

empty as big dark windows
will line up for you.

Like that, I was here, and I stopped too.
Somewhere in stillness the lights
came on, for their own pale being,
and I listened with all my life
for something else, quickly, the way you do.

Happy in Sunlight / William Stafford

Maybe it's out by Glass Butte some
time in late fall, and sage owns the whole
world. Even the obsidian chips
left by the Indians glitter, out of
their years. Last night's eager stars
are somewhere, back of the sky.

Nothing where you are says, "It's me
only." No matter how still the day,
a fence wire hums for whatever there is,
even if no one is there. And sometimes
for luck, by neglecting to succeed that day,
you're there, no one else, and the fence wire sings.

FIELDS OF ACTION

The Poem as a Field of Action: Guerilla Tactics in *Paterson* / Paul Mariani

A plan for action to supplant a plan for action:

In those dark days of December, 1940, with the German Stukas dive-bombing over London, ringing the city with fire, T. S. Eliot, from his fire

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station post on the roof of Faber & Faber's offices on Russell Square, caught in that apocalyptic moment, that scene from Dante's hell, the Pentecostal moment as well. And so,

After the dark dove with the flickering tongue
Had passed below the horizon of his homing,

he could begin to compose, in what would have seemed a most inauspicious time, the last of his *Four Quartets*, could sum up a lifetime's concentration on his craft, a logo-centric craft, words fluttering about the ineffable Logos. "We shall not cease from exploration," he concluded, in sprung four-stressed lines, alike and yet so unlike those quatrains he'd done twenty-five years before,

And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

Looking at the bombed city blazing in the pre-dawn dark, he might feel he had earned the right to invoke the idea of mystical union, could now call on the presences of that anonymous English mystic who had penned *The Cloud of Unknowing* back in Chaucer's time and of Dante, whose paradisaical rose, aflame now on the horizon, could evoke the whole company of the blessed, purged, now, and cleansed, in those refining fires. Let the fire bombs do their worst, consigning whole streets to fiery destruction. Here, still, was a heart that could sing in that pyre, singing that

all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

This, the *Little Gidding*, would be Eliot's final important poem. And though he still had another twenty-five years and a number of verse plays to write and the Nobel Prize to accept, and though he would continue to be lionized, to be the darling of the universities even after his death, he would stop with this poem, believing that he had extended the poetic line as far as he felt it ought reasonably be extended in his time. The period of experimentation was over; it had ended with the poetic apotheosis of *Little Gidding*, though he was too modest to name the event outright. "So here I am," the loose Alexandrines of *East Coker* lament,

in the middle way, having had twenty years—
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre deux guerres*—
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it.

So, addressing the British Academy in 1947 on the subject of his revisionist stance on Milton's influence, Eliot, standing there in the direct line of succession, closed his speech with a series of elevated, in fact, churchly, sonorities.¹ "We cannot," he intoned, "in literature, any more than in the rest of life, live in a perpetual state of revolution." Poetry, he reminded his listeners, had not one but two functions. It should help not only to purify the dialect of the tribe, as Mallarmé had enjoined, but it should also prevent the language "from changing too rapidly," for "a development of language at too great a speed would be a development in the sense of a progressive deterioration." And that sort of breakdown and deterioration of English posed a very real threat to the tradition in A.D. 1947. Had not the modernists, himself among the leaders, already established a new poetic diction for the young to explore and utilize? Let the young, therefore, turn to Milton to see how a long poem might be written, let them turn to Milton that they might "avoid the danger of a *servitude* to colloquial speech and to current jargon." Beware the breakdown of forms, "the pointless irregularity." Milton's greatness, this wayward son had come to see, lay just there, in his adherence to the great tradition of English verse, in his "departure from, and return to, the regular measure." In his adherence to the established norms, paradoxically, Milton had achieved his greatest freedom. "In short," Eliot summed up, "it now seems to me that poets are sufficiently liberated from Milton's reputation, to approach the study of his work without danger, and with profit to their poetry and to the English language." And there Eliot felt he could let the issue rest. The period of poetic experimentation was now at an end. It had, as it turned out, coincided exactly with Eliot's own years of development. Now let the young, in this post-war time, consolidate and employ what their ghostly masters had indeed achieved for them.

When the *Enola Gay* lumbered off its Pacific runway on the morning of August 6, 1945, it carried in its womb a single bomb. Over the city of Hiroshima (population 245,000) the bomb-bay doors of this other dark dove opened to release that single, almost lumpish bomb. What happened then was radically unlike anything that had ever before happened in the long

history of war. Within moments enough energy had been released to kill 80,000 people and seriously burn, break, and poison another 80,000. It was the first act of a new kind of war; a new kind of energy had been unleashed which stunned not only those on whom it had been dropped, but also the very ones who had dropped it as well. Wars do release energy, William Carlos Williams knew, and though they release it wastefully, destructively, they do release it. And the very *fact* of the atom bomb, staggering in its implications, once grasped, came to inform the very core of Williams' poetics, to stand as metonym for the vast open fields of poetry which had not yet even been tapped.

No wonder, then, that Williams, who was still searching for a new measure even as Eliot spoke for a new stability, should lash out against him. In an essay published in *Four Pages* in February, 1948—one of those ephemeral "little magazines" which constituted for Williams the cutting edge of the avant garde and which together made up the incredibly tough flower which might (in time) break the very rock on which the academies stood—Williams swung out against Eliot and the pernicious influence Milton's poetry could still have on the young.² Milton's capital offense (and Eliot's as well) was to have perverted "the language in order to adhere to certain orthodoxies of classic form." Like Milton, Eliot already belonged to the "old"; both were mountains fallen "across the way modern poetry must take to get on with its work." What was Eliot *really* up to, after all, Williams wondered, in "throwing the young against [such] an earthworks as Milton"? Wasn't it that he feared *they* just might "DISCOVER a means, a means for expression, an enlargement of mood and style in our day which Mr. Eliot has never sighted"? Milton could still effect a destructive influence, had, in fact "converted" Eliot himself "over a lifetime." In time Eliot himself had become the Milton of the mid-twentieth century, the singer of his own "enlightened and distant world." Some of Milton's early poetry—the experimental work (and here Williams placed *Samson Agonistes*)—the young could use to good effect. But the later Milton had better be avoided, because there was new work to be done, "enormously difficult work unlike anything Milton [or Eliot, he might have added] ever conceived, a negative which his best scarcely envisions."

From the late thirties on and throughout the forties, as he moved by halts, blurts, and many false starts towards the realization of the major form he'd spent thirty years preparing the way for, the form of his long poem *Pater-son*, Williams' letters, notes, essays, and lectures are likewise preoccupied with one overriding question: the question of clearing the field in order to find a new form, the need felt marrow-deep to move, as he told Horace

Gregory in mid-1944, "into the field of action and go into combat there on the new ground."³ The poem as field of action, as battlefield, where the new, still-green open formations might successfully route the older, entrenched forces of orthodoxy: the sonnet, the blank verse line, the octosyllabic couplet, the iambic pentameter, all drawn up in their imposing columns, their flanks supported by systems and ideologies of all sorts, protecting those shell-like forms, those stale linear configurations. "The artist," Williams had written in March, 1938, "is to be understood not as occupying some outlying section of the field of action but the whole field, at a different level howbeit from that possessed by grosser modes."⁴ And what were those grosser modes? Again and again, Williams insists, they are any of those special interest groups—usurious in the truest sense—which would use poetry for their own special interests: parties and ideologies and churches of all sorts. Fields of knowledge of whatever kind were, by their very nature, parties, divisions, factions, offering partial solutions, containing in their very incompleteness—as against an expanding universe—the seeds of their own destruction, their own shell-like (Shelley) deaths. Only in the well-made poem, the poem which adequately incorporated in its expanded base the fact of a living, sensuous, present-day reality (as opposed to an ideological or intellectualized reality) might the poet manage to beat time, that all-consuming fire, at its own game. "Formal patterns," Williams insisted in what is a key into his own poetics, "formal patterns of all sorts represent arrests of the truth in some particular phase of its mutations, and immediately thereafter, unless they change, become mutilations."⁵

Therefore, just as General Braddock had learned the hard way when his closed formations, his well-ordered columns, had run smack into an ambush deep inside the New World wilderness, you either adapted to the new conditions by dispersing your forces in an *apparently* random formation, or your lines went under. Enter, then, the all-important dissonance, the unstable element disturbing the settled periodic maps, enter Pan, that unstable, unrhyming factor into the orthodoxy, so that the phoenix might once more rise out of the destruction, the decreation, of the old nest, plastered together from all those old bits of form.

Williams came to harp on the need for a new line, a new measure, until he was sure his audiences thought him obsessed. At least from the twenties on, the insistence on the need for new forms, for what later became the emphasis on the variable foot, is everywhere in Williams' poetry and criticism. It threatened to become polyvalent, omnipresent, a stridency, so much so that Williams came in time very near to apologizing for bringing the issue up this one more time, and then, having said that, he would proceed to expound on the need again. Looking back now with the hindsight of thirty

years, it should become more readily noticeable what it was that Williams was rejecting, and why (though the battle is even now far from won). In his notes for the series of lectures he delivered at the University of Washington in July, 1948, subsequently published in part and included in his *Selected Essays* under the title, "The Poem as a Field of Action," Williams struggled to articulate his own sense of how the poem might develop in the next twenty to thirty years.

At the very time he began taking notes for that series of talks—on odd scraps of prescription paper and random pages in that notebook he kept by his bedside while recuperating from an operation in February of 1948 and later while at Atlantic City with Floss for a few days—Williams was also smack in the middle of organizing *Paterson* III and still had *Paterson* II fresh in his memory.⁶ The actual working out of the new measure in the only place it mattered, finally—the poem itself—was nearly concomitant with the attempt to articulate the very need for that new measure. No sooner had Williams come in from exploring the field than he would try to say what it was, exactly, he had found out there. And he had found, in the little magazines, the young and the near-young out there in those same fields, listening carefully, and even then demonstrating in their own poems the truth of what Williams was saying in the summer of '48: poets like Louis Zukofsky⁷ and Theodore Roethke and Charles Olson, and even younger poets like Robert Creeley and Denise Levertov and Allen Ginsberg and countless others.

There were, Williams told his audience, two traditions, one representing stability, the other—the viable tradition—representing change. Change in the forms of the poem, Williams said, was absolutely necessary to avoid stasis, stagnation, a marmoreal fixity.⁸ And, in fact, the best poems in the poetic tradition proved that it was only when the form had sufficiently changed from its predecessors that it could truly be said to have entered that tradition. By change, however, as he had been at some pains to point out in his "Letter to an Australian Editor" in late 1946, he meant a structural change in the poem arising out of a deep understanding of one's society—that fructifying female, the language as really used—and not the androgenetic habit of the son feeding off the forms of the father without recourse to the changes in the matrix of the living, pulsing language itself. What Pound and Eliot had done—and they were simply the most important examples—was to go running off to Europe, to a ready-made culture, where they could, in tapeworm fashion, feed off the figures of the great tradition, in effect "translating" the dead masters into their own idiom. The effect, however, was to use those masters as "the fixed basis of their divagations," altering their sources without ever breaking clear of them. What resulted

was a stasis, a blockage, which prevented the idiom from coming over unhampered, unfettered, without literary constriction or falseness. That blockage created an artificiality, turned the language into a sort of wax container housing a language smothered in honey.

Recall just how beset by the forces of the "great tradition" Williams felt in the mid-forties, by what he termed the "party-line" boys. (For a start, he would have tossed the *Partisan Review*, Conrad Aiken's recent *Anthology of American Poetry*—which had failed to include him—and those two Anglo-Catholics, first Eliot and now the young upstart Auden into that stew.) And recall, too, to shift the force of the field metaphor ever so slightly, that a field must first be cleared and new furrows, new lines made, before there can be new growth and new flowers. (Hence the central importance of Poe's example in clearing the field in Williams' essay on Poe in *In the American Grain*, the essay with which Williams had originally wanted to close his book.) In the mid-forties, it was the example of Auden in particular which Williams held up for examination and for rejection.⁹ Why, really, had Auden come to the United States, Williams asked. Because, he felt, Auden had come to realize that he was rapidly becoming "breathless" in England, had already come to the end of his poetic resources, and so had been drawn to America hoping he could find a new, more flexible measure.

Let Auden write as much as he liked about the impoverished industrial landscape or write all the occasional pieces he wanted unless they contained an expanded and flexible structure, they were lifeless. And yet Auden was perceptive enough to see that the language in England had become too rigidified, too stable to admit of real experimentation, so that it was no longer able to contain a significant part of his own world and his own reality. And for all their expatriation attempts, both Eliot and Pound had unavoidably carried with them the seeds of the American language. That language might be constricted, rejected, spurned as an embarrassment. But it was this very unstable element, this dialect phase of the English language, which had entered into their poetry to save it in a way that Auden's best work, try as he might, could not match.

But there were other contemporaries of Williams' who had also failed to develop adequate formal means. If the poem was "a construction embodying the reality of the moment," then Hart Crane—that other American contender—had also failed. For Crane's lines did "not disturb the bed of the form": only his surfaces were new. He had cultivated the blank verse line, this poet, who, cruising the bars in the Red Hook district of Brooklyn looking for companionship, used to give his name out as Kit Marlowe, and that line had become his staple. He had chosen, rather to cultivate a stable field, those elaborate Elizabethan sonorities with their "heady metaphors," had chosen rather to plaster new lexical configurations on the old English

forms. There was, Williams insisted, "no new structure" in the man, "no new bones."

And Stevens. The trouble with Stevens, Williams had remarked back in 1937, was that, when he used the blank verse line, he felt compelled to say something important.¹⁰ Early on in his talk, "An Approach to the Poem," delivered at the Kenyon Conference in mid-July, 1947 and given again at the English Institute meetings held at Columbia that September, Williams spoke of his having read Stevens' lecture which had been read before a Harvard gathering the previous February and subsequently published in *The Partisan Review* (where Williams saw it): the piece entitled "Three Academic Pieces." Without stressing the fact that his own poetics was in sharp contradistinction to his old friend's, Williams in effect rejected Stevens' contention that the modern structure of reality resided in the accuracy of the resemblances between things, ideas, facts, and their lexical and metaphoric referents: that metaphor was at the core of the poetic act. For Stevens, the singularity of poetry rested in the fact that in "satisfying the desire for resemblance it touches the sense of reality, it enhances the sense of reality, heightens it, intensifies it."¹¹ The essay is not one of Stevens' better efforts, and a comment he had made a few months earlier, when he was preparing his talk, reinforces the sense of just how great the distance between Stevens and Williams had become on the question of form in poetry. In December, 1946, Stevens had written a friend that he had not read *Paterson* I because there was "the constant difficulty" in reading Williams that the man was "more interested in the way of saying things than in what he has to say." But, Stevens insisted, people were "fundamentally interested in *what* a writer has to say. When we are sure of that, we pay attention to the way in which he says it, not often before" (*italics added*).¹² So, first there was the paraphrasable content, and *then* there was the form. But, Williams argued in his talk, the poem was "made up of nothing else" than a new reality superseding the particular occasion out of which it had arisen, and only as that was made manifest by the *form* of the poem. The reality lay just there, then, in the particular form of the utterance, in the precise shape in which the words jostled along the line.

If these figures—and a host of other poets besides—had failed to sufficiently engage the structure of the poem, still there was a tradition of innovation in modern American poetry. It was a tradition which had tried, however haltingly, to achieve a radically new measure, a new structure which could respond adequately to the complex reality of the living language itself. For the Americans there was, to begin with, the example of Walt Whitman's "formal excursions," the "cry of a man breaking through the barriers of constraint IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO SAY *exactly* what was in his mind."¹³ His greatest contribution—that which constituted his major

contribution to the development of American poetry—had proven to be a negative but nevertheless all-important one: “the break he instituted with traditional forms.” What Whitman had done in effect was to break down the complex associations of the old forms to their “nascent elements” for future poets to recombine into new forms “as the opportunities of a new language offer.”¹⁴ Was something like “Song of Myself” a free verse poem? Yes, and yet, no. Yes, because the poem lay there on the page in its “free” verse form. But, in a deeper sense, no, because if one could only look deep enough into the elements of the line, one would see that there really was no such thing as free verse without a governing principle of some sort. Free verse poems were, in fact,

poems to which the ordinary standards of measure have not been found applicable or to which they have not been applied. They are, or represent . . . a new association of the prosodic elements in the making (or might be so) or of unrecognized elements waiting for final assessment.¹⁵

The history of American poetry since Whitman had shown two distinctive trends: a regression back to the older, safer rules of English prosody—poetry via Saintsbury (and in our own moment we might add Bloom or Davie), or an irregular advance, often “bizarre and puzzling,” a venture out into the uncharted reality all about us, after a new measure, those new forms made by recombining the most basic element of the poem: the foot itself.

There already existed a tradition of innovation in the search to expand the resources of the poetic foot. There were, for example, Hopkins’ poems in sprung rhythm, with their all-important emphasis on the stress quality of the language.¹⁶ And there was Robert Bridges, both in such early pieces as “The Dead Child” and “London Snow,” with their modified sprung-syllabic base, and in the later sprung music of *The Testament of Beauty*.¹⁷ These were the important early English innovators, though, of course, there was the special—and complex—case of Ezra Pound, Williams’ early master and amiable antagonist. Pound’s greatest importance as a poet for Williams rested in the work he had done with the line. “Time,” he wrote of Pound in January, 1950, “is the pure element of Pound’s success.” It was a quality in his lines—this “joining phrases to time”—which “makes most other contemporary verse sound juvenile by comparison.”¹⁸ It was not with the ideogram or with his ideas on the cancer of usury, a cancer which had even eaten into the lines of those working in the field of the poem, then, that Pound had made his greatest contributions. In fact, Williams was afraid that Pound’s ideas (until the Pisan Cantos were published) had blocked the poetry, so that his “present line” (the poetry of the thirties and early for-

ties) had become “repetitious, tiresomely the same or positively decayed.”¹⁹ All Pound had done was to put the same kinds of content into a form he had created between 1915 and 1925. He was the androgyne par excellence and in that sense, as Williams had said a quarter of a century earlier, the “best enemy” American poetry had. And he was still the one man from whom Williams could continue to refine his own craft.²⁰ But in the mid-forties, Williams was primarily troubled by Pound’s apparent rejection of the technical means and his continued reliance on the idea, on the relatively unimportant content.²¹

So Williams had again looked over the fields of his contemporaries, evaluating their relative strengths and deficiencies, the strategic entrenchments, and that unguarded break in their defenses: the critical weakness in the line itself. That weakness was acting as a cancer, undetected, ignored, so that, unawares, many of their basic structures had become grids, cages, entrapping rather than freeing that elusive beauty: Kore, the radiant gist, the goddess herself. What field tactics could Williams point to, how expand the field of action to include an expanding reality? One thing the atom bomb had done: it had shown what could be done, what might be done, if the irritant disturbing the structural valence of the line itself could be charted and then utilized. Most contemporary poetry was being brought stillborn into the world because the line itself, which had once contained life, had become increasingly rigid, had moved with the passage of time towards the stability of inert lead.

The problem lay, then, in the elements which made up the line itself and finally in the concept of the foot itself. That was where the stasis lay, in something as elementary as that. To continue to write on in the old iambic pentameter, with its accentual-syllabic guidelines, was to write in a leaded form. Smash the foot, determine what it was that was disturbing the periodic table, find a new measurement consonant with our own sense of time, and the effect in terms of a released energy could be as revolutionary for good as the bomb had been for destruction.²² Eliot and Crane and Stevens and a multitude of others had for too long played at conventional warfare. New, revised tactics, as disciplined and as regulated as the old, but more in line with the modern world: that was what was needed! That, and that alone, would raise our own moment into reality; otherwise we dreamt on alone, our world, our people, our time slumbering on into oblivion.

All well and good. But there were difficulties. “Maybe I am dreaming,” Williams had confessed to himself, “maybe what I conceive is impossible. I may be excusing myself, for I do not seem to have succeeded so far in making studies of what I *think* can be done. I write about it in all my so-called

criticism, but I have not, in my own work, made some practical tests. I just go on writing, which isn't what I want to do."²³ And yet, when he wrote this, in January, 1947, he was on the brink of writing the "Descent" passage and of tapping into the energy flow disturbing the metrical valence (though it would still be several years before he realized what he had in fact achieved). In the meantime, there were possibilities which he could articulate: things to avoid as well as things to look for.

He saw, for example, that the trouble with English poetry from Chaucer's time on (he did not know Anglo-Saxon poetry well enough to feel free to comment on it, but he was fond of Chaucer, especially the *Troilus and Criseyde*) was that it was a rhyme-poor language, and that poets had continually distorted their syntax to make it conform to the endurable limits of the old metrical patterns. Rhyme patterns had never much troubled Williams once he was thirty; he had simply dropped the device, except for occasional effects, soon after his first, privately printed volume, *Poems* (1909). And he learned early on that a good modern poet could not invert the phrase and still write good modern poetry. And yet, how many poets, in order "to gain wit [and] fluidity," had "perverted the prose construction"? The meter could only be twisted, forced, strained so much, and then the poet was forced to "invert the phrase *or go dead*."²⁴

But the so-called free verse was not the answer, for without discipline the line simply went slack, sputtered off into, not prose, but a bad poem. Who did the contemporary practitioners of the craft think they were, Williams warned, to assume that they could "do what the greatest geniuses of the language can do, with freshness, originality, and WITHOUT new devices or structures."²⁵ A new measure, a new government of the words, a new open formation: that was what was needed if the poem were once again to become a sensual reality, become again a fit abode for the muse.²⁶

Well, then, what could he point to? What examples of this new measure could he offer young poets in 1948? As for actual evidence of the new work, people would have to search for it as he had: in all those little magazines and in the anthologies. For good work, tentative as it was, *was* being accomplished. He could urge them to study their own idiom, the American language, the dialect phase, the green shoot stemming from the solid English trunk, study it as *he* had, by listening to the rhythms of the language as it got itself spoken daily in the streets of whatever polis or place one found oneself in. He could urge them especially to listen hard for the pace of the language, its phrasing, its "acceptable pauses and interludes," its breaks, its heaves, its breath, its very life.²⁷ He could urge them further to attend carefully to speed values in their lines, to try to trace across the page "the mere brushing of a meaning" rather than to plod on with metrically "cor-

rect" lines which could not hold the elusive life necessary to any good poem. He could urge them too to utilize those loose, colloquial phrases that were in the very grain of the spoken language and which gave the line a certain freedom of manner, a sense, as he put it, "of emotional drive and reality." An idiomatic freshness coupled with an intense care for a syntactic structure which, on the other hand, should be packed tight with meaning, even if that were expressed elliptically, with all the leaps and disjunctures of the mind itself, as Joyce for one had done. *There* was a poetics Williams could subscribe to. For it was words and only words that could unlock the mind, new combinations of words, as free as possible of their old associational weights, words new to the consciousness, new in their measure, radiant tracings of the ever-fleeting moment. That was how one began to create a new force-field, a new field of action.

And that is something of what Williams was saying about the poem in the years immediately following World War II. But that was only the half of it, for was not the real proof *only* in the poem itself, the well-made poem? "The most I can say concerning the poem is inevitably only second best beside the poem itself," Williams had warned his Washington audience at the outset of his talks. "This is a permanent and irreversible qualification. It is the poem, the new poem, the invention it implies that takes the cake. Never forget that. The achieved poem needs no bush of argument any more than did good wine in the old days." (*PFA*) Which suggests that it would be profitable to look at *Paterson* as well as at some of the shorter pieces Williams was writing at about the same time he was formulating his "so-called criticism." When Williams was writing criticism, especially for his college audiences, he felt the revolutionary's need to make himself not only widely understood but also widely accepted. But in the act of enunciating what exactly it was that he was charting in this unexplored new world, what often came across were two things: a sense of enthusiasm often bordering on the urgent, and a Cassandra-like frustration about being unable to say clearly what it was he was actually seeing.

But in his poems, Williams is a different kind of person. There the hesitations and the false steps and the frequent descents in *Paterson*, for example, are in fact all part of a brilliant guerilla tactic as Williams brings the city into alignment with himself. He is the patient strategist, mapping out his lines, shifting his metrical emphases, retreating, like Washington across Long Island and over New York (Williams' own metaphor) until he can take the field by storm in New Jersey. Consider, for example, how Williams says "Raindrops on a Briar," a poem first published in early 1947:

I, a writer, at one time hipped on
painting, did not consider
the effects, painting,
for that reason, static, on

the contrary the stillness of
the objects—the flowers, the gloves—
freed them precisely by that
from a necessity merely to move

in space as if they had been—
not children! but the thinking male
or the charged and deliver-
ing female frantic with ecstasies;

served rather to present, for me,
a more pregnant motion; a
series of varying leaves
clinging still, let us say, to

the cat-briar after last night's
storm, its waterdrops
ranged upon the arching stems
irregularly as an accompaniment.

(*Collected Later Poems*, p. 99)

What Williams has given us is both an action poem and, affectively, the poetics behind such a poem. Consider the effects of the phrasing, the double caesure in the first and last lines of the initial stanza, the varied pace, the effect of the syntax as it pushes forward and the counterpressure of the voice slowing the line down with its various asides and qualifiers as it attempts to make sure that the reader understands that it is painting he is talking about (though it is writing he is actually performing). Consider such idiomatic interpolations as “for that reason,” “on the contrary,” “precisely,” “merely,” “for me,” and “let us say.” Consider the compression of the lexical package he gives us, of how to paint in words an un-still life, first negatively (“not children” and not simply the male or the female aspects of the reality under consideration and certainly not the stillness of the situation), and then positively giving us a dynamic, unquiet “still” life where the unsteady and irregular waterdrops “clinging still” to the “arching” stems (how active are those present participles, how shimmering that stillness) give us the illusion of freshness, of the life still clinging to the

ephemeral moment, as though we were still witnessing to the effects of "last night's/storm." That moment, that image and the voice speaking the words create a field of action, a dynamic stillness over which a violent activity has passed, where the effects are still present.

But what of the larger field, of *Paterson*, embodying as it does in its very pages Williams' long, often frustrating search for a viable form. Think back to the early attempts, to poems stretching as far back as "The Wanderer" (1914), the various sketches, the aborted plans throughout the '20s and '30s, Williams' telling Pound in 1936 about that projected "magnum opus I've always wanted to do," the long sounding out, "working toward a form of some sort."²⁸ In the spring of '42 he plunges into the writing of what he thinks of as a relatively short long poem, and begins amassing page after page of an introduction, as he tries out one approach after another. And even with the presence of David Lyle on the one hand and of Marcia Nardi on the other—his Noah Faitoute Paterson, his Cress—Williams cannot break through an overwhelming sense of constriction into a satisfying form.

In January, 1943, he is telling his publisher, James Laughlin, that the poem is "crying to be written" as an answer to "the kind of thought that destroyed Pound and made what it has made of Eliot," an answer which will allow the local culture to infiltrate the city.²⁹ In August of that year he is telling McAlmon that he is writing "an account, a psychologic-social panorama of a city treated as if it were a man, the man Paterson," but that though he has already "done a hundred pages or so," he is still finding it extremely difficult to work at his poem.³⁰ Again, in early 1944, he tells Charles Abbott, curator of the Poetry Room at the Lockwood, that he has been trying to push himself forward, that he is blocked because he cannot find the right way into the poem, though now he thinks he can see his way clear. The long "Introduction" already amassed, he is hoping Laughlin will publish separately (though it will not be).³¹ And in July, he writes Horace Gregory from his vacation cottage in West Haven, Connecticut, that he is "aligning" a whole sheaf of papers into something like the final draft of his "Introduction," a fact he repeats to Wallace Stevens two weeks later.³² Speaking of his poems in *The Wedge* (1944) to Marianne Moore that November he admits that there "is too often no convincing form or no form convincing or promising enough to hold me over or take me over to some more satisfying invention."³³

And then, on New Year's, 1945, he confesses his profound sense of failure to Horace Gregory:

All this fall I have wanted to get to the "Paterson" poem again and as before I always find a dozen reasons for doing nothing about it. I see the mass of material I have collected and that is enough. I shy away

and write something else. . . . I am timid about beginning what I know will surely exhaust me if I permit myself to become involved. Just yesterday I learned one of the causes of my inability to proceed: I MUST BEGIN COMPOSING again. . . . The old approach is outdated, and I shall have to work like a fiend to make myself new again. But there is no escape. Either I remake myself or I am done.³⁴

By early February, however, the blockage has been dynamited, and Williams can write Gregory that his friend Kitty Hoagland has already typed out "the first finished draft of the 1st quarter of the 'Paterson' thing,"³⁵ at the same time that he is already asking Laughlin where to send his "contribution to the meal of the gods," though it may prove to be little more than "perhaps a radish," once this early draft of *Paterson* I has been finished ("sometime before St. Patrick's Day").³⁶ By early 1945, then, Williams has achieved a major form which, with a plenitude of variations, will be repeated throughout the rest of the poem.

And yet, if one compares the typographical layout of *Paterson* I with that of *Paterson* II, compares them without recourse to the content of each, as Fabre might examine a fish, one will note that there are distinctive and even radical line differences between the two. Most of the verse sections of *Paterson* I are in columns, in lines varying from the epic-like opening,

Paterson lies in the valley under the Passaic Falls
its spent waters forming the outline of his back . . .

to the shorter lines of a passage like

We sit and talk and the
silence speaks of the giants
who have died in the past and have
returned to those scenes unsatisfied . . .

to the terse quatrains of

Who is younger than I?
The contemptible twig?
that I was? stale in mind
whom the dirt. . . .

But with *Paterson* II, which Williams apparently began in earnest in January, 1947, lines and parts of lines are spread out across the page, as Williams begins to literally split up his poem into its constituent elements,

in search of the radiant gist he believed he could discover if he could only name the element that was disturbing the metrical tables. Here in the second book of his long poem, Paterson, that sleeping giant of a man/city, begins to stir now from the whole dream of the poem,³⁷ and it is in the very lines of the poem itself that the giant is able to come into at least momentary contact with reality, since, most profoundly, it is only in learning how to measure correctly that we can truly come to know a place.

So it is that in *Paterson* II the characteristic signature of the man/city becomes walking, as Paterson begins now to walk concretely across the charged female, Garrett Mountain, stroking her into a concomitant response. It is in this measuring of foot moving out from foot as Paterson begins the ascent, first up the same traveled footpaths as the others, but then, soon, cutting off across the open field on his own, that the poet's thoughts begin to flame into action. Garrett Mountain, we realize, becomes in fact the necessary woman caressed into life, into a charged field, as the male principle begins to instruct his thoughts concretely over her. Leaving the beaten path, the old line (tradition), Paterson recalls how those old singers on the mountain had nearly killed someone else for trying to expel them by force from his garden, (the Dalzell episode), and then enters the old field with its "old furrows, to say labor sweated or / had sweated here. / a flame / spent." These, then, are the old furrows, old lines, old measures Paterson has come upon, breaking down once more to their original formlessness. But just there, arising out of this scene of apparent formlessness, here at this decreative juncture, as the poet half stumbles in his halting measure, there, "before his feet, half tripping, / picking a way," suddenly there is "a flight of empurpled wings": grasshoppers in flight, the imagination itself aflame. From the imagination, from the very "core [Kore] of his mind," out of the decreated, "disintegrating" mound, emerges a red basalt grasshopper, the stone (the female) shaped, "instructed / to bear away some rumor / of the living presence that has preceded / it."

Out of the breakdown of the old forms, then, the emergence of the new, the still-living. There, literally, in that unpromising field, Paterson has discovered a field of incessant activity, where stones—heavy words, things themselves—find their "counter buoyancy / by the mind's wings." As the poet "walks" across the page/field half stumbling in his halting measures, he is paradoxically creating a new measure. Watching the grasshoppers transforming themselves into act as they whiz and blur forward in irregular patterns, Paterson recalls that stone grasshopper, that stone stroked by the phallic chisel (as inert words are stroked into life by the phallic imagination) and comes to realize that the poem, and in fact his own sense of identity, must be created foot by foot, step by step, in halting measure:

Before his feet, at each step, the flight
is renewed. A burst of wings, a quick
churring sound. . . .

Truly, then, here in this most unpromising of places, this abandoned field, Paterson has witnessed an annunciation, as these grasshopper/seraphim, these "couriers to the ceremonial of love," announce by the very presence of their activity, a new poetic life, a new inspiration for Paterson.

There are, of course, the forces of authority which would strike out at this elusive beauty, this new field of energy, as it tries to push itself up through the old imprisoning lines, the metrical grid over the "cellar window" (and remember, it is in the cellar that Paterson will discover Kore/Persephone, the beautiful thing, misused, raped repeatedly, but lying there on those stained sheets, fertile between the thighs). Like Kore, the elusive mink of *Paterson* II is another of those female images creating a dissonance, a disturbance in the (water) table, the atomic periodic grid, and the forces of stasis (the status quo: the academy, the Church) though they try to kill that beauty, cannot.³⁸

Throughout Book II, Paterson will continue to walk, stroking the rock beneath him. And there, whether ascending the mountain, or later, descending, he will encounter the various forces of repression: the Eliot-like figure combing out the "new-washed Collie bitch," until the lines lie "like ripples in white sand," a tame design stroked on the British pedigree, the figure of the English establishment who will reappear later to look down on the haranguing minister, Klaus Ehrens, who is, like Williams himself, the figure of the Protestant protesting. Or the shadow of Lambert's Castle, its phallic tower dominating the mountain, a reminder of another (economic) form of repression, recalling the English immigrant who, like Alexander Hamilton before him, saw the masses of people as some "great beast" to be exploited, maimed, crippled, crying out in their great crippled language. And the woman herself, Cress, becomes one with the very field over which Paterson walks, crying out for the poet who will marry her and thus create the poem itself, but who instead all but pulls the poet under as her neuroses dominate the field at the close of the second book.

And yet Williams knows and knows deeply that the poet "will continue to produce only if his attachments to society continue adequate. If a man in his fatuous dreams cuts himself off from that supplying female, he dries up his sources."³⁹ So here, on this Sunday in May, among these working class families and couples from the mills and factories of that city from which the poet draws his sustenance, indeed, his very identity, Paterson/Williams has come to be fed, to translate that falling, tumbling, cascading roar everywhere about him into the measured poem: "I bought a new bath-

ing suit, just / pants and a brassier,” and “Come on! Wassa ma’? You got / broken leg? . . . What a bunch of bums! Afraid somebody see / you? / Blah! / *Excrement!*” But also, the “featureless” harangue of the minister preaching outdoors on Garrett Mountain near some stone benches, his words “arrested in space”:

Don’t think
about me. Call me a stupid old man, that’s
right. Yes, call me an old bore who talks until
he is hoarse when nobody wants to listen. That’s
the truth. I’m an old fool and I know it.

And of course there is the poet’s own voice, arising out of the same place, arising into newly measured cadences, triple-plied, falling and yet buoyant, a descent countered by a new ascent:

The descent beckons
as the ascent beckoned
Memory is a kind
of accomplishment
a sort of renewal
even
an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new
places. . . .

It is a line so new for Williams that he will not at once realize its full potential as a new measure, will not see for several years yet that he has created a slower, more meditative measure that he will call upon in his sickness, when his characteristically nervous, sharp, body rhythms will pace more slowly.⁴⁰

But Paterson’s voice here in Book II is more usually a falter, as the lines break up to make their own frequent descents. How often that voice must confront the petrifying stasis of an unchartered language, as when it laments:

The language • words
without style! whose scholars (there are none)
• or dangling, about whom
the water weaves its strands encasing them
in a sort of thick lacquer, lodged
under its flow •

And then the field itself threatens to become lead-bound, blocked, divorced from the supplying female, to become an “unmoving roar!” Only by breaking “down the pinnacles of his moods / fearlessly— / to the bases; base! to the screaming dregs,” only in that terrifying descent leading, as Williams well knew, to wisdom but also to despair, can the poet hope to win through, finding in the structure of the language, in the inner structure of the elemental foot itself, “something of interest.”

Name it, name that elusive something that Paterson finds of interest in the three quatrains that conclude—except for the fragmentary refrain and then the long complaint of Cress whiplashing into the poem and drowning out Paterson himself. Name the measure of lines like these, where anapests give way to spondees:

On this most voluptuous night of the year
 the term of the moon is yellow with no light
 the air's soft, the night bird has
 only one note, the cherry tree in bloom

makes a blur on the woods, its perfume
 no more than half guessed moves in the mind,

where a loose, triple measure seems to hover over the lines:

On this
 most voluptuous night
 of the year
 the term of the moon
 is yellow
 with no light
 the air's
 soft
 the night bird has
 only
 one note
 the cherry tree in bloom. . . .

Is it the variations in the caesura that Paterson hears, breaking the lines into irregular triads, or is it something else? Hard put to it, Williams himself does not seem to have had a readily articulated answer. His own critical comments on the poem as a field of action, its energy released and realized by a new, more flexible measure, are maddeningly scattered all over the earth. And yet, when brought together, their dismembered corpse will yield

up a unified sensibility if not an answer. And what we are finally given is the sense of a man coming down hard again and again on the work he has already achieved with that deeper mind which never sleeps and which cannot wait for the critical clarification, not even if that clarification should eventually come from the poet himself.

In the very weeks that Williams was typing out his first drafts of *Paterson* II, including the "Descent" passage, his old friend Kenneth Burke, in one of those characteristically Aristotelian gestures of his, sent Williams a long summary of Vergil's "plan" in writing the *Aeneid*. *Paterson* I was, of course, already published, but perhaps Williams might consider planning out the remaining books of his long poem, and thus reinforce its sense of a major form. But Williams knew, as he believed Burke too in his heart of hearts knew, that Vergil had never "formulated any such preliminary plan as this before beginning composition on the *Aeneid*." No, the critic, he insisted, must come after. "For if the poet allows himself to fall into that trap (of listening too early to the philosopher) he will inevitably be of little use to the very philosopher himself as a field of investigation after he, as a poet, has completed his maneuvers." And maneuvers, of course, took place on fields of intense action across which the poet/tactician must move, stumblingly, haltingly, while his "nascent instincts" probed "into new territory." Even Einstein himself, working with other fields of action, had acknowledged the primary importance of this *a priori* mode of strategy. Better to keep poet and critic separate, "to penetrate separately into the jungle, each by his own modes, calling back and forth as we can to keep in touch for better uniting our forces."⁴¹

There was, then, talk about the poem as a field of action and the poetic field of action itself. Williams at different points did act as critic, but it was usually after the fact itself, after he had already made those heated forays of his into the virgin territory of the spoken language. And when he emerged, try as he might—and his own attempts are better than any critic's in his own lifetime—he could only stumble by fits and starts to say where it was he'd been and what he'd seen, pointing over and over again in the general direction of those fields where all the action was still swarming.

NOTES

¹ *Milton II*, collected in *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Noonday Press, 1961), pp. 165-183.

² "With Forced Fingers Rude," *Four Pages*, Galveston, Texas, No. 2 (Feb. 1948), 1-4.

³ *The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams*, ed. John C. Thirlwall (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1957), p. 227. Hereafter cited as *SL*.

⁴ "Against the Weather: A Study of the Artist," collected in *Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams* (New York: New Directions, 1954), p. 197. This collection hereafter cited as *SE*. When Charles Olson read this essay, he wrote Williams half-jokingly that he had stolen heavily from it. (Unpublished letter, dated December 5 [1939], in the William Carlos Williams collection of manuscripts in the American Collection at Yale.) Olson's Projective Verse essay, published in 1950, would appear to bear that statement out, in the sense that Williams acted as the central influence in shaping many of Olson's ideas and emphases.

⁵ *SE*, 205-6.

⁶ The working papers for "The Poem as a Field of Action" are now in the Poetry Room of the Lockwood Library. These consist of an early draft in the "Red University Notebook" and seven drafts (most of a few pages in length and written first in pencil at odd moments snatched and then corrected in ink) and the last a 71-page sheaf, with many corrections in pencil, ink, and red and blue crayon, marked up in the same fashion and with the same tools as the *Paterson* manuscripts.

⁷ Reviewing Zukofsky's *Notes on ANEW* for the Winter 1947-48 issue of *The New Quarterly of Poetry*, for example, Williams praised his friend's poems as "fertile, prolific in possibilities" for a revolution in the poetic line that might well be a direction for the future (p. 11). Zukofsky's major breakthrough, Williams believed, was his "new understanding of the line structure," a metrical pattern *discovered* in the language of his own day" (p. 12). Here were lines that could "expand physically before the pressure and the speed of thought." In that lay "the new. And the release. And the happiness" (p. 14). The poem Williams particularly drew attention to as containing in its fullness the new line Zukofsky had worked out is his very fine "No. 42," reprinted in his *All: The Collected Short Poems, 1923-1964* (New York: W. W. Norton), pp. 109-11.

⁸ The inability to change enough had seriously affected Eliot's own poetry, Williams strongly felt. In fact, he could hardly think of Eliot without thinking of a potentially fluid line moving into marmoreal rigidity, stasis. So, for example, when he finally did get to meet "the Eliot" in mid-November, 1948, when Eliot gave a reading at the Library of Congress in Washington, Williams sent his friend Robert McAlmon a picture postcard of the Statuary Hall in the Capitol with the comment that, though he personally like Eliot, "now that I have met him, the party last night [following the reading] closely resembled the reverse of this card." (From the collection of Norman Holmes Pearson.)

⁹ Auden's immediate popularity among American audiences from the late thirties on not only angered Williams; it seemed to threaten the very direction he was hoping American poetry would take. In his unfinished collaborative novel, *Man Orchid* (written in late 1945 and early 1946 and published posthumously), Williams recalls a poetry reading which he shared with Alfred Kreymborg, Malcolm Cowley, and Auden himself—three old-timers and this young Englishman in his early thirties—held in the Great Hall in Cooper Union in April, 1940. Even five and a half years later he can still not forgive his American audience for their uncritical acceptance of all things English:

Remember at Cooper Union when the young Englishman read his verse to that supposedly tough bunch. I was there. Remember? There were a couple of American poets, not too hot but hitting along the line I'm telling [an authentic American line]. Well, this young English poet with his smooth Oxford accent got up and

smiled at those lunks and said, I hope you'll pardon my accent, I can't help it! And they almost drowned in their own slobber they were so tickled to grant him any small favor that lay to their eager hands. Their faltering hands! And he read them his verses, and very good sweet verses they were and—they raised the roof with their gracious huzzas. It was magnificent to hear and to see.

Cf. A Williams Garland: *Petals from the Falls, 1945-1950*, ed. Paul L. Mariani, *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. 14, no. 1 (Winter 1973), 85. Hereafter cited as MR.

¹⁰ Cf. Williams' review of *The Man with the Blue Guitar and Other Poems* in *The New Republic*, 93, 1198 (Nov. 17, 1937), 50.

¹¹ *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, n.d.), p. 77.

¹² Letter of December 19, 1946 to José Rodríguez Feo in *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), p. 544.

¹³ "An Approach to the Poem," in *English Institute Essays, 1947* (New York: AMS Press, 1965), p. 68.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁶ Williams' attitude towards Hopkins continued to shift. At one point he calls him "a great early innovator" and at another point his effects are "constipated." But one of the neatest observations Williams made on Hopkins was in pointing to the man's sharp, "brutal" chin in his notes to "The Poem as a Field of Action" as a sign of Hopkins' control over his forms to counterbalance their "dream" content. He might dream on in his poems of his logocentric world, but it was in his hard, brilliant ability as a craftsman that he caught the sensuous reality, the very pulse of his "abrupt self."

¹⁷ After his teaching session at the University of Utah in July of 1947, Williams and his wife went to visit the Mesa Verde with their old friend, Robert McAlmon, and stayed at the local hotel in Cortez. Out of that visit came Williams' "The Testament of Perpetual Change" (*Collected Later Poems*, p. 103) with its interlinear grid (in italics) taken from the opening lines of Bridges' *A Testament of Beauty*. Williams' and Bridges' lines, laid thus side by side, chime remarkably in their cadences (though the tone, lexis, and content of each writer clearly inhabit quite different worlds). A study of Williams' poem would show, I think, in what ways Williams' own practice is a "testament" of perpetual change.

¹⁸ Cf. "The Later Pound," an essay Williams wrote on January 13, 1950, and published in MR, p. 124.

¹⁹ Cf. "A Study of Ezra Pound's Present Position," an essay Williams wrote between January 21 and 23, and published in MR, p. 118.

²⁰ By 1950, after he had read the Pisan Cantos, Williams saw that Pound *had* developed, not in those quotable "purple passages" which kept dragging Pound back into the past, but in the "common text," where the "heavy work" of any long sequence was done, and done beautifully. Remove Pound from his library and his ear for the native cadence could still shine through with extraordinary sensitivity.

²¹ This is the same argument he had with Stevens and Eliot, different as they were in other respects. In an unguarded moment, Williams put the crucial difference this way:

. . . Pound has given up his earlier attempts and gone over to "ideas." As he has said, "You gotta have something to say, Bull. If you ain't got something to say, you can't write." . . . But suppose both have something to say . . . , as there are at least several important things to say. Both being equal in that and both being

poets, then the next step is the implementation itself that will determine their value *as poets*. It is even conceivable to me that, though one may have something important to say and the other next to nothing to say, the second may still, judging him by his resources as a poet, be the more "virtuous" person. At least the possibility seems there.

This is a crucial statement of Williams' distinction between the poet as man of ideas and the poet as man of action, creating the poem itself as a field of action. In his lecture delivered at Briarcliff Junior College on November 29, 1945, Williams stressed the distinction between prose, where the writer put his thoughts on paper and the poet, whose poem was "evidence of that within the man or about him by which *he* is thought." The idea, and that way of phrasing it Williams had taken from the opening of Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell*. Williams' "Memory Script," entitled "Verse as Evidence of Thought," is in the Poetry Collection at the Lockwood at Buffalo.

²² In a letter to Parker Tyler (February 9, 1946), Williams recalled being asked if he could give "any evidence of the 'new way of measuring' in anything . . . I myself had written at any time. It was a fair question but one I shall have to postpone answering indefinitely." And then he conjured up the image of the Mendelejeffian table of periodic weights:

Years before an element was discovered, the element helium, for instance, its presence had been predicated by a blank in the table of atomic weights.

It may be that I am no genius in the use of the new measure I find inevitable; it may be that as a poet I have not had the genius to do the things I set up as essential if our verse is to blossom. I know, however, the innovation I predict must come to be. Someone, some infant now, will have to find the way we miss. Meanwhile I shall go on talking. [SL, 243.]

²³ MR, 120.

²⁴ Working papers for "The Poem as a Field of Action," p. 53. Hereafter cited as PFA.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

²⁶ In his working papers (PFA), Williams refers to the example of his friends, Charles Scheeler, the painter, and his Russian wife, Musya, the dancer. He relates this story at length at a critical juncture in his *Autobiography*, just after quoting from Charles Olson's *Projective Verse* essay (1950). Thus, the Scheelers serve as a concrete example of the field theory of poetry. What Scheeler had done was to settle down in a small stone cottage, one of the few structures remaining on what had formerly been a Hudson River colonial estate with its own 60-room mansion with all of its outlying buildings. By reorganizing that field (the estate, which had had its own formal center) around his new center, Scheeler had "married" himself to a "present-day necessity," less grand than the past, but containing the "seed" of a new intelligence, a new structure, created out of the elements of the past, and had filled it with *local* artifacts (Shaker furniture). It had been taken, by this transference of new values, into a new context, into a fitting place for Scheeler's Russian wife, his muse, to dance.

²⁷ In early 1947, Williams wrote that it was in the handling of the caesura, the break (or breaks) *within* the line, that he then saw as holding out the "greatest hope I have discovered so far for a study of the modern line" (MR 122). The expanded use of the caesura might well prove to be what quantity was to Greek poetry.

²⁸ SL, 163.

²⁹ SL, 214.

30 SL, 216.

31 Abbott/Williams correspondence in the Poetry Room, Lockwood Library, Buffalo.

32 SL, 230.

33 SL, 232.

34 SL, 234-35.

35 SL, 236.

36 SL, 236-37.

37 Williams, who knew Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, was in full agreement with Freud that the content of the poem was indeed "a dream, a daydream of wish fulfillment." It was "always phantasy—what is wished for, realized in the 'dream' of the poem—but . . . the structure confronts something else." What the structure confronts, of course, is reality itself. ("The Poem as a Field of Action" in SE, 281.)

38 Cf. Williams' comment on the figure of the emergency squads of the omnipresent authorities—the critics, the universities—who, once they detect a trickle of new energy escaping from the dams they have built, "rush out . . . to plug the leak, the leak! in their fixed order, in their power over the water." And also, in the same essay-review, the image of the old poetic line as a "grill . . . before a prison window" and the new line as "the grill gone." ("A New Line is a New Measure," *The New Quarterly of Poetry*, II.2 (Winter 1947-48), 10.

39 "Letter to an Australian Editor," *Briarcliff Quarterly*, III.2 (October 1946), 277.

40 That Williams needed a line like the staggered or step-down three-ply line after his crippling strokes, needed their more meditative resources, can in part be demonstrated by listening to his reading on the *Caedmon LP*, *William Carlos Williams Reading His Own Poems*, of poems like "To Daphne and Virginia" and "The Host" in the new measure, where the pace seems correct, next by listening to his reading of "The Yachts" that same day—June 6, 1954—and then by listening to his reading of the latter poem recorded nine years earlier (in May, 1946) and issued in *An Album of Modern Poetry: An Anthology Read by the Poets*, edited by Oscar Williams. Listening consecutively to Williams' two recordings of "The Yachts," one realizes that at 62 he is reading the poem nearly twice as fast as he does at 71.

41 SL, 251-52.

TWO POEMS / CHARLES TOMLINSON

In the Intensity of Final Light,

In the intensity of final light

Deepening, dyeing, moss on the tree-trunks

Glares more green than the foliage they bear:

Hills, then, have a way of taking fire

To themselves as though they meant to hold

In a perpetuity of umber, amber, gold

Those forms that, by the unstable light of day,