

Classic Poetry Series

William Carlos Williams
- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

William Carlos Williams(17 September 1883 – 4 March 1963)

an American poet closely associated with modernism and Imagism. He was also a pediatrician and general practitioner of medicine, having graduated from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. Williams "worked harder at being a writer than he did at being a physician"; but during his lifetime, Williams excelled at both.

Biography

Early Years

Williams was born in Rutherford, New Jersey to an English father and a Puerto Rican mother. He received his primary and secondary education in Rutherford until 1897, when he was sent for two years to a school near Geneva and to the Lycée Condorcet in Paris. He attended the Horace Mann High School upon his return to New York City and after having passed a special examination, he was admitted in 1902 to the medical school of the University of Pennsylvania, from which he graduated in 1906.

Family

Williams married Florence Herman (1891–1976) in 1912, after his first proposal to her older sister was refused. They moved into a house in Rutherford, New Jersey, which was their home for many years. Shortly afterward, his first book of serious poems, *The Tempers*, was published. On a trip to Europe in 1924, Williams spent time with writers Ezra Pound and James Joyce. Florence and Williams' sons stayed behind in New Jersey.

Career

Although his primary occupation was as a doctor, Williams had a full literary career. His work consists of short stories, poems, plays, novels, critical essays, an autobiography, translations and correspondence. He wrote at night and spent weekends in New York City with friends—writers and artists like the avant-garde painters Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia and the poets Wallace Stevens and Marianne Moore. He became involved in the Imagist movement but soon he began to develop opinions that differed from those of his poetic peers, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. Later in his life, Williams toured the United States giving

poetry readings and lectures.

During the First World War, when a number of European artists established themselves in New York City, Williams became friends with members of the avant-garde both American, such as Man Ray, and visitors from Europe, such as Francis Picabia, and Marcel Duchamp. In 1915 Williams began to be associated with a group of New York artists and writers known as "The Others". Founded by the poet Alfred Kreymborg and by Man Ray, this group included Walter Conrad Arensberg, Wallace Stevens, Mina Loy, Marianne Moore and Duchamp. Through these involvements Williams got to know the Dadaist movement, which may explain the influence on his earlier poems of Dadaist and Surrealist principles. His involvement with The Others made Williams a key member of the early modernist movement in America.

Williams disliked Ezra Pound's and especially T. S. Eliot's frequent use of allusions to foreign languages and Classical sources, as in Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Williams preferred to draw his themes from what he called "the local". In his modernist epic collage of place, *Paterson* (published between 1946 and 1958), an account of the history, people, and essence of Paterson, New Jersey, he examined the role of the poet in American society. Williams most famously summarized his poetic method in the phrase "No ideas but in things" (found in his poem "A Sort of a Song" and in *Paterson*). He advocated that poets leave aside traditional poetic forms and unnecessary literary allusions, and try to see the world as it is. Marianne Moore, another skeptic of traditional poetic forms, wrote Williams had used "plain American which cats and dogs can read," with distinctly American idioms.

One of his most notable contributions to American literature was his willingness to be a mentor for younger poets. Though Pound and Eliot may have been more lauded in their time, a number of important poets in the generations that followed were either personally tutored by Williams or pointed to Williams as a major influence. He had an especially significant influence on many of the American literary movements of the 1950s: poets of the Beat Generation, the San Francisco Renaissance, the Black Mountain school, and the New York School. He personally mentored Theodore Roethke, and Charles Olson, who was instrumental in developing the poetry of the Black Mountain College and subsequently influenced many other poets. Robert Creeley and Denise Levertov, two other poets associated with Black Mountain, studied under Williams. Williams was friends with Kenneth Rexroth, the founder of the San Francisco Renaissance. A lecture Williams gave at Reed College was formative in inspiring three other important members of that Renaissance: Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen and Lew Welch. One of Williams's most dynamic relationships as a mentor was with fellow

New Jerseyite Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg claimed that Williams essentially freed his poetic voice. Williams included several of Ginsberg's letters in *Paterson*, stating that one of them helped inspire the fifth section of that work. Williams also wrote introductions to two of Ginsberg's books, including *Howl*. Williams sponsored unknown poets such as H.H. Lewis, a radical Missouri Communist poet, who he believed wrote in the voice of the people. Though Williams consistently loved the poetry of those he mentored, he did not always like the results of his influence on other poets (the perceived formlessness, for example, of other Beat Generation poets). Williams believed more in the interplay of form and expression.

Death

After Williams suffered a heart attack in 1948, his health began to decline, and after 1949 a series of strokes followed. He also underwent treatment for clinical depression in a psychiatric hospital during 1953. Williams died on March 4, 1963 at the age of seventy-nine at his home in Rutherford. He was buried in Hillside Cemetery in Lyndhurst, New Jersey.

Two days after his death, a British publisher announced that he was going to print his poems. During his lifetime, Williams had not received as much recognition from Britain as he had from the United States, and Williams had always protested against the English influence on American poetry.

Poetry

Williams' major collections are *Kora in Hell* (1920), *Spring and All* (1923), *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* (1962), *Paterson* (1963, repr. 1992), and *Imaginations* (1970). His most anthologized poem is "The Red Wheelbarrow", considered an example of the Imagist movement's style and principles (see also "This Is Just To Say"). However, Williams, like his associate Ezra Pound, had long ago rejected the imagist movement by the time this poem was published as part of *Spring and All* in 1923. Williams is more strongly associated with the American Modernist movement in literature, and saw his poetic project as a distinctly American one; he sought to renew language through the fresh, raw idiom that grew out of America's cultural and social heterogeneity, at the same time freeing it from what he saw as the worn-out language of British and European culture.

Williams tried to invent an entirely fresh form, an American form of poetry whose subject matter was centered on everyday circumstances of life and the lives of common people. He then came up with the concept of the variable foot evolved

from years of visual and auditory sampling of his world from the first person perspective as a part of the day in the life as a physician. The variable foot is rooted within the multi-faceted American Idiom. This discovery was a part of his keen observation of how radio and newspaper influenced how people communicated and represents the "machine made out of words" (as he described a poem in the introduction to his book, *The Wedge*) just as the mechanistic motions of a city can become a consciousness. Williams didn't use traditional meter in most of his poems. His correspondence with Hilda Doolittle also exposed him to the relationship of sapphic rhythms to the inner voice of poetic truth:

"The stars about the beautiful moon again hide their radiant shapes, when she is full and shines at her brightest on all the earth"—Sappho.

This is to be contrasted with a poem from *Journey To Love* titled "Shadows":

"Shadows cast by the street light
under the stars,
the head is tilted back,
the long shadow of the legs
presumes a world taken for granted
on which the cricket trills"

The breaks in the poem search out a natural pause spoken in the American idiom that is also reflective of rhythms found within jazz sounds that also touch upon Sapphic harmony. Williams experimented with different types of lines and eventually found the "stepped triadic line", a long line which is divided into three segments. This line is used in Paterson and in poems like "To Elsie" and "The Ivy Crown." Here again one of Williams' aims is to show the truly American (i.e., opposed to European traditions) rhythm which is unnoticed but present in everyday American language. Stylistically, Williams worked with variations on free-form styles, notably developing and utilising the triadic line as in his lengthy love-poem *Asphodel, That Greeny Flower*.

In a review of Herbert Liebowitz's *Something Urgent I have to say to You: The Life and Works of William Carlos Williams* appearing in the December 15, 2011 issue of *The New Republic*, critic Christopher Benfey writes of the thematic purpose of Williams's poetry, "Early and late, Williams held the conviction that poetry was in his friend Kenneth Burke's phrase, 'equipment for living,' a necessary guide amid the bewilderments of life.' The American ground was wild and new, a place where a blooming foreigner needed all the help he could get. Poems were as essential to a full life as physical health or the love of men and women."

Politics

Modern liberals portray Williams as aligned with liberal democratic issues; however, as his publications in more politically radical journals like *New Masses* suggest, his political commitments were further to the left than the term "liberal" indicates. He considered himself a socialist and opponent of capitalism, and in 1935 published "The Yachts", a poem which indicts the rich elite as parasites and the masses as striving for revolution. The poem features an image of the ocean as the "watery bodies" of the poor masses beating at their hulls "in agony, in despair", attempting to sink the yachts and end "the horror of the race". Furthermore, in the introduction to his 1944 book of poems "The Wedge", he writes of socialism as an inevitable future development and as a necessity for true art to develop. In 1949, he published a booklet/bar "The Pink Church" that was about the human body but was understood, in the context of McCarthyism, as being dangerously pro-communist. The anti-communist movement led to his losing a consultantship with the Library of Congress in 1952/3, an event that contributed to his being treated for clinical depression. In an unpublished article for *Blast*, Williams wrote artists should resist producing propaganda and be "devoted to writing (first and last)." However, in the same article Williams claims that art can also be "in the service of the proletariat".

Legacy, Awards and Honors

In May 1963, he was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems (1962) and the Gold Medal for Poetry of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. The Poetry Society of America continues to honor William Carlos Williams by presenting an annual award in his name for the best book of poetry published by a small, non-profit or university press.

Williams' house in Rutherford is now on the National Register of Historic Places. He was inducted into the New Jersey Hall of Fame in 2009.

"Libertad! Igualdad! Fraternidad!"

You sullen pig of a man
you force me into the mud
with your stinking ash-cart!

Brother!
--if we were rich
we'd stick our chests out
and hold our heads high!

It is dreams that have destroyed us.

There is no more pride
in horses or in rein holding.
We sit hunched together brooding
our fate.

Well--
all things turn bitter in the end
whether you choose the right or
the left way
and--
dreams are not a bad thing.

William Carlos Williams

A Celebration

A middle-northern March, now as always--
gusts from the South broken against cold winds--
but from under, as if a slow hand lifted a tide,
it moves--not into April--into a second March,

the old skin of wind-clear scales dropping
upon the mold: this is the shadow projects the tree
upward causing the sun to shine in his sphere.

So we will put on our pink felt hat--new last year!
--newer this by virtue of brown eyes turning back
the seasons--and let us walk to the orchid-house,
see the flowers will take the prize tomorrow
at the Palace.

Stop here, these are our oleanders.

When they are in bloom--

You would waste words

It is clearer to me than if the pink
were on the branch. It would be a searching in
a colored cloud to reveal that which now, huskless,
shows the very reason for their being.

And these the orange-trees, in blossom--no need
to tell with this weight of perfume in the air.
If it were not so dark in this shed one could better
see the white.

It is that very perfume
has drawn the darkness down among the leaves.

Do I speak clearly enough?

It is this darkness reveals that which darkness alone
loosens and sets spinning on waxen wings--
not the touch of a finger-tip, not the motion
of a sigh. A too heavy sweetness proves
its own caretaker.

And here are the orchids!

Never having seen

such gaiety I will read these flowers for you:

This is an odd January, died--in Villon's time.

Snow, this is and this the stain of a violet

grew in that place the spring that foresaw its own doom.

And this, a certain July from Iceland:
a young woman of that place
breathed it toward the South. It took root there.
The color ran true but the plant is small.

This falling spray of snow-flakes is
a handful of dead Februaries
prayed into flower by Rafael Arevalo Martinez
of Guatemala.
Here's that old friend who
went by my side so many years: this full, fragile
head of veined lavender. Oh that April
that we first went with our stiff lusts
leaving the city behind, out to the green hill--
May, they said she was. A hand for all of us:
this branch of blue butterflies tied to this stem.

June is a yellow cup I'll not name; August
the over-heavy one. And here are--
russet and shiny, all but March. And March?
Ah, March--
Flowers are a tiresome pastime.
One has a wish to shake them from their pots
root and stem, for the sun to gnaw.

Walk out again into the cold and saunter home
to the fire. This day has blossomed long enough.
I have wiped out the red night and lit a blaze
instead which will at least warm our hands
and stir up the talk.
I think we have kept fair time.
Time is a green orchard.

William Carlos Williams

A Goodnight

Go to sleep--though of course you will not--
to tideless waves thundering slantwise against
strong embankments, rattle and swish of spray
dashed thirty feet high, caught by the lake wind,
scattered and strewn broadcast in over the steady
car rails! Sleep, sleep! Gulls' cries in a wind-gust
broken by the wind; calculating wings set above
the field of waves breaking.

Go to sleep to the lunge between foam-crests,
refuse churned in the recoil. Food! Food!
Offal! Offal! that holds them in the air, wave-white
for the one purpose, feather upon feather, the wild
chill in their eyes, the hoarseness in their voices--
sleep, sleep . . .

Gentlefooted crowds are treading out your lullaby.
Their arms nudge, they brush shoulders,
hitch this way then that, mass and surge at the crossings--
lullaby, lullaby! The wild-fowl police whistles,
the enraged roar of the traffic, machine shrieks:
it is all to put you to sleep,
to soften your limbs in relaxed postures,
and that your head slip sidewise, and your hair loosen
and fall over your eyes and over your mouth,
brushing your lips wistfully that you may dream,
sleep and dream--

A black fungus springs out about the lonely church doors--
sleep, sleep. The Night, coming down upon
the wet boulevard, would start you awake with his
message, to have in at your window. Pay no
heed to him. He storms at your sill with
cooings, with gesticulations, curses!
You will not let him in. He would keep you from sleeping.
He would have you sit under your desk lamp
brooding, pondering; he would have you
slide out the drawer, take up the ornamented dagger
and handle it. It is late, it is nineteen-nineteen--
go to sleep, his cries are a lullaby;

his jabbering is a sleep-well-my-baby; he is
a crackbrained messenger.

The maid waking you in the morning
when you are up and dressing,
the rustle of your clothes as you raise them--
it is the same tune.

At table the cold, greenish, split grapefruit, its juice
on the tongue, the clink of the spoon in
your coffee, the toast odors say it over and over.

The open street-door lets in the breath of
the morning wind from over the lake.
The bus coming to a halt grinds from its sullen brakes--
lullaby, lullaby. The crackle of a newspaper,
the movement of the troubled coat beside you--
sleep, sleep, sleep, sleep . . .
It is the sting of snow, the burning liquor of
the moonlight, the rush of rain in the gutters packed
with dead leaves: go to sleep, go to sleep.
And the night passes--and never passes--

William Carlos Williams

A Love Song

What have I to say to you
When we shall meet?
Yet—
I lie here thinking of you.

The stain of love
Is upon the world.
Yellow, yellow, yellow,
It eats into the leaves,
Smears with saffron
The horned branches that lean
Heavily
Against a smooth purple sky.

There is no light—
Only a honey-thick stain
That drips from leaf to leaf
And limb to limb
Spoiling the colours
Of the whole world.

I am alone.
The weight of love
Has buoyed me up
Till my head
Knocks against the sky.

See me!
My hair is dripping with nectar—
Starlings carry it
On their black wings.
See, at last
My arms and my hands
Are lying idle.

How can I tell
If I shall ever love you again
As I do now?

A Sort Of A Song

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

-- through metaphor to reconcile
the people and the stones.

Compose. (No ideas
but in things) Invent!
Saxifrage is my flower that splits
the rocks.

William Carlos Williams

Apology

Why do I write today?

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

colored women
day workers—
old and experienced—
returning home at dusk
in cast off clothing
faces like
old Florentine oak.

Also

the set pieces
of your faces stir me—
leading citizens—
but not
in the same way.

William Carlos Williams

Approach Of Winter

The half-stripped trees
struck by a wind together,
bending all,
the leaves flutter drily
and refuse to let go
or driven like hail
stream bitterly out to one side
and fall
where the salvias, hard carmine--
like no leaf that ever was--
edge the bare garden.

William Carlos Williams

AprÈS Le Bain

I gotta
buy me a new
girdle.
(I'll buy
you one) O.K.
(I wish

you'd wig-
gle that way
for me,

I'd be
a happy man)
I GOTTA

wig-
gle for this.
(You pig)

William Carlos Williams

April

If you had come away with me
into another state
we had been quiet together.
But there the sun coming up
out of the nothing beyond the lake was
too low in the sky,
there was too great a pushing
against him,
too much of sumac buds, pink
in the head
with the clear gum upon them,
too many opening hearts of lilac leaves,
too many, too many swollen
limp poplar tassels on the
bare branches!
It was too strong in the air.
I had no rest against that
springtime!
The pounding of the hoofs on the
raw sods
stayed with me half through the night.
I awoke smiling but tired.

William Carlos Williams

Arrival

And yet one arrives somehow,
finds himself loosening the hooks of
her dress
in a strange bedroom--
feels the autumn
dropping its silk and linen leaves
about her ankles.
The tawdry veined body emerges
twisted upon itself
like a winter wind . . . !

William Carlos Williams

Asphodel, That Greeny Flower

Of asphodel, that greeny flower,
like a buttercup

upon its branching stem-
save that it's green and wooden-

I come, my sweet,
to sing to you.

We lived long together

a life filled,
if you will,

with flowers. So that

I was cheered
when I came first to know

that there were flowers also
in hell.

Today

I'm filled with the fading memory of those flowers

that we both loved,
even to this poor

colorless thing-

I saw it
when I was a child-

little prized among the living

but the dead see,
asking among themselves:

What do I remember

that was shaped
as this thing is shaped?

while our eyes fill

with tears.
Of love, abiding love

it will be telling

though too weak a wash of crimson
colors it

to make it wholly credible.

There is something
something urgent

I have to say to you

and you alone
but it must wait

while I drink in
the joy of your approach,
perhaps for the last time.

And so
with fear in my heart
I drag it out
and keep on talking
for I dare not stop.
Listen while I talk on
against time.
It will not be
for long.

I have forgot
and yet I see clearly enough
something
central to the sky
which ranges round it.
An odor
springs from it!
A sweetest odor!
Honeysuckle! And now
there comes the buzzing of a bee!
and a whole flood
of sister memories!

Only give me time,
time to recall them
before I shall speak out.

Give me time,
time.

When I was a boy
I kept a book
to which, from time
to time,
I added pressed flowers
until, after a time,
I had a good collection.
The asphodel,
forebodingly,
among them.
I bring you,
reawakened,
a memory of those flowers.

They were sweet
 when I pressed them
and retained
 something of their sweetness
 a long time.
It is a curious odor,
 a moral odor,
 that brings me
near to you.
 The color
 was the first to go.
There had come to me
 a challenge,
 your dear self,
mortal as I was,
 the lily's throat
 to the hummingbird!
Endless wealth,
 I thought,
 held out its arms to me.
A thousand tropics
 in an apple blossom.
 The generous earth itself
gave us lief.
 The whole world
 became my garden!
But the sea
 which no one tends
 is also a garden
when the sun strikes it
 and the waves
 are wakened.
I have seen it
 and so have you
 when it puts all flowers
to shame.
 Too, there are the starfish
 stiffened by the sun
and other sea wrack
 and weeds. We knew that
 along with the rest of it
for we were born by the sea,

knew its rose hedges
to the very water's brink.
There the pink mallow grows
and in their season
strawberries
and there, later,
we went to gather
the wild plum.
I cannot say
that I have gone to hell
for your love
but often
found myself there
in your pursuit.
I do not like it
and wanted to be
in heaven. Hear me out.
Do not turn away.
I have learned much in my life
from books
and out of them
about love.
Death
is not the end of it.
There is a hierarchy
which can be attained,
I think,
in its service.
Its guerdon
is a fairy flower;
a cat of twenty lives.
If no one came to try it
the world
would be the loser.
It has been
for you and me
as one who watches a storm
come in over the water.
We have stood
from year to year
before the spectacle of our lives
with joined hands.

The storm unfolds.
 Lightning
 plays about the edges of the clouds.
The sky to the north
 is placid,
 blue in the afterglow
as the storm piles up.
 It is a flower
 that will soon reach
the apex of its bloom.
 We danced,
 in our minds,
and read a book together.
 You remember?
 It was a serious book.
And so books
 entered our lives.
The sea! The sea!
 Always
 when I think of the sea
there comes to mind
 the Iliad
 and Helen's public fault
that bred it.
 Were it not for that
 there would have been
no poem but the world
 if we had remembered,
 those crimson petals
spilled among the stones,
 would have called it simply
 murder.
The sexual orchid that bloomed then
 sending so many
 disinterested
men to their graves
 has left its memory
 to a race of fools
or heroes
 if silence is a virtue.
 The sea alone
with its multiplicity

holds any hope.
The storm
has proven abortive
but we remain
after the thoughts it roused
to
re-cement our lives.
It is the mind
the mind
that must be cured
short of death's
intervention,
and the will becomes again
a garden. The poem
is complex and the place made
in our lives
for the poem.
Silence can be complex too,
but you do not get far
with silence.
Begin again.
It is like Homer's
catalogue of ships:
it fills up the time.
I speak in figures,
well enough, the dresses
you wear are figures also,
we could not meet
otherwise. When I speak
of flowers
it is to recall
that at one time
we were young.
All women are not Helen,
I know that,
but have Helen in their hearts.
My sweet,
you have it also, therefore
I love you
and could not love you otherwise.
Imagine you saw
a field made up of women

all silver-white.

What should you do
but love them?

The storm bursts
or fades! it is not
the end of the world.

Love is something else,
or so I thought it,
a garden which expands,
though I knew you as a woman
and never thought otherwise,
until the whole sea
has been taken up
and all its gardens.

It was the love of love,
the love that swallows up all else,
a grateful love,
a love of nature, of people,
of animals,
a love engendering
gentleness and goodness
that moved me
and that I saw in you.

I should have known,
though I did not,
that the lily-of-the-valley
is a flower makes many ill
who whiff it.

We had our children,
rivals in the general onslaught.
I put them aside
though I cared for them.
as well as any man
could care for his children
according to my lights.

You understand
I had to meet you
after the event
and have still to meet you.

Love
to which you too shall bow
along with me-

a flower
 a weakest flower
shall be our trust
 and not because
 we are too feeble
to do otherwise
 but because
 at the height of my power
I risked what I had to do,
 therefore to prove
 that we love each other
while my very bones sweated
 that I could not cry to you
 in the act.
Of asphodel, that greeny flower,
 I come, my sweet,
 to sing to you!
My heart rouses
 thinking to bring you news
 of something
that concerns you
 and concerns many men. Look at
 what passes for the new.
You will not find it there but in
 despised poems.
 It is difficult
to get the news from poems
 yet men die miserably every day
 for lack
of what is found there.
 Hear me out
 for I too am concerned
and every man
 who wants to die at peace in his bed
 besides.

William Carlos Williams

Backward

A three-day-long rain from the east--
an terminable talking, talking
of no consequence--patter, patter, patter.
Hand in hand little winds
blow the thin streams aslant.
Warm. Distance cut off. Seclusion.
A few passers-by, drawn in upon themselves,
hurry from one place to another.
Winds of the white poppy! there is no escape!--
An interminable talking, talking,
talking . . .it has happened before.
Backward, backward, backward.

William Carlos Williams

Berket And The Stars

A day on the boulevards chosen out of ten years of
student poverty! One best day out of ten good ones.
Berket in high spirits--"Ha, oranges! Let's have one!"
And he made to snatch an orange from the vender's cart.

Now so clever was the deception, so nicely timed
to the full sweep of certain wave summits,
that the rumor of the thing has come down through
three generations--which is relatively forever!

William Carlos Williams

Between Walls

the back wings
of the

hospital where
nothing

will grow lie
cinders

In which shine
the broken

pieces of a green
bottle

William Carlos Williams

Blizzard

Snow falls:
years of anger following
hours that float idly down --
the blizzard
drifts its weight
deeper and deeper for three days
or sixty years, eh? Then
the sun! a clutter of
yellow and blue flakes --
Hairy looking trees stand out
in long alleys
over a wild solitude.
The man turns and there --
his solitary track stretched out
upon the world.

William Carlos Williams

Blueflags

I stopped the car
to let the children down
where the streets end
in the sun
at the marsh edge
and the reeds begin
and there are small houses
facing the reeds
and the blue mist in the distance
with grapevine trellises
with grape clusters
small as strawberries
on the vines
and ditches
running springwater
that continue the gutters
with willows over them.
The reeds begin
like water at a shore
their pointed petals waving
dark green and light.
But blueflags are blossoming
in the reeds
which the children pluck
chattering in the reeds
high over their heads
which they part
with bare arms to appear
with fists of flowers
till in the air
there comes the smell
of calmus
from wet, gummy stalks.

William Carlos Williams

Children's Games

I

This is a schoolyard
crowded
with children

of all ages near a village
on a small stream
meandering by

where some boys
are swimming
bare-ass

or climbing a tree in leaf
everything
is motion

elder women are looking
after the small
fry

a play wedding a
christening
nearby one leans

hollering
into
an empty hogshead

II

Little girls
whirling their skirts about
until they stand out flat

tops pinwheels
to run in the wind with
or a toy in 3 tiers to spin

with a piece
of twine to make it go
blindman's-buff follow the

leader stilts
high and low tipcat jacks
bowls hanging by the knees

standing on your head
run the gauntlet
a dozen on their backs

feet together kicking
through which a boy must pass
roll the hoop or a

construction
made of bricks
some mason has abandoned

III

The desperate toys
of children
their

imagination equilibrium
and rocks
which are to be

found
everywhere
and games to drag

the other down
blindfold
to make use of

a swinging
weight
with which

at random
to bash in the
heads about

them
Brueghel saw it all
and with his grim

humor faithfully
recorded
it.

