William Carlos Williams's "Spring and All": The Oneness of Experience

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WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAM'S SPRING AND ALL:

THE ONENESS OF EXPERIENCE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

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Master of Arts

by

Molly E. Jones

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify and contextualize the strategies that William Carlos Williams uses in the prose sections of Spring and All to free American writing from what he sees as its enslavement to the European tradition, and, thereby, to express his particular brand of twentieth-century American modernism.

Each of the prose sections of Spring and All, the introduction, numbered chapters, and unnumbered prose parts, is analyzed in relation to the others, as well as in relation to the work of selected European, expatriate-American, and other American modernists. Particular emphasis is placed on verbal and stylistic strategies Williams employs to create this genre-defying text which explores the implications of imagism as Ezra Pound defined it. Spring and All, also consonant with Williams's other experimental texts of the 1920s, demonstrates this concern.

This study concludes that the dynamic prose of Spring and All, which charts a series of particular explorations of time, landscape, and the contemporary American moment, is William Carlos Williams's strongest response to the challenges he saw facing the American writer.
WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS'S SPRING AND ALL:

THE ONENESS OF EXPERIENCE
William Carlos Williams's 1923 modernist manifesto *Spring and All* is a plural text characterized by irregularly alternating prose parts and poems of varied lengths. Beginning with several pages of prose and ending with a poem, *Spring and All* is comprised of an introduction; six numbered chapters, 19, IIIX [sic], VI, 2, XIX, and I; ten unnumbered prose sections; twenty-six numbered poems, I-VI and VIII-XXVII; and a single unnumbered poem. The text is continually abrupt; the contrast evident at the "edges" where prose and poetry meet calls attention to the double nature of the text and to the style of each genre. Foreground and background in this text continually and rapidly change places as Williams moves from prose to poetry to prose, as well as from word to word. The effect of this dynamic makes *Spring and All* an experience of the simultaneous. The same may be said of other texts Williams published in the 1920s; *Kora in Hell: Improvisations* (1920) and *The Descent of Winter* (1928) are both double-natured as well. The former is comprised of a series of numbered prose improvisations, many of which are followed by prose commentaries that are made distinct from the improvisations by italic type. In the latter, Williams presents an admixture of poetry and prose both of which are marked by dates. The double format is a characteristic Williams form that predicts his collage-like epic *Paterson* (1946-1958). The texts he created in the 1920s, especially *Spring and All*, show that Williams is actively interested in genre and the relationship between genre and words. His poetics ultimately centered on words, Williams is rooted in the brand of twentieth century American modernism which aimed at making an absolute break with the past. For Williams, achieving such a break means freeing words from their "enslavement" to certain specified historical meanings and associations (*The Embodiment of Knowledge* 143). In *Spring and All*, Williams annihilates the European heritage of English by creating a New World language, a language that is "grounded...on a very slippery piece of territory"--the elusive and evanescent moment (Breslin 10).
In writing about *Spring and All*, Williams's critics have generally given the lion's share of attention to the poetry, supporting their claims by referring to the ideas expressed in the prose.\(^2\) Perhaps because poetry is worthier in our generic value system, critics have assigned the prose of this text a subordinate status, usually neglecting or glossing over the numbered chapters especially, which differ markedly from the unnumbered prose sections following them. The style of Williams's prose in all of the chapters is unusually unprosaic; it violates both generic and verbal proprieties, thereby answering the modernist charge to "make it new." In the introduction, the opening prose chapters, and many of the remaining prose sections, Williams deliberately uses various linguistic and stylistic strategies to disappoint conventional expectations of prose in order to create an immediate American writing.

Williams begins his subversion of conventional prose in *Kora in Hell: Improvisations*, which "sets up a north"\(^3\) (to use a Williams expression), for approaching the prose of *Spring and All*. In his insightful *Poet's Prose*, Stephen Fredman comments at length on Williams's unorthodox prose in *Kora*, especially his "detachment and apotheosizing of individual words" (16) in constructing paratactic, rather than hypotactic, sentences. As Williams does, Fredman questions the conventional understanding of a sentence as a complete thought.

Let us say that the sentence enacts a plot. A hypotactic sentence fulfills our normal plot expectations: Whether it begins at the beginning or *in medias res*..., there is a logical connection and subordination among the grammatical elements of the sentence plot and an outcome in which the plot reaches a denouement or completion. Like any familiar plot, the hypotactic sentence can be diagrammed hierarchically; it has a logical order. The plot of the paratactic sentence works by a continual sidewise displacement; its wholeness is dependent upon the fraternal bonds of a theoretically endless proliferation of familial resemblances rather than the dynastic bonds of filiation. Thus the
conscious sentence writer can subvert, deny, or replace the authority of the hypotactic sentence through the alogical plot and the aural structure of the paratactic sentence (30-31).

