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THE NEW POETRY OF WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS:
POETIC USES OF MUSIC AND DANCE

BY

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M.A., North Texas State University, 1966

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1977

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS BY

SANDRA MASON SHERWOOD

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POETIC USES OF MUSIC AND DANCE

BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

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DS17
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An inherent alliance between the sister arts of music and poetry has been recognized as long as the two arts have co-existed. Literary history is filled with notable examples of their kinship, and additionally, critics have long seized upon the 'musical' qualities of poets' language as justification for praise. By the same token, a poet's insensitivity to such qualities of language may mark a serious deficiency. To only a slightly lesser degree has the dance been allied with poetry. Given this established tradition of analogy between poetry and the arts of music and the dance, it is scarcely surprising to meet with yet another set of examples in the work of a twentieth century poet, William Carlos Williams.

Precisely because such correspondences have been made so frequently, and so generally, it is easy enough to regard their appearance in Williams' poems with little more than passing observation. Certainly his work offers image clusters more startling to make claims on the reader's attention, and attention in abundance has been accorded the traditionally 'non-poetic' images that color his poems. However, three facts preclude easy dismissal of Williams' music/dance images and their relationship to poetry: first, Williams' music and dance images appear with unusual frequency; second, such images, though sometimes used primarily as reinforcement for other images, are very often the dominant shaping images of the poems in which they appear; and third, they are used not in a loose, general manner, but quite specifically. These three facts do not quite mesh with the traditional usage of music and dance as images of poetry. Such correspondences are most commonly vague at best, and rarely do they emerge as recurring thematic images throughout the body of a poet's work.
Williams' consistent fascination with music and dance as poetic images, then, appears to extend well beyond the level of mere traditionalism—a posture rejected out of hand by Williams, in any case. Rather, the music/dance images he draws, far from being reflex analogs, are carefully constructed indices to the formative conception underlying not only the content of his poems, his selection and handling of images, but also to the prosodic structure in which his images are embodied. They are central to his understanding of the poetic process—the making of the poem and the kind of poem that is made. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to examine the varied ways in which Williams viewed the properties of music and dance to hold implications for the practice of poetry and to explore such implications as they are given substance in the poems.

For an image, particularly an extended one, to be forceful and effectively serve the ends to which it is employed, its dynamics must in some way be analogous to the thing imaged. The basic components of Williams' poetic experience may be seen as contact, process, measure and relativity. Chapter I looks at each of these in the light of their congruence with the arts of music and dance and finds that from the inception of the poetic process through to its ultimate realization in the poem, the dynamics of dance and music may be seen to offer specific corollaries.

Contact between mind and thing (through the agency of the senses), which Williams designates as initiating the impetus toward the poem, finds a ready image in music, which may bring together disparate tones in its harmonic structures, combine instruments of differing tonal qualities and superimpose compatible rhythmic lines. The vital movement of language in the poem, its imitation of the processes of life, likewise
is analogized in the kineticism of both music and the dance, and the relative measure of music provides both the model and image for the variable prosodic measure that Williams found appropriate to his conception of the poem.

Chapters II and III are an extension of the discussion of poetic and musical relativity to their foundations in the relativity of modern physics and philosophy. Williams was sceptical and frequently critical of science and philosophy on the ground that their methods are opposed to the imagination. The imagination was seen by Williams to be organic and expansive; science and philosophy, mechanistic and reductive. A small, quite select number of scientists and philosophers escaped Williams' critical censure, however, Albert Einstein and Alfred North Whitehead being among the most important of these. Perhaps these exceptions are due to Williams' determination that they themselves were imaginative thinkers. Whitehead's is an organic philosophy, opposed to mechanistic systems, compatible with Williams' own organicism. And departing from the normal methods of scientific procedure, Einstein's greatest discoveries had their origin in daydreams—hypothetical situations created by Einstein's imagination—only later to be borne out by mathematics and experimentation.

Williams looked upon poetry as a creation of life-patterns, on a microcosmic scale, analogous to those of life in the world and, by extension, the life-patterns of the universe. In his mind, a cosmos understood to be relativistic could no longer be imitated by static, or non-relative poetic modes. Thus Chapters II and III are devoted to a consideration of the means by which music and dance, as arts of
relative time, may image a poetry of relativity, which in turn images
the modern universe of Einstein and Whitehead.

It is impossible to proceed with any lengthy discussion of Williams'
work and poetic theory without considering in some depth his notion of
the imagination. It is the imagination which Williams credits with all
true invention and it is, in the final analysis, not only the impetus
for poetic activity, but its subject as well. Williams' imagination,
therefore, deserves a chapter unto itself. Chapter IV is an attempt to
clarify the functions of the imagination as Williams understood it and
to place it in historical perspective by balancing it against the more
popular theories of imagination of the Neo-classical and Romantic periods.
This seems to me a necessary procedure if we are to make any kind of
evaluation of Williams' claim to 'newness'. From this retrospective
consideration, it appears that while Williams cannot be said to have
completely broken with the past as he would like to have it believed,
that the modifications he brings to earlier traditions of the poetic
imagination are sufficient to credit him with a genuinely modern poetic
consciousness.

Chapter V is devoted to analyses of Williams' use of music and
dance as images of the poetic process and the poem in which it culminates
and Chapter VI to the patterns of musical structures as Williams adopted
them for poetry.

Williams' use of music and dance, both in imagoic employment and
as models for poetic form, are successful because he understood the
nature of these two arts sufficiently well to allow him to use them in
very specific ways. While at times they seem to appear in the poems
almost casually, we soon discover that they are rich with implications
of Williams' convictions about the poem and the activity that leads to it. The kind of easy integration of such images that Williams achieves, with their underlying complexity, can occur only if the poet has a sophisticated understanding of the dynamics of the arts he is analogizing with poetry. The particulars of those arts must fit with the particulars of the poem. The corollaries he draws between music and dance and poetry are not artificially imposed, but emerge from the characteristic natures of those arts. As Williams uses them, they are not ornament, but essence. And as such, they may guide us to an increased appreciation of the depth of poetic experience which is their genesis.
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CHAPTER I
MUSIC AND DANCE: OBJECTIFICATION
OF POETIC EXPERIENCE

Outside
outside myself
there is a world,
he rumbled, subject to my incursions
—a world
(to me) at rest,
which I approach
concretely—
—Williams, Paterson, Book II

Contact, process, measure and relativity: these are the fulcrums
upon which the poetics of William Carlos Williams turn. Each is a
phase or aspect of a single process, the progression of the imagination
in action as it moves from an extension of the individual mind to the
external world to the ultimate realization of experience in the objective
form of the poem. Like the embryo image which Williams, the physician-
poet, sometimes uses, the end is inherent in the inception. Accordingly,
it may be expected that any one phase cannot be wholly separated from the
others and that as one is lifted out of the process for consideration
that it will bear evidence of its intrinsic connection with the others.
Very briefly, contact may be thought of as the connection between self
and thing, between the internal mind and the external world. Process is
the necessary nature of the contact, active and immediate. Measure is
the primary means for objectification of the processes of contact in the
poem, while relativity has to do with the relative movement of the agen-
cies of contact and the variable aspects of prosodic technique.

Williams asks, "To whom am I addressed?" and unhesitatingly gives
his own answer: "To the imagination." The imagination is the familiar
name of Williams' muse. When we remember that the word 'music' is derived from the Greek word *mousa*, meaning 'muse,' it seems entirely appropriate that Williams should have chosen music as his image for the processes of the imagination which ultimately give rise to the poem. Williams' imagaic association of music with the action of the imagination and the dance with the poem is supported and affirmed by every level of the poetic process, which we only fully appreciate when we look at its various aspects closely. Only then do we understand Williams' genius for refining subtle complexities into seemingly simple images.

Contact, the initial stage of the process, is seen in Williams' writings as an acceptance of the environment and a meeting with its particulars. The difficulty to be overcome is a schism between the inner self and the external world, the 'me' and the 'not me.' To overcome this schism, the necessary condition is an extension of the mind outward to meet in union with the empirical world. The faculty for such extension is the imagination, its medium the senses. The failure to achieve extension can only result in empty solipsism. There is no reality in such a vacuum, and unless one break from it to establish contact with the physical universe, the death of the mind is the inevitable consequence:

> The inevitable flux of the seeing eye toward measuring itself by the world can only result in himself [sic] crushing humiliation unless the individual raise [sic] to some approximate co-extension with the universe. This is possible by aid of the imagination. Only through the agency of this force can a man feel himself moved largely with sympathetic pulses at work.3

Williams' often-quoted line from *Paterson*, "No ideas but in things," indicates the importance he places on the concrete and on apprehension by the senses: the only way to attain to the universal is through the concretion of the particular. Abstraction and subjectivity are, for Williams,
formless and, therefore, antithetical to affirmative reality. The world is in flux, and the experience of the individual in such a world must necessarily be chaotic unless he create a vital reality of self through imaginative selection. He must lift out of the chaotic bombardment of experience a single object or complex of objects for contemplation. In doing so, he relieves himself of subjective immersion in formlessness.

The question may legitimately arise as to how the universal may be attained by concentration on the particular. In his 1920 Prologue to *Kora in Hell*, Williams says:

> The imagination goes from one thing to another. Given many things of nearly totally divergent natures but possessing one-thousandth part of a quality in common, provided that be new, distinguished, these things belong in an imaginative category and not in a gross natural array. To me this is the gist of the whole matter . . . But the thing that stands in the way of really good writing is always one: the virtual impossibility of lifting to the imagination those things which lie under direct scrutiny of the senses, close to the nose. It is this difficulty that sets a value upon all works of art and makes them a necessity.4

The answer, then, lies in part in the essential connectedness of things. By his co-extension of self to particular things, the individual enters into the fundamental co-extension between all things, which is the condition of universality. Further, as Williams says, "The imagination goes from one thing to another." As the world is not static, neither is the imagination, and, if contact is truly made with the object, the imagination will not, cannot remain in a state of fixity, but will follow the progressive line of co-extension between things, as a melody, set into rhythmic motion, follows its line, one note to the next.

Although the imagination may extend contact to the universal by recognition of commonality between things, Williams also stresses the necessity for recognizing the uniquenesses of things:
The true value is that peculiarity which gives an object a character by itself. The associational or sentimental value is the false. Its imposition is due to lack of imagination, to an easy lateral sliding. The attention has been held too rigid on the one plane instead of following a more flexible, jagged resort.5

Here Williams does not undercut the connectedness of things, but impugns attaching to them sentimental associations. Such wariness of sentimental symbolism, of course, is reminiscent of Ezra Pound's invective against associative symbolism in his essay, "Vorticism": "Almost anyone can realize that to use a symbol with an ascribed or intended meaning is, usually, to produce very bad art." Pound, in his Imagist doctrine, prescribed "direct treatment of the thing."6 Williams, like Pound, was for a time associated with the Imagist movement and, in fact, probably produced more truly "imagistic" poems than any other author publishing primarily in America. Eventually he moved away from Imagism on the ground, among others, that it lacked structure, but for the duration of his career the early influence of the tenets of Imagism is apparent. Certainly Williams agreed with the rule for "direct treatment of the thing," and this end can only be achieved when the contact is with the thing itself and the unique reality of the thing, not with a subjective sentimental association.

While still a medical student, Williams began his efforts as a poet in the romantic tradition, specifically the tradition of Keats. After an abortive attempt at writing a long, Endymion-like poem which happily ended in the incinerator, Williams rejected this approach in favor of his more familiar poetic based upon experience and contact with the world. Williams early dispossesses himself of his romantic inheritance, its epistemological obsessions as well as its seminal metaphors of alienation. He sees no
need for escape or for evasion; any transcendence beyond the immediate field of experience is unthinkable. There are no magic casements opening on another world nor elfin grots that lead to heaven's bourne. "The dumfoundering abyss / Between us and the object" no longer exists for Williams."

One may argue that Williams did not wholly abandon romanticism, but rather adopted a different, non-visionary type of romanticism; however, it is evident from the direction that his poetry took that he moved to an affirmation of poetic imagination that grows in the soil of reality rather than in any aetherial substance.

If one takes reality as the territory of the poetic imagination, it is inconsistent to eliminate portions of reality as unsuitable material for poetry. To choose only those elements which are traditionally considered to be beautiful or that have sentimental associations is a kind of exclusivity which is antithetical to reality. In Williams' mind, to exclude any portion of reality would be equivalent to a composer accepting, say, the tone B natural as an acceptable element of composition but excluding B flat on arbitrary grounds. For Williams, all reality is the proper material for poetry, and the task of the poet is to create a reality within the poem, independent of but congruent with external reality. There must be selectivity in order to give experience form, but selection is not based upon denial of any portion of reality. Consequently, Williams' poetry includes what Wallace Stevens has described as the "anti-poetic," and, true to his doctrine of contact, Williams rejected the label.

Williams is not denying the pursuit of beauty through poetry, but beauty is to be achieved through the transformational power of the imagination and its power to give form to reality without distortion. What Williams does deny is the equation of beauty with prettiness. Writing of Randall
Jarrell's squeamishness in reacting to the unabashed treatment of life's seamier side in Book Four of *Paterson*, Williams says,

> If you are going to write realistically of the conception of filth in the world, it can't be pretty. What goes on with people isn't pretty. With the approach to the city, international character began to enter the innocent river and pervert it; sexual perversions, such things that every metropolis when you get to know it houses. Certain human elements can't take the gaff, have to become perverts to satisfy certain longings. When human beings herd together, have to face each other, they are very likely to go crooked. What in the world is the artist to do? He is not a moralist. He *sees* things; reacts to them, must take them into consideration.\

Just as Williams does not see the artist as a didactic moralist, he deplores the moralistic response to the poem, such as that of Randall Jarrell or Marianne Moore to Book Four of *Paterson*. In Williams' view, the only moral depravity in a poem is the failure to bring form out of chaos.

Perhaps one of the attributes of music that appealed to Williams in his adoption of it as an image of the imagination and its contact with the world is that music, of all the arts, lends itself least to moralizing and to moral evaluation, particularly in a period of post-Stravinsky modernism. With the possible exception of program music, which purposefully conjures external associations, music is pure form and, therefore, a self-contained reality. The form and the content are the same in music, which is similar to the goal sought by Williams in establishing "a primordial union of subject and object" which "is the basic presupposition of [his] poetry." If such union is achieved, then the word—and the poem—may achieve the status of independent 'thingness.'

Williams refers to the "music of events," and, in "The Desert Music," as elsewhere, music is the image of the imagination. We have already observed that the world and the imagination have a common quality: neither
is static. Everything is in process, in a state of becoming. The mind can meet with the object only if its own movement, its own rhythmic patterns are congruent with those external to itself which it contemplates.

Each thing has its own unique rhythm. The rhythm of a particular tree as it develops will not be that of a particular flower. The rhythm of each entity is governed by its own nature. Yet all things share the general common quality of movement, even seemingly solid inert masses, as modern physics tells us. Returning for a moment to Williams' discussion of the similarities and uniquenesses of things in the Prologue of Kora in Hell:

... this loose linking of one thing with another has effects of a destructive power little to be guessed at: all manner of things are thrown out of key so that it approaches the impossible to arrive at an understanding of anything. All is confusion, yet it comes from a hidden desire for the dance, a lust of the imagination, a will to accord two instruments in a duet.

But one does not attempt by the ingenuity of the joiner to blend the tones of the oboe with the violin. On the contrary the perfections of the two instruments are emphasized by the joiner; no means is neglected to give to each the full color of its perfections. It is only the music of the instruments which is joined and that not by the woodworker but by the composer, by virtue of the imagination.

On this level of the imagination all things and ages meet in fellowship. Thus can they, peculiar and perfect, find their release. This is the beneficent power of the imagination.10

The imagination, then, by placing itself in rhythmic congruity with the rhythms it contemplates in the world, enters into a rhythmic unity of subject and object. In doing so, it is a part of "the music of events." But the imagination, as indicated by the above quotation, also functions in the capacity of the composer, imparting harmonic form to the things which it contemplates. The pitfall which Williams points out in seeing
only the similarities between things is consistent with his musical analogy: "all manner of things are thrown out of key." Key, which is the constructive core of tonal music, is only discernible through harmonic relationship of tones, which is to say that it is dependent upon the comparative relationship of different tones.

The second musical analogy of the quotation focuses upon the element of timbre, or the characteristic sound quality of particular instruments. Instruments are used in combination not to dull or obliterate their distinct timbres, but to complement one another, to enhance the sound quality of one instrument by juxtaposing it with another. The success of tonal and instrumental combination is dependent upon the sensual ear and imagination of the composer, who, like the poet, is the organizer of sound. Tones are the structural units of the composer while the building blocks of the poet are words, but they may be compared in that both the composer and the poet attempt to create a complete form, harmonious in its parts, but with respect for the integrity of each component element.

Williams fervently expostulated a revolution in language that would accomplish "a break-away from that paralyzing vulgarity of logic for which the habits of science and philosophy coming over into literature (where they do not belong) are to blame."\textsuperscript{11} Not logic, but the senses are the stuff of literature, but logic continues to hang like a scrim between the word and the thing or action it signifies. When such is the case, the word no longer carries the impact of experience, and the contact between the perceiver and the object cannot be completed, for completion means giving the experience of contact reality in the word.
In discussing the merits of Lawrence Sterne's imaginative blow to the pathology of language, Williams says, referring to Chapter 43 of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*,

Note how the words alive, skin, pointed, described, dreamed come into the design of these sentences. The feeling is of words themselves, a curious immediate quality quite apart from their meaning, much as in music different notes are dropped, so to speak, into repeated chords one at a time, one after another—for themselves alone.12

The point that Williams makes with his musical analogy in this passage is similar to that made in the Prologue to *Kora in Hell*, namely, that musical tones do not sacrifice their autonomous character, which is their significance, when placed in juxtaposition with other tones. The logic of the harmonic design does not obfuscate the notes of the melody. Williams wishes to create a similar effect with the literary use of words: to create a form which does not obscure the autonomous impact of the words.

It is important to note that in the passage to which Williams refers, Sterne achieves his effect by subverting the normal lines of logic, thereby permitting the words to come into a kind of relief and retain their own quality. Williams' quarrel with logic is its rigidity, which he considers antithetical to liberation of the intelligence. Art, as well as science and philosophy, has as its immediate goal the furthering of knowledge, but it differs from them in its way of knowing. Science (which Williams links with philosophy) depends on a method of limitation, the reduction of perception, while art proceeds on the expansion of perception. Thus, Williams contends, art, not science, is the way to all knowledge. Science isolates part from part and is static, while art seeks cohesion of the parts and is kinetic.13
The artist differs from the philosopher in point of action. He is the whole man, not the breaker up but the compactor. He does not translate the sensuality of his materials into symbols but deals with them directly. By this he belongs to his world and time, sensually, realistically. His work might and finally must be expanded—holds power of expansion at any time—into new conceptions of government. It is not the passive "to be" but the active "I am."14

Williams turns again in his essay, "The Work of Gertrude Stein," to a musical example to clarify his notion of the type of movement conducive to true intelligence:

... movement must not be confused with what we attach to it but, for the rescuing of the intelligence, must always be considered aimless, without progress.

This is the essence of all knowledge.

Bach might be an illustration of movement not suborned by a freight of purposed design, loaded upon it as in almost all later musical works; statement unmusical and unnecessary. Stein's "They lived very gay then: has much of the same quality of movement to be found in Bach—the composition of the words determining not the logic, not the "story," not the theme even, but the movement itself. As it happens, "They were both gay there" is as good as some of Bach's shorter figures.

Music could easily have a statement attached to each note in the manner of words, so that C natural might mean the sun, etc., and completely dull treatises be played—and even sciences finally expounded in tunes.15

This passage attests to Williams' agreement with Pound's previous quoted conviction "that to use a symbol with an ascribed or intended meaning is, usually, to produce very bad art." Pound made this statement about art in general and poetry in particular, but it occurs in the context of a comment on program music, or music which refers to something outside itself. In such music, there is an identification of the musical elements with, for example, a place or an event, and concomitantly, the emotions roused by these associations. Williams' example of ascribing particular symbolic
meanings to particular notes is to carry the proposition of program music to its ridiculous extreme. Equational representation tends to make for bad music and no better poetry in Williams' view, for it leaves no room for the free movement and interplay of the imagination, which is "the essence of all knowledge."

Williams takes the position that the "optimum of intelligence" lies neither in fixed and static ends of logical equation nor simply in purposeless transition. The example of Bach's music is appropriately chosen. Bach, because of the tight structure of his polyphonic forms, has been canonized by some minds whose only god approaches Blake's rigid and logical Urizen. Williams, however, is not misled by Bach's careful structure and realizes that the energy of his musical line is not overweighed by the logic of the design. Bach's line, in fact, is remarkable for its dynamic fluency, which is not impeded but enhanced by the structural design of the composition. The music of Bach, then, serves well as a reinforcement of Williams' ideal of a poetic line which would have structure, but one which would not inhibit the movement of the line nor mire the words in a bog of logical imposition.

With our attention thus drawn to the importance of movement in Williams' poetics, we have edged into our second area of consideration, process, although process is really an aspect of contact (as, for that matter, it is of measure and relativity as well), for contact is a condition of process. There are a number of terms which are applicable to process: activity, movement, energy, kinesis, immediacy, spontaneity, synesthesia, synergy, to name a few. Process is to be in tune with the environment, with the moment, to be in the flow of things, to be sensitive
to the non-logical lines of connection between things, to be responsive to
the sensual nature of experience.

The language of process is habitual with Williams from very early on
in his career. In the prose from *Spring and All*, Williams states that the
imagination "attacks, stirs, animates, is radio-active in all that can be
touched by action. Words occur in liberation by virtue of its processes."
Certainly this comment is phrased in a vocabulary of process. Opposing the
language of process is lingual description, a dead use of language in which
"words adhere to certain objects, and have the effect on the senses of
oysters, or barnacles." It is the function of the poetic imagination to
create "experience dynamized into reality," a phenomenon occurring only by
a use of language which approximates the processes of experience. To bor­
row the words of Herbert Schneidau in his book on Ezra Pound, language must
embody "the 'shock and stroke' of experience." The image "must be felt
rather than merely seen, and must embody a kinetic sense of movement." It is the function of the poetic imagination to
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a use of language which approximates the processes of experience. To bor­
row the words of Herbert Schneidau in his book on Ezra Pound, language must
embody "the 'shock and stroke' of experience." The image "must be felt
rather than merely seen, and must embody a kinetic sense of movement."
Thus, the images that the poet uses must approach the processes of nature
in order to assume a reality of their own. Again, in his insistence upon
vital linguistic usage rather than weakened, static description or second­
ary recounting of experience, Williams stays close to his Imagistic roots.
Like Pound, he was aware that the key to vital linguistic imagery is the
verb.

The significance of the verb in Williams' theory of poetry is com­
pletely clear only if we consider it together with the distinction he makes
between 'copying' nature and 'imitating' nature. Imitating rather than
copying nature is identical with his concern to create a self-contained
reality rather than illusion, which is mere "realism." There are several
brief commentaries from the prose of Spring and All which help to elucidate Williams' point:

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

I suppose Shakespeare's familiar aphorism about holding the mirror up to nature has done more harm in stabilizing the copyist tendency of the arts among us then—

the mistake in it (though we forget that it is not S. speaking but an imaginative character of his) is to have believed that the reflection of nature is nature. It is not. It is only a sham nature, a "lie."

He holds no mirror up to nature but with his imagination rivals nature's composition with his own.  

The point, then, is to bring the experience of reality—nature—into poetic language. This is done not by copying nature but by imitating its operations. In a 1951 letter to Frank Moore, Williams writes, "To copy nature is a spineless activity; it gives us a sense of our mere existence but hardly more than that. But to imitate nature involves the verb. We then ourselves become nature, and so invent an object which is an extension of the process."  

Williams' determination to revitalize the state of poetic language is reminiscent of Ernest Fenollosa's complaint of the "anemia of modern speech," which he discusses in his well-known essay, The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry. Williams' efforts were directed not toward revamping modern speech—on the contrary, he favored a poetic diction based upon the American idiom—but it should be remembered that
Fenollosa was concerned primarily in his essay with poetic speech, and his general comment may be taken in this context. Ezra Pound worked on the Fenollosa papers in the years following 1913, and finally published this essay in his Instigations in 1920. The proximity of this date to the publication dates of Kora in Hell (1920) and Spring and All (1923) as well as other works in which Williams advocates a language of process should be noted. Williams, like Pound, had an active interest in oriental poetry, and it is likely that Williams would have been familiar with this essay, given the voluminous exchange of manuscripts and matters poetic between Pound and Williams.

The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry is a study of the original verbal nature of all language, and the ideas set forth in this essay make a convincing argument that Williams is correct when he says of the poem (as he does in "The Desert Music"), "the verb calls it into being."

Fenollosa was convinced that the Chinese ideogram reveals the now-obscured root of all language. He asserts that the sentence form, which exists in all languages, "was forced upon primitive men by nature itself," and that sentence structure reflects the natural unit of process in nature, which is a "transference of power," the agent acting upon the object. In this process, the act is the factual substance of the truth expressed; the agent and object function only as terms limiting the act. Clearly then, the action—or the verb—is the important thing in nature, and, correspondingly, in language. According to Fenollosa:

A true noun, an isolated thing, does not exist in nature. Things are only the terminal points, or rather, the melting points of actions, cross sections cut through actions, snapshots. Neither can
a pure verb, an abstract motion, be possible in nature. The eye sees noun and verb as one: things in motion, motion in things, and so the Chinese conception tends to represent them. If we accept Fenollosa's theory, it is apparent that only by creating images which are based on the verb or retain a verbal nature and preserve the natural transferences of energy which occur in nature may nature in any real sense be "imitated." It is an imitation of the vital rhythms of nature that brings poetry into life.