William Carlos Williams

Classic Scene

A power-house
in the shape of
a red brick chair
90 feet high

on the seat of which
sit the figures
of two metal
stacks--aluminum--

commanding an area
of squalid shacks
side by side--
from one of which

buff smoke
streams while under
a grey sky
the other remains

passive today--

William Carlos Williams

Complaint

They call me and I go.
It is a frozen road
past midnight, a dust
of snow caught
in the rigid wheeltracks.
The door opens.
I smile, enter and
shake off the cold.
Here is a great woman
on her side in the bed.
She is sick,
perhaps vomiting,
perhaps laboring
to give birth to
a tenth child. Joy! Joy!
Night is a room
darkened for lovers,
through the jalousies the sun
has sent one golden needle!
I pick the hair from her eyes
and watch her misery
with compassion.

William Carlos Williams

Complete Destruction

It was an icy day.
We buried the cat,
then took her box
and set fire to it
in the back yard.
Those fleas that escaped
earth and fire
died by the cold.

William Carlos Williams

Daisy

The dayseye hugging the earth
in August, ha! Spring is
gone down in purple,
weeds stand high in the corn,
the rainbeaten furrow
is clotted with sorrel
and crabgrass, the
branch is black under
the heavy mass of the leaves--
The sun is upon a
slender green stem
ribbed lengthwise.
He lies on his back--
it is a woman also--
he regards his former
majesty and
round the yellow center,
split and creviced and done into
minute flowerheads, he sends out
his twenty rays-- a little
and the wind is among them
to grow cool there!

One turns the thing over
in his hand and looks
at it from the rear: brownedged,
green and pointed scales
armor his yellow.

But turn and turn,
the crisp petals remain
brief, translucent, greenfastened,
barely touching at the edges:
blades of limpid seashell.

William Carlos Williams

Danse Russe

If I when my wife is sleeping
and the baby and Kathleen
are sleeping
and the sun is a flame-white disc
in silken mists
above shining trees,—
if I in my north room
dance naked, grotesquely
before my mirror
waving my shirt round my head
and singing softly to myself:
'I am lonely, lonely.
I was born to be lonely,
I am best so! '
If I admire my arms, my face,
my shoulders, flanks, buttocks
against the yellow drawn shades,—

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

William Carlos Williams

Dawn

Ecstatic bird songs pound
the hollow vastness of the sky
with metallic clinkings--
beating color up into it
at a far edge,--beating it, beating it
with rising, triumphant ardor,--
stirring it into warmth,
quickenning in it a spreading change,--
bursting wildly against it as
dividing the horizon, a heavy sun
lifts himself--is lifted--
bit by bit above the edge
of things,--runs free at last
out into the open--!lumbering
glorified in full release upward--
songs cease.

William Carlos Williams

Dedication For A Plot Of Ground

This plot of ground
facing the waters of this inlet
is dedicated to the living presence of
Emily Dickinson Wellcome
who was born in England; married;
lost her husband and with
her five year old son
sailed for New York in a two-master;
was driven to the Azores;
ran adrift on Fire Island shoal,
met her second husband
in a Brooklyn boarding house,
went with him to Puerto Rico
bore three more children, lost
her second husband, lived hard
for eight years in St. Thomas,
Puerto Rico, San Domingo, followed
the oldest son to New York,
lost her daughter, lost her "baby,"
seized the two boys of
the oldest son by the second marriage
mothered them -- they being
motherless -- fought for them
against the other grandmother
and the aunts, brought them here
summer after summer, defended
herself here against thieves,
storms, sun, fire,
against flies, against girls
that came smelling about, against
drought, against weeds, storm-tides,
neighbors, weasels that stole her chickens,
against the weakness of her own hands,
against the growing strength of
the boys, against wind, against
the stones, against trespassers,
against rents, against her own mind.

She grubbed this earth with her own hands,

domineered over this grass plot,
blackguarded her oldest son
into buying it, lived here fifteen years,
attained a final loneliness and --

If you can bring nothing to this place
but your carcass, keep out.

William Carlos Williams

Election Day

Warm sun, quiet air
an old man sits

in the doorway of
a broken house--

boards for windows
plaster falling

from between the stones
and strokes the head

of a spotted dog

William Carlos Williams

Epitaph

An old willow with hollow branches
slowly swayed his few high gright tendrils
and sang:

Love is a young green willow
shimmering at the bare wood's edge.

William Carlos Williams

First Praise

Lady of dusk-wood fastnesses,
Thou art my Lady.

I have known the crisp, splintering leaf-tread with thee on before,
White, slender through green saplings;
I have lain by thee on the brown forest floor
Beside thee, my Lady.

Lady of rivers strewn with stones,
Only thou art my Lady.

Where thousand the freshets are crowded like peasants to a fair;
Clear-skinned, wild from seclusion
They jostle white-armed down the tent-bordered thoroughfare
Praising my Lady.

William Carlos Williams

Flowers By The Sea

When over the flowery, sharp pasture's
edge, unseen, the salt ocean

lifts its form-chicory and daisies
tied, released, seem hardly flowers alone

but color and the movement-or the shape
perhaps-of restlessness, whereas

the sea is circled and sways
peacefully upon its plantlike stem

William Carlos Williams

For Viola: De Gustibus

Beloved you are
Caviar of Caviar
Of all I love you best
O my Japanese bird nest
No herring from Norway
Can touch you for flavor. Nay
Pimento itself
is flat as an empty shelf
When compared to your piquancy
O quince of my despondency.

William Carlos Williams

From Book I, Paterson

Paterson lies in the valley under the Passaic Falls
its spent waters forming the outline of his back. He
lies on his right side, head near the thunder
of the waters filling his dreams! Eternally asleep,
his dreams walk about the city where he persists
incognito. Butterflies settle on his stone ear.
Immortal he neither moves nor rouses and is seldom
seen, though he breathes and the subtleties of his machinations
drawing their substance from the noise of the pouring river
animate a thousand automations. Who because they
neither know their sources nor the sills of their
disappointments walk outside their bodies aimlessly
 for the most part,
locked and forgot in their desires-unroused.

—Say it, no ideas but in things—
nothing but the blank faces of the houses
and cylindrical trees
bent, forked by preconception and accident—
split, furrowed, creased, mottled, stained—
secret—into the body of the light!

From above, higher than the spires, higher
even than the office towers, from oozy fields
abandoned to gray beds of dead grass,
black sumac, withered weed-stalks,
mud and thickets cluttered with dead leaves-
the river comes pouring in above the city
and crashes from the edge of the gorge
in a recoil of spray and rainbow mists-

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

A man like a city and a woman like a flower
—who are in love. Two women. Three women.
Innumerable women, each like a flower.

But
only one man—like a city.

William Carlos Williams

Great Mullen

One leaves his leaves at home
beomg a mullen and sends up a lighthouse
to peer from: I will have my way,
yellow--A mast with a lantern, ten
fifty, a hundred, smaller and smaller
as they grow more--Liar, liar, liar!
You come from her! I can smell djer-kiss
on your clothes. Ha! you come to me,
you, I am a point of dew on a grass-stem.
Why are you sending heat down on me
from your lantern?--You are coudung, a
dead stick with the bark off. She is
squirting on us both. She has has her
hand on you!--well?--She has defiled
ME.--Your leaves are dull, thick
and hairy.--Every hair on my body will
hold you off from me. You are a
dungcake, birdlime on a fencerail.--
I love you, straight, yellow
finger of God pointing to--her!
Liar, broken weed, dungcake, you have--
I am a cricket waving his antennae
and you are high, grey and straight. Ha!

William Carlos Williams

Gulls

My townspeople, beyond in 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 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.

First I say this: you have seen
the strange birds, have you not, that sometimes
rest upon our river in winter?
Let them cause you to think well then of the storms
that drive many to shelter. These things
do not happen without reason.

And the next thing I say is this:
I saw an eagle once circling against the clouds
over one of our principal churches—
Easter, it was—a beautiful day!
three gulls came from above the river
and crossed slowly seaward!
Oh, I know you have your own hymns, I have heard them—
and because I knew they invoked some great protector
I could not be angry with you, no matter
how much they outraged true music—

You see, it is not necessary for us to leap at each other,
and, as I told you, in the end
the gulls moved seaward very quietly.

William Carlos Williams

Haymaking

The living quality of
the man's mind
stands out

and its covert assertions
for art, art, art!
painting

that the Renaissance
tried to absorb
but

it remained a wheat field
over which the
wind played

men with scythes tumbling
the wheat in
rows

the gleaners already busy
it was his own---
magpies

the patient horses no one
could take that
from him

William Carlos Williams

Heel & Toe To The End

Gagarin says, in ecstasy,
he could have
gone on forever

he floated
at and sang
and when he emerged from that

one hundred eight minutes off
the surface of
the earth he was smiling.

Then he returned
to take his place
among the rest of us

from all that division and
subtraction a measure
to and heel

heel and toe he felt
as if he had
been dancing

William Carlos Williams

Hic Jacet

The coroner's merry little children
Have such twinkling brown eyes.
Their father is not of gay men
And their mother jocular in no wise,
Yet the coroner's merry little children
Laugh so easily.

They laugh because they prosper.
Fruit for them is upon all branches.
Lo! how they jibe at loss, for
Kind heaven fills their little paunches!
It's the coroner's merry, merry children
Who laugh so easily.

William Carlos Williams

Hunters In The Snow

The over-all picture is winter
icy mountains
in the background the return
from the hunt it is toward evening
from the left
sturdy hunters lead in
their pack the inn-sign
hanging from a
broken hinge is a stag a crucifix
between his antlers the cold
inn yard is
deserted but for a huge bonfire
that flares wind-driven tended by
women who cluster
about it to the right beyond
the hill is a pattern of skaters
Brueghel the painter
concerned with it all has chosen
a winter-struck bush for his
foreground to
complete the picture

William Carlos Williams

It Is a Small Plant

It is a small plant□
delicately branched and□
tapering conically□
to a point, each branch□
and the peak a wire for□
green pods, blind lanterns□
starting upward from□
the stalk each way to□
a pair of prickly edged blue□
flowerets: it is her regard,□
a little plant without leaves,□
a finished thing guarding□
its secret. Blue eyes—□
but there are twenty looks□
in one, alike as forty flowers□
on twenty stems—Blue eyes□
a little closed upon a wish□
achieved and half lost again,□
stemming back, garlanded□
with green sacks of□
satisfaction gone to seed,□
back to a straight stem—if□
one looks into you, trumpets—!□
No. It is the pale hollow of□
desire itself counting□
over and over the moneys of□
a stale achievement. Three□
small lavender imploring tips□
below and above them two□
slender colored arrows□
of disdain with anthers□
between them and□
at the edge of the goblet□
a white lip, to drink from—!□
And summer lifts her look□
forty times over, forty times□
over—namelessly.

January

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.

William Carlos Williams

January Morning

I

I have discovered that most of
the beauties of travel are due to
the strange hours we keep to see them:

the domes of the Church of
the Paulist Fathers in Weehawken
against a smoky dawn -- the heart stirred --
are beautiful as Saint Peters
approached after years of anticipation.

II

Though the operation was postponed
I saw the tall probationers
in their tan uniforms
hurrying to breakfast!

III

-- and from basement entries
neatly coiffed, middle aged gentlemen
with orderly moustaches and
well-brushed coats

IV

-- and the sun, dipping into the avenues
streaking the tops of
the irregular red houselets,
and
the gay shadows drooping and drooping.

V

-- and a young horse with a green bed-quilt
on his withers shaking his head:
bared teeth and nozzle high in the air!

VI

--and a semicircle of dirt-colored men
about a fire bursting from an old
ash can,

VII

-- and the worn,
blue car rails (like the sky!)
gleaming among the cobbles!

VIII

-- and the rickety ferry-boat "Arden"!
What an object to be called "Arden"
among the great piers, -- on the
ever new river!
"Put me a Touchstone
at the wheel, white gulls, and we'll
follow the ghost of the Half Moon
to the North West Passage -- and through!
(at Albany!) for all that!"

IX

Exquisite brown waves -- long
circlets of silver moving over you!
enough with crumbling ice crusts among you!
The sky has come down to you,
lighter than tiny bubbles, face to
face with you!
His spirit is
a white gull with delicate pink feet
and a snowy breast for you to
hold to your lips delicately!

X

The young doctor is dancing with happiness
in the sparkling wind, alone

at the prow of the ferry! He notices
the curdy barnacles and broken ice crusts
left at the slip's base by the low tide
and thinks of summer and green
shell-crustled ledges among
the emerald eel-grass!