To discuss the discontinuity of Williams's prose in Kora, Fredman invents the term generative sentence, which is a suggestive paratactic construction characterized by repeated beginnings. Williams's generative sentence "proceeds by the method of discovery" (33), asking the reader to start over with each word and to discover possible meanings as the sentence moves forward. The example about which Fredman writes at length is "Beautiful white corpse of night actually!" (Imaginations 38). Appearing together, the terms corpse, night, and actually disturb conventional perceptions of both meaning (corpse of night) and syntax (actually not clearly modifying any word). In Fredman's view, the prose Williams creates in Kora generates multiple possibilities, word by word.

In The Poetics of Indeterminacy, Marjorie Perloff agrees with Fredman that Williams succeeds in "eliminating [from Kora] such traditional features as plot, argument, linear continuity and connectives" (122). In addition, she observes and demonstrates that in these improvisations Williams repeats words or phrases in a "series of altered contexts so that meanings are always shifting ground ever so slightly" (118). Although arguing that Kora is unconventional prose, Perloff concludes that Williams is "not yet certain how to bring 'Kora' out of her hell" (122); by this witty claim, she suggests that Williams has more to do to subvert the conventions of written language. It is in the poems of Spring and All that she sees Williams achieving a break with the past, his language therein marked by a "calculated indeterminacy" resulting from "word echoes" which resound in a complex "metonymic network" (129, 133, 137).4

In Spring and All, Williams acknowledges that Spring and All is an extension of his convention-subverting efforts in Kora, which he looks back on as partially faulty.

The virtue of the improvisations is their placement in a world of new values--
their fault is their dislocation of sense, often complete....Now I have come to
a different condition. I find that the values there discovered can be extended.
I find myself extending the understanding to the work of others and to other
things--I find that there is work to be done in the creation of new forms, new
names for experience and that "beauty" is not related to "loveliness" but to a
state in which reality plays a part (CP 1: 203-204).

In creating Spring and All, Williams creates a text which manifests its principle more
profoundly than Kora does. The primary idea shaping Spring and All is the creation, in
writing, of new forms. In discussing and demonstrating this principle, Williams develops
some of the ideas in Ezra Pound's essay "A Few Don'ts," an essay later restated in "A
Retrospect." Although he had, in his poetry, been exploring the implications of Pound's
definition of an image since 1914-1915, in Spring and All Williams seeks to sustain the
instantaneous image of which Pound writes:

An "Image" is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an
instant of time....It is the presentation of such a "complex" instantaneously which
gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and
space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence
of the greatest works of art (Make It New 336).

Such a definition poses problems for writers creating longer poems, longer than Pound's
two-line "In a Station of the Metro" (1916), for example. While Pound and Eliot found
other ways to explore the issue of sustaining the instantaneous, in Spring and All
Williams invents new (and longer) forms, both poetry and prose, which reflect Pound's
definition. Because prose is conventionally considered to be ongoing discourse flowing
toward an ever-deferred meaning, to write instantaneous prose Williams must face the
challenge of keeping its "teleology...entirely in the present" (Fredman 14). Williams
meets that challenge; Spring and All is a series of instantaneous complexes.
Newness for Williams, however, is more than a matter of time and space; he is intent on creating an American modernist text, free of what he considers to be the limitations of the European tradition and free of the "dislocation of sense" characterizing Kora. His condemnation of such a tradition is acerbically expressed in the "Prologue" to Kora; he describes the expatriates Eliot and Pound as "men content with the connotations of their masters" (Imaginations 24). Discontented with such, Williams sarcastically mocks the praise given to Eliot:

But the summit of United States achievement, according to Mr. J[epson]--who can discourse on Catullus--is that very beautiful poem of Eliot's, "La Figlia che Piange": just the right amount of everything drained through, etc., etc., etc., etc., the rhythm delicately studied and--IT CONFORMS! ergo, here we have "the very fine flower of the finest spirit of the United States" (Imaginations 25).

Williams not only considers Eliot's celebrated poem to be derivative, but also to be un-American, as this passage makes clear. How could the "finest spirit" of the United States be an expatriate who creates that which "CONFORMS"? Williams takes to heart Pound's terms freedom and liberation, avoiding in Spring and All the "dislocation" that he thought made Kora faulty. In Spring and All Williams captures American speech, including its idioms and colloquialisms, and thereby achieves the "natural sound" Pound speaks of in "A Few Don'ts."

From its title to its final poem, Spring and All is located in America; Williams begins with the inclusive expression and all, common in American speech, and he ends with the indigenously North American black-eyed Susan. Liberating himself from the pull of European tradition, Williams is not "satisfied by loans" (Selected Essays 157), but rather he is interested in a new language in the New World. In a 1934 essay, "The American Background," Williams asserts the importance of location, specifically America, and the disciplined use of perception and language.
They saw birds with rusty breasts and called them robins. Thus, from the start, an America of which they could have had no inkling drove the first settlers upon their past. They retreated for warmth and reassurance to something previously familiar. But at a cost. For what they saw were not robins. They were thrushes only vaguely resembling the rosy, daintier English bird. Larger, stronger, and in the evening of a wilder, lovelier song, actually here was something the newcomers had never in their lives before encountered. Blur. Confusion....