Both music and the dance contain within their structures an analogous transference of energy. Both exist within the dimension of time and are impelled forward by rhythmic movement of one tone (or group of tones) or one step (or gesture) to the next. The continuum thereby set into motion is characterized by successive tensions. Tensions in music may be established in a number of ways, but they all may be thought of as contributing to the commanding rhythmic form of the piece. In her book, Feeling and Form, Suzanne Langer has recognized, quite rightly, that rhythm is more than a mechanical, metronomic, equal division of time. To put it another way, there is a difference between rhythm and meter. Langer defines rhythm as a "relation between tensions," and points out that this concept of rhythm "makes it quite comprehensible that harmonic progressions, resolutions of dissonances, directions of 'running' passages and 'tendency tones' in melody all serve as rhythmic agents. Everything that prepares a future creates rhythm; everything that begets expectation, including the expectation of sheer continuity, prepares the future. . . ." Also, she explains that:

The essence of rhythm is the preparation of a new event by the ending of a previous one. A person who moves rhythmically need not repeat a single motion exactly.
His movements, however, must be complete gestures, so that one can sense a beginning, intent and consummation, and see in the last stages of one the condition and indeed the rise of another. Rhythm is the setting up of new tensions by the resolutions of former ones. They need not be of equal duration at all; but the situation that begets the new crisis must be inherent in the denouement of its forerunner.

Essentially, Langer's conception of rhythm in music and dance is analogous to Fenollosa's "transference of power" that characterizes nature. The potential for energy is held within each tension, and as that tension is released, the energy contained within it is transferred to the next point of tension, and the process continues until the tension is fully resolved and the energy dissipated at the conclusion of the composition or dance.

When Williams stipulates the verb as the source of the poem, he means that the verb is the condition of life, and, therefore, it must be the condition of the poem if the poem is to imitate life. One of the essential ways in which this verbal condition is achieved in his poetry is through attention to movement within the structure of the poem. Williams was occupied during the course of his career with his search for a "new measure," which evolved as a relative measure that would function as a concretion of the process of nature. Early on an enthusiast of the principles of Imagism, Williams soon struck out in a new direction on the grounds that the free verse of Imagism lacked necessary structural order: "No verse can be free, it must be governed by some measure, but not by the old measure. . . . We have to return to some measure but a measure consonant with our time and not a mode so rotten that it stinks." The method of conventional metric poetry struck him as awkward and unpoetic because it imposes a rigid, arbitrary pattern upon language, which has the effect of distorting language and destroying natural rhythmic flow. This awareness
indicates Williams' understanding of the distinction between rhythm and
meter that Langer makes, and his option for rhythmic rather than metrical
poetry is consistent with his conviction that poetry should imitate nature,
for the rhythms of nature are organic rather than metrical.

In his reflections in I Wanted to Write a Poem, Williams recalls that
with his volume of poems, The Tempers, in 1913, he abandoned the use of
rhyme and capital letters to begin lines: "I found I couldn't say what I
had to say in rhyme. It got in my way." The practice of beginning each
line with a capital letter struck him as "pretentious." Williams had made
the leap from Keats to Whitman. Whitman's influence was a strong one,
offering to the young poet Williams two irresistible advantages: his
poetry was free of the inhibiting and deforming effects of traditional
meter, and he wrote with the voice of his time. Eventually Williams' enchantment with Whitman was tempered by his need for greater discipline
than Whitman offered, but Whitman always remained an important figure for
Williams because of his contribution in breaking with the modes of the
past. The form adopted by Williams in The Tempers, as he tells us, is one
of a "rhythmic unit." He writes,

When I came to the end of a rhythmic unit (not necessarily a sentence) I ended the line. The rhythmic unit was not measured by capitals at
the beginning of a line or periods within the lines. I was trying for something. I wanted it to look that way on the page. I didn't go in for long lines because of my nervous nature. I couldn't. The rhythmic pace was the pace of speech, an excited pace because I was excited when I wrote. I was discovering, pressed by some violent mood. The lines were short, not studied.

It is important that "the rhythmic pace is the pace of speech," as the
rhythms of his own speech remained the standard in Williams' search for
an acceptable prosody. He remained unalterably firm in his belief that
prosody should emerge from natural speech rather than be imposed upon it.

The rhythmic unit of the earlier poetry reflects Williams' impulse
to seek a natural order in poetic construction. The effect of structure
determined by rhythmic rather than syntactical closure is highly individ­
ual, one of mood, and consequently, the pattern varies from one poem to
another. As James Guimond has observed, this fact accounts for critics'
failure to find in these poems any consistent prosodic mode. The rhyth­
mic unit, however erratic, nonetheless satisfied Williams' need for a
structural method that would allow unimpeded flow of movement, and it
served him for a good many years. In the 1940's, however, a new urgency
began to stir in Williams to develop a formal prosody, one that would re­
tain the benefits of the rhythmic unit but that would provide greater
concrete discipline.

Writing to Parker Tyler in 1946, following a lecture in which he had
asserted (as he often did) the necessity for American poets to establish a
poetic mode apart from British tradition, Williams says, "Someone in the
audience, I have seen him before, an older man, asked me if I thought I
had given any evidence of the 'new way of measuring' in anything I had
read that night or in anything that I myself had written at any time. It
was a fair question but one I shall have to postpone answering indefinite­
ly." The question put to him by this unidentified 'someone' continued
to occupy Williams, and the following year he wrote to Kenneth Burke, "For
myself I reject almost all poetry as at present written, including my own.
I see tendencies, nodes of activity here and there but no clear synthesis.
I am trying in Paterson to work out the problem of a new prosody--but I am
doing it by writing poetry rather than 'logic' which might castrate me,
since I have no ability in that medium (of logic)." Williams' method of writing rather than reasoning paid off in Book II of *Paterson*, which he describes in *I Wanted to Write a Poem* as a "milestone." In Book II, Williams for the first time used the variable foot and the triadic line, but he did not recognize until some time later that this was what he had so long searched for, the final conception of his prosodic technique.

We have only to go back to Flint's and Pound's words to would-be Imagist poets in 1913 to understand that Williams was not isolated among modern poets in his conception of poetry as a sister art to music. Pound tells the poet, "Don't chop your stuff into separate *iambic*. Don't make each line stop dead at the end, and then begin the very next line with a heave. Let the beginning of the next line catch the rise of the rhythm wave, unless you want a definite longish pause.

"In short, behave as a musician, a good musician, when dealing with that phase of your art which has exact parallels in music rhythm. The same laws govern and you are bound by no others." We can only imagine Williams nodding in full agreement. Indeed, the rhythmic structure of music is governed by laws, but the Imagists stopped short of spelling out an analogous structural methodology for poetry. They described the desired end but neglected the means, a fact which Williams, trained in the precise science of medicine, could not indefinitely ignore. It was not sufficient to think of the line as vaguely 'musical'; it must be specifically so. The passage from Part III, Book II of *Paterson* that ultimately answered Williams' need for a workable structural method is the "Descent" section (published separately as "The Descent" in *The Desert Music and Other Poems*, 1954):
The descent beckons
   as the ascent beckoned .
   Memory is a kind
of accomplishment
   a sort of renewal
   even
an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new places
   inhabited by hordes
   heretofore unrealized
of new kinds --
   since their movements
   are towards new objectives
(even though formerly they were abandoned)

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

With evening, love wakens
   though its shadows
   which are alive by reason
of the sun shining --
   grow sleepy now and drop away
   from desire

Love without shadows stirs now
   beginning to waken
   as night
advances.

The descent
   made up of despairs
   and without accomplishment
realizes a new awakening:
   which is a reversal
of despair.
   For what we cannot accomplish, what
is denied to love,
   what we have lost in the anticipation --
   a descent follows,
endless and indestructible .
Recalling this passage, Williams writes,

Several years afterward in looking over the thing I realized I had hit upon a device (that is the practical focus of a device) which I could not name when I wrote it. My dissatisfaction with free verse came to a head in that I always wanted a verse that was ordered, so it came to me that the concept of the foot itself would have to be altered in our new relativistic world. It took me several years to get the concept clear. I had a feeling that there was somewhere an exact way to define it; the task was to find the word to describe it, to give it an epitaph, and I finally hit upon it. The foot not being fixed is only to be described as variable. If the foot itself is variable it allows order in so-called free verse. Thus the verse becomes not free at all but just simply variable, as all things in life properly are.

From this time on, Williams, by his own account, became absorbed with "the intellectual concept of the thing itself," that is, with the structural technique of the verse.31

One senses a real current of jubilation in Williams' recorded accounts of his discovery of the variable foot. It is the elation of the quester rewarded. In the end, however, Williams was not content with his answer to the question of a new poetic measure. In an interview in 1962 with Stanley Koehler, he tells of the excitement he experienced with the composition of "The Descent," but he adds that he could not sustain the delicate balance between order and irregular composition that distinguished that poet from earlier ones:

WILLIAMS
I had to acknowledge I was licked. I didn't dare fool with the poem so that it would have been more rigid; I wouldn't have wanted that.

INTERVIEWER
You felt there was nothing more you could do with it?
WILLIAMS
Nothing more. I felt all that I could do with it had been done, but it was not complete. I returned to it; but the irregularity of that poem could not be repeated by me. I was too... I've forgotten.

INTERVIEWER
You feel it wasn't a perfect poem.

WILLIAMS
It was too regular. There were variations of mood which would have led me to make a different poem out of it.

INTERVIEWER
And you don't think anything after "The Descent" goes beyond it?

WILLIAMS
No. I always wanted to do something more with it, but I didn't know how.

Elsewhere in the interview, Williams expresses his desire for greater exactness in the measure. As he put it in "The Desert Music," the poem should be "The counted poem, to an exact measure":

INTERVIEWER
You think it should be more exact then, than you have yet made it.

WILLIAMS
Yes, it should be more exact, in Milton's sense. Milton counted the syllables.\textsuperscript{32}

The disappointment in his own achievement indicated in these lines may perhaps be attributable to the general sense of frustration that Williams experienced in the ten years following his first stroke in 1952 which left his speech severely impaired and his ability to read and write nearly gone. Such limitation could not easily be accepted by a man who so strongly believed in the need for continual renewal, both personally and professionally. Ultimately, however, the task of judging an artist's achievement belongs properly not to the artist himself, but to others.
Whatever Williams' misgivings about the inexactitude of his measure and the need for counted syllables in 1962, a decade earlier, at the pinnacle of his powers as a poet, he wrote to Richard Eberhart,

> I have never been one to write by the rule, even by my own rules. Let's begin with the rule of counted syllables, in which all poems have been written hitherto. That has become tiresome to my ear. Finally, the stated syllables, as in the best of present-day free verse, have become entirely divorced from the beat, that is the measure. The musical pace proceeds without them.

At this time, Williams was not opposed to the poem's being counted, but he did oppose count by syllables. What he sought was a poetic measure that could be counted in the way that a musical measure, or bar, is counted. Williams continues, "By measure I mean musical pace. Now with music in our ears the words need only be taught to keep as distinguished an order, as chosen a character, as regular, according to the music, as in the best of prose."³³

The fundamental characteristic that allies Williams' later poetry with music is the principle of duration. Because Williams considered time rather than syllable count to be the crucial factor in poetic measure, the musical bar suggested itself to him as the natural analogue for the measure he sought: "a bar definitely, since it is not related to grammar, but to time... The clause, the sentence, and the paragraph are ignored, and the progression goes over into the next bar as much as the musical necessity requires... a sequence of musical bars arranged vertically on the page and capable of infinite modulation."³⁴ (It should be pointed out that Williams frequently uses musical terms not in their specialized technical sense but with a looser meaning. This is mentioned here only to avoid confusion. As an example, Williams is quoted above as saying that by measure,
he means "musical pace." "Musical pace" would normally be considered a definition of tempo rather than measure. However, what Williams seems to mean is the rhythmic line of the musical phrase, which has its parallel in the cadences of speech. Also, the word "modulation" in musical vocabulary refers to the passage from one key or modality to another. In Williams' meaning, it refers to the adaptability of the quantitative measure, which may admit variety while still maintaining the rhythmic flow of the poem.)

Williams was not the only poet of his generation to look to a quantitative measure as a possible way out of the metric morass of modern poetry. Among his contemporaries, Williams respected Ezra Pound above all others for his impeccable sense of time, and Pound, while he did not flatly reject meter, was one of the major proponents of quantitative verse. Williams, writing of Pound's translations of two Cavalcanti sonnets, praised Pound for his remarkable ear and for his perceptivity in recognizing the central importance of time:

Pound is not "all poetry"; that I thoroughly understand. But he has an ear that is unsurpassable. There lies his chief importance. The great change that is taking place in verse in our era is from a standardized stressed meter that has been graced by such superb works that we have come to think generally of it as fixed, fast and final in our tongue. But Pound, writing in the "new" language (which should be its name) discovered early that time is the real matter of measure and not stress. Elapsed time is the whole story as the Greeks should have told us long ago.35

In 1917, Pound expressed the opinion that "progress lies rather in an attempt to approximate classical quantitative metres (NOT to copy them) then in a carelessness regarding such things."36 He did not feel that English could be adapted successfully to the rules of Greek and Latin quantity, but that the principles of quantity could be applied to the
English language. In his essay, "The Tradition," he states, "As to quantity, it is foolish to suppose that we are incapable of distinguishing a long vowel from a short one, or that we are mentally debarred from ascertaining how many consonants intervene between one vowel and the next."

Although Williams ultimately viewed vers libre to be without a prosodic base, Pound considered vers libre as a quantitative verse. He saw it as one option of the poet, placing upon its use these conditions:

I think one should write vers libre only when one 'must', that is to say, only when the 'thing' builds up a rhythm more beautiful than that of set metres, or more real, more a part of the emotion of the 'thing', more germane, intimate, interpretive than the measure of regular accentual verse; a rhythm which discontents one with set iambic or set anapestic.

Given Williams' doctrine of contact and his belief that the rhythms of the poem should spring from the object of the poem (since the poem should imitate nature in a kinetic sense), the conditions that Pound places upon the use of quantitative verse would, for Williams, inherently be the conditions for all poetry.

Pound saw vers libre (or quantitative verse) in musical terms:

No one is so foolish as to suppose that a musician using 'four-four' time is compelled to use always four quarter notes in each bar, or in 'seven-eighths' time to use seven eighth notes uniformly in each bar. He may use one 1/2, one 1/4 and 1/8 rest, or any such combination as he may happen to choose or find fitting.

To apply this musical truism to verse is to employ vers libre.

In the 40's and 50's, when Williams had long rejected vers libre as such, this same musical principle served him in the definition of a new measure. What he needed was a structural unit that would permit internal flexibility and variety and yet provide the necessary order for sustained rhythmic...
flow. In 1944, Williams had written that grammatical units—the sentence and the clause—were to be ignored in favor of rhythmic structure, and for a time the focus of experimentation was upon line length and arrangement. By 1947, his emphasis had again shifted. Measure, not line, was the structural unit.

we must break down
the line
the sentence
to get at the unit of measure in order to build.⁴⁰

The problem that Williams was attempting to solve had its source in the smallest unit of measure, the foot, and it would have to be solved in the foot. The limitations of traditional meter were caused by the fixity of the foot, and the only way that the foot could be redeemed was to loosen it, to make it variable. As Pound had noted in 1913, the musical analogue to the poetic foot, the bar, has this variable property based on duration rather than number. The rigidity of the traditional foot stemmed from the fact that it is constituted of a specified number of syllables. 'Musical quality' has for centuries been considered a positive value in poetry; it seemed that the problem might be solved by bringing the two arts one step closer by changing the conception of the foot. The syllables of the foot may be considered comparable to the notes of the bar, but the number of notes in the bar is not limited. Rather, notes have relative time values and their number depends only upon the combination used to comprise the total time span of the bar unit. The relative time values of notes allows for rhythmic structure. The rhythm may be constant—a steady beat—but the components, the notes, are variable.

The beat, then, not the number of notes, is the 'countable' element of music. Writing to Eberhart, Williams describes his own method of counting his new measure:
By its music shall the best of modern verse be known and the resources of the music. The refinement of the poem, its subtlety, is not to be known by the elevation of the words but—the words don't so much matter—by the resources of the music.

To give you an example from my own work—not that I know anything about what I have myself written: (count): -- not that I ever count when writing but, at best, the lines must be capable of being counted, that is to say, measured—(believe it or not).—At that I may, half consciously, even count the measure under my breath as I write. --

(approximate example)

(1) The smell of the heat is boxwood
(2) when rousing us
(3) a movement of the air
(4) stirs our thoughts
(5) that had no life in them
(6) to a life, a life in which

(or)

(1) Mother of God! Our Lady!
(2) the heart
(3) is an unruly master:
(4) Forgive us our sins
(5) as we
(6) forgive
(7) Those who have sinned against

Count a single beat to each numeral. You may not agree with my ear, but that is the way I count the line. Over the whole poem it gives a pattern to the meter that can be felt as a new measure. It gives resources to the ear which result in a language which we hear spoken about us every day.41

The significance of Williams' measure is that it not only allows for rhythm based upon the duration of words or, more accurately, syllables, but that it permits rhythmic inclusion of the pauses that characterize natural speech. There is a story that once Mozart, when asked, "What is the most beautiful part of the music?" replied, "The silences." Music would be dull indeed if it were not for the contrast of silence with sound. Spaces between the notes lend importance to the notes that are played and are a major means by which the tensions and relaxations necessary for rhythmic line are created. In short, the silences of music are not to be
overestimated in their importance to dynamic and rhythmic interest. Certainly our speech is marked by pauses which impart expressiveness and rhythmic quality, and any poetic measure that purports to be based upon natural speech must take this phenomenon into account. The accommodation that Williams makes for non-speech as well as speech in his quantitative measure is completely deliberate. To his own question, "What else is verse made up of but 'words, words, words?" he replies, "Quite literally, the spaces between the words, . . . which takes with them an equal part in the measure. A musician understands this, as should a poet also."41

In his Spectrum essay, "Measure," Williams quotes from a letter to him from an unidentified source which compares the variable foot to the mensuration of hymns. I include it here in that it is helpful in understanding the way in which the variable foot is essentially musical:

"... "in the back of the hymn book you will find the psalms marked off--I suppose for chanting to music--into measures like this:

"Praise / ye the / Lord. // Praise ye the Lord from the heavens. / Praise him / in the / heights.

"Praise ye him, / all his / angels: // praise ye / him, / all his / hosts.


"Three measures before the caesura, four after. The music organ gives the time-structure of the line, and the words vary in pace so that from one to six go into a 'foot.'

"Of course the words and music are entities conceived on separate occasions, and the words are being stretched and compressed to fit them into the music. Your job, on the other hand, consists in making them both come out right together from the start. Otherwise, the analogy between the variable foot and the mensuration of the psalms seems to me rather close . . ."43
Williams clearly regards the variable foot as analogous to the bar in music, which can be counted. The way music is counted depends, of course, on the time signature designated: three counts to the bar in 3/4 time, four in 4/4, six in 6/8, and so on. It is apparent from Williams' example that he does not count his measure precisely as one counts a musical bar. Rather, he counts only a single beat for each foot, as one counts syllable-stress feet, although the standard for the beat is not stressed syllables, but duration. For the reader who is trying to catch the feel of Williams' rhythmic pattern, ordinary methods of scansion are not of much assistance. It is possible instead to use musical notation, which has the advantage of indicating the relative durations of the syllables and which is also helpful in showing the weight of the pauses in the rhythmic pattern. Assuming the time signature as 4/4, the following demonstrates such notational analysis:

```
\( 1 \) \( \underline{2} \) \( 3 \) \( \underline{4} \)
\( \text{All women are fated similarly} \)
\( \text{facing men} \)
\( 1 \) \( \frac{1}{2} \) \( 3 \) \( 4 \)
\( \text{and there is always} \)
\( \text{another, such as I,} \)
\( 1 \) \( \underline{2} \) \( 3 \) \( 4 \)
\( \text{who loves them,} \)
```
loves all women, but

finds himself, touching them,

like other men,

often confused.

Such analysis is not meant to suggest that the beats indicated mark a strictly chronometric interval. As Williams has repeatedly stated, the duration of the variable foot is approximate. And, it may be added, the variable foot becomes ever more variable through performative individualities.

Although Williams preferred the term, 'variable,' to describe his approach to measure, his quantitative prosody may equally be described as relative, for reasons that we have seen. Williams was not one to be arbitrary, and his reasons for seeking a relative structural form may be traced to his conviction that form be imaginatively integrated with content.

As discussed earlier, the content of Williams' poetry springs from contact between the mind of the poet and the things it meets in the world, an inherently relative relationship. Each--the mind's activity and the objects it contemplates--having its own unique rhythm, they can meet in contact only if their rhythms are consonant. The mind extends to those things different from itself, but to which it 'fits'. When contact occurs,
its agencies—subject and object—share in a relative rhythmic relationship, which finds its realization in the poem only in a comparable rhythmic structure, which is to say, a relative measure which allows for the individuations of both.

The variable foot, then, incorporates all the major aspects of Williams' poetics, enabling him to embody the whole of the poetic process. In the prosodic vehicle of the musical measure, he found the means to a poem that would be as vital as the experience that preceded it, a poem that would contain the 'nowness' and intensity of the relationship that brought it into life.
FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER I

1. These terms are used variously by Williams throughout his writings on the theory of poetry, though with varying degrees of specificity. His notions of contact and measure have been elaborated more fully than those of process and relativity; however, each has a significant bearing in Williams' approach to the poem. In this author's opinion, each of these terms offers a convenient designation of a particular aspect of his poetic conception relating to the arts of music and the dance.


3. Ibid., p. 105.


5. Ibid.


10. Williams, Prologue to Kora in Hell, p. 16.


12. Ibid., p. 114.


16. Williams, Spring and All, p. 149.


18. Williams, Spring and All, p. 121.


20. The word "verbal" is used here in the specific sense of the function of the verb as a part of speech rather than in its broader application by which all use of language is considered "verbal."


25. Ibid., p. 15.


31 Williams, I Wanted to Write a Poem, pp. 82-83.


33 Williams, Selected Letters, pp. 325-26.


41 Williams, Selected Letters, pp. 326, 327.

42 William Carlos Williams, "Measure," Spectrum, 5, No. 3 (Fall, 1959), 149.

43 Ibid., p. 150.
Without invention nothing is well spaced, unless the mind change, unless the stars are new measured, according to their relative positions, the line will not change, the necessity will not matriculate . . .

--Williams, Paterson, Book II

When Williams abandoned Romantic poetic style in his youth, he turned his back on the past and became an apostle of the new. His purpose became "to enter a new world, and have there freedom of movement and newness."\(^1\) Dedicated not only to the spirit but the actuality of this goal, for the remainder of his life, Williams demanded originality in form, both in his own work and in the work of his contemporaries, particularly those poets of American birth. He deplored the continuing tyranny of past tradition over present structural modes, taking the position that the first maxim of the artist should be that his work is a product of its time and place. Williams' strongest criticisms of Pound and Eliot are based on their violation of this maxim. Williams frequently attacked Pound and Eliot for their rejection of America, for their refusal to stick it out in their place of origin and come to terms with the 'local'. Of Eliot, Williams says that "Critically" he "returned us to the classroom just at the moment when I felt that we were on the point of an escape to matters much closer to the essence of a new art form itself--rooted in the locality which should give it fruit."\(^2\) And though he remained friends with Pound following his expatriation to Europe, he never really approved his friend's defection. But his insistence on the responsibility of Americans to develop an American style independent of European poetic modes is, at its core, an
insistence that modern poets shed the past and confront the time in which they live. The 17th Century or Medieval Provencal lyrics will not do, Williams would say, as models for today.

In the modern world, we have seen old concepts of reality abolished, supplanted by a new Weltanschauung, unique to our time in history. In Williams' view, the office of the poet can be fulfilled only if he evolve new forms consonant with man's new understanding of himself and the universe he inhabits. America is, relatively speaking, a new country, forging its identity concurrently with the changes brought about by industrial growth and the revolutions wrought by advances in science. Thus America, in its state of emergence, serves for Williams as an emblem of the larger condition of man, in many ways severed from the past rather than an extension of it. With such a conception of America and the role of the American poet, it is understandable that Williams should find little merit in the value of tradition as espoused by Eliot and Pound.

Many factors enter into the phenomenon of the modern world view, certainly far too numerous and complex for the scope of this study. Certain preoccupations and influences stemming from Williams' new world conceptions are clearly evident in his writings, however, and, if understood, help to explain his choices of the arts of time--music and dance--as relevant images for the poem and the poetic process.

One of the paramount influences apparent in Williams' work is the theory of Relativity. Relativity in its general sense was introduced in the first chapter as one of the tenets of Williams' poetic method pertaining to his doctrine of contact and prosodic structure. Taking it to its source, however, we find that it has specific application as it pertains to Albert Einstein's Special and General Theories of Relativity.
Einstein first published his Special Theory in 1905, and its scope was expanded with publication of the General Theory in 1915. The General Theory came to public attention in 1919, and the cosmic laws discovered and amplified by Einstein were of such far-reaching magnitude in their implications for man's view of himself in the universe that they gave rise to a new climate of philosophical thought. The epistemological import of Relativity assured that its impact would not be limited to the scientific community, and Relativity quickly entered into the vocabulary of not only philosophers, but of artists, writers and musicians as well.

According to Mike Weaver, Williams became familiar with Relativity through a book by Charles Proteus Steimetz, *Four Lectures on Relativity and Space*, which he obtained from John Riordan in 1926. Riordan and Williams engaged in a protracted discussion on Relativity and the application of the principles of science to poetry through the spring of 1926, and in March of that year, Williams attempted to convince Riordan to co-author with him a study on modern prosody, based upon their exchange.  

Williams' close friend, Robert McAlmon, writes in *Being Geniuses Together* that the period of the mid-twenties in Paris was marked by high enthusiasm for Einstein's theories: "There was a period which was very Einstein or relativist." In this connection, McAlmon recounts his and Ezra Pound's association with the English mathematician J. W. N. Sullivan and their discussions of Einstein and music. Williams was in Paris in 1926, and it is not likely that he should have escaped the currency of relativism among McAlmon's group. Certainly there was a climate at this time which was remarkable for its welcome of free interchange between the arts and science, and no one introduced into the Parisian circle of Pound
and McAlmon, even as a temporary member, could easily have remained unaware of the intellectual excitement generated by this exchange.

Williams' absorption with the application of Relativity to poetry is most evident in the late 30's and the 50's when he was developing a clear conception of the variable foot. However, for several decades past, he had stressed the importance of movement and time in poetic structure, and his interest in Relativity in the mid-20's suggests that he made the connection between poetic form and Relativity long before he hit upon the measure that would, in his own mind, adequately satisfy the conditions of Relativity. Certainly the eventual evolution of the variable foot offered a way for a poetic form to meet Williams' criterion of a measured structure uniquely adapted to the modern world view. In many respects, Williams' adoption of Relativity theory may be seen as a modern-day counterpart to the effects of the new science of the Renaissance on John Donne.

Alan Ostrom correctly recognizes Williams' intent that his 'new' measure, the variable foot, reflect the variable, or relative, universe that entered man's conception with Einstein's theories. Ostrom writes,

These new concepts of reality are what the poet must seek with the changed mind Williams speaks of in *Paterson*; the new measurement of the stars "according to their relative positions" is for Williams an adaptation in the arts of the Einsteinian theory of relativity, which Williams has long used as a symbol of the modern world and conceived of as the informing intellectual spirit of his time. His new measure, the "open formation," is, therefore, not only the product but the image of our understanding of the universe (human and social as well as physical) as composed of parts only relative to each other; the old forms, the old orders, are based on the belief in absolutes, on a rigidity of all structures, whether scientific, social or theological.
As Ostrom notes, the crucial change in the new universal conception is the supplantation of an absolutist order by a relative order. From the seventeenth to the twentieth century, man's notion of his universe was dominated by Newtonian physics. The cosmology of Newton was a comfortable mechanical construction in which all matter, from the largest planetary mass to the smallest particle, moved in conformity with the same mathematical laws. Newton's explanation of movement of bodies in the solar system depended upon the presence in the universe of a fixed reality as a constant frame of reference. The two cornerstones upon which Newton constructed his system were absolute space and absolute time, which, according to his definition of these elements, existed independently, without reference to anything external.

The findings of science have always had metaphysical extensions, and Newtonian physics was no exception. The absolutes of time and space seemed to be the analogues in nature of the divine order in which God was the immovable absolute being. Thus the Newtonian universe offered tangible security of spiritual as well as natural harmony. Newton's cosmology was, moreover, keyed to human perception; reality was what it seemed. Man relied upon his own senses to ground himself in the universe, his own 'here' and 'now' placing him within its vast reaches. The experience of his senses could impart to him the security of his own reality because his observations of place and time were not unique to himself, but affirmed an absolute universal standard.

It was not until the late nineteenth century that science evolved the means to extend beyond the limits of man's perception, but the resistance to destruction of the Newtonian universe was perhaps as much a matter of fear of chaos as of inadequate technology. The appearance of the
Einsteinian universe seemed a threat to the basic assumptions that man had held about his spiritual and physical identity in the universe. Such assumptions die hard. However, in the later nineteenth century the validity of Newton's mechanical cosmos increasingly began to be questioned. The work of Mach, Poincaré, Kirchoff, Maxwell, Fitzgerald, Lorentz, Michelson-Morley and others began to uncover flaws in the Newtonian system, which finally toppled with the publication of Einstein's Special Theory, and later, the General Theory. Einstein firmly believed in the principle of universal harmony, but for many, the universe that succeeded Newton's absolutist cosmology created a sense of radical doubt: the traditional bases of individual certainty were destroyed.

Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity states that the laws of nature are identical for all systems—or observers—moving uniformly relative to each other. This theory reinforces the notion of universal harmony, but it refutes the existence of any absolute, fixed frame of reference. Prior to this time, space had been thought to be some real substance at rest in the universe, termed since ancient times as the 'ether'. Einstein rejected space as substance and redefined it as "the order of relation of things among themselves." In other words, space has no definition other than that given it by the order of bodies that occupy it.

With the discarding of absolute space, absolute time was no longer a viable concept since an absolute standard of measurement is requisite for the establishment of absolute time. Certainty was thus replaced by possibility—a possible order of objects, a possible order of events. The measurement of time, like that of space, became relative to an independent system of reference. Consequently, the terms 'here' and 'now' could no
longer be assumed as undisputed universal facts. Beyond individual systems of reference, these terms have no meaning.

For Williams, who thought that poetry should be the imitation of the operations of nature in the truest sense, Einstein's discoveries about the natural order of the universe held the most profound implications:

How can we accept Einstein's theory of relativity, affecting our very conception of the heavens about us of which poets write so much, without incorporating its essential fact—the relativity of measurements—into our own category of activity: the poem. Do we think we stand outside the universe? Or that the Church of England does? Relativity applies to everything, like love, if it applies to anything in the world.

On virtually every level, Williams' poetic process assumes the revelations yielded up by the new physics. The process begins with the postulate of the poet in a post-Einsteinian universe, devoid of absolute time or position.

With the knowledge that absolute time-space does not exist and therefore cannot be taken as a universal given, the poet is forced to seek physical significance in specific, perceptible relations between himself—the system of reference—and particular events or things external to himself. Failing the fixed, external elements of the old order against which he might verify his own being, he must turn his gaze to seek a new absolute. In the new universe, the old standards of time and space are replaced by a new gauge—the speed of light. For Williams, the light is inward: the imagination, which illumines and makes credible himself and those things touched by his senses.

Light, the imagination
and love,
in our age,
by natural law,
which we worship,
maintain
all of a piece
their dominance.

The alternative is a seemingly capricious universe in which the individual
is afloat in a dark chaos of paradoxes.

The only reality possible for the individual, then, is the relationship
discernible between himself and particular things, and such a relationship is cognizable, and therefore real, only if it can be measured.

Measurement, which is essential for identity, stems from the imagination--the light--and is the confirmation of reality in the poem. In a 1955 letter to John C. Thirlwall, Williams writes:

The first thing you learn when you begin to learn anything about this earth is that you are externally barred save for the report of your senses from knowing anything about it. Measure serves for us as the key: we can measure between objects; therefore we know that they exist. Poetry began with measure, it began with the dance, whose divisions we have all but forgotten but are still known as measures.11

Williams, then, embraces the validity of the "report of the senses."

The difficulty which arises from acceptance of sensory data as an indicator of reality is the inherent subjectivity of individual perception in a relative universe. By his methodology, the scientist is generally debarred from using subjective terms when describing particular phenomena. His task is to objectively report his findings, which he accomplishes by defining the relations between systems and events. Likewise, the poet, who must objectify his perceptions, does so by defining the relations between the agencies of contact, the 'me' and the 'not me,' the inner self and outer object. For both the scientist and the poet, measure is the means for objectification, but a new universe demands a new kind of measure.
The altered view of the universe in the modern world, with its relinquishment of space-time absolutes, seems to suggest that the goal of the scientist or the poet of attaining to the universal is a futile pursuit. Universality has been thought of as that which is true for all places and for all times. Certainly universality in this sense is frustrated by the concept of a universe in which neither time nor place is fixed or constant. The cliché that "the only constant is change" expresses a post-relativity consciousness that there is no ultimate transcendence of flux in space and time. Einstein asserted that "the scientist who wishes to describe the phenomena of nature in terms that are consistent throughout the universe must regard measurements of time and distance as variable qualities."¹² Such variable measurement became possible by means of the Lorentz transformations which used the speed of light as a universal constant and modified, according to the velocity of each system of reference, the measurements of time and distance. Einstein generalized the principle inherent in the Lorentz transformations to assert that the laws of nature are uniform in all systems when they are related by the Lorentz equations. However, it must be stressed that, although uniformity of the laws of nature can be demonstrated mathematically, all the quantities of time and space are always variable.

In Williams' poetic process, following contact between poet and object, essentially a subjective apprehension, the relationship must be objectified in the poem. That is to say, it must be measured. But, Williams came to feel, the measure must be variable. In casting the relationship between the poet and the object of his perception in a variable construct, the poet not only lifts the relationship from subjectivity, but he affirms the reality of both self and thing and provides the bridge from
the particular to the universal. It becomes clear that the fixed foot of syllable-stress meter would not serve for this purpose. Fixed meter belonged to the old order, the order of absolutes. Williams, like Einstein, had to find a method of measure that would accommodate the new physics notion of time-space variability in order to avoid falsification of relationships. The variable foot is the poetic equivalent of Einstein's application of the Lorentz transformations, and it is, for Williams, a return to the sources of poetry in dance, the rhythms of which are durational and relative as those of music.

The poem is, in microcosm, a space-time structure analogous to the universe. ("A poem is a complete little universe. It exists separately."\textsuperscript{13}) It exists as a being-in-itself, defined spatially in its configuration on the page and temporally in its patterns of duration. Williams, as we have seen, was acutely sensitive to the positioning of the linear components of the poem on the page, recognizing the intrinsic relation of space to time, and his ultimate development of the triadic line was the means by which he could make visible the natural unity of space and time in the poem. The interdependence of space and time in Williams' line, which is spatially and temporally measured to approximate the variable rhythm of the spoken idiom, corresponds to Einstein's principle of Relativity of mass.

Since the mass of a moving body increases with an increase in velocity, Einstein reasoned that the increase in mass is accounted for by an increase in energy. In other words, energy has mass. Prior to Relativity, the universe had been visualized as a bifurcated structure, made up of mass, which was thought to be inactive and tangible, and energy, intangible, without mass. The discovery that mass and energy are equivalent strongly reinforces Williams' notion of the poem as an energized object.
From early in his career, Williams speaks of the poem as an autonomous energy construct. The poem is 'dynamized' and, at the same time, it is an object within itself, with the integrity of independent 'thingness'.

In *Spring and All*, Williams writes, "Sometimes I speak of imagination as a force, an electricity or a medium, a place. It is immaterial which: for whether it is the condition of a place or a dynamization its effect is the same . . . ."\(^4\)

While this exposition is of the imagination, it also holds true for the poem in which the operations of the imagination are manifest in concrete form. The imagination apprehends the nature of things in the world and, by its improvisational power, creates a new object, the poem, which it invests with the conditions of natural objects. That is to say, the poem becomes both place and force, or mass and energy. The space of the poem is defined by the relationships between words, which themselves must carry the force of reality—objects, things within themselves—liberated from dependencies upon fixed references to things outside the poem, which weigh words down, inhibiting natural force and movement. "The word is not liberated, therefore able to communicate release from fixities which destroy it until it is accurately tuned to the fact which giving it reality, by its own reality establishes its own freedom from the necessity of a word, thus freeing it and dynamizing it at the same time."\(^5\) The word is a thing, in itself a unit of energy. The relationships between words in the formal structure of the poem is the imitation of nature, the image of dynamic relationships in the world, the dance:

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

But an imitation of nature. In poetic form, Williams states the goal most succinctly:

Good Christ what is a poet—if any exists?

a man whose words will bite their way home—being actual having the form of motion

Joseph N. Riddel says in his article, "The Wanderer and the Dance: William Carlos Williams' Early Poetics," that "the made poem implies a dynamics, a motion and hence a transference of energy in 'form / of motion.' The form is Williams' duration, the 'intrinsic form' of a man's relationship with his local. . . . " The dance as an image of this process is appropriate because within its medium it satisfies Williams' conditions for the poem: the dance is "the form / of motion."

Perhaps R. P. Blackmur offers us a helpful guide to understanding the precise quality of language that makes dance its natural image. The key is gesture. In Language as Gesture, Blackmur states a theory of poetic language very close to Williams' own, although he himself does not recognize their proximity and tends to dismiss Williams' work as formless. Whatever Blackmur's opinion in regard to Williams' structural accomplishment, he nonetheless seems to approach Williams' own position in his theoretical discussion of the gestic power of language:
Gesture, in language, is the outward and dramatic play of inward and imaged meaning. It is that play of meaningfulness among words which cannot be defined in the formulas of the dictionary, but which is defined in their use together; gesture is that meaningfulness which is moving, in every sense of that word: what moves the word and what moves us.19

Gestic words are nodal points of energy in the poem, as are physical gestures within the dance. They are the carriers of meaning not by dictionary definition, but by 'vital movement,' which is the definition given by Suzanne Langer to gesture. Gesture she identifies as the 'primary illusion' of dance: "The primary illusion of dance is a virtual realm of Power—not actual, physically exerted power, but appearances of influence and agency created by virtual gesture."20

The poem, "Spring Strains," provides an excellent example of gestic language in the poem. Williams' object in this poem, as in numerous others, is a tree, which, though it may be assumed to be growing and fulfilling its seasonal ritual of change, is normally perceived in any given moment as static. The visual countenance of the tree, however, undergoes perceptual dynamization as it is transposed into the language of the poem. Roughly, the poem falls into two halves, the first devoted to the lines of the tree which become forces gathering the tree inward and pulling it downward. The "tissue thin monotone of blue-grey buds" are "crowded erect with desire against the sky."21 They seem to be straining outward, as if to fly off the limbs to which they are attached. But "tense blue-grey twigs" are "slenderly anchoring them down, drawing them in--." Even the background, the backdrop of the sky, the spaces between the limbs, are not excluded from this force:
Vibrant bowing limbs
pull downward, sucking in the sky
that bulges from behind, plastering itself
against them in packed rifts, rock blue
and dirty orange!

With the rising of the sun, the second half of the poem becomes a
counterforce to the first:

But

(Hold hard, rigid jointed trees!)
the blinding and red-edged sun-blur--
creeping energy, concentrated
counterforce--welds sky, buds, trees,
rivets them in one puckering hold!
Sticks through! Pulls the whole
counter-pulling mass upward, to the right
locks even the opaque, not yet defined
ground in a terrific drag that is
loosening the very tap-roots!

Following Langer's definition of gesture, the forces that dominate
"Spring Strains" are not actual, physical forces, although they are attached
to the physical world. But the words in which Williams embodies his per­
ception give them an immediacy and vitality that make them as actuality in
the poem. Gestic words such as "tense," "anchoring," "struggle," "converg­
ing," "bowing," "pull downward," "sucking in," "bulges," "packed," "creep­
ing energy," "concentrated counterforce," "welds," "rivets," "puckering,"
"sticks through," "counterpulling," "drag," all interact to draw the
reader's line of perception through the poem as the dancer's gestures lead
the eye of his audience through the dance.

Although many dancers do not themselves distinguish dance gestures and
the emotions and meanings that they convey from the emotive gestures of
real life, thoughtful reflection will soon convince the observer of the
dance that what he sees is not the spontaneous gestures of ordinary behav­
or. Gestures of the dance are not spontaneous, though they have the
quality of spontaneity. They are, rather, as Langer points out, first
imagined then willed. Similarly, gestic words in the poem are not the things themselves, but spring from imaginative contact with the thing itself and bear the stamp of willed creation. Like the gestures of the dance, they have the impact of reality, spontaneity and energy. If these conditions are met, then the poem assumes its own reality and, like the dance, is a "virtual realm of Power."

Gesture is not simply posture, but movement, and without it, there is no dance. It is the spatial configuration by gesture which delineates the form of the dance. Thus form and movement are inseparable.

The identity of form and movement in the dance is analogous, on the macrocosmic scale, to the equivalence of mass and energy in the universe, and, on the microcosmic level, to the objectified and dynamized use of language by which the form of the poem is determined. The union of form and movement as it necessarily is found in the dance was, for Williams, the ideal of the poem. To consider form and movement separately would be, in Williams' view, not only to sap poetry of its autonomous vitality, but to perpetuate the Newtonian fallacy of a bifurcated universe.

Williams' insistence on the quantitative sameness of form and movement further explains why he could not feel comfortable with any metrical scheme of the past. Fixed metrical patterns seemed inherently to do violence to the natural movement of language, its gestic power, which, for Williams, was the syntactical analogue of energized nature. In his abandonment of set metrical formulas, Williams opened himself to criticisms of formlessness and structural anarchy from critics such as Blackmur, but convinced in his belief that poetry should be of its time and imitate nature as we understand it, he persisted in his goal to develop a measure--
a form—relative as the universe is relative, which would be inseparable from the inherent gestic movement of words, the energy of language.

Many of Einstein's discoveries may seem to be a series of previously unrecognized equivalencies. Among these is his Law of Gravitation, which equates gravitation and inertia. Einstein's explanation of gravitation differs from the traditional understanding in that it is not predicated upon the axiom of attractional force. Rather,

It describes the behavior of objects in a gravitational field—the planets for example—not in terms of "attraction" but simply in terms of the paths they follow. To Einstein, gravitation is simply part of inertia; the movement of the stars and the planets arise from their inherent inertia; and the courses they follow are determined by the metric properties of space—or more properly speaking, the metric properties of the space-time continuum.22

The title of a published talk given by Williams at the University of Washington in 1948 is "The Poem as a Field of Action." This definitive title is multi-faceted, going to several points which Williams makes about poetry within the article. First, it reinforces his assertion that, in a changing world, poets cannot afford to cling to the past or to metrical structures which betray an orientation to the past. The field of poetry in the modern world demands action. But also, the poem itself is a field, a non-static field in which subject and structure are indivisible. Richard Macksey, in his very astute article, "A Certainty of Music: Williams' Changes," correctly perceives the 'field' structure of Williams' poetry, although he does not explicitly connect it with Einstein's field theory:

The poem, too, is a local place, "a field of force," which the imagination of the poet inhabits and composes. . . . He [Williams] makes a start out of particulars "so that in looking at some apparently small object one feels the swirl of great events" (SE, 294). The agency of this imaginative mastery
lies precisely in words, themselves ordered in space as the measured stresses and junctures of speech compose a figured dance. Forming new figures in print these words are held in tension on the page as in a new field of force.23

The correlation between Einstein's field theory and Williams' poetic field schema perhaps may be seen most readily by setting up the correspondences between their key elements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Einstein</th>
<th>Williams</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>planets</td>
<td>words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inertia</td>
<td>tension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>planetary courses</td>
<td>movement of the line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metric properties of space-time</td>
<td>metric properties of figured speech</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most relevant aspect of the Law of Gravitation for Williams' theory of the poem is Einstein's assertion that the determining factor in the courses described by heavenly bodies is the metric properties of the space-time continuum. Williams' corollary is his belief that the movement of the line should be determined by the inherent metric properties of speech, which, as it is imaginatively composed within the space-time continuum of the poem, becomes figured speech. While the source of the movement of planets is their inertial force, the movement of language springs from its tensional energy, its gestic force.

C. P. Steinmetz, in *Four Lectures on Relativity and Space*, discusses both gravitational fields and electromagnetic fields in terms of energy. He defines a field as "'a condition of energy storage in space exerting a force on a body susceptible to this energy,'" and he goes on to explain the importance of field energy:
All that we know of the world is derived from the perceptions of our senses. They are the only real existing facts; all things else are exclusively energy effects. That is, energy is the only real existing entity, the primary conception, which exists for us because our senses respond to it. All other conceptions are secondary, conclusions from the energy perceptions of our senses. Thus space and time and motion and matter are secondary conceptions with which our mind clothes the events of nature—that is, the hypothetical cause of our sense perceptions. Obviously, then, by carrying the explanation of light and magnetic waves back to the energy field—that is, to energy storage in space—we have carried it back as far as possible, to the fundamental or primary conceptions of the human mind, the perceptions of the senses, which give us the entity energy and the form under which the human mind conceives it, that of space and time.

This passage is basic to understanding why Steinmetz' book was an intellectual landmark in Williams' evolvement of a poetic theory. Here, drawn into a conceptual unity based on nature, were his major convictions (previously expressed in *Spring and All*) of what should be accomplished in poetic language. The notion of energized language, the importance of sense perceptions, and the goal of primary experience, all of which pre-dated his reading of Steinmetz, were herein focused—at least by analogy—as the summation of the field concept of Relativity. Thus, the field theory became, for Williams, a logical and even inevitable way of thinking of the poem.

Williams' choice of the dance as an image of poetry appears to be supported by his poetic employment of the field theory according to the notion of the dance advanced by certain theorists. Notable among these is Rudolf Von Laban, a well-known dancer and theorist writing in the early twenties. Von Laban tended to see the dance in cosmic terms, relating dance tensions to the physics of the actual world. Suzanne Langer describes his conception of the dance as "complexes of intersecting forces
in balletic space" which "lets one conceive the entire world of dance as a field of virtual powers . . . elements, living Beings, centers of force, and their interplay." While thus far she speaks approvingly of Von Laban's notion of the dance, agreeing that "the relation between them [two dancers] is more than a spatial one, it is a relation of forces," she draws the line at considering dance forces in terms of the forces of a gravitational field. She contends that "the prototype of these apparent energies is not the 'field of forces' known to physics, but the subjective experience of volition and free agency, and of reluctance to alien, compelling wills . . . the play of such 'felt' energies is as different from any system of physical forces as psychological time is from clock-time and psychological space from the time of geometry."  

The basis for Langer's argument that the energies characterized in the dance are distinct from forces of the actual physical world is that dance forces are not actual, but virtual powers. Certainly dance gestures involve the gathering, concentration and expense of actual physical energy; however, they function not as in life, but symbolically. They convey not actual emotion, but imaged emotion. Langer's point is valid and well-taken, but it does not stand in the way of consciously adopting the dance as an image of a 'field of forces'. An image requires no more than virtual truth, the impact if not the fact. Thus the dance, for Williams' purpose, functions much as Von Laban's scientific conception of it.

It is uncertain whether or not Williams may have known of Von Laban and his theories. Von Laban was associated with the Dadaists, and many well-known Dada artists were involved with the Laban Dance Theatre in Europe. Williams had an express interest in Dada and even experimented with Dadaist techniques in his own work (cf. Kora in Hell). He knew
Marcel Duchamp in New York and kept abreast of current avant-garde move­ments in Europe, including Dada. However, it is more likely that the simi­larities between Williams' imagaic conception of the dance and the theories of Von Laban may be accounted for by the wide interest in Relativity and science in general during the early twentieth century.

Williams viewed the poem as the image of the physical universe, and the dance, in turn, is the image of the poem. What is common to all three is the field conception. The field is, respectively, the gravitational field of nature, the poem on the page, and the dancing floor. The gestic tensions between dancers parallel the gestic tensions between words, and together they image the inertial forces which control the movements of the universe.

In "The Desert Music," as elsewhere, music is the image of the imagi­nation, truly the "music of survival." Music is the impetus to the dance as the imagination is to the poem. While many of the properties of music are fitted to Relativity equally with the dance—primarily because both dance and music are durational and employ relative time units in their rhythmic structure—the dance seems more suited as an image of nature and the relative universe since it, unlike music, involves space. Music, through tone intervals, duration and dynamics, suggests a quality of space, but the space remains illusory until it is manifest actually in the dance. In this sense, the dancer truly dances the music, a belief which was dear to the heart of Isadora Duncan and her followers. Not all or even many dancers would agree that dance is music made visible, preferring to regard dance as a separate art rather than as an auxiliary of music, but this theory seems close to Williams' use of dance as an image since the poem
(dance) is the visible and concrete manifestation of the operations of the imagination (music).

As seen earlier in this chapter, Newtonian physics offered an external point of reference for self-identification, both physically and spiritually. Williams, using Einstein's Relativity theory as a basis, moves the point of reference inward, seating it in the imagination. With the transforming and ordering power of the imagination, the threat of chaos is overcome. The music of the spheres, which imaged the harmony of the universe since the ancients, is replaced by the music of the imagination, which is the source of harmony in the new universe, imparting order to things and events as music imparts ordering rhythms to the dance.
FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER II


5 Cf. for example, William Carlos Williams, "The Poem as a Field of Action" (1948) and "On Measure--Statement for Cid Corman" (1954), rpt. in Selected Essays (New York, 1969), pp. 280-91, 337-40.


7 Lincoln Barnett, The Universe and Dr. Einstein (New York, 1948), p. 33. In order to avoid extensive repetitious footnotes, I herein acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr. Barnett's explanation of Einstein's Special and General Theories of Relativity in the discussion that follows and will footnote only for direct quotations. Although numerous other sources were consulted, for the layman, Mr. Barnett's book affords one of the most readable and comprehensible treatments of the subject.

8 Ibid., p. 39.

9 Williams, "The Poem as a Field of Action," p. 283.


12 Barnett, The Universe and Dr. Einstein, p. 47.


14 Williams, Spring and All, p. 150.
15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., pp. 149, 150.


22 Barnett, The Universe and Dr. Einstein, p. 79.


CHAPTER III
WHITEHEAD AND WILLIAMS: PHILOSOPHICAL AND POETIC ORGANICISM

The science of Pure Mathematics, in its modern developments, may claim to be the most original creation of the human spirit. Another claimant for this position is music.

—Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*

Despite his grumblings against the stagnant logic of science in the late twenties and early thirties, Williams abundantly paid tribute over the years to the triumphs of the imagination represented by advancements in modern mathematics, and music, the art of the mathematician, served him as an emblem of imaginative invention. But poetry, which in his opinion should be the natural domain of the imagination and, therefore, should have claim as "the most original creation of the human spirit," had not kept pace. Perhaps Williams' determination to lift poetry to equal status with mathematics and music is, at least in part, the impetus behind his identification of poetic with mathematical and musical principles.

In Williams' mind, verse was inextricably allied with mathematics, or, to use his preferred term, measure. But, says Williams, "Today verse has lost all measure." Referring to the failure of poets to assimilate the consequences of modern mathematics and the new physics, he adds,

Our lives also have lost all that in the past we had to measure them by, except outmoded standards that are meaningless to us. In the same way our verses, of which poems are made, are left without any metrical construction of which you can speak, any recognizable, any new measure by which they can be pulled together.
As we have seen, Williams maintained unalterably that the form of modern poetry must be constructed on a mathematical basis which applies to the modern world. The fallacy of modern prosody, as Williams saw it, was that poems continued to be written in a structural mode based on Euclidean geometry. Composed as it is of three dimensions, three space coordinates only, Euclidean geometry fails to take into account the fourth dimension time coordinate of the relative universe. Similarly, accentual meter ignores the (for Williams) essential element of time. Poetic form before the modern period had naturally reflected a world based on Euclidean principles, but modern poets, their heads in the sand, continued to write as if Euclid had never been deposed by Einstein and his colleagues.

Harvey Gross, in Sound and Form in Modern Poetry, maintains that modern poetry in its emergence circa 1910 did indeed reflect the changing universe and, in fact, uses T. S. Eliot as an example of modern prosodic consciousness:

This period of experimentation and its orientation toward a new style in the arts [Gross discusses modern prosodic development in relation to harmonic and rhythmic experiments in music and the appearance of cubism in art] reflected fundamental revisions in western thinking about space and time. The older mechanistic and chronological approaches to the temporal flux had been replaced by relativistic and psychologic theories. Earlier we said prosody images human processes as it moves through time; a poet's rhythm reveals his feelings about temporal relationship and movement. Modern prosodic style, whether flatly conversational or flashily rhetorical, has interpreted "Time present and time past." I intend no elucidation of Einstein's influence on Schönberg and Eliot; they were, in all probability, unaware of Einstein's existence in 1910. However, Eliot had listened to Bergson lecture at the Sorbonne; Symbolist theory and practice had long recognized that the deepest and most significant part of human consciousness functioned in a realm outside of measureable space and time.
Gross's evidence of Eliot's prosodic consonance with modern science's revelations about the nature of time and space is largely based upon the fragmentation, the abruptness of the line and the interposition of snatches of verse from the past (Marvel, Spenser, et al.) which break in upon the present, creating an effect of discontinuity and simultaneity in The Waste Land.

No choice of a representative of modernity could have been more inimical to Williams. Eliot, in Williams' opinion, was nothing more than an "extractor of genius," clever enough, but having a disastrous effect on the state of modern letters: he turned his back upon the all-important search for a new poetic language and hurled us headlong backward to the past. To Williams, Eliot was a copier of the past rather than an imitator of nature, and was, as lesser poets, guilty of turning a blind eye to our changed condition.

For all the appeals of the Euclidean order, we live in the present, a fact which poets have a moral responsibility to recognize in the construction of the poem. According to Williams,

> We get sonnets, etc., but no one alive today, or half alive, seems to see anything incongruous in that. They cannot see that poems cannot any longer be made following a Euclidean measure, "beautiful" as this may make them. The very grounds for our beliefs have altered. We do not live that way any more; nothing in our lives, at bottom, is ordered according to that measure; our social concepts, our schools, our very religious ideas, certainly our understanding of mathematics are greatly altered. Were we called upon to go back to what we believed in the past we should be lost. Only the construction of the poem—and at best the construction of the poem must engage the tips of our intellectual awareness—is left shamefully to the past.
Implicit in Williams' statement is a call for a poetics rooted in a pragmatic philosophy incorporating the relative nature of the universe. Such a philosophy was offered, at least in part, by Alfred North Whitehead. According to Mike Weaver's account, John Riordan introduced Williams not only to Einstein, but to Whitehead, presenting him with a copy of *Science in the Modern World*, which he completed reading on September 26, 1927, during his passage across the Atlantic. In an inscription in the book, along with the date of completion, Williams wrote, "A milestone surely in my career, should I have the force and imagination to go on with my work," 6 In fact, Williams' imagination was not deterred by Whitehead, but to the contrary, was spurred into activity. On Friday, September 30, 1927, four days after completing Whitehead's book, he writes from aboard the S.S. Pennland, "I have written constantly on this trip, that is, as I write, in mad spurts. I have written the reply to Miss Riding which you have, a ten-page thing called *Philosophy as Literature*, relative to a subject brought up in the concluding chapter of Whitehead . . . ." 7

If we go back four years from the date of Williams' introduction to Whitehead to *Spring and All* (1923), we may conclude that the mathematician-philosopher did not present an entirely new intellectual landscape for the poet. In *Spring and All*, Williams had already made his own, however incomplete, investigations of the general region tracked by Whitehead, and as he read *Science and the Modern World*, certain landmarks must have struck him as familiar. Whitehead's book, however, offered Williams an extended vision in developing his own notion of the nature of the poem by providing a cogent philosophy based on premises entirely compatible with those already held by Williams.
Clearly, Williams and Whitehead shared many convictions at the outset, among them a mutual contempt for the habit of mind so long dominant in Western thought, namely, the schism between logical scientific analysis, which applies only to abstractions, and the sensory cognition of concrete experience. The culprit, as Whitehead observes, is materialistic mechan­ism, our inheritance from the eighteenth century. Both Williams and White­head recognize the deficiency of science (as it existed in the mid-twenties) in ignoring concrete perceptual intuition. For Williams, this deficiency may be corrected by the creative imagination in action: "A CREATIVE FORCE IS SHOWN AT WORK MAKING OBJECTS WHICH ALONE COMPLETE SCIENCE AND ALLOW INTELLIGENCE TO SURVIVE." Whitehead seeks the remedy through philosophy, though he recognizes poetry as a means to the end:

I hold that philosophy is the critic of abstractions. Its function is the double one, first of harmonising them by assigning them to their right relative status as abstractions, and secondly of completing them by direct comparison with more concrete intuitions of the universe, and thereby promoting the formation of more complete schemes of thought. It is in respect to this comparison that the testimony of great poets is of such importance. Their survival is evidence that they express deep intuitions of mankind penetra­ting into what is universal in concrete fact.

In his chapter, "The Romantic Reaction," Whitehead cites the work of Wordsworth and Shelley as evidence of a breakaway from the strictures of the mechanistic world view. Although the two Romantic poets approached their subject matter differently, Wordsworth actively rejecting the narrow­ness of science in favor of nature, while Shelley, fascinated by science, infused his images with its schemas, the work of both men bears "witness to the discord between the aesthetic intuitions of mankind and the mechan­ism of science." The "aesthetic intuitions of mankind," as evident in the poetry of Wordsworth and Shelley, take cognizance of what science, in
its exclusive abstractionism, had not: the importance of concrete sensory experience and the experience of nature as greater than the sum of its parts. Thus, the Romantic poets, in their intuitive recognition, were wiser than the scientists of their day.

Whitehead concedes, however, that the twentieth century has witnessed some movement in science and philosophy toward a refashioning of the concepts of science. The decision still must be made, however, whether to proceed on a subjectivist or objectivist basis. Whitehead argues against the subjectivist position, which denies a common world of experience by holding "the nature of our immediate experience is the outcome of the perceptive peculiarities of the subject enjoying the experience." The consequence of this position is the ultimate severance of man from nature.

In the place of subjectivism, Whitehead posits an objectivist position, very close to that adopted by Williams:

This creed [objectivism] is that the actual elements perceived by our senses are in themselves the elements of a common world; and that this world is a complex of things, including our acts of cognition, but transcending them. According to this point of view the things experienced are to be distinguished from our knowledge of them. So far as there is dependence, the things pave the way for the cognition, rather than vice versa. . . . The objectivist holds that the things experienced and the cognisant subject enter into the common world on equal terms.

To one familiar with Williams, this passage must seem to echo that famous line from Paterson to which we find ourselves returning so often, "No ideas but in things," which is Williams' ultimate summary of his own objectivist position. Further, since the things which we perceive and which lead to cognition are elements of a common world, it is clear how, as Williams maintained since the early twenties, experience and knowledge of the particular could lead to the universal. (Whitehead's book, however, was not the
only place that Williams would meet with this notion. In the chapter on Paterson in The Autobiography, Williams cites his chance discovery of a comparable passage in John Dewey: "The local is the only universal, upon that all art builds." 13

In 1928, Williams collaborated with Louis Zukofsky in the formulation of the theories of Objectivism. There has been some controversy over the extent, if any, to which the concept of Objectivism might have been derived from Whitehead's philosophy. The subject has been most extensively explored by Mike Weaver (William Carlos Williams, the American Background) and Jerome Mazzaro (William Carlos Williams, the Later Poems), both of whom take the position that Whitehead's influence was minimal or non-existent. Weaver cites Zukofsky's remark of March 8, 1967, in a talk given at Yale University that at the time of the development of Objectivism he had not read Whitehead, and further, that Zukofsky, in his introduction to An 'Objectivists' Anthology, disclaimed any connection with the philosophical associations of the term, 'objectivist.' 14 Both Weaver and Mazzaro, however, concede that Williams at any rate had read Whitehead at the outset of Objectivism, and at least the possibility of an influence of the philosopher's ideas on his understanding of Objectivism cannot be precluded. In fact, it would seem unlikely that Williams, involved in any serious consideration of the notion of objectivism, could have been so without memory of the Whitehead book completed only a year before. Weaver and Mazzaro are probably correct in their conclusion that Whitehead meant little or nothing for most of the poets included in the category of 'Objectivists'. The term was Zukofsky's, and the poets of An 'Objectivists' Anthology were grouped loosely, more, according to Weaver, in the spirit of collaboration, which resulted in The Objectivist Press, than
within the doctrine of an aesthetic movement. The very looseness of Objectivism, however, leaves upon the possibility that Williams' conception of the term may have incorporated his reading of Whitehead. The best evidence would seem to be found in Williams' own application of Objectivist theory and the extent to which such application seems to be congruent with Whiteheadian objectivism.

One poem, "The Descent of Winter" (10/28), chosen at random from Williams' contributions to An 'Objectivists' Anthology, may serve as an example of his approach to objective construction in the poem:

In this strong light
the leafless beech tree
shines like a cloud

it seems to glow
of itself
with a soft stript light
of love
over the brittle
grass

But there are
on second look
a few yellow leaves
still shaking

far apart

just one here one there
trembling vividly

Whitehead states that "the objectivist holds that the things experienced and the cognisant subject enter into the common world on equal terms." By this standard, we must look at the object perceived in the poem and the poet's perception of the object, and determine their relative weight. Is the impression created within the poet's mind the most important element of the poem? If so, by Whitehead's definition, the poem cannot qualify as 'objectivist'.
There are two acts of perception within the poem, each directed toward the beechtree. In the first, the beechtree is "leafless." What captures the attention, however, is the luminescent quality of the tree as it reflects the "strong light": it "shines like a cloud" and "seems to glow of itself." Up to this point, the perception is limited to a straightforward sensory accounting of the object, the tree. But the perception is then extended inward, into the mind of the poet, and to "the soft stript light" of physical perception, the association "of love" is added. The fusion of this emotional element with the object which triggers it marks a progress from the external phenomenal world into the internal life of the persona, and if the poem ended there, it would be doubtful that the poem could be considered objectivist. The focus of the poem would have shifted to a subjectivist position.

However, the movement of the poem does not come to rest in the poet's mind. There is a second look, a look which corrects the faulty perception that the tree is "leafless." "There are / ... a few yellow leaves / still shaking." One may assume that this second perception occurs with the memory—including that of the initial emotional association—of the first, but this time the perception remains with the tree, its leaves ("just one here and there") "trembling vividly."

The dynamics of this poem is an exact prototype of the pattern of Williams' contact doctrine: a movement from external object to inner mind and a movement outward again. Objects of the world, experienced through the senses, are the source of ideas. They rouse emotions, call up memories of past experience, set off associations. But Williams is not content to let the matter rest there. The external perception linked with the inner response, the act is completed only when the two, each strengthened by the
other, move outward in an objective unity. The writing of the poem is Williams' ideal completion of the perceptual act, incorporating inner and outer experience in a new objective reality, the "common world" of the poem. In the new world which is the poem, the persona's cognition of the things he perceives are given a concrete substance equal to that of the objects of the physical world that are transposed into the poem. Williams had no love for similes, and here he speaks of "a soft stript light / of love," not like love. The emotion of love takes on the physical quality of the light against the tree.

It is important that the way the poem is written, the perception that it embodies, be consistent with the perceptual theory behind it. Thus it is vital to the success of the poem that perceptual movement not be arrested in a subjective phase, but that the inner experience of the cognisant persona move outward to take its equal place beside the more tangible objects of the external world. Only in this way can "We seem to be ourselves elements of this world in the same sense as are the other things we perceive."

As Williams practiced it, Objectivism was a means by which the inherited schism of the past, the gulf between the mind and the empirical world, could be bridged. His aim was, as he stated it in "The Desert Music," "to place myself (in my nature) beside nature." Charles Olson, writing in 1959, described Objectivism as "getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the 'subject' and his soul, that particular presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature (with certain instructions to carry out) and those other creatures of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects." This aim, as delineated by Olson, reflects the same concern expressed by Whitehead to extend beyond mere solipsism: "in our sense-experience we
know away from and beyond our own personality; whereas the subjectivist holds that in such experience we merely know about our own personality."  

Olson and Williams (who quotes a long section of Olson's *Projective Verse* in his *Autobiography*) were of sympathetic mind, and they shared the notion that the point of view that regarded man's experience in the world as objective participation within nature must be cast in an objective form. And they further agreed that objective form demanded a new conception of the kinetic structure of the poem. Thus Williams' quest for a new measure became the summation of his poetic goals. As Mike Weaver points out, aptly quoting Williams' line, "Measure is the only solidity we are permitted to know," Williams' 'measure' was inclusive; it embraced the theory of poetic structure, the perception of form, and man's objective and subjective role in the world."

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to ascertain precisely to what degree Williams' theories were shaped by his reading of Whitehead. It does seem evident on the basis of his writing up to 1927, however, that Whitehead's ideas are compatible with Williams' own thinking. At the very least, Whitehead offered a synthesis of many ideas akin to Williams' own in a comprehensive philosophical system, and the student of Williams can, in fact, gain much by reading Whitehead. In particular, Whitehead's notion of the 'event' offers a germane approach to Williams inasmuch as many of Williams' poems follow a dynamic pattern similar to a Whiteheadian event.

Williams was, we must remember, first, last and always a nature poet, his avowed intention to imitate nature. In order to do this, he had to arrive at a clear-cut concept of how nature operates—not as something external to man but as including man and his perceptive capabilities. Thus Williams must have been alert, as he read *Science and the Modern World*, to
the potentiality of the scheme of Whitehead's 'event' to provide a modus operandi for the structure of poems that would imitate nature. In his essay, "The Poem as a Field of Action," Williams includes a note pertaining to the possibility of drawing upon modern physics and natural science in the evolution of a literary style. Specifically, he alludes to Edmund Wilson's essay on Proust, contained in *Axel's Castle.* The citation almost certainly refers to Wilson's application of the Whiteheadian event to Proust's method, and it suggests that Williams himself was thinking in Whiteheadian terms in his effort to invent a workable dynamics of the poem which would be based on a twentieth-century understanding of nature.

The event is a unique confluence of entities, a unity of perceptor, perception and its objects, having a particular locus in space and time. Its essence is determined by its particular here and now, but, at the same time, it shares commonality with all other places and times. Wilson, in the passage referred to by Williams, suggests that Whitehead's epistemology applied not only to the Romantics, but even moreso to the Symbolists:

For modern physics, all our observations of what goes on in the universe are relative: they depend upon where we are standing when we make them, how fast and in which direction we are moving—and for the Symbolist, all that is perceived in any moment of human experience is relative to the person who perceives it, and to the surroundings, the moment and the mood. The world becomes thus for both fourth dimensional—with Time as the fourth dimension. The relativist, in locating a point, not only finds its coordinates in space, but also takes the time; and the ultimate units of his reality are "events," each of which is unique and can never occur again—in the flux of the universe, they can only form similar patterns. And, in the universe of Whitehead, the "events," may be taken arbitrarily as infinitely small or infinitely comprehensive, and make up an organic structure, in which all are interdependent, each involving every other and the whole.
Williams may have agreed that the "event" concept was evident in the handling of subject matter in the works of certain of the Romantics and Symbolists. They did not, however, carry the concept through to the form—a serious failure in Williams' opinion. The diverse objects which make up an event are held together in a patterned unity, and for Williams, it would be inconsistent to base the content of the poem on the event concept without casting it in a form congruent with the pattern implied by the relations of its constituent parts.  

Clearly, Williams felt that the structure of nature could not be imitated in traditional syllable-stress (Euclidean) meter, but neither was free verse a viable solution since it lacked any pattern at all.

The relationships of things which make up the pattern of the event are of the utmost importance because they constitute a 'real value', which is the actuality of the event. The value of the event, then, cannot be divorced from sensory apprehension of concrete things. In this light, Williams' stress upon the importance of things and their relationships is entirely justified, for without sensory realization of matter-of-fact objects and their relationships in a pattern, into which the body of the observer himself enters, there is no meaning.

Evidently this concept was at least intuited by Williams prior to his reading of Whitehead, as evidenced by the poems of Spring and All. Indeed, Williams' entire doctrine of contact essentially presupposes a conviction similar to Whitehead's. Only such a notion can explain, for example, why "So much depends / upon" the objects of "The Red Wheelbarrow." "A red wheel / barrow // glazed with rain / water" and "white chickens" may scarcely seem of earth-shaking moment. It is their entrance into a perceptual unity, a pattern, however, which gives them their significance,
indicated by the one word, "beside," which links them into a unity. The "so much" that depends on this pattern is no less than the realization of actuality, both of the empirical world and of the perceptor within it. Such realization occurs only within the event, as a participant within the 'real togetherness' of its aspects.

"The Red Wheelbarrow" reveals a unity of objects which are juxtaposed in a spatial visual image; the wheelbarrow and the chickens are 'placed', one "beside" the other. They are also 'placed' on the page, which is our cue to their placing in the poet's perception, in fact, incorporates that perception along with its objects. Visually, then, the objects of the poem are presented in terms of spatial location, but their realization in the poem also occurs within a pattern of durational succession, which approximates the elapsed time of the poet's perception. Thus the poem becomes a spatio-temporal entity by which the poet can approach objective reality and thereby imitate nature.

According to Whitehead, "nature is a structure of evolving processes. The reality is the process. It is nonsense to ask if the color red is real. The color red is ingredient in the process of realization. The realities of nature are the prehensions in nature, that is to say, the events in nature." Thus, the observations of the poet—the 'redness' of the wheelbarrow, the "glazed" effect of the rainwater on its finish, the 'whiteness' of the chickens—all are significant as aspects of the event. The concrete details that the poet perceives impart actuality both to the objects which they define against his senses and to himself.

In Whiteheadian theory, sense-objects, which are components of events, are enduring objects and exhibit a pattern of duration which may differ from the temporal pattern of the whole event, but which participate in the
pattern of the whole and share in its essence. "The duration is that which is required for the realization of a pattern in the given event," and "endurance is the repetition of the pattern in successive events. Thus endurance requires a succession of durations, each exhibiting the pattern."^{28}

In other words, the concrete object has an existence which transcends its participation in a perceptual unity, as, for example, a rock does not lose its essence when its location is changed; it merely enters into new relationships. Similarly, when a sense object of the real world is entered imagically into a poem, it enters as an aspect of a new event and gains its realization through its pattern of duration within the poem. It exists there in a spatio-temporal unity with the other aspects of the poem, exhibiting its own patterns of duration, but organically participating in the pattern of the poem as a whole.

If one thinks of the poem in this way, it readily becomes apparent why the measure must be variable. A regular syllable-stress pattern is not, first of all, a durational pattern, and cannot, therefore, accommodate the process of realization. Secondly, it does not allow for the individuality of each aspect in its realization or for a demonstration of the uniqueness of the interrelationships within the whole structure. Rather, a traditional meter imposes sameness upon the pattern, without allowing for differentiation, change, or contrast, either between various aspects of the whole or within the pattern of one aspect. Given these considerations, the measure of music as the prototype for a new poetic measure becomes increasingly pertinent since musical measure admits within its structural framework a nearly infinite potential number of durational combinations. Duration of tones is one of two primary means (the other being interval) by which the smallest melodic unit—a figure or motif—is characterized. Without its
identifiable durational pattern, a motif is not ascertainable. In a similar manner, the constituent objects of a poetic construction are, for Williams, inseparable from their durational measure, which is part and parcel of their nature.

Any object in nature exhibits a particular pattern of duration, but, consistent with its pattern, may change. "In the organic theory," says Whitehead, "a pattern need not endure in undifferentiated sameness through time. The pattern may be essentially one of aesthetic contrasts requiring a lapse of time for its unfolding. A tune is an example of such a pattern." 29

Musical composition, then, stood in Whitehead's mind as an illustration of an event pattern as it stood in Williams' as the image of the imaginative ordering of the poem. Musical structure is based upon the principle of repetition and contrast, or variation, which permits us, as listeners, to ground ourselves in the musical event. Sameness, whether of tone or of rhythm, destroys musical essence. Remembering that both Williams and Whitehead considered nature as process—which by definition, involves change—any conception of things in the world must recognize the way in which things change consistent with their unique natures. The particular process characterizing individual essence must be accommodated in the conception and in any pattern based on the conception. Thus the principle of variability, which has been intrinsic to musical structure throughout its history, quite naturally finds a corollary in the epistemological and poetic conceptions of Whitehead and Williams.

Since the aspects that comprise an event are characterized by their individual essences, the total pattern of the event derives from the durational relationships of its component parts. And it is significant to
note that the entry of an object into the unity of an event is determined
by its durational (as well as spatial) compatibility with the other aspects.
This requirement of the event is reminiscent of the view of harmony taken
by Ezra Pound in *Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony* which was first pub­
lished in 1927 and was familiar to Williams. Pound takes the view that the
notion of harmony—the relationships between tones—has been misdirected
following the time of Bach, and offers another approach in lieu of the con­
ventional wisdom.

Pound's credentials as a music theorist are justly somewhat suspect,
but he was an avid musicophile. Nor was his interest in music merely that
of a passive appreciator. He wrote regular music reviews for the *New Age*
from 1917 to 1920 under the name William Atheling and even composed an
opera, *Le Testament*, which was performed three times between 1926 and the
mid-sixties. Virgil Thomson, who attended the first performance, said,
"the music was not quite a musician's music, though it may well be the
finest poet's music since Thomas Campion."30

The tone of *The Treatise* is often pompous, its pronouncements pedantic,
although occasionally the insights it offers are remarkably incisive, par­
ticularly with regard to the relationship of words to music. Despite the
often arrogant posture assumed by Pound, he himself admits, "in music,
apart from accommodating notes to words, I am an incompetent amateur."31

An amateur, certainly, from all accounts Pound was afflicted with
what is commonly known as a 'tin ear', having little sensitivity to tone.
No one, however, has successfully challenged his keen sense of time, upon
which he constructs his theory of harmony. In Williams' opinion, Pound's
subtle ear for poetic rhythm carried over to his sense of musical time.
In *The Autobiography*, he states:
I have always felt that time was Ezra's chief asset as a musical appreciator. A man with such an ear as his, attuned to the metrical subtleties of the best in verse, must have strong convictions upon the movement of musical phrases.

and:

Ezra, in my opinion, like W. B. Yeats, does not know one tone from another. This, if it is true, is interesting, for it is known that a lack of one gift frequently is compensated for by an extreme subtlety of perception in another. Pound's sense of time is extraordinary.

No doubt it was a similar recognition, in the music, of Pound's gift of time-perception that prompted Thomson to call Le Testament, "poet's music."

And it is this same facility which lends verity to Pound's so-called harmonic theory, despite his general musical naiveté and explains why it would be interesting to Williams.

Pound maintains that harmony since Bach as come to be thought of as vertical blocks of sound, struck simultaneously, a development which has deflected attention away from the musical necessity of durational progression. According to Pound:

The element most grossly omitted from treatises on harmony up to the present is the element of TIME. The question of the time interval that must elapse between one sound and another if the two sounds are to produce a pleasing consonance or an interesting relation, has been avoided.

Pound seems to be protesting what he sees as a shift in emphasis that attended the historical evolution from polyphony (voices—or melody lines—moving simultaneously) to homophony (chordal harmony). In polyphony, the stress is on the rhythmic interest of each voice. Homophony, which arose about 1600 and which was popularized following the Age of Bach, is the converse of polyphony. The emphasis is directed away from the lateral rhythmic movement of parts to the verticality of chord structure. In
Pound's view, this type of harmonic structure is static and ignores the all-important element of time-durations between the sounding of tones. Polyphony accommodates the spatial factor of intervals, but, according to Pound, composers of Bach's time "thought of music as travelling rhythm going through points or barriers of pitch and pitch combinations."  

Pound contended that he believed in "absolute rhythm" as early as 1910 in his preface to Guido Cavalcanti. This somewhat enigmatic phrase has caused some confusion, but Pound states his meaning clearly in his article, "Vorticism": "I believe that every emotion and every phase of emotion has some toneless phrase, some rhythm-phrase to express it." There is, then, a proper durational pattern corresponding to each emotion—rendered in the realization of its attendant object or complex of objects—which is determined by the pitch and quality of the syllables of the words by which the realization occurs.

Pound's poetic method derived directly from musical principles, and, as he put it in the ABC of Reading, "Poetry begins to atrophy when it gets too far from music," and "music begins to atrophy when it departs too far from the dance." One of the ways by which poetry keeps to the lesson of music is, ideally speaking, for the durations—or quantities—of syllables to be ordered according to their quality as the durations of tones should be rhythmically related according to their audible nature.

This attention to durational relationships between syllables (in poetry) and tones (in music) stemming from their unique qualities in combination is very similar to the event concept of pattern formed by the durational nature of individual aspects and their relationships one to another. In each case, the time-pattern is determined by the intrinsic durational necessities of the component elements.
Williams speaks of "The power of music / of composition, the placing of sounds together, / edge against edge." This joyous elegy for Sibelius, "Tapiola," is not only a tribute to the music of the Finnish master, but a celebration of the power of the imagination, the "mind where all / good things are secured, written down." "The placing of sounds together, / edge against edge," is the business of either composer or poet, the means to create an order to combat the "storm," "to defy the devil of emptiness." Toward this end, composer or poet must create a structure, attending not only to the spatial requirements (which would be to create a Euclidean, static structure), but to the necessities of the durational (time) dimension in the sounds he composes.

Like Pound, Williams was remarkably sensitive to words as sound and was much interested in the Ding an sich quality of words from which the movement of poetry might spring. In this context, the earlier quoted passage from "The Work of Gertrude Stein" comes to mind, in which Williams speaks of "The feeling . . . of words themselves, a curious immediate quality quite apart from their meaning, much as in music different tones are dropped, so to speak, into repeated chords one at a time, one after another—themselves alone." In this passage analogizing music to the desirable use of words, Williams gives us some insight into his own notion of harmony. In his understanding, tones are not swallowed up into the vertical chordal structure. They retain their autonomous character, and the focus is upon the forward movement deriving from their sequential appearance. It is noteworthy that for both Williams and Pound, Bach stands at the apex of compositional art, precisely because his music consistently exhibits a quality of vigorous movement while the notes retain a crystal-line autonomy. Both men suggest that there is a direct connection between
considering tones—and, by extension, words or syllables—as things in themselves, with unique properties (which must include their durational character) and the true achievement of compositional movement.

Pound's and Williams' approaches to movement in music and poetry seem to be compatible with the approach described by Alfred Pike in A Phenomenological Analysis of Musical Experience and Other Related Essays, which, in turn, reflects a musical conception similar to Whitehead's approach to phenomenal experience in the world described in the event. Much of the terminology used by Pike is the same as Whitehead's and would seem to apply in the cases of Pound and, especially, Williams as well. Pike's musical— or tonal—event, like the Whiteheadian event, is a phenomenally perceptual, spatio-temporal unit, defined by the particular characteristics of its component parts and their relationships. Both are experienced as Gestalten, are realized as an inherently organic process, and the approach in both cases is essentially objective:

The structure of immediate musical experience is obtained through intuitive cognition, a direct, and habitual perceptual penetration in which the tonal event and its meaning are grasped at the level of its essential structure. This gives rise to ontic, "lived" experience rather than reflective or discursive experience. The objective essence of a tonal event is intuitively grasped in the experience of that event as the direct object of consciousness. The term "essence" is not used here in its universal, or abstracted sense, i.e., not its nature considered apart from its existence. The essence is the "what" of a tonal event, its individuating notes or characteristics, its distinctive traits, its singularity and individuality.

All three men presently under discussion, like Pike, argue for intuitive cognition. Pound claims that through direct aural perception, i.e., really listening, one (with the ear for it) is intuitively aware of the proper durations. For Whitehead, intuition, as opposed to abstract
analysis, is the key to ontological, concrete experience, which involves durational nature. And for Williams, intuition is inseparable from the imagination. It is the means by which contact occurs and is the essential factor in defining the consequent measure, which must appropriately embody the inherent rhythm, or durational pattern, of its object. For each, while intuitive perception may encompass other factors, it is directly and immediately concerned with durational movement.

Pike's description of how perception of movement occurs in a tonal event is enlightening since the phenomenon is essentially the same in apprehending the dynamic structure of a Whiteheadian event or a Williams' poem. He first posits a single tone sounded. This tone—a potential aspect of a tonal event—has its own distinctive quantitative characteristics: pitch, duration, overtone structure. The tone, however, is perceived not in terms of its partial qualities, but "as a complete gestalt." "The ear does not count these transphenomenal fluctuations, but is aware of their relative rate of motion by comparison with preceding and following tones" [emphasis mine]. The individual character of a tone, then, acquires significance only within the relative construct of a tonal event. This fact immediately recalls the Whiteheadian event, in which the 'real value' of a thing derives from its realization within the pattern of the event.

Further, there can be no perception of movement until other tones, differentiated by pitch and duration, follow. Then, according to Pike, the change in audible space brings about "an awareness of change in time." He maintains that musical movement arises "from a combination in time and space." Acoustical space is defined by sounding several tones simultaneously in a chord. The result, however, is static. If the chord is repeated a number of times in succession, the effect is of time passing, but there
is "no consciousness of motion. Only when each tone of the chord is played separately, as in a melody, or by a succession of chord changes is tonal motion perceived." Thus perception of movement in music is dependent upon apprehension of the tonal event in which durational relationships between tones is defined. The conception of movement in the poem-as-event utilizes the same principle with regard to durational relationships of syllables.

Interestingly, Pike's observation that chords (or, for that matter, single tones) repeated without pitch or rhythm differentiation mark the passage of time but create no sense of movement points up one of the greatest flaws in the use of syllable-stress poetry. The relation of syllable-stress meter to time, such as it is, is limited to marking equal divisions of time only. Thus it can create a sense of elapsed time, but not of movement. Accentual meter in poetry is equivalent to music with meter but not rhythm, and it is questionable that such 'music' could be called music at all if one accepts the notion that music is durational time rendered perceptible by movement of audible forms. Meter is a factor in the perception of aural movement, but the perception is incomplete without the concurrent presence of variable durational relationships between tones. In developing a poetic based upon musical principles, both Pound and Williams were consciously seeking a means to capture in poetic form the sense of 'lived' time that they instinctively recognized as the heart of the musical mode. As Pike states, "In rhythm, the listener 'lives' the music as each rhythmic moment flows into the next. Rhythm is the vital form and organizing principle of music and is the very essence of musical motion."

In music, the perception of movement relies upon change of pitch as well as durational contrast. Pitch is, perhaps, a more obvious character-
istic in music than in speech, but inflection, or modification by change
in pitch, is a primary means of expressiveness in spoken language.
Williams' determination to develop a poetic measure based upon the natural
rhythms of human speech is entirely compatible with his equal insistence
that poetic measure be constructed upon the principles of musical measure.
His goal was to establish a means by which poetic movement could approxi­
mate the rhythms of life. Music, speech and poetry, as he conceived it,
all share a common dynamics in which movement derives from the gathering
into a perceptual unit of aspects (tones, syllables), each with its own
characteristic necessities, related in a spatio-temporal construct. This
approach to dynamic structure in art mirrors the dynamics of the Whitehead­
ian event and satisfies Williams' epistemological requirement that poetry
imitate the operations of nature.

Williams' was something of an eclectic mind, practicing his doctrine
of contact not only in his experience of things, but of the ideas they
spawn, particularly such ideas as he sensed might point toward a means of
ordering concrete experience within the poem. Like Whitehead, his approach
to the world (and therefore the poem) was fundamentally organic—a disposi­
tion of mind which inherently implies synthesis and coordination. Williams
was no slavish imitator of styles, methods or systems, but he opened him­
self to what could be learned from others, took what suited his own pur­
poses, and entered them into the synergistic processes of his own imagina­
tion. Thus Einstein, Whitehead, Pound and others all meet in the mind of
Williams, together with his own convictions about music, dance and language.
None can be said to stand alone as the pure model of his approach to the
poem, but each makes a contribution toward the imaginative birth of the
new object, the poem, which, like the Whiteheadian event or a musical work, is more than the collective sum of the elements which enter into its composition.
FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER III


2 Ibid.


5 Williams, "On Measure--Statement for Cid Corman," p. 337.


7 William Carlos Williams, Selected Letters, ed. John C. Thirlwall (New York, 1957), pp. 84-85. The manuscript to which Williams refers was unpublished, but according to Thirlwall, still exists in typescript.

8 William Carlos Williams, Spring and All, rpt. in Webster Schott, ed., Imaginations (New York, 1971), p. 112.


10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., p. 88.

12 Ibid., pp. 88-89.


14 Weaver, William Carlos Williams: The American Background, pp. 53-54.

15 Ibid.

Olson prefers the term 'Objectism' to 'Objectivism' to emphasize the importance of the object-like quality of the poem.


Williams, "The Poem as a Field of Action," p. 287.


Wilson, of course, was applying the 'event' concept to the fiction of Proust rather than to poetry, and the demands of fictional treatment are different from the concerns of poetic form.


Ibid., p. 125.

Ibid., p. 133.


Ibid.

36 Ibid.


41 Ibid., p. 16, 16n.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., p. 17.
CHAPTER IV

THE IMAGINATION: A TWENTIETH CENTURY POETIC

How easy to slip
into the old mold, how hard to
cling firmly to the advance
--Williams, Spring and All, V

Having cut himself loose from his early moorings to Romanticism and declared himself dedicated to 'newness,' Williams set about giving substance to his independence. By his own choice no longer privy to the easy comfort of established approaches to the poem and an inherited poetic identity, he began the solitary task of forging a personal poetic and wrestling through the problems of prosody and perspective that would truly free him from the past and wed his poems to his own time. In short, he had to become his own man. The struggles and exhilarations of this mission are to be seen most vividly in Kora in Hell and in the subsequent Spring and All.

Kora (1921) is the residuum of a year-long descent into and through a poetic hell, and it reveals an urgent personal necessity, recalled by Williams in the Autobiography:

It was Persephone gone into Hades, into hell. Kora was the springtime of the year; my year, my self was being slaughtered. What was the use in denying it? For relief, to keep myself from planning and thinking at all, I began to write in earnest.

I decided that I would write something every day, without missing one day, for a year. I'd write nothing planned but take up a pencil, put the paper before me, and write anything that came into my head. Be it nine in the evening or three in the morning, returning from some delivery on Guinea Hill, I'd write it down.
The loneliness of this period comes through—the young doctor in a sleeping household, after the day's rounds at last giving himself over to the cause of poetry—and the autobiographical figure of "Danse Russe" comes to mind:

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

Who shall say I am not
the happy genius of my household?²

"Dance Russe," however, gives us another side of the portrait from the somewhat dark description of The Autobiography. Perhaps 'alone' would be a more apt term than 'lonely' to describe this state of being, the state required for the artist to create. Alone, one creates, one writes. One dances. The dance of "Danse Russe" is a dance of self-celebration, the joy of visceral realization of self as any act of creation must be. Williams had to know himself viscerally by writing, by 'dancing,' as he did the world that would fill his poems. Kora is filled with this dance motif which embodies giving himself physicality by fitting his imagination to the world in words:

Hark! it is the music! Whence does it come?
What! Out of the ground? Is it this that you have been preparing for me? Ha, goodbye,
I have a rendezvous in the tips of three
birch sisters. Encouragez vos musiciens!
Ask them to play faster. I will return--
later. Ah you are kind. --and I? must
dance with the wind, make my own snow flakes,
whistle a contrapuntal melody to my own
fugue! Huzza then, this is the dance of
the blue moss bank! Huzza then, this is
the mazurka of the hollow log! Huzza then, this
is the dance of rain in the cold trees.

When Kora was published, Williams opted to retain the fragmented,
somewhat spasmodic quality that resulted from his method of composition.
A few paragraphs were added, ostensibly for clarity and continuity, but
they were written in the same style and in fact did little to shape the
work toward conventional prose. The reading of Kora, as of a number of
Williams' other experimental works, demands something of a leap of logic,
but irregular and opaque though the form is, no one could easily miss the
intrepid energy of those nocturnal disquisitions.

In 1923, followed Spring and All, a combination of poems and theory.
It is the companion piece to Kora, Persephone returned to the world, and
would establish, along with the earlier "The Wanderer," a pattern of
descent and subsequent ascent that would be traceable throughout Williams' long career. Spring and All, like Kora, is structurally unorthodox; it is
typographically experimental and, because of its loose sequence of ideas
and sentences that frequently begin strongly but trail off in incompleteness, has the feel of emergence rather than a fait accompli of poetic theory. Together, these two works represent the early thrust in Williams' evolution of a mature poetic. They are, at times, rather determinedly
antiestablishmentarian, but they are saved from the indictment of contrivance by their tone of urgency. And the matter at hand was urgent in Williams' mind. His undertaking was twofold: not only to establish his
own identity as a poet, but also to educate a readership for the poems
that he would write. As he embarks for a new poetic territory in *Spring and All*, he takes his reader with him: "Whenever I say, 'I' I mean also, 'you.'" After all, a new kind of poem requires a new kind of reader, one who can enter into the particular imaginative activity that informs the poem.

*Kora in Hell* and *Spring and All* are paeans to the imagination, Williams' touchstone for all matters poetic, and our investigation of his approach to the poem must inevitably follow his focus there. Although Williams set his own definition upon the poetic imagination, he of course was not the first to view it as the source of poetry. An age earlier, the Romantics firmly established the imagination as the center of creative activity, and, at least in the importance which he assigns to its function, Williams appears to have been carrying on in the tradition established in the previous century. The question of his 'newness,' then, is directed not so much toward his centrality of imagination as toward the particular operations which he ascribes to its activity.

What, then, does Williams mean by 'imagination'? *Kora* and *Spring and All*, as well as other theoretical writings and poems, are important sources for its understanding, but because of his habit of explaining by images and his frequently apparent distaste for straightforward expository prose, the going is not always easy. As Williams himself says in *Spring and All*, "The work will be in a realm of the imagination as plain as the sky is to a fisherman—A very clouded sentence." Certain qualities of the imagination he makes definite: it is "an actual force," it gives "value to life," it is the source of "design" and newness. Each of these qualities is elaborated forcefully in *Spring and All*, but wary as he was of philosophers and philosophizing, Williams successfully avoids any kind of systematic
analysis. This is left to the reader who would have the care and persistence to know, and knowing comes in bits and pieces. At times, Williams almost seems to demand of his reader the exercise of that imagination he seeks to define.

Despite Williams' avowed break with literary tradition, his readers may profit by turning back to his predecessors in an earlier age in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of his conception of the imagination, its function in the creation of the poem and its influence in the kind of poem that is produced. In doing so, we find that there are resonances, if not exact echoes, not only of Romantic theory, but of Neoclassical notions of the mind's activity in his own concept of imagination and its application. This is not to suggest that Williams wrote Romantic or Neoclassical poems: his distinctions affirm his proper placement among the moderns. Yet (although Williams would doubtless take exception to the reference) these points of similarity do seem to bear out T. S. Eliot's contention in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that no literary work appears distinct from the tradition that precedes it, but that the new work modifies the tradition that it enters. Williams himself seems to have reached a similar recognition in "The Poem as a Field of Action" (1948) when he says, "It may be said that I wish to destroy the past. It is precisely a service to tradition, honoring it and serving it that is envisioned and intended by my attack, and not disfigurement—confirming and enlarging its application."

One may infer that it was in a similar sense, although without qualification, that he wrote in the Prologue to Kora in Hell, "Nothing is good save the new. If a thing have novelty it stands intrinsically beside every other work of artistic excellence. If it have not that, no
loveliness or heroic proportion or grand manner will save it. It will not be saved above all by an attenuated intellectuality." Newness, then, in the sense of a work's consonance with its own time, was for Williams a measure of value. Thus his poetic theory and the poetry it produced cannot be considered in a vacuum if we, his readers, are not only to grasp the fullness of his poetic experience, but to take his measure as a poet. We must know the modifications that he offers to tradition. Williams evolved his poetic from much the same questions that have occupied poets and critics for generations: What is the aim of poetry? What is the relationship of the mind to objects of the external world? How do they meet in the poem? The answers that he gives must be balanced against the answers given by his predecessors.

The historical tendency has been to conceive the mind of man in terms of the current conception of the universe. That is to say, the universe, as it is understood, in a very real sense produces the mind which inhabits and perceives it. Williams was following this tendency when he talked of the imagination in the language of relativism. Accordingly, the eighteenth-century mind was largely framed within the construct of the mechanism of Descartes and Newton.

Perhaps more than any other, John Locke was the philosophical spokesman of his time, and he defined the operations of the mind within the parameters of contemporary scientific thought. In his Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690), he undertook to empirically study the mind by the scientific method popularized by Newton, with the result that the mind underwent a process of reduction, becoming limited and passive. Examined from without, under the philosophical microscope, the mind is seen by Locke as nothing more exotic than matter, inactive, incapable of originating
ideas, all knowledge initiating through the senses. The mind thus circum-
scribed, reason was elevated to the supreme mental function, and imagina-
tion, as we have come to think of it, was given little play. Imagination
was not a faculty of invention but was limited to the activity of associa-
tion, to the combining of images derived originally from sense experience.

The impact of the Associationist theory of Imagination may be seen in
the Spectator, Nos. 411-21, wherein Addison considered "The Pleasures of
the Imagination" (1712) in the light of the popular wisdom of Newton and
Locke. The full extent of the limitations of the Associationist theory
of the imagination are clear: the imagination is bounded by science,
and, like science, its ideas come only from the senses, a view which is
further narrowed by limitation to the sense of sight. Since imagination
is thus dependent upon secondary observation of nature and its function in
poetry confined to combining thusly furnished images, Addison concludes
that art, produced by such an imagination, must be regarded as inferior to
nature.9

Not all theorists of the period would have agreed that art is of a
lower order than nature, however. As Meyer Abrams observes, a number of
mimetic approaches avoided the trap of Platonic criticism by explaining
art as imitative of an "empirical ideal." Most of these doctrines aim
toward representation of "the typical, the uniform, the salient, and the
familiar," which, as Abrams points out, makes "originality, or even diver-
sity, impossible."10 In aiming for the general, particulars were not
excluded, but they were usually employed in the service of determining the
uniform.11 Eighteenth-century associationism is essentially an Aristote-
lian method of imitation; the imagination is a mirror, or passive reflector,
of external nature, and nature is the ideal. In Romantic theory, we find that the 'ideal' has shifted position, moving inward and ultimately upward.

The associative function ascribed to the imagination of the eighteenth century survives into the Romantic period, most notably in what Coleridge and Wordsworth term the 'Fancy.' Coleridge, however, viewed it as distinct from and inferior to the imagination, and Wordsworth, though making a less harsh distinction and at times forcefully defending the Fancy as the complement of imagination, seems to have agreed that it is a lesser faculty. In general, the imagination, reduced in Newtonian/Lockean scientific analysis, undergoes an expansion in Romantic theory, becoming active and claiming unto itself powers of autonomous invention. In fact, mechanistic reduction became a specific point of reaction for the Romantics, pointedly illustrated by Coleridge in a letter to Wordsworth. Coleridge strongly urged his friend to join with him in his determination to rescue "Life and Intelligence" from the lifeless mechanism to which it had been subjected:

". . . the philosophy of mechanism which in everything that is most worthy of the human intellect strikes Death . . . ." ¹²

Williams seems to stand closer to the Romantics than to the Neo-classicists in several ways, although his theory of the mind appears comparable to that of Locke insofar as he agrees that ideas are spawned by sensory perception of things in the external world. ¹³ He does not, however, limit imaginative stimulus to the sense of sight as Locke did—an obvious fact to anyone who has read such poems as "Daphne and Virginia" ("The smell of the heat is boxwood") or "Ol' Bunk's Band" ("Stand up, stand up! the / slap of a bass string. / Ping, ping! The horn, the / hollow horn / long drawn out, a hound deep / tone--") ¹⁴ Nor does he conceive the mind as passive. The terms of contact between mind and thing--
"co-extension," as he liked to call it—imply mutual activity: things act upon the mind through sensory perception, but the mind—specifically the imagination—equally acts upon things, transforming them into the stuff of poetry through fusion or interpenetration. Finally, he did not, like Addison, regard art as inferior to nature. He shared Coleridge's concern for the survival of intelligence, and he saw the answer in "A CREATIVE FORCE"—the imagination—by which the poet "holds no mirror up to nature, but . . . rivals nature's composition with his own."15

In his essay, "Against the Weather," Williams speaks of the imagination as "the transmuter," "the changer."16 He does not believe that the objects of perception may enter the poem willy-nilly, but that they must undergo imaginative mutation before the poet's composition may rival that of nature. The difference is that between mirroring nature and imitating nature, a distinction that Williams makes repeatedly. Coleridge, too, argues for imaginative transformation, but there are significant differences between his view of nature and that of Williams that mark a noteworthy distinction in their respective transformative concepts.

In his crucial Chapter XII of the Biographia Literaria, Coleridge states that "every object is, as an object [by which he meant nature], dead, fixed, incapable in itself of any action, and necessarily finite."17 Approaching this statement with a certain mindset, one may puzzle as to why a vital, organic universe would be regarded as "dead" and "fixed." However, the phrase, "necessarily finite," tips us that Coleridge was considering nature not from a physical but from a metaphysical perspective, and "incapable of any action" suggests why nature, uncognitive and without autonomous will, is unsuited for metaphysical ends. Williams' ends were not metaphysical, but rooted in the here and now, the inner life of man.
being quickened by its response to the vitality of nature through the agency of the imagination:

\[
\text{The instant}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{trivial as it is} & \\
\text{is all we have} & \\
\text{unless---unless} & \\
\text{things the imagination feeds upon,} & \\
\text{the scent of the rose,} & \\
\text{startle us anew.} & \tag{18}
\end{align*}
\]

In constructing a workable metaphysical system, Coleridge found it necessary to determine the relationship between the mind (subject) and nature (object), but because his was an idealized bias, the weight was on the side of the mind and consciousness, with its capability for abstraction and transcendence of the merely physical. Although the finite world might be useful as a philosophical and poetic vehicle, ultimately Coleridge was interested in the infinite, or as he put it, "the absolute self, the great eternal I AM."\(^{19}\) The realization of the "I AM" requires the unity of subject and object; but such unity necessitates an act, of which the sentient mind alone—over and against passive nature—is capable. Nature, in being perceived by the mind, is formed by the mind. This idea is seen clearly, not only in the Biographia Literaria, but in the previously cited letter to Wordsworth in which Coleridge chided his fellow poet for his failure to come to terms with "the sandy sophisms of Locke and the Mechanic Dogmatists" in his poem, "The Recluse." Coleridge had hoped that Wordsworth's poem would stand as a philosophical manifesto of Romanticism by "demonstrating that the Senses were living growths and developments of the Mind & Spirit in a much juster as well as higher sense, than the mind can be said to be formed by the Senses—."\(^{20}\) He believed it essential to the cause of Romantic poetry to advance his belief that in the act of percep-
tion, the mind perceives itself and is therefore objectified to itself,
accomplishing union of subject and object, which is the spirit. Within the framework which Coleridge establishes, this process of objectification may be understood, but it should not mislead. Ultimately it is a means of verifying a subjective essence, and nature becomes the handmaiden of the mind—a far remove from the objectification of subject and object that Williams sought.

Given the role of nature in Coleridge's transcendental metaphysics and his view that poetry should be dedicated to the attainment of 'higher' metaphysical ends, it is readily apparent that nature should have to be altered to a state proper for poetry before it can enter the poem. Essentially "dead" and "fixed," nature must be metamorphosed and animated via the emotions before it may image the mind's vitality and 'higher' truth. Poetry is thus distinguished from 'fact.' 'Facts'—objects met in the empirical world of the senses—may serve in the poem, but they are always secondary to, a vehicle for the poet's vision of higher realities. Wordsworth does not appear as dogmatic as Coleridge in his insistence upon transcendental attainment, frequently defending the worth of the Fancy that sets its sights upon the lower pleasures of perceptual experience. Nonetheless, he too makes a distinction in the relative value of higher and lower realities, and the predominant tendency among the Romantic poets was to agree with Shelley that "A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth."\footnote{[emphasis mine]}

For the majority of poets in the Romantic Age, adherence to 'facts' and particulars was considered to result in description, not poetry (or at least in poetry of a lower order), and to indicate the mind as passive and subject to the external. Wordsworth's statement may stand as example:
The ability to observe with accuracy things as they are in themselves, and with fidelity to describe them, unmodified by any passion or feeling existing in the mind of the describer . . . though indispensable to a Poet, is one which he employs only in submission to necessity, and never for a continuance of time: as its exercise supposes all the higher qualities of the mind to be passive, and in a state of subjection to higher objects.22

Objects represented for their own sake would be, by this disposition of mind, a surrender to Eighteenth-Century Mechanism, a relinquishing of recovered passion by which the mind would transcend the commonplace. The ideal, then, for the Romantics had moved inward. Not the mind, but nature, had become passive, thus marking the shift from an empirical to a transcendental ideal.

Williams' ideal may be described as synergistic. Neither the mind nor nature is exclusively the repository of the ideal, nor does one hold supremacy over the other. Rather, meeting in a new unity, they become, in the poem, a new thing, greater than the sum of its parts. Within the poem, particulars, 'facts,' are held in a new field of force that imitates the fields of force within nature.23 Objects are not literally transported wholesale into the poem; nature is not 'mirrored,' but recreated in an imaginative construct. This is Williams' notion of transformation: to structure objects and their relationships in a new medium in such a way as to preserve the integrity of their inherent natures.

To an extent, Williams shared with Coleridge the view of the subject/object relationship as a means to self-verification, but he rejected the inward-pointing thrust of Coleridgean perceptual dynamics. Perhaps the distinction may be made clearer by availing ourselves of the diagrammatic models devised by I. A. Richards to demonstrate the workings of Romantic perception as opposed to 'scientific' perception, which approaches that
of Eighteenth-Century Mechanism. Against these models, we may readily
determine the distinguishing properties of Williams' perceptual complex:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>'Mind'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aware of (perceiving)</td>
<td>Brain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Object (The apparition of a man)</td>
<td>Receptor (e.g., eye)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Light Waves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agitations in some physical system</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Immediately obvious is that in both the Romantic and 'scientific'
perceptual operations, the line of perception runs in only one direction.
In the Romantic model on the left, the static object is acted upon by the
active subject, investing it with a projection of its own consciousness.
The subject receives nothing from the object, which remains a passive tool
for the subject's contemplation of itself. In the *Biographia Literaria*,
Coleridge explains that "a subject . . . becomes a subject by the act of
constructing itself objectively to itself; but . . . never is an object
except for itself, and only so far as by the very same act it becomes a
subject."25 Thus the object is always secondary to the subject. In the
'scientific' understanding of perception on the right, the opposite is
true. As in the Lockean perceptual scheme, the subject—or 'mind'--is
passive, acted upon by physical phenomena initiated through the senses.

Williams' perceptual complex extends beyond both Romantic and 'scientific' perception, incorporating aspects of each. While affirming with
the Mechanists that knowledge has its origin in sensory perception (again, the notion of "no ideas but in things"), he simultaneously declares, like
the Romantics, that the purpose of poetry is to reveal the inner man:
"The objective in writing is, to reveal. . . . Reveal what? That which
is inside the man." To be consistent with both these positions, Williams had to devise a perceptual dynamics different from that offered either by Neo-classicism or Romanticism, an imagination that would see the subject/object relationship in a more egalitarian way. Thus for Williams the active principle dominates in both subject and object, and they mutually modify each other within an experiential construct, or in Whiteheadian terminology, an event. The business of the poet then becomes not simply to mirror the world without or to illumine it with the inner radiance of the mind's apprehension of things unseen, but to create in the poem a faithful semblance of the event, wherein perceptor, perceived and perception all meet on equal ground in an objective unity.

In Williams' ideal, the rejoining of nature and the mind of man is achieved in a way impossible for the Neo-classicists or the Romantics, given the premises of each. Coleridge, in "On Poesy or Art," probably most closely approaches Williams' position in his assertion that art is "the mediatress between, and reconciler of, nature and man." Not only in his life as a physician, but as well in his poetic life, Williams often appears to take the role of healer, binding the psychic wound of man, his split from nature. Such resolution was, for Williams, the highest aim of poetry: "Be reconciled, poet, with your world, it is / the only truth!"

This concern is at the heart of the Paterson conception, which he approaches as the physician working up his "case," and it is at the center of his preoccupation with "divorce" in that poem. Given this view of his poet-role, it is unlikely that Williams would have disagreed with Coleridge's statement, taken alone. But Coleridge's intent cannot be taken in Williams' sense because the action is one-way, and thus ultimately, from Williams' perspective, a poetics of exclusion and division. Coleridge also says,
"Poetry is . . . purely from the mind; for all its materials are from the mind," a statement in direct conflict with Williams' position. Nevertheless, when Coleridge declares the aim of poetry "to make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought and thought nature," he seems at least to anticipate Williams' later ideal.

Several times in this chapter I have had occasion to refer to metaphors of the imaginative process dominant in Neo-classical and Romantic poetry. Such metaphors—the mirror of the Neo-classical period, the lamp, the fountain, the plant in the Romantic, to name a few—are invaluable in their implications as indices to fundamental shifts in assumptions about the poetic process. As an example, the Neo-classical period, with its Associationism and emphasis upon the sense of sight, found a natural analogue between poetry and painting. Painting was a logical extension of the mirror metaphor so popular in the eighteenth century. To the Romantics, however, the expressive qualities of music, its power to evoke feeling-states and its harmonic nature seemed properties more compatible with the aims of poetry as they had been redefined.

Nowhere is this shift recorded more clearly or directly than in Hazlitt's, "On Poetry in General." "Painting," says Hazlitt, gives the object itself; poetry what it implies. Painting embodies what a thing contains in itself: poetry suggests what exists out of it in any manner connected with it. But this last is the proper province of the imagination. Again as it relates to passion, painting gives the event, poetry the progress of events: but it is during the progress, in the interval of expectation and suspense, while our hopes and fears are strained to the highest pitch of breathless agony, the pinch of interest [for poetry] lies.
Hazlitt's opinion is clear: painting is by its nature inferior, limited and lacking in those qualities to which the highest aim of poetry aspires. But he explicitly defines poetry in the cast of music: poetry "is the music of language, answering to the music of the mind, untying as it were 'the secret soul of harmony.'"34

The identification of music and poetry by the Romantics found its most favored embodiment in the metaphor of the Aeolian, or Wind Harp, and this musical metaphor is a particularly convenient instance for illustrating Williams' points of departure from Romanticism. The Aeolian Harp in many respects typifies certain aspects characteristic of imaginative dynamics within the mainstream of Romanticism, as Williams' conception of the imaginative process is imaged in his use of music. It may be argued with justification that Williams' choice of music imagery in this context evidences a degree of kinship with Romanticism; but, as we shall see, its particular application strikes to the core of his divergence.

The Romantic Aeolian Harp is, of course, not a conventional instrument, designed for human invention and performance; the music it emits is produced by the play of breezes over its strings, which respond in harmonics. Its music, then, has its source in nature, but in its metaphorical application, the breeze that stirs the strings to music becomes transnatural, an "intellectual breeze":

And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze.
At once the Soul of each, and God of all?35

The Harp images the poet himself, who responds together to the stimulus of physical nature and to the transcendant realm of ideas, producing a harmony of Platonic music, the "Soul of each." The Harp is reverenced
by Coleridge for its capacity to translate such transcendental music into humanly perceptible form. As the Aeolian Harp is no ordinary instrument, the poet is no ordinary man. To borrow the words of Wordsworth, the poet is one who, "made quiet by the power / Of harmony, and the deep power of joy," has the ability to "see into the life of things."  

It is the poet's office to serve as mediator, reconciler of the empirical world of appearances and the eternal order of higher realities, to respond to their coalescence in his spirit with a chord, the poem. And he can ask no more than Shelley in "Ode to the West Wind," "Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is."  

Williams' interest in music imagery, like that of Coleridge and others of the Romantics who adopted the Wind Harp metaphor, was centered in the notion of harmony, but the harmonic elements are different. Williams' is no aetherial, other-worldly music; rather it is a harmony produced in the moment of contact between the world and the imagination. Williams' is the music of physical nature, whose rhythms continue despite man's deafness. But for his own survival, man must hear the music of the phenomenal world and match it in harmony, a feat accomplished only when he succeeds in breaking free of "the law"---the man-made, logical restraints that separate him from nature. He must learn to live by his own intuitions, trust his own senses---his remaining links with nature---to make contact with the world and hear "the insensate music" that surrounds him. And because in doing so he naturalizes himself, the resulting music he hears is not only the music of external nature, but the music of his own nature, his own imagination. 

Williams' music, as we will see in the discussions of the poems that follow, is not the abstract music of the Romantics, but the music of the
imagination given concretion in its sensory apprehension of natural phenomena. It is not a harmony with a transnatural world of essences, but with the world of 'facts.'

Because Williams made so much of his rejection of tradition, it is an easy matter to take him at his word and view him as a pure product of a new world in a new age. This view is largely one that Williams consciously fostered and one, it would seem, that he found convenient in exorcising the ghosts of Romantic poeticisms that crowded his early poems. As Williams matured in his poetic identity, his view toward tradition softened somewhat, but he never flagged in his insistence that poetry be of its own time.

Now that Williams' poetic is an accomplished fact, it is perhaps easier for his readers to place him in historical perspective. And it is no discredit to his claim of 'newness' to do so. We find that he was perhaps not the complete revolutionist in the sense of totally overthrowing the past, but that his modifications to tradition were substantial and mark a definite line of progress into our own era. His work shows theoretic kinship to the sensory orientation of the Neo-classicists, and he shares the Romantics' affinity for intuitive cognition along with their emphasis on imagination, unity of subject and object and musical conception of poetry. But his similarities do not add up to equivalency; they do show him as vitally involved with the same concerns that have traditionally been determined as central to poetic activity. And they show him to have ultimately followed his own lights in fulfilling the requirements set down for the artist by Kandinsky in *Ueber das Geistige in der Kunst*, quoted by Williams in the Prologue to *Kora in Hell*: 
Every artist has to express himself.
Every artist has to express his epoch.
Every artist has to express the pure and eternal qualities of the art of all men.
FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER IV


5. Ibid., p. 102.

6. Ibid., pp. 120, 115, 106, 98.


8. Williams, Prologue to *Kora in Hell*, p. 21.


11. Ibid.


15. Williams, *Spring and All*, pp. 122, 121.


29. Williams, Paterson, Book II, p. 84.

30. Williams, Introduction to Paterson.
The "divorce" of Paterson is correctly defined by Richard Macksey in "'A Certainty of Music': Williams' Changes" as a schism between language and reality, but more fundamentally it is a schism between Man and Nature. Increasingly severed from the nature of which he once was a part, Man took his language with him. Removed from the sources of energy in nature, language became static and enervated, a dead symbol of Man's condition.


Ibid.

Cited in Williams, Prologue to Kora in Hell, p. 23.
CHAPTER V

THE POEMS: IMAGES OF MUSIC AND DANCE

Dance! Sing! Coil and uncoil! Whip yourselves about! Shout the deliverance!

—Williams, Kora in Hell

As we have seen previously, Williams' imagination is the primary agent of contact, which marks the incipience of the poetic process. But the imagination is also the active principle in every phase of the poem's evolution. Contact established, the imagination moves to invention, to the engendering of images that will embody the experience of contact in the new structure of the poem. It is the business of imagination "through metaphor to reconcile the people and the stones."¹

Figurative language is, of course, an important aspect of all poetry, but the image is of paramount significance for Williams since he believed that most of the world's ills may be traceable to the failure of the imagination, the image-making faculty. Over and over, we encounter variations of his belief that "If a man die / it is because death / has first / possessed his imagination."²

If the imagination is seen, as it is by Williams, to have such immense restorative capacity, we may well ask what role, if any, reason plays in its function. Williams rarely speaks directly of reason or logic. He does, however, write freely and extensively about the failures of science and philosophy: "Science is a lie, philosophy a sham"; "science and philosophy have become in our day the anatomy and physiology of a body lacking a head."³ Since science and philosophy are the disciplines we most associate with reason and logic, we may infer that he considered them at best inadequate, and at worst, dangerous.
In *The Embodiment of Knowledge*, Williams elaborates his conviction that the "head" of the body of Man "is art," and "Art alone remains always concrete, objective." Art being the province of the imagination, it seems clear that Williams regarded the imagination as a separate faculty, superior to reason and logic. In "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," the Asphodel, an object of nature, is the image of the imagination, pitted against the destructive image of "the bomb," the product of science bereft of imaginative mitigation. The Asphodel is a skillful example of the kind of imaging that Williams valued most highly—the image that accomplishes coalescence of subject and object. As it is a natural object, the flower represents all of nature, and as an image of the imagination, it stands for the best in man. In the poetic object, the fusion is complete, unifying man and nature, and can stand against the destructive impulses arising from the divorce of thought from imagination.

The imagination as an active force in life emerges in Williams' works as a moral stanchion, and images of the imaginative activity in his poems assume a corresponding moral quality. (At this juncture, I should stress that this moral quality does not lapse into moralizing; rather, the images Williams invents retain their autonomy and communicate their moral character only as inherent aspects of their natures and in juxtaposition with contrasting images. Williams scrupulously avoids didacticism, with only rare exceptions, believing that the thing should speak for itself.) The property of imagination that most qualifies it as a moral force, in Williams' usage, is its capability to order perception and experience. As it provides structure and cohesion, it offers a counter to the chaos of self-imposed destruction.
Although Williams uses numerous images that serve in this moral capacity, many of them drawn from natural life as the Asphodel mentioned above, music proves to be one of his favored images of rescue and repair. We repeatedly encounter the words, "design," "form" "figure," all words pointing to the preeminent ordering activity of the imagination. And it is in this activity that we may discern the common link between music and poetic concerns. Both poetry and music, as imaginative structures, take on the moral quality inhering in the process of their invention. The moral base of music is a proximate corollary to that of poetry: both arts achieve the condition of morality by drawing the disparate elements of sensory experience into an order through the agency of imagination. And both arts (done well according to Williams' standards) achieve a coalescence of subject and object by a unity of form and content.

"The Orchestra," published in 1954, in The Desert Music and Other Poems, is one among a number of Williams' later poems that develop the theme of imaginative redemption, and it is one of the fullest developments of music as an image of this process. It is also an excellent example of Williams' skillful reinforcement of the music image by extending musical technique to the actual composition of the poem, an achievement which will be examined in depth in the following chapter.

"The Orchestra" begins with an image of chaos in nature, "a cacophony of bird calls," which is paralleled by another, human, image of disorder—that of a symphony tuning up. As "woodwinds / clarinet and violins" seek and finally "sound a prolonged A," they are brought into accord and the chaos of sound gives way to a unison. Analogous to the "A" tone which brings the orchestra into a tonal unity is the rising sun. As the "A" is
the "common tone" to which the orchestra tunes, nature tunes to the ascending sun, which "is about to rise / and shed his beams / as he has always done / upon us all."

With the first six lines, Williams establishes the two major image patterns of the poem: nature and the orchestra. In the following lines, he joins them to his theme: the condition of humanity. Mankind, like either nature or an orchestra, is scarcely constituted as an homogenous unit. It is a gallery of diversity, "drudges and those / who live at ease, / women and men," "the old," "children and the sick." These, too, must seek a "common tone" sufficient to hold humanity "to an assembled order / in spite of the 'wrong note'." At the end of the first section, Williams tells us,

Love is that common tone
shall raise his fiery head
and sound his note.

In this triadic line unit, the images of the orchestra coming to a unity as they tune to the common "A" tone and nature tuning to the sun's ascension are sounded together with the dominant theme of love as the principle of order for mankind.

Near the end of the poem, Williams breaks the otherwise consistent triadic line to state his concern more fully, almost, one might say, didactically:

"Man has survived hitherto because he was too ignorant to know how to realize his wishes. Now that he can realize them, he must either change them or perish."

It is fitting that this statement should be cast in prose form rather than the musical triadic line. This is the "wrong note" that threatens the "assembled order," or harmony, of mankind.
Despite his uncharacteristic exposition in these lines, Williams stops short of explicitly defining these wishes of man that now threaten his very survival. It is left to the reader to determine the "memory that will not sleep" by which "Our dreams have been assaulted." He leaves us, as he says in *Paterson*, to "Music it for yourself." Williams' intent may be discerned more directly in "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," which takes up many of the same concerns as "The Orchestra." There he tells us:

The poem
  if it reflects the sea
    reflects only
its dance
  upon that profound depth
    where
it seems to triumph.
The bomb puts an end
  to all that.
I am reminded
  That the bomb
    also
is a flower
  dedicated
    howbeit
to our destruction,
The mere picture
  Of the exploding bomb
fascinates us
  so that we cannot wait
    to prostrate ourselves
before it.

Williams seems to feel that the age-long dream of man has been to bring nature under his domination. Finally, with the advent of a new scientific age, culminating in Einstein's discovery of the principle of Relativity and the development of atomic power, the dream has been realized. In our century, we stand in a new relationship to nature, but we find that the dream has been perverted to a nightmare of potential and actual destruction. Williams' doctrine of contact is based upon his belief that the evolution of human thought has led us to divorce from
nature, a schism that must be imaginatively healed if we are not to destroy ourselves. The bomb becomes for Williams a symbol of that schism and all that it implies for the future of mankind. In "Asphodel," he states its cure, which is the same offered in "The Orchestra":

There is no power
so great as love
which is a sea,
which is a garden—
as enduring
as the verses
of that blind old man [Homer]
destined
to live forever.
Few men believe that
nor in the games of children.
They believe rather
in the bomb
and shall die by
the bomb. 7

In "The Orchestra," the redemptive motif is sounded by "The / French horns" which "Interpose / . . their voices:"

I love you. My heart
is innocent. And this
the first day of the world!

With the ushering in of love, they usher in a new world, a new harmonious order that enables man to triumph over himself, over his own self-destructive impulses. Through love, he may establish a new and positive order between himself and nature and between himself and his fellow man, thereby assuring his own survival:

The birds twitter now anew
but a design
surmounts their twittering.
It is a design of a man
that makes them twitter.
It is a design.

The saving "design of a man" clearly arises from redemptive love, defeating evil and reestablishing a state of innocence. Williams views
man's fall, like that of Adam, as resulting from his own misguided will. The reattainment of a pre-Lapsarian state of innocence and unity with nature, however, departs from the Edenic myth; it comes not by grace, but as the achievement of man's own imaginative resources. In "The Orchestra," love is not directly identified as an activity of the imagination. However, in "Asphodel," we are told that "the imagination and love" are "all of a piece."8 With this identification, music as an image of love in "The Orchestra" is expanded to be an image of the imagination. The "A" tone of the orchestra, as we have seen, is equated with the "common tone" which binds mankind in a community of love; but at the heart of both is the imagination, the redeeming capacity for order and design.

The "design" which is achieved in the last two triadic line units of the poem is prefigured in the second section. As the orchestra, having been brought to "as assembled order," begins to play, Williams counterpoints the ear's response with that of the mind, drawing to a focus the moral implications of music in its synthesis of thought and nature: "Well, shall we / think or listen? Is there a sound addressed / not wholly to the ear?" What is perceived, both aurally and mentally, is again, "a principle of music": "It is not / a flute note either. It is the relation / of a flute note / to a drum."

The flute, a pitched instrument, is employed primarily for melodic purposes and the coloristic qualities of its timbre. In contrast, the drum is an indefinitely pitched instrument (although the battery of timpani, which is tuned, is an exception in the drum family) and is used for rhythmic purposes. By singling out these two contrasting instruments from the orchestral body, Williams stresses the necessity for diversity within an order, a conviction reflected in his determination that the order of
the poem is best served by variability. Both types of instruments, pitched and non-pitched, are necessary for the orchestral whole, just as the purposes which they serve, melody and rhythm, are both essential to the musical whole.

In the passage from the Prologue to *Kora in Hell* cited in the first chapter, Williams emphasizes the musical fact that instruments are used in combination, not to obscure the distinct qualities of each, but rather for mutual enhancement. Taken as a general principle, this observation is only a partial truth, belied by some exceptions such as string choirs. However, Williams mentions specifically the oboe and the violin, indicating that he was thinking of instruments of varying classes of tonal quality in combination. For Williams, the principle holds true, not only in musical composition, but in the poetic ordering of words, in the harmonious balance of nature, and, as we see in "The Orchestra," in the structuring of the multiplicity of mankind in a workable societal order. With the aid of imagination, and thus love, we may put our newly attained ability to manipulate nature to the service of bringing mankind together in a mutually enhancing order rather than using our knowledge perversely to obliterate our differences, by which we destroy ourselves. Williams seems to suggest that the knowledge that produced the bomb, which was used in the Second World War—a war in which both his sons served—to destroy millions different from ourselves, must be turned, through love and imagination, to the benefit of all men. Despite this "wrong note," Williams seems to feel the past is not irredeemable, the imagination and the principle of the orchestra may yet triumph.

Williams' use of music as an image of order, and thus survival, has its root in the nature of music as an art which structures time through
measure, or rhythmic pattern, thereby bringing time within the grasp of perception. The dance, also an art of structured time, functions much in the same way, transposing time from the abstract into concrete form. This appears to be a crucial process in Williams' scheme, on the basis that it allows us to be in touch with our experience in the world, and thus with ourselves. Writing of Charles Sheeler in The Autobiography, Williams says that "The poem . . . is the construction in understandable limits of his life. That is Sheeler; that, lucky for him, is also music."\(^{10}\) Williams held fast to the notion that it is through the imaginative ordering of concrete experience that we verify our beings. The imagination, which orders experience, is the catalyst, bringing thought and perception together, which is the requisite condition for creative activity.

This process is the subject of "The Dance" (1962) which takes its title from its primary image. In this poem, the dance is visually presented as taking place between pairs of snowflakes, spatially linked on imaginary axes in their downward descent. These, however, are snowflakes that fall "in the woods of your / own nature," thus setting the locus of the dance within the mind: "two and two to make a dance / the mind dances with itself."\(^{11}\) The metaphoric representation of the mind by falling snowflakes places emphasis on the uniquenesses of the mind's operations. As snowflakes are each singular in design and highly structured, so with the minds of men. Each is unique unto itself. By extension, the same is true of the poem, the object which the mind makes.

The "two and two" that is required to make this dance is, perhaps, somewhat confusing at first reading, but as we read the lines that follow, together with other instances of the "two and two" image, we see that the
poem presents not just one pairing, but a succession of pairings in the
dance leading to the poem. Each pairing marks a progression in the poetic
process:

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

yourself and the other,

On the first of multiple levels upon which the dance occurs, "the
mind dances with itself." In the Prologue to *Kora in Hell*, Williams
writes, "... a dance is a thing in itself. It is the music that dances
but if there are words then there are two dancers, the words pirouetting
with the music." In "The Dance," the image of music dancing is expanded
to "the mind" dancing "with itself," a variant on the identification
between music and the imagination made in "The Orchestra" and other poems.
The mind dancing with itself is the image of the ability of the imagina-
tion to join the diverse things held in the mind--perceptions, memories,
knowledge--in dynamic relationships. The mind thus set in motion, the
dance can be taken up on the second level, extending to "yourself and the
other." This is the level of contact, in which the 'me' meets, accepts
and enters into the dance with the 'not me.' Together, these two levels
are the very source of poetry, or creative activity of any sort. Finally
is the poem itself, "the words pirouetting with the music." Put yet
another way in *Paterson* (though in a somewhat different context) the poem
involves "events dancing two and two with language." The poem itself
is the best illustration of the process, interrelating the snow-filled
woods, the dance and the self held together in the structure of language.
The poem is the dancing floor in which the images of the mind meet and move in a rhythmic pattern of words.

Williams warns, "if you break away and run / the dance is over." The dance is an order, a pattern of measured steps and gestures. It also, in Williams' use, requires a partner. If the pattern is broken, measure lost or contact—the rhythmic congruence between the mind and the things it meets in the external world—interrupted, the self is again faced with the threat of chaos and the condition for creative activity is at least temporarily destroyed. We recall, however, that life is inevitably in flux, and change inescapable. Thus.

Breathlessly you will take another partner better or worse who will keep at your side, at your stops whirls and glides until he too leaves off on his way down as if there were another direction gayer, more carefree spinning face to face but always down with each other secure only in each other's arms

Each event, each human relationship constituting a portion of the life-pattern of the individual has its own pattern, its own dance. Various relationships or contact situations offer momentary, but fleeting, security against the flux that draws us inevitably down to death. However, Williams appears to be seeking something more dependable, something more constant than uncertain circumstances afford, and—again—he finds his answer in the imagination. It is the imagination that is the single constant, though flexible, element in each event; it is the imagination that shapes and
informs events with design and form; it is the imagination that is at the ready to dance with whatever life places before it. Thus, Williams concludes,

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

In recommending reliance upon "the dance," Williams is recommending reliance upon the capacity within ourselves to dance: the imagination that sustains one through flux and the threat of chaos, "the storm":

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

dancing, dancing as may be credible.

"The Dance" reflects Williams' notion that we are, inescapably, caught in a relative universe which is capricious ("plays with us") and bedevils our sense of order and, consequently, of self. In such a universe, security is elusive. Williams' dependable answer is to seek significance inward, in the resources of the imagination, which has the capacity to establish the self, relatively, in relation to other things and to dance with them.

The close reader of Williams soon recognizes that his poetics is inseparable from his view of life. Both are based on the same principles, and his poetry, particularly that of the later years, is an implementation of his philosophy. In many of the poems that employ music or dance imagery, a particular poem may overtly be 'about', say, a social issue or personal crisis, but at the same time, it is 'about' the writing of poetry. This is certainly true in the instances of "The Orchestra" and "The Dance,"
in which the principles of structure provide a pattern for life governed by imaginative order, the realization of which for Williams, the poet, occurs in the actual composition of the poem.

Music and dance as metaphors of personal survival are most numerous and fully developed in the later poetry, most preeminently in the two poems discussed above, and in "The Desert Music," to be discussed later. The notion that only "the dance is sure," however, appears in Williams' poetry as early as December, 1921, in "Overture to a Dance of Locomotives."  

Of particular interest for our study is the demonstration in this poem of Williams' concern with time and perception of time. This concern dominated his prosodic development over the next several decades; in the instance of "Overture to a Dance of Locomotives," however, we see his particular interest in time perception manifest in theme and handling of images.

Williams, of course, was not an anomaly in his fascination with the problems arising from new considerations of time perspective. As we have seen in our previous discussions of the influence of Einstein and Whitehead, the impact of recent discoveries in science, philosophy and mathematics reached far beyond the parameters of those fields of study to affect major currents within the progressive intellectual and artistic mainstream of the early Twentieth Century. Revolutions in the understanding of the nature of time are perhaps more readily apparent in the fields of science and philosophy where they are dealt with directly, but observations in these fields had direct spillovers into other areas, including the arts. It is difficult to imagine the time experiments of composers such as Stravinsky or a visual art movement such as Cubism without the
new possibilities of time perception first having been advanced by the
scientific and philosophic communities.

Perhaps more than at any other time in history, artists of all sorts
in the first part of this century felt driven to verbal expression, and
their manifestoes, poems and other writings are a testament to the
abstract nature of their orientation. In their impulses to 'explain' the
new ground being broken, they have left us abundant documentation of their
preoccupation with time and related phenomena. From F. T. Marinetti's
"Futuristic Manifesto," we read, "We stand on the far promontory of
centuries. . . . What is the use of looking behind us, since our task is
to smash the mysterious portals of the impossible? Time and Space died
yesterday. We live already in the absolute since we have already created
the eternal omnipresent Speed."15 And Appollinaire, writing on Cubism,
declares, "Today, scientists no longer limit themselves to the three
dimensions of Euclid. The painters have been led quite naturally to
occupy themselves with the new possibilities of spatial measurement which
. . . are designated by the term: the fourth dimension."16 The fourth
dimension, of course, not only is a conception affecting spatial percep-
tion but also that of time, and with the Cubists, in particular, time came
to be an integral element of graphic art.

Williams, who himself painted and in his youth flirted with aspira-
tions to make graphic art his creative profession, numbered many figures
of the art world among his friends and acquaintances. In a chapter of
his Autobiography, he recounts the event of the 1913 Armory Show in New
York and weekend parties with his artist friends, at which they would
"have arguments over cubism which would fill an afternoon." On such
occasions, he tells us, these discussions were accompanied by a "comparable
whipping up of interest in the structure of the poem." Williams seems to link Cubism, the Armory Show and experiments in poetry at the time:

"Whether the Armory Show in painting did it or whether that also was no more than a facet—the poetic line, the way the image was to lie on the page was our immediate concern." 17

"Overture to a Dance of Locomotives" was published as one of the poems in Sour Grapes in 1921, but Williams recalls in The Autobiography reading it at one of the artists' gatherings of 1913, indicating that it was written around the time of the Armory Show. It is a poem that not only reflects the time/space concerns of Cubism, but in its visualization recalls the techniques of cubist painting. It is a poem filled with the geometrical figures of Cubism: the angle of "descending stairways" (Duchamp's Armory Show "Nude Descending a Staircase"?), "domed ceiling," "discordant hands of a clock straining out from / a center," "A leaning pyramid of sunlight," "inevitable postures infinitely / repeated," "lights" which "hang crooked," "parallels," "cylinders." The visuals of "Overture to a Dance of Locomotives" are unmistakably cubistic, all angles, intersecting lines, geometric repetition.

Williams was acquainted with Marcel Duchamp, who was numbered among the Dadaists, but who employed cubistic techniques in numerous paintings, including his famous "Nude Descending a Staircase," exhibited in the Armory Show. All the Cubists, including Duchamp, were fascinated with the problem of the effect of movement and delay on perception. In response to this problem, many of the Cubists replaced conventional depth perspective with time perspective, allowing for a visual equivalency of duration through effects of simultaneity and juxtaposition of geometric planes. Such techniques may be seen in the overlays of geometric shapes
comprising the figure of Duchamp's nude in its time/space progression down the stairs.

"Overture to a Dance of Locomotives" resembles a cubistic painting not only in the geometric shapes and angles of its visual images, but in the depersonalization of its objects. A line such as, "Porters in red hats run on narrow platforms," draws the focus not on porters as living, breathing individuals, but as round splotches of vivid color juxtaposed against a horizontal. The effect is painterly, much like Pound's imagistic faces which are "petals on a wet, black bough" (also depicting persons in a railway station). 18

What are we to make of this early poem, with its cubistic handling of images and its obvious concern with the variability of time perception? The relationship of these elements of the poem is somewhat vague, but they seem to draw to a nexus in the notion of the dance. In Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature, Wylie Sypher defines Cubism as having developed to accommodate the new world of relationships defined by the predecessors of Einstein. As an art of relativism,

... cubism is a breakdown of three-dimensional space constructed from a fixed point of view: things exist in multiple relations to each other and change their appearance according to the point of view from which we see them—and we now realize that we can see them from innumerable points of view, which are also complicated by time and light, influencing all spatial systems. 19

The abandonment of absolute time and Euclidean space in the wake of discoveries by a new generation of scientists led to an unprecedented emphasis on movement in the arts as they attempted to adjust their orientation. Consequently, not only did the cubists break their objects into multiple spatial planes "which give an illusion of closure and depth," but into
planes "which are always moving and readjusting themselves to one another."^20

The plurality of spatial planes and the prominence of formal movement in cubistic paintings indeed achieve a kind of 'dance' on the canvas. The body of the dancer moves through shifting spatial planes, continually altering the spatial relationship to the observer. Additionally, the viewer's cognition of the dance form comes from the contextual memory of successive gesture, achieving a kind of montage of postures in the mind's eye that is a corollary to the literal montage often employed by the Cubists. Williams' poetic technique is another adaptation of the montage method: though images are, by the nature of the poem, presented in sequential time, their relationships to one another are spatial, the effect one of simultaneity. The reader views the poem as a canvas, its surface filled with refracted, shifting geometrical planes—or as a dance, its objects ever changing their relationships.

Thus it is true in "Overture to a Dance of Locomotives," that not only Cubism, but the dance and the poem are "region[s] of process, arrest, transition, where things emerge into recognition, then revise their features; an Uncertainty Principle operates here as it does in the new science."^21 Sypher also tells us, however,. that "The cubist world knows both change and permanence."^22 Thus far, we have centered our attention on the aspect of change, but in the second part of the poem, we encounter its complement in the notion of permanence that adheres to the image of the train, the 'dancer' of the poem, and to the dance itself.

The dance pervades the poem, though it does not actually begin until the train begins to move out from the station, ten lines before the end of the poem. The first, longer portion of the poem is the overture.
The basic experience of time in the first part of the poem seems to be one commonly experienced: time stretched out and prolonged in anticipation, though moving more quickly at other times. This is ontic, or lived time on the level of personal perception. Beyond this immediate perception of time, there appears to be a more impersonal, cosmic time conception, the time that surrounds the train. These two perceptions are countered in the poem in several ways.

The time of the overture is uncertain, deceptive, time perceived through human awareness. "The hands of a great clock" move "covertly" and, in their almost imperceptible movement, conceal a "secret." The time of the locomotive is, however, like its dance, "sure." The "dance" of the poem and its overture is the most finely drawn image of time in the poem and underscores the contrast of two types of time.

The scurrying passengers (Williams images them as "ants") move about the station, but their movement in no way suggests the patterned, ordered steps of a "dance." Their feet are "rubbing," "shuffling"—motion uncertain. The indeterminacy of movement in this section perhaps reflects the uncertainty of time perception in the modern world. These depersonalized passengers moving about or waiting aimlessly in a sort of limbo of time contrast vividly with the locomotive, "poised horizontal / on glittering parallels," ready for the dance.

Although there is a marked contrast in tone between the overture, which takes place within the station, and the dance, which is performed by the locomotive upon the rails, shifting from an uncomfortable tension in time perception and visual elements to the rhythmic surety of the train's movement, aspects linked with the train's dance appear throughout the poem. In the opening line, "Men with picked voices chant the names /
of cities in a huge gallery," an aural extension of the train's timetable. Their chant suggests the Greek chorus whose chant accompanied the stylistic movements of dancers in an age that saw the birth of the dance, and from the dance (as Williams believed), poetry.23

In the third stanza, "the hands of a great clock / go round and round!" and in the fourth, the hands of the clock assume "inevitable postures infinitely / repeated--." In such phrases, the clock hands seem to mark their own slow dance of time, but their dance too belongs to the dance of the train, moving to the moment when it will begin. In the passengers' perception, they are only "discordant" and "straining," reflective of their own imprecise experience of time.

The isolated line, "two--twofour--twoeight!" stands alone, spatially isolated from the preceding and following lines. Its autonomous placement arrests the reader's eye and focuses his attention. The line, because of its detachment, is deliberately ambiguous, but its ambiguity serves to fuse the three principal elements of the poem: it suggests, simultaneously, measured time, the count of a dance rhythm, and the onomatopoetic depiction of the sound of a train.

The discordancy between the atmosphere within the railway station and the train outside is effectuated by a detail of the inner structure, "Lights from the concrete / ceiling hang crooked," contrasted with

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

The whistle!

The machine on the tracks is the embodiment of order. There are no clumsy words such as "rubbing" and "shuffling" that can apply to this
locomotive, "poised" on the tracks, ready to move into the efficient and
controlled movement of its dance. In its "fixed posture," the engine
stirs the image of the dancer, completely controlled, waiting for the
downbeat, which comes in the next line: "Not twoeight. Not twofour.
Two!" As the train moves on its way, gathering speed, the perception of
the poem has shifted from the interior of the station to the interior of
the train: "Gliding windows. Colored cooks sweating / in a small
kitchen."

The train picks up speed, moving rhythmically: "In time: twofour! /
In time: twoeight!" External obstacles are no impediment to the trains'
sure progress: "--rivers are tunneled: trestles cross oozy swampland."
There is a certainty in the train's motion that transcends the chaotic
motions of the hurrying and impatient passengers: "Wheels repeating /
the same gesture remain relatively / stationary: rails forever parallel
return on themselves infinitely. / The dance is sure."

The dance, in which two partners relate to each other in a common
space/time locus is the image of the relative relationship, symbolized
by the train's wheels. The wheels of the train, like dance partners,
repeat the same "gesture." They are bound in a spatial relationship,
and though they are in motion, they are synchronized and remain "rela-
tively stationary," or at rest with each other. Thus a kind of stasis
is achieved in the dance of the wheels which, in their movement, are
relatively at rest. In the train's dance, the uncertainty of time
perception and the elusiveness of space and time in human experience,
which dominate the first part of the poem, are dissipated.

The train not only achieves a stasis within its own movement, but
it flows with the environment through which it moves. Its nature is
movement, a continual process of changing position, and in its ever-shifting relationships with the objects it passes, it achieves a kind of permanency akin to that of the cubists, who held (like Whitehead) that each event or relationship construct is only an aspect of a larger configuration of events and thus the pattern of the whole is discernible in each individual event.

These two facts of the train's being harken back to Williams' ideas concerning the poem. The train's fluid relationship to the environment through which it moves recalls the dance of snowflakes in "The Dance," which image the contact relationships requisite to the poem's creation. The mindset which allows for such contact is one of fluidity and process, characterized in this poem by the train's easy movement through the landscape. The rest-within-movement achieved by the motion of the train's wheels upon the tracks is suggestive of Williams' ideal of the contact experience within the poem. For the poet to meet with the object in contact, their respective rhythms must be congruent, they must meet and move in relative conjunction. This experience may perhaps most readily be understood in human relationships, described as 'compatibility,' but it holds true in relationships with inanimate objects as well. For example, if a particular tree arrests one's attention, there is something in the tree's configuration, the coloration or pattern of the foliage that strikes a sympathetic response within the viewer. This 'something' that brings the subject and object together in a spatial and temporal event is the element which must be transposed into the structure of the poem. When the poem is successful, human experience moves from destructive temporality into an indestructible moment. As in "The Dance," it is the imagination that enables such transformation, the dance of the
mind that embraces change yet transcends it. And thus, "The dance is sure."

"Overture to a Dance of Locomotives," then, like "The Orchestra" and "The Dance," belongs to that category of Williams' poems about poetry. The locomotive functions not only as a metaphor of cosmic time, but, indirectly, of the poem which strives toward the universal in its structure. The somewhat unorthodox association of the train with the poem is logical in light of Williams' conception of the poem as a mechanical construction. As he was to write in later years (1944) in the "Introduction to The Wedge," "A poem is a small (or large) machine made of words." In keeping with his belief that poetry should imitate the operations of nature, however, the mechanism he envisioned was organic, much like that of Whitehead. According to Mike Weaver, "The general laws by which the poem is organized are presented as plastic and not grammatical, the parts of the poem differ in their intrinsic values according to the situation in which they find themselves as speech. It was Williams' poetic application of Whitehead's theory or organic mechanism."

Having stated that a poem is a machine of words, Williams proceeds to elaborate:

Prose may carry a load of ill-defined matter like a ship. But poetry is the machine which drives it, pruned to perfect economy. As in all machines its movement is intrinsic, undulant, a physical more than a literary character. In a poem this movement is distinguished in each case by the character of the speech from which it arises. . . .

When a man makes a poem, makes it, mind you, he takes words as he finds them interrelated about him and composes them--without distortion which would mar their exact significances--into an intense expression of his perceptions and ardors that they may constitute a revelation in the speech that he uses. It isn't what he
says that counts as a work of art, it's what he makes, with such intensity of perception that it lives with an intrinsic movement of its own to verify its authenticity.\(^\text{26}\)

The machine-like quality of poetry, then, in its precise interrelationships of words, is the same quality that makes poetry analogous to the dance. The gestures of dance, too, must be "pruned to a perfect economy." The motor movements of dance, like the poet's use of gestic words, must be clear, defined, and manifestly contribute to the conceptual intent. All three—the machine, the poem and the dance—realize themselves in an energy construct comprised of parts tensionally interrelated. Recalling Steinmetz' conclusion from relativity theory, which seems to have echoed Williams' own belief, that "energy is the only real existing entity,"\(^\text{27}\) we understand why, then, the dance—together with the poem and the locomotive—"is sure."

The poems considered thus far have had to do with the "certainty of music"\(^\text{28}\)—or the dance—and the associations of these two arts with imaginative activity, poetic and moral. In such instances, the imagaic value of music and dance lies in their ordering of sensual elements which mirrors the ordering capacity of the imagination. Beyond these and related uses, there is another category of poems in which music and dance acquire another association: that of celebration or exuberance. "Dance Russe," discussed previously, belongs to this category. Among the poems which Williams based on paintings by the sixteenth century Flemish painter, Peter Breughel the Elder, "The Wedding Dance in the Open Air" and "The Dance" offer further examples of the celebratory dance image in combination with the ordering dance image already encountered.
Williams' poem, "The Wedding Dance in the Open Air," is a faithful verbal rendering of Breughel's painting: "a riotously gay rabble of / peasants and their // ample-bottomed doxies" "go round & round" in "the market square." This is the occasion of a wedding, as the title tells us, a natural time of celebration, and Breughel's figures, transported into the poem, enter into the festivities with joyful exuberance:

They prance or go openly
toward the wood's edges
round and round in
rough shoes and
farm breeches
mouths agape
Oya!
kicking up their heels.

This is a dance of physical delight, from the wedding couple to the couples disappearing into the wood to pursue their own sensual pleasures. Amid all this riotous indulgence, however, the reader, placed in the position of the viewer, is reminded that the figures of this dance are "Disciplined by the artist / to go round & round." The painting itself bears out this statement: the eye of the viewer focuses first upon the rhythmic units of the rounded couples dancing in a circular pattern in the foreground, then is led in a modified spiralling pattern to the horizon and back again through the peasants in the middle ground to rest upon the group of circling dancers once more.

There are, then, two levels of the dance in this poem: the depicted dance of the peasants, which is obviously celebratory, and the 'dance' of the painting's rhythmic design, a dance of order. But these two levels merge in the painting itself (and, one might add, in Williams' poem about the painting). In keeping with Williams' doctrine of contact, the artist
must objectively enter into the essential spirit of the thing he observes
before he can transform it into art. Thus the celebratory dance of the
peasants becomes Breughel's own on the level of imagination, and the
shaping design he gives it on the canvas becomes his celebratory dance
of the contact experience.

In "The Dance," a similar fusion of the celebratory and structuring
images of the dance occurs. As in "Wedding Dance in the Open Air," "In
Breughel's great picture, The Kermess / the dancers go round, they go
round and / around." In both poems, Williams emphasizes the solid
rotundity of the figures, a hallmark of Breughel's style, but probably
for Williams an evidence of the artist's earthy apprehension of his sub-
jects.

We are told that "Kicking and rolling about / the Fair Grounds,
swinging their butts, those / shanks must be sound to bear up under such /
rollicking measures, prance as they dance / in Breughel's great picture,
The Kermess." The shanks of the dancers exist for the viewer only in
the painting, and therefore it is in the painting that they must be
'sound.' Once again, in this poem the emphasis is upon physicality, not
only upon the physical nature of the celebration, but upon the physicali-
ty of the artist's structure. The form given to his figures must be
'sound' enough to carry the rhythmic line of the structural pattern.

Often Williams' celebratory use of music and dance is not an extended
image, dominating the poem, but is a secondary, reinforcing image. One
of the most delightful incidences of this limited usage of music and
dance may be found in "The Sparrow," a poem about the male sexual ego,
couched in the form of a small, common bird, which for Williams "is a
poetic truth / more than a natural one." The sparrow is purely sensual,
his actions geared to his physical being and his joys to its indulgence:

His voice, his movements,
his habit --
how he loves to
flutter his wings
in the dust --
all attest it;
granted, he does it
to rid himself of lice
but the relief he feels
makes him
cry out lustily --
which is a trait
more related to music
than otherwise.

Here, music scarcely seems a cerebral activity, but rather a sensual, passionate expression. The same is true with his dance in the dust; the impulse to dance is in the instincts, inseparable from his physical being. Later in the poem, in his mating dance with the female of his species, there is

Nothing even remotely
subtle about his lovemaking.
He crouches before the female,
drags his wings,
waltzing,
throws back his head
and simply --
yells! The din is terrific.

The dance is uncomplicated by reason, but serves its purpose, accomplishes its end; it seems to be a physical celebration of the sparrow’s physical nature. But viewed more critically, the sparrow is something of a comic figure in all his amorous strutting:

Wherever he finds himself
in early spring,
on back streets
or beside palaces,
he carries on
unaffectedly

his amours.

It begins in the egg,

his sex engenders it:

What is more pretentiously useless

or about which

we more pride ourselves?

It leads as often as not to our undoing.

Yet,

Practical to the end,

it is the poem

of his existence

that triumphed finally;

The dance of Williams' anthropomorphic sparrow is "the poem of his existence," that which makes this common bird an uncommon "poetic truth."

In this image, Williams once again draws together the poem and the dance, this time emphasizing their commonality as arts of self-expression. Each art, Williams seems to feel, stirs from somewhere in the blood, in the sensual nature of its creator, conditional upon the ability of the artist to accept and joy in his own instinctual being.

The poem which most extensively and complexly utilizes the music/dance motif is "The Desert Music," and, if one must choose, it seems to be the single most important poem in the Williams canon for grasping the significance that music and dance hold for Williams in relation to poetry. Its scope encompasses all the major nuances of music and dance found in the shorter poems, and, additionally, it is an excellent example of the polyphonic method that Williams used in contrast to his more simply structured, more purely imagistic poems.

"The Desert Music" is initiated by the dance: "--the dance begins: to end about a form."32 In this opening line there is an incipient
metaphorical linking of the dance and the form on the bridge. In the course of the poem the form takes on a symbolic association with the poem itself, and thus the association between the dance and the form on the bridge is extended to include the poem. It is significant that the embryonic shape on the bridge is referred to as a form, a word which stresses the notion of structure. Early in the poem we see the importance of structure in Williams' poetic theory: "Only the poem / Only the counted poem, to an exact measure." The words "counted" and "measure" immediately conjure an association between poetry and the aspect of music which most fascinated Williams: the process of composition by which musical elements—tones, rhythms, tempi—are organized into an organic whole.

The form as it appears on the bridge, however, lacks definition. It is more potential than a form clearly delineated, and this fact serves well to underscore the symbolic association between the shape on the bridge and the poem. The poem is beginning, it is in the process of formation in the poet's mind, as the embryo develops within the womb. Only gradually will it grow and assume the structure of the poem, though the potential of the structure is inherent in its germinal stages. But to assume its ultimate, completed form it must have the ordering nourishment of the poet's imagination, as we will see.

As noted in the line cited above, Williams not only qualifies the poem in structural terms, but the terms he chooses are from musical vocabulary. The words refer, of course, to the musical element of rhythm; and indeed, as this section continues, the poem is explicitly linked with the dance:
Only the counted poem, to an exact measure:
to imitate, not to copy nature, not
to copy nature

NOT, prostrate, to copy nature but a dance! to dance
two and two with him —
sequestered there asleep,
right end up!

Here once again, we meet with the notion of dancing "two and two," encountered earlier in "The Dance." Two elements are needed to make a dance: the physical form and the informing imaginative intelligence which determines the structure of the movements of the physical form. In order for the poet to dance "two and two with him [the shape on the bridge]," the imagination must be set into rhythmic motion. The mind must first "dance with itself," as "The Dance" tells us, structuring the potential materials of the poem into patterns of imagery and movement. All elements of the dance are necessary for its continuation, but there is an emphasis in this image upon the imagination which orders and controls the creation of the poem; without the dance of the imagination, the dance between the poet and the material of the poem in language would be impossible. Thus again, in the image of dancing "two and two," there is a stress on structure and order, on the form and the imaginative control which animates it and gives it life.

The form on the bridge, however, is "motionless"; it is perhaps "a very shriveled old man. / Maybe dead." In such descriptions Williams seems to be projecting his own fears of a shriveling (and maybe dead) capability to write poetry. But the form is most frequently described in embryonic images which suggest birth or coming to life (for Williams, rebirth)—not death. The embryonic form, however, is "sequestered there asleep, / right end up!" The position indicates a breech birth, which
is often associated with birth trauma, and indeed, Williams describes this coming (or return) into poetic life as "an agony of self-realization," which is "bound into a whole / by that which surrounds us." This latter line does not become wholly clear until near the end of the poem when the poet again returns to the image of the embryo:

a child in the womb prepared to imitate life,
warding its life against
a birth of awful promise. The music
guards it, a mucus, a film that surrounds it,
a benumbing ink that stains the sea of our minds -- to hold us off -- shed of a shape close as it can get to no shape,
a music! a protecting music .

The embryonic poem, the germinal idea, then, is protected and sustained, nourished by the music of the imagination, the poetic embryonic fluid which allows the poem to grow and assume its form within the mind. "That which surrounds us," is, as Williams puts it a few lines further on in the poem, the "music of survival," but at the same time it suggests the poet's relationship to environment, to the external world with which the poet interacts through memory and imagination to create form and reality.

Sherman Paul, in his excellent study of "The Desert Music," which he titles The Music of Survival, points out that there are several kinds of dancing or action in Williams' work:

That of coming into contact with the world, that of discovering the particular motions of particular things, and that of creating (inventing, composing) the poem, which is in itself the result of previous actions in the world and an objective representation of them on the plane of the imagination.33

These various types of dancing are prepared for by the mind's activity, as music urges the feet into the dance. The music of the imagination acts upon and transforms the external world and experience in it into a new form, a reality in itself, preparing the conditions for contact. Contact,
all-important for Williams, is exemplified in the dance, which is a vital, rhythmic relationship. The dance, which unfolds its pattern in time, by its nature always a process of becoming, and which demands rhythmic congruence between partners, is an apt symbol of the poet's imaginative relationship to the rhythmic patterns of things in the world. After all, the only way that the poet can imitate nature, can dance "two and two" with his environment, is by "the counted poem, to an exact measure."

Without rhythmic congruence, form, measure, there is neither dance nor poetry, and these things can only be achieved through the superior ordering powers of the imagination in unity with the world in which it moves.

Williams, in "The Desert Music," states two conditions for poetry: first, the poem ought "to imitate, not to copy nature," and second, "the verb calls it [the made poem] into being." These two statements are related and should be considered together (see Chapter I, pp. 11-15). It has been noted that nature, or the external world, is always in process, and that the dance, the metaphor for the imaginative relationship between the poet and the world in the poem, is likewise a process. In language, process is symbolized by and contained in the verb. Discussing the art of writing in "A Beginning on the Short Story (Notes)," Williams says, "It is not to place adjectives, it is to learn to employ the verbs in imitation of nature—so that the pieces move naturally—and watch, often breathlessly, what they do. . . . It is perhaps a transit from adjective (the ideal 'copy') to verb (showing process)."

Williams' designation of the verb as the source of poetry is actually a synecdoche for the kinetic nature of the spoken idiom. While "The Desert Music" is an exception among the poems in the volume of the same name in not employing the triadic line, it does demonstrate Williams'
acute consciousness of rhythmic movement. In the early 1940's, he began to experiment with speech rhythms determined by typographical placement on the page. There is an emphasis on duration, emphasized by extra periods and spaces between words. This is a very visual means of establishing rhythmic patterns; the eye is forced into a sort of rhythmic movement as it follows the split lines and various types of spatial separation on the page. "The Desert Music" is written with this type of rhythmic arrangement, which suggests, in conjunction with the dance imagery, a kind of 'choreographing' of the verbal components on the page. By this means, Williams attempted a poetic structure that allowed him to preserve the transfers of energy, or flow between points of tension, that characterizes speech as well as music and dance, thereby "imitating" the rhythmic structure and movement of nature.

The transformation of perception and experience into the poetic medium is possible only by a process of patterned fixation, the design of which, in its spatial, as well as syntactical, form, creates the semblance of vital, temporal movement. Williams achieves this effect, not only by spatial arrangement, but by juxtaposing a series of present moments selectively drawn from past 'experience.' As Williams' memory of Juárez is shaped in the poem, it is linked with other memories, other concerns; the external landscape is fused to the environment of his own thoughts. The day in Juárez itself is presented episodically, but not in chronological sequence, with the consequence that time is leveled in the surface of the poem, taking on the character of the experiential collage that Richard Macksey describes:

There is no temporal depth to the experience or to the poem. Time past can only be represented spatially, as a collage of juxtaposed presents.
In this temporal as well as spatial construction into an indestructible moment, as well as in the extraordinary tactility of consciousness, Williams' poetry resembles that of a contemporary poet whom he admired and translated, René Char. Both are rooted in the particularities of their environment and moment; both see a vital transfer of energy in the willed compression of time and place into the poetic "object."35

It is precisely because of the comparable transferences of energy within an ordered structure that characterize both music and dance that these arts appealed to Williams as the closest possible analogs in other arts to his conception of the poetic process and what the poem should be.

Poetry which does not achieve this rhythmic transference of energy only secondarily reflects nature—'copies' it—and is dead, which is to say that it has no intrinsic life of its own. Such poetry is like "the law," which gives us nothing but "a corpse wrapped in a dirty mantle." This passage in "The Desert Music" brings to mind Williams' tireless opposition to "the law" handed down by poetic tradition, which he thought based on the "murder and confinement" of language, and his insistence on poetic forms consistent with the energy imperatives of the nature that he sought to imitate. This view of poetic language and form is of primary significance since it is Williams' power to create a vital, self-contained reality in his poetry that is threatened. As he moves in the poem through the desert toward El Paso, the desert becomes an ambiguous metaphor of Williams' creative capacity. The desert is fertile, but only if it gets "water," the life-giving element. Travelling through the desert, Williams is aware of the "music of survival" and is "engulfed" in it. The word "engulfed" suggests an identification between the water, which is necessary for fertility, and the "music of survival," which is the imaginative faculty required to keep Williams' poetic powers alive. This kind of
identification underscores Williams' conviction that the material of the poem is there in the external world, waiting transformation by the imagination into the fertile, experiential analog of nature. As he launches into the experience of Juárez, he attempts to "place myself (in / my nature) beside nature," in other words, to establish within his own imaginative perception a rhythmic pattern congruent with that of the outer world in which he moves so that the dance may begin.

The central section of "The Desert Music" is comprised of Williams' odyssey through Juárez. His movement in the external world of the foreign Mexican city is countered by the recurring theme of his inner apprehension, introduced in the first part of the poem. The intrusion of the poet's inward uncertainty always marks a movement from the outer world to inner mind, from the 'not me' to the 'me.' What is missing is a co-extension between poet and environment, and, indeed, it is the fear of inability to achieve and sustain through creative activity such a co-extension that is at the root of Williams' apprehension.

Penny please! Give me penny please, mister.

Don't give them anything.

. instinctively
one has already drawn one's naked
wrist away from those obscene fingers
as in the mind a vague apprehension speaks
and the music rouses

Let's get in here.
   a music! cut off as
the bar door closes behind us.

The hand of the street urchin reaches out to him, asking for pennies, but at the same time offering contact with the world. And the music, like a recurring basso ostinato, rouses in the poet's mind. The imagination is roused and enticed by the gesture, which, on the imaginative
level of the poem, becomes an invitation to the dance. In Sherman Paul's words, "The imagination thrives on contact, not on withdrawal," and "without contact the dance cannot begin." Williams, however, fearing failure, recoils from contact, declining the dance, and music of the imagination is cut off as he retreats with Floss and his friends into a bar.

Later, in yet another bar, the music is once more roused in the poet's mind by the dance of a stripper, who is, as Williams fears himself, "Some worn-out trouper from / the States." Williams is fascinated as he watches her heavy gyrations and puzzles at his own response. She is not attractive in any usual sense of the term, but she appeals to him because, in Williams' words, "She fits / the music."

This passage, which is central to the poem, is complicated by the contrast of two types of music. One is the "lying music" of the "Indians," "this nauseating prattle about their souls and their loves," which is the music on the literal level that accompanies the stripper's dance. The other is the music that recurs throughout the poem, the music which the stripper "fits." These two types of music are evidently in conflict, but the reason for the contrast is, perhaps, not immediately apparent. Remembering the symbolic function that music has served throughout the poem, one may approach the problem with the premise that the second type of music introduced also bears a relationship to the imagination and poetry. Proceeding from this premise, one of the first questions to follow is why this music (that of the Indians) is "lying" music.

Reaching back to Williams' development as a poet, we recall that his initial poetic efforts were in the romantic, Keatsian tradition, which he afterward rejected in favor of a poetic based on immediate experience and contact with the world. To Williams' imagination, the music of the
Indians represents a poetic tradition opposed to his own. It is "nauseating prattle / about their souls and their loves": it is abstract, sentimental, subjective, and therefore, in Williams' view, "lying." One might object that by rejecting this music Williams is contradicting his own insistence on contact with the world, for on the literal level, this music of the Indians is part of the world. But it must be remembered that it is a music which aims at escape from the world rather than integration with it. Sustained contact with the world with its harshnesses is never easy, and temptation to flight is an impulse to which Williams himself has succumbed. He too has sought "relief from that changeless, endless / inescapable and insistent music." The conflict between the two types of music is Williams' own conflict. He therefore understands, but rejects, any creation based upon a predication of withdrawal, which must always be passive. His attitude is evident in the lines:

What else, Latins, do you yourselves seek but relief! with the expressionless ding dong you dish up to us of your souls and your loves, which we swallow.

The stripper is, in a physical sense, grotesque, but in Williams' perception she manages to transform herself, in her dance, into art. She is in opposition to the music to which she dances: "She / at least knows she's / part of another tune," and "that gives her / one up / one up / following the lying music." Fully cognizant of herself and the environment in which she moves, she has no "lying" illusions and has achieved the co-extension between self and world that is the condition for creative activity which Williams both seeks and avoids. This co-extension is the source of the music which she dances, that other tune of which she is a part.
The question with which Yeats ends his poem, "Among Schoolchildren," "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" is answered for Williams in the form of this "old whore in / a cheap Mexican joint in Juárez." She is the dance as the dance is the music, by virtue of sympathetic rhythm; the rhythms of imagination (or soul), body, and external reality are in congruence. To borrow from the title of another of Williams' poems, she, in her dance, becomes "the world contracted to a recognizable image" and thus is able to "raise to his ear / so sweet a tune, built of such slime."

The world, life and reality are not wholly beautiful, but contain ugliness and distortion as well, and art, for Williams, must take account of the "slime." The image of the dancer corresponds on every plane to Williams' theory of poetry. Her grotesqueness, her candor, her lack of illusion about the world or herself reflect Williams' conviction that life in all its aspects is the proper material of poetry; it must include the "anti-poetic" as well as the sublime. With respect to the poet's relationship to the material of his poems, she demonstrates the necessity for the poet to be attuned to environment and to bring order out of flux by ordered creation—the rhythms and patterns which reflect the necessary co-extension between poet and world.

The embryo figure on the bridge, which both begins and ends "The Desert Music" and which is a symbol of the poem, is potentially a form, but it is described as an "inhuman shapelessness" near the beginning of the poem. "The dance begins: to end about a form," but only if the dancer creates the form within the dance. Or, if Williams, the poet, can create out of the imaginative perception of the chaotic environment in which he moves a structured order which will imitate life and give form to his material. Like the dancer, he must be able to dance "two and two"
with his poetic material, whereby there is no separation between himself, his imagination (the music) and the poem (the dance).

Leaving the strip joint behind, Williams goes to the restaurant where he, Floss and their friends are to have dinner. To get to the dining room they must pass through another bar where there are "two oversize Americans, no / longer young, got up as cowboys," dancing with their "gals." They are all drunk and are only capable of dancing "stumblingly." This dance provides a contrast—and an alternative—to that of the stripper. But there is nothing refreshing to Williams in their display; they do not fit the music, are incapable of being 'in tune.' Their costumes, their drunkenness, their "oblivious[ness] to everything" preclude any co-extension between themselves and the environment and reflect the same need to escape that characterizes the "lying" music which so annoys Williams.

During the dinner conversation, Williams is once again forced into a consideration of himself as poet:

You seem quite normal. Can you tell me? Why does one want to write a poem?

Because it's there to be written.

Oh. A matter of inspiration then?

Of necessity.

Oh. But what sets it off?

This question puts Williams' crisis squarely before him: how to begin, how to enter into the dance that will "end about a form"? And he is forced to an inward admission: "I am that he whose brains / are scattered / aimlessly."
After leaving the restaurant, he is again accosted by the children begging for pennies. This time he gives in: "here! now go away." However, the music once again rouses in his mind as they move back toward the bridge, and again Williams wishes for "relief from that changeless, endless / inescapable and persistent music." But contact has been made, the co-extension has been established, the invitation to the dance, however reluctantly, has been accepted, prepared for by his response to the stripper. Approaching the bridge to cross back over the border, Williams is again reminded of the embryonic form, the blanket-wrapped Mexican asleep earlier on the bridge. In his mind, he must once more confront that "egg-shaped" lump with which, if he is to survive as a poet, he must ultimately dance "two and two," and as he does so, the music overwhelms him:

\[
\text{the music! the} \\
\text{music! as when Casals struck} \\
\text{and held a deep cello tone} \\
\text{and I am speechless}. \\
\]

The music wells out of his imagination to surround him, the sustained—and sustaining—note. There are perhaps several reasons why Williams associates this moment of personal crisis and resolvement with Casals. There was only a seven-year age difference between Casals, who was born, in 1876, and Williams, who was born in 1883. Thus, when "The Desert Music" was written, both men were in their seventies. Williams, the aging poet who is so apprehensive about his ability to sustain creative activity, had long been an admirer of Casals, who had not declined in his art. Casals seems to have "struck and held" his level creativity as Williams wishes to do.
Also, the passage seems to stem from a particular memory in Williams' mind. "As when Casals struck / and held a deep cello tone [my italics]" seems more definite than a merely imagined experience would warrant. Williams is probably remembering a specific performance given by Casals and a particular piece of music to which he reacted strongly and now associates with his present experience. Certainly he had the opportunity; in The Autobiography, he recalls that he and Alfred Stieglitz would "have been to hear Pablo Casals." Unfortunately, he does not give us any indication of the particulars of those occasions, but it is noteworthy that their memory remained in his mind as he wrote The Autobiography, some twenty years after the event. Whatever Williams' associations with Casals or his music, one must agree with Sherman Paul's assessment of the reference. Paul sees it as "associated with the sustenance of the imagination, which it is a function of art to provide," and Williams' "Having now to reaffirm that he is a poet makes him ashamed because he had known and shared that music, and should live in the assurance of its power."38

"The Desert Music" is a poem about the "barriers which keep the feet from the dance"—creative blockage, a short-circuit of the imagination which prevents the poem from moving into motion. In the Prologue to Kora in Hell, Williams says that such barriers "are the same which in a dream paralyze the effort to escape and hold us powerless in the track of some murderous pursuer. Pant and struggle but you cannot move. The birth of the imagination is like waking from a nightmare. Never does the night seem so beneficent."39 By the end of "The Desert Music," the poet wakes from this nightmare of poetic paralysis, rescued by imagination, able to say, "I am a poet! I / am. I am. I am a poet, I reaffirmed,
ashamed." Although in this moment of reaffirmation, Williams faces the "agony of self-realization," a "birth of awful promise," he is sustained by the "music of survival." Having confronted death, he has been revived into poetic life. The music is now sustained, the dance begins as "the verb detaches itself / seeking to become articulate," and Williams is brought again to celebrate the imagination that allows him to meet and dance with the particulars of his world:

And I could not help thinking
of the wonders of the brain that
hears that music and of our
skill sometimes to record it.
FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER V


4. William Carlos Williams, "The Orchestra," *Pictures from Breughel*, p. 80. All subsequent quotations from "The Orchestra" will be taken from this edition.


7. Ibid., p. 166.


12. Williams, Prologue to *Kora in Hell*, p. 47.


14. William Carlos Williams, "Overture to a Dance of Locomotives," *Selected Poems*, pp. 21, 22. All subsequent quotations from "Overture to a Dance of Locomotives" will be taken from this edition.


20 Ibid., p. 270.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.


24 William Carlos Williams, "Introduction to The Wedge," Selected Essays, p. 256.


26 Williams, "Introduction to The Wedge," pp. 256, 257.


33 Sherman Paul, *The Music of Survival, A Biography of a Poem by William Carlos Williams* (Urbana, 1968), p. 70. Sherman Paul's study of "The Desert Music" is a sensitive and beautifully written book which affords the reader a keenly insightful view, not only into the poem itself, but into its sources in Williams' life and understanding of the poetic process. His book is not exclusively concerned with Williams' use of music and dance in "The Desert Music," but his many incisive commentaries on the dynamics of such images have been of inestimable value in the writing of the present study, a debt I herein gratefully acknowledge.

34 William Carlos Williams, "A Beginning on the Short Story: Notes" (1949), rpt. in *Selected Essays*, p. 303.


39 Williams, *Prologue to Kora in Hell*, p. 21.
CHAPTER VI

THE POEMS: STRUCTURAL USES OF MUSIC

Williams' use of music and dance in "The Desert Music" is remarkable in that it exists on every level of the poem, and its function on each level is a reinforcement of its use on every other level. It is seen to exist most obviously on the level of the literal narrative—the music he actually hears, the dances he actually sees—but it exists equally on the imaginative level as it provides a symbolic correlative for aspects of Williams' poetic theory. This dual imagaic function provides a vehicle for linking the imaginative and narrative planes of the poem, and it is especially important as a means of allowing the poem movement from one level to the other as he carries the reader between inner mind and outer world and ultimately achieves, in terms of the poem, the co-extension between self and world which is the primary condition for poetic creation. In its multi-level recurrence, the music/dance motif functions in much the same manner as the multi-voice reappearance of theme in polyphonic music: its use on several levels permits exploration and development of the various potentialities of the themes, while at the same time providing a means of unification between levels.

In terms of technique, Williams has been consistent with his imagery. The rhythms and spatial patterns that he employs are congruent with, indeed, analogous to the aspects of music and dance that make them apt metaphors of his poetic theory and the poem as he conceives it. Like music or the dance, the poem is filled with tensions and resolutions accomplished through visual spacings and groupings which exploit the potential of gestic language.
Finally, musical form provides not only the model for technique, along with the dance, but, as in other poems, for the over-all design of the poem, which in this instance follows the format of the sonata-allegro, or compound-binary, form. The sonata-allegro is a three section form, consisting in an Exposition, Development, and Recapitulation (diagrammed A-B-A). In the first section, the Exposition, the themes are stated, or exposed. In "The Desert Music," the first section does exactly this, exposing the main themes, which concern (1) Williams' basic poetic theory and (2) his apprehension concerning his creative powers. The second section of the poem, which begins with the narrative of the day in Juárez, develops these themes in various ways as they are 'modulated' through the memory of his experiences, thereby corresponding to the second section of the sonata-allegro, in which the themes of the first section are manipulated and developed harmonically, rhythmically, contrapuntally, and so on. The third section of the sonata-allegro, the Recapitulation, marks a return back to a more or less straightforward statement of the themes of the first section, except that all the themes are stated briefly and in the 'home key,' as they are not in the Exposition. With the return back to the bridge and Williams' memory of the shapeless figure encountered on it earlier, he brings the poem back to a restatement of the main imagery and thematic concerns that are found in the beginning section of the poem. There is a change, however, in that there is a sense of resolution, comparable to that accomplished by the return to the 'home key' in the sonata-allegro.

The A-B-A form of the "The Desert Music" was undoubtedly consciously chosen. Williams' awareness of the form is documented clearly enough in
the Prologue to *Kora in Hell: Improvisations*, which he patterned on this musical format:

I have placed the following Improvisations in groups, somewhat after the A.B.A. formula, that one may support the other, clarifying or enforcing perhaps the other's intention.\(^1\)

The form is apparent in many Williams poems, as it is in "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," which is clearly marked in three divisions, followed by a fourth section labeled as a "Coda," a musical passage appearing at the end of a composition, often at the end of a sonata or sonata-allegro section, to give a greater sense of finality.

In "Asphodel," Book I centers upon the relationship between the poet and his wife, to whom the poem is addressed. Love and Death are established as the major thematic concerns, and the primary image patterns of flowers, the sea and the storm emerge. These themes are modulated in Book II as they and the images of Book I are associated through memory with a multiplicity of other images: a visit to the Jungfrau, Granada, the bomb, Homer, Darwin, the voyage of the *Niña*, the *Pinta* and the *Santa Maria*, the fire in the Jockey Club in Buenos Aires which destroyed the priceless Goyas kept there. Book III returns to the marriage relationship. Having considered the implications of love and death on a personal level in Book I and moved to a more universal application of theme and image in Book II, Book III comes home, the poet seeking 'resolution' in forgiveness and the triumph of the capacity for imaginative renewal, including renewal of love. The Coda fixes the ultimate focus of the reader upon the imagination as the cure against the threat of death and the loss of love: "Only the imagination is real! / I have declared it / time without end."\(^2\)
Several poems reveal structural patterns based on either the A-B-A sonata-allegro form just discussed or on other musical forms. An obvious example is "January Morning," which is labeled as a "suite." A musical suite is a group of two or more independent compositions which are compatible yet sufficiently different to benefit by contrast. They may share thematic material or not, but generally all movements are in a dance/rhythm. Williams' "January Morning" is a group of fifteen short poems, each a miniature vignette of winter morning in New Jersey and New York. Each focuses upon some brief scene peculiar to early hours and morning light to bear out the poet's first 'movement' discovery "that most of / the beauties of travel are due to / the strange hours we keep to see them: // the domes of the Church of / the Paulist Fathers in Weehawken / against a smoky dawn -- the heart stirred -- / are beautiful as Saint Peters / approached after years of anticipation."3

Some of Williams' 'suite' poems, like "January Morning," are thematically related in their component poems. "Shadows" and "Paul" are similarly constructed. Other poems that follow the 'suite' format, however, reveal little connection between their movement-like units, as is the case with "Some Simple Measures in the American Idiom and the Variable Foot," or the relationship is more mechanical than thematic, as in "Calypsos." The three poem units of "Calypsos" are related rhythmically, employing a type of calypso beat as the title might imply, and are only slightly further related by the words, "love," which is common to the first and second poems, and "zippy-zappy," which appears in both the second and third. While Williams demonstrates considerable flexibility in his adaption of the 'suite' format, he is usually consistent in retaining the dance-like rhythm associated with the musical suite,
which is consistent with his conception of the variable foot. His poetic rhythms are established in much the same way as music rhythms—by balance of sound and silences, by repetition and emphasis. "Perpetuum Mobile" offers an excellent example of a swingy rhythm achieved through repetition:

To all the girls
of all ages
who walk up and down on
the streets of this town
silent or gabbing
putting
their feet down
one before the other
one two
one two they
pause sometimes before
a store window and
reform the line
from here
to China everywhere
back and
forth and back and forth
and back and forth

Still other poems, including "The Clouds" and "The Orchestra," the images of which were discussed earlier in the preceding chapter, are based on another musical form, that of the sonata, the form of symphonies and concertos. "The Orchestra" has been discussed by Linda Wagner as a symphonic construction, and she has noted the division of the poem into movement-like sections, each characterized by a tempo corresponding to those of standard symphonic movements. Similar tempo identifications may be made with the four divisions of "The Clouds." In keeping with Wagner's observation, the first section of "The Orchestra" does seem to be an allegro tempo, contrasting with the slower adagio of lento pace of the second section. The difference in tempo is readily apparent by
comparing the ending triadic line of the first section—"Love is that common tone / shall raise his fiery head / and sound his note"—with the conclusion of the second section:

But the year
in a half-reluctant mood
stretches
. . and yawns.

The third section enters, a lively allegretto tempo:

and so the banked violins
in three tiers
enliven the scene,
pizzicato. 6

The three tiers of banked violins are mirrored in the three tiers of the triadic line, which, like the music it recounts, moves at a quickened pace. It is typical of Williams' technique in his later career to make the poem happen rather than simply say by fitting the line to the rhythmic necessities of the poetic object. This method is especially appropriate when the theme is cast in musical images, as in "The Orchestra," since in music there is no distinction between the theme and its structure. In music, the theme is its structure. Based on the evidence of the poetry, a similar fusion of content and structure was one of Williams' primary aims when he set a musical standard for poetic construction.

Finally, the fourth section of the poem, as in the symphony, returns to an allegro or allegro moderato tempo, and the themes are restated in their final form.

It should be remembered, though, that poetry, however it may draw upon musical sources, is ultimately a separate art, and while one may readily discern musical parallels in the form, they are likely, of necessity, to be only loosely analogous. Thus, while a particular poem such as "The Orchestra" certainly follows a symphonic organization as
Wagner's analysis shows, it may, at the same time, borrow certain structural principles equally from other musical forms. Such is the case with "The Orchestra," which also bears certain resemblances to the fugue.

Counterpoint, while it may be employed in other forms, is the very essence of the fugue. The concept of counterpoint is conspicuous in Williams' writing, from whistling "a contrapuntal melody to my own fugue" in *Kora in Hell* to dancing "to a measure / contrapuntally" in *Paterson*. 'Counterpoint' is generally synonymous with 'polyphony,' and refers to the compositional technique of superimposing two or more voices. As the voices are heard, simultaneously, the effect is richly textural.

Ezra Pound, writing in *Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony*, states that verbal rhythm, which is monolinear, "can form contrapunto only against its own echo, or against a developed expectancy." It is true that, in a rhythmic sense, poetic form does not allow for simultaneity. Only one rhythmic line can be sounded at a time. However, Williams achieves a definitely contrapuntal, or polyphonic, effect through his handling of images. Each of the three main images, nature, the orchestra, mankind, is a version of the primary theme: the need to bring order from diversity. Williams suggests his use of contrapuntal technique in the first line of the poem as he begins, "The precise counterpart . . . ." With these words, he sets up the entry of the first voice, which states the first version of the theme (known in the terminology of the fugue as the subject), "a cacophony of bird calls," to be successively countered by the second version of the theme (known as the counter-subject), the "woodwinds / clarinet and violins." Finally, the third voice enters, stating yet another version of the theme, humanity. All three themes stated, they begin to interweave more intricately, almost in the manner
of a *stretto* passage, in which the voices enter in more rapid succession, creating almost a 'tumbling' effect:

Ah, ah and ah!
together, unattuned
seeking a common tone,

Love is that common tone
shall raise his fiery head
and sound his note.

The "three tiers" that "enliven the scene" are also the banked tiers of the three voices, more and more intertwining. Williams himself explains the technique he employs:

> For a short
> memory or to
> make the listener listen
> the theme is repeated
> stressing a variant:
> it is a principle of music
> to repeat the theme. Repeat
> and repeat again,
> as the pace mounts.

The technique described by Williams is that of the fugue. It is almost impossible for one to listen to a fugue and not recognize the theme or dominant motif, it is repeated so frequently, often with variations, but always recognizable. And it is imperative that Williams' theme not escape the reader, since it bears on his very survival.

The deftness of Williams' handling of music and dance images bears witness to the fact that the identification he makes between these temporal arts and the poetic process is not arbitrary, but is based upon an intimate knowledge of their intrinsic natures. And it is this thoroughness of understanding that enables him to incorporate the music/dance motif on so many levels and exploit the points of interrelatedness between this motif, the theory of the poem and the poem itself. Williams' power as a poet is, in large part, due to his sense
of process, the effect of immediacy that rises out of imaginative integra-
tion with the world, the habit of mind by which he sees idea and object
as one. Music and dance, in their dynamic structures, embody these
characteristics and are, therefore, for Williams, vital analogs for the
conditions by which poetry comes into life. It is out of this conviction
that Williams speaks when he says at the end of Paterson:

    We know nothing and can know nothing  .
    but
    the dance, to dance to a measure
    contrapuntally,
    Satyricaly, the tragic foot. 10
FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER VI


7. Williams, Kora in Hell, p. 34.


10. Williams, Paterson, Book V, p. 239.
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