XI

Who knows the Palisades as I do
knows the river breaks east from them
above the city -- but they continue south
-- under the sky -- to bear a crest of
little peering houses that brighten
with dawn behind the moody
water-loving giants of Manhattan.

XII

Long yellow rushes bending
above the white snow patches;
purple and gold ribbon
of the distant wood:
what an angle
you make with each other as
you lie there in contemplation.

XIII

Work hard all your young days
and they'll find you too, some morning
staring up under
your chiffonier at its warped
bass-wood bottom and your soul --
out!
-- among the little sparrows
behind the shutter.

XIV

-- and the flapping flags are at
half-mast for the dead admiral.

XV

All this --
was for you, old woman.
I wanted to write a poem
that you would understand.
For what good is it to me
if you can't understand it?
But you got to try hard --
But --
Well, you know how
the young girls run giggling
on Park Avenue after dark
when they ought to be home in bed?
Well,
that's the way it is with me somehow.

William Carlos Williams

Kora In Hell: Improvisations I

1

Fools have big wombs. For the rest?—here is pennyroyal if one knows to use it. But time is only another liar, so go along the wall a little further: if blackberries prove bitter there'll be mushrooms, fairy- ring mushrooms, in the grass, sweetest of all fungi.

2

For what it's worth: Jacob Louslinger, white haired, stinking, dirty bearded, cross eyed, stammer tongued, broken voiced, bent backed, ball kneed, cave bellied, mucous faced—deathling,—found lying in the weeds "up there by the cemetery." "Looks to me as if he d been bumming around the meadows for a couple of weeks." Shoes twisted into incredible lilies: out at the toes, heels, tops, sides, soles. Meadow flower! ha, mallow! at last I have you. (Rot dead marigolds—an acre at a time! Gold, are you?) Ha, clouds will touch world's edge and the great pink mallow stand singly in the wet, topping reeds and a closet full of clothes and good shoes and my-thirty-year's-master's-daughter's two cows for me to care for and a winter room with a fire in it—. I would rather feed pigs in Moonachie and chew calamus root and break crab's claws at an open fire: age's lust loose!

3

Talk as you will, say: "No woman wants to bother with children in this country";—speak of your Amsterdam and the whitest aprons and brightest doorknobs in Christendom. And I'll answer you: "Gleaming doorknobs and scrubbed entries have heard the songs of the housemaids at sun-up and—housemaids are wishes. Whose? Ha! the dark canals are whistling, whistling for who will cross to the other side. If I remain with hands in pocket leaning upon my lamppost—why—I bring curses to a hag's lips and her daughter on her arm knows better than I can tell you—best to blush and out with it than back beaten after.

—————

In Holland at daybreak, of a fine spring morning, one sees the housemaids beating rugs before the small houses of such a city as Amsterdam, sweeping, scrubbing the low entry steps and polishing doorbells and doorknobs. By night perhaps there will be an old woman with a girl on her arm, histing and whistling across a deserted canal to some late loiterer trudging aimlessly on beneath the gas lamps.

William Carlos Williams

Kora In Hell: Improvisations II

1

Why go further? One might conceivably rectify the rhythm, study all out and arrive at the perfection of a tiger lily or a china doorknob. One might lift all out of the ruck, be a worthy successor to the man in the moon. Instead of breaking the back of a willing phrase why not try to follow the wheel through—approach death at a walk, take in all the scenery. There's as much reason one way as the other and then—one never knows—perhaps we'll bring back Euridice—this time!

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. And so it may be that once upon the way the end drives back upon the beginning and a stoppage will occur. At such a time the poet shrinks from the doom that is calling him forgetting the delicate rhythms of perfect beauty, preferring in his mind the gross buffetings of good and evil fortune.

2

Ay dio! I could say so much were it not for the tunes changing, changing, darting so many ways. One step and the cart's left you sprawling. Here's the way!—and you're hip bogged. And there's blame of the light too: when eyes are hummingbirds who'll tie them with a lead string? But it's the tunes they want most,—send them skipping out at the tree tops. Whistle then! who'd stop the leaves swarming; curving down the east in their braided jackets? Well enough—but there's small comfort in naked branches when the heart's not set that way.

A man's desire is to win his way to some hilltop. But against him seem to swarm a hundred jumping devils. These are his constant companions, these are

the friendly images which he has invented out of his mind and which are inviting him to rest and to disport himself according to hidden reasons. The man being half a poet is cast down and longs to rid himself of his torment and his tormentors.

3

When you hang your clothes on the line you do not expect to see the line broken and them trailing in the mud. Nor would you expect to keep your hands clean by putting them in a dirty pocket. However and of course if you are a market man, fish, cheeses and the like going under your fingers every minute in the hour you would not leave off the business and expect to handle a basket of fine laces without at least mopping yourself on a towel, soiled as it may be. Then how will you expect a fine trickle of words to follow you through the intimacies of this dance without—oh, come let us walk together into the air awhile first. One must be watchman to much secret arrogance before his ways are tuned to these measures. You see there is a dip of the ground between us. You think you can leap up from your gross caresses of these creatures and at a gesture fling it all off and step out in silver to my finger tips. Ah, it is not that I do not wait for you, always! But my sweet fellow—you have broken yourself without purpose, you are—Hark! it is the music! Whence does it come? What! Out of the ground? Is it this that you have been preparing for me? Ha, goodbye, I have a rendez vous in the tips of three birch sisters. Encouragé vos musicians! Ask them to play faster. I will return—later. Ah you are kind. —and I? must dance with the wind, make my own snow flakes, whistle a contrapuntal melody to my own fugue! Huzza then, this is the dance of the blue moss bank! Huzza then, this is the mazurka of the hollow log! Huzza then, this is the dance of rain in the cold trees.

William Carlos Williams

Kora In Hell: Improvisations Vii

1

It is still warm enough to slip from the weeds into the lake's edge, your clothes blushing in the grass and three small boys grinning behind the derelict hearth's side. But summer is up among the huckleberries near the path's end and snakes eggs lie curling in the sun on the lonely summit. But—well—let's wish it were higher after all these years staring at it deplore the paunched clouds glimpse the sky's thin counter-crest and plunge into the gulch. Sticky cobwebs tell of feverish midnights. Crack a rock (what's a thousand years!) and send it crashing among the oaks! Wind a pine tree in a grey-worm's net and play it for a trout; oh—but it's the moon does that! No, summer has gone down the other side of the mountain. Carry home what we can. What have you brought off? Ah here are thimbleberries.

In middle life the mind passes to a variegated October. This is the time youth in its faulty aspirations has set for the achievement of great summits. But having attained the mountain top one is not snatched into a cloud but the descent proffers its blandishments quite as a matter of course. At this the fellow is cast into a great confusion and rather plaintively looks about to see if any has fared better than he.

2

The little Polish Father of Kingsland does not understand, he cannot understand. These are exquisite differences never to be resolved. He comes at midnight through mid-winter slush to baptise a dying newborn; he smiles suavely and shrugs his shoulders: a clear middle A touched by a master—but he cannot understand. And Benny, Sharon, Henrietta, and Josephine, what is it to them? Yet jointly they come more into the way of the music. And white haired Miss Ball! The empty school is humming to her little melody played with one finger at the noon hour but it is beyond them all. There is much heavy breathing, many tight shut lips, a smothered laugh whiles, two laughs cracking together, three together sometimes and then a burst of wind lifting the dust again.

Living with and upon and among the poor, those that gather in a few rooms, sometimes very clean, sometimes full of vermine, there are certain pestilential individuals, priests, school teachers, doctors, commercial agents of one sort or another who though they themselves are full of graceful perfections nevertheless contrive to be so complacent of their lot, floating as they are with the depth of a sea beneath them, as to be worthy only of amused contempt. Yet even to these sometimes there rises that which they think in their ignorance is a confused babble of aspiring voices not knowing what ancient harmonies these are to which they are so faultily listening.

3

What I like best's the long unbroken line of the hills there. Yes, it's a good view. Come, let's visit the orchard. Here's peaches twenty years on the branch. Not ripe yet!? Why—! Those hills! Those hills! But you'd be young again! Well, fourteen's a hard year for boy or girl, let alone one older driving the pricks in, but though there's more in a song than the notes of it and a smile's a pretty baby when you've none other—let's not turn backward. Mumble the words, you understand, call them four brothers, strain to catch the sense but have to admit it's in a language they've not taught you, a flaw somewhere,—and for answer: well, that long unbroken line of the hills there.

Two people, an old man and a woman in early middle life, are talking together upon a small farm at which the woman has just arrived on a visit. They have walked to an orchard on the slope of a hill from which a distant range of mountains can be clearly made out. A third man, piecing together certain knowledge he has of the woman with what is being said before him is prompted to give rein to his imagination. This he does and hears many oblique sentences which escape the others.

Coda

Squalor and filth with a sweet cur nestling in the grimy blankets of your bed and on better roads striplings dreaming of wealth and happiness. Country life in

America! The cackling grackle that dartled at the hill's bottom have joined their flock and swing with the rest over a broken roof toward Dixie.

William Carlos Williams

Kora In Hell: Improvisations Xii

1

The browned trees are singing for my thirty-fourth birthday. Leaves are beginning to fall upon the long grass. Their cold perfume raises the anticipation of sensational revolutions in my unsettled life. Violence has begotten peace, peace has fluttered away in agitation. A bewildered change has turned among the roots and the Prince's kiss as far at sea as ever.

To each age as to each person its perfections. But in these things there is a kind of revolutionary sequence. So that a man having lain at ease here and advanced there as time progresses the order of these things becomes inverted. Thinking to have brought all to one level the man finds his foot striking through where he had thought rock to be and stands firm where he had experienced only a bog hitherto. At a loss to free himself from bewilderment at this discovery he puts off the caress of the imagination.

2

The trick is never to touch the world anywhere. Leave yourself at the door, walk in, admire the pictures, talk a few words with the master of the house, question his wife a little, rejoin yourself at the door—and go off arm in arm listening to last week's symphony played by angel hornsmen from the benches of a turned cloud. Or if dogs rub too close and the poor are too much out let your friend answer them.

The poet being sad at the misery he has beheld that morning and seeing several laughing fellows approaching puts himself in their way in order to hear what they are saying. Gathering from their remarks that it is of some sharp business by which they have all made an inordinate profit, he allows his thoughts to play back upon the current of his own life. And imagining himself to be two persons he eases his mind by putting his burdens upon one while the other takes

what pleasure there is before him.

Something to grow used to; a stone too big for ox haul, too near for blasting. Take the road round it or—scrape away, scrape away: a mountain??s buried in the dirt! Marry a gopher to help you! Drive her in! Go yourself down along the lit pastures. Down, down. The whole family take shovels, babies and all! Down, down! Here's Tenochtitlan! here's a strange Darien where worms are princes.

3

But for broken feet beating, beating on worn flagstones I would have danced to my knees at the fiddle's first run. But here's evening and there they scamper back of the world chasing the sun round! And it's daybreak in Calcutta! So lay aside, let's draw off from the town and look back awhile. See, there it rises out of the swamp and the mists already blowing their sleepy bagpipes.

Often a poem will have merit because of some one line or even one meritorious word. So it hangs heavily on its stem but still secure, the tree unwilling to release it.

William Carlos Williams

Kora In Hell: Improvisations Xvii

1

Little round moon up there—wait awhile—do not walk so quickly. I could sing you a song—: Wine clear the sky is and the stars no bigger than sparks! Wait for me and next winter we'll build a fire and shake up twists of sparks out of it and you shall see yourself in the ashes, young—as you were one time.

It has always been the fashion to talk about the moon.

2

This that I have struggled against is the very thing I should have chosen—but all's right now. They said I could not put the flower back into the stem nor win roses upon dead briars and I like a fool believed them. But all's right now. Weave away, dead fingers, the darkies are dancing in Mayaguez—all but one with the sore heel and sugar cane will soon be high enough to romp through. Haia! leading over the ditches, with your skirts flying and the devil in the wind back of you—no one else. Weave away and the bitter tongue of an old woman is eating, eating, eating venomous words with thirty years mould on them and all shall be eaten back to honeymoon's end. Weave and pangs of agony and pangs of loneliness are beaten backward into the love kiss, weave and kiss recedes into kiss and kisses into looks and looks into the heart's dark—and over again and over again and time's pushed ahead in spite of all that. The petals that fell bearing me under are lifted one by one. That which kissed my flesh for priest's lace so that I could not touch it—weave and you have lifted it and I am glimpsing light chinks among the notes ! Backward, and my hair is crisp with purple sap and the last crust's broken.

