.  
Therefore we can speak  
And be conscious  
(O' the two sides)  
Unbent by the sensual  
As fits accuracy.

This notion that consciousness is dependent upon the contradictory activity of two sides, a dialectic, is a central element in 'Parturition'. Those lines quoted above offer a remarkable (if less agitative) echo of Loy's:

And the ego succeeds in unifying the positive and negative poles of sensation  
Uniting the opposing and resisting forces  
In lascivious revelation  
[my italics]

Consciousness, or ego, manipulates sensation, or the sensual, unifying it so that it "fits accuracy". The "two sides" are obviously "the opposing and resisting forces", positive and negative. This basic dialectic was to become a major strategy in Kora in Hell and Spring and All.

In response, perhaps, to Loy's 'logopoeia', this poem displays an element of word play, in its use of the phrase, "not men". "We" are certainly not women although it is the woman in us that makes us not men; men whose behaviour is characterised by the word 'not' connoting dissent.  

For Williams, the American writer was a minority figure like the female writer, operating in a literary world which was dominated by the cultured English male tradition. Forty years later Williams recalled that, "from the very
beginning I felt I was not English. If poetry had to be written, I had to do it my own way. It all happened very quickly. Somehow poetry and the female sex were allied in my mind" (IWW 14). Later in the same interview Williams said, "I was conscious of my mother's influence all through this time of writing, her ordeal as a woman and as a foreigner in this country" (IWW 16). He saw his mother's position as having been subsumed by the dominant culture in which she had found herself, unable, as she was, to 'speak' loudly enough to be heard. Williams had felt similarly marginalised through his activity as an American poet, but now he felt himself at the brink of a new commitment, on the periphery of a group of potential like minds, of not men. In the poem it is significantly "we" who can "speak" and "be conscious" in collective opposition. The New York avant-garde was gaining momentum and Others was merely seven months away.

The poem can hardly be described as 'logopoeic', being much more crude in its manipulation of language than Loy's poem. There are, however, one or two instances of word play, of intelligence skulking among the words on the page. The idea of modern poets as not men is reaffirmed in the final line. The question has been asked, "Dare you make this / Your propaganda?" And he answered: Am I not I--here?

"Here" is the locus, the context of the poem itself, and the subject, "I", qualified by the word "not" provides the
dissenting energy, turning that context from the "sensual" towards an "accuracy" of construction (putting art once more at the service of the mind, in the wake of Duchamp and Loy). This was Williams' aim, to replace the old restrictive, associative male order with a new, more syntagmatic, 'female' one. Later he explained that

...this was a period of finding a poetry of my own. I wanted order, which I appreciated. The orderliness of verse appealed to me - as it must to any man [my italics] - but even more I wanted a new order. I was positively repelled by the old order which, to me, amounted to restriction. (IWW 18)

While Williams was no doubt attempting with 'Transitional' to claim new territory for himself, the poem was, in fact, strung between the magnetism of two powerful influences. The word play shows a struggle away from the hard edges and surfaces of Pound and Imagism, but only part way toward the audacity of Loy. However there is a certain tentative ambiguity achieved in the lines:

Therefore we can speak
And be conscious
(0' the two sides)
Unbent by the sensual
As fits accuracy.

The fact that the middle line is placed in parentheses suggests that the words are offered as an aside. the rather clumsy archaic abbreviation of 'of' suggests the exclamation 'Oh!' as if the poem is expressing exasperation over the divergence between male and female activity. On the other hand, the phrase could be a suggestion that the not man persona of the poem is the product (not woman also), a synthesis "of the two sides". In his Collected
Earlier Poems Williams decided to change the abbreviation to "of" so as to avoid the glaring archaism in a way that reduces the play of choices. However, there are other possibilities. For instance: dissident expression makes the narrator conscious "of the two sides", or if the phrase is taken as an aside, conscious and accurate, "unbent by the sensual".

When Loy arrived in New York in 1915, her reputation as an uncompromising innovator had preceded her and Kreymborg and Arensberg decided to invite her to contribute to the inaugural edition of Others. The chosen poem, 'Love Songs' should have opened with the lines:

Spawn of fantasies
Sitting the appraisable
Pig cupid his rosy snout
Rooting erotic garbage
"Once upon a time"
Pulls a weed white and star-topped
Among wild oats sewn in mucous-membrane

In the published version, "silting" had been changed to "sitting" altering the effect of the lines. Later Loy was given a whole issue for the extended and definitive version of 'Love Songs', from which these extracts are taken.

The subversive effect of this poem is immediately apparent in its presentation of Cupid as a pig, the "spawn of fantasies", and is characteristic of much contemporary experimental work. Orthodox art as an expression of European cultural and intellectual hegemony came under fire from the younger American experimentalists, providing an ideal
seedbed for this latest form of radicalism.

The decision by Kreymborg and Arensberg to launch Others with energy derived from Loy's 'Love Songs' proved to be well founded. The magazine very quickly became notorious, and even other members of the avant-garde (Amy Lowell, Harriet Monroe, John Gould Fletcher) were scandalised by it. However, Yvor Winters later referred to it and its contributors as, "the most interesting single group manifestation...in American verse." Recalling the critical response to Loy's contribution, Kreymborg commented:

In an unsophisticated land, such sophistry, clinical frankness, sardonic conclusions, wedded to a madly elliptical style scornful of the regulation grammar, syntax and punctuation...drove our critics into furious despair. The nudity of emotion and thought roused the worst disturbance, and the utter nonchalance in revealing the secrets of sex was denounced as nothing less than lewd. 

As Kreymborg pointed out, the greatest barrier between the reader and this poem was the knowledge that the writer was a woman. What the critics did not perhaps appreciate was that their reaction was written into the text. Loy was courting rejection with her desecration of cultural icons, turning the elements of poetry against themselves so as to strip bare the tyrannical associations which accompanied them. Even those of her contemporaries who learned valuable lessons from her were guilty, occasionally, of misrepresenting her for their own ends. Williams, for instance, described her in his Autobiography as, "very skittish, an evasive, long limbed woman...[who] had written some attractive verse" (Auto 138). This kind of comment, so like
Pound's casual treatment of Loy, can be read as a defensive strategy: male entrenchment in the face of female aggression. Loy's verse could hardly be summed up as "attractive". On the contrary, it was bitterly satirical and destructive in its attitude to the state of the arts, that "spawn of [male] fantasies".

By 1916, when 'Love Songs' first appeared, Williams had published two books; one of sub-Keatsian sonnets and one of sub-Poundian Imagisme. The notorious laconicism of his lines, his vernacular antagonism to the iambic pentameter had not yet surfaced. Indeed it was during his association with Others that he successfully combined varied line length with minimal use of conventional punctuation, agitated diction, movement toward metonymic as opposed to metaphoric tropes and a disquieting element of eroticism.

Nervously
she crushes her straw hat
about her eyes
and tilts her head
to deepen the shadow--
smiling excitedly!

As best she can
she hides herself
in the full sunlight
her cordy legs writhing
beneath the little flowered dress
that leaves them bare
from mid-thigh to ankle-- (CEP 155)

These lines from 'Sympathetic Portrait of a Child' recall such early Loy poems as 'Parturition' and 'Love Songs'. Loy's example opened up new avenues for experimental verse in America, radiating impressively though briefly, among the other luminaries of New York Dada who provided a shift
of focus from the subsuming successes of such European and expatriate figures as Joyce, Yeats, Eliot and Pound. By 1926 Winters was able to claim for Loy that her work "beyond a doubt has been more imitated" than that of Williams, Stevens or Moore. Williams recalled that "some of the issues of Others were landmarks. Never shall I forget our fascination with Mina's 'Pig Cupid', his rosy snout rooting erotic garbage" (Auto 147). This fascination was provoked by a poem which audaciously but meticulously deconstructed the attitude of 'art' to sexuality, and the traditional hierarchy of gender roles, focussing on the woman's function and reducing it to the status of:

The skin sack
In which a wanton duality
Packed
All the completions of my infructuous impulses (Others p.3)

Like 'Parturition' this poem foregrounds the element of opposition, that "wanton duality" which applies as much to the dialectical nature of the language as to the content of the poem. Also like 'Parturition' it works without the assistance of orthodox punctuation, and it is through line and stanza breaks, in addition to idiosyncratic internal spacing, that both the rhythm and the extractable meanings are organised:

I would an eye in a Bengal light
Eternity in a sky-rocket
Constellations in an ocean
Whose rivers run no fresher
Than a trickle of saliva

These are suspect places
I must live in my lantern
Trimming subliminal flicker
Virginal to the bellows
Of Experience

By isolating the indefinite article "an" in the first line, the following word "eye" becomes less an object, allowing it to function phonically as an echo of the subject, "I". Thus the I/eye relationship becomes apparent, drawing the reader's attention, even more graphically than in 'Parturition', to the I as delegated cognisance; the female eye.

The poem proceeds through a variety of equally eccentric images, strung together it might seem, by the vagaries of the author's capricious imagination:

Once in a mezzanino
The starry ceiling
Vaulted an unimaginable family
Bird like abortions
With human throats

To these bizarre manifestations are added: "lamp-shade red dresses", "a baby / In a padded porte-enfant", a "sarsanet ribbon", a "goose's wing" and "fearful furniture". The effect is achieved through the accumulation of conflicting energies, and may well have been influenced by Bergson's suggestion that "many diverse images, borrowed from the very different orders of things, may, by the convergence of their action, direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to be seized". Language is manipulated in the accumulation of various emblems of female experience, but their mutual antagonism acts to abrogate their usefulness as currency within the cultural marketplace. The "family" is aborted, a baby is "tied
with a sarsanet ribbon" to its mother's "goose's wing" an image of potential flight, frustrated (tied by the reality of maternity), the woman, or her womb, is reduced to the status of "The skin sack", a container which is filled as the result of "wanton duality".

The sequence of poems is **ironically** titled 'Love Songs', once again surfacing within the same genus as Eliot's 'Prufrock' published the same year, possibly with the same ancestry in Laforgue's 'Pierrot'. But Loy's sequence differs significantly from Eliot's in its confrontational treatment of the love song tradition, subverting its function as celebration of the sexual drama in male-female relationships. Prufrock is presented, defined by his inability to 'sing', his neurasthenic dislocation from the rhythm of physical existence. Loy's persona, however, wilfully appropriates the love song in order to betray its essentially coercive function. Cupid, the subject of so many love songs, appears as the "Spawn of Fantasies", a "pig" whose role is to root "erotic garbage", and to offer this anachronistic system of values ("Once upon a time") in as attractive a package as possible. In other words, this poem is a satyric comedy which burlesques the form of the love song, with the love song as its subject, representative of the arts generally and their rigid perspective on sexuality.

The ignominy of Cupid's role as the purveyor of stale romance leaves him "Silting the appraisable" among clichéd
associations. Meanwhile the poem advances into that which is not "appraisable", which eludes easy association, and which depends instead on the phonic echoes of language that suggest possibilities without offering them already processed on a plate:

Let the meeting be the turning
To the antipodean
And Form a blurr
Anything
Than seduce them
To the one
As simple satisfaction
For the other

(Others p.18)

Here Stein's cryptic definition of poetry as "concerned with using with abusing with losing with wanting, with denying with avoiding..." begins to signify. As Julia Kristeva has written:

Poetic discourse measures rhythm against the meaning of language structure and is thus always eluded by meaning in the present while continually postponing it to an impossible time-to-come....

The code becomes receptive to the rhythmic body and it forms, in opposition to present meaning, another meaning, but a future impossible meaning. The important element of this "future anterior" of language is "the word perceived as word," a phenomenon in turn induced by the contest between rhythm and sign system.

Loy sets into motion this "contest between rhythm and sign system" as a dialectic. Having eschewed both metric and phonic regularity for the enhancement of rhythm, she excludes also that "direct treatment of the thing" which Pound had demanded of modern poets. "Go in fear of abstractions" Pound warned in his 'A Few Don'ts By An Imagist" in an attempt to relocate the language of poetry in function as opposed to decoration. There is a further category of
language, that Pound seems not to have included before coming upon the work of Loy and Moore in the Others Anthology of 1916: i.e. language as language, or as Kristeva puts it, "the word perceived as word". Pound commented on the logopoeic nature of Loy's and Moore's verse, describing its "arid clarity" as the "utterance of clever people in despair," whose particular lament is: "In the midst of this desolation, give me at least one intelligence to converse with". 61

Loy's verse did not "go in fear of abstraction", neither did it include "emotion" as a discrete element to be reached by association. While her poetry deals in emotional crisis, it works through controlled diction and an "intellectual" use of vocabulary to contain the emotion, in mechanisms equivalent to those conventions of behaviour and expectation which contain human crisis. The energy thus constrained is allowed to increase in tension. Release is achieved as the poem clarifies in the reader's consciousness - as language - rhythm and meaning in dialectical opposition. This dynamic surfacing of the medium (a use of language in which ideology is betrayed in overt contrast with its orthodox manipulative concealment in a system masquerading as neutral) is profoundly modernistic. The energy of such poetry is generated by compression, which can only be sustained in relatively short sections, feeding directly into the development of the modernist technique of composition in sequences of lyric fragments. This is what
Williams had referred to in his 'Speech Rhythms' essay as "ripples of greater and lesser rhythmic particles regularly repeated or destroyed". It is a technique which he used to great advantage in the poem "March" and, much more significantly, in Spring and All.

Williams' first publication with Others was in the second issue in August 1915. There are four poems, two entitled 'Pastoral', 'The Ogre' and 'Appeal', all of which appear little changed (apart from the disappearance of capitalised line beginnings) in The Collected Earlier Poems. These poems, particularly 'The Ogre' show a marked advance on 'Transitional' in their development of the 'not man' position Williams had adopted after his exposure to Loy's impressive work. Williams can be seen, in 'The Ogre', attempting to push his own work forward using the energy generated in Loy's subversion of lyric eroticism in 'Parturition' and 'Love Songs'. The poem is articulated around the problematic sexuality imposed by an adult narrator upon a child. As in Loy's 'Parturition', the poem does not record the event, it re-enacts the human drama of conscious response in language:

Sweet child,
able girl with well shaped legs
you cannot touch the thoughts
I put over and under and around you.
This is fortunate for they would
burn you to an ash otherwise

This short poem can be read as a portrait, but not necessarily one of the child. The eponymous 'ogre' is someone who becomes defined by a masculine response to physical
signals he (there is little doubt that the narrator is male) claims to be receiving from the little girl. Despite the fact that such response is conditioned by society, that society will label anyone 'ogre' who acknowledges his response in such a situation in words or action. In this case the words are both the action and the apology. The poem ends, "These are my excuses".

According to Weininger's *Sex and Character* the only significant male function is the chase, in pursuit of the female objective, to be consumed as transient reward, hence Williams' "sweet child"; sweet like confection, and just as unfulfilling. From this reductive, dislocated male point of view, all women are children, immediate, sexual, too much in contact with the actual to be concerned with the abstract, to "touch the thoughts" constructed around them.

Williams was attempting in this poem to augment the thematic movement with the musical effect of the medium. He used a subtle pattern of 'i' and 'e' vowels, articulated initially with 't's ("sweet" - "little") and subsequently with 'l's ("child" - "girl" - "well" - "Legs") to catch the eye and ear, and then to slip easily through the danger of collision between conflicting expectations. The conflict is set up through the association of "sweet" childhood and conscious sexuality in the person of a "little girl with well shaped legs", whose eroticism is not yet wholly corrupted by society's dominantly male expectations. There had, of course, been countless lyric poems concerned with
'love' but couching it in metaphoric terms; in other words imposing a dislocation of the emotion from the facts by association. Like Loy, Williams was attempting to bring the raw material of poetry back into direct contact with human experience as he saw it (however disturbing and disillusioning this might be); in this case relating eroticism metonymically with the body. The expected reward of sexual arousal or emotional fulfilment is withheld in a problematic relationship. The poem continues: "you cannot touch the thoughts / I put over and under and around you". The vowel sounds have changed from the lightness of 'i's and 'e's to the more portentous 'o's and 'u's. The little girl, like all females, is free of metaphysical discomfort. The psychological divergence of males and females (as described by Weininger) makes it impossible for her to "touch the thoughts", making these thoughts 'untouchable' (beneath contempt), a play on words which is logopoeic. This section is interwoven with a subtle modulation of word sounds and connotations such as; "over", "under", "around", "would" (wood?) and "burn". The very difference between male and female mentality is the reason they do not mutually ignite. The word modulation is extended through "thoughts", "fortunately" and "for", leading to the conclusion of the first section with the deconstruction (as with Loy's "Pig Cupid") of a traditional erotic metaphor. The image is conveyed through the use of word sounds which halt the easy progress of the eye and ear through the movement of the poem.
aware of the physical attraction her sexuality has stimulated and she displays this awareness in her posture. "The tentative lines" are equivalents of the tentative lines of the poem, a male reconstruction (and abstraction in language) of awakening female sexuality.

While the male sexual impulse is shown as transient and potentially destructive, the female is shown to be functional and regenerative. The little girl is being groomed for her role in the evolutionary cycle, Loy's "the was-is-ever-shall-be / of cosmic reproductivity". 63 She has been provided with a "toy baby cart" as a badge of her potential fecundity: and "mother" (significantly not her mother, but the concept "mother") has already begun the process, the "knot" which unites all women and which separates them from the abstract world of men. Here, once again, one can detect echoes of Loy, particularly the lines from section IV of 'Love Songs':

One bore a baby  
in a padded porte-enfant  
Tied with a sarsanet ribbon  
To her goose's wings  

William's concept of female psychology was based on his reading of Weininger's Sex and Character, and this is at the root of 'The Ogre' and of various other poems which had their first book publication in Al Que Quiere! (or, as Williams translated it, "to him who wants it"). He did, however, seem to believe sincerely that in the world of literature at least, women held the key to the replacement of a dislocated, creaking old order with a revitalised new
This is fortunate for they would
burn you to an ash otherwise.
Your petals would be quite curled up.

Perhaps there is a hint of irony here; that women may be complicitly involved in the traditional concepts of erotic good taste, and that the imposition of abstract structures which distort honest relationships is as much due to their acquiescence as to male restlessness. If this were not the case, the "you" which would burn "to an ash" (the insubstantial equivalent of a myth exposed) would be the tired rose-petal metaphor of a disintegrating tradition. But this child is a representative figure, standing in reductively for most women who are neither intellectual nor dissident, and therefore the finer features of the argument are "beyond" her, and the cultural edifice survives. The child's real function is practical, forming a tangible link in the chain of existence, an equivalent chain of which is constructed in the pattern of word sounds throughout the second section. Consider the linkage set up through the words highlighted in:

This is all beyond you--no doubt,
yet you do feel the brushings
of the fine needles;
the tentative lines of your whole body
prove it to me;
so does your fear of me,
your shyness;
likewise the toy baby cart
that you are pushing--
and besides, mother has begun
to dress your hair in a knot.
These are my excuses.

One element of the exchange which is not "beyond" the girl is that projected by means of body language. She is
one. Having defined their function as revolutionary, he recruited the activity of women to his private war against orthodoxy. He was given the opportunity of publicising his ideas, which he entitled 'The Great Sex Spiral', in 1917, in response to a series of articles by Dora Marsden, the editor of The Egoist.

'The Great Sex Spiral'

In 1911 Williams wrote to Viola Baxter Jordan that "men are not strong enough to 'bat air' with women. That forever proves to me I am not a man [my italics]". To be more accurate, he was too much a not-man, a dissident artist whose hunger for significance was pushing him into confrontation with what he saw as the establishment. He saw around him, significant contribution by women writers (Loy, Moore, H.D., Stein and Lowell) and editors (Monroe, Marsden, Anderson and Heap) to the modernist movement. With Weininger's theories lurking in the background he constructed a two part justification for his definition and recruitment of 'militant female psychology' entitled 'The Great Sex Spiral'. This was written in response to articles in The Egoist written by Dora Marsden, attacking orthodox philosophical method.

As early as 1913, Marsden had published commentaries in The New Freewoman (later to become The Egoist) which would prove of great relevance to Williams in his search for a
consolidation of his own ideas. In an editorial, 'Thinking and Thought', she attacked cultural decadence; people (men) whose powers of perception were limited and who had become too dependent upon philosophical structure, theory as a means of avoiding analysis. She wrote that "the process of thinking is meant to co-ordinate two things which are real: the person who thinks and the rest of the phenomenal world of sense". Presumably by this she meant the world as it is apprehended by the senses. Notwithstanding the problems inherent in the use of the word "real", an a priori assumption in itself, Marsden was suggesting an approach to the human situation which would be empirically based on investigation rather than intuition or theory. The basis of knowledge was experienced emotion; being preceding thought in a basic dialectic, contributing, perhaps, to Williams' notion of contact.

In a later article, 'The Art of the Future' in which she made specific reference to Pound, Marsden attempted to relate her ideas on science and philosophy to the art of poetry, once again suggesting that an alternative approach based on sound analysis might be more relevant than that which was condoned by the cultural establishment. She went on to demand of poetry that it should be "the highest manifestation of self-consciousness, presented in terms of selfrecognised emotion". It was statements like this, tapping onto the tradition of scholarship in an attempt to subvert it, that provided Williams with the
foundations for a current poetic system, a new measure to hold up as the successor to the old. He believed that the old world, which was degenerating, was controlled and informed by male psychology, and he recruited Marsden, on the strength of her 'Lingual Psychology" essays, for the new resistance.

Marsden used, as the basis for her attack on traditional thought, the idea that all western philosophy from the time of Locke onward was agnostic, arising from "the utter intractability of philosophy's subject-matter to treatment by the analytical method". Because of the basic inability of the human faculties to rise to the ultimate problems of reality and truth, a form of suspended skepticism or agnostic philosophy was necessary. Philosophy was unable to deal with the inexplicable (that pervasive threat of abnegation that Dickinson had confronted in her work) without constructing theories by which it might be contained. It was Kant, Marsden suggested, who came up with the appropriate system:

He decided to regard the inexplicables as "given" a priori and working from beyond that point, proceeded to construct for them an appropriate superstructure. He did not, of course, propose to analyse them: obviously since for the senses—which alone can analyse—they were not "there" to permit of it. By insinuating apriorism as the process of "explanation" in place of analysis, Kant thus endeavoured to make the best of a situation. Philosophy had abandoned analysis in favour of invention, and the answer arrived at was labelled variously; made truth, fictional truth, creative truth, necessary truth.
It is, Marsden ironically suggested, "truth which is 'Harmony and Beauty'; it is every kind of truth, in fact, except the common or garden 'real' truth." Once again Marsden had not acknowledged the aprioristic nature of the assumption that an objective "common or garden 'real' truth" can be found for analysis. Williams would later develop for his purposes the idea that all truths, as meaning, depended for their existence upon human consciousness in language, and that meaning therefore separated from experience. With Spring and All he struggled to present the existential vacuum between the world of phenomena and human response in consciousness as briefly articulated, but never filled, by poetry.

It was not long, Marsden suggested, before creative artists began taking advantage of this structuring of theory as 'truth'. "When Keats asserted that, 'Truth is Beauty, Beauty Truth,' he gave a nicely accurate description of this apriorist 'Truth'." She commented, "The aesthetically minded...adopted apriorism wholeheartedly, and embarked on full sailed careers as creative artists".

There it was, ammunition for Williams' war against orthodoxy. The old order of literary form was simply based on aprioristic foundations, constructed by men who refused or who were unable to relate their process analytically to the experience of human beings. He believed that this was partly because they were men, and psychologically unfitted for objective analysis of the cyclical processes of being.
Marsden argued that the major problem as the situation had developed thus far was that, even in terms of their own purpose of enquiry, the apriorists' means had become structurally unsound. The structure had, in fact, become its own end rather than the medium by which to achieve ends. The medium had become too specialised, losing touch with the process by which it had been arrived at. Williams should no doubt have seen the analogy; that the development of poetic formal strictures as the means toward poetic expression was an aprioristic avoidance of the need to justify structure in terms of the experiential necessities of that particular poem. His response suggests a different interpretation, as well as a characteristic misreading (for his own ends) of Marsden's fairly uncomplicated message. He wrote that for him, "the edge of all Miss Marsden says lies in a covert attack on the 'creative artist'." She was, in essence, advocating what Williams claimed (in his eagerness to identify with other artists) many female modernist writers were attempting to achieve. On various occasions he would suggest that Loy, Moore and Stein were working to cleanse the language of its outworn associative habits, and to bring it back into contact with its source in human experience. Marsden was seeking to refute the assumption that the analytical approach was necessarily static, and that the perpetual flux of existence could be approached only by way of imposed and adjustable theoretic structures. The alternative assumption must be that analysis is flex-
ible, since empirical investigation depends wholly upon the available evidence, whereas aprioral investigation is static, adjusting the evidence to fit the theory. Once again, a fitting analogue might be that, in traditional verse form, the conditions from which the poem arises are distorted to comply with an imposed structure.

Marsden based her solution to the problem on what she perceived as the only alternative to a system of inquiry whose vocabulary had become too esoteric, a situation where, "the symbols adequate to express the part are inadequate for the expression of the whole". The alternative was language relocated in closer proximity with the locus which had originally engendered it; human experience and desire to evaluate and communicate.

Williams' enthusiastic response to Marsden's 'Lingual Philosophy' was first of all to point out that:

...though she succeeds brilliantly in abolishing an historic philosophy that is agnostic, the basic agnosticism of her own reasoning remains no more than hidden. To this extent the entire argument of her thesis is futile. 74

Nevertheless, despite what he saw as its defects, there was for Williams a solid basis for the attack which underlined the surface of Marsden's argument; what he called

an attack full of spirit and distinction upon what amounts to a male psychology entrenched in agnosticism, which last is facing for the first time a definite enemy.

For the first time, here is a philosophy from the female standpoint: militant female psychology.

As has been argued above, for Williams femaleness and dissidence were synonymous, and not necessarily attributes
only of women. As a 'not man' he was himself capable of showing such attributes; indeed he was eager to embrace them in his campaign against the establishment. Marsden's thesis was exciting for him precisely because it added to his arsenal a wider appraisal of the situation. This could provide a base for radical response in many areas of activity, including poetry, but not, he claimed in his revisionary zeal, for the reasons she had supposed. He called the essay "a magnificent, if perhaps unconscious piece of irony". He explained:

Not the apparent promise of an abolition of agnosticism from the realm of philosophical inquiry but the establishment of a truly pregnant female psychology therein gives Miss Marsden's thesis its basis in fact.

Fact? Williams joins Marsden, Kant, Keats et al in the aprrioral trap. He weakened his case further by compromising his argument for an ascendent female psychology with the reductive adjective "pregnant", and by claiming that:

In the speed of attack and defence, however, it must not be forgotten that, though male psychology has completely filled the philosophical field heretofore and though it is now past its use and is about to be supplanted by a vigorous and fruitful female psychology [my italics], it can only be so supplanted in the realm of practical affairs and not that of pure knowledge.

The suggestion here is that there is such a thing as "pure knowledge" (a close relative, perhaps, of 'Absolute Truth') and that its activities took place on a plane untouchable by the matter of fact nature of (fruit bearing) female psychology. As a 'not man' he, presumably, was qualified to operate in both dimensions.

It comes as no surprise, given the contradictions in
his theories on women and culture, that Williams was no
great advocate of woman's liberation. Paul Mariani offers
evidence in A New World Naked from unpublished letters that
show Williams refusing to take the issue seriously. In
April 1917, for example, he wrote to Marjorie Allen Seiffert (an Others contributor) excusing his position. He
suggested that intellectually, all his time and energy was
consumed by his art, and in any case he "couldn't see what
all the fuss the suffragettes were making was about". 75
What really interested him, what he believed he could gain
from associating with dissident women was their potential
as conscripts to his own struggle for identity as a modern
writer. To stand out against the establishment was in
itself an act of self-definition, and Williams perceived
that women, especially in literature, were achieving this.
During this period of particular insecurity, in his search
for self-justification, a concept of ascendent female
psychology revisionistically applied to his own position,
provided a temporary focus.

In the second instalment of his criticism of Marsden's
'Lingual Philosophy', published in The Egoist in August
1917 he argued Weininger's case for

...the universal lack of attachment between the male
and an objective world—to the earth under his feet—
since the male, aside from his extremely simple sex
function is wholly unnecessary to objective life: the
only life which his sense perceives. He can never be
even certain that his child is his own....

When not in pursuit of the female man has absolutely
no necessity to exist. But this chase can never lead
to satisfaction, since as soon as the catch is made the
objective is removed....
Thus the male pursuit leads only to further pursuit, that is, not toward the earth, but away from it—not to concreteness, but to further hunting, to star-gazing, to idleness.

Williams was suggesting here that the whole area of philosophy is one in which women have no part. The deracination of male psychology leads men to seek outward for self-justification; leads them to construct alternative structures of 'pure thought' as a consolation for their dislocated state. The inevitability of "male pursuit" puts them on a different intellectual plane from that inhabited by women, the objects of the chase. He asserted:

Female psychology, on the other hand, is characterized by a trend not away from, but toward the earth, toward concreteness, since by her experience the reality of fact is firmly established for her. Her pursuit of the male results not in further chase, at least not in the immediate necessity for further chase, but to definite physical results that connect her firmly and indisputably with the earth at her feet by an unalterable chain every link of which is concrete.

Williams had thus established for himself a subtle but ironically reactionary hierarchy that placed the earth-bound female in the front line of an attack on orthodox culture, but with the aim of replacing that with another male defined order, since women (by their very nature) operated with no need for definition. He continued:

To the female mind, male psychology (philosophy) which is agnostic, due to his experience, has no reality in her experience. To the female mind such a psychology (philosophy) will always remain a meaningless symbol—a negative attracting her attack.

So women need not waste time in search of an alternative kind of philosophy, since philosophy itself is profoundly foreign to the female experience. Philosophy, pure thought,
aprioral structuralism, agnosticism, these are elements of the scaffolding erected to support a dislocated male psychology. That this flimsy structure had been dominant in western civilization throughout recorded history was obvious, but what women had to offer in opposition was not a different philosophy, but simply "militant female psychology", bringing with it, it would seem, a fresh approach to language. The language of female psychology, bound to female experience, rooted in the process of physical regeneration, must emerge in implicit opposition to the stale agnosticism of the tottering male cultural superstructure. This would have been an attractive notion to the dissident American poet in search of a radical vantage point.

'The Great Sex Spiral' was published in April (the second part in August) 1917, just two months after Williams had written to Marianne Moore, an Others contributor, and certainly one of the most impressive of the radical American writers of the time. In his Autobiography Williams described her position as "like a rafter holding up the superstructure of our uncomplete building...surely one of the main supports of the new order....Marianne was our saint...." (Auto 146) He wrote, "we all loved and not a little feared her, not only because of her keen wit but for her skill as a writer of poems" (IWW 20). The contradiction is obvious in his attitude to women, and his reference to such as Moore, Loy and Stein. He drew attention to the female 'qualities' as being rooted in earth, body, physical
regeneration. However, his interest in Marianne Moore, for example, had little to do with those aspects of 'female psychology' he had identified in 'The Great Sex Spiral'. She was a woman who never married, never had children, and was as intellectually agile as any of the male modernist writers.

This is the kind of rift that characterises Williams' work from Kora onward. While critics have gone to great pains to identify the objectness of his lyrics, they have missed the essential element of inconsistency that was part of his process. His subsequent books, especially those like Spring and All, Paterson, and to a lesser extent Kora in Hell which combine poetry and prose, contain, as equivalent to the ideological inconsistencies of the time, an articulated matrix of contradictions that synthesise in the poems.

In a letter to Moore, Williams acknowledged his reliance on her as an example of dissident courage. He wrote, somewhat patronisingly, "Help me, O leading light of the Sex of the Future" (Letters 40). The problem he was grappling with was how to title his book of poems, the result of his association with Others. This was the first collection which showed evidence of his power as an innovative American writer. He wrote, "I'm going to have a book...a fine book, naturally--or will be. But the title bothers me". The phrase "I'm going to have a book", suggests the process of giving birth, and, to this obstetrician it would
be apt to see the book as the product of a gestation period with Others. During this time the embryo which was 'Transition' had matured to a fully formed, though infant poetic. The name had to be right, with which to send this vigorous offspring out into the world.

The title he agreed with his publisher was A Book of Poems, Al Que Quiere! To offer the book "to him who wants it!" in this way was to suggest that not many would, and ironically his translation of the title excluded those very dissidents, women, with whom he had attempted to align himself in 'Transitional' and 'The Great Sex Spiral'.

Many of the poems which appeared in the book had already appeared in The Egoist, Poetry and less well known magazines. About half had been published by Others. In a short article written for The Egoist he described the magazine and its New York Dadaistic ambience as 'The Great Opportunity'.

Al K: To Him Who Wants It!

Williams' article 'The Great Opportunity' was written in the autumn of 1916 when he believed Others to be failing. There would be, in fact, thirteen more issues, including special numbers for named poets (including Loy, Kreymborg and Williams).

During that "unpleasant passage of arms" with Amy Lowell, Williams wrote to her:
Yes, you gathered together a few rather well advertised people from both sides of the Atlantic and together with your own unquestionable prestige and a little stolen notoriety from the omission of Pound. [sic] Your commercial sense led you into making a sellable book. (Letters 37)

Although Lowell was a woman, her "commercial sense" located her firmly within the cultural market, and even there, she was contributing only what Williams felt she had stolen from Pound. Others, however, had held "the future" in its grasp, "even if only for a short while". In another letter sent just four days later (October 16, 1916) he told Lowell, "Others did not attempt to sit in judgement over American letters" (Letters 38). A month earlier his article in The Egoist had attempted to explain the success and failure of Others. "In New York in the spring of 1915," he wrote, "one was feeling a strange quickening of artistic life." 76

The war had brought various members of the European avant-garde to the new world.

The weekly papers began to notice that Du Champ [sic] was with us—and Gleize [sic] and Croty [sic]. There were even productions of photographs and paragraphs speaking of "New York's gain due to its little progressive colony of artists forced out of France and England."

While recognising that the major input into European modernism had come from the painters, Williams claimed that it was among the writers that America's greatest advance took place. In poetry especially, he wrote, "the fiercest twitchings appeared", leading to "wild enthusiasm among the free verse writers". The inception of Others brought timely opportunities for dissident writers and its pages
became a laboratory in which radical formal experimentation could take place. "Kreymborg", Williams acknowledged, "was the hero".

Williams' book title *Al Que Quiere!* contained within it an assonantal dedication to the editor (Al K.) who had made it all possible. Through Alfred Kreymborg and *Others*, poetry which was located in America had a chance to survive against the tide of European cultural colonialism. "Good verse was coming from San Francisco, from Louisville, Ky., from Chicago, from 63rd Street, from Staten Island, From Boston, from Oklahoma City".

But by September, 1916, Williams believed that *Others* was well advanced in its process of disintegration. He saw the main area of contention as located in the internecine disagreement.

It seemed that the painters and the poets didn't get along very well together, perhaps that was why we couldn't get the things said which we were all aching to say.

Well, let's meet without the painters.

The painters had opened a breach in the establishment's defences, through which the experimentalists had emerged. Now it seemed that their pre-eminence had become something of an embarrassment for the writers. They were not alone.

Next it was the women who interfered. The women agreed to stay at home. Six men met one evening and had a bully good time discussing the news and affairs in general in a reasonably intelligent way. This was the high water mark.

Williams the not man, with his admiration for painting, felt the irony of a clique which moved to exclude women and
painters. The old male structure seemed to have been replaced by a new one, no less distrustful of those who "interfered". Artists like Loy and Duchamp with their continuing and growing disrespect for the temples of culture (expressed in works such as 'Love Songs' and Fountain), be they galleries or 'modern' magazines, were a thorn in the flesh of the newly established order, struggling as it was to attract respect. At this stage, Williams was struggling, not so much for respect as for relevance, something he felt had been possible in the early issues of Others.

This little magazine was said to be the sun of a new dawning in its little yellow paper cover! America had at last found a democratic means of expression! It was free verse! Even the newspapers went so far as to make extensive mockery of the men and the movement in their funny columns. We were elated at our success.

Ever since the Armory Show of 1913, newspaper disapproval was seen as an endorsement of the degree of radicalism any creative endeavour might achieve. Others, a year on, had lost its way. Manuscripts "of our native artists beginning to fail to appear" in the magazine which no longer fostered "meetings with strange cousins of Isadora Duncan, etc., strange French 'Artists,'" and caused "no stir in the newspapers". The reference to Isadora Duncan, that first female dissident artist to whom Williams had become attracted, combined with the reference to French artists as a recognition of the debt owed by the American avant-garde to specific women (Loy, Stein, Moore) and to specific painters (Duchamp, Picabia, Gleizes).

In this article, however, he did acknowledge his debt
to Alfred Kreymborg. He lamented a little prematurely: "At last the movement is dead. Now for the advance." Others had at least contributed some impetus to his own progression. He referred to Kreymborg's book *Mushrooms*, commenting on "the skilful use of small words, the artistic effect depending on the musical design and not on the values denoted and connoted in the words themselves".

Kreymborg had published a book of avant-garde poems early in 1916, which included the following short, rather quiet lyric:

```
EVERY MORNING
Our halls are very dark
But not so dark we cannot see,
every morning,
a bent old figure,
kneeling,
on the steps or in the halls,
scrubbing--
what you call a janitress.
Good morning, she says.
Good morning, say we.
Our halls are very dark,
but not so dark--
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Kreymborg's influence, in poems like this, on the development of Williams' poetic, can be seen as antithetical to that of Loy. Most significant is the diction; quiet, conversational, presented as a representation of everyday speech. The subject matter is what Stevens would later describe as "anti-poetic". "The genius of the United States..." Whitman had written, is "always most in the common people", and this 'democratic' locus for American literary expression was articulated as much by Others, "rebelling", as the *Life* critic had put it, "against an
aristocracy of form", as by any other contemporary group. Kreymborg, the controlling spirit, was "the hero" in the struggle for an American forum. In his 'Prologue' Williams identified in Kreymborg "a bare irony, the gift of rhythm and Others" (Imag 23). From the fomenting turmoil of post-Armory Show New York, Kreymborg had offered his contacts, his editorial ability, and his brief, rather fragile literary radicalism as a focal point for incipient native talent. Williams described Kreymborg as "peculiarly able to value what is being done here. Whether he is bull enough for the work I am not certain...." Kreymborg had, of course, shown himself already to be quite "bull enough" to bring writers like Williams into the ring. This statement is yet another example of Williams side-stepping acknowledgement of direct influence so as to avoid accusations of plagiarism. In the same passage, however, he made a statement about Kreymborg's verse which might just as easily be applied to his own work.

Few people know how to read Kreymborg. There is no modern poet who suffers more from a bastard sentimental appreciation. It is hard to get his things from the page. I have heard him say he has often thought in despair of marking his verse into measures as music is marked.

It is the lineation, each line end-stopped, which gives the reader the flexible rhythmic unit of Kreymborg's poem. The lines are irregular, but regulated by silences, pauses at each terminal juncture which can vary in length according to the conditions of the poem. This characteristically flattens the tone of the poem, distancing it from the
'elevation' of the traditional lyric, not so much an 'anti-poetic' as an alternative one.

In this poem we are offered a formally organised 'proletarian' portrait of an old cleaner at work.

    a bent old figure,
    kneeling
    on the steps or in the halls,
    scrubbing--
    what you call a janitress.

The music of this piece needs no "marking into measures". It is a quiet music conveyed through a conversational rhythm and understated word-sound repetitions such as (from this short extract): "bent", "steps", "janitress", or; "kneeling", "scrubbing", or; "kneeling", "halls", "call".

The poem is rendered, significantly, without recourse to figurative language. Although this stripped back aspect of Kreymborg's work no doubt influenced Williams, the reduction in the latter's poetry is seldom quite so stringent. His immediate response to Kreymborg's example appears to have been a quietening of his diction and the rejection of initial capitals for each line. *Mushrooms* was published in 1916, and in December of that year *Others* contained a group of Williams' poems including 'The Young Housewife'. This was Williams' first poetry to be published without capitalised line beginnings. 'The Young Housewife' is (like Kreymborg's poem) a 'portrait' which raises to the level of cultural significance the writer's version of an unexceptional woman.

The poem is more complex than it seems, operating on
two distinct levels. It is at once an imagistic poem presenting sexual attraction through the image of a young woman, while attempting to deconstruct the ideological implications of the narrator's perspective. She is depicted as seen voyeuristically (presumably through a window) going about her morning routine.

At ten A.M. the young housewife moves about in a negligee behind the wooden walls of her husband's house. I pass solitary in my car. (CEP 136)

The narrator is situated moving away from the subject, whose erotic value is qualified by her status, the property of her husband, contained within his territory. It is only after she has removed herself from that restrictive environment, when she "comes to the curb", that she becomes available, "shy, uncorseted, tucking in / stray ends of hair..."

There is an implication of social criticism, as in Kreyemborg's 'EVERY MORNING'. Kreyemborg implies society's habitual refusal to recognise the individuality of common people. By raising the "janitress" from her dark halls into the spotlight of poetry he has called to our attention her existence as a sentient being. So, very subtly, the whole poem, while functioning on a metonymic axis, becomes a metaphor for the strategies we adopt to obscure our obligations to each other.

Williams' poem combines conflicting traditional views of female sexuality, attempting to synthesise an objective product, uncorrupted female physicality. The dialectic is
constructed using two orthodox masculine views on female value. First there is the idea of woman as property, to be bought and maintained by the husband. This notion had been expanded by Weininger in *Sex and Character* and taken on by Marsden in her essay 'The Heart of the Question'. Weininger had argued that women should work to free themselves from the constraints of the marriage market. Only this way could they achieve their rightful status in the eyes of men. Marsden accepted this, suggesting also that women had been complicit in the syndrome, grooming their daughters for the inevitable exchange and insisting on preserving 'virtue' as a means of adding 'value' to the object for sale; thus contributing to a system of prostitution.

The antithesis, ironically dependent for its own value structure on the market value notion, is the traditional poetic concept of the poet's relationship to his muse. The woman must be idealised, modified, that is, to fit a male notion of what is ideal, etherialised through the use of metaphor, and so presented here in terms of a fallen leaf.

Neither of these perspectives can signify female sexual identity as anything but the object of masculine preoccupation. Of course Williams' notion of women as "physically essential to the maintenance of physical life" is no less confining. His attempt in this poem to break down the traditional notion of female sexuality as passive, at most responsive, is made through a straightforward dialectic. Activity is generated between the idea of women as collat-
eral, dependent for their value on the notion of virtue, and that of women as muse, taken from the merchant tradition and idealised. Both the husband and the poet demand the same, the exclusive right to construct a sexual value, and to control it for the sake of personal aggrandisement. Between the two, however, emerges a third male appropriation, a cleverly constructed illusion of woman as individual, physically present in her own right:

Then again she comes to the curb
to call the ice-man, fish-man, and stands shy, uncorseted, tucking in stray ends of hair...

Williams betrays his phallocentrism by highlighting her erotic potential in proximity to such (pagan) figures as "ice-man" and "fish-man". While this poem's attempt to create a sympathetic male perspective on female physicality (in the shadow of Loy's 'Parturition') must inevitably fail for the reasons given, Williams' use of a subtle music, echoing Kreymborg's poem, is finely wrought through a careful linkage of modulating word sounds. The first two stanzas begin with lines which are remarkably similar. Compare: "At ten A.M. the young housewife", with: "Then again she comes to the curb" (my italics). The italicised word sounds are woven into a carefully modulated progression, in the words "ice-man, fish-man", "stands", "ends". the word "housewife" connects with "house" and "ice-man", forming a link with the first chain. The 'i' vowel in "housewife" has echoes throughout the poem in words such as; "behind", "I", "ice-man", "shy", modulating to "stray"
and "hair" and "compare", linking with a previous word, "car", and anticipating, in the final stanza, "my car", "over", "dried" and "smiling". This intricate interweaving of sounds is underpinned by a controlled use of alliteration. The 'h' and 'w' of "housewife" are deftly reiterated in the phrase "behind / the wooden walls of her husband's house". There is more alliterative interaction in the lines, "Then again she comes to the curb / to call the ice-man, fish-man and stands", and the whole final stanza operates as a lexical equivalent of the quietly destructive car wheels, conveyed through a predomination of 's' sounds:

\[\text{The noiseless wheels of my car}\
\text{rush with a crackling sound over}\
\text{dried leaves as I bow and pass smiling.}\]

The narrator/driver, a recurrent device of Williams', drives the automobile of modern consciousness (cynically bowing and smiling) which must inevitably crush the "dried leaves" of poetic preconception. The woman emerges de-metaphorised, but, ironically, re-mythicised, reduced to the sensual (as opposed to the intellectual), representing for Williams all women, dependent for definition on the male quest for signification, prefiguring the female principle in Williams' later work, particularly \text{Paterson}.

Critics and Connoisseurs

Earlier that same year, Kreymborg had handed over the editorship of \text{Others}, temporarily, so that specific edit-
ions could be edited by loyal contributors. Williams wrote to Marianne Moore in May 1916 requesting work for his edition. He explained that his idea was "to put into the thing what I think is the best work. I am not philanthropic. One piece by each person...that he or she is willing to stand to" (Letters 34). He solicited work also from Pound, H.D., John Gould Fletcher, Amy Lowell, Aiken, Stevens, Sandburg and Loy along with Pound's "worser phenomena of Others". Williams' eagerness to include only what he considered "the best work" reveals a level of insecurity which encompassed, in addition to his own efforts, those contemporaries with whom he might be associated.

At about this time he wrote, in his letter/article for The Egoist, 'The Great Opportunity', that there was "no verse but the worst being accepted by the magazines, ...our minds began to go to sleep. One picked among the bones of the stew for a little nourishment". 79

Picking among the bones for items for his issue of Others, Williams came up with Moore's 'Critics and Connoisseurs' which begins:

There is a great amount of poetry in unconscious Fastidiousness. Certain Ming Products, imperial floor coverings of coach Wheel yellow, are well enough in their way but I have seen something That I like better—a
Mere childish attempt to make an imperfectly ballasted animal stand up, A determination ditto to make a pup eat his meat on the plate. 80

The elegance of the language, and the syllabically controlled lineation ironically camouflage the irreverent nature
of the poem. It is suggested that the inconsequential but immediate optimism of a child (for example) may well provide more rewarding subject matter for poetry than the weight of cultural inheritance present in (for example) such "Ming products" as "imperial floor coverings". In 1913 Williams had written to Monroe complaining that "to me, what is woefully lacking in our verse and in our criticism is not hammered-out but stuff to be hammered out. A free forum, there is the need which asks only, 'Is it new, interesting?'" (Letters 25). The "hammered out stuff" is Williams' equivalent of Moore's "unconscious fastidiousness", both relying on the past efforts of others. Further into the poem the reader encounters a swan defying the current of the stream on which it swam:

....Disbelief and conscious fastidiousness were the staple Ingredients in its Disinclination to move.

In a letter responding to Moore's contribution Williams wrote to her that her poem served exactly "the very purpose I would wish it to serve so perfectly: to plead for careful thought, for a precise technique--the better to ensnare the intangible--or something of that sort" (Letters 35). The "connoisseurs" in Moore's poem are those who maintain the "hammered out stuff" of traditional culture. The "critics" of the new generation are constantly seeking "stuff to be hammered out", struggling against the current in stubborn apposition. This might well be an oblique reference to the energy which engendered Others; indeed, the final stanza
contains a hint, perhaps of the reason why that energy began to dissipate, why Others never did quite manage to "ensnare the intangible".

...What is
There in being able
To say that one has dominated the stream
in an attitude of self defense,
In proving that one has had the experience
Of carrying a stick?

Dissidence for its own sake provided no real advance on the "unconscious fastidiousness" of traditional culture. It must have seemed at the time, with Others making little headway, and with Poetry and Amy Lowell dominating the literary scene, that the entire gesture had floundered in the rhetoric of change.

Moore's own version of conscious fastidiousness was apparent even in this early period, with her careful syllabic control and what Pound had called her "logopoeia...a mind cry more than a heart cry". 81 Pound suggested in a letter to her, written in December 1918, that she consider publishing a book "You will never sell more than five hundred copies, as your work demands mental attention". 82 At this time Moore's work had perhaps more in common with that of Wallace Stevens than with most of the other contributors (including Williams) to Others. Her quietly reflective tone and elegantly articulated diction, like Stevens', obscured a tough core of existential relevance which was to prove more durable than the more obvious contrariness of such as Maxwell Bodenheim, Orrick Johns or even Kreymborg. Ironically, it is arguably that elegant
veneer which (in spite of her wry irreverence) has allowed her star to rise for a critical establishment which has continued to reject or ignore the more aggressive innovations available in the work of Mina Loy. Loy's impact on Williams was more immediate during the Others period, although Moore would provide the basis for changes which took place less dramatically in his work during the following decade. A detailed examination of these changes is offered in Section Five of this thesis.

Belly Music

Williams had been signalling the end of Others variously since September 1916 with 'The Great Opportunity', and after a further three years of turbulent and precarious continuation, the magazine finally succumbed, with Williams himself delivering the coup de grace. The July 1919 issue, edited by him, included a supplement entitled 'BELLY MUSIC' which functioned as an epitaph, an autopsy and a personal manifesto. In his Autobiography he wrote:

I know Kreymborg...thought I had sabotaged it in the end. But it was finished. It had published enough to put a few men and women on their feet...but had no critical standards and offered only the scantiest rallying point for a new movement. It was individually useful to many of us; it gave a hearing to us in the face of the universal refusal to publish and pay for available new work by young poets. It helped break the ice for further experimentation with the line, but that was all. (Auto 141/2)

The evidence, of course, gives a different perspective. The first rank American modernist writers who had early
work published in Others included Williams, Eliot, Stevens, Moore, Loy, H.D. and Djuna Barnes. The time and energy Williams dedicated to the magazine contributed to a period during which his most dramatic development took place. As he acknowledged in an interview in 1958: "Whenever I wrote at this time, the poems were written with Others in mind" (IWW 19). Al Que Quiere!, his first significantly modern collection, was a direct result of this association. Through Others he became associated with Kreymborg, Loy, Moore, Duchamp, Stevens, Arensberg and other artists whose example lifted him from potential mediocrity.

Williams began the final issue of Others with an anarchic editorial ironically entitled 'GLORIA!'. The excitement had all finally drained away from his American vortex, and without that momentum, he felt the need to cast free. He had 'had' his book and it was time to sever the umbilicus, to build on his new formed confidence as an individual. Having reached this stage and, incidentally, the age of thirty-five, there was no satisfaction in being labelled one of the Others crowd. He wrote:

We older can compose, we seek the seclusion of a style, of a technique, we make replicas of the world we live in and we live in them and not in the world. And THAT is Others. The garbage proved that we were alive once, and it cannot prove us dead now. But THAT is Others now, that is its lie. 83

Earlier in this diatribe Williams had written, "the rubbish stirred and a rat crawled from the garbage, alive! in that filth. What else was Others at that time: a rat in the garbage heap of New York". But Others had broken through
the establishment's defences, and, presumably, the rats were multiplying in the garbage. Simply surfacing with radical work was no longer enough. The time had come for a formal consolidation, and the greatest barrier to that was the lack of expertise among the critics for the appraisal of the new verse. Williams dealt with the problem in his supplementary essay, 'BELLY MUSIC' which doubled also as an explanation of his own aesthetic position. The essay begins, "I am in the field against the stupidity of the critics writing in this country about poetry today". That same year Conrad Aiken had written of Al Que Quiere! that it "has the savoury quality of originality", but felt compelled to ask, "Is it poetry?" He castigated Williams for being "more amiable than beautiful, more entertaining than successful". Aiken, himself a struggling young poet, a contributor to Others, was incapable of freeing himself from traditional concepts of 'beauty' and poetic 'success'. For Williams, therefore, he was in no position to appraise the current phenomenon of free verse. With Williams' work Aiken made the same mistake as had been made regarding Loy and Moore. He wrote:

The sensory element is kept in the foreground, the tone remains whimsically colloquial, and as a result the total effect - even when the material is inherently emotional - is still quaintly cerebral....He is ashamed to be caught crying, or exulting, or adoring. On the technical side this puritanism manifests itself in a resolute suppression of beauty.

Aiken was unable to comprehend Williams' struggle to escape the tyranny of subjective 'beauty' and 'emotion'. Like
Duchamp he was aiming his 'originality' at that part of the human intelligence which demanded progression. The evolution of the human race had been dependent upon adaptation, and it was reasonable to expect cultural expression correspondingly to evolve. The critics, Williams asserted in 'BELLY MUSIC', had not caught up. "It is simply that the brains have not passed the mark set by the post Darwinian botanists, etc."

Aiken had accused Williams of suppressing beauty. Williams wrote, "The American...critical mind is hipped on the question of 'good stuff' especially if it be lovely." He used this accusation as a means of introducing what was to become a lifelong preoccupation; that writers should locate their ideas in the integrity of objects rather than in their potential as symbols. "Oh damn loveliness", he wrote, "poets have written of the big leaves and the little leaves, leaves that are red, green, yellow and the one thing that they have never seen about a leaf is that it is a little engine. It is one of the things that make a plant GO". To relate a leaf to a mechanical contrivance suggests Williams' anxious need to relate his work to the currency of ideas and achievements in the modern world. He confirmed this later in the essay when he claimed, somewhat exclusively, that "the mark of a great poet is the extent to which he [my italics] is aware of his time and NOT, unless I be a fool, the weight of loveliness in his meters. And I cannot see anything worth striving for save great-
ness". Greatness, significance, these were the only things worth striving for, although, ironically, greatness was a status defined by a hostile cultural establishment. This was the paradox, self-defined, that would allow Williams an alternative greatness; that of heroic crusader for the cause of modern poetry. He asserted, "I would write no matter what other choice I had." Although the members of the establishment were in control of the mechanisms of culture, the visionary dissident artist was bound to oppose them all. There can be little doubt that Williams was describing his own fraught position in the following:

He writes to assert himself above every machine and every mechanical conception that seeks to bind him. He writes to free himself, to annihilate every machine, every science, to escape defiant through consciousness and accuracy of emotional expression. And this can never occur until he is conscious of and takes discriminating grips upon the first brains of his generation.

Williams had accomplished just that. During the preceding decade he had consciously absorbed the possibilities (and contingent anxiety) made available for him through the example of such contemporary innovators as Pound, Eliot, Loy, Moore, Stein, and others. He wrote:

I began when I was twenty. I BEGAN then. OTHERS saw its inception when I was thirty, when I had already proved a failure time after time. And yet I sing.... And will fight to insist that I am not voiceless...

Or if the answer is that no one will listen to my singing or even call it singing I say that they cannot help listening and that--it doesn't matter one way or the other.

With Others gone Williams began once again to feel the cold of exclusion. He had reached his poetic majority and he had had his book. Now was the time for consolidation, to
work through the variety of contesting influences and to attempt to sublimate them for the sake of an identity. The excitement of Dada, in conflict with Williams' deep rooted need for control over his line and diction, would come almost to resolution in *Kora in Hell* (1920) and would be synthesised in *Spring and All* in 1923.

Meanwhile a claim for individual significance had to be registered. "At last the movement is dead", Williams had written somewhat prematurely in 'The Great Opportunity', "now for the advance". Modern American poetry had been stimulated into existence by *Poetry, Others* and the influential *Little Review*, now perhaps it was mature enough to be carried on by individual poets. Williams wrote:

One turns at last to one's desk drawer and thumbs over one's own verses with something of the feelings of a miser.

America has triumphed! 86
Section Five

Spring and All: Liberating The Word

In his rearguard defence of Hellenism (discussed above) Richard Aldington had, in 1914, categorised the modern writers as, "like...the Byzantines who invented conventions to excuse themselves for not attempting to emulate the art of their ancestors". Williams echoed this sentiment ironically in Spring and All, invoking the presence of Samuel Butler as a paragon of English traditional value.

He wrote:

The great English divine, Sam Butler, is shouting from a platform, warning us as we pass: There are two who can invent some extraordinary thing to one who can properly employ that which has been made use of before. Enheartened by this thought, THE TRADITIONALISTS OF PLAGIARISM try to get hold of the mob. They seize those nearest them and shout into their ears: Tradition! The solidarity of life!

The fight is on: These men who have had the governing of the mob through all the repetitious years resent the new order. Who can answer them? One perhaps here and there but it is an impossible situation. (Imag 97/8)

As is so often the case with Williams in his statements on art and aesthetics, the situation is seen in terms of a "fight" against the oppressive forces of cultural tradition. "THE TRADITIONALISTS OF PLAGIARISM" were those figures who, like Aldington, clung pragmatically to a faith in the "the art of their ancestors" as models of current value. Williams included in this category such members of the new elite as Lowell, H.D., Fletcher, Eliot, Pound, and even Wallace Stevens. As early as 1917 he wrote, "Fletcher
and Eliot and Stevens are going over the forms of yesterday and making fine stuff to read and enjoy. So is Pound".  

In the same essay he wrote:

UNLESS I speak of that which exists or create a new art I speak in sense. There is no art of poetry save in poetry itself. In America to speak of the art of poetry is pure imbecility unless there be an art in America. And if I cannot speak of that which exists here where can I know it, it stands to reason that I cannot speak of the art anywhere.  

In this essay, 'America, Whitman and the Art of Poetry', Williams was arguing for a poetic shift, away from the established traditions of European culture, made possible by a positive shift the early settlers had made into a new environment. Characteristically ignoring the prior claims of America's indigenous population, and anxiously sidestepping his own debt to European tradition, he offered as more valuable the creation of a new poetic art from contact with the New World. 

In 1917, the year Al Que Quiere! was published, Williams was on the verge of his breakthrough, and he placed himself on guard, in protection of a hard won, but vulnerable position. His strategy was to adopt the attitude of champion for the poetic expression of a uniquely modern American condition, an attitude he maintained and consolidated throughout his career. In Spring and All, however, an anxious need to be unlike other writers to establish idiosyncratic territory as a means of attracting attention, is pushed into the foreground. He wrote:

Those who led yesterday wish to hold their sway a while longer. It is not difficult to understand their mood.
They have their great weapons to hand: "science," "philosophy" and most dangerous of all "art."

Meanwhile, SPRING, which has been approaching for several pages, is at last here. (Imag 98)

Spring is the major figure in the work, developed, on the whole, metonymically as a means of sustaining the concept of birth and rejuvenation.

Now at last that process of miraculous verisimilitude, that great copying which evolution has followed, repeating move for move every move that it made in the past—is approaching the end.

Suddenly it is at an end. THE WORLD IS NEW. (Imag 95)

The title of this crucial work is a key to its purpose and trajectory, and as such deserves detailed comment. It relates the specific, "spring", with the general, "all", in a pointed clue to the overall strategy of the sequence.

The textual evocation of that season in which life is renewed parallels a prevailing condition, the modern era, in which renewal is the major energising force. Spring is not, however, a metaphor for the modern era (spring as all) since its constituent characteristics are presented as much for their intrinsic value as for their associative potential. Spring takes place herein both coincidentally (and inexorably) as a phenomenon of extra-human existence, and as an exemplary lesson on the inevitability of change. In this context the title Spring (physical experience or 'being') and All (consciousness, combining discrete phenomena in structures or designs) draws attention to the dialectical nature of the work as a whole. Spring is rather more straightforwardly included as part of the context
of this work than is a recognisably existent 'waste land' in Eliot's poem. Eliot had resorted openly to association, a divergence from "that which exists" which Williams labelled plagiaristic. Of course this is simplistic, avoiding the obvious and potentially disquieting fact that both *Spring* and *All* and *The Waste Land* employ very similar tactics in their presentation, within a unified landscape, of modern dislocation. The important difference is that the waste land is a backdrop for Eliot's drama whereas for Williams, spring provided the drama; Eliot's waste land is largely metaphoric while Williams' spring is, on the whole, metonymic. He asserted that, "composition is in no essential an escape from life. In fact if it is so it is negligible to the point of insignificance". Significance is inextricably linked, he suggested, with a tangible relationship with the ground from which composition emerges, "as sappy as the leaf of the tree which never moves from one spot" (Imag 101).

Following the publication of *Al Que Quiere!* in 1917, Williams continued to develop, but with greater confidence based on a growing respect for his work, largely among other artists. Without losing contact with the aesthetic demands of the European avant-garde he identified for his own use a hybrid model which combined precepts with his version of the American condition. In this, Williams was one of the first among that expanding group of American stay-at-home Modernists whose compulsion to apply
Modernism to the American landscape, vernacular culture and political system, appeared to humanise it. In the work of Williams, Moore, Cummings, Dos Passos and, to a lesser extent, Faulkner, the reader is rarely confronted with the obscurities encountered in Joyce, Proust, Pound or Eliot, or the ideological totalitarianism of Pound, Eliot, Yeats or Wyndham Lewis.

Having decided, (from whatever motivation) to dedicate his art to the construction of American culture, Williams began to identify compatible characteristics in the expression of others. His tendency unilaterally to recruit allies to his cause led to his association during this period with figures such as Moore, Kenneth Burke and his co-editor of the short lived magazine Contact, Robert McAlmon. It is out of his involvement with the magazine, and his greater confidence among sympathetic like-minds that he was able to contribute significantly to an American counter to European cultural influence. Bloom's "anxiety of influence" syndrome might here be applied broadly to the American artistic condition, in thrall to the European master, clutching for 'contact' with the American ground as a means of escape.

By locating himself in contact with the American ground which, Williams maintained, was still uncorrupted by the forces of traditional European culture, he was able to claim for himself a position liberated from the demands of
erudition. Pound and Eliot advocated reading as essential to the process of sound composition, but reading exposed the impressive remnants of cultural success, making it difficult not to value those remnants as art. So the avid reader/poet is likely to be seduced by the notion of art as valuable product rather than as process, and to attempt to produce finished work of similar value. Williams, perhaps balking at this awesome challenge, consciously placed himself in the vanguard of what Bloom has diagnosed as "the revisionary impulse", breaking Oedipally away from the powerful example of the parent (in this case a parent culture as opposed to an individual) in order to construct for himself a separate identity. Bloom identifies Emerson as a precursor of this peculiarly modern revisionism which has resulted, he implies, in a dilution of cultural energy and a dearth of really strong writers. His own insecurity is precisely that of a besieged traditionalist, faced with the divergence of possibilities opened up in the arts by Modernism. His defensive attitude to Modernism is apparent in the statement, "Modernism in literature has not passed; rather it has been exposed as never having been there". The essential element of dissidence which characterised Modernism placed it outside the system of evaluation which laments, "the subsuming of tradition by belatedness". Significantly, it is this very element of belatedness which Williams confronted in his campaign against THE TRADITION-ALISTS OF PLAGIARISM. In a statement strongly reminiscent
of Emerson's celebrated essay 'The Poet' Williams wrote in 1917:

And yet American verse of today must have a certain quality of freedom, must be "free verse" in a sense. It must be new verse, in a new conscious form. But even more than that it must be free in that it is free to include all temperaments, all phases of our environment, physical as well as spiritual, mental and moral. It must be truly democratic, truly free for all--and yet it must be governed. 6

This was Williams' greatest dilemma. In his anxious need to counter the gravitational pull of European culture, he found himself floating in a critical vacuum. Others had provided him and some kindred spirits with a vague indication of the direction they might take, but there seemed to be no real cohesion, no means by which they could claim to have discovered a tangible alternative.

Like Williams, Harold Bloom attempted to confront the dilemma of definition in twentieth century literature. Unlike Williams, his solution is to ignore the problem, to weather the storm of current revisionism, sheltering behind a quasi-religious faith that, "the literary teacher, more than ever, will find he is teaching Paradise Lost, and the other central classics of Western literary tradition, whether he is teaching them overtly or not". 7 His obsession with the need for "strength" in poetry is commensurate with his assumption that the teacher be male, and the handing on of greatness must take place between father and son. "Even the strongest poets", he comments in The Anxiety of Influence, "were at first weak, for they started as prospective Adams, not as retrospective Satans". 8 Strong
poets are men, strength is a male attribute, and dissident figures such as Eve do not even enter the discussion. This is consistent, of course, with Bloom's attitude to literary Modernism, since a significant contribution to this came from women writers. Williams was aware of this (while he consistently referred to the 'great' writer as 'he'). He felt that the literary establishment was essentially masculine and oppressive. In attempting to write free from the European model, the "central classics of Western literary tradition", he placed himself in an entrepreneurial category defined by Bloom as lacking strength. This is analogous to the notion that inherited wealth is of greater significance than that which is acquired, a cultural snobbery which is engendered by fear of change and its contingent threat of disinheri tence.

Marianne Moore

In his search for an alternative position from which to confront the anachronistic exclusiveness of the cultural establishment Williams had the good fortune to come into contact with Marianne Moore. Moore's approach to modern expression (unlike the aggressive, agitational brilliance of Loy) was quietly conservative, fastidious. She presented a sufficiently low profile for Williams to attribute literary importance to her work without endangering his own precarious identity as an innovator. From whatever motiv-
ation, Williams was consistent in his praise of her work and the valuable contribution it was to American letters. Her name is conspicuously cited among those influential artists (Shakespeare, Whitman, Cézanne, Gris and Charles Demuth) conscripted for the prose passages of *Spring and All*. He claimed for her poetry an engagement with language which did not, for the most part, avoid the difficulties arising from the rejection of association. He claimed that Moore was, "of all American writers most consistently a poet":

...because the purpose of her work is invariably from the source from which poetry starts— that it is constantly from the purpose of poetry. And it actually possesses this characteristic, as of that origin, to a more distinguishable degree when it eschews verse rhythms than when it does not. It has the purpose of poetry written into [it] and therefore it is poetry. (Imag 145)

Williams had come to the realization, through contact with writers as different from one another as Pound and Stein, that the one essential dimension in which they all operated was that of consciousness as language. He had begun to recognize that for him and for those around him whom he recognized as 'modern', poetry which attempted to draw only from established stockpiles of association was no longer viable. It was not a simple choice of one form or another; the nature of the American condition required a more profound investigation of the language, a clearing of space, in order to make progress. Moore's value was in her primary preoccupation with the operation of words, with their interaction as elements in the artist's scheme, as
opposed to their associative activity as denotation.

The American condition was new, distinct from the matured condition of a Europe which was defined by the weight of history. The language had to be purged of irrelevant association so that American poetry could establish new roots for survival under different conditions. This was the seedbed of Williams' notion of contact, developed during his association with McAlmon and Contact magazine. It was through contact with the reality of American experience that American writers might survive the reactionary activity of the cultural establishment, materialising, Williams accused, in the work of Eliot and Pound. In his Autobiography he claimed that "the blast of Eliot's genius" had affected other writers as well as himself. Eliot's ability to produce valuable exhibits through his archaeological involvement with European culture had, Williams suggested, a damaging affect on the workaday process essential to those more democratic American writers. "Marianne Moore," he wrote, "like a rafter holding up the superstructure of our uncompleted building, a caryatid, her red hair plaited and wound twice about the fine skull, though she was surely one of the main supports of the new order, was no luckier than the rest of us." (Auto 146) In an essay written in 1948 he described her as "straight up and down like the two by fours of a building under construction" (Essays 292). In this essay Williams recognised a basic necessity which underpinned both his own work and much of
Moore's; a uniquely human compulsion to wrap the pervading existential threat in complexes of language.

Therefore Miss Moore has taken recourse to the mathematics of art. Picasso does no different: a portrait is a strategem singularly related to a movement among the means of the craft. By making them operative, relationships become self-apparent—the animal lives with a human certainty. This is strangely worshipful. Nor does one always know against what one is defending oneself. (Essays 293)

Like Dickinson then, Williams and Moore engaged their language in continuous articulation as proof of existence. It is through poetry (art) that things take on significance, conceptualised and interrelated as constituent parts of the process of self-definition which can only be terminated by death. It is through "human certainty", language as consciousness, that the human "animal lives" by recognising self. In the poem 'January', first published in January 1921 in The Dial, and later that year included in Sour Grapes, this defensive articulation is obvious:

Again I reply to the triple winds running chromatic fifths of derision outside my window:

  Play louder.
You will not succeed. I am bound more to my sentences the more you batter at me to follow you.

  And the wind, as before, fingers perfectly its derisive music. (CEP 197)

The human compulsion, here, is to superimpose a musical structure onto the arbitrary sound of the wind, which nonetheless is a bitter reminder of human mortality. The poet takes refuge in "sentences" to stave off this inevit-
ability, sentences which retreat into anthropomorphism, conveying "fingers" and a desire to persuade, personifying the wind in an attempt to tame it. This poem, like many in Sour Grapes is transitional in that it strains after a thematic resolution to the existential void it reveals. Later, particularly in Spring and All, the existential vertigo is calmly included, incompleteness is recognised as a necessary hiatus into which language is poured, and without which language is unnecessary:

for everything
and nothing
are synonymous
when
energy in vacuo
has the power
of confusion
which only to
have done nothing
can make
perfect (Imag 104/5)

The short poem from which this has been extracted deals with the gap between language and meaning. The lasting dialectical irony is that consciousness becomes structured in enquiry which, demanding resolution, creates a vacuum which, in turn, can only be filled by language. The inevitable conclusion is that only in silence can the vacuum be dispelled, and silence and death are one and the same.

So Williams' antipathy for those like Eliot and Pound who found reassurance in the tangible wealth of an old established cultural tradition, is informed by a growing suspicion that in a land devoid of appropriate history
(Indian history was not his) the only means of self-definition was in the constant renewal of language in contact with the American soil. But coaxing his poetic to maturity through this cultural spring was a stark uncomfortable process, evidenced in many of the poems from *Al Que Quiere!* and *Sour Grapes*, and Williams believed that he had found a source of calm reassurance in the even linguistic articulation that characterised Moore's verse. Acknowledging this aspect of his reliance upon her, he wrote a poem which appeared in the first issue of *Contact*, the editorial of which championed the cause of "native artists" and offered "the conviction that art which attains is indigenous of experience". 9

Marianne Moore

Will not some dozen sacks of rags
observant of intelligence
conspire from their outlandish cellar
to evade the law?

Let them, stuffed up, appear
before her door at ten some night
and say: Marianne, save us!
Put us in a book of yours.

Then she would ask the fellow in
and give him cake
and warm him with her talk
before he must return to the dark street. 10

Evasion of the law, writing against the grain, places the author in a position analogous to these "sacks of rags", shapeless and without definition. To be saved, to achieve definition the stuffed rag-being-poet must seek the warmth of talk (language), particularly that which "Marianne" provides, calmly systematised and given context as a book.
This slight poem is a grateful response to the relief available for an embattled cultural champion in Moore's example. The respite is only temporary, however, and having been warmed and sustained, the fugitive must inevitably "return to the dark street".

Moore's example as a writer was augmented by her frequent positive responses to his own work. Following her comments on Kora in Hell (1920) Williams wrote to her: "You make the blood to flow in my smallest capillaries again by what you say of my book. I feel even that my brain, somewhat dull of late, is getting fed quite as amply as my skin. Such is the miracle of a friend's good words" (Letters 52).

The fact that Moore was a friend and ally and a considerable poet working in America made her the ideal choice as the focal point of Williams' theories on the development of a definitive American poetic. The rigorous precision with which she constructed her verse impressed Williams, particularly because she managed to steer clear of the English metrical devices he so fervently avoided (or disguised) in his own work. Her syllabically organised lines showed a predilection for the correct word or phrase, and an awareness of innate rhythm so that syllables are not distorted to fit some phonic template.

In his 'Speech Rhythm' essay of 1913 and in 'America, Whitman and the Art of Poetry' (1917), Williams asserted
that the term "free verse" was a misnomer. Without form there could be no poetry, but having turned away from English verse tradition, an alternative had to be found. In 1923 he wrote that "work such as Miss Moore's holds its bloom today...by the aesthetic pleasure engendered where pure craftsmanship joins hard surfaces skilfully" (Imag 315).

In 1919 she contributed to the last issue of Others a poem, 'Poetry', which summed up for Williams the difficulties of modern American verse. In the same issue his essay 'BELLY MUSIC' called for a more professional critical approach to current form. The lack of constructive modern criticism left the techniques of current composition uncategorised, while the clichés and pitfalls of free verse went undetected. Williams acknowledged that, "it is important for the bad writers to realize that they are bad writers—but it is sickening to hear NOTHING ELSE". Moore's poem provided some light, however, with its systematised approach to the very problem Williams was confronting. The poem could almost have been addressed directly to him with its ironic opening statement, "I too dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle". This poem engages the reader in the same tactical subterfuge which characterises Williams' poem 'January' ("Again I reply to the triple winds") and Eliot's 'Prufrock' ("Let us go then, you and I"); masquerading as a speech act in progress. Poetry that uses the modern idiom assumes the
authenticity of spoken words, briefly covering the silence. But Moore subverts even this aspect by drawing attention to the imposture, the superimposition of artifice in language as "fiddle". Moore foregrounded in this poem the basic dichotomy that arises in language as art. The fiddle of artistry, the arrangement into aesthetically pleasing systems of sound and rhythm, has to be achieved in conflict with the activity of language as reference. However exclusively the poet may concentrate on the form, content will constantly work to modify the end result. Poems are human responses to sensory experience transformed into records of consciousness, or as Moore has it, "imaginary gardens with real toads / in them". In his discussion of another of Moore's poems, 'Marriage' Williams commented:

There are two elements essential to Miss Moore's scheme of composition, the hard and unaffected concept of the apple itself as an idea, then its edge-to-edge contact with the things which surround it--the coil of a snake, leaves at various depths, or as it may be: and without connectives unless it be poetry, the inevitable connective, if you will. (Imag 317)

He saw Moore as working to bring the language once more into contact with things as they appear, in touch themselves with the other things around them. Touch, contact; these are the real connectives which poetry must convey as part of itself, touching on things in a way which does not appropriate them or force them into arbitrary patterns of signification. In Spring and All Williams insisted "The rose is obsolete" but qualified this by reminding us that, obscured beneath its clichéd "weight of love", there lies a
wealth of significance in the geometry of its contact with and penetration of the world around it. This is the aspect of phenomena which had, Williams believed, been sadly neglected by THE TRADITIONALISTS OF PLAGIARISM and which Moore countered with the lines: "there is in / it after all, a place for the genuine". Properly treated, all phenomena can be organised linguistically so as to become poetry. For example:

The bat, holding on upside down or in quest of something to eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf under a tree, the immovable critic twinkling [sic] his skin like a horse that feels a flea, the baseball fan, the statistician—case after case could be cited did one wish it; nor is it valid to discriminate against "business documents and school books"; all these phenomena are important. 13

The flatness of the language and its adherence to a tone which, if not exactly conversational, is remarkably discursive, is consonant with the material it conveys. In contrast to "the autocrats among us" (TRADITIONALISTS OF PLAGIARISM) we have on offer, "literalists of / the imagination" whose language is democratic in its lateral inclusiveness. Nothing assumes a symbolic precedence, and the poem functions on an axis which has equal contact with all its operational parts. This, Williams suggested, was an ideal toward which poetry should be directed, in spite of opposition or disdain from the "autocrats among us".
In the meantime, if you demand on one hand in defiance of their opinion--
the raw material of poetry in all its rawness and that which is on the other hand genuine then you are interested in poetry.

Reading this poem in 1919 when the comfort that Others had provided for Williams was no longer available would have been some consolation, reassuring him that he was, if not exactly on the right path, at least moving in the right direction. "Perhaps I am a sullen suburbanite, cowardly and alone", he wrote in "BELLY MUSIC", expressing his acute anxiety as a bourgeois part-time poet among the genuine bohemian avant-garde. In this context he expressed also the existential insecurity which undercuts so much of his lyric verse.

Perhaps it is all a vain regret, an insane determination to walk forward and backward at the same moment, a clinging to a youth I never enjoyed except in mad athletic excesses and still born ecstacies of loneliness. AT LEAST IT IS THAT. At least I exist in that. 14

Moore had presented in her poem a sequence which included, without imposition of hierarchy a bat, elephants, a wild horse, a flea, a baseball fan, a critic and a statistician, thereby implying a non-centric human perspective. In the New World, European consciousness, come late to the scheme of relationships, simply takes its place among them, its only function, to articulate continuously the space it occupies as justification of self. Whatever response his poems provoked in others, Williams insisted, "at least I exist in that". Moore's example was to artic-
ulate the same existential problem, but with less sign of anxiety, and for this she became for him that "rafter holding up the superstructure of our uncompleted building".

Williams returned regularly, throughout his career, to Moore's work as a source of reassurance. However, many of the statements which purported to deal with her strategies dealt more convincingly with his own. Like Bloom's "strong poet", Williams is revealed to have been wilfully misreading Moore in order to appropriate from her work those elements of process and inclusion which he found most complementary to his own verse. But he could no more forge his poetic in imitation of Moore than he could in imitation of Eliot or Pound. It is because his poetry is superficially so different from Moore's that he was able to draw repeated attention to her excellence. There are instances, however, when Williams appears to have benefited directly from Moore's example. In his vigorous search for a new means of organising verse, he would have been interested in the way Moore structured her lines, meticulously arranging them into stanzaic units which, though internally irregular, were often, syllabically, exact copies of one another. Generally, this imposition of a kind of linear structure did not interfere with the flattened elegance of the tone and pace, while it contributed a sense of measure or control which free verse so often lacks. Williams must have been intrigued by the device which seemed to offer a control which did not depend for
its effect on English metre. Indeed, as both Pound and Eliot have noted, Moore's verse, with its syllabic as opposed to metrical regularity, appears to have more in common with French than English verse tradition.

Williams could not, however, simply produce poems of syllabic regularity. This would merely open him up to the suspicion (if only from himself) of plagiarism. But there is evidence in the poetry he produced in the early 1920s of a growing tendency to regulate his line lengths syllabically. The lines are in most cases (though not all) organised on an average, rather than exact syllabic regularity. Thus in a poem like "On the road to the contagious hospital" from *Spring and All*, two thirds of the lines contain seven or eight syllables, while the average for the poem as a whole is 7.5. This much-anthologised piece has never been noted for its regularity, and neither has another celebrated lyric, poem XVIII ('To Elsie'). Three stanzas from this poem should be enough to illustrate the syllabic pattern.

The pure products of America (9)
go crazy-- (3)
mountain folk from Kentucky (7)
or the ribbed north end of Jersey (2)
with its isolate lakes and (7)
valleys, its deaf-mutes, thieves (6)
old names (2)
and promiscuity between (8)
(Imag 131)

The pattern is repeated with one or two slight variations throughout the poem. The most obvious example of Williams'
syllabic design from this volume is the perfectly symmetrical XXII, ('The Red Wheelbarrow') whose celebrated couplets reveal a syllabic count of: four-two, three-two, three-two, four-two. It is worth noting that those poems which show a tendency toward syllabic regularity tend also to move with a greater measure of authority and calm. There is less sense of a trapped vitality struggling for release than in such poems as 'Spring Strains', 'Metric Figure', 'Winter Quiet' and 'Sympathetic Portrait of a Child', which characterise the collection Al Que Quiere!.

It is not only the increased use of syllabic measure which contributed to this new authority; there is also in evidence at this time an increased confidence in the use of the vernacular. Pound had drawn Williams' attention on more than one occasion to his weakness for slipping out of the idiom he knew best. In Spring and All that idiom is present in a carefully controlled diction. The poems do not masquerade as workaday conversation, but they do rely on a diction which is less 'poetic', the language operating within the context of American experience:

A letter from the man who
wants to start a new magazine
made of linen

and he owns a typewriter--
July 1, 1922
All this for eyeglasses

to discover. But
they lie there with the gold
earpieces folded down (Imag 118)
Like Dickinson, Williams interrupted the flattened diction of his poems with an occasional exotic image or latinate phrase, hence the line "tranquilly Titicaca--", that completes this lyric, disrupting the easy flow in order, perhaps, to re-engage the reader's intelligence.

During his time of involvement with Others, Williams' major struggle had been with the language of literary culture, a medium which was available to the writer only in a refined and properly seasoned form. Like the architect or furniture maker, the poet's product was pre-scribed by the shape and condition of the best raw materials. Williams was vigorously engaged during his early years in an attempt to redefine the end product by utilising a stripped-down raw material. In other words, instead of ordering pre-cut shapes from the timber merchant (English prosody), he went in person to the tree (the language of spoken communication). This did not mean that the end product would be crude by comparison with traditional work, but new terms of criticism were required to make that comparison. The early settlers, by necessity, lived in houses made from the trunks of trees they had felled while clearing the land on which to subsist. If at first their building was unsophisticated, it was because their lives were unsophisticated, and as they found themselves concentrating less on survival and more on the context of their existence, their methods became more finely developed. Like Whitman with his "wellbeloved stonemcutters", 
Williams saw the need for a new craftsmanship in poetry, one which related confidently (and democratically) to the conditions by which American identity was being moulded. Whitman had provided the start by clearing the ground, now the process of refinement had to begin, to bring American poetry toward maturity. With Al Que Quieres! Williams had been wrestling with the raw material; through Spring and All he engaged in a further stage, a process of construction based on a confident understanding of that material. The five years between had contributed much to his growing confidence.

Sour Grapes and Contact

The transition between the two books takes form in the poetry of Sour Grapes, out of Williams' involvement with the short lived but pivotal publication Contact. He first encountered his partner in the enterprise, Robert McAlmon, shortly after publication of Kora in Hell, during his association with The Little Review and his flirtation with the possibilities of Dada. The superficial excitement of Dada lasted with Williams into the composition of Spring and All (evident in the eccentric section numbering and headings), but throughout this period he never lost sight of his real quest, which was for a satisfactory system by which to define his place as an American Twentieth-Century artist.
In a short statement on poetics published in Poetry in July 1919 he had written about the insecurity of the poet in the twentieth century, whose task it was "to tear down, to destroy life's lies, to keep the senses bare, to attack; to attack for the nakedness he achieves, the sense of an eternal beginning and end". 15 This is a Dadaistic gesture, with its insistence upon attack and destruction and nakedness, but there is a more profound thread to Williams' statement, relating fundamentally to his developing poetic. He wrote, "to see makes me afraid--I am conscious that I know nothing". 16 By 1919 Williams' use of language as the raw material of his art was highly developed, and he would no doubt have been aware of the implication of this statement. "To see makes me afraid", is fairly unambiguous. However, "I am conscious that I know nothing" could imply awareness of the limitations of accumulated knowledge which is in itself of no permanent value. It could also mean, and much more profoundly in relation to Williams' poetic, that consciousness is a direct route to the knowledge of nothing. In other words it is through consciousness that looking becomes seeing; the recognition of the insignificance of consciousness and the permanence of nothing.

As has already been shown regarding the similarities between Williams' poems of this period and those of Emily Dickinson, this existential dilemma was a major preoccupation of both poets, and one which Williams related specif-
ically to the problems of relevant expression in the New World. With the raw materials of art, human aspiration is directed toward emotion, brief though it must be, as the only means of achieving definition against an everlasting backdrop of meaninglessness. Once achieved it quickly fades and the pursuit is taken up again. The process is continuous and dialectical and is necessarily the province of the artist since, "the artist is the only man bound by his intelligence to consider facts: the fundamental emotional basis of all knowledge". In America the novelty of European systems of definition in a space previously uncluttered by cultural debris, meant that an opportunity existed by which knowledge could be brought back into repeated emotional contact with its basis in experience. Williams continued:

Modern poetry has certain characteristics....it has been under the necessity of realizing that eyes, ears, fingertips, everything we are, everything we do, is constantly wearing out. The sense seeks avidly not only a language, but a fresh language. This is the first job of the artist: he must do this--it is truth. For twenty years old is a lie because the emotion has gone out of it.

For Williams the true value of modern art was in its rejection of old forms in favour of risk-taking forays into the hinterland of the chosen medium. In pursuit of signification (as opposed to the comforting myth of cultural immortality), Williams eschewed the paternal embrace of traditional orthodoxy in favour of experimentation. He pushed his chosen medium into areas of activity which offered the possibility of emotional peaks, but at the
greatest psychological risk. The thrill a reader might provoke in engaging a poem like "On the road to the contagious hospital" or "The pure products of America / go crazy--" is analogous to walking, for the hell of it, on thin ice. Human frailty is brought into painful proximity with the transience of experience and the total indifference of the world of phenomena to the human condition. There is a perverse kind of romanticism at work here, where the very indifference of the landscape is given significance in the complex, providing the human consciousness with its ecstatic existential panic:

Somehow
it seems to destroy us

It is only in isolate flecks that
something
is given off

No one
to witness
and adjust, no one to drive the car
(Imag 133)

By bringing the language into repeated contact with experience, that is, by ensuring at all points in the articulation of a poem that words and phrases do not relapse into vague association, the relationship between text and reader is maintained as process rather than as assurance, or as lullaby.

In a short statement on contemporary criticism written for the October 1919 issue of The Little Review (entitled, characteristically, 'More Swill') Williams bemoaned the continuing reliance on vague notions of "beauty" and "ug-
liness" in discrimination between works of art. This crude delineation, he accused, "signalises a fixed point of separation: one theme has escaped...understanding and one satisfies it". In other words, the critic is reassured by what is expected and calls it "lovely" while that which requires a shift in perspective and the active participation of the intelligence, because of its novelty, is labelled "ugly". He damned "loveliness" as "possessed at large before it is composed...so [it] can never be created. And the hell of created work is that it is never possessed until after it has been set down and after the artist has lost his taste for it...." The tone of this statement is characteristically defensive. If the poet is motivated (like Williams) by a need to contribute an advance on the cultural status quo, then the work produced is bound to be unusual and therefore categorised by the critical establishment as "ugly". For Williams, whose work was often thus dismissed, this mode of categorisation was simply redundant, relying as it did on the value system of the traditional cultural market. In 'More Swill' he commented further:

Americans are cursed with a desire to be understood. Everything must be "beautiful" or it must show this or that well-understood perfection, but it never occurs to an American, to an American critic in this case, to discover first whether he is dealing with a live thing or with the symmetries of a corpse.

Emily Dickinson had asked her mentor T.W.Higginson whether he was able to tell her if her verse was "alive", if it "breathed". Higginson recognised the vitality of her work
but was unable to support her with enthusiasm, characterising her poems as "indifferent to all conventional rules...poetry torn up by the roots". Since the poetry arose in language which was turned against the orthodox current, orthodox criticism was not equipped to negotiate it.

In his 1923 essay on Moore, Williams noted that, like Dickinson, her poetry progressed with "rapidity of movement" suggesting a "distaste for lingering" in any way that might suggest hierarchy or human centricity. This 'democratising' effect, in conjunction with the flattening of diction, could be perceived as less than "lovely" by critics seeking pre-moulded reinforcement for a decaying cultural superstructure. Williams identified in Moore's example, "a swiftness that passes without repugnance from thing to thing" (Imag 313). This even handed swiftness is the very quality which Moore identified in Williams' work. She wrote:

The acknowledging of our debt to the imagination constitutes, perhaps, his positive value. Compression, colour, speed, accuracy and that restraint of instinctive craftsmanship which precludes anything dowdy or laboured - It is essentially these qualities that we have in his work.

In this short review Moore managed to touch on elements which are uniquely characteristic of Williams' defensive strategies. She probed to the core of his insecurity with the comment:

Despite Dr Williams's championing of the school of ignorance, or rather of no school but experience, there is in his work the authoritativeness, the wise
silence which knows schools and fashions well enough to know that completeness is further down than professional intellectuality and modishness can go.

The very intellectuality which Williams attacked in Eliot, Moore suggested, was an essential element of Williams' own work, and one toward which, because of the exigencies of his chosen position, he exaggerated his antipathy. She added:

Dr Williams's wisdom, however, is not absolute and he is sometimes petulant.

'Nowadays poets spit on rhyme and rhetoric,' he says. His work provides examples of every rhetorical principle insisted on by rhetoricians and one wonders upon what ground he has been able to persuade himself that poets spit upon rhyme?

Of course, as has been argued earlier in this study, the construction of Williams' cultural attitude had been, prior to the publication of Kora in Hell, a series of defensive strategies, attempts, precisely "to persuade himself that [modern] poets spit upon rhyme and rhetoric". In this way he was clearing ground from which he could make his, occasionally self-contradictory, forays into the linguistic hinterland of the American condition. His inconsistency is largely the result of a genuine and courageous quest for relevance in an infant culture, tempered by the emotional restraints forced on him by an inherited tradition. As he commented in an essay of 1934, such inconsistency is understandable and analogous to the problems of identity suffered by the early settlers.

It is conceivable that a new language might have sprung up with the new spectacle and the new conditions, but even genius, if it existed, did not make one. It was an inability of the mind to function in the face
of overwhelming odds, a retreat to safety, an immediate defensive organization of whatever sort against the wilderness. As an emergency the building up of such a front was necessary and understandable. But, if the falsity of the position is to be appreciated, what they did must be understood to have been a temporary expedient. (Essays 134/5)

Williams had, at the outset of his career, succumbed to the comfortably secure embrace of English tradition. Subsequently, however, he had been attempting to write free from that constraint, to liberate his words in order that he might use them to relocate himself in his actual context. It was necessary, certainly in the early stages, to remind himself regularly of this Herculean labour in order to remain resolutely (if not absolutely consistently) faced in the required direction. This is the motivation which enhanced his relationship with Robert McAlmon and led to their partnership in Contact.

Williams' poem 'Portrait of the Author', which was first published in the Spring 1921 issue of Contact, exemplifies this period during which his insecurity was gradually replaced (partly through the encouraging attitude shown by others to his work) by a more positive resolve. Moore's intelligent review of Kora in Hell was a necessary contribution toward the growth of a more reciprocal element in his poetic. She drew attention to the particular qualities that were at work in the poem 'Portrait of the Author'. "It preserves", she wrote, "the atmosphere of a moment into which the impertinence of life cannot intrude. In the sense conveyed, of remoteness from what is detest-
able, in the effect of balanced strength, in the flavour of newness in presentation, it is unique." 21 Here Williams was reassured that however isolated he might have felt, there were other intelligences at work, and that one imaginative and sympathetic reading of his verse presented the possibility of others. He responded with gratitude in March 1921:

But you startle me by your praise of the piece in Contact. Yet you quite convince me that you are speaking accurately and with enlightened judgment. You can imagine how hard it is for me to believe that! ... In any case you have made me feel again as if I wanted to put some words on paper. I feel much stronger than I ever did towards this work. Let us see what comes of it. (Letters 53)

Recalling the origin of this poem in his interview with Edith Heal, Williams said: "Bob McAlmon, my co-editor on Contact rescued it from the wastebasket. I threw it away because I thought it was sentimental and I was afraid I was imitating Pound" (IWW 35/6).

It is interesting here that, during this crucial stage of his development, it was in an energy field of contradictory impulses that the poetic (as distinct from the poem) was engendered. His response to this poem is a reflection of his attitude to his work generally, emerging from his anxiety, cast in the shadow of Pound. He was relieved, however, of the burden of responsibility by McAlmon's action and Moore's praise. This kind of response to his work, which was becoming more frequent, placed it in a context quite different to the one he had previously associated with his own verse. His various aggress-
ively defensive statements imply an assumption that he was writing into a void, that his work would be either ignored or at best misunderstood. Here he was confronted with the possibility that his words were not just being read, but they were being claimed by others, included in their systems of imagination regardless of his own belligerent attitude. As his work was taking on the added dimension provided by the notion of a co-operative consciousness, 'the reader', the painful, protective link between author and poem was relaxed. Language as gesture becomes language as contact. The poem which McAlmon rescued, however, falls between the two, while leaning more significantly toward the former category. It begins:

The birches are mad with green points
the wood's edge is burning with their green,
burning, seething--No, no, no. (CEP 228/9)

The imposition of human value judgement upon the behaviour and appearance of non-human phenomena is reminiscent of many of the poems from Al Que Quiere!. The struggle in language between the human and the inhuman takes place against a backdrop of nature's indifference.

I am shaken, broken against a might
that splits comfort, blows apart
my careful partitions, crushes my house
and leaves me--with shrinking heart
and startled, empty eyes--peering out
into a cold world.

When Williams threw this poem into the wastebasket, perhaps it was because he recognised that it was a thematic exploration. Williams can be seen, as in 'The Wanderer', to be probing new territory, but in terms of the old. The
diction is hortative; Williams was right in comparing it with Pound. He could also have mentioned Whitman, so obviously present in lines such as:

Answer me. I will clutch you. I will hug you, grip you. I will poke my face into your face and force you to see me.

The reader approaches, but 'he' is still seen as, at best, "ignorant" and at worst hostile. He has to be forced to see in a turmoil of emotional activity, and the action of coercion itself becomes a means by which a measure of identity is given off.

I drag you, I am drowned in you, you overwhelm me! Drink! Save me!

This is a poem of desperate activity, as if by setting in motion by collision all the elements in an indifferent scene, like the molecules in a solid body, one might achieve, as in the heating process, significant radiation. The text strains away from a perceiving centre which itself seems to be straining after a greater ease of mobility. There are passages of flattened control which look forward to *Spring and All*, only to be thwarted by further attacks of anxiety:

The birches are opening their leaves one by one. Their delicate leaves unfold cold and separate, one by one. Slender tassels hang, swaying from the delicate branch tips—Oh I cannot say it. There is no word.

The poem, moving through a calm, contiguous phase, loses faith and falls back into the ego-centric neurosis of the writer-process. In lines echoing those from 'The Wanderer'
("How shall I be a mirror to this modernity" CEP 3) and 'Sub Terra' ("--God, if I could fathom / the guts of shadows!" CEP 118) which betray the poet's writerly panic, Williams undermines his advance in the lines "...what have I left undone / that I should have undertaken?" (CEP 228). This undeveloped existential concern for process, action as a means of continual definition, moving from one fleeting emotional charge to the next, was quietened and brought more under control by the time the poems in Spring and All began to appear. Under the influence of Moore the lines in that volume are less abrupt, and the diction is, in the main, flattened, unrippled by panic. In one of the prose passages Williams wrote: "I think often of my earlier work and what it has cost me not to have been clear. I acknowledge I have moved chaotically about refusing or rejecting most things, seldom accepting values or acknowledging anything" (Imag 115). The cost to Williams' pre-1920s verse, arising out of his struggle against THE TRADITIONALISTS OF PLAGIARISM, had been significant; clarity had been sacrificed for the sake of energy. By defining his position in opposition to the rest (traditional and contemporary luminaries) with slogans such as "nothing is good save the new", Williams created a stark and unwelcoming gulf into which he projected his words, expecting no return but an echo.

When he began to encounter sympathetic responses after the publication of Al Que Quiere!, from such critics as
Kenneth Burke, Paul Rosenfeld, Dorothy Dudley, John Gould Fletcher and, of course, Pound and Moore, his self-inflicted isolation was disrupted. Forced into confrontation with his sympathisers, Williams had to recast his mould in order to accommodate them in his scheme of things. He had to read himself, and that extension to his process had the effect of deepening his focus. Clarity had become an important pre-condition of his art, in poems which "must give not the sense of frustration but a sense of completion, of actuality" (Imag 117). This is something of an advance on the resigned anxiety expressed in the final lines of 'Portrait of the Author':

And coldly the birch leaves are opening one by one.
Coldly I observe them and wait for the end.
And it ends.

The poem ends, and with the ensuing silence, meaning slips into nothingness and the human laws of identity and definition are abrogated. This is based, of course, on the presupposition that the poem has contact only with the intelligence which conceived it. Once another intelligence is engaged and acknowledged, this kind of utterance becomes redundant. With Contact Williams appears to have made this transition, the stages of which are nicely sign-posted in his regular critical statements, which appeared between December 1920 and June 1923. In the first of these he offered Contact as:

issued in the conviction that art which attains is indigenous of experience and relations, and that the artist works to express perceptions rather than to attain standards of achievement: however much inform-
ation and past art may have served to clarify his perceptions and sophisticate his comprehensions... 22

He reminded his contributors that "America is a bastard country where decomposition is the prevalent spectacle", no doubt to reinforce his concept of acceptable American writing "as that which cannot be bought by smearing a lick of borrowed culture over so many pages". In his anxious avoidance of the dangerous lure of Pound and Eliot, however, Williams was marginalising and exposing his own incomplete poetic.

In the second issue (January 1921), however, in a short statement on Moore's verse (responding, presumably, to statements by Pound and Eliot) he wrote:

Some may refuse to call a work poetry because it lacks "emotion" and is analytical and intellectual. What the force is back of the intellect we cannot say if it is not emotion. We are quite ready to believe the intellect the complex, refined and proven emotion....We compliment ourselves upon publishing Marianne Moore, than whom no writer has more definitely established a form, based on perceptivity, that individualized also achieves universality. 23

Williams, it seems, was quite at ease with the notion of an emotional foundation for Moore's poetry while Eliot's, he claimed, betrayed a kind of archaeological ambition. It is of some interest to speculate here that had Eliot remained in America, as Williams insisted he should, he would have posed a much greater threat within the anxiety syndrome that plagued Williams' development. At the convenient distance allowed by an English cultural context, Eliot could be indicted for treachery and found guilty with the same gesture. Writers like Moore and Loy, on the
other hand, had to be treated with far greater delicacy.

In the second issue of *Contact* he wrote:

Only by slow growth consciously fostered to the point of enthusiasm, will American work of the quality of Marianne Moore's best poetry come to the fore of intelligent attention and the ignorance which has made America an artistic desert be somewhat dissipated. We lack interchange of ideas in our country more than we lack foreign precept. Every effort should be made we feel, to develop among our serious writers a sense of mutual contact first of all. 24

This statement heralds a shift in focus from the idea (pre-1920) that it was the circumstances which engendered poetry, the relationship between art and its locality, which mattered most. Now Williams was beginning to examine the relationship between art and audience, its need for "intelligent attention" whereby "a sense of mutual contact" is established, a dialogue in which poetry takes its proper place. That dialogue was utterly dependent upon the development of an American critical base, which Williams projected somewhere between Eliot's erudition and Moore's native intelligence. In the first issue of *Contact*, while calling for "native work", Williams had felt it necessary to "call attention, at the same time, and acknowledge our debt to all importation of excellence from abroad". 25 As editor of a magazine, Williams assumed an authoritative tone, and with the confidence of alliance with such figures as McAlmon, Moore and Burke, he was able to envisage the establishment of an American critical forum. In his Spring 1921 essay, 'Yours O Youth' he wrote:

The American critical attitude! it is that we are seeking to establish. It is young. It is not neces-
sarily inexpert, as the hollow wits would have us believe, but it is necessarily young. There is no long chain of sophistication to engage us... Our processes are for the moment chaotic but they have the distinct advantage of being able to claim no place of rest save immediacy. (Essays 34)

Later in the essay he pointed out, in relation to the criticism of Kenneth Burke, that "criticism must be first in contact with the world for which it is intended".

All around him Williams perceived a growing interest in the production of a significantly American art form, and the emergence of younger figures like McAlmon and Burke who were expressing ideas essential to his own somewhat isolated development thus far. His work had appeared in anthologies edited by such celebrated avant-gardists as Pound (Catholic Anthology, 1915), Kreymborg (Others; 1916, 17 and 20) and Monroe (The New Poetry, 1917). He was included in these volumes among such impressive writers as Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Joyce, Masters, Sandburg and Stevens. He could no longer fail to recognise that his words were being received, stimulating the broadening of his poetic to include the operation of a receptive intelligence as reader, and dissolving the overpowering sense of isolation which had dominated his previous work. With contact came intelligence and human aspiration, a dialogue which covered the silence much more satisfactorily than could one strident voice.

In the final issue of Contact which came out, following a year's inactivity, in June 1923, Williams offered "--a few theoretic statements and notes, upon the art of
writing". The tone of this essay 'Glorious Weather' is confident and calm, written, incidentally, during the period when he was desperately searching for a publisher for Spring and All. "The object of writing", he suggested, "is to celebrate the triumph of sense". Where previously he had been concerned to draw attention to art as "a living thing", now he was much more interested in it as a medium by which human significance could be recognised and sustained.

Note: Sense is the ability to set a thing up against the moment and have it escape banality. The result is not a symptom, not a synthesis of the time, but a construction that proves itself able to exist even in spite of and over against everything in its time that is deadly. Lesser work succumbs through vulnerability: lack of sense. 26

Williams' continuing 'influence anxiety' is revealed in the final sentence. However, having cleared for himself a space in the American cultural wilderness, he was able to cast around for others like himself, and to contribute to the growth of a collective identity, through intelligent co-operation, against the forces of orthodoxy. In his 1934 essay 'The American Background', an analogy is drawn between the artist's "ability to set a thing up against the moment" and the development among some New England colonists of an indigenous craft. Following the period of subsistence came a more relaxed time during which the newly-established condition became, inevitably, the subject of expression in, for example:

the furniture in white pine and other native woods built by the Shakers in their colonies along the New
York-Connecticut border. Beautiful examples are these of what could be done by working in a related manner with the materials in hand; they are plastically the most truthful monuments to the sincerity of the motives that produced them. (Essays 150)

Here Williams' position has shifted sufficiently to accommodate the idea that a kind of lasting significance is possible, so long as it is projected from local conditions and materials with sincerity. In 'Glorious Weather' he had dealt with the art of writing in similar terms, describing form as "everything in a work which relates to structural unity...a question only of choice of material according to circumstances". The real significance of a piece of writing (as in the Shakers' craft) was in its motivating force:

Forms grow rapidly obsolete and must be replaced, but the intelligence, the motive power behind all composition, seeks further liberation of pure forms. Everything in the development and present make-up of the art of writing has resulted from a desire, on the part of writers, to clarify the implications of pure form.

The clarification process was based on an understanding that the medium, in this case language, provided an overall unity, both for the structural constituents of a work of art, and between writer and reader. It is only through the assumption of a receptive intelligence that a text can achieve a role of signification. This is not to say that Williams' texts were constructed with a particular type of reader in mind, but to suggest that the growing recognition that his texts were making contact with another intelligence both broadened and deepened the range of his poetic. Williams brought his craft to this position by
assuming an intelligence equal to his own, signalling to
that intelligence with greater subtlety than hitherto. In
the place of direct, confrontational openings that read
like challenges shouted into the wind ("You exquisite
chunk of mud" [CEP 157], "Fool" [CEP 139], "I know only
the bare rocks of today" [CEP 141], "You sullen pig of a
man" [CEP 134], etc., all from Al Que Quiere!) the reader
is expected to contribute, to unravel the thread of clues
in linguistic incongruities ("By the road to the contagi-
ous hospital" [CEP 241], "The farmer in deep thought"
[CEP 243], "No that is not it" [CEP 247], "The rose is
obsolete" [CEP 249], "in passing with my mind" [CEP 258]
etc., all from Spring and All). These poems display a
consistent reliance upon the traceable contiguity of lan-
guage, so that the movement potential in an alert reading
can take place without the need to make leaps of assoc-
iation or comparison. Williams explained in 'Glorious
Weather' that the writer's obligation was "to present the
sense of the moment, high complications of understanding,
revealed in climaxes of intelligence (beauty) through
continually refreshed crystallizations of form". 27 This
"continually refreshed crystallization" process, if suc-
cessful, will engage the reader in such a way as to stimu-
late responsive "climaxes of intelligence" so that beauty
is something which is generated rather than received. If
the beauty of a poem is generated, there will be no need
to make reference by comparison to external paragons, so
"crude symbolism" becomes redundant.

Williams was already beginning to achieve this clarity in the quieter poems of Sour Grapes, poems which move on an axis of internal contiguity, the surfaces of which are articulated by a finely organised modulation of vowels.

Yellow, yellow, yellow, yellow!
It is not a color.
It is summer! (CEP 209)

These are the opening lines of 'Primrose', which plainly signal to the reader the linguistic nature of the engagement. "Yellow" is presented as "not a color", but as "summer"; only to be relocated in the following lines as a catalogue of phenomena commencing with, "the wind on a willow, / the lap of waves". There is, finally, an aspect of the word which is not mentioned. "Yellow" is a word, a sound, and a key which unlocks many possibilities within the rules set up by the poem. It operates as a condition within which connected images can accumulate:

...a bird, a bluebird,
three herons, a dead hawk
rotting on a pole--
Clear yellow!

The condition within which this poem operates is "Clear yellow!", an equivalent of language in that it is both transparent (clear) but with a tangible quality of its own (yellow). Language contains and conveys other elements, just as this "yellow" contains and conveys other colours: "bluebird", "blue paper", "green walnuts", "pink fists", "five red petals", and "purple grass". The incongruities which are accommodated within this system, operate against
an associative or naturalistic process of reading, and require the complicity of the reader in order to function.

Williams had commented that the most consistent significance of Moore's verse was in her ability to make of a poem "an anthology of transit...a pleasure that can be held firm only by moving rapidly from one thing to the next" (Imag 313). This rapid movement can be seen operating in much of Moore's poetry, significantly for Williams' purposes in 'Poetry', and 'Those Various Scalpels' which appeared in the second issue of Contact. The following lines -

a bundle of lances all alike, partly hid by emeralds from Persia
and the fractional magnificence of Florentine goldwork -- a collection of half a dozen little objects made fine
with enamel in gray, yellow, and dragonfly blue: a lemon a pear
and three bunches of grapes, tied with silver: your dress, a magnificent square cathedral of uniform
and at the same time, diverse appearance

can be seen as remarkably close in their contiguous movement to these from Williams' 'Primrose' -

It is ladysthumb, forget-me-nots in the ditch, moss under
the flange of the carrail, the wavy lines in split rock, a great oak tree--

It is worth noting here that Moore's syllabic regularity leaves the indefinite article suspended at the line ends, here and there, a feature Williams uses, perhaps more
consciously (as a rhythmic device) since his verse is not so bound by its structure.

In Williams' various statements regarding her admirable avoidance of connectives and crude symbolism, he was, of course, describing a position toward which he was directing his own poetic, and toward which her verse was much less rigorously inclined. There is an undeniably metaphorical strategy in the lines, "fighting cocks head to head in stone - like sculptured / scimitars", "your eyes / flowers of ice", and "your dress, a / magnificent square / cathedral". Moore's verse, like Dickinson's, in spite of its success in setting up difficulties which can only be resolved in terms allowed by the poem as a linguistic unit, depended partly for her poetic effect on metaphoric troping. Williams concentrated on the "rapidity of movement" and the "fastidious precision of thought" which he detected in her work because these were strategies he recognised as valuable for his own advance. By the time he came to write 'Primrose' the lessons he had learned from Moore had been fully assimilated, and his own version of "rapidity too swift for touch" was emerging in a linguistic control which was remarkably deft. Notice the play with human gender that takes place in the lines:

one boy
fishing, a man
swinging his pink fists
as he walks--
it is ladysthumb,
placing "boy", "man" and "lady" in a group like a family. The man is identified metonymically in his "pink fists", while the flower chosen is, significantly "ladys-thumb". This kind of linkage: boy-man-lady, fist-thumb, offers no particular external association by which 'meaning' can be unearthed, but allows an internal bonding process to take place which, by design, strings together otherwise diverse elements of the poem. The innate music of speech is utilised here, but with great tact so that sounds are repeated and modulated without becoming obtrusive. The alliterative nature of the following lines only becomes obvious when they are scrutinised specifically for that effect:

five red petals or a rose, it is
a cluster of birdsbreast flowers
on a red stem six feet high,
four open yellow petals...

Phonic repetitions occur with equal unobtrusiveness in:

It is a piece of blue paper
in the green grass or a three cluster of
green walnuts swaying, children
playing croquet or one boy
fishing, a man
swinging his pink fists...

--- lines which display a subtle and irregular use of internal rhyme and assonance as elements of the poem's quiet music. In this and subsequent poems by Williams, such devices are used with a lightness of touch which indicates a much greater degree of confidence with the medium than had been the case hitherto.

The more successful poems in Sour Grapes show a tend-
ency to move away from a stated human perspective, looking forward to *Spring and All* with its various linguistic, equalising tactics. There are, however, various poems like 'Portrait of the Author', already considered, which betray the transitional nature of the collection. There is a further category, however, which provides a link between the earlier and later phases of Williams' career, through which the existential anxiety continues unabated. Poems like 'The Ogre', 'Canthara' and 'Sympathetic Portrait of a Child' from *Al Que Quiere!*, revealed an alienated perspective on the problems of sexual desire. Later poems that fall into this category are: 'The Girl' (1937), the 'Episode 17' sequence from *Paterson* (first published in 1937), 'The Monstrous Marriage' (1943), and 'Chloe' (1959). In *Sour Grapes* we have 'Arrival', and 'The Lonely Street', here quoted in full:

School is over. It is too hot
to walk at ease. At ease
in light frocks they walk the streets
to while the time away.
They have grown tall. They hold
pink flames in their right hands.
In white from head to foot,
with sidelong idle look--
in yellow, floating stuff,
black sash and stockings--
touching their avid mouths
with pink sugar on a stick--
like a carnation each holds in her hand--
they mount the lonely street. (CEP 227)

By offering a state of loneliness as the basis of a poem in which more than one other person is active, the narrative becomes voyeuristic. The systematic, almost obsessi-
with oral, sexual imagery, leaves the narrator gazing at these adolescent girls, constructing a sexual significance for them which is painfully self-exclusive. In their "light frocks", and "sidelong idle look", they could be "the murderer's little daughter" (CEP 155) "grown tall". In fact they are simply returning home dressed in school clothes, eating candyfloss, but the underlying sexual anxiety is such that these innocent facets become reflections of the narrator's physical isolation. The tone of the poem is well under control, however, with a subtly constructed music which, unlike "The Ogre" and "Sympathetic Portrait of a Child", holds the anxiety in suspense rather than thrusting it forward with agitated language. Unfortunately this suspense is somewhat lost in the final, disappointingly crude image: "they mount the lonely street". Unable to sustain his reliance upon the reader's ability to unravel the poem, Williams threw in an obviously sexual innuendo. But the poem, like many from this period, shows an increased familiarity with the materials of poetry, and confidence in his skill to use them.

Williams' brief alliance with McAlmon provided him with a reference, a marker by which he could take stock of his position. For the first time he found himself the focus for a younger writer's attention. This was a situation which would be repeated many times: most importantly with Louis Zukofsky and the 'Objectivists' in the late twenties and early thirties; with Charles Olson and the
'Projectivists' in the fifties; and with Allen Ginsberg and 'The Beats' also in the fifties. He could see his work as elevated to the status of example. He was flattered by McAlmon's attention and impressed by his youth (Williams was thirteen years older), recalling in his Autobiography, "Bob was a coldly intense young man, with hard blue eyes". McAlmon supported himself as an art school model, "posing in the nude" with his "ideal youth's figure"(Auto 157). He represented, for the older poet, exciting new possibilities, departures from the old order which were, perhaps, partly the result of Williams' example as a dissident writer. If this were the case, then Williams could be said to have arrived.

The idea of 'contact' as an essential quality for American art was McAlmon's, a fact which Williams went to some trouble to acknowledge, but there is a sense in which the label is simply a pulling together of the various trains of thought with which Williams had been approaching the problem of definition. In his 'Prologue' to Kora in Hell, Williams advocated "lifting to the imagination those things which lie under the direct scrutiny of the senses" (Imag 14). In his 1917 Whitman essay he insisted that "American verse of today...must be new verse in a conscious form. But even more than that it must be free to include all temperaments, all phases of our environment". 28

It is in the poems from Al Que Quiere!, however, that Williams' aesthetic dependence upon the American ground is
most consistently present for the first time. Poems like "Tract", "Pastoral" (both versions), and "Apology" foreground the intricacies of an urban American landscape, drawing attention both to the Americanness and to the concrete detail in a way which anchors the poetry in its locality. As he wrote in *Kora*:

> Despite vastness of frontiers, which are as it were the fringes of a flower full of honey, it is the little things that count! Neglect them and bitterness drowns the imagination. (Imag 47)

His sense of place as the matrix of all creative expression is encapsulated in the two final lines of "Dedication for a Plot of Ground": "If you can bring nothing to this place / but your carcass, keep out". (CEP 172)

McAlmon, from his position as an outsider, was able to read Williams calmly and intelligently and to provide a rationale which gave coherence to Williams' somewhat less than organised approach to his work. In the second issue of *Contact* McAlmon commented:

> No literature...[which is] dependent upon information that is literary alone, rather than perceptive of reality, is a clear art. Such work is a type of deified parodism, and its basic element is a cleverness about ideas, rather than poignant feeling, or penetrating perception. 29

McAlmon's essay, ironically entitled "Modern Artiques", goes on to define Eliot in terms of 'deified parodism' in a way which Williams could read as directly supporting his own position. McAlmon's real value was, however, always indirect. Williams wrote in his *Autobiography*, "Bob McAlmon was the instigator of the Contact idea....[which] when
we began it...didn't promise much". The magazine was short-lived, producing only five issues of "direct, uncompromising writing". Hardly any copies were sold, and in the end its real contribution was in providing a forum in which Williams' poetic could be defined and developed. He wrote, "but the talking and the plans that went on constantly between McAlmon and myself especially were not lost" (Auto 175).

**Spring and All**

*Spring and All* is a culmination, a conscious resume of the evolutionary process of a poetic oeuvre, as if Williams, recognising that he had cleared the way for his own advance, had gathered for posterity the sum of his efforts thus far. The book opens characteristically: "If anything of moment results--so much the better. And so much the more likely will it be that no one will want to see it" (Imag 88). Here is the familiar voice, belligerently shouting into the void. He pre-empted Stevens by ten years with his parody of the orthodox critic who accuses, "Is this what you call poetry? It is the very antithesis of poetry. It is antipoetry". Those to whom this anti-poetry represents the "annihilation of life", Williams countered, were hidebound by traditional concepts of poetry, merely as a "refuge in fantasy". However, into this unfriendly world, through which the poet struggles alone
to construct "anything of moment" enters the notion of a catalytic reader who allows the relief of intelligent exchange. The reader is presented as incomplete, seeking resolution, which is available in the poem, but equally, dialectically providing resolution as the missing link in a chain of poetic events. Williams wrote:

The reader knows himself as he was twenty years ago and he has also in mind a vision of what he would be, some day. Oh some day! But the thing he never knows and never dares to know is what he is at the exact moment that he is. And this moment is the only thing in which I am at all interested. (Imag 89)

The reader here is constructed as a consciousness with a past and future, and one which is threatened by its fear of the moment, the actuality of existence which is always lost with the passage of time (a human concept). This is a highly evolved mentality which Williams has introduced as the (perhaps unwilling) fictive recipient of his imagination's product:

And if when I pompously announce that I am addressed--To the imagination--you believe that I thus divorce myself from life and so defeat my own end, I reply: To refine, to clarify, to intensify that eternal moment in which we alone live there is but a single force--the imagination. This is its book. I myself invite you to read and to see. (Imag 89)

It is important to note here that the text is constructed as an invitation (rather than, as was so often the case previously, a demand) that the reader enter and contribute as an essential element in its movement. The text has no significance, and has no chance of temporality, that is, of participation in the dimension of continuity, without the collaboration of a receptive intelligence. Williams,
using himself as a model, and with Whitman at his shoulder, procedes to construct one. "Whenever I say 'I' I mean also 'you.' And so, together, as one, we shall begin". (Imag 89)

Kora in Hell took shape as Williams appended the "Interpretations" to the "Improvisations" as a concession to orthodoxy. What resulted was a fortuitous developmental structure, a conflict between straightforwardly explicative narrative and the idiosyncratic 'Improvisations'. Where Spring and All is a direct development from this tentative experiment is in the realised dialectic which takes place; the interaction between the prose and the poetry, neither of which takes precedence in the relationship. In their complex interaction they represent the two major axes of language which, because they react antithetically, provide the whole with an internal dynamic. The prose, with its often stated assumption of the existence of a receptive intelligence, proceeds along the associative axis of language, assuming a common subjective world to which both writer and reader can relate. It is in the prose sections that Williams slips most often and most conspicuously into metaphor. For example:

In that huge and microscopic career of time, as it were a wild horse racing in an illimitable pampa under the stars, describing immense and microscopic circles with his hoofs on the solid turf, running without stop for the millionth part of a second until he is aged and worn to a heap of skin, bones and ragged hoofs. (Imag 94)
Those figures and textures of language normally associated with poetry Williams superimposes upon his prose sections, while the poetry, contrarily taking the lateral axis, is flattened in diction and contiguous in movement. Metonymy takes the place of metaphor as the dominant figure, and the ground from which the verse unfolds is phenomenological. The fact that the two conflicting elements have appropriated from one another their most common means of identification is a profound irony, and one which contributes significantly to the dialectic which allows a bonding to occur.

Metaphor surfaces here and there as a figurative strategy in the poems, but it is constructed, as in Emily Dickinson's verse, so that the linkage between vehicle and tenor is so obscure as to require considerable decoding. This is illustrated in the first three stanzas from VII ('At the Faucet of June'):

The sunlight in a
yellow plaque upon the
varnished floor

is full of a song
inflated to
fifty pounds pressure

at the faucet of
June that rings
the triangle of the air (Imag 109)

This poem follows on immediately from VII ('The Rose') in which roses and geometry are engaged as compatible, as contributing to a scheme of things in which things prefigure the scheme. If the scheme is exaggerated in import-
ance, the thing is lost to the senses. The traditional metaphor value of roses as currency for love has become too inflated, and in order to re-establish a value for the phenomenon, a rigorous re-examination is necessary of the properties and behaviour of the thing. The poem ends:

The fragility of the flower unbruised penetrates space (Imag 109)

so that a contiguity of geometry in language has been established, to be developed in the following poem. The structure of the whole is dependent upon the movement available in the medium, language, by which the disparate phenomena can be included. By setting up a geometric field, it is possible to allow "sunlight" to take the form of a "yellow plaque". Indeed the figure is reassuring in its ease of association, and in its logical progression from the previous sequence of images. The difficulty arises in the presentation of the sunlight as "full" since it is unreasonable to suggest that a reflected area of light has capacity. However, to move on, that which is contained is a "song", a human creation, a linguistic utterance, something which cannot be contained, except in language, as a poem, recorded and awaiting the release allowed in reading. So the human consciousness makes the accidental geometry of reflected sunlight into a dynamic moment of significance in language. Sunlight plus cognisance equals song. With the reader as catalyst the song potential of "a yellow plaque" of sunlight is real-
ised. The release is climactic because of a specific poundage of pressure generated in the poem: "inflated to fifty pounds pressure", an odd reference this, but in keeping with the quasi-technological linkage which has been established. Later in the poem the figure is reinforced with the inclusion of "motor cars" whose song is the sound of tyres (inflated to fifty pounds pressure?). The car is a central motif in Spring and All, representing in its mass produced form the real achievement of American ingenuity. It is also included as an example of the dynamic potential of twentieth-century progress. There is an accelerating inevitability, conveyed in the confrontation and renewal taking place through the two linguistic modes engaged, which recalls the Marxist notion of 'dialectical materialism'. Cognisance is dependent upon the pre-existence of phenomena, which themselves have no meaning unless they are first recognised and categorised. The geometry of sunlight in this poem is related to song through cognisance and the human need to create significance. That need is given the property of "pressure" which, when released (as if by turning on a faucet) "rings the triangle of the air". The triangle is geometric (relating to the plaque), musical (relating to the song) and technological (a metal construction, relating to the car). Inevitably, human cognisance alters the nature of phenomena, which in turn will alter the modes of cognisance which re-structures and makes use of the phenomena observed:
And so it comes
to motor cars--
which is the son
leaving off the g
of sunlight and grass--

Inevitably, human ingenuity, developing from its dialectical relationship with the phenomenal world, making sense of that world and its relationships, will pull together those relationships, explain them as mechanisms and make use of them. Given the oppositional nature of being and consciousness (and the oppositional nature of this work) the resolution is synthesis, in this case appearing as "motor cars", linguistically released with the words, "And so it comes". The car motif is repeated in poems XI ('The Right of Way') and XVIII ('To Elsie') as the mechanical paradigm of human evolution, but one which (particularly in XVIII) is marginally ahead of human ability to make full use of it, the dialectic in process:

No one
to witness
and adjust, no one to drive the car

(Imag 133)

Williams was careful, however, not to allow references to phenomena to take precedence in *Spring and All*. In poem VII for instance, the linguistic nature of the engagement is maintained through the manipulation of words and their connotations. The notion of inevitability is reinforced with the introduction of the word "son" (betraying, incidentally, a 'phallogocentrism' in the movement of the poem) introducing the concept of inheritance. But as the poem
tells us, "son" is merely "song" without "the g". The word "son" sounds like the sun in "sunlight" and the letter "g" is linked with "grass". New relationships are being constructed by the human consciousness as language, through which all things are linked, if not explained:

Impossible

to say, impossible
to underestimate--
wind, earthquakes in

Manchuria, a
partridge
from dry leaves (Imag 110)

The Manchurian earthquakes (in reality enormous disruptions) appear as subordinate to the specific trauma of "a / partridge / from dry leaves", thus directing the intelligence toward the medium through which these phenomena are processed and re-presented. Their phenomenological basis is not under dispute, but it is through their apprehension and subsequent re-ordering in consciousness that they take on significance. The fact that they have occurred (if at all) at different times, on different continents and on different scales of magnitude does not dictate their integration in the conscious response of the reader, who is engaged here only in their existence as language.

The structural integrity of Spring and All is rooted in its thematic concern, the linguistic basis of all human understanding, and is carried in a loose trajectory which begins in constraint, achieves direction like a projectile
in release, and continues through the confusion of human experience and conditioned expectation. Its energy source is dialectical, and its target is synthesis. In keeping with human experience it fails as much as it succeeds, and incompleteness is written in as a structural necessity. In this 'new world' (a phrase which is used a number of times in the work) there is the possibility of fresh response to the experience of 'contact' with uncluttered expectation, unconditioned by 'old world' culture. The danger of that 'old world' culture remains, however, as an attractive alternative to the uncertainty of experimentalism, and its constant proximity makes it impossible to ignore. The field has to be constantly cleared of cultural intrusion; that is, the intrusion of a cultural value system as constraint upon expression.

Spring and All consistently focuses attention on what Williams identified as 'separation' in poetry. If a text masquerades as reality by "holding the mirror up to nature" (a paraphrasing of Hamlet), the separation cannot take place, and the physical world eludes the imagination. The separation he envisaged was based on the interactive condition that prefigures human evolution, the dialectical relationship between idea and experience, or, as he put it, "the jump between fact and the imaginative reality". The idea of separation is taken further, perhaps to highlight the conflict set up to activate the book. He wrote:

I mean only to emphasise the split that goes down through the abstractions of art to the everyday exer-
cises of the most primitive types--
there is a sharp division--the energising force of
imagination on one side--and the acquisitive--PROGRES-
SIVE force of the lump on the other
The social class with its religion, its faith,
sincerity and all the other imaginative values is
positive (yes)
the merchant, hibernating, unmagnetized--tends to
drop away into the isolate, inactive particles--Relig-
ion is continued then as a form, art as a convention--
To the social, energized class--ebullient now in
Russia the particles adhere because of the force of
the imagination energizing them-- (Imag 135)

Williams associated this dislocation from the energizing
source (down to earth experience of local conditions) with
the growth of the American bourgeoisie, the merchant class
whose rejection of contact had engendered hollow form and
convention. Engaged in abstract systems of exchange value,
the bourgeois accepts similarly structured notions of cul-
tural value, inherited from the European merchant class.
In poem VIII ('The Faucet of June'), the paragon of Ameri-
can bourgeois success, J.P.Morgan (Senior, 1837-1913),
defines himself culturally by plundering European collect-
ions for old masterpieces, "a Veronese or / perhaps a
Rubens--" while turning his back on the current symbol of
American progress, examples of which are being manu-
factured daily in his own factories (actually J.P.Morgan Jr.,
1867-1943, a financier who dealt in "motor cars"):

whose cars are about
the finest on
the market today-- (Imag 110)

These lines are patently an attempt by Williams to aggran-
dise America at Europe's expense. Morgan's rejection of
American art is implicit in his greed for "old masters",
and Williams, in his insecurity, over-emphasises the point through misplaced irony. American cars were by no means "the finest on / the market", and the poem is weakened by this overreaching chauvinism. By touching on American success in the development, for example, of mass production techniques, thus bringing the benefits of technology into the reach of ordinary people, he might more clearly have made his point. American ingenuity, responding to the conditions experienced in the 'new world', formed one thrust of the dialectic. In his essay 'Yours, O Youth' for the third issue of Contact, in 1921, he argued that no effort can begin to grow until:

precedent has been rendered secondary to necessity or completely ignored. It has been by paying naked attention first to the thing itself that American plumbing, American shoes, American bridges, indexing systems, locomotives, printing presses, city buildings, farm implements and a thousand other things have become notable in the world. (Essays 35)

So the "energizing force of the imagination" is no more likely to result in native work of relevance than is that "acquisitive--PROGRESSIVE force of the lump" which is characterised in poem XVIII ('To Elsie') as devoid of "peasant traditions to give [it] / character". What these two conflicting forces must inevitably achieve is adherence, synthesis, through: "[some]one to witness / and adjust, [some]one to drive the car" (Imag 133).

In this honeymoon period before the Moscow Trials (1935), Williams like many other American liberals viewed the Russian Revolution as a liberating movement, and the
Russian people, romantically, as dynamically involved in constructive social change. In 'A Democratic Party Poem', written for the election campaign of 1928-9, he wrote: "The strongest feature of the Russian Soviets is their local character". The Revolution, based, or so it appeared from the outside, on the concept of the soviet, a small collective working in co-operation with others, excited Williams' current obsession with the local as the source of all relevant expression. Thus the Russian people appeared to him a "social, energized class" for whom the force of the imagination was in contact with that of localised experience. He recalled in the Autobiography hearing Vladimir Mayakofsky read from his poetry, sometime around 1920:

A big man, he rested one foot on top of the studio table as he read. It was the perfect gesture. He had a good voice, and though no one understood a word he said, we were all impressed by the tumbling sounds and his intense seriousness....For myself it sounded as might The Odyssey from the mouth of some impassioned Greek. (Auto 163)

Mayakofsky embodied for Williams the ideal creative response of the artist to his time and conditions, Russian poetry from a Russian perspective. In this he was no different, in essence, from Williams, utilising the two sides of the dialectic to produce art as synthesis. In Spring and All Williams wrote:

Among artists, or as they are sometimes called "men of the imagination" "creators" etc. this force is recognized in a pure state--all this can be used to show the relationships between genius, hand labor, religion--etc. and the lack of feeling between artists and the middle class type--
The jump between fact and the imaginative reality

The study of all human activity is the delineation of the cresece and ebb of this force, shifting from class to class and location to location--rhythm: the wave rhythm of Shakespeare watching clowns and kings sliding into nothing (Imag 135)

Williams strenuously argued that art "in a pure state" is the product of a marriage between imagination and experience, a 'new world' cultural necessity which is blocked by the inherited clutter imposed on the landscape by "the middle class type" who he saw as dislocated, "unmagnetized", dependent upon redundant form and convention. That they invest so much value in Shakespeare is a direct result of their basic misunderstanding of his importance as an artist who, like Mayakofsky, was the inevitable genius of his time and place. Shakespeare appears in Spring and All as a focus for the cleansing process which is its primary function. If expression simply relies on convention, the structural superimposition of cultural value, it remains dislocated. But if experience goes unwritten (unsystematised in the conscious imagination) it fails to sustain human significance and slips therefore into nothingness. Cleansed of traditional association, language can be brought to bear on experience without the necessity of "holding up a mirror to nature". In poem IX ('Young Love') the point is illustrated. Remembered images are subtly distorted in a surreal sequence which is reminiscent (in its eccentric spacing and punctuation) of Mina Loy:
I watched

You sobbed, you beat your pillow
you tore your hair
you dug your nails into your sides

I was your nightgown
I watched! (Imag 115)

The "I" (eye) performs the act of cohering, relating the various odd phenomena in an inclusive gesture of observation and recording. In control of words, liberated from their previous enslavement to association, the poet can control significance.

Clean is he alone
after whom stream
the broken pieces of the city--
 flying apart at his approaches

In language so much is possible, but only if the words are combined in response to experience. Williams followed this poem with a plain statement: "...life becomes actual only when it is identified with ourselves. When we name it, life exists" (Imag 115). The poet's function is to refine the linguistic nature of human response to experience which is, by the restrictive nature of human sensory equipment, local. Herein lies the basis of Williams' oft repeated assertion that the local, minute particulars, properly adhered to, will give rise to the universal. The human consciousness is capable of virtually unlimited acts of inclusion, a capacity which can then be applied as signification at the level of art, poetry, giving value to life by naming it. Language is a uniquely human system, and by converting experience into language the poet is in
essence humanising it. The recording of human experience raises it to the level of meaning, but only when it can presuppose the compliance of another as 'reader' to give it dimension, temporality (both in the duration of the act of reading, and through the engagement with the reader's own past). "When we name it, life exists", which is not to say that 'naming' or cognisance prefigures experience, quite the contrary. Experience is the concrete base upon which the concept existence is raised, a simple dialectic whose synthesis, in this context, would seem to be consciousness, language, poetry. The rearrangement of the elements of experience in a poem such as IX ('Young Love') is purely linguistic, like holding up a fragmented mirror to nature. Nature is not less present as a result, it is simply afforded less illusory prominence in an act of communication which celebrates its own medium.

The act of naming engages the reader, and the language, cleansed of association, becomes a physical part of the process of meaning. But the poet's obsessive need to record, to signify, makes "him", as Williams put it, "prey to life" (Imag 115). This poem enacts (as a microcosm of the work as a whole), in its linguistic strategies, the problematic relationship of the modern poet to experience. On one level it includes metonymic gatherings of related spaces and objects; a hospital within which the reader comfortably encounters, "beds, beds, beds / elevators, fruit, night-tables", only to be ambushed with:
It is not onion soup
Your sobs soaked through the walls
breaking the hospital to pieces

All recollections are given current value when they arise
in language so that, in this poem, past experience is
mixed with contemporary consciousness, and the remembered
sobs achieve sufficient potency to break the no-more con-
crete hospital "to pieces". The poem is an enactment of
the struggle between consciousness and experience. Consc-
iousness in its most independent activity, cleansed, so to
speak, breaks away from 'sense':

Clean is he alone
after whom stream
the broken pieces of the city—
lying apart at his approaches

But this makes non-sense of experience, whereas poetry
rightfully seeks to maintain a balance as the vibrant
record of the struggle, returning constantly for susten-
ance to the concrete base:

but I merely
caress you curiously

fifteen years ago and you still
go about the city, they say
patching up sick school children

The present tense of "caress" collides with "fifteen years
ago" suggesting that the caress (like the sobs and disin-
tegrating hospital) is just talk, which is, of course, the
case. But talk is the naming of life, and through naming
it (or through reading someone else's act of naming) we
recognise a common linkage; the sharing of language is the
sharing of experience, the inclusion of other selves as a
barrier against existential doubt. As Williams put it, "life becomes actual only when it is identified with ourselves".

In *Spring and All* this identification with self takes place on a level which embraces the reality of human inconsistency. Contradiction is foregrounded specifically in the prose/poetry juxtapositioning and in the typographical inconsistencies. The "naming of life" in a Modernist text such as this must expose the contradictory nature of complex experience. Text can no longer assume the role of ordering mechanism. This is not to say that textual coherence is rejected, although this was a dilemma which writers of Williams' generation had to face. For Williams the solution was to be found in the medium, language, through which experience could be formally moulded as design. In his essay 'Glorious Weather' (*Contact* 1923) he confidently asserted that, "the object of writing is to celebrate the triumph of the sense," and, "in writing, as in art generally, sense is in the form". 31 His immediate problem was how to achieve coherence in a text which was formally engaged in conflict, and which acknowledged an equivalent conflict in the consciousness of the reader.

The structural integrity of *Spring and All* lies in its insistence on fixing the particular "with the universality of [the artist's] own personality--Taught by the largeness of his imagination to feel every form...he must prove the truth of this by expression" (*Imag* 105). Expression is the
coherent product of conflict, an element foregrounded in the recruitment of Poe in *Spring and All* as "a man of great separation--with close identity with life....Poe could not have written a word without the violence of expansive emotion combined with the in-driving force of a crudely repressive environment. Between the two his imagination was forced into being" (*Imag* III).

Williams' version of Poe's poetry could (as with so much of Williams' positive criticism) be applied to his own work. Poe is approached in terms of synthesis, imagination as the product of a uniquely American condition. Poe's imagination is forced into being, an interesting figure this from the New Jersey obstetrician, suggesting the process of physical birth, which was central to the structural energy of *Spring and All*. If a "crudely repressive environment" provided Poe with the necessary expansive contractions, then a similar function is carried out for Williams by the contrary energies of Dada.

In the abovementioned passage from 'Glorious Weather' Williams claimed that "Dada was the small sweet forget-me-not of the war." By 1923 Dada in New York appeared to have lost its essential acceleration, and in this essay Williams lamented the lack of output by its greatest exponent, Marcel Duchamp. Without his intelligence, Dada appeared lifeless and hollow. Williams wrote:

The only thing that the occasional work of such a man as Marcel ABOLISHES is bad work...BAD WRITING, senseless composition with improper use of materials out of which the sense has passed and into which a new sense
must be put before THAT material can be used again. This is precisely what Williams was engaging in Spring and All in the apparently frivolous trickery of the prose sections. Chapter headings are printed upside down and numbered out of sequence, some with Roman numerals and some Arabic. What has tended to go unnoticed by critics, however, is that this idiosyncratic structural foolery ceases to operate just over one-sixth of the way into the text. The decade prior to 1923 had been exciting, providing Williams with his own, occasionally painful, consistently anxiety-ridden dialectic: with the poetry strung between his location as an American bourgeois and his identity as an innovator, fired by the dazzling example of the modernists. Through his anxious progression from one influential model to another, he had gradually accumulated his own tools for cutting through the confusion. Spring and All acted as a kind of summing up, an enactment in language of this process. "Genius," Williams asserted in 'Glorious Weather', "...is the triumph of sense".

Beginning in confused agitation, the prose passages act out Williams' early flirtation with anarchic experimentalism. The activity, however, is directionless (plainly signalled in the non-sequential 'chapter headings') and the energy contained in such a way as to require resolution. This is partially relieved with the first few 'poems' whose language is flattened and controlled; moving contiguously, and with a sense of release which is direc-
tly linked with their emergence from such constricted vibrance. The poems can be seen as "the triumph of sense" in that they separate from a Dadaistic conflict in language that thwarts sense and disallows clarity, those goals toward which Spring and All is activated. In 'CHAPTER 19' (which is really section two) the reader has to contend with:

Imagine the monster project of the moment: Tomorrow we the people of the United States are going to Europe armed to kill every man, woman and child in the area west of the Carpathian Mountains (also east) sparing none. Imagine the sensation it will cause. First we shall kill them and then they, us. But we are careful to spare the Spanish bulls, the birds, rabbits, small deer and of course—the Russians. For the Russians we shall build a bridge from edge to edge of the Atlantic—having first been at pains to slaughter all Canadians and Mexicans on this side. (Imag 90)

This Dadaistic rhetoric, in conflict with the world of sequent phenomena, and in conflict with its own medium, language, builds up in these early sections. Pressure is exerted from which a coherent imagination is born, capable of taking its place in the exchange system which is the signification of human consciousness.

The final chapter heading is graphically and unequivocally:

CHAPTER I

and from then on the prose engages in a more collected advance, being more directly, if only slightly less idiosyncratically, marshalled for the cause of linguistic spring-cleaning. "Meanwhile, SPRING, which has been approaching for several pages, is at last here", in spite of
"THE TRADITIONALISTS OF PLAGIARISM" who, "ask us to return to the proven truths of tradition". The reader is forced to contend with the confused rhetoric of Dada struggling in the congested grip of tradition. Clarity is lost in the struggle, but may well result from it as synthesis:

Demuth and a few others do their best to point out the error, telling us that design is a function of the IMAGINATION, describing its movements, its colors--but it is a hard battle. I myself seek to enter the lists with these few notes jotted down in the midst of the action, under distracting circumstances--

Demuth, to whom this book was dedicated, appears as the first recruit, the first American artist engaged in the struggle for clarity and significance. But the goal has not always been so clear, especially with so many claiming victories against the forces of regression. On the previous page Williams had presented the problem;

A terrific confusion has taken place. No man knows whither to turn. There is nothing! Emptiness stares us once more in the face. Whither? To what end? Each asks the other. Has life its tail in its mouth or its mouth in its tail? Why are we here? Dora Marsden's philosophic algebra. Everywhere men look into each other's faces and ask the old unanswerable question: Whither? How? What? Why?

At any rate, now at last spring is here!

Marsden's ideas had been pivotal in the development of his own theory of language and its contiguously relationship with a material basis in phenomena and experience. In her Egoist editorial she had decried the inadequacy of any system dependent upon a priori assumptions (like metaphoric poetics) to express human consciousness, calling for a revitalised language as the only alternative means to that end. This concept of language as the medium in which
human consciousness is suspended and given expression is central to the form and theme of *Spring and All*, even down to the quasi-philosophic, investigatory nature of the prose, and the dialectical nature of the response. The dilemma as expressed is: "does the mouth catch the tail or the tail penetrate the mouth?"; and while "men" waste time asking "the old unanswerable question", profound signification takes place in the conscious awareness (among 'not men) of the arrival of "spring". Marsden had insisted that all investigation of consciousness should engage in the human experience of phenomena: being preceding cognisance. Williams in *Spring and All* develops the idea for his own ends: the re-alignment of the imagination in an American context; the interacting conflict between the 'naked' self and the 'new world'; the American condition.

Charles Demuth

Two poems have preceded this statement, the first two in the sequence: poem I ("By the road to the contagious hospital") and poem II ("Pink confused with white"). Both deal with natural phenomena in a human context devoid of human presence. The first poem is a metonymic enactment of natural birth, physical awakening:

One by one objects are defined--
It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf
But now the stark dignity of entrance--Still, the profound change
has come upon them: rooted they
grip down and begin to awaken (Imag 96)

The second introduces the humanising of physical nature, the containment of it in a plant pot. This is reinforced by the probability that the poem is a linguistic response to, not a pot of flowers, but a painting of one by Charles Demuth. The watercolour Tuberose (Plate 6) was painted in a New Jersey sanitorium for the treatment of diabetes during 1922. Williams recalled visiting Demuth there on several occasions, and even bringing him home for short visits (Auto 152). The American artist provided for the American poet an example of their shared need to locate the confused modern focus in concrete phenomena. Demuth's painting is a delicate investigation of the behaviour of light among leaves in a composition whose slipping off into blankness at the picture's periphery draws attention to its basis in design. Williams concurred:

Pink confused with white
flowers and flowers reversed
take and spill the shaded flame
darting it back
into the lamp's horn (Imag 96)

Williams and Demuth had established a close friendship while they were both students in Pennsylvania which was to last until the painter's premature death from diabetes in 1935. Demuth had spent the two years from 1912 in Paris, and his greatest influence came from those painters associated with Cubism. He attempted to superimpose the structural techniques he had learned onto those essentially American subjects, in particular the industrial and sub-
urban landscape, which fascinated him. Both Williams and Demuth were profoundly influenced by the modern experimentalisms which arrived in New York during the second decade of the century. Demuth was more directly affected having spent time among the French experimentalists, and his absorption of the specifically plastic innovations presented Williams with an example of their application in an American context.

Williams' interest in painters was not unlike his interest in scientists such as Einstein and Curie. He focused on their activities, their contribution to the modern context, and then transposed what he wanted from them into the linguistic strategies of his chosen medium. It is interesting that in *Spring and All*, both in the poems and the prose, Williams' engagement with painters (Demuth, Cézanne, Monet, Gris) is largely on the level of catalogue or description, whereas the writers, especially Moore and Shakespeare, are recruited in order to investigate their process and technique in comparison with his own. Paintings by Demuth and Juan Gris are objectified, investigated with the same intensity as the phenomena of the so called 'real world', as a way of enacting the homogeneity of all things in language. The images appropriated from pictures are no less 'real' than the "partridge / from dry leaves" or "the white / chickens", appearing, as they do in this context, courtesy of a shared medium. The reader is not necessarily aware, to begin with, that
some of the images are second hand, although the strategy of the text as a whole tends to draw attention to this as a distinct possibility. As a result, the reader can be sure only of one consistently 'real' linkage, the effect of language on consciousness which, being itself structured in language, dominates the human reception of phenomena. Human beings are so conditioned on reaching adulthood that all conscious response to experience must be rooted in the need for definition, which can only be achieved in language. So language and the concept of reality are inextricably linked, and all human experience is subject to this linkage. In the section of prose, immediately following the most 'Cubist' (Gris) inspired poems (VII and VIII), Williams wrote, "the only realism in art is of the imagination. It is only thus that the work escapes plagiarism after nature and becomes a creation" (Imag 111).

Williams dedicated Spring and All to Demuth, possibly because he recognised that both were attempting in their chosen media to bring the reality of the American condition up to the level of art. Painters had shown themselves to be conspicuously successful in flouting tradition, and modernist works had achieved a notoriety which placed their creators, as far as Williams was concerned in the advance guard of the attack. Demuth, represented, as an American in America and as a close friend, the cross-over between European experimentalism with form and the unique condition of the 'new' world. His
usefulness was in his example, and for this reason, presumably, he was recruited for the activity that energises the opening sections of the book. He provided a link between an exciting but directionless Dadaism and the clarity of contact from which to advance. It is Demuth who tells us that "design is a function of the IMAGINATION, describing its movements, its colours" (Imag 98). Williams' response was to shift into a more efficient gear, recognising with relief the directional, contiguous necessity of language, to establish contact with the environment and with the reader as the completion of the act. A poem is not achieved on the page, but in the receptive process of the reader. The language is freed of the obligation to connect with external systems of 'poetic' expression. Demuth's Tuberose need have no more significance than is contained in their "movements", their "colors":

petals aslant darkened with mauve
red where in whorls
petal lays its glow upon petal
round flamegreen throats
petals radiant with transpiercing light
contending above
the leaves
reaching up their modest green
from the pot's rim
and there, wholly dark, the pot
gay with rough moss.

This poem owes considerably more to the lineation techniques displayed in Loy's poetry than it does to the plastic techniques utilised in the painting. The absence
of orthodox punctuation almost throughout leaves the poem dependent for its rhythmic and referential coherence upon spacing and lineation. There are some resultant ambiguities which are reminiscent of Loy's logopoeia, and which must assume the complicity of the reader in order to achieve significance. For instance, does the "white" of the first line apply to the "flowers" of the second? Probably, but this should not be assumed; if a comma has been excised there, the meaning could be subtly changed. When Williams has left an ambiguity, then that ambiguity is as much a part of the poem's structure as any other element. Is the word "round" an adjective describing "flamegreen throats", or is it a shortening of 'around', locating precisely the "glow" of "petals"? Probably both, and this is the process by which the language is eased free from accepted notions of behaviour and association in 'poetry'. Flowers are contained in pots, and the language of a new and revitalised condition must move on, must contend with a less accommodating, less domestic soil. "The imagination", Williams wrote, concluding the more confused, Dadaistic section of the book, "freed from the handcuffs of 'art,' takes the lead! Her feet are bare and not too delicate" (Imag 97).
On the following page we are introduced to "The farmer in deep thought", one whose relationship with the land may be immediate and physical, but whose response to it is essentially human, conceptual and dialectical. This poem, which appears at first to be one of those "imagist" or "objectivist" exercises the critics insist on in their anxious search for labels, is, like all good poetry, a linguistic movement on a phenomenal base. The first move is achieved in one articulated sentence:

The farmer in deep thought
is pacing through the rain
among his blank fields, with
hands in pockets,
in his head
the harvest already planted. (Imag 98)

Why is it that we, as readers, readily ignore the incongruity of this statement? We know beyond all reasonable doubt that farmers do not plant harvests in their heads. We are able to make a contiguous linkage of our own by which we arrive at the probability that the farmer has planned his planting, consigning that plan to his memory, an attribute of mind we normally associate with the brain which is, of course, located in the head. Having made that assumption we have been primed for the next stage in the movement. Meanwhile reassurance takes place with the insertion of a simple statement -

A cold wind ruffles the water
among the brown weeds.
- reinforcing our picture of the scene as barren and blown and rain drenched. What this has achieved is to prepare the reader, to set the scene and to introduce an odd sense of incongruity. Apart from the anomaly already mentioned, there is another which may just begin to surface: harvests are not planted. Seeds are planted and later harvests are reaped. So the farmer thinks, twice removed from the action, not of seeds, but of harvest. The poem continues:

On all sides  
the world rolls coldly away:  
black orchards  
darkened by the March clouds—
leaving room for thought.

The farmer here is projected upon the apex of the world, drawing attention to the human tendency to centralise self while concurrently undermining the position, leaving the human consciousness vertiginously stranded, inescapably surrounded by an inhospitable landscape which "on all sides / ...rolls coldly away". The constant elusiveness of the world creates a void, a vacuum which must be filled and the human consciousness is sucked in, substituting "thought" for experience. Language constantly seeks to gratify a human desire for completion, moving in where 'reality' has escaped, as it always will. Spring and All is constructed using textual strategies which consistently draw attention to this vacancy. The gap between experience and consciousness demands to be bridged by language, which, ironically, draws attention to the rift. This is firmly established on page one:
There is a constant barrier between the reader and his consciousness of immediate contact with the world. If there is an ocean it is here. Or rather the whole world is between: Yesterday, tomorrow, Europe, Asia, Africa,—all things removed and impossible, the tower of the church at Seville, the Parthenon. (Imag 88)

Throughout the work, both in the prose and poems, there are recurring references to absence of one kind or another. "There is nothing", we are informed, "Emptiness stare us once more in the face" (Imag 96). There are constant references to the inadequacy of language (especially orthodox modes of expression) to fulfil its primal function, in poems such as IV, "Nobody / to say it--; V, "there is nothing in the twist / of the wind but--dashes of cold rain"; VIII, "Impossible / to say"; XI which opens, "In passing with my mind / on nothing in the world" and XX which includes the lines, "it is a wordless / world / without personality / I do not / seek a path". There are many other instances and strategies which draw attention to the void at the centre of human consciousness, not the least of which is the constant use of ellipses, sentences in both the prose and the poetry which fall off into incompleteness.

If entry into language severs humanity from the 'real', in *Spring and All* that separation leads inevitably to a state of competition with it. For instance, "the farmer in deep thought", by imposing his language-based imagination, constructing harvest where there are only "blank fields", on the receding world, places himself in a situation of dialectical confrontation with it:
Down past the brushwood
bristling by
the rainsluiced wagonroad
looms the artist figure of
the farmer--composing
--antagonist

A human figure, the embryonic American, and the inkling of
a persona for *Spring and All* is thus introduced onto the
inhospitable surface of the 'new' world. Where Eliot's
'waste land' is structured partly through the sensibilities of a representative of the *mythic past*, Tiresias,
blind, hermaphrodite, ancient and pessimistic in a con-
temporary context of shifting values and rejection of
tradition, Williams' 'new world' is given form through the
dialectical consciousness of a representative of the *myth-
ic present*. The "artist figure of / the farmer", the
archetypal New England stoic, like Robert Frost, attempts
to carve out a path toward self-definition from the rugged
and indifferent materials of nature. This is, of course,
at odds with the fact of Williams' middle class, profes-
sional status, revealing an appeal to myth which, as with
most other stay-at-home American experimentalists, was an
attempt to conceal a basic anxiety. Equivalents can be
found in the work of Demuth, Frank Lloyd Wright, Faulkner,
Charles Ives, and others, all major figures, who attempted
to reconcile international, cosmopolitan avant-gardism
with American vernacular folk traditions. The solution,
for Williams, was to identify the anxiety of the experi-
mental artist with the existential insecurity of the Amer-
ican farmer. The solution is not wholly satisfactory, but
then satisfaction at the level of resolution is not part of Williams' brief in this book.

The first necessity for the early settlers in America was to come to some kind of understanding of its ground, and this brought them up against a new world of contingencies, stretching the tenacious cultural bonds which tied consciousness to tradition. Consciousness for the farmer poet comes about through a struggle with the inhuman ground, a process which realigns the receptive ego, forcing it to respond to different stimuli. As the conditions of the new world are imposed, those pertaining to the old one are sublimated. The consciousness becomes conditioned into a mode of acceptance which includes change as integral, thus encoding a constant need for novelty. It is this human complex which forms the basis as persona and provides a broad structural coherence for *Spring and All*. The need is consistently reiterated for a structured response to the conditions experienced by Americans in writing wrenched from the grip of tradition. *Spring and All* enacts a re-awakening into language and a movement from birth, through the accumulative processes of experience, to a realisation of the complex of relationships that makes up the world of adult cognisance. Nothing is resolved, since resolution is a closure which depends on faith in verifiable truths, the kind of faith which characterises THE TRADITIONALISTS OF PLAGIARISM who offer a **prior**al assumptions disguised as law. The break is achie-
ved through the energy of rebirth in the final lines of poem I, "By the road to the contagious hospital":

But now the stark dignity of entrance—Still, the profound change

has come upon them: rooted they
grip down and begin to awaken

This natural birth process is sifted through the consciousness of the farmer/poet whose imagined harvest, composition, is 'antagonistic'. Language as the structuring of the consciousness gives rise to desire, so that the operation of consciousness is oppositional to the real. The farmer/poet has designs upon the land which will change it, altering its manifest properties so as to influence, in turn, any subsequent conscious response to it. The dialectical forward acceleration is contained, however, by the Dadaistic confusion taking place in the prose. The following poem, IV ("The Easter stars are shining") has to redirect it in order to precipitate the collision which must take place between the new and the old worlds. The poem opens with a traditional metaphor:

The Easter stars are shining
above lights that are flashing--
coronal of the black-- (Imag 99)

- relating the effect of stars to a coronal, usually worn, like a crown, as a badge of power. But this is not the required, cleansed response of a new world consciousness, which might come up with a much more straight-talking figure, a metaphor based on observation:
to say it--

Nobody to say: pinholes

Much more convincingly based on experience, the "pinholes" succeed "coronal" as the appropriate image. The imagination (characterised as feminine on the previous page, "her feet are bare and not too delicate") provides the way through:

Thither I would carry her
among the lights--
Burst it asunder
break through to the fifty words necessary--

- looking forward to the "fifty pounds pressure" inflated in poem VIII. The imagination, moving in response to the local need, filling the space left by experience in the newly adapted consciousness, replaces the complacency of convention with desire. The American condition demands that conscious response to its elusive 'reality' be made in a language appropriate to its characteristic constituents. In other words, there is little point in approaching the issue of American consciousness using images like 'crowns' and 'castles' which relate specifically to old world systems of political hegemony, the like of which Spring and All is activated to reject. The crown and castle symbolism is undermined in this poem by a bathetic combination of Romantic European cultural value with an equivalent figure from modern urban America:

a crown for her head with
castles upon it, skyscrapers
filled with nut chocolates--
The pursuit of the American condition in language must always be devalued, even totally abrogated by an insistent use of irrelevant figures. But the absurdity of such usage is most obvious in the modern idiom, uncluttered by romantic allusion as decoration. As Williams put it in his essay 'Edgar Allan Poe' (IAG, 1925), in a statement which characteristically defines his own position:

> With Poe words were not hung by usage with associations, the pleasing wraiths of former masteries, this is the sentimental trap-door to beginnings.... Sometimes he used words so playfully his sentences seemed to fly away from sense, the destructive, with the conserving abandon, forshadowed, of a Gertrude Stein. (IAG 221)

This statement offers certain assumptions as unchallengable in a way which begs analysis. In the first place, to suggest that Poe's words "were not hung by usage with associations" is blatantly contrary to the main thrust of his work. His writing is not only highly metaphoric, but it is also largely dependent upon the gothic element of European Romanticism; the very 'crowns' and 'castles' imagery which Williams so vehemently eschewed. Williams was, in his recruitment of Poe, as was so often the case, creatively misreading the texts for his own purposes. The comparison of Poe with Stein is also of interest in this context. Both writers were influenced by, and most readily embraced by European culture. Williams' insistence on placing them in the advance guard of an American renais-
sance reveals a basic lack of confidence in his theory of cultural rebirth. To argue that the American experience
had returned language to an elemental state is itself problematic. But to offer as examples of achievement within that state, two writers whose work was so dependent upon European models, was to undermine the foundations of his thesis. The point is that Williams' anxiety, in common with many of the stay-at-home modernists, as the self-styled representative of an ill-defined culture in thrall to the parent culture (European tradition), left him striving to establish a coherent front for tactical deployment. However, there is a sense in which this anxiety, pervasive among his peers, was contributing to a coherent American advance, and that the inevitable conflicts that arose, especially in Williams' case, contributed much toward the idiosyncratic brilliance of the work. For example, European high culture and modern America appear, sparring, in this fragment from poem XIII:

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Lights speckle
El Greco
lakes
in renaissance
twilight
with triphammers

which pulverize
nitrogen
of old pastures
to dodge
motorcars
with arms and legs-- (Imag 125)```

Clarity and Separation

Williams' insistence on the need to cleanse, to strip back the language in response to the elemental nature of America as he saw it, produced a kind of opacity as a necessary stage in the development of an alternative poetic. He was dedicated in *Spring and All* to the pursuit of clarity as response to the American condition, but he acknowledged, partly through the inclusion of convoluted and opaque passages toward the beginning of the work, the need for a vigorous break from the reassuring predictability of orthodox poetics. Dada had provided a focus with its irreverence for the culture of museums, and the anti-sense activity of figures like Loringhoven provided the space and impetus for artists like Williams and Demuth to bring their newly dislocated consciousnesses (their media freed if not yet redefined) into contact with their new 'reality'. Poetry, for instance, had been wrenched free from some of the old restraints, and its relevance now had to be maintained in a reconstruction process, informed by the locality which could give it shape and motivation; 'freed' rather than 'free' verse. As Williams expressed it in *Spring and All*, making once again a clear statement of intent:

> What I put down of value will have this value: an escape from crude symbolism, the annihilation of strained associations, complicated ritualistic forms designed to separate the work from "reality"—such as rhyme, meter as meter and not as the essential of the work, one of its words. (Imag 102)
If Dada briefly liberated the media of art from the culture of museums, it also, through its snowball effect of accelerating opposition, reached a position of incoherence which was no more intrinsically relevant to the new world than what it had replaced. "Dada" as Williams described it, "was the small sweet forget-me-not of the war". The war had been the one major disruption after which the relevance of all systems had to be called into question. Dada was a symptom of that and if it was to prove of any lasting significance it had to be built on so that its energy could be channelled into new systems which, with clarity, could relocate the human consciousness closer to the ground from which it sprang.

Thus cleansed and liberated, language becomes a contiguous system through which consciousness is constructed, but constructed in response to physical stimuli which can be utterly disparate in origin while accumulating, homogenised, in language:

That is why boxing matches and Chinese poems are the same—That is why Hartley praises Miss Wirt (Imag 103)

Marsden Hartley, in his book of essays, Adventures in the Arts (1921), a book specifically referred to on the page preceding this poem, had presented in similar terms, poetry, vaudeville, painting, acrobatics (Miss Wirth was a celebrated circus equestrienne) and philosophy. Williams recognised an interesting if unintentional effect of the collection: that things can become equalised in language.
An extension of that recognition is that if language equalises things by expressing them in an undifferentiated medium, then any privileging that takes place in a text does so through the manipulation of words. The elements of a poem are entirely subject to the language and the poet must learn to control that power, a difficult task when the old techniques have been rejected. The poem (poem V) ends:

How easy to slip
into the old mode, how hard to
cling firmly to the advance--

The inhospitable world of inhuman phenomena, "Black winds from the north", "dashes of cold rain", as in so many of the poems from Spring and All, provides one of several chains throughout the work, upon which is strung the antithetical function of the farmer/poet, constructing his framework of signification to cover the void between experience and meaning. While the process is dialectical, the advance is possible, but as soon as language is directed in pursuit of its own substance, divorced from its dependence on experience, it slips into negation, as enacted in poem VI:

nothing
I have done

is made up of
nothing
and the diphthong

ae (Imag 104)

The poem is immediately followed by this statement which opens with a pun, a play on the sound and association
between the words 'I' and 'eye', once again reminiscent of Loy:

The inevitable flux of the seeing eye toward measuring itself by the world it inhabits can only result in himself crushing humiliation unless the individual raise to some approximate co-extension with the universe. This is possible by aid of the imagination. (Imag 105)

Once again the dialectical energy of Spring and All is at work. Following a poem in which the divorced strategies of language are shown to be without body (the very shortness of the lines draws attention to this), we have a prose statement in which experience, the unmediated response of the human being to the phenomenal world, is presented as equally undynamic. It is only through the interaction of the two elements, the concrete and the abstract in apposition, that the advance can continue. And the advance continues here in an idiosyncratic confrontation with syntax during which the relationship between the receiving imagination and the work of art moves once again into the foreground. Having laid down that the artist enacts a record of "exactly what every eye must do with life, fix the particular with the universality of his own personality" Williams added:

Only then can the sense of frustration which ends. All composition defeated.
Only through the imagination is the advance of intelligence possible, to keep beside growing understanding.
Complete lack of imagination would be the same at the cost of intelligence, complete. (Imag 105/6)

The importance of art, then, is merely as a record of the individual personality activated in response to the mater-
ial world, and in order to re-activate that, to complete the circuit, a receptive imagination has to be included. Williams introduced himself, at this point, as a representative imagination, receptive to the artistic record of others. But of course, in this context the "I" of the prose refers also to "you" the reader, and in this way a fictive reader's imagination is textualised, included, assumed as the conceptual motivation of the whole work. The reader (this word must stand for the human imagination in response to all modes of artistic expression) is described as undergoing an enlargement process "before great or good work", though not one which blocks out life, "better to the individual by a 'vision of beauty'":

It is a work of the imagination. It gives the feeling of completion by revealing the oneness of experience; it rouses rather than stupifies the intelligence by demonstrating the importance of personality, by showing the individual, depressed before it, that his life is valuable—when completed by the imagination. And then only. Such work elucidates— (Imag 107)

With this evocation of completion the prose rounds out, much more than that immediately preceding, exploiting a syntactical resolution which acts rather like a major chord following a suspended one in music.

Having established this rewarding completion in the relationship between the imagination of the reader and the imaginative work, Williams proceeded to examine the energy field set up in his own response to a painting, possibly Roses (1914), by Juan Gris:

The rose carried weight of love but love is at an end—of roses
It is at the edge of the petal that love waits (Imag 108)

The word play allows none of the usual slither into complacency. Having begun, "The rose is obsolete" the poem advances through to "love is at an end", challenging, as did Loy's 'Love Songs' the clichéd eroticism of common imagery, "crude symbolism". Where roses end, "at the edge of the petal", in geometric potential, love, as an intangible goal of poetry, may be pursued. The rose, meanwhile, as an available image, continues to be exploited:

Crisp worked to defeat laboredness--fragile
plucked, moist, half-raised
cold, precise, touching

What "What" is left in suspense, neither a question nor an alternative. Incompletion is re-introduced in graphic starkness as a necessity in modern poetic structure, to be reinforced by the following lines:

The place between the petal's edge and the

From the petal's edge a line starts that being of steel
infinitely fine, infinitely rigid penetrates the Milky Way
without contact--lifting from it--neither hanging nor pushing--

The void into which the first of these statements plummets may well be an attempt to present typographically the existential anxiety that follows recognition of the inadequacy of language to cover all experience. It is, how-
ever, much more simply, an inclusion of the tendency in speech to make false starts, to proceed in short and often contradictory trajectories. Having set the imagination in pursuit of what the rose actually touches, where its real signification lies, the consciousness recognises a futile route, and redirects, to advance with more precision. It may be that the writer, having substituted the second more controlled movement for the first, decided to include the original as a means of drawing attention to the fitful process of poetic composition.

Poetry is the record of the imagination which is activated, in the section under discussion, in response to a "great or good" work of art. It can be activated in response to any human experience, but requires the cooperation of another human intelligence for signification. This poem (coupled with VIII, "The sunlight in a / yellow plaque...") interrupts a prose deliberation on the value of modern painting, with particular reference to Gris:

But such a painting as that of Juan Gris, though I have not seen it in color, is important as marking more clearly than any I have seen what the modern trend is: the attempt is being made to separate things of the imagination from life, and obviously, by using the forms common to experience so as not to frighten the onlooker away but to invite him, (Imag 107)

The passage ends with a comma, suggesting some kind of continuation. This signals the contiguous movement into the two poems, so as to include them in the larger movement. The poems illustrate, as does the painting, the activity of the imagination, disrupting the more common-
place activity of the human consciousness, which must continue.

Things with which he is familiar, simple things—at the same time to detach them from ordinary experience to the imagination. Thus they are still "real" they are the same things they would be if photographed or painted by Monet, they are recognizable as the things touched by the hands during the day, but in this painting they are seen to be in some peculiar way—detached (Imag 110)

This integrative activity signals the overall development- al structure of *Spring and All*, that development unfolding through the appositional cooperation of prose and poetry. As the work moves into its final phase, in the prose section following poem XVIII ("The pure products"), this relationship is increasingly alluded to as the basic rhythmic dialectic that structures human consciousness. Having established that human response to 'real' world phenomena can only take place in "the world of the imagination, wholly our own" (Imag 129), the dialectic is translated into that human world through the apposition between two linguistic modes. Prose in pursuit of "the accuracy of its subject matter" moves contrary to poetry, whose form "is related to the movements of the imagination revealed in words—or whatever it may be—the cleavage is complete" (Imag 133). Cleavage and separation are offered consistently throughout the work as the basis by which release of energy is possible, as in the electro-magnetic field between opposite poles: "The cleavage goes through all phases of experience. It is the jump from prose to the process of imagination that is the next great leap of the intel-
ligence—from the simulations of present experience to the facts of the imagination" (Imag 134).

So it is that *Spring and All* is an enactment of that separation, the textual assumption of the existence of the readerly imagination, allowing that jump between prose and poetry. To read the poetry as separate lyrics, and the prose as idiosyncratic passages of occasionally amusing, occasionally elucidating commentary, is simply to ignore the basic structural integrity of the whole. To reinforce this integrity, there are a profusion of references back and forth between the poems and the prose, using common images and figures such as cathedrals, nakedness as an elemental state, a new world, the "I"/"eye" association, intoxication, cars and rotating machinery, birds, the relationship between humankind and the sky, and spring. All of this is assembled with its various conflicting activities and incompletions, into one loosely embracing system. The element which energises this system and releases it from stasis is the integration of an ideal, readerly intelligence. Williams wrote:

*It is the imagination on which reality rides—It is the imagination—It is a cleavage through everything by a force that does not exist in the mass and therefore can never be discovered by its anatomization.*

*It is for this reason that I have always placed art first and esteemed it over science—in spite of everything.*

*Art is the pure effect of the force upon which science depends for its reality—Poetry.*

*The effect of this realization upon life will be the emplacement of knowledge into a living current—which it has always sought—*(Imag 139/40)*
Denouement

Spring and All is a highly complex attempt to approach the problematic area of art as the sharp edge of human consciousness in its dialectical confrontation with experience in a specific context: the American condition in a modern world. The complexity of the issue is enacted through a textual complexity which is often confusing, often contradictory, sometimes even prohibitive, putting up barriers beyond which most critics have refused to venture. This can be read, however, as a typical modernist strategy, consciously constructed so as to demand a greater degree of involvement from the reader. It is possible that Williams considered the strategy as having to some extent failed in its purpose. In his anxious obsession with self-definition in the shadow of the European culture of value, he appears to have been embarrassed by the book's Dadaistic trickery and constant fragmentation. This is to some extent borne out by his more controlled use of the prose/poetry dialectic in 'The Descent of Winter' published by Pound in his magazine Exile five years later. It is ironically the greater control exercised throughout 'The Descent of Winter' that dissipates the energy, and while that sequence contains various passages of brilliance the lack of textual conflict detracts from its overall cohesion.

Finally, Spring and All is the impressive product of a
matured and confident poetic, a systematised culmination in one inclusive gesture, of that poetic and its history, and the courageous application of that poetic to its phenomenological source. Where it falls short of its ambitious goal is in the residual anxiety surfacing in lines such as these from poem XXV:

Somebody dies every four minutes in New York State--

To hell with you and your poetry--
You will rot and be blown through the next solar system with the rest of the gases--

What the hell do you know about it?

AXIOMS

Do not get killed (Imag 146)

In the throes of composition, the text is agitated by that basic human panic which has informed Williams' poetry throughout. In the face of the utter indifference of the world, in the absolute certainty of inevitable de-signification, why write? This ultimate anxiety provides its own justification for composition which is, as Spring and All perfectly exemplifies, antagonistic. The imagination is activated in response to conflicting elements in order to give shape to the emptiness which pervades in a godless world. The pursuit of beauty, purity, the eternal, must continue, even when those states, as constants, have been withdrawn. Language moves in where experience, constantly falling away into memory, leaves a vacuum. Human beings must constantly articulate their lives as self-definition,
or cease to have significance. In modern America, however, the ball game is more likely to stimulate an emotional leap than poetry, and the poet must contend with this in addition to all the other arguments against composition:

The crowd at the ball game
is moved uniformly

by a spirit of uselessness
which delights them--

all the exciting detail
of the chase

and the escape, the error
the flash of genius--

all to no end save beauty
the eternal--

(Imag 148)

This poem, like the sequence as a whole, slips into contradiction and irresolution. But Spring and All transcends its own structured faults to survive as the first, and perhaps the greatest, of Williams’ significantly mature works. It looks forward to Paterson with its eccentric, insistent combination of prose and poetry, but emerges as the more audacious of the two by daring to include entropic elements which betray a tendency toward self-abnegation in human consciousness.
FOOTNOTES

Section One

Against the Traditionalists of Plagiarism: Diversionary Tactics


3. Ibid, p.3.

4. Ibid, pp.10/11.


14. Ibid.


20. Ibid.


25. Bloom, Anxiety, p.25.


30. Ibid.


34. Ibid.

36. Ibid, p.5.

37. Ibid, p.165.


43. Ibid, p.xii.
FOOTNOTES

Section Two:

Doctor Williams' Position.

3. Ibid.
4. Bloom, Anxiety, p.5.
9. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. 'A Tentative Statement' L.R., p.95.
15. Ibid, p.96.
20. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
29. ____*, 'A Tentative Statement', L.R., p.98.
33. Ibid, p.130.
44. P. Jones, Imagist Poetry, p.131.
51. ______, See letter to V Baxter Jordan, Letters, p.27
53. Pound, Letters, pp. 3-7. Williams letter is unavailable so the reader is obliged to reconstruct elements of his criticism from Pound's very detailed reply.
57. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
70. McAlmon, 'Gertrude Stein' Exile, p.72.
71. Mariani, A New World Naked, see p. 261.
72. McAlmon, 'Gertrude Stein' Exile, pp. 72/3.
73. Dijkstra, Heiroglyphics, p.16.
75. Ibid, p.9.
78. Ibid.
79. Rose, American Art, p.56.
83. Ibid, p.15.
84. Ades, Dada and Surrealism, pp.30/1.
85. Young, Dada and After, p.23.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid, p.89.

90. Young, *Dada and After*, p.15.

91. Ibid.


FOOTNOTES

Section Three:

An American Tradition.

2. Ibid.
5. Ibid, p.303.
8. Ibid, p.79.
9. Ibid, p.84.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
25. Mike Weaver, The American Background, p.22.
26. Emily Dickinson, Poems 1880-1896 (A Facsimile reproduction of the original three volumes), Florida, Scholars Facsimilies & Reprints, 1967, p.34. Subsequently the poems from this volume will be identified in the text as 'E.D. Poems'.
29. Ibid, p.5.
36. Weaver, Background, p.82.
37. Ibid, p.28.


46. Porter, Dickinson, p.223.

47. Ibid, p.25.


53. Blake & Wells, Recognition of E.D., pp.3-10.


Section Four

An American Vortex

2. Mike Weaver, The American Background, pp. 82-3.
3. Ibid.
5. Ibid, p. 2.
6. Paul Mariani, A New World Naked, p.789.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
17. Pound, Letters, p.27.
18. Kreymborg, Troubadour, p.204.
22. Ibid.


29. Ibid, p.25.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid p.28.


34. Yvor Winters, "Mina Loy" *The Dial* No 80 (June 1926), p.499.


36. Ibid p.(xv)-(xvi).


38. Ibid, p.274.


40. Loy, "Parturition", *Baedeker*, p.67. All further quotations from this poem will be acknowledged in the text, using the abbreviation LLB.

41. Kouidis, *Loy*, p.44.


47. _____, *Letters*, p. 157.


55 Loy, 'Love Songs To Joannes', *Others* 3, 6, (April 1917) pp. 3-20, p. 3. This version edited and extended by Loy, with various corrections to improve the version as published by Kreymborg in the first issue of *Others* (e.g. the substitution of "sitting" for "sitting" in the second line, and various changes to lineation). Unfortunately these changes were not picked up by Conover for the version included in *The Last Lunar Baedeker*. All subsequent quotations from the poem will be acknowledged in the text.

56. _____, *Baedeker*, p. (xxxv).

57. Ibid, pp. (xxxvi)-(xxxvii).

58. Winters, 'Mina Loy' *The Dial*, p. 496.


62. Weaver, *The American Background*, p. 82.
63. Loy, Baedeker, p.70.
64. Weaver, The American Background, p.22.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid, p.100.
73. Marsden, 'Lingual Psychology', p.100.
74. Williams, 'The Great Sex Spiral'.
75. Mariani, A New World Naked, p.142.
82. _____, Letters, p.143.
83. Williams, 'GLORIA' Others Vol.5, No.6 (July 1919), p.3.
84. _____, 'BELLY MUSIC' (supplement to Others Vol.5, No.6), p.25.

86. Williams, 'The Great Opportunity'.
FOOTNOTES

Section Five

Spring and All: Liberating the Word

3. Ibid, p.27.
5. Ibid, p.36.
10. Ibid, p.4.
13. Ibid.
15. __________, 'Notes from a Talk on Poetry', Poetry Vol XIV No 4 (July 1919) p.211.
21. Ibid.
22. Williams, Editorial Comment, Contact No 1., p.1.
23. ____________, *Contact* No.2 (Jan 1921), p.1.


25. ____________, *Contact* No.1 (December 1920), p.10.

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27. Ibid.

28. ____________, 'America, Whitman and the Art Of Poetry,' p.29.

29. Robert McAlmon, 'Modern Artiques', *Contact* No.2 (Jan 1921), pp.9/10.

30. Mike Weaver, *The American Background*, p.35.

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32. Ibid.
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