...Strange and difficult, the new continent induced a torsion in the spirits of the first settlers, tearing them between the old and the new. And at once a split occurred in that impetus which should have carried them forward as one into the dangerous realities of the future.

They found that they had not only left England but that they had arrived somewhere else: at a place whose pressing reality demanded not only a tremendous bodily devotion but as well, and more importantly, great powers of adaptability, a complete reconstruction of their most intimate cultural make-up, to accord with the new conditions. The most hesitated and turned back in their hearts at the first glance.

Meanwhile, nostalgically, erroneously, a robin (Selected Essays 134). Williams follows this story with the claim that "a new language might have sprung up with the new spectacle and the new conditions, but even genius, if it existed, did not make one" (Selected Essays 134). In Spring and All, a New World language springs up, for Williams neither hesitates nor turns back in his heart. He repeatedly manifests his conviction that American art must be situated in America, "embracing everything involved, climate, geographic position, relative size, history, other cultures--as well as the character of its sands, flowers, minerals and the condition of knowledge within its borders" (Selected Essays 157).
THE INTRODUCTION

the harvest already planted (CP 1: 186, Poem III)

To read the introduction of *Spring and All* is to experience disorientation; its transitory surface is both fast-paced and actively fragmented. Musings, quotations, questions, exclamations, assertions, and denials mercureally mix, marked by a panoply of punctuation. Although Williams's tone is definite, even impassioned, the introduction is characterized by the linguistic uncertainty inherent in the presence of pronouns without antecedents, sentences and paragraphs meeting others without transitions, and oxymoronic terms. Williams first attacks traditional European writers for constructing "a constant barrier between the reader and his consciousness of immediate contact with the world" (CP 1: 177). Next, he questions ironically the attacks that have been leveled at his writing. Subsequently, he announces what he most cares about in writing, then returns to expand his original attack on traditionalists, and, finally, focuses on the force generating *Spring and All*:

To refine, to clarify, to intensify that eternal moment in which we alone live there is but a single force--the imagination (CP 1: 178).

The succinct centerpiece of this assertion, *eternal moment*, is the most important term in the introduction, for Williams claims boldly, "And this moment is the only thing in which I am at all interested" (CP 1: 178). *Eternal moment* both states and demonstrates Williams's theme, immediate writing. Immediate writing is writing that does not stand between the reader and the world; it is not imitative of, and, therefore, dependent on, previous texts or nature. Instead, immediate writing is a new reality itself, situated in the New World. Because Williams is an American writing in America for an American audience (although he published *Spring and All* in France), his text is aurally immediate as well. The word *immediate*, as Williams uses it, means "existing independently"
(unique), and "present without intervening space" (here), and "existing in the present time" (now). The term eternal moment states the idea of immediacy because it expresses, simultaneously, indefinite duration (eternal) and definite transience (moment). Eternal moment also performs the idea of immediacy because the differences between the two apposed words are blurred. To experience their meaning necessitates entering the realm of the imagination, which provides "unity of understanding" (CP 1: 206). In this one paratactic term, eternal moment, Williams encapsulates the essence of Spring and All; he intends to create a novel text disrupting traditional expectations, and he shows the primary syntactic means by which he will achieve that end.

As it is in Kora in Hell, Williams's syntactic strategy in Spring and All is primarily paratactic; his prose lacks the rigidity of hypotactic construction. Instead, he subverts conventional notions of logically ordered thought carried by the linear progression of hypotactic sentences by writing a flexible, protean prose. The prose of Spring and All is characterized by "the fraternal bonds of a theoretically endless proliferation of familial resemblances," rather than by authoritative, "dynastic bonds of filiation" (Fredman 31). The difference between Williams's parataxis in Kora and in Spring and All lies in the size of its movement. The quick, word-by-word "skirmishes" of Kora (as Fredman calls them) become larger movements of the imagination in Spring and All. In other words, the parataxis within the sentences of the former text becomes parataxis among sentences, paragraphs, and whole prose sections in the latter. Williams comments on the enlargement characterizing Spring and All:

Now I have come to a different condition. I find that the values there discovered [in the improvisations] can be extended. I find myself extending the understanding to the work of others and to other things--

I find that there is work to be done in the creation of new forms, new names for experience...now works of art...must give not the sense of frustration but a sense of completion, of actuality...
enlargement... (CP 1: 203-204)

By such larger movement, Williams avoids in Spring and All the "dislocation of sense, often complete" he finds faulty in Kora. The organic generative sentence Fredman discusses in relation to Kora is enlarged to an organic generative text in Spring and All.

If his writing in Spring and All is consistently to communicate the new and the now, Williams must abandon conventional indicators of, and strategies for, beginning and ending. He must find the means by which to create the experience of being perpetually in medias res. When and where the conventional hallmarks of commencement and conclusion would be, Williams presents varied techniques to create his immediate writing. Beginnings and endings occur so rapidly and frequently in Spring and All that they seem to be simultaneous; they are, therefore, free of their usual function as a means of orientation. The effect is that the text is continually abrupt; the experience is one of being picked up and set down in the midst of things, repeatedly. