THE INFLUENCE OF IMAGISM AND MODERN PAINTING ON THE EARLY FLORAL POETRY OF WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

THESIS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Familiar, ordinary things of life are often the subjects of William Carlos Williams' poems. In the early decades of this century a few critics considered his poetry innovative, but many considered it unusual and even "anti-poetic" (5, p. 63), because he chose such subjects as wheelbarrows, broken pieces of glass, and water spouts. Richard J. Calhoun points out that the poetic objects with which Williams concerns himself primarily distinguish him from his contemporaries of the 1910's and 1920's. He says that Williams used these ordinary objects as subjects for entire poems much more consistently than did other poets (11, p. 29). Calhoun mentions two poems which express the poet's awareness of his absorption in unorthodox objects. Both are called "Pastoral" and make clear Williams' preoccupation with the commonplace objects of his life. The first, after a listing of admired objects of the poet's neighborhood, concludes with emphasis on his awareness of how others will regard his intense interest in such things:

No one
will believe this
of vast import to the nation.
(8, p. 121)

The second poem is based on two contrasts between an apparently lower and higher form of life. The first contrast is
between the quarreling "little sparrows" and the "wiser" human kind capable of guarding their emotions. The second contrast features the gait of an old man "gathering dog-lime," whose tread is more majestic than that of the Episcopal minister approaching the pulpit of a Sunday. (8, p. 124)

Williams' conclusion reflects amazement at his own observations:

These things
Astonish me beyond words.
(8, p. 124)

In insisting on drawing poetic materials from the familiar world, Williams turned frequently to nature, and to flowers especially, for his particulars. Indeed, flowers are ubiquitous in the earlier poetry. He uses flowers for contrast, for metaphorical purposes, for allusion, or simply as general descriptive background where other objects or situations dominate the poem. However, a large number of poems take flowers themselves as their subjects. Admittedly, poets have always written extensively about flowers. Their reasons for doing so are surely varied, as Williams' may also have been. However, the purpose of this study is to demonstrate that Williams turned so often to flowers in his early poetry for two basic reasons: one was that he found flowers to be the subject which would best allow him to adhere to the
tenets of Imagism; the second was that flowers were peculiarly appropriate as subjects that stimulated Williams to do with words what some artists of the 1920's were doing on canvas.

Why did Williams want to imitate the painters? What were they doing and what were they talking about that was vital both to the paintings and to Williams' poetry of the period? Some answers lie in the ideas of the photographer Alfred Stieglitz, mentor of so many of the young painters with whom Williams was associated during his early years. Understanding the ideas and techniques of this group of young artists may lead to a fuller understanding of Williams' work: how he transliterated the techniques of the painter into the techniques of the poet; why he could better use those techniques in describing flowers than other objects; and how the flower, as an object of nature, became for Williams one of his most common tools for probing the human experience.

Because Williams believed, both as Imagist and while under the influence of the painters, that the objects of nature are not only worthy subjects of study in themselves, but also subjects for commentary on the condition of man, his flower poems may be divided roughly into two main classes: those of pure description and those which treat nature in one of its many relations with humanity. He writes such poems under both the Imagistic and Stieglitz influence. A purely descriptive poem, which focuses on a single flower and concentrates on delineating a clean and
accurate image, examines the flowers' physical qualities for their own sake. In the awareness of these qualities and of their appeal to the senses lies the pleasure of the poem. "Daisy" and "Primrose," both to be discussed in later chapters, are good examples of Williams' use of the purely descriptive technique. More often than not, however, Williams' flowers act by interpreting, recalling, or suggesting some phase of human feeling, as in "Chicory and Daisies." "Queen Ann's Lace" and "Great Mullen," also to be discussed later, are examples of Williams' flower poems which successfully combine the purely descriptive technique which he may have learned from the Imagists and the organizational elements he learned from the painters with the necessity to use the natural objects to point up some poignant moment of human life.

Williams believed that only through strict delineation of the image could the poet attain any kind of universality in his work, so, in a sense, the two kinds of poems become fused in the best of his works. So also, the image becomes an important factor in his poetry. The Stieglitz group influenced Williams' handling of the image, but there was an earlier and equally important influence on his poetical theories: the Imagist movement. The similarities in the two groups prepared Williams for a natural transition during the late 1910's from the Imagists to the Stieglitz group, as further discussion will make clear. Therefore, before
attention can be given to the Stieglitz group, it will be necessary to indicate something of the Imagist movement and Williams' relationship to it. The Imagist movement, which had its beginnings in the first decade of this century, in many ways parallels what the painters of the early 1920's were doing. Williams actually grew away from the movement, and it was the painters who eventually fulfilled the greater demands he was making on poetry--demands Imagism alone could not satisfy. Chapter II is a discussion of Imagism and how Williams' poetry, especially the flower poetry, adheres to its basic tenets, but found insufficient room for artistic growth. Chapter III discusses Alfred Stieglitz and the painters who gathered around him, what they had in common with the Imagist ideas, and what they further offered Williams that satisfied his artistic expectations.

The effects of both the Imagist movement and the ideas of the Stieglitz group can more easily be understood with knowledge of what Williams thought a poem should do and why. Kenneth Burke has called Williams the master of the "glimpse" (4, p. 47), and indeed in his early poetry Williams seems to be interested almost exclusively in an exact registration of the immediate experience. His poetry demonstrates a direct antithesis to the kind of poem which Keith Harrison says sets "up a subject, circles it, draws the moral juice out of it, and moves with rhetorical lucubrations to a
ponderous THEREFORE" (2, p. 577). Quite the contrary to this circuitous type of poetry, Williams' work demands that the reader pay attention to the specifics. There will be rewards for such stringent demands, however. Williams' objective in writing poetry is "to reveal" (8, p. 268). He tells us in his Selected Essays that he does not want to teach, to advertise, or even "to communicate (for that needs two) but to reveal, which needs no other than the man himself"--to reveal "that which is inside the man" (8, p. 268). For these reasons Williams rejected poetry which propagandized, preached, or moralized. He believed that poetry deals with the generalities of human conduct, "with questions that are important for more than ten minutes, with movement greater than the French occupation of the Saar Basin" (8, p. 237). He continues to explain that what men seldom learn is that "the end of poetry is a poem" (8, p. 238). He saw his job as poet as one of helping people better to see, touch, taste, and enjoy their world. He says in his Selected Essays that "the only world that exists is the world of the senses" (8, p. 196).

He "reveals" by presenting the thing itself to his readers. He held up an object to the direct scrutiny of the senses. The awareness of the object itself becomes the purpose, the result, and the satisfaction of the poem. He wanted no rehash, no repetition, no dependence on traditional modes of thought or writing (8, p. 21). Therefore, he presented
poems full of objects with sharp, clean edges—"there must be edges" he said (8, p. 128):

Good Christ what is a poet—if any exists?
a man whose words will bite their way
home------------------
(7, p. 68)

And so, with unusual singleness of purpose the poems of William Carlos Williams invite or, rather, demand our attention. As Thomas Whitaker explains in his study of Williams, it is not merely that his poems "often celebrate the attentive mind, deplore its absence, or urge it upon us, but, when successful, they are themselves dramatic structures of attentive or contactful speech; and that achievement is their primary meaning" (6, p. 17).

"Flowers by the Sea," from Williams' An Early Martyr (1935), demonstrates specifically how the image best allowed him to apply these ideas to his poetry:

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.
(7, p. 87)

The poem is a juxtaposition of two images—the sea and a field of flowers (chicory and daisies). The pasture of
flowers, evidently seen from a distance, is compared to the
color, movement, and shape of the sea, thereby illustrating
the paradox of the poem, that of the sea and the pasture
suggesting one another's basic natures rather than their
own. They are not symbols. "No symbolism is acceptable"
says the poet early in his career (8, p. 213). The flowers
do not stand for anything. Like the red wheelbarrow, the
young sycamore, and so many other objects in Williams'
poems, the flowers are simply presented as themselves, to
mean themselves. The flowers are identified in terms of
what they exist next to--the sea. Neither does the sea
symbolize a unity, or flow of some great nature-spirit.
It is simply depicted in its uniqueness and similarity to
the pasture of flowers that exists next to it. The poet is
describing a scene that has affected him and is presenting
the "glimpse" to us. "Movement" could be the key word in
the poem, for in a sense, the similarity between the move-
ment of the ocean and that of the mass of flowers directly
adjacent to the sea interests the poet:

--chicory and daisies

ties, released, seem hardly flowers alone

but color and the movement--

The sea, then, in turn, seems a giant bulbous flower that
sways "peacefully" on a giant "plantlike stem." The image
is very much like that of an impressionistic painting. In
the restless amalgam of color and movement of the flowers
and the vast blue round of the sea itself, Williams points
out that the flowers are a sea and the sea is a flower. The poem achieves its effect in seeing things in terms of other things which emphasize a previously unexpected identity. This paradox gives the poem unity and point.

In Williams' poetry platonic symbolism does not exist. Objects to him exist in and for themselves. The poet sees and presents to his reader "the thing itself without forethought or afterthought but with great intensity of perception" (8, p. 5). His better poems have the quality which he claims for "Chicory and Daisies"; "A poet witnessing the chicory flower and realizing its virtues of form and color so constructs his praise of it as to borrow no particle from right or left. He gives the poem over to the flower and its plants themselves" (8, p. 17).

This same "intensity of perception" is present in "Flowers by the Sea." The poet is simply "witnessing" the flowers. He is not imbuing them with meanings or connotations other than those that reside in the thing itself. From his vantage point, the "form," the "color," the "movement" of the flowers impressed him, so he presented them cleanly, with no intrusions from "right or left." The poem is indeed the flowers themselves. It is a moment, a glimpse enjoyed by the poet and shared with the reader. He directs our attention to one specific object at one immediate moment in time, and the aim of the poet must, therefore, be "to refine, to clarify, to intensify that eternal moment" (8, p. 3).
Written in the present tense, "Flowers by the Sea" exemplifies Williams' ability to do this.

The sequence of verbal forms also expresses the special way in which "Flowers by the Sea" takes place in a single moment. J. Hillis Miller explains that the instant for Williams is "a field of forces in tension" (4, p. 8). The red wheelbarrow, the locust tree in flower, the young sycamore, even the things named in long poems like *Paterson* or "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," stand fixed in the span of an instant. Nevertheless, Miller points out, there is in every moment a "dynamic motion" (4, p. 8). "Flowers by the Sea" exemplifies another characteristic technique in Williams' poetry, that is, the process of flowering, growth, or movement. This desire to present the object as an organic entity is why Williams often describes the total flower, or tree, or whatever object he is writing about. The total description gives a greater feeling of process. Though the young sycamore is portrayed completely in an instant, from trunk to topmost twig, "the poet experiences this stasis as a growth within the moment" (4, p. 9).

Like "The Young Sycamore," "Flowers by the Sea" also exemplifies Williams' ability to present the objects of a single moment of his vision and at the same time to give a feeling of movement, growth, or "process." Words that give the poem fluidity are "over," "lifts," "tied" (with its obvious play on tide), "releases," "movement," "restlessness,"
"circles," and "sways." In no line of the poem is the movement allowed to subside, but continues its undulation in imitation of the flowers and the sea. This stylistic or poetic technique gives the poem itself credibility as an object of nature. The movement of the poem, like the movement of the described objects in nature, is continual. This movement allows the poem to hold permanently open the beauty which is revealed in the flowers juxtaposed with the sea.

"Flowers by the Sea," written before 1930, shows Williams' early concern for both the image and the construction in his poetry. Alan Ostrom's comment on Williams' poetry indicates how important structure was becoming to his writing during the twenties:

Clearly it is Williams' belief that like the things and ideas used in a poem, the form, the structure, of a poem is a matter of conscious choice; and what a poem "says" is contained not so much in its overt statement--its philosophy, its doctrine, its "wisdom" --as in how the things are ordered, how the words that represent the things are made into a series of relationships (6, p. 105).

Ostrom further states that the poem must "reproduce the poet's understanding of the rhythm, the measured pattern, of the life of his world" (5, p. 105). In his depiction of the two images in "Flowers by the Sea" Williams has presented the principal characteristic that the sea and the field of flowers have in common: movement. This movement allows Williams' poetry to exist as an activity, not as a passive substance. The poem, not merely a picture of a pasture of
flowers along the seaside, is similar to the flowers because it shares their natural process with them. That is, it has "an intrinsic movement of its own to verify its authenticity" (8, p. 257). The poem, often anthologized, is typical of Williams' work in its intention to make the reader appreciative of a seemingly common scene. Also typical of his work is the use of the cleanly drawn image, and the incorporation of a feeling of movement, which, as will be demonstrated in Chapter III, he learned from the painters.

The here and now, the local, the specific, the present—all these phrases appear again and again in the poetry and prose works of Williams. From all the prose works that he left, Kora in Hell, Spring and All, his essays, and his letters, one would think that there would be a wealth of material from which to put together his theory of art. In truth, all these writings violate the dictum that he followed assiduously in his poetry—write "nothing that is redundant." All his critical prose says essentially just one thing—"no ideas but in things." In order to think, in order to formulate ideas a man must have facts. And the facts of our lives are the things that surround us and that we see every day. The poet's job, according to Williams, is to "reveal" those objects to us, to make us really see and be aware of the facts of our lives. From there we can move, if able, to understanding and eventually to ideas.
The following three chapters identify influences of the Imagist movement and the avant garde painters on the early poetry of Williams, and particularly on those poems that deal with flowers. This study is restricted to the earlier poems for several reasons, the most obvious being that Williams simply does not employ floral imagery to any extent in The Collected Later Poems. For instance, of the almost three hundred poems in The Collected Earlier Poems nearly sixty take flowers as their title or rely on floral imagery for part of their power. Nearly half that many use arboreal imagery, another prominent and important "object" in Williams' poetry, and, of course, many more use other images from the natural world. On the other hand, in The Collected Later Poems only three poems have flowers in their titles. Even in these three Williams was more interested in depicting sociological situations than in description, for his conception of poetry changed radically after the 1930's. He became convinced at that time that poetry should be serious rather than entertaining. Further, he became a staunch advocate of the "anti-poetic" theory of beauty whose chief tenet was that beauty and ugliness were part of a single whole. Nothing beautiful, like a flower, could exist without its soil of ugly, drab antecedents. James Guimond believes that this is the reason why Williams ceased presenting "his beautiful objects in splendid, static isolation from time and the world around them" (1, p. 50). Possibly
for these reasons the nature imagery is not nearly so dominant in these poems as in those written before 1940. Nor has the poetry of *Paterson* or *Pictures from Breugel* been included in this study. Because of the tremendous attention given them in the last five years, their nature imagery has been well covered. However, of the nature, and especially floral, imagery of the earlier poetry little has been said. Hopefully, this study will show that Williams made extensive and successful use of flowers in his poetry because they were the particular objects of the concrete world which best lent themselves to the related techniques and goals of first the Imagistic movement in poetry and later the Stieglitz school in painting.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER II

WILLIAMS AND THE IMAGISTS

By the time Williams finished college in 1912 an argument was raging over who actually did formulate the doctrine of Imagism. At one time or another Ezra Pound, T. E. Hulme, Ford Madox Ford, and Amy Lowell had all written essays and espoused rules for good "Imagistic" writing, and all laid some claim as founder or leader of the movement. However, for the purpose of this study it makes little difference who originated the Imagist school; what is important is an evaluation of Imagist doctrine as an influence upon the poetic practices of William Carlos Williams.

"Imagism" describes a kind of poetry written first around 1908-1909 by a small group of English and American poets, most of whom were studying together in London. Like many literary movements it seems to have been influenced by earlier models, but most scholars agree that Imagism to a large extent was a reaction against the vagueness and sentimentality of Romantic and Victorian poetry. William Pratt explains that the Imagist poem was produced by "the grafting of poetic forms from other languages" (10, p. 11). Some of the most obvious influences came from ancient Chinese and Japanese poetry through Ezra Pound, one of the most dominant and influential members of the movement. Late
in 1913 he had become literary executor of the estate of Ernest Fenalossa. A portion of Fenalossa's research had been published in his *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*. Pound began editing and translating material unfinished by Fenalossa, which included a Japanese Noh drama and Chinese and Japanese poetry. The impact of Oriental poetry comes from its dependence on a swiftly and cleanly drawn image. Pound and his friends were very impressed by some of the translations and were quick to draw parallels between Oriental and Imagist poetry (2, pp. 156-157). Hilda Doolittle (H.D.) and Richard Aldington brought their interest in classical Greek poetry to the movement, and all the young poets who were talking together in London during this time were reading French Symbolist poems.

Whatever the outside influences on Imagism, the movement did not merely emphasize a change in technique, but also consisted of a change in attitude toward the nature and function of poetry. Indeed, as Stanley Coffman states in his history of the movement it was "the first attempt by contemporary poets to formulate a change of direction that would mark them as contemporary, and an understanding of Imagism is important for explaining, in part, the direction taken by poetry since 1912" (2, p. 24).

The first discussions and descriptions of Imagism came out of meetings that gathered around T. E. Hulme, an Englishman studying in London in 1908-1909. The nature of the
movement was first defined in a lecture which Hulme gave to the group that formed the first "school of Images" (10, p. 24). He suggested that modern art, as it was then emerging, was different from art of the past in that "it no longer deals with heroic action, it has become definitely and finally introspective and deals with the expression and communication of momentary phases in the poet's mind" (5, p. 68). Hulme advocated the use of the vers libre of the French Symbolist poets. He understood that poetry could not exist without a definite form, but he felt that poetic form should respond more directly to the inner control of the impression, or image, than to the outer control of the pre-established pattern of accent and rhyme (5, p. 60). In the Imagist poem the rhythm was chosen to fit the subject, just as the words were determined by the subject; every true poem should have its own inner order, and the only real "freedom" was in the subject, the image, with which the poem began (10, p. 27).

Hulme's philosophy of the poem maintained that real communication between human beings is possible only by means of images. His belief was that "thought is prior to language and consists in the simultaneous presentation to the mind of two different images" (5, p. 84). All language, according to Hulme's view, originates in word-images, and in all real communication "each word must be an image seen, not a counter" (5, p. 79). Through unprecise thinking and careless use of the language, words lose their significance
as images and so cease to communicate—"unless revived by fresh associations and unexpected combinations" (10, p. 28).

The poet's language always endeavors to arrest you, and to make you continuously see a physical thing, to prevent your gliding through an abstract process. It chooses fresh epithets and fresh metaphors, not so much because they are new, and we are tired of the old, but because the old cease to convey a physical thing and become abstract counters (6, pp. 122-123).

It is important, then, for language, and especially poetry, to have visual content, to be communicative and powerful. Hulme meant that poetry at its best must be visual and concrete. Images become the very essence of good language. Essentially, then, the Imagist poem, according to Hulme, is a moment of revealed truth, rather than a structure of consecutive thoughts of events. The emphasis is on a single, dominant image, or a quick succession of related images: its effect is meant to be instantaneous rather than cumulative. The test of the image was that it be rendered exact, in as few words as possible and with the maximum of visual content. "The sparer, starker, more striking the image, the better the poem" (1, p. 30). Hulme was convinced that the imaging process must be present in good writing. "A man cannot write without seeing at the same time a visual significance before his eyes. It is this image which precedes the writing and makes it firm" (6, p. 84).
This is not to say, as many scholars have, that the image projected was to be free of all human significance. Good literature cannot be without human content or relevance. In the Imagist poem, however, the human significance is implied rather than stated. Often there is a phrase which draws the connection, as in Williams' "so much depends" of "The Red Wheelbarrow." Or, the connection may be more subtle, as in "Love Song." In this way Imagist poems differ from other poems in leaving more for the reader to interpret, but this does not mean they contain less human significance. It is in this characteristic, along with the conveying of one cleanly drawn image, that they are like the Japanese haiku, one of their models. The Imagist poem differs from the haiku in being less restrictive in subject (classical haiku were almost exclusively nature images) and in form (the haiku was traditionally three lines of five, seven, and five syllables respectively). However, the Imagist poems, like the haiku, were meant to be read and re-read, to be meditated upon, until the full significance of the image had communicated itself.

Although it is generally agreed that Hulme first formulated the Imagist theory of writing, two brief essays in the March, 1913, issue of Poetry were important for publicizing and clarifying the thoughts of the participants in the movement. They were "Imagism," written by F. S. Flint, and "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," written by Ezra Pound. These
essays represented the first serious attempt at a statement of Imagist principles (10, p. 17). Flint's article began by protesting that the Imagists "were not a revolutionary school; but their only endeavor was to write in accordance with the best tradition, as they found it in the best writers of all time,--in Sappho, Catullus, Villon" (4, p. 199). He went on to give a few of the rules which the Imagists professed to follow and which had never been published before:

1. Direct treatment of the "thing," whether subjective or objective.

2. To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation.

3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in a sequence of a metronome (4, p. 199).

Pound's essay, which followed directly after Flint's, further elaborated on the image: "An image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (9, p. 200). He further clarified by adding, "It is the presentation of such a 'complex' instantaneously which gives the sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art" (9, pp. 200-201). He went on to emphasize that it is better "to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous words" (9, p. 201). Pound then proceeded to give his list of "don'ts," which
became guide-lines for all those who wished to follow the Imagist style of writing:

1. Use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something. (He explained that the writer must realize that the natural object is always the "adequate symbol.")

2. Go in fear of abstractions.

3. Use either no ornament or good ornament.

4. Don't chop your stuff into separate iambics.

5. Don't mess up the perception of one sense by trying to define it in terms of another (9, pp. 200-201).

The first anthology of the Imagists came out in the spring of 1914. It was edited by Pound and it bore the French title, Des Imagistes. The thirty-odd poems in the volume were of distinctly mixed quality, and were written in a variety of poetic forms, from prose to rhymed and metered verse, but all were quite short, were prevalently in free verse and informal diction, and bore the stamp of the three main poetic influences: the classical Greek lyric, the Japanese haiku, and recent French symbolist poetry in vers libre (10, p. 19). The anthology included most of the names then associated with Imagism: Richard Aldington, H. D., Flint, Pound, Amy Lowell, Skipworth Connell, Allen Upward, John Corunos, James Joyce, Ford Madox Ford, and, of course, William Carlos Williams.

Striking similarities exist in the thinking of Williams and the Imagists. The first and most obvious is their opinion on the subject matter of poetry. Hulme defended
the classical notion that man is a limited creature who cannot know reality and thus cannot reveal the truths of the universe. He explained that Romantic poetry always attempts to communicate perfection. In doing so the poet slips into a sloppy and careless kind of language that is "moaning or whining about something or other" (6, p. 126). The essence of this poetry is to lead the reader to "a beyond of some kind" (6, p. 127). In rejecting such poetry Hulme praised the classicist's attempt to express the vivid patches of his life. The classical poem, he continued, "is always the light of ordinary day, never the light that was never on land or sea. It is always perfectly human and never exaggerated: man is always man and never a god" (6, p. 127). The feelings that Hulme wanted poetry to express were the minor, transient, almost trivial ones which result from seeing physical things in an unconventional way.

Williams' writings show his affinity with Hulme's poetical expectations. Indeed, in his Selected Essays Williams says repeatedly that there is no universal except in the local: the poet must "first become awake to his own locality" (15, p. 28). First in importance to the artist is his attention to the here and now, a phrase he uses repeatedly in his essays. The poet must be in contact with the immediate: the "only human value of anything, writing included, is intense vision of the facts" (15, p. 71). Both Hulme and Williams believed that the use of poetry is to
reveal the inner life of things. The artist, they agreed, portrays his vision of life which allows men to lift the blinders that they wear toward reality. They both wanted the poem to evoke a "physical and thus individual reaction which startles the reader out of his normal habits of thought by presenting relations unseen before" (2, p. 58). A desire for such an evocation leads to a dependence on the sharp, cleanly drawn image. The specific is all we can know, they believed. To reject that is to reject any possibility of the universal.

In a letter to Louis Zukofsky, Williams wrote that "the effect of a 'thing' surpasses all thought about it" (16, p. 102). And so, again and again he presents the thing to us. "Nantucket" is a good example of his ability to present the effect of a "thing," rather than discussion or thought about that thing.

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
the key is lying--and the
immaculate white bed.
(14, p. 348)

The emphasis in the poem is definitely on the "here and now." Its intent is to wake up the senses. The poet
expresses the urgency of being aware. Williams is saying, "Look, perceive, be aware!" All the senses come in to play: splashes of color--white begins the poem with the curtains, and ends it with the sheets of the bed, and the lavender and yellow of the flowers contribute to the brightness of the picture; the fresh smell of the room; texture--the image of the glass on a glass tray. In the perception of these minutiae the poet makes contact with his world. In the shape of the depicted objects lies the essence of the poem. He shows that in keeping ourselves alive to the particulars of experience we shun the screen of generalities that often forms between the world and ourselves. As Hulme explained the Imagist should do, Williams deals not with vast emotions or with the problems of the universe, but with "the very personal feelings that result from viewing a physical object in an unusual way" (2, p. 70).

Another good example of Williams' adherence to the Imagist techniques is "The Locust Tree in Flower." Williams almost always begins his poems by establishing a structure of actual things, the only part of the world we can know fully as men bounded by the limits of our senses (8, p. 127). As has been stated, the inevitable result of the Imagist techniques is a pruning of all superfluous material, always working toward compression. All words but the absolutely indispensable denotations of the objects are done away with if possible. As Alan Ostrom explains, this leads not only
to a subtlety in expression of intellectual materials, but also to a great energy being pent up in the poem (8, p. 128). The two versions of "The Locust Tree in Flower" show this pruning process taking place. The first version shows Williams working his way toward an ultimate in compression. Every word is fertile and must be examined closely by the reader in order to obtain a completeness of associations and extended meanings:

Among
the leaves
bright
green
of wrist-thick
tree
and old
stiff broken
branch
ferncool
swaying
loosely strung--
come May
again
white blossom
clusters
hide
to spill
their sweets
almost
unnoticed
down
and quickly
fall
(14, p. 94)
In the second version the line and the word become identical:

Among
of
green
stiff
old
bright
broken
branch
come
white
sweet
May
again
(14, p. 93)

Although both versions relay some similar connotations, the second version has taken the Imagist rules to their farthest extremity. Not one single word that does not add detail to the image is allowed, and even some that would add have been dropped. Like the Japanese haiku, bits and pieces of information are given to us, and the composition of the selected materials must deliver the impact of the poem. In this poem, Williams, like the Japanese haiku maker, is aiming at a form of expression in which an image is the resonant heart of an exquisite moment.

The reader's attention is caught immediately by the introduction in the first two lines of the two prepositions—a seemingly illogical sequence of words. But this unorthodox use of the language reminds the reader that the poem demands not a logical sort of sense, but a poetical sense. The word
"among" must be held in the reader's mind until he finishes the poem and returns to the beginning word. It becomes evident that the word is used for its impressionistic value. It implies that the poet is with, or included in, something. That is, in the natural phenomena that he describes, he, too, is participating. In fact, his, and the reader's, awareness of the participation is vital to the poem. "Green" supplies the objective reference to the first two lines: the poet (and the reader) seems to be within and identified with the green.

Williams continues in his impressionistic manner to give only the dominant characteristics of the image. Through imagination the reader fills in the rest. And once again, the senses are vital to the comprehension of the impression the poet is giving. Color, texture, smell are all evoked and lend vitality to the final image.

Each word is presented as an image in itself. As the reader juggles them, he sees that the juxtaposition of these word-images becomes the basis of the structure of the poem. The verb "come," not agreeing with any noun in proximity, is eventually taken as an imperative. Only when we put aside the common mode of logical thinking and allow our imaginations to react to the piling up of words does the impact of the final four words come. The stiff branch cracks, and we are covered with a soft and sweet shower of locust blossoms.
In "The Locust Tree in Flower" meaning emerges from the structural relationship of a group of words, a technique Williams learned from his painter friends. But the aim of the poem is to make each word function as an image, a thing, in itself. "To allow a word to be absorbed by the language surrounding it is as bad as to let it be swallowed up in its traditional associations," Williams said (7, p. 296). The poet's words must "remain separate, each unwilling to group with the others except as they move in one direction" (17, p. 86). In this use of language, the juxtaposition of the words gives the poem force and vitality.

The use of the short, unadorned line as a unit of measurement underlies much of Williams' poetry. Like "The Locust Tree in Flower," "Blueflags" is a good example of how this accretion of sense units can be carried out without a confusion in thought or shifts to seemingly unrelated images. Williams begins his poem:

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.

(14, p. 225)
Although this poem is not as lean as "The Locust Tree in Flower," a similar process of building is effected in each line. Each line adds new detail to the scene as the poem builds toward a culmination. The images are piled on until in the twenty-third line the reader is arrested with "But blueflags are blossoming." The "But" implies the urgency of such an event and functions much in the same way as "so much depends" of "The Red Wheelbarrow." Even though the other images Williams has presented have enchanted him, all are forgotten with the delight that comes in seeing the blueflags in full bloom.

Williams' listing of things, as in "Blueflags," can be accounted for by his intent to show things. It is almost as if he felt that in naming or listing objects he shows the reality of them. In order to accomplish this reality he presents to his readers the materials of the world. "By creating a replica of the actual world, at last by heightened sensitivity to it to pierce through actuality to the universal men and actions and qualities of mind that are at once unique and typical--the representation of reality" (8, p. 22). Once the "things" have been established, their relationships, their implications, their ideas live in their order: "No ideas but in things" (12, p. 3).

This does not mean, however, that no ideas should appear in poetry, nor, as some critics argue, that there are no ideas in Williams' poetry. It means only that they should not
appear "arsenaled as in a textbook but must be part of the way you see the object itself. Ideas are not stated but implied" (12, p. 3). When Williams began to demand more than mere description of the image he began to outgrow the Imagist movement and prepared himself to become receptive to the thinking of Stieglitz. Although there is reason enough for focusing only on the local, Williams has said several times that the business of poetry is to show the universal in the local. He believed that the universal is shown in specifics by the artist who has freed himself from the self-interest that prevents most people from seeing it:

Being an artist I can produce, if I am able, universals of general applicability. If I succeed in keeping myself objective enough, sensual enough, I can produce the factors, the concretions of materials by which others shall understand and so be led to use--that they may the better see, touch, taste, enjoy--their world differing as it may from mine . . . . That--all my life I have striven to emphasize it--is what is meant by universality of the local. From me where I stand to them where they stand in their here and now--where I cannot be--I do in spite of that arrive (15, pp. 197-198).

A good example of his ability to imbue a kind of universality in the specific and still adhere to the principles of Imagism is "Chicory and Daisies."

I
Lift your flowers on bitter stems chicory!
Lift them up out of the scorched ground!
Bear no foliage but give yourself wholly to that!
Strain under them
you bitter stems
that no beast eats--
and scorn greyness!
Into the heat with them:
Cool!!
Luxuriant! sky-blue!
The earth cracks and
is shriveled up;
the wind moans piteously;
the sky goes out
if you should fail.

II
I saw a child with daisies
for weaving into the hair
tear the stems with her teeth!

(14, p. 122)

On one level the poet presents to us the virtues of the form
and color of the flowers (once again, senses are all-important).
And on this level the poem "says" no more than this. But on
another level, the level of universality, Williams might have
said of the flowers, as he said of the red wheelbarrow, "so
much depends." That is, so much depends on flowers that
flourish in rocky and unfertile places, for they are necessary
in this world and therefore they are included in Williams' celebration of it. As his flower poems point out, he is passionate toward nature and appreciative of whatever form it takes.

"The Widow's Lament" is another poem in which Williams imbues his images with a greater responsibility than mere sensuousness. As has been mentioned, Williams has said that the aim of writing is to reveal what is inside man. In this poem the vivid images of a new spring are presented to emphasize the grief of the widow. The flowers are too full of life, too rich for a woman bearing the pain of her husband's
death. The flowers act as the pivotal point of the poem—from instigation of the son's observations, to her wish for death for herself. The woman's speech, contrasted with the images of spring and new life, reveals a person facing the plight of being old and alone.

This is not symbolism, which was, again, a technique that was avoided by the Imagists. The images themselves carry the emotional weight of the poem, rather than a network of symbolic correspondences which exists outside the poem. Williams is merely adhering to Pound's statement that the "Image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." As Nancy Willard has said of Williams, he uses the images as he does because in that way he can "articulate an emotion more clearly than the subject is able to do. The poet's language is free of localisms, as simple and intense as that of the anonymous fifteenth century song writers to whom Williams has been compared" (12, p. 23). "The Widow's Lament in Springtime" exhibits the characteristics of a good Imagist poem while at the same time maintaining the simplicity and intensity of which Miss Willard speaks.

Although Williams' ideas on poetry are close to Hulme's, it is not known that Hulme influenced him in any direct way. Rather, he probably learned directly of Imagist thought through Ezra Pound, whom he had met in 1909 and become good friends with at the University of Pennsylvania, and only indirectly
learned of Hulme through his correspondence with Pound in London. Williams' first poem, written in 1902, although immature, certainly conforms to most of the principles of the Imagist poem:

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

(13, p. 47)

But the Imagist school in its earliest stages was not begun until 1909 in England. This would indicate that Williams, rather than being motivated solely by the Imagists, was developing his poetical standard parallel to them. In this case, Williams is an Imagist not because he followed the Imagist movement, but because the Imagist ideas coincided with his.

We know that Williams and Pound talked at great length during their college years about literature, and especially poetry. Pound began forming his ideas about the image while at the University of Pennsylvania, and they were well known by 1913 when, while in London, he published his article, "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" (3, p. 3). It was during his college years and his close association with Pound, Hilda Doolittle, Marianne Moore, and Charles Demuth that Williams began to take a serious stance on what a poem should be. After he was graduated and Pound had left for London, they continued to correspond. It is through this communication with Pound that Williams further refined his views on poetry.
Several of Pound's letters to Williams show him still expounding on what he did and did not like in poetry. Above all things he urged Williams to avoid sloppiness and sentimentality in his writing. He reiterated for him the basic view of the Imagists: paint the thing as you see it (2, p. 126). This Williams agreed with and applied to his poetry. Aside from this insistence upon an honest and precise rendering of subject matter, and upon craftsmanship rather than inspiration, they also agreed that "the ultimate subject of art is the nature of man--that is, man considered as a thinking and sentient creature" (2, pp. 128-129).

In accordance with Pound's early views, the principal material of Williams' early poems is an intensely concentrated reaction to some natural object, a reaction that is always evoked by the object as a physical thing. In "The Lily" he portrays the tiger lily in terms of its unique and almost grotesque characteristics. He does not describe in hackneyed phrases the loveliness or beauty of the flower, nor does he use it as a symbol for the viciousness of nature (a fly is caught in its petal). He presents its color and its physical quality, and gives a feeling of the intricacy and delicacy of this object of nature. This poem, like so many of Williams' earlier poems shows the qualities Pound had praised--concreteness, accuracy of observation, swiftness of comparison, and beauty of image.
The preceding examples show that Williams' aims and concerns in poetry most definitely make him a part of the Imagist movement. The poems are all part of Williams' attempt to "devise a poetic structure that will formalize experience without deforming it; to let the beat of speech determine the measure; to rinse language of ornament and encrustation; to be scrupulously selective but to allow for accident and impingement" (1, p. 7). Williams said in his autobiography that the poet's business is "not to talk in vague categories but to write particularly, as a physician works, upon a patient, upon the thing before him, in the particular to discover the universal" (1, p. 7). It was the image which allowed him to do this.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER III

WILLIAMS AND THE STIEGLITZ GROUP

After 1920 Williams rejected Imagism as a movement and was more heavily influenced by Alfred Stieglitz and the group of painters that associated themselves with him. Because of the obvious similarities between the Imagists and Stieglitz's group, one has to wonder what instigated his movement away from Imagism. Why did he become dissatisfied with a mode of writing that had seemingly served him so well? The answer lies in the one major difference in the two groups--structure. A passage from Williams' autobiography is especially helpful in our understanding of his dissatisfaction with Imagism:

We had had "Imagism" (Amygism, as Pound called it), which ran quickly out. That, though it had been useful in ridding the field of verbiage, had no formal necessity implicit in it. It had already dribbled off into so called "free verse" which, as we saw, was a misnomer. There is no such thing as free verse! Verse is measure of some sort. "Free verse" was without measure and needed none for its projected objectifications. Thus the poem had run down and become formally non-extant.

But, we argued, the poem, like every other form of art, is an object, an object that in itself formally presents its case and its meaning by the very form it assumes. Therefore, being an object, it should be so treated and controlled--but not as in the past. For past objects have about them past necessities--like the sonnet--which have conditioned them and from which, as a form itself, they cannot be freed.

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The poem being an object (like a symphony or a cubist painting) it must be the purpose of the poet to make of his words a new form: to invent, that is, an object consonant with his day (13, pp. 264-265).

But Imagism had been more than just "useful" to Williams. Although he later looked upon his Imagist phase as a passing involvement, he never wavered from the deft, uncalculated transcribing of what he saw and felt. John Malcolm Brinnin says that

no other American poet--with perhaps the exception of H. D.--has written so many poems that can serve as models illustrating the Imagist canon. Concretion, exactitude, observation without comment, vulgar subject matter, common speech, homely details glittering with mineral clarity--Williams exhibits all and achieves over and over again that complexity of emotion within an instant of time that was the goal of true Imagists (1, p. 12).

He quickly became impatient, not with the basic techniques that he had learned from Imagism, but with its limitations on structure. He never swerved from his belief that the focus on concrete imagery was necessary in a good poem, yet he felt that Imagism "lost its place finally because as a form it completely lacked structural necessity. The Image served for everything so that the structure, a weaker and weaker free verse, degenerated into a condition very nearly resembling the sonnet" (1, p. 13). Imagism undoubtedly clarified and sharpened Williams' poetical techniques. And although it helped Williams to define his own peculiar language, it did not serve his greater need
for a broader and more viable sense of structure (1, p. 13). He turned to the plastic arts for lessons on structure.

The particular plastic arts from which he learned were those of photography and painting. Williams saw innovation in both the technique and subject matter of the painters and photographers who grouped themselves around Alfred Stieglitz in New York from about 1915 to 1940. This group set out to develop the implications of the Imagists and of the Cubists. The influence of the developments made by these painters and photographers has been pervasive in Williams' poetry, and their techniques can be seen clearly in many poems with flowers as subjects.

Williams had been throughout his life fascinated by painting. He acquired his interest in the visual arts from his mother, who had studied painting in Paris and who continued to paint throughout his youth. "I've always held her as a mythical figure," Williams said. "Her interest in art became my interest in art" (9, p. 16). He recalls enjoying watching her paint outside, and tells that he even painted some himself while in college (13, p. 10).

But the most important influence from the visual arts was to come some ten years after college when he became good friends with the New York photographer and gallery owner Alfred Stieglitz. By 1915 Stieglitz had become the mentor of several young experimental artists in New York, and his gallery, called "291," was their meeting place. Among his
protégés were Charles Demuth, John Marin, Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove, Charles Sheeler, and Georgia O'Keeffe. Williams often came to examine and admire the exhibitions at "291" and soon became friends with Stieglitz and his companions. He thus became closely allied, socially and artistically, with the painters.

It was Williams' interest in the visual arts and his fascinated immersion in the experimental activities of the painters in New York during those years that, according to Bram Dijkstra, determined his style of writing (3, p. 49). His poetry of the twenties indicates his determination to do for poetry what the painters had done for painting. Concomitant with the advent of Imagism, Williams had developed in his poetry the clear and sharp image that Pound and Hulme had urged. Imagism had further supported his feeling that the rhythms and patterns of rhyme which the older poets were using were not to be included in the "new poetry." But the manifestoes of Stieglitz and the painters of "291" took him one step beyond the goals of the Imagists. From them he learned that the image supports itself and is not only the topic of the poem, but also the method of the poem.

Like an Imagistic poem, a good painting must also rely first on the concrete perception of an object. This concrete perception of an object, on which both the painters and Williams relied, was illustrated most clearly and forcefully by Stieglitz. Unlike many earlier photographers who
were aiming for a hazy, impressionistic effect, Stieglitz was producing prints with razor sharp clarity. He taught his followers to be alert to the material world. He urged them to depend on the eye—the artist "must see before he can create" (3, p. 96). Like the Imagists he emphasized the important facts of the scene. Indeed, there is a very fine line between what the Imagists were doing and what Williams learned to do from the painters. The essence of that distinction seems to be that in paying closer attention to the object itself the artist can do justice to it without forcing it to function as a metaphor. In other words, the image is still all important, but its detail, depth, and intricacy become of more value to the artist than they had been before. Nevertheless, like the Imagists, Stieglitz paid attention to the important facts of the scene, eliminating or moderating the less important and "bringing every detail into due subordination to a single effect of telling simplicity" (3, p. 97). Above all else, the painter, photographer, or poet must attain clarity.

Like the image of the Imagist, though, the image for Stieglitz and his group was not meaningless. Dijkstra explains, in his study of modern painting and photography, that the painters "carefully analyzed each object in nature as potentially representative of the full scope of their inner experience" (3, p. 98). This is exactly what Williams was doing in many of his better poems, as discussed in
Chapter II. Stieglitz realized that through ever more precise observation of the objects of the world around him he could express "his most intense and therefore most inarticulate emotions accurately in terms of the materials of life" (3, p. 100). Williams agreed that in the form and movement of the objects of reality, carefully chosen and faithfully rendered, his feelings are represented. But never is the significance of the object itself to be slighted. Thus in Williams' best poetry we get a combination of the two classes into which we have divided his work. That is, we get a poetry that is descriptive and concrete in its delineation of the object but also makes a correlation between the nature of the object and the nature of man.

For Stieglitz the objects of nature are absolutes from which all derives (3, p. 101). Thus, he learned to see all things with perfect precision in an attempt to penetrate into the nature of each object. His photographs, like the paintings of his followers, came closest to his ideal when they accurately observed the object. By way of the senses art became meaningful, not by way of the intellect.

The Stieglitz group soon realized that the conventional "photographic" way of presenting material was not always the best. Often, if a particular picture is presented to a viewer (or reader) that picture will be scrutinized for its "subject" rather than for the independent perception of the shape, line, and texture inherent in the object
itself. In order to inhibit this "reading" of a picture the Stieglitz group began to focus very closely on one particular aspect of a scene or image. In this way the essence of the object is caught by presenting even smaller details of the image. The picture then becomes almost an abstraction. The artist forces the viewer to pay attention to minute and particular physical characteristics of an object, rather than concerning himself with the uses of the object. Stieglitz did this in his 1921 photograph "Dancing Trees." He has placed his camera only a few inches from a mass of twisted branches on a tree, showing in intimate detail the line and texture of the bark, while blurring the background of the scene. Arthur Dove does a similar thing in his 1921 painting "A walk Poplars." The intent in both pieces is to present the "treeness" of a tree, not to show simply a pretty and representational picture of trees. Georgia O'Keeffe is probably most well known for her flower paintings in which she uses a similar technique. She forces a careful examination of a single flower by extending its proportions on her canvas.

It becomes clear, then, that the emphasis on techniques under Stieglitz's tutorage became more intense than that of the Imagists. The purpose of the painters became not merely to present the sharp contours of an image, but to give a feeling of "thingness" about whichever object they were describing. If the artist is taking a piece of green broken
glass as his subject, he should focus on the unique characteristics of the glass, not simply tell that it rests between the back walls of a building, as Williams does in "Between Walls." Dijkstra explains what this intense concentration on the thing itself means to the artist and what it allows the work of art to portray:

To capture reality, to understand the meaning of his spiritual constitution, the artist must feel deeply and without prejudice, until the object opens itself to him in its full visual and tactile purity, revealing in its constitution the objective equivalence of the emotion which moves the artist. The artist then becomes the recording agent. His subjective response is made universal when it becomes absorbed by the object whose texture, line, color, and volume represent the elements which evoke the artist's original emotion (3, p. 119).

If the artist has learned how to see clearly, he can isolate those objects of the world which are the source of his feelings. The artist then focuses on those objects, selecting and juxtaposing their salient forms, lines, and textures, always careful never to undermine their autonomy as things. They should never come to stand for something else, for it is then that they lose their objectivity as real things.

During the 1920's Williams thoroughly incorporated the ideas of the Imagists and the ideas of the Stieglitz group into his poetry. Through his careful study of the ways in which the painters of the group were presenting their material, he began to pick up the style of the painter in his poems. Form, line and structure became more important in his poetry than they had been. That is, he noticed which
object commanded the eye first, and how the artist goes about giving that specific object precedence in the painting. Where does the eye go after it rests on the dominant object of the painting, and in what order does the eye follow the rest of the supporting material? He knew, of course, that he could never attain the spontaneity of a painting. The instant perception of a moment in painting is not literally possible in writing. No matter how short the poem, the reader has to follow a progression of words before he has all the information necessary to complete the image. Nevertheless, from these painters in general, and especially from his close friend Charles Demuth, Williams learned to arrange the objects of his poems so that their unusual conjunction makes us more clearly aware of their individual significance as objects. This lesson the Imagists, because of their lack of interest in the construction of the poem, could not teach him.

The structuring that he sought produces the essential difference in his poems during his purely Imagistic period and the poems he began to write after his associations with the painters. The earlier poetry was not determined in its structure by anything but the immediate visual object. Beginning about 1920 Williams was attempting to use his ink and paper just as the painters used their oil and canvas. He was convinced that the words "have to be arranged in the manner most appropriate to a faithful representation of the
aspect of the objective world constituting the material for the poem" (3, p. 142). In attempting to do this he turned for guidance most specifically to the photography of Stieglitz and the paintings of Sheeler, Hartley, Demuth, Gris, and O'Keeffe.

In adapting his poetry to the visual example of the painters, Williams followed most closely the work of Charles Demuth. Most of Demuth's paintings are marked by his characteristic stamp of juxtaposing a beautiful object with a tawdry environment which encroaches upon it. However, when he dealt with flowers he lifted them entirely out of life so they could be free of the decay that was sure to come to them. Williams does the same thing in many of his early flower poems. For instance, Williams' poem "A Pot of Flowers" is a literal rendering of Demuth's watercolor "Tuberoses," which was painted in 1922 and soon became a part of Williams' own collection (7, p. 49).

Pink confused with white flowers and flowers reversed take and spill the shaded flame darting it back into the lamp's horn petals aslant darkened with mauve red where in whorls petal lays its glow upon petal round flamegreen throats petals radiant with transpiercing light contending above the leaves
reaching up their modest green
from the pot's rim

and there, wholly dark, the pot
gay with rough moss.

(14, p. 242)

In the first two lines of the poem Williams delineates
the characteristics of the flowers that first command atten-
tion in the painting itself. The vivid colors that Demuth
was noted for using in his flower paintings are transliterated
in the poem. The blending of pink and white in the delicate
petals of the roses is appropriately called "confused"--as if
the petals themselves could not decide whether to be pink or
white. The lower petals, shaded or pushed underneath, are
called "mauve"--a good verbal description of what happens to
red or pink when it is toned down by shade. And finally,
"flame green" is used to describe the brightness of young
leaves. Williams begins at the top part of the picture,
with the blossoms themselves, and works his way down to the
base of the pot, the last thing the eye comes to in the
painting. Accordingly, he descends from the lively and
bright colors of the petals of the flower to the damp,
dark softness of the moss at the base of the flowers.
The structure of the poem has been dictated by the or-
dering of objects in the painting.

The poem abounds in words having to do with color, some
degree of light, or absence of light. Once again Williams
is able to give the feeling of movement and process, not only
because of the total description of the flowers, from uppermost petal to pot, but also because of the progression and diffusion of light as it pierces through the petals and leaves. Each line offers a fragment of the total image, so that a building, or layering, effect takes place. The light shifts and plays on the texture of leaves and petals, indicating the blotchy effect present in Demuth's painting. In this way Williams simulates Demuth's use of what Milton W. Brown calls the "ray-line." The ray-line in Demuth's scheme, Brown says, "suggests a spot-light or light-ray, for when it crosses some object, it affects the shade of the geometric area thus created" (2, p. 115). The movement is stopped and the structure given stability when we reach finally the base of the pot and the "wholly dark" moss that surrounds it. The structure and control of the poem result from Williams' careful attention to the way Demuth ordered his painting. Williams is still faithful to the techniques that Hulme and Pound had taught him, but he has joined with them the awareness of the structural implications of the movement of objects within the visual space of a painting. "A Pot of Flowers" is a fine example of his placing the elements of the poem in a certain pattern to give the feeling of visual exploration of a painting. In transposing this visual experience of the painting to his poetry, Williams has presented the details of the object under his scrutiny "according to a very deliberate sequence
which would approximate the pattern the eye traces on the visual field of a carefully composed painting" (3, p. 188).

Many of Williams' poems written after the early twenties show that the awareness of structure or pattern that the painters insisted on was an essential feature of his organization. The "linear exploration," as Dijkstra calls it (3, p. 189), attained through precise description of the facets of the object is seen clearly in the flower poems. The technique seems to be smoother and achieved more easily when it is applied to an object that is all of a piece, yet has an intricate structure. Possibly because of its physical construction, a flower allows him to maintain a unity while at the same time achieving the effect of linear movement. "The Young Sycamore," first published in The Dial in 1927, is one of the few non-floral poems which attains this principle of linear movement. The poem has a definite linear movement beginning at the trunk of the tree and continuing until the reader almost feels his neck straining to allow him to see the tree's top branches. Guimond maintains that this poem is a minute description of the tree in Stieglitz's photograph "Spring Showers" (7, p. 280).

The first poem of Spring and All, "By the Road to Contagious Hospital," has also been compared in both style and subject to one of Stieglitz's brooding photographs (3, p. 169; 7, p. 46). Like Stieglitz's photographs, and the
work of the painters who were learning from him, the poem has a clarity of description and a starkness which come from careful adherence to the visual field to be incorporated. One by one the objects are defined, but unlike "A Pot of Flowers," or "The Young Sycamore," this poem lacks the cohesion or feeling of totality achieved with the floral objects. The poem, though Imagistic, has loose ends and does not pull itself together, as a successful painting does. Too many objects are discussed for the poem to be structurally cohesive in the style of a painting, and particularly in the style of the paintings Williams was observing at that time. The poet is describing the sights of a particular road that he traveled to reach a hospital. In the first stanza alone he talks of clouds, wind, muddy fields, and dried weeds, all of which are described in good, Imagistic terms, but because of the variety of objects he has listed the scene becomes too panoramic for a Stieglitz-influenced painting. Further, in the sixth stanza, he begins to tell the reader what he is doing rather than showing the reader what he wants him to see, a danger Pound had warned against in his "Don'ts":

One by one objects are defined
It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf.
(14, p. 241)

Not only does Williams veer from attention to the object itself, but in attempting to comment on what he is doing he becomes vague and loses his visual picture. The poem is a good example of Williams' application of the painter's techniques to an object not well suited to that approach.
"Pot of Flowers" is not Williams' only flower poem inspired by or similar to one of Demuth's flower paintings. A. E. Gallatin says in his compilation of Demuth's paintings that his studies of flowers are among the works most familiar to the public (5, p. 6). He produced a profusion of watercolors taking tulips, zinnias, cyclamen, daisies, gladioli and orchids as subjects; Williams no doubt was familiar with most of them. Although he never said so, Williams might have had Demuth's tempura poster entitled "Calla Lillies" in mind when he wrote "The Red Lily." In admiring the flowers' "even lines / curving to the throat" (14, p. 351) he verbally interprets the smooth, swaying stem of the lily in Demuth's painting. The full trumpet-shaped flower that tops each of the two thick stems of the painting could easily be the "trumpeted flower" of Williams' poem that rests on a "steady stem" "slightly tilted / above a scale of buds--."

"Flower Piece," a 1915 watercolor by Demuth, is strikingly reminiscent of the "disputant" flowers of Williams' poem "The Disputants." Demuth's painting presents a mass of flowers in an explosive arrangement over the whole canvas. Patches of bright colors merge to give a confused, excited effect. The whole movement of the painting is up and outward, almost as if the flowers were going to shoot right off the canvas. Williams once again catches the aura of the painting when he describes his flowers, this time in a bowl, as a
violent disarray
of yellow sprays, green spikes
of leaves, red pointed petals
and curled heads of blue and white.
(14, p. 218)

Two other poems, "The Crimson Cyclamen" and "Daisy," bear resemblance to paintings by Demuth; however, they are examined in Chapter IV.

Guimond uses several poems from Spring and All, which is dedicated to Demuth, to point out comparisons between Williams' poetry and Demuth's paintings. The fact that Spring and All was dedicated to Demuth indicates how deeply Williams knew himself to be indebted to the work of his friend. Guimond says that "Flight to the City," "Young Love," "Rapid Transit," and "The Agonized Spires" achieve the same "cold precision and nervous speed that characterizes many of Demuth's paintings" (7, p. 44). In these poems Williams does use the commonplace, even drab, urban imagery of many Demuth paintings, but the methods of construction learned from Demuth are not as evident in these poems as they are in the floral poems previously discussed. Dijkstra also maintains that "Spring Strains," from Spring and All, was to some extent influenced by John Marin's work, as well as by European Cubism (3, p. 184). But the flower poems, the nature of their focus, and the development of subject matter, show most clearly the progressive redirection of his poetry according to the structural patterns advocated by the painters he most admired.
Through Stieglitz, Williams became friends with other painters whose work had a direct influence on his subject matter as well as his style. Each of his two poems on roses shows the influence of members of the Stieglitz group, Georgia O'Keeffe and Juan Gris. Almost all of Georgia O'Keeffe's paintings are enlarged forms of nature, which appear to be abstractions. She is concerned not with the mere visual appearance of things, but with their essential life, their being, their identity (6, p. 15). The thing-in-itself is what matters. In the marked characteristics of her painting, a simplification to essentials and a quality of movement, lies the admiration Williams had for her. Best known for her flower paintings, she concentrates on the form, isolating part of her subject from the world of reality, giving it a new significance (6, p. 15). By enormously enlarging the form of the flower, she slows down the movement of detail in the painting and gives the eye an opportunity to examine thoroughly that which it might overlook. Williams, in his poem "The Rose," seems to have attempted with words what O'Keeffe did in her 1927 oil painting "Abstraction--White Rose II. The painting is a rendering of the very center of the rose itself, all the folds and concentric creases of the center of the rose being enlarged to occupy the full breadth and length of a 36×30 canvas. The circles at the center of the canvas are very tight and enlarge gradually as they approach the outer edges of the flower. The
colors at the center of the flower are unblemished white, but deepen as the forms of the flower become even larger. Williams captures this whiteness at the center of the rose by listing its characteristics: "First warmth, variability/color and frailty" (14, p. 369). In the next two-line stanza he imitates the swirling movement of the rose in O'Keeffe's painting, the petals blending into a stream of movement rather than remaining separate discs: "A grace of petals skirting/the tight-whorled cone" (14, p. 369). And the expanding motion of the painting as it reaches the edges of the canvas he illustrates by "Wider! Wider!/Wide as if panting" (14, p. 369). Williams too is attempting to enlarge the characteristics of the rose so that we might become more aware of its "perfection."

Juan Gris joined his "very personal brand of Cubism" with a clear love for the natural forms of concrete materials, a combination that brought his work very close in conception to that of such painters as Demuth, Marin and Sheeler (3, p. 173). Not surprising, then, is Williams' special affinity with this artist. The Cubist tendencies can be seen in "The Rose," poem vii from Spring and All, a rendering of Gris' 1914 collage "Roses." W. H. Wright says in Modern Painting that Cubism "retained the older methods of form and conception, and added to them the illustrative device of reorganizing and rearranging objectivity so that
the separated parts would intersect, overlap, and partly obscure the image" (18, p. 238). The Cubists' primary interest was the organization of form, concreteness, and order. Their ambition was to attain a kind of synthesis, a "concentrated composition," which had for its goal the artistic consistency of all the picture's qualities (18, p. 243). The still-life, Wright says, became even more precise, more hard-cut, more completely ordered under the influence of Cubist thought (18, p. 247). Also important in Cubist painting is the theory of simultaneity, which Wright explains as the "combined presentation of a number of aspects of the same object from many different angles" (17, p. 247). Arthur Eddy, in Cubists and Post-Impressionism, explains that by using this technique of simultaneity the Cubist forces us to take in a series of objects at a glance (4, p. 72). The precision, the order, the instantaneous visual impression of the Cubists bring their work very close in conception to the poetical theories of the Imagists and to the ideas on painting and photography which Alfred Stieglitz offered.

Gris's photographic use of light, together with his precise delineation of objects, assured him the approval of both Stieglitz and Williams. In "Roses" photographs of roses, cut from a magazine perhaps, give the hard-edged shapes an even more striking sharpness. Williams turned these stark
mechanical roses into a poem "consisting of words with a quality as hard and real as the reproduction from which he took his poem" (3, p. 141):

... each petal ends in an edge, the double facet cementing the grooved columns of air--

(14, p. 249)

He continues his orderly description of the collage using words which connote the harsh, brittle effect of the collage:

... . . . . The edge cuts without cutting meets--nothing--renews itself in metal or porcelain--

The poem is marred only once when it fails to adhere to the objective toughness of the collage. He breaks away from description to direct interpretation when he asserts that

The rose carried weight of love but love is at an end--of roses. It is at the edge of the petal that love waits.

Here the poem begins to flounder because Williams became sentimental and careless in his use of words. He recovers himself quickly, however, and returns to the crisp, precise delineation of the beginning.

One other member of the Stieglitz group who influenced Williams was Charles Sheeler, the American artist whom Williams most specifically praised for depicting local materials. In his introduction to Sheeler's 1939 publication of paintings, drawings, and photographs the poet stated:
I think Sheeler is particularly valuable because of the bewildering directness of his vision, without blur, through the fantastic overlay with which our lives so vastly are concerned, "the real," as we say, contrasted with the artist's fabrications (11, p. 6).

Williams admired his work greatly and applied what he learned from it to some of his poems. In seeking "illumination in the local" (11, p. 7) Sheeler found that it is "in the shape of the thing that the essence lies" (11, p. 8). In his autobiography and various essays on Sheeler, Williams explained that here was an artist who could help men "to see":

To discover and separate these things from the amorphous, the conglomerate normality with which they are surrounded and of which before the act of "creation" each is a part, calls for an eye to draw out that detail which is in itself the thing, to clinch our insight, that is our understanding of it (11, p. 8).

It was his eye for the "thing" and his ability to make a painting articulate that most distinguished Sheeler for Williams.

According to Constance Rourke, Williams once asked Sheeler how he found his subjects:

"Do you go out for them, seize them?" Sheeler replied that he could not go out and find something to paint. Something seen keeps recurring in memory with an insistence increasingly vivid and with attributes added which escaped observation on first acquaintance. Gradually a mental image is built up which takes on a personal identity. . . . Since the value of the mental picture can be determined only by the degree of response it arouses in other persons it must be restated in physical terms--hence the painting (10, pp. 167-168).

Guimond says that both Sheeler and Williams were convinced that this reality of subject, or "personal identity,"
as Sheeler calls it, could only be realized through a classical approach (7, p. 54). The mark of this classicism, as Hulme had taught Williams, was that it gave the local subject a universal significance or validity. "From the shapes of men's lives," Williams wrote, "imparted by the places where they have experience, good writing springs. . . . One has to learn what the meaning of the local is, for universal purposes. The local is the only thing that is universal. . . . The classic is the local fully realized, words marked by the place" (16, p. 132).

Several techniques evident in both Williams and Sheeler give their subjects universal significance. Guimond cites similarity in the two in that they "assemble a number of subjects that seem--at first glance--to possess nothing in common beyond the fact that they come from the same locality. Actually, however, the objects share some common trait or principle--'a general relationship'--which suggests universal significance" (7, pp. 57-58). "Chicory and Daisies" and "The Wildflower," discussed earlier as Imagistic poems, do this. In other works, Williams and Sheeler deny the conception that man and nature have little in common, and in still other poems and paintings they seek to reconcile the natural and the artificial by insisting on the essential sameness of the governing laws of form (7, p. 58). Sheeler's still life "Cactus," for example, compares the plant with his studio lamps that light it. The nature of this peculiarly bulbous
structure is discovered by comparing it with the roundness of the metal lamp shades (7, p. 58). In his crayon drawing "Timothy," Sheeler compares the linear plant stalks to the slender, cylindrical vase in which they are placed. The delicately curved and fluted leaves of the plant serve to counterpoint the linear stiffness of both vase and stalks (7, p. 59).

Williams used this technique of juxtaposing an image from nature with a human or artificial image in many of his poems. In The Descent of Winter two bare, unexplained images are juxtaposed to make us aware of their unexpected similarity (7, p. 59):

Dahlias--
    What a red
    and yellow and white
    mirror to the sun, round
    and petaléd
    is this she holds?
    with a red face
    all in black
    and grey hair
    sticking out
    from under the bonnet brim
    Is this Washington Avenue Mr. please
    or do I have to
    cross the tracks?
(14, p. 304)

Williams uses a similar technique in "The Nightingales," where he juxtaposes shoes and flowers, and in "The Dead Baby," where images of death are surrounded and contrasted with flowers, images of life.

In his more ambitious and mature works Williams shows Sheeler's influence in his fusion of what Guimond calls the three realities:
the natural world of unconscious things--trees, rocks, soil, and minerals; the quotidian world of buildings and artifacts formed by men by practical, material needs; and the third world of the mind, the world produced by men conscious of their aesthetic, philosophic, or mathematical capabilities (7, p. 60).

In bringing together these three "realities" Williams, like Sheeler, was able to achieve a kind of organic unity in many of his better poems. From Sheeler's particular style of painting Williams said he learned

the realization of the qualities of a place in relation to the life which occupies it; embracing everything involved, climate, geographic position, relative size, history, other cultures--as well as the character of its sands, flowers, minerals and the condition of knowledge within its borders. It is the act of lifting these things into an ordered and utilized whole (16, p. 157).

The qualities of immediacy and visual precision which Williams learned from the Imagists were further emphasized and given new depth when he applied the lessons in form and structure that he had learned from the painters. He developed and refined these techniques throughout the rest of his life. Certainly painting was by no means the only determinant in the early development of his poetry, but in terms of style, structure, and to some extent subject matter, it is one of the more important influences. As has been shown here, these influences can be seen clearly in the flower poems. He never gave up in his attempt to translate the visual elements of the world around him into their verbal counterparts. With his precise and literal mind he was always pleased at the
literalness with which the painter could present the visual experience. In so many of his poems he seems to articulate what he truly believed could be done better in painting and "dispense with those damn words altogether" (3, p. 197). One of his earlier poems portrays the frustration that words often brought him:

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. (14, p. 228)

He continued to develop the various possibilities of presenting the material object, closely perceived, and recorded through a selection of its most salient features. The work of Charles Demuth, Charles Sheeler, Georgia O'Keeffe, Juan Gris, and most importantly Alfred Stieglitz helped in forming the visual stimulus for Williams' move toward precision of expression. The work of these artists taught Williams to see the objective world with photographic precision and to translate its materials into words of equal clarity. The poem "This Florida: 1924" evinces without any doubt Williams' concern in following the concrete visual effect of the painters. Only by following them could he avoid what he felt was the miasma of conventional poetry.

Shall I write it in iambic tetrameters.
Cottages in a row
all radioed and showerbathed?
But I am sick of rime--
The whole damned town

is riming up one street and
down another, yet there is
the rime of her white teeth

the rime of glasses
at my plate, the ripple time
the rime her fingers make--

And we thought to escape rime
by imitation of the senseless/unarrangement of wild things--

the stupidest rime of all--
Rather, Hibiscus,
let me examine

(14, p. 330)

The poem demonstrates his refusal to write in the conventional manner ("But I am sick of rime") and further shows his dissatisfaction with Imagism ("imitation of the senseless/unarrangement of wild things"). Instead, he says, let me examine Hibiscus, another affirmation of his desire to deal with the thing itself and let the construction of the poem be dictated by the form of that object.

In The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech, Dijkstra explains Williams' position in 1925 as one in which he fully equated his role as a poet with the function of visual artist. His concept of the shaping force of the imagination both stemmed from and subsequently reinforced that attitude. The imagination makes snapshots of the material world, as it were, thus fixing the objects of existence on the film of the artist's memory, until he can analyze their elements and select their most significant details, to create through his art an equivalent to the emotion which moved him at the moment of vision, thus allowing that moment to be suspended in an eternal present of universal significance (3, pp. 186-187).
Williams persisted until the end of his life in his belief in the immediacy and power of the image of the visual arts. One of his later poems, "Still Lifes," is probably his final effort in reaffirming that belief:

All poems can be represented by still lifes not to say water-colors, the violence of the Iliad lends itself to an arrangement of narcissi in a jar. The slaughter of Hector by Achilles can well be shown by them casually assembled yellow upon white radiantly making a circle smart strokes violently given in more or less haphazard disarray. (17, p. 516)

This poem articulates the difference between the lengthy and laborious word of the poet as compared to the swift visual and emotional impact that the painter can deliver. He knew he could not do exactly with words what painters do with oil, but by using their methods he continued until death to turn the words themselves into sensory rather than abstract or logical objects.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER IV

PAINTING TECHNIQUES IN FIVE FLORAL POEMS

Although many of Williams' poems in single or combined effects demonstrate the influence of specific modern painters, five poems can be separated from the rest of Williams' floral poetry as prime examples of the influence of the painters. Here the total poem, rather than sections, demonstrates a concerted effort on the part of the poet to incorporate the techniques of the painters. They are "Daisy," "Primrose," "Queen Ann's Lace," "Great Mullen," and "The Crimson Cyclamen." Although each poem interprets the style of the painter in a unique way, all share the common characteristic of seeming to be transliterations of either specific paintings or the style of specific painters.

"Daisy," "Primrose," "Queen Ann's Lace," and "Great Mullen" have proven to be four of Williams' most popular early poems. Williams himself must have been partial to them, for, when Whit Burnett asked him to contribute to his anthology, This Is My Best, he chose these four poems (4, p. 35). Williams says in I Wanted to Write a Poem that he used "straight observation" in his description of them and, further, that he thought of them as "still lifes": "I looked at the actual flower as it grew" (4, p. 35). The four poems appeared together in the definitive edition of Williams'
Collected Earlier Poems. Williams seems to have thought of them as a set, like a quartet of paintings that are hung together and take on added appeal in the comparison that their proximity encourages.

Williams' poem "Daisy," first published in 1921, seems to have been inspired by Charles Demuth's 1918 watercolor "Daisies."

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. (8, p. 208)
Again, the poet's style and subject matter are dictated by what the painter did with his brush. In Demuth's watercolor, as in most of his flower paintings, the blossom itself is the focal point of the picture. The eye immediately scrutinizes the large, round, yellow-brown centers of the flower. The white ring of petals circling these centers is seen next, not only because of its physical position on the plant, but because of its glaring white effect. The white is contrasted with the dark surface of the leaves and the slender stems that pierce them.

Although a poet has no vivid and contrasting colors, no startling movement with which to gain the observer's attention, Williams does approximate with words what Demuth has done with color, line, and form. The first line of his poem catches the reader's interest, not with the play of color, as Demuth does, but with the delightful play of words: "The dayseye hugging the earth" (8, p. 208). The word "daisy" does in fact come from the Middle English daies eige, meaning literally the eye of the day. Thus, in one word Williams suggests the older and more descriptive name of the plant, while at the same time calling the reader's attention to the visual significance and dominance of the core (the "eye") of the flower.

Demuth, in his watercolor, assured that our initial focus is upon the daisy blossom itself, continues to draw in minute, but selective, detail the features which contribute
most to the further delineation of the daisies' singular attributes. Our attention is drawn next to the careless, uncultivated growth which diminishes in sharpness as it radiates outward from behind the flowers until that growth simply disappears in deliberately unfinished outlines toward the edge of the paper (6, p. 163). Williams too diverts his development of the daisy momentarily to fill in those cursory details of Demuth's painting:

weeds stand high in the corn,
the rainbeaten furrow
is clotted with sorrel
and crabgrass, the
branch is black under
the heavy moss of leaves--

As mentioned earlier, it is characteristic of Demuth to leave certain details of his image unfinished, only giving suggested elements of much of the background material. With a concise, well-aimed pencil foundation and one or two strategically placed splashes of color he often achieved an accurate evocation of his subject (6, p. 26). Williams' description of the flower's surroundings seems to remain deliberately unfinished at this point, in an attempt to achieve the suggestive and unfinished effect of Demuth's watercolor.

Having noted the less important details surrounding the flower, Williams returns to the flower itself, calling it "the sun," reference once again to the more literal origins of its name. The "slender green stem/ribbed lengthwise" which supports Williams' "sun" is present in Demuth's painting also, and is used there, as in the poem, to draw the eye back up to the blossom of the daisy for further
examination. With our attention once again directed to the large blooms, Williams persists in his observation of the salient features of the flower. In doing so, his words follow the same pattern that Demuth, by using lines and color, has forced our eyes to follow in the watercolor:

round the yellow center,
split and creviced and done into minute flower heads, he sends out his twenty rays--

Demuth's sharp and thinly drawn lines and his careful, gauze-like treatment of the petals find a series of very precise analogues in the words of Williams' poem. To both the painter and the poet, the clearly defined image is the basis of the structure of the finished work of art.

Demuth limits himself only to the most prominent features of the flowers, forcing us to attend to a carefully selected assembly of line, color, and texture. Williams does this with his words too, revealing the essential qualities of the daisy through selection and reduction of focus, as well as through close observation of the object. The second stanza of the poem finds the observer examining the underside of the flower:

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

Attention returns, as it must in the painting, to the blossom itself in the final stanza. Williams maintains the clear
immediate focus of Demuth as he concludes the assemblage of his image:

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

In "Daisy" Williams creates a still life through the close observation of a selected scene. He has given his poem the qualities of a painting that he learned generally from Alfred Stieglitz and specifically from Charles Demuth. Demuth and Williams alike have followed Stieglitz's advice that "the thing itself should be the basis for all scrutiny" (1, p. 128). This dictum, common to both the Imagists and the Stieglitz group, Williams followed diligently. But he further learned that there must be an organizing principle around which to structure the object. "Daisy" demonstrates the conscious structure of the still life that Williams saw in Demuth's "Daisies."

A first reading may not reveal the painter's influence in the second of Williams' flower quartet, "Primrose." Indeed the poem seems to be merely a collection or piling up of disjunct and irrelevant images:

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 ladysthumb, 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.

Although the clear, direct treatment of the "thing" that
the Imagists insisted on is more evident, the influence
of the painters is here too. The poem is a collage of
swiftly drawn images, splashed on the page much in the
same way that Juan Gris used visual images in his well-known
collages.

The influence of Gris and his particular brand of Cubism,
discussed in the previous chapter, can be seen once again in
this poem. The Cubist's interest in organization of form and
concreteness that Williams used in "The Rose" can also be
seen in "Primrose," but, unlike "The Rose," the layered
images that Williams presents in "Primrose" all combine to
conclude in a final "concentrated composition" that, as a
whole, gives the effect of a Cubist painting. The poem,
using the Cubist technique of simultaneity, is essentially
a layering of images from a summer scene. Not only has the primrose, with its bright yellow petals, become an image of summer itself, but it also brings to the mind of the poet many other images that he may have associated with summer. And so, in the manner of the Cubists, he presents us with a variety of images that the primrose itself has brought to his mind.

As in many of these short poems, the images provide merely the briefest possible account of the object. A few precisely drawn lines suffice for the poet as they do for the painter. The images that comprise the poem are good examples of Williams' ability to make us aware of the things of this world. As usual he wants us to examine the objects of the poem for what they are, not for what they symbolize, but as stimulaters to our imaginations. The images can then become representative of all the objects in which "summer-ness" resides for the reader.

Williams begins the poem in a burst of excitement, seemingly unable to articulate the beauty of the flower. Indeed, its exuberant color says much about this American species: "Yellow, yellow, yellow, yellow!" And thus, following the poet's logic, the flower is not a flower but summer itself:

It is not a color.
It is summer!

He proceeds with a succession of one-line images, all succinctly drawn and layered upon each other, as in many of
Gris' still lifes. In line nine he interjects again the flower impression, seemingly still unable to present an apt metaphor for its radiance—"Clear yellow!" This interjection recalls the reader's attention to the image of the primrose, which has served as inspiration to all the images that follow. As in a Cubist painting, many images are overlapping and protruding from behind each other. In returning to the image of the primrose, Williams has simulated what the eye would do in examining a Cubist painting. He continues to call to mind images that represent a part of what summer is, as does the yellow primrose which has inspired his visions. As he has said of good poetry (9, p. 132), the universal is presented in the particular; summer becomes

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a cluster of birdsbreast flowers on a red stem six feet high, four open yellow petals above sepalas curled backward into reverse spikes--
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A description of Gris' particular style of Cubism applies as well to Williams' handling of his images in this poem: "scenes are broken up into their many-sided facets, planes are folded back, superimposed, reshuffled" (3, introduction).

As stated earlier, one of Williams' major aims as a poet was to show relationships between "things." In "Primrose," as in many other poems, he presents a number of seemingly diffuse objects and "arrives at some sort of 'appreciation' by showing how they are related within a field of perception" (5, p. 32). Single elements are arranged to
create a complex scene in accurate perspective. To achieve the montage effect of the Cubists, the poet lists each detail separately, with no explanation for its position and no transition to other images. Through this series of vignettes, his summary of "things," Williams creates a word montage derived from the total cumulative structure, rather than from the individual features. Each image, in turn, helps to create the whole impression of "summerness" and should be looked at as part of the total composite, as well as in isolation. Through these Cubist techniques Williams felt he came close to achieving what he called the "white light" of perception, an almost instantaneous poetic "apprehension" (9, p. 122).

"Daisy" and "Primrose," belonging to the primarily descriptive category of Williams' poetry, seem to exist only for their varied sensual qualities. In the third poem of this floral quartet, "Queen Ann's Lace," Williams uses description of the wild flower as an instrument to express an intricate interplay of feeling, impression, memory, and fancy:

Her body is not so white as anemone petals nor so smooth--nor so remote a thing. It is a field of 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 blemish. Each part is a 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.

(8, p. 210)

The poem, on one hand, is concerned, as Williams has said, with the description of the wild carrot, or Queen Ann's Lace. But into his description the poet has woven and interwoven a metaphorical expression of the specific nature of a man's love for a woman, and her response to that love. Through the description of the flower and its comparison to a woman's body, a specific complex of ideas is developed.

The poet's description shifts back and forth from the woman's body to the flower itself, but the reader soon realizes that all descriptions apply to both objects. He begins with the woman's body:

Her body is not so white as anemone petals nor so smooth—nor so remote a thing.

He then turns to the flower:

It is a field of wild carrot taking the field by force;

This last line is a nice phrasing of a scene that is a common phenomena on the American countryside. The Queen Ann's Lace is indeed a wild and forceful plant that often overtakes a pasture with its white and lacy looks.
The image of whiteness, introduced in line one as referring to the woman's body, is re-emphasized in the next three lines, which describe the flower:

Here is no question of whiteness, white as can be, with a purple mole at the center of each flower.

The mention of the two minute purple petals (moles) that reside at the center of the flower of the Queen Ann's Lace is of importance to the poem. This first mention of it is of purely descriptive significance and refers to Williams' image of the flower. The round whiteness of the flower with its small purple center is reminiscent of the female breast too. Thus, the image of the mole becomes a fusion of the dual image it represents, the woman's breast and the purple center of the flower. Two lines later he further develops the image again in his reference to the touching of the woman's body:

Each flower is a hand's span of her whiteness. Wherever his hand has lain there is a tiny purple blemish.

Of all the senses that come in to play in this poem, the tactile seems to be especially well conveyed. Not only does the visual scene make the reader aware of the "feel" of its objects, but Williams employs particularly tactile words: "petals," "smooth," "whiteness," "mole," "blemish," "fiber."

The interplay of the two images continues and becomes more intricately entwined in the next five lines as the
growth and expression of physical love are described in terms of the development and unfolding of the flower itself:

Each part
is a blossom under his touch
to which the fibers of her being
stem one by one, each to its end,
until the whole field is a white desire

Here, reminiscent of the large flower paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe, nature's organism carries sexual association. The rush of sexual excitement is emphasized with the use of the word "stem" in line sixteen as a verb. Here "stem" connotes a flowing or onrushing movement that is being checked until a final climactic "end," the attainment of her "white desire," can be reached. The release over and the climax reached, Williams begins the let down of the poem too:

empty, a single stem,
a cluster, flower by flower,
a pious wish to whiteness gone over--
or nothing.

The technique of shifting back and forth between the two images of the woman's body and the white and delicate flower is effective. The shifting provides an organic construction in the poem, as found also in "Young Sycamore" and "Flowers by the Sea." This structural manipulating allows Williams to present images that are not isolated, but in the interplay of their descriptive qualities become interchangeable, and thus more interesting in their complexity.

The Imagist techniques are obvious: the precision of language, the rendering of particulars in sharp clear terms,
the use of common speech, the use of a natural rhythm, attention to the "thing" itself. Also evident are the lessons in construction that Williams learned from Demuth, Gris, and O'Keeffe. The image of the flower is developed through the correlative image of the woman's body. The visual shifting throughout the poem produces a mottled structure and allows the two images to enhance, explain, and finally reflect each other.

"Great Mullen" is the last of the flower quartet and is the only humorous poem of the four. Like "Queen Ann's Lace," though, it too belongs in the category of Williams' poetry that through description of a physical object reveals relationships between the world of nature and the world of man. The poem consists of a dialogue between a great mullen and a man who has come into the field once more to admire it:

One leaves his leaves at home
being 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 cowdung, a dead stick with the bark off. She is squirting on us both. She has had 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 fenceraill.--
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!

(8, p. 211)

The structure of the poem lies not in the interplay of the two images, as in "Queen Ann's Lace," nor does it come directly from the form of a still life, as in "Daisy"; rather, Williams uses dialogue to construct the poem. However, the visual influence of the painters is visible in "Great Mullen" too, although in a much more subtle manner than in the other three poems. Williams has said that he looked at these poems as still lifes, but here his still life takes its shape through what two characters say about each other rather than through the poet's firsthand description of his subject. He lets his characters tell the reader what to see. The emphasis is, of course, primarily on the characterization of the mullen, for the man, in essence, describes all that he loves in his favorite plant. On the other hand, the mullen's retorts to his one-time companion consist largely of epithets. The man remains undeveloped as far as his physical description is concerned. However, Williams does show the reader much of the man's attitude toward the plant and, in turn, his attitude toward nature.

The mullen is a spike of a plant surmounted by a cluster of bright yellow flowers. As we have seen him do before, Williams begins his poem with a description of the plant itself:
One leaves his leaves at home
being a mullen and sends up a light house
to peer from:

The image of a light house is a fine metaphor for the highly
visible yellow tip of the plant. The mullen sullenly replies:

I will have my way,
yellow---

The good-humored man ignores his friend's bad attitude and
continues his admiration, and in doing so continues adding
the visual elements that culminate in the picture of the
great mullen:

A mast with a lantern, ten,
fifty, a hundred, smaller and smaller
as they grow more---

The mullen is spiteful and foul tempered because the
man, often his companion in the past, has seemingly just
recently associated with a lady friend, and only after his
attentions have been lavished upon her has he found time to
admire the plant, a blatant betrayal as far as the super-
cilious mullen is concerned. He interrupts his friend's
flattering words, determined not to give in, and obviously
quite jealous:

--Liar, liar, liar!
You come from her! I can smell djer-kiss
on your colthes. Ha! you come to me,
you--

The tolerant man, refusing to take his friend's fickle
tantrum seriously, replies in an attempt to assuage the
flower's anger and regain its affection:
--I am a point of dew on a grass-stem.
Why are you sending heat down on me
from your lantern?--

The petulant mullen, still feeling betrayed and not willing
to be cowed by a human, remains abusive:

--You are cowdung, a
dead stick with the bark off. She is
squirtting on us both. She has had her
hand on you!

Obviously disgusted by the man's dealings (they may or may
not be sexual) with the woman, the mullen wants his friend
to reject the world of man and devote his attentions only
to nature's beauty. The man's attempt to blend the two leads,
as far as the mullen is concerned, only to a defamation of
of nature and himself:

--She has defiled

ME!

The man, in continuing to ply him, continues with his por-
trait of the sulky plant:

--Your leaves are dull, thick
and hairy.

and once again is interrupted and derided for thinking he
can so easily atone for such an onerous deed:

--Every hair on my body will
hold you off from me. You are a
dungcake, birdlime on a fencerail.--

The man persists in his attempts to win the mullen over:

I love you straight, yellow
finger of God pointing to--

and is interrupted by the unforgiving mullen who implies that
his praises are only surrogates for his affection for "her!"
As in "Queen Ann's Lace" the sexual imagery is abundant in this poem. However, unlike "Queen Ann's Lace," here that imagery is not so vital to the impression that the poet is depicting and lends little to the development of the stated thesis. Of more importance, rather, is the issue that the dialogue raises. The poem humorously questions (or maybe makes fun of questioning) whether man or nature should come first to us. The plant, of course, insists on nature. As for the man's final answer, it would seem that he would love both--a very diplomatic closure for Williams.

The poem dramatizes a thoughtful subject through an amusing colloquy. Williams uses dramatic dialogue shifting rapidly from the speech of the mullen to the speech of the man and back again, and through this dialogue the still life forms before our eyes. Williams has drawn for us a variegated garden scene and through a short narrative sequence develops an image of the great mullen. In doing so, he has brought up the question of man's relationship to nature, and humorously given nature a say in the matter.

"The Crimson Cyclamen" is one of the more mature and accomplished of Williams' poems that demonstrate his use of the painters' techniques. Written in the latter part of the 1930's when he was much more at ease with his own style and much more assured of fulfilling the demands he had come to make on his own writing, the poem incorporates all that Williams had learned from the Imagists and the painters.
As in "Queen Ann's Lace" and "Great Mullen" Williams delves beyond the purely pictorial representation and through his cyclamen image makes comment on the nature of man. Here Williams succeeds in sustaining an image and its correlative idea for eight pages, giving himself the necessary breadth to develop both to their full intensity and complexity.

Dedicated to the memory of Charles Demuth, "The Crimson Cyclamen" was surely written with two of Demuth's paintings of the 1920's in mind: "Cyclamin," and "Flowers, Cyclamen." Here Williams is still using the image as the Imagists and Stieglitz had taught him, but he combines these techniques with a more subtle and complex intertwining of his projected theme. The poem describes the plant's flowering and fading, but close attention to the poem, its diction and its structure, reveals that the flower is also interpreted as a metaphor by the poet. The poem seems to be another work in the manner of "A Pot of Flowers," or "The Young Sycamore," but Williams uses the cyclamen as a stepping stone that leads to certain human truths.

The poem becomes not only a tribute to Demuth, but also a tribute to all of the painters from whom Williams learned so much. The cyclamen, a bright and colorful flower that Demuth himself admired, is presented in and for itself. Williams intricately handles every minute detail, describing the total flower with the same exactness and the same
control that Demuth uses in his paintings. But, as Williams said so often, the purpose of poetry is to reveal that which is inside man. And so, the cyclamen becomes a symbol for the "cycle" of the growth of a man. The name cyclamen comes from the Greek word kuklaminos, which means cycle or circle, probably called so because of the bulbous shape of the roots. Certainly Williams was aware of this etymology, for the poem itself develops according to the cycle of the life of the flower and has numerous references to cycles and circles. At the end of the poem the flower folds back on itself ending its day, ready to give the plant a rebirth on the following day, so the circle of its existence is completed and thus allowed to continue.

The idea behind the "thing" described is never to overshadow the reader's awareness of the physical characteristics of the object. So taught Stieglitz, and Williams writes accordingly. Williams sees in the cyclamen the fragility of all things that grow to a climactic point and then must wither and decay. He begins his poem in the concrete world of description, as usual, with the plant in full bloom:

White suffused with red
more rose than crimson
--all acolor
the petals flare back
from the stooping craters
of these flowers
as from a wind rising

(8, p. 397)
As in so many of his other flower poems, Williams allows the structure to be dictated by what the painter did on canvas. The eye first goes to the vivid crimson petals in Demuth's painting. Thus, Williams too begins with the flowers, describing the color, shape, and position of the petals. Once again, light plays an important part in the poet's evocation of the flower, just as the use of light is important in a Demuth painting. As the light of "A Pot of Flowers" had "transpierced" the petals and leaves to give depth and shade to both poem and painting, here too the light "enfolds and pierces" the flowers to discover the blues and yellows that reside beneath the pink of the flower. In Demuth's painting "The Cyclamen" the source of light is directly above the plant so that the top flowers and most of the outside leaves are bathed in a "transpiercing" light, while the underneath and inner leaves are darker and richer in hue. Along with the order of the description of the plant, it is the light, sifting through leaves and petals to the base of the plant, that gives the poem a sense of movement, an important characteristic not only of Williams' flower poems but also of the painters in the Stieglitz group.

As Demuth did so often with his flowers, Williams divorces the subject from all the tawdriness of the world. In their color and in their movement they represent to him a kind of "perfection":

as thought mirrors
of some perfection
could never be
too often shown--
silence holds them
in that space.

(8, p. 397)

That perfection, as he shows later, is not merely the exu-
berant beauty of the cyclamen itself, but it is the circle
of existence of which the flower in full bloom is but a
part:

But the form came gradually.
The plant was there
before the flowers
as always--the leaves,
day by day changing.

(8, p. 398)

The short-lived climax of the flower's blooming is only one
element of the whole cycle of change being celebrated.

After the blossoms of the flowers, the next object of
prominent interest in the painting is the mass of leaves that
encircles the flowers but rests several inches below them.
They are large, dark, heart-shaped leaves,

quirked and green
and stenciled with a paler
green
irregularly
across and round the edge--

The randomness of the leaves in the painting seems to be
implied not only by Williams' use of the word "irregular,"
but also by the varying lengths of the lines.

The next section of the poem continues the pattern of
describing the elements of the object in order of their im-
portance in the painting, but here Williams allows
embellishments on his "idea" to intercede a little more
blatantly than was his wont previously. He continues to
focus on the leaves, but calls their patterns a "logic"
rather than a "purpose" that "links each part to the rest,"
certainly a divergence from what Pound meant when he called
for the avoidance of abstraction. For the most part Williams
does avoid not only abstract thought in his poetry, but also
the use of words that have any abstract connotations. But
here he says the pattern on the leaf is not a pattern of
"purpose," a word that implies result, meaning, and reason.
The pattern has no meaning, nor is it used to achieve certain
results or ends. It is as useless as "pure thought." The
pattern is simply there, rather a pattern of "logic" implying an inevitable or necessary course of development. That
course of development is to "link each part to the rest--"
once again the circle image of the cyclamen appears. The
circle image is further developed in the description of the
leaves:

the edge tying by
convergent, crazy rays
with the center--
where that dips
cupping down to the
upright stem

The leaves are an extension to the "source" of the cycle of
the plant.

Williams moves next, as the eye does in the Demuth paint-
ing, to the linear movement of the plant, and so comes to the
base of the flower:
The young leaves
coming among the rest
are more crisp
and deeply cupped
the edges rising first
impatient of the slower
stem--

(8, p. 399)

When every detail of the plant is covered, the poet, as does the painting, takes our interest back up to the focal point of the completed image, back to the "conclusion," the beautiful flowers,

floating
if warped and quaintly flecked
whitened and streaked
resting
upon the tie of the stem

(8, p. 400)

Finally the poet realizes that there is more to this plant than the logical design of its parts: "it begins that must put thought to rest." The "passion is loosed" in the climax of the life cycle of the plant, which is the radiant and dazzling flower of the cyclamen. The petals (the passion of the plant) have reached up through the leaves and finally opened. Again, Williams gives the poem movement with this undulant thrust that the flower makes through the leaves. The flower "lifts," "loosens," releases," "flows," and finally moves "upward to the light!" This is not only the climax in the cycle of the flower, but the climax in the structure of the poem too. This is the release from the logical, the purely reasoning side of life and a joining with the passionate side to make life whole. He has achieved this by joining the perfection of the leaves with the wildness of the flowers.
Together they are complete, forming two halves of a circle. Williams says in "How to Write" that unless the "rhythmic ebb and flow of the mysterious life process . . . is tapped by the writer nothing of the moment can result" (9, pp. 57-58).

Williams changes to short stanzas and short lines while he builds to the moment of "ecstasy" and the flower emerges and "flows to release." In its awakening, nature achieves a kind of wholeness, a unity, when passion and reason are joined and equal and life is therefore complete. The flower opens to

no bean
no completion
no root
no leaf and no stem
but color and form only

No reason, no aim, no continuing course of development is revealed with its opening. No bean is produced by it, no root is refurbished with it, nothing comes of it but shape and color. That it exists is cause enough for celebrating it.

The climax of the flower is held in stasis in the two paintings by Demuth, but in the poem Williams carries the flower through its cycle. The delicacy of the flower is more complex, more intense than the logical designs of the smooth and symmetrical leaves, but also

the soonest to wither
blacken
and fall upon itself
formless--
Williams traces the cycle as the flowers "widen," and "relax." He slows the poem down to give relief from the fast pitch of the previous seventeen sections by extending the length of both line and stanza. The rhythm slows and relaxes as the "color draws back" and

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flower touches flower
down around
at the petal tips
merging into one flower--
(8, p. 404)
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Indeed, we see our own lives passing as the flowers age before our eyes and deep veins mark the purity of their color. Williams does not depart from the concrete in order to express these ideas. The precise description of particular things found in the best Imagistic poetry is here, but there is more. As Edith Heal says, here Williams' ideas are skillfully implied but never stated except through the description of the cyclamen (4, p. 31). He keeps his description tight and to the point and refrains from losing the grasp of his object, as he did in "The Rose." In "The Crimson Cyclamen" Williams is able to combine the best of the Imagists with the best of the painters. Stieglitz had preached that "the objects of nature are the absolutes from which all derives" (1, p. 101). He implored his protégés to observe and transcribe the objects of concrete reality, for it is here that the artist could "express his most intense and therefore most articulate emotions accurately" (1, p. 100). Dijkstra says
of "The Crimson Cyclamen" that "the precise visual language Williams developed in studying the painter's work allowed him to write a poem in which the cycles of man's existence are expressed in terms of Demuth's intensely real world of water-color flowers" (1, p. 173).
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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The previous chapters have shown some of the various ways in which William Carlos Williams incorporated the techniques of the Imagists and the modern painters into his early floral poetry. Chapter I has demonstrated his basic concern with the concrete world around him and his belief that it is the responsibility of the poet to "reveal" the universal through the specific. Such a poetical stance led readily to his alignment with the Imagists and, as Chapter II discusses, his early floral poetry was especially in tune with if not completely dependent on the basic doctrines of Imagism. Once he realized, however, that Imagism could not fulfill the structural necessities of a poem Williams turned to the Stieglitz group of painters around 1918. The ideas of Stieglitz, although initially referring to painting and photography, were close to what the Imagists asked of poetry, but added lessons on construction, which Williams needed so badly. Chapter III, then, has shown how Williams further developed his poetical technique by applying the techniques of both the Imagists and the modern painters, especially those of Demuth, Gris, and O'Keeffe, to his floral poetry. The flower became for Williams (for a time, at least) the subject through which he could most successfully apply
those dual techniques while at the same time do what he felt all good poetry should do: reveal that which is inside man.

No strong evidence has been found to indicate that Williams wrote poems inspired by any non-floral paintings of his painter friends. Nor does he describe flowers only because those were the subjects which the painters frequently used. The painters of the Stieglitz group by no means limited their subject matter to the flower. They all dealt quite frequently with architectural studies. Demuth is well-known for his series of watercolors on the circus, as well as his series on fruits and vegetables. Gris' and O'Keeffe's still lifes take many objects other than flowers as subjects. The particular poems examined in previous chapters would indicate that Williams turned to the flower so often because it was the subject that the painters dealt with which most readily allowed him to translate the techniques of the painter to those of the poet, while at the same time revealing the universal in the local.

The five poems examined in Chapter IV are not only among Williams' successful blendings of the verbal lessons of the Imagists with the visual lessons of the painters, but they also demonstrate a progress and development in Williams' use of the techniques he learned from the painters. Although it is apparently not known in what order Williams wrote the quartet, their placement in the collected poetry and in
Burnett's anthology shows a development in style and method beginning with the simplest, "Daisy," and ending with the stylistically most complex of the four, "Great Mullen." "Daisy" as pure description follows the form of Demuth's painting as Williams saw it. "Primrose" too is basically descriptive, but here Williams achieves effects of collage and montage through techniques that he learned from the Cubists. In "Queen Ann's Lace" Williams' structured interplay and balance of the two dominant images form an even more complex and subtle use of the construction of the still life. And finally, in "Great Mullen," the dominance of the dialogue between the plant and the man seems to mask the studied effect of a painting that also lies within that conversation. "The Crimson Cyclamen," of course, was written much later and in many ways is a culmination of all that Williams had learned from Hulme, Pound, Stieglitz, and Demuth.

The examples of Williams' poetry and prose presented in the previous chapters have established that he found meaningless words too often replacing the articulate speech necessary for communication. He felt a frustration with words and a despair in their frequent failure. In "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower" he says

It is difficult to get the news from poems yet men die miserably every day for lack of what is found there.

(3, pp. 161-162)
In trying to avoid that failure he turned to a poetry that had as its base the physical world around him, and to a poetry which borrowed much from the graphic arts for expression. He even refers to the "making" of a poem, rather than the writing of it (4, p. 257), as if he were presenting a physical entity to his critics, as a painter or a sculptor does. Actually, in saying that he "makes" a poem Williams is using a very apropos term, for the word "poet" comes from the Greek word poietes, meaning literally "one who makes." Our written language, once pictographic, is itself a complex of long-forgotten word pictures, or images. Williams then, as an artist, fits together, or joins, images to make experience concrete and create its own translation of reality.

Williams, as a poet, has further followed in the tradition of the painters in that he presents his knowledge passionately to the emotions or feelings, rather than logically or intellectually. In itself, the word "emotion" implies an intelligent heart, a thinking heart, not merely a sentimental heart. He, like the painter, does not want us to think out (or analyze) the work of art, so much as he wants us to feel it out. In "The Widow's Lament in Springtime," for example, Williams does not attempt to present an intellectual understanding of the husband's death. He does not want us to know finally what his death means. Rather he recreates the incident, using images of loneliness, grief,
and emptiness to make the poetic experience exist. We do not really understand the experience, but Williams, through a careful handling of the image, has forced us to participate vicariously in the pain of grief with the widow. There are no abstractions in the poem; the words "grief" or "lonesomeness" do not appear. All the words are concrete. In writing this poem, as in the best of all his poetry, Williams, like the painter and the photographer, has given eternal form to a flashing moment of life; he has made the incident almost palpable enough to hold before him. Because he can see it, he may be able to grasp it, which is to say, to know it. The poem makes clear that the poet does not understand the husband's death. He may not even understand the widow's loss. But he is aware of it. He is keenly, humanly, aware. This is the supreme gift of poetic knowledge: awareness. This is the kind of awareness that can stun or startle. The anesthesia that all human beings move under for so much of the time is shattered. We have a shock of recognition. When the recognition comes the reader is permitted, just for a moment, to empathize with that widow. We know, that is we feel, her grief. The poetic image has made this knowledge possible. Hulme, Pound, Stieglitz and the painters, all participated in making this lesson clear to Williams. The artists of the Stieglitz group, whether poet, photographer, or painter, knew that human thought is not fast enough to see fully and to hold for long the little moments of human
experience that go to make up our lives. They also knew that it is precisely those little moments that the artist must be aware of if he, and his readers, are to rise above the level of mere animal consciousness. If the artist is to know these moments, he must then recreate them, he must concretize them, so they will not move away so quickly. For Williams, the Imagists gave him the materials to deal with, but the painters gave him the tools to shape those materials. The image, along with the structural revelations of the painters, taught Williams the significance of close observation of material things. As Karl Shapiro has said of Williams, "the poet's emotions, ideas, and sensations are selected and tranquilized in the eye, then distributed on paper as ideographs, and finally arranged, as an artist arranges the elements in a picture" (2, p. 152).

In the final analysis Williams felt that what really matters about poetry is how effectively it "reveals." Great poetry, he says, has the "power to annihilate half-truths for a thousandth part of understanding" (4, p. 19). Bram Dijkstra has pointed out that the poets whose work has lasted have invariably "shown a special ability to translate the elements of thought into 'objects' of experience, to communicate spiritual or philosophical concerns by means of material equivalences, that is, correspondent concrete 'events' taken from their observation of reality" (1, p. 166). Through his accomplished handling of the lessons of the
Imagists and the Stieglitz group Williams made his poetry communicate, on the basis of visual and tactile configurations, his response to the details of his environment. "Daisy," "Primrose," "Queen Ann's Lace," "Great Mullen," and "The Crimson Cyclamen" are among the best of his poems that convey, in sharp verbal approximation of the painter's visual record, certain aspects of man's relationship to nature which seem otherwise difficult to articulate.
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