A woman on the verge of growing old kindles in the mind of her son a certain curiosity which spinning upon itself catches the woman herself in its wheel, stripping from her the accumulations of many harsh years and shows her at last

full of an old time suppleness hardly to have been guessed by the stiffened exterior which had held her fast till that time.

3

Once again the moon in a glassy twilight. The gas jet in the third floor window is turned low, they have not drawn the shade, sends down a flat glare upon the lounge's cotton-Persian cover where the time passes with clumsy caresses. Never in this milieu has one stirred himself to turn up the light. It is costly to leave a jet burning at all. Feel your way to the bed. Drop your clothes on the floor and creep in. Flesh becomes so accustomed to the touch she will not even waken. And so hours pass and not a move. The room too falls asleep and the street outside falls mumbling into a heap of black rags morning's at seven—

—————

Seeing a light in an upper window the poet by means of the power he has enters the room and of what he sees there brews himself a sleep potion.

William Carlos Williams

Kora In Hell: Improvisations Xxvii

1

This particular thing, whether it be four pinches of four divers white powders cleverly compounded to cure surely, safely, pleasantly a painful twitching of the eyelids or say a pencil sharpened at one end, dwarfs the imagination, makes logic a butterfly, offers a finality that sends us spinning through space, a fixity the mind could climb forever, a revolving mountain, a complexity with a surface of glass; the gist of poetry. D.C. al fin.

2

There is no thing that with a twist of the imagination cannot be something else. Porpoises risen in a green sea, the wind at nightfall bending the rose-red grasses and you—in your apron running to catch—say it seems to you to be your son. How ridiculous! You will pass up into a cloud and look back at me, not count the scribbling foolish that puts wings to your heels, at your knees.

3

Sooner or later as with the leaves forgotten the swinging branch long since and summer: they scurry before a wind on the frost-baked ground—have no place to rest—somehow invoke a burst of warm days not of the past nothing decayed: crisp summer! —neither a copse for resurrected frost eaters but a summer removed undestroyed a summer of dried leaves scurrying with a screech, to and fro in the half dark—twittering, chattering, scraping. Hagh!

Seeing the leaves dropping from the high and low branches the thought rise: this day of all others is the one chosen, all other days fall away from it on either side and only itself remains in perfect fullness. It is its own summer, of its leaves as they scrape on the smooth ground it must build its perfection. The gross summer of the year is only a halting counterpart of those fiery days of secret triumph which in reality themselves paint the year as if upon a parchment, giving each season a mockery of the warmth or frozenness which is within ourselves. The true seasons blossom or wilt not in fixed order but so that many of them may pass in a few weeks or hours whereas sometimes a whole life passes and the season remains of a piece from one end to the other.?

William Carlos Williams

Landscape With The Fall Of Icarus

According to Brueghel
when Icarus fell
it was spring

a farmer was ploughing
his field
the whole pageantry

of the year was
awake tingling
near

the edge of the sea
concerned
with itself

sweating in the sun
that melted
the wings' wax

unsignificantly
off the coast
there was

a splash quite unnoticed
this was
Icarus drowning

William Carlos Williams

Libertad! Igualdad! Fraternidad!

You sullen pig of a man
you force me into the mud
with your stinking ash-cart!

Brother!
-if we were rich
we'd stick our chests out
and hold our heads high!

It is dreams that have destroyed us.

There is no more pride
in horses or in rein holding.
We sit hunched together brooding
our fate.

Well-
all things turn bitter in the end
whether you choose the right or
the left way
and-
dreams are not a bad thing.

William Carlos Williams

Light Hearted Author

The birches are mad with green points
the wood's edge is burning with their green,
burning, seething--No, no, no.
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.
Black is split at once into flowers. In
every bog and ditch, flares of
small fire, white flowers!--Agh,
the birches are mad, mad with their green.
The world is gone, torn into shreds
with this blessing. What have I left undone
that I should have undertaken?

O my brother, you redfaced, living man
ignorant, stupid whose feet are upon
this same dirt that I touch--and eat.
We are alone in this terror, alone,
face to face on this road, you and I,
wrapped by this flame!
Let the polished plows stay idle,
their gloss already on the black soil.
But that face of yours--!
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.
Take me in your arms, tell me the commonest
thing that is in your mind to say,
say anything. I will understand you--!
It is the madness of the birch leaves opening
cold, one by one.

My rooms will receive me. But my rooms
are no longer sweet spaces where comfort
is ready to wait on me with its crumbs.
A darkness has brushed them. The mass
of yellow tulips in the bowl is shrunken.

Every familiar object is changed and dwarfed.
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.

In the spring I would be drunk! In the spring
I would be drunk and lie forgetting all things.
Your face! Give me your face, Yang Kue Fei!
your hands, your lips to drink!
Give me your wrists to drink--
I drag you, I am drowned in you, you
overwhelm me! Drink!
Save me! The shad bush is in the edge
of the clearing. The yards in a fury
of lilac blossoms are driving me mad with terror.
Drink and lie forgetting the world.

And coldly the birch leaves are opening one by one.
Coldly I observe them and wait for the end.
And it ends.

William Carlos Williams

Light Hearted William

Light hearted William twirled
his November moustaches
and, half dressed, looked
from the bedroom window
upon the spring weather.

Heigh-ya! sighed he gaily
leaning out to see
up and down the street
where a heavy sunlight
lay beyond some blue shadows.

Into the room he drew
his head again and laughed
to himself quietly
twirling his green moustaches.

William Carlos Williams

Lines

Leaves are graygreen,
the glass broken, bright green.

William Carlos Williams

Love

Love is twain, it is not single,
Gold and silver mixed to one,
Passion `tis and pain which mingle
Glist'ring then for aye undone.

Pain it is not; wondering pity
Dies or e'er the pang is fled;
Passion `tis not, foul and gritty,
Born one instant, instant dead.

Love is twain, it is not single,
Gold and silver mixed to one,
Passion `tis and pain which mingle
Glist'ring then for aye undone.

William Carlos Williams

Love Song

I lie here thinking of you:---

the stain of love
is upon the world!
Yellow, yellow, yellow
it eats into the leaves,
smears with saffron
the horned branched the lean
heavily
against a smooth purple sky!
There is no light
only a honey-thick stain
that drips from leaf to leaf
and limb to limb
spoilng the colors
of the whole world-

you far off there under
the wine-red selvage of the west!

William Carlos Williams

March

I

Winter is long in this climate
and spring--a matter of a few days
only,--a flower or two picked
from mud or from among wet leaves
or at best against treacherous
bitterness of wind, and sky shining
teasingly, then closing in black
and sudden, with fierce jaws.

II

March,
you reminded me of
the pyramids, our pyramids--
stript of the polished stone
that used to guard them!
March,
you are like Fra Angelico
at Fiesole, painting on plaster!

March,
you are like a band of
young poets that have not learned
the blessedness of warmth
(or have forgotten it).
At any rate--
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.

III

See!
Ashur-ban-i-pal,
the archer king, on horse-back,

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

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

Now--
they are coming into bloom again!
See them!
marching still, bared by
the storms from my calender
--winds that blow back the sand!
winds that enfilade dirt!
winds that by strange craft
have whipt up a black army
that by pick and shovel
bare a procession to
the god, Marduk!

Natives cursing and digging
for pay unearth dragons with
upright tails and sacred bulls
alternately--
in four tiers--
lining the way to an old altar!
Natives digging at old walls--
digging me warmth--digging me sweet loneliness
high enamelled walls.

IV

My second spring--

passed in a monastery
with plaster walls--in Fiesole
on the hill above 'Florence.
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 colored wings
half kneeling before her--
and smiling--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.

V

But! now for the battle!
Now for murder--now for the real thing!
My third springtime is approaching!
Winds!
lean, serious as a virgin,
seeking, seeking the flowers of March.

Seeking
flowers nowhere to be found,
they twine among the bare branches
in insatiable eagerness--
they whirl up the snow
seeking under it--
they--the winds--snakelike
roar among yellow reeds
seeking flowers--flowers.

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

I deride with all the ridicule

of misery--
my own starved misery.

Counter-cutting winds
strike against me
refreshing their fury!

Come, good, cold fellows!
Have we no flowers?
Defy then with even more
desperation than ever--being
lean and frozen!

But though you are lean and frozen--
think of the blue bulls of Babylon.

Fling yourselves upon
their empty roses--
cut savagely!

But--
think of the painted monastery
at Fiesole.

William Carlos Williams

Memory Of April

You say love is this, love is that:
Poplar tassels, willow tendrils
the wind and the rain comb,
tinkle and drip, tinkle and drip--
branches drifting apart. Hagh!
Love has not even visited this country.

William Carlos Williams

Metric Figure

There is a bird in the poplars!
It is the sun!
The leaves are little yellow fish
swimming in the river.
The bird skims above them,
day is on his wings.
Phoebus!
It is he that is making
the great gleam among the poplars!
It is his singing
outshines the noise
of leaves clashing in the wind.

William Carlos Williams

Muier

Oh, black Persian cat!
Was not your life
already cursed with offspring?
We took you for rest to that old
Yankee farm, — so lonely
and with so many field mice
in the long grass —
and you return to us
in this condition —!

Oh, black Persian cat.

William Carlos Williams

Nantucket

Flowers through the window
lavender and yellow

changed by white curtains –
Smell of cleanliness –

Sunshine of late afternoon –
On the glass tray

a glass pitcher, the tumbler
turned down, by which

a key is lying – And the
immaculate white bed

William Carlos Williams

On A Proposed Trip South

They tell me on the morrow I must leave
This winter eyrie for a southern flight
And truth to tell I tremble with delight
At thought of such unheralded reprieve.

E'er have I known December in a weave
Of blanched crystal, when, thrice one short night
Packed full with magic, and O blissful sight!
N'er May so warmly doth for April grieve.

To in a breath's space wish the winter through
And lo, to see it fading! Where, oh, where
Is caract could endow this princely boon?

Yet I have found it and shall shortly view
The lush high grasses, shortly see in air
Gay birds and hear the bees make heavy droon.

William Carlos Williams

On Gay Wallpaper

The green-blue ground
is ruled with silver lines
to say the sun is shining

And on this moral sea
of grass or dreams lie flowers
or baskets of desires

Heaven knows what they are
between cerulean shapes
laid regularly round

Mat roses and tridentate
leaves of gold
threes, threes and threes

Three roses and three stems
the basket floating
standing in the horns of blue

Repeating to the ceiling
to the windows
where the day

Blows in
the scalloped curtains to
the sound of rain

William Carlos Williams

Overture To A Dance Of Locomotives

Men with picked voices chant the names
of cities in a huge gallery: promises
that pull through descending stairways
to a deep rumbling.

The rubbing feet
of those coming to be carried quicken a
grey pavement into soft light that rocks
to and fro, under the domed ceiling,
across and across from pale
earthcolored walls of bare limestone.

Covertly the hands of a great clock
go round and round! Were they to
move quickly and at once the whole
secret would be out and the shuffling
of all ants be done forever.

A leaning pyramid of sunlight, narrowing
out at a high window, moves by the clock:
disaccordant hands straining out from
a center: inevitable postures infinitely
repeated--
two--twofour--twoeight!
Porters in red hats run on narrow platforms.
This way ma'am!
--important not to take
the wrong train!
Lights from the concrete
ceiling hang crooked but--
Poised horizontal
on glittering parallels the dingy cylinders
packed with a warm glow--inviting entry--
pull against the hour. But brakes can
hold a fixed posture till--
The whistle!

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.
The dance is sure.

William Carlos Williams

Pastoral

The little sparrows
hop ingenuously
about the pavement
quarreling
with sharp voices
over those things
that interest them.
But we who are wiser
shut ourselves in
on either hand
and no one knows
whether we think good
or evil.

Meanwhile,
the old man who goes about
gathering dog-lime
walks in the gutter
without looking up
and his tread
is more majestic than
that of the Episcopal minister
approaching the pulpit
of a Sunday.
These things
astonish me beyond words.

William Carlos Williams

Peace On Earth

The Archer is wake!
The Swan is flying!
Gold against blue
An Arrow is lying.
There is hunting in heaven--
Sleep safe till tomorrow.

The Bears are abroad!
The Eagle is screaming!
Gold against blue
Their eyes are gleaming!
Sleep!
Sleep safe till tomorrow.

The Sisters lie
With their arms intertwining;
Gold against blue
Their hair is shining!
The Serpent writhes!
Orion is listening!
Gold against blue
His sword is glistening!
Sleep!
There is hunting in heaven--
Sleep safe till tomorrow.

William Carlos Williams

Peasant Wedding

Pour the wine bridegroom
where before you the
bride is enthroned her hair

loose at her temples a head
of ripe wheat is on
the wall beside her the

guests seated at long tables
the bagpipers are ready
there is a hound under

the table the bearded Mayor
is present women in their
starched headgear are

gabbing all but the bride
hands folded in her
lap is awkwardly silent simple

dishes are being served
clabber and what not
from a trestle made of an

unhinged barn door by two
helpers one in a red
coat a spoon in his hatband.

William Carlos Williams

Play

Subtle, clever brain, wiser than I am,
by what devious means do you contrive
to remain idle? Teach me, O master.

William Carlos Williams

Poem (As The Cat)

As the cat
climbed over
the top of

the jamcloset
first the right
forefoot

carefully
then the hind
stepped down

into the pit of
the empty
flowerpot

Anonymous submission.

William Carlos Williams

Portrait Of A Lady

Your thighs are appletrees
whose blossoms touch the sky.
Which sky? The sky
where Watteau hung a lady's
slipper. Your knees
are a southern breeze -- or
a gust of snow. Agh! what
sort of man was Fragonard?
-- As if that answered
anything. -- Ah, yes. Below
the knees, since the tune
drops that way, it is
one of those white summer days,
the tall grass of your ankles
flickers upon the shore --
Which shore? --
the sand clings to my lips --
Which shore?
Agh, petals maybe. How
should I know?
Which shore? Which shore?
-- the petals from some hidden
appletree -- Which shore?
I said petals from an appletree.

William Carlos Williams

Postlude

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.

Your hair is my Carthage
And my arms the bow,
And our words arrows
To shoot the stars
Who from that misty sea
Swarm to destroy us.

But you there beside me—
Oh, how shall I defy you,
Who wound me in the night
With breasts shining
Like Venus and like Mars?
The night that is shouting Jason
When the loud eaves rattle
As with waves above me
Blue at the prow of my desire.

William Carlos Williams

Primrose

Yellow, yellow, yellow, yellow!
It is not a color.
It is summer!
It is the wind on a willow,
the lap of waves, the shadow
under a bush, a bird, a bluebird,
three herons, a dead hawk
rotting on a pole--
Clear yellow!
It is a piece of blue paper
in the grass or a threecluster of
green walnuts swaying, children
playing croquet or one boy
fishing, a man
swinging his pink fists
as he walks--
It is ladythumb, forget-me-nots
in the ditch, moss under
the flange of the carrail, the
wavy lines in split rock, a
great oaktree--
It is a disinclination to be
five red petals or a rose, it is
a cluster of birdsbreast flowers
on a red stem six feet high,
four open yellow petals
above sepals curled
backward into reverse spikes--
Tufts of purple grass spot the
green meadow and clouds the sky.

William Carlos Williams

Proletarian Poet

A big young bareheaded woman
in an apron

Her hair slicked back standing
on the street

One stockinged foot toeing
the sidewalk

Her shoe in her hand. Looking
intently into it

She pulls out the paper insole
to find the nail

That has been hurting her

William Carlos Williams

Queen Anne's Lace

Her body is not so white as
anemone petals nor so smooth--nor
so remote a thing. It is a field
of the wild carrot taking
the field by force; the grass
does not raise above it.
Here is no question of whiteness,
white as can be, with a purple mole
at the center of each flower.
Each flower is a hand's span
of her whiteness. Wherever
his hand has lain there is
a tiny purple blossom under his touch
to which the fibres of her being
stem one by one, each to its end,
until the whole field is a
white desire, empty, a single stem,
a cluster, flower by flower,
a pious wish to whiteness gone over--
or nothing.

William Carlos Williams

Romance Moderne

Tracks of rain and light linger in
the spongy greens of a nature whose
flickering mountain--bulging nearer,
ebbing back into the sun
hollowing itself away to hold a lake,--
or brown stream rising and falling at the roadside, turning about,
churning itself white, drawing
green in over it,--plunging glassy funnels
fall--

And--the other world--
the windshield a blunt barrier:
Talk to me. Sh! they would hear us.
--the backs of their heads facing us--
The stream continues its motion of
a hound running over rough ground.

Trees vanish--reappear--vanish:
detached dance of gnomes--as a talk
dodging remarks, glows and fades.
--The unseen power of words--
And now that a few of the moves
are clear the first desire is
to fling oneself out at the side into
the other dance, to other music.

Peer Gynt. Rip Van Winkle. Diana.
If I were young I would try a new alignment--
alight nimbly from the car, Good-bye!--
Childhood companions linked two and two
criss-cross: four, three, two, one.
Back into self, tentacles withdrawn.
Feel about in warm self-flesh.
Since childhood, since childhood!
Childhood is a toad in the garden, a
happy toad. All toads are happy
and belong in gardens. A toad to Diana!

Lean forward. Punch the steerman

behind the ear. Twirl the wheel!
Over the edge! Screams! Crash!
The end. I sit above my head--
a little removed--or
a thin wash of rain on the roadway
--I am never afraid when he is driving,--
interposes new direction,
rides us sidewise, unforseen
into the ditch! All threads cut!
Death! Black. The end. The very end--

I would sit separate weighing a
small red handful: the dirt of these parts,
sliding mists sheeting the alders
against the touch of fingers creeping
to mine. All stuff of the blind emotions.
But--stirred, the eye seizes
for the first time--The eye awake!--
anything, a dirt bank with green stars
of scrawny weed flattened upon it under
a weight of air--For the first time!--
or a yawning depth: Big!
Swim around in it, through it--
all directions and find
vitreous seawater stuff--
God how I love you!--or, as I say,
a plunge into the ditch. The End. I sit
examining my red handful. Balancing
--this--in and out--agh.

Love you? It's
a fire in the blood, willy-nilly!
It's the sun coming up in the morning.
Ha, but it's the grey moon too, already up
in the morning. You are slow.
Men are not friends where it concerns
a woman? Fighters. Playfellows.
White round thighs! Youth! Sighs--!
It's the fillip of novelty. It's--

Mountains. Elephants humping along
against the sky--indifferent to

light withdrawing its tattered shreds,
worn out with embraces. It's
the fillip of novelty. It's a fire in the blood.

Oh get a flannel shirt, white flannel
or pongee. You'd look so well!
I married you because I liked your nose.
I wanted you! I wanted you
in spite of all they'd say--

Rain and light, mountain and rain,
rain and river. Will you love me always?
--A car overturned and two crushed bodies
under it.--Always! Always!
And the white moon already up.
White. Clean. All the colors.
A good head, backed by the eye--awake!
backed by the emotions--blind--
River and mountain, light and rain--or
rain, rock, light, trees--divided:
rain-light counter rocks-trees or
trees counter rain-light-rocks or--

Myriads of counter processions
crossing and recrossing, regaining
the advantage, buying here, selling there
--You are sold cheap everywhere in town!--
lingering, touching fingers, withdrawing
gathering forces into blares, hummocks,
peaks and rivers--rivers meeting rock
--I wish that you were lying there dead
and I sitting here beside you.--
It's the grey moon--over and over.
It's the clay of these parts.

William Carlos Williams

Sicilian Emigrant's Song

O—eh—lee! La—la!
Donna! Donna!
Blue is the sky of Palermo;
Blue is the little bay;
And dost thou remember the orange and fig,
The lively sun and the sea breeze at evening?
Hey—la!
Donna! Donna! Maria!

O—eh—li! La—la!
Donna! Donna!
Gray is the sky of this land.
Gray and green is the water.
I see no trees, dost thou? The wind
Is cold for the big woman there with the candle.
Hey—la!
Donna! Donna! Maria!

O—eh—li! O—la!
Donna! Donna!
I sang thee by the blue waters;
I sing thee here in the gray dawning.
Kiss, for I put down my guitar;
I'll sing thee more songs after the landing.
O Jesu, I love thee!
Donna! Donna! Maria!

William Carlos Williams

Slow Movement

All those treasures that lie in the little bolted box whose tiny space is
Mightier than the room of the stars, being secret and filled with dreams:
All those treasures—I hold them in my hand—are straining continually
Against the sides and the lid and the two ends of the little box in which I guard
them;
Crying that there is no sun come among them this great while and that they
weary of shining;
Calling me to fold back the lid of the little box and to give them sleep finally.

But the night I am hiding from them, dear friend, is far more desperate than
their night!
And so I take pity on them and pretend to have lost the key to the little house of
my treasures;
For they would die of weariness were I to open it, and not be merely faint and
sleepy
As they are now.

William Carlos Williams

Smell

Oh strong-ridged and deeply hollowed
nose of mine! what will you not be smelling?
What tactless asses we are, you and I, boney nose,
always indiscriminate, always unashamed,
and now it is the souring flowers of the bedreggled
poplars: a festering pulp on the wet earth
beneath them. With what deep thirst
we quicken our desires
to that rank odor of a passing springtime!
Can you not be decent? Can you not reserve your ardors
for something less unlovely? What girl will care
for us, do you think, if we continue in these ways?
Must you taste everything? Must you know everything?
Must you have a part in everything?

William Carlos Williams

Sonnet In Search Of An Author

Nude bodies like peeled logs
sometimes give off a sweetest
odor, man and woman

under the trees in full excess
matching the cushion of

aromatic pine-drift fallen
threaded with trailing woodbine
a sonnet might be made of it

Might be made of it! odor of excess
odor of pine needles, odor of
peeled logs, odor of no odor
other than trailing woodbine that

has no odor, odor of a nude woman
sometimes, odor of a man.

William Carlos Williams

Spring And All

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

patches of standing water
the scattering of tall trees

All along the road the reddish
purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy
stuff of bushes and small trees
with dead, brown leaves under them
leafless vines --

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
dazed spring approaches --

They enter the new world naked,
cold, uncertain of all
save that they enter. All about them
the cold, familiar wind --

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

William Carlos Williams

Sub Terra

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.

Where are you this day—
You, my seven-year locusts
With cased wings?
Ah, my beauties, how I long!
That harvest
That shall be your advent—
Thrusting up through the grass,
Up under the weeds,
Answering me—
That shall be satisfying!
The light shall leap and snap
That day as with a million lashes!

Oh, I have you!
Yes, you are about me in a sense,
Playing under the blue pools
That are my windows.
But they shut you out still
There in the half light—
For the simple truth is
That though I see you clear enough ...
You are not there.

It is not that—it is you,
You I want, my companions!
God! if I could only fathom
The guts of shadows!—
You to come with me
Poking into negro houses
With their gloom and smell!

In among children
Leaping around a dead dog!
Mimicking
Onto the lawns of the rich!
You!
To go with me a-tip-toe
Head down under heaven,
Nostrils lipping the wind!

William Carlos Williams

Sympathetic Portrait Of A Child

The murderer's little daughter
who is barely ten years old
jerks her shoulders
right and left
so as to catch a glimpse of me
without turning round.
Her skinny little arms
wrap themselves
this way then that
reversely about her body!
Nervously
she crushes her straw hat
about her eyes
and tilts her head
to deepen the shadow—
smiling excitedly!

As best as 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—

Why has she chosen me
for the knife
that darts along her smile?

William Carlos Williams

The Adoration Of The Kings

From the Nativity
which I have already celebrated
the Babe in its Mother's arms

the Wise Men in their stolen
splendor
and Joseph and the soldiery

attendant
with their incredulous faces
make a scene copied we'll say

from the Italian masters
but with a difference
the mastery

of the painting
and the mind the resourceful mind
that governed the whole

the alert mind dissatisfied with
what it is asked to
and cannot do

accepted the story and painted
it in the brilliant
colors of the chronicler

the downcast eyes of the Virgin
as a work of art
for profound worship

William Carlos Williams

The Approaching Hour

You Communists and Republicans!
all you Germans and Frenchmen!
you corpses and quickeners!
The stars are about to melt
and fall on you in tears.

Get ready! Get ready!
you Papists and Protestants!
you whores and you virtuous!
The moon will be bread
and drop presently into your baskets.

Friends and those who despise
and detest us!
Adventists and those who believe
nothing!
Get ready for the awakening.

William Carlos Williams

The Artist

Mr T.
bareheaded
in a soiled undershirt
his hair standing out
on all sides
stood on his toes
heels together
arms gracefully
for the moment

curled above his head.
Then he whirled about
bounded
into the air
and with an entrechat
perfectly achieved
completed the figure.
My mother
taken by surprise
where she sat
in her invalid's chair
was left speechless.
Bravo! she cried at last
and clapped her hands.
The man's wife
came from the kitchen:
What goes on here? she said.
But the show was over.

William Carlos Williams

The Birds

The world begins again!
Not wholly insufflated
the blackbirds in the rain
upon the dead topbranches
of the living tree,
stuck fast to the low clouds,
notate the dawn.
Their shrill cries sound
announcing appetite
and drop among the bending roses
and the dripping grass.

William Carlos Williams

The Cold Night

It is cold. The white moon
is up among her scattered stars--
like the bare thighs of
the Police Sergeant's wife--among
her five children . . .

No answer. Pale shadows lie upon
the frosted grass. One answer:
It is midnight, it is still
and it is cold . . . !

White thighs of the sky! a
new answer out of the depths of
my male belly: In April . . .
In April I shall see again--In April!
the round and perfects thighs
of the Police Sergeant's wife
perfect still after many babies.
Oya!

William Carlos Williams

The Corn Harvest

Summer !
the painting is organized
about a young

reaper enjoying his
noonday rest
completely

relaxed
from his morning labors
sprawled

in fact sleeping
unbuttoned
on his back

the women
have brought him his lunch
perhaps

a spot of wine
they gather gossiping
under a tree

whose shade
carelessly
he does not share the

resting
center of
their workaday world.

William Carlos Williams

The Crowd At The Ball Game

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—

So in detail they, the crowd,
are beautiful

for this
to be warned against

saluted and defied—
It is alive, venomous

it smiles grimly
its words cut—

The flashy female with her
mother, gets it—

The Jew gets it straight— it
is deadly, terrifying—

It is the Inquisition, the
Revolution

It is beauty itself
that lives

day by day in them
idly—

This is
the power of their faces

It is summer, it is the solstice
the crowd is

cheering, the crowd is laughing
in detail

permanently, seriously
without thought

William Carlos Williams

The Dance

In Breughel's great picture, The Kermess,
the dancers go round, they go round and
around, the squeal and the blare and the
tweedle of bagpipes, a bugle and fiddles
tipping their bellies, (round as the thick-
sided glasses whose wash they impound)
their hips and their bellies off balance
to turn them. Kicking and rolling about
the Fair Grounds, swinging their butts, those
shanks must be sound to bear up under such
rollicking measures, prance as they dance
in Breughel's great picture, The Kermess

William Carlos Williams

The Dark Day

A three-day-long rain from the east--
an terminable talking, talking
of no consequence--patter, patter, patter.
Hand in hand little winds
blow the thin streams aslant.
Warm. Distance cut off. Seclusion.
A few passers-by, drawn in upon themselves,
hurry from one place to another.
Winds of the white poppy! there is no escape!--
An interminable talking, talking,
talking . . .it has happened before.
Backward, backward, backward.

William Carlos Williams

The Desolate Field

Vast and grey, the sky
is a simulacrum
to all but him whose days
are vast and grey and --
In the tall, dried grasses
a goat stirs
with nozzle searching the ground.
My head is in the air
but who am I . . . ?
-- and my heart stops amazed
at the thought of love
vast and grey
yearning silently over me.

William Carlos Williams

The Disputants

Upon the table in their bowl
in violent disarray
of yellow sprays, green spikes
of leaves, red pointed petals
and curled heads of blue
and white among the litter
of the forks and crumbs and plates
the flowers remain composed.
Coolly their colloquy continues
above the coffee and loud talk
grown frail as vaudeville.

William Carlos Williams

The Gentle Man

I feel the caress of my own fingers
on my own neck as I place my collar
and think pityingly
of the kind women I have known.

William Carlos Williams

The Great Figure

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.

William Carlos Williams

The Horse Show

Constantly near you, I never in my entire
sixty-four years knew you so well as yesterday
or half so well. We talked. you were never
so lucid, so disengaged from all exigencies
of place and time. We talked of ourselves,
intimately, a thing never heard between us.
How long have we waited? almost a hundred years.

You said, Unless there is some spark, some
spirit we keep within ourselves, a life, a
continuing life's impossible-and it is all
we have. There is no other life, only the one.
The world of the spirits that come afterward
is the same as our own, just like you sitting
there they come and talk to me, just the same.

They come to bother us. Why? I said. I don't
know. Perhaps to find out what we are doing.
Jealous, do you think? I don't know. I
don't know why they should want to come back.
I was reading about some men who had been
buried under a mountain, I said to her, and
one of them came back after two months,

digging himself out. It was in Switzerland,
you remember? Of course I remember. The
villagers tho't it was a ghost coming down
to complain. They were frightened. They
do come, she said, what you call
my 'visions.' I talk to them just as I
am talking to you. I see them plainly.

Oh if I could only read! You don't know
what adjustments I have made. All
I can do is to try to live over again
what I knew when your brother and you
were children-but I can't always succeed.
Tell me about the horse show. I have
been waiting all week to hear about it.

Mother darling, I wasn't able to get away.
Oh that's too bad. It was just a show;
they make the horses walk up and down
to judge them by their form. Oh is that
all? I tho't it was something else. Oh
they jump and run too. I wish you had been
there, I was so interested to hear about it.

William Carlos Williams

The Hunter

In the flashes and black shadows
of July
the days, locked in each other's arms,
seem still
so that squirrels and colored birds
go about at ease over
the branches and through the air.

Where will a shoulder split or
a forehead open and victory be?

Nowhere.
Both sides grow older.

And you may be sure
not one leaf will lift itself
from the ground
and become fast to a twig again.

William Carlos Williams

The Hunter In The Snow

The over-all picture is winter
icy mountains
in the background the return
from the hunt it is toward evening
from the left
sturdy hunters lead in
their pack the inn-sign
hanging from a
broken hinge is a stag a crucifix
between his antlers the cold
inn yard is
deserted but for a huge bonfire
that flares wind-driven tended by
women who cluster
about it to the right beyond
the hill is a pattern of skaters
Brueghel the painter
concerned with it all has chosen
a winter-struck bush for his
foreground to
complete the picture

William Carlos Williams

The Ivy Crown

The whole process is a lie,
unless,
crowned by excess,
It break forcefully,
one way or another,
from its confinement—
or find a deeper well.
Antony and Cleopatra
were right;
they have shown
the way. I love you
or I do not live
at all.

Daffodil time
is past. This is
summer, summer!
the heart says,
and not even the full of it.
No doubts
are permitted—
though they will come
and may
before our time
overwhelm us.
We are only mortal
but being mortal
can defy our fate.
We may
by an outside chance
even win! We do not
look to see
jonquils and violets
come again
but there are,
still,
the roses!

Romance has no part in it.

The business of love is
cruelty which,
by our wills,
we transform
to live together.
It has its seasons,
for and against,
whatever the heart
fumbles in the dark
to assert
toward the end of May.
Just as the nature of briars
is to tear flesh,
I have proceeded
through them.
Keep
the briars out,
they say.
You cannot live
and keep free of
briars.

Children pick flowers.
Let them.
Though having them
in hand
they have no further use for them
but leave them crumpled
at the curb's edge.

At our age the imagination
across the sorry facts
lifts us
to make roses
stand before thorns.
Sure
love is cruel
and selfish
and totally obtuse—
at least, blinded by the light,
young love is.
But we are older,

I to love
and you to be loved,
we have,
no matter how,
by our wills survived
to keep
the jeweled prize
always
at our finger tips.
We will it so
and so it is
past all accident.

William Carlos Williams

The Last Words Of My English Grandmother

There were some dirty plates
and a glass of milk
beside her on a small table
near the rank, disheveled bed--

Wrinkled and nearly blind
she lay and snored
rousing with anger in her tones
to cry for food,

Gimme something to eat--
They're starving me--
I'm all right--I won't go
to the , no, no

Give me something to eat!
Let me take you
to the hospital, I said
and after you are well

you can do as you please.
She smiled, Yes
you do what you please first
then I can do what I please--

Oh, oh, oh! she cried
as the ambulance men lifted
her to the stretcher--
Is this what you call

making me comfortable?
By now her mind was clear--
Oh you think you're smart
you young people,

she said, but I'll tell you
you don't know anything.
Then we started.
On the way

we passed a long row
of elms. She looked at them
awhile out of
the ambulance window and said,

What are all those
fuzzy looking things out there?
Trees? Well, I'm tired
of them and rolled her head away.

William Carlos Williams

The Late Singer

Here it is spring again
and I still a young man!
I am late at my singing.
The sparrow with the black rain on his breast
has been at his cadenzas for two weeks past:
What is it that is dragging at my heart?
The grass by the back door
is stiff with sap.
The old maples are opening
their branches of brown and yellow moth-flowers.
A moon hangs in the blue
in the early afternoons over the marshes.
I am late at my singing.

William Carlos Williams

The Lonely Street

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.

William Carlos Williams

The Mind's Games

If a man can say of his life or
any moment of his life, There is
nothing more to be desired! his state
becomes like that told in the famous
double sonnet--but without the
sonnet's restrictions. Let him go look
at the river flowing or the bank
of late flowers, there will be one
small fly still among the petals
in whose gauzy wings raised above
its back a rainbow shines. The world
to him is radiant and even the fact
of poverty is wholly without despair.

So it seems until these rouse
to him pictures of the systematically
starved--for a purpose, at the mind's
proposal. What good then the
light winged fly, the flower or
the river--too foul to drink of or
even to bathe in? The 90 story building
beyond the ocean that a rocket
will span for destruction in a matter
of minutes but will not
bring him, in a century, food or
relief of any sort from his suffering.

The world too much with us? Rot!
the world is not half enough with us--
the rot of a potato with
a healthy skin, a rot that is
never revealed till we are about to
eat--and it revolts us. Beauty?
Beauty should make us paupers,
should blind us, rob us--for it
does not feed the sufferer but makes
his suffering a fly-blown putrescence
and ourselves decay--unless
the ecstasy be general.

William Carlos Williams

The Nightingales

My shoes as I lean
unlacing them
stand out upon
flat worsted flowers
under my feet.
Nimbly the shadows
of my fingers play
unlacing
over shoes and flowers.

William Carlos Williams

The Parable Of The Blind

This horrible but superb painting
the parable of the blind
without a red

in the composition shows a group
of beggars leading
each other diagonally downward

across the canvas
from one side
to stumble finally into a bog

where the picture
and the composition ends back
of which no seeing man

is represented the unshaven
features of the des-
titute with their few

pitiful possessions a basin
to wash in a peasant
cottage is seen and a church spire

the faces are raised
as toward the light
there is no detail extraneous

to the composition one
follows the others stick in
hand triumphant to disaster

William Carlos Williams

The Poem

It's all in
the sound. A song.
Seldom a song. It should

be a song—made of
particulars, wasps,
a gentian—something
immediate, open

scissors, a lady's
eyes—waking
centrifugal, centripetal.

William Carlos Williams

The Poor

By constantly tormenting them
with reminders of the lice in
their children's hair, the
School Physician first
brought their hatred down on him.
But by this familiarity
they grew used to him, and so,
at last,
took him for their friend and adviser.

William Carlos Williams

The Red Wheelbarrow

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

William Carlos Williams

The Shadow

Soft as the bed in the earth
Where a stone has lain—
So soft, so smooth and so cool,
Spring closes me in
With her arms and her hands.

Rich as the smell
Of new earth on a stone,
That has lain, breathing
The damp through its pores—
Spring closes me in
With her blossomy hair;
Brings dark to my eyes.

William Carlos Williams

The Spouts

In this world of
as fine a pair of breasts
as ever I saw
the fountain in
Madison Square
spouts up of water
a white tree
that dies and lives
as the rocking water
in the basin
turns from the stonerim
back upon the jet
and rising there
reflectively drops down again.

William Carlos Williams

The Spring Storm

The sky has given over
its bitterness.
Out of the dark change
all day long
rain falls and falls
as if it would never end.
Still the snow keeps
its hold on the ground.
But water, water
from a thousand runnels!
It collects swiftly,
dappled with black
cuts a way for itself
through green ice in the gutters.
Drop after drop it falls
from the withered grass-stems
of the overhanging embankment.

William Carlos Williams

The Term

A rumpled sheet
Of brown paper
About the length

And apparent bulk
Of a man was
Rolling with the

Wind slowly over
And over in
The street as

A car drove down
Upon it and
Crushed it to

The ground. Unlike
A man it rose
Again rolling

With the wind over
And over to be as
It was before.

Anonymous submission.

William Carlos Williams

The Thing

Each time it rings
I think it is for
me but it is
not for me nor for

anyone it merely
rings and we
serve it bitterly
together, they and I

William Carlos Williams

The Thinker

My wife's new pink slippers
have gay pompons.
There is not a spot or a stain
on their satin toes or their sides.
All night they lie together
under her bed's edge.
Shivering I catch sight of them
and smile, in the morning.
Later I watch them
descending the stair,
hurrying through the doors
and round the table,
moving stiffly
with a shake of their gay pompons!
And I talk to them
in my secret mind
out of pure happiness.

William Carlos Williams

The Tulip Bed

The May sun--whom
all things imitate--
that glues small leaves to
the wooden trees
shone from the sky
through bluegauze clouds
upon the ground.
Under the leafy trees
where the suburban streets
lay crossed,
with houses on each corner,
tangled shadows had begun
to join
the roadway and the lawns.
With excellent precision
the tulip bed
inside the iron fence
upreared its gaudy
yellow, white and red,
rimmed round with grass,
reposedly.

William Carlos Williams

The Turtle

Not because of his eyes,
the eyes of a bird,
but because he is beaked,
birdlike, to do an injury,
has the turtle attracted you.
He is your only pet.

When we are together
you talk of nothing else
ascribing all sorts
of murderous motives
to his least action.

You ask me
to write a poem,
should I have a poem to write,
about a turtle.

The turtle lives in the mud
but is not mud-like,
you can tell it by his eyes
which are clear.

When he shall escape
his present confinement
he will stride about the world
destroying all
with his sharp beak.

Whatever opposes him
in the streets of the city
shall go down.

Cars will be overturned.

And upon his back
shall ride,
to his conquests,
my Lord,
you!

You shall be master!

In the beginning
there was a great tortoise
who supported the world.

Upon him
All ultimately

rests.

Without him

nothing will stand.

He is all wise

and can outrun the hare.

In the night

his eyes carry him

to unknown places.

He is your friend.

William Carlos Williams

The Uses Of Poetry

I've fond anticipation of a day
O'erfilled with pure diversion presently,
For I must read a lady poesy
The while we glide by many a leafy bay,

Hid deep in rushes, where at random play
The glossy black winged May-flies, or whence flee
Hush-throated nestlings in alarm,
Whom we have idly frightened with our boat's long sway.

For, lest o'ersaddened by such woes as spring
To rural peace from our meek onward trend,
What else more fit? We'll draw the latch-string

And close the door of sense; then satiate wend,
On poesy's transforming giant wing,
To worlds afar whose fruits all anguish mend.

William Carlos Williams

The Wedding Dance In The Open Air

Disciplined by the artist
to go round
and round

in holiday gear
a riotously gay rabble of
peasants and their

ample-bottomed doxies
fills
the market square

featured by the women in
their starched
white headgear

they prance or go openly
toward the wood's
edges

round and around in
rough shoes and
farm breeches

mouths agape
Oya !
kicking up their heels

William Carlos Williams

The Widow's Lament In Springtime

Sorrow is my own yard
where the new grass
flames as it has flamed
often before but not
with the cold fire
that closes round me this year.
Thirtyfive years
I lived with my husband.
The plumbtree is white today
with masses of flowers.
Masses of flowers
load the cherry branches
and color some bushes
yellow and some red
but the grief in my heart
is stronger than they
for though they were my joy
formerly, today I notice them
and turn away forgetting.
Today my son told me
that in the meadows,
at the edge of the heavy woods
in the distance, he saw
trees of white flowers.
I feel that I would like
to go there
and fall into those flowers
and sink into the marsh near them.

William Carlos Williams

The Yachts

contend in a sea which the land partly encloses
shielding them from the too-heavy blows
of an ungoverned ocean which when it chooses

tortures the biggest hulls, the best man knows
to pit against its beatings, and sinks them pitilessly.
Mothlike in mists, scintillant in the minute

brilliance of cloudless days, with broad bellying sails
they glide to the wind tossing green water
from their sharp prows while over them the crew crawls

ant-like, solicitously grooming them, releasing,
making fast as they turn, lean far over and having
caught the wind again, side by side, head for the mark.

In a well guarded arena of open water surrounded by
lesser and greater craft which, sycophant, lumbering
and fluttering follow them, they appear youthful, rare

as the light of a happy eye, live with the grace
of all that in the mind is feckless, free and
naturally to be desired. Now the sea which holds them

is moody, lapping their glossy sides, as if feeling
for some slightest flaw but fails completely.
Today no race. Then the wind comes again. The yachts

move, jockeying for a start, the signal is set and they
are off. Now the waves strike at them but they are too
well made, they slip through, though they take in canvas.

Arms with hands grasping seek to clutch at the prows.
Bodies thrown recklessly in the way are cut aside.
It is a sea of faces about them in agony, in despair

until the horror of the race dawns staggering the mind;
the whole sea become an entanglement of watery bodies
lost to the world bearing what they cannot hold. Broken,

beaten, desolate, reaching from the dead to be taken up
they cry out, failing, failing! their cries rising
in waves still as the skillful yachts pass over.

William Carlos Williams

The Young Housewife

At ten AM the young housewife
moves about in negligee behind
the wooden walls of her husband's house.
I pass solitary in my car.

Then again she comes to the curb
to call the ice-man, fish-man, and stands
shy, uncorseted, tucking in
stray ends of hair, and I compare her
to a fallen leaf.

The noiseless wheels of my car
rush with a crackling sound over
dried leaves as I bow and pass smiling.

William Carlos Williams

These

are the desolate, dark weeks
when nature in its barrenness
equals the stupidity of man.

The year plunges into night
and the heart plunges
lower than night

to an empty, windswept place
without sun, stars or moon
but a peculiar light as of thought

that spins a dark fire -
whirling upon itself until,
in the cold, it kindles

to make a man aware of nothing
that he knows, not loneliness
itself - Not a ghost but

would be embraced - emptiness
despair - (They
whine and whistle) among

the flashes and booms of war;
houses of whose rooms
the cold is greater than can be thought,

the people gone that we loved,
the beds lying empty, the couches
damp, the chairs unused -

Hide it away somewhere
out of mind, let it get to roots
and grow, unrelated to jealous

ears and eyes - for itself.
In this mine they come to dig - all.
Is this the counterfoil to sweetest

music? The source of poetry that
seeing the clock stopped, says,
The clock has stopped

that ticked yesterday so well?
and hears the sound of lakewater
splashing - that is now stone.

William Carlos Williams

This Is Just To Say

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

William Carlos Williams

Thursday

I have had my dream--like others--
and it has come to nothing, so that
I remain now carelessly
with feet planted on the ground
and look up at the sky--
feeling my clothes about me,
the weight of my body in my shoes,
the rim of my hat, air passing in and out
at my nose--and decide to dream no more.

William Carlos Williams

To A Friend

Well, Lizzie Anderson! seventeen men--and
the baby hard to find a father for!

What will the good Father in Heaven say
to the local judge if he do not solve this problem?
A little two-pointed smile and--pouff!--
the law is changed into a mouthful of phrases.

William Carlos Williams

To A Friend Concerning Several Ladies

You know there is not much
that I desire, a few chrysanthemums
half lying on the grass, yellow
and brown and white, the
talk of a few people, the trees,
an expanse of dried leaves perhaps
with ditches among them.

But there comes
between me and these things
a letter
or even a look--well placed,
you understand,
so that I am confused, twisted
four ways and--left flat,
unable to lift the food to
my own mouth:
Here is what they say: Come!
and come! and come! And if
I do not go I remain stale to
myself and if I go--
I have watched
the city from a distance at night
and wondered why I wrote no poem.
Come! yes,
the city is ablaze for you
and you stand and look at it.

And they are right. There is
no good in the world except out of
a woman and certain women alone
for certain. But what if
I arrive like a turtle,
with my house on my back or
a fish ogling from under water?
It will not do. I must be
steaming with love, colored
like a flamingo. For what?
To have legs and a silly head

and to smell, pah! like a flamingo
that soils its own feathers behind.
Must I go home filled
with a bad poem?
And they say:
Who can answer these things
till he has tried? Your eyes
are half closed, you are a child,
oh, a sweet one, ready to play
but I will make a man of you and
with love on his shoulder--!

And in the marshes
the crickets run
on the sunny dike's top and
make burrows there, the water
reflects the reeds and the reeds
move on their stalks and rattle drily.

William Carlos Williams

To A Poor Old Woman

munching a plum on
the street a paper bag
of them in her hand

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

You can see it by
the way she gives herself
to the one half
sucked out in her hand

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

William Carlos Williams

To Elsie

The pure products of America
go crazy--
mountain folk from Kentucky

or the ribbed north end of
Jersey
with its isolate lakes and

valleys, its deaf-mutes, thieves
old names
and promiscuity between

devil-may-care men who have taken
to railroading
out of sheer lust of adventure--

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--

Unless it be that marriage
perhaps
with a dash of Indian blood

will throw up a girl so desolate
so hemmed round
with disease or murder

that she'll be rescued by an
agent--
reared by the state and

sent out at fifteen to work in
some hard-pressed
house in the suburbs--

some doctor's family, some Elsie--
voluptuous water
expressing with broken

brain the truth about us--
her great
ungainly hips and flopping breasts

addressed to cheap
jewelry
and rich young men with fine eyes

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

and we degraded prisoners
destined
to hunger until we eat filth

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

the stifling heat of September
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

William Carlos Williams

To Waken An Old Lady

Old age is
a flight of small
cheeping birds
skimming
bare trees
above a snow glaze.
Gaining and failing
they are buffeted
by a dark wind --
But what?
On harsh weedstalks
the flock has rested --
the snow
is covered with broken
seed husks
and the wind tempered
with a shrill
piping of plenty.

William Carlos Williams

Tract

I will teach you my townspeople
how to perform a funeral
for you have it over a troop
of artists-
unless one should scour the world-
you have the ground sense necessary.

See! the hearse leads.
I begin with a design for a hearse.
For Christ's sake not black-
nor white either - and not polished!
Let it be whethered - like a farm wagon -
with gilt wheels (this could be
applied fresh at small expense)
or no wheels at all:
a rough dray to drag over the ground.

Knock the glass out!
My God - glass, my townspeople!
For what purpose? Is it for the dead
to look out or for us to see
the flowers or the lack of them -
or what?
To keep the rain and snow from him?
He will have a heavier rain soon:
pebbles and dirt and what not.
Let there be no glass -
and no upholstery, phew!
and no little brass rollers
and small easy wheels on the bottom -
my townspeople, what are you thinking of?
A rough plain hearse then
with gilt wheels and no top at all.
On this the coffin lies
by its own weight.

No wreathes please-
especially no hot house flowers.
Some common memento is better,

something he prized and is known by:
his old clothes - a few books perhaps -
God knows what! You realize
how we are about these things
my townspeople -
something will be found - anything
even flowers if he had come to that.
So much for the hearse.

For heaven's sake though see to the driver!
Take off the silk hat! In fact
that's no place at all for him -
up there unceremoniously
dragging our friend out to his own dignity!
Bring him down - bring him down!
Low and inconspicuous! I'd not have him ride
on the wagon at all - damn him! -
the undertaker's understrapper!
Let him hold the reins
and walk at the side
and inconspicuously too!

Then briefly as to yourselves:
Walk behind - as they do in France,
seventh class, or if you ride
Hell take curtains! Go with some show
of inconvenience; sit openly -
to the weather as to grief.
Or do you think you can shut grief in?
What - from us? We who have perhaps
nothing to lose? Share with us
share with us - it will be money
in your pockets.
Go now
I think you are ready.

William Carlos Williams

Transitional

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
(of the two sides)
Unbent by the sensual
As befits accuracy.

I then said:

Dare you make this
Your propaganda?

And he answered:

Am I not I-here?

William Carlos Williams

Waiting

When I am alone I am happy.
The air is cool. The sky is
flecked and splashed and wound
with color. The crimson phalloi
of the sassafras leaves
hang crowded before me
in shoals on the heavy branches.
When I reach my doorstep
I am greeted by
the happy shrieks of my children
and my heart sinks.
I am crushed.

Are not my children as dear to me
as falling leaves or
must one become stupid
to grow older?
It seems much as if Sorrow
had tripped up my heels.
Let us see, let us see!
What did I plan to say to her
when it should happen to me
as it has happened now?

William Carlos Williams

Willow Poem

It is a willow when summer is over,
a willow by the river
from which no leaf has fallen nor
bitten by the sun
turned orange or crimson.
The leaves cling and grow paler,
swing and grow paler
over the swirling waters of the river
as if loth to let go,
they are so cool, so drunk with
the swirl of the wind and of the river --
oblivious to winter,
the last to let go and fall
into the water and on the ground.

William Carlos Williams

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.

William Carlos Williams

Young Sycamore

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

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

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

dividing and waning
sending out
young branches on
all sides-

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

eccentric knotted
twigs
bending forward
hornlike at the top

William Carlos Williams

Young Woman At A Window

She sits with
tears on
her cheek
her cheek on
her hand
the child
in her lap
his nose
pressed
to the glass

William Carlos Williams

Youth And Beauty

I bought a dishmop--
having no daughter--
for they had twisted
fine ribbons of shining copper
about white twine
and made a tousled head
of it, fastened it
upon a turned ash stick
slender at the neck
straight, tall--
when tied upright
on the brass wallbracket
to be a light for me
and naked
as a girl should seem
to her father.

William Carlos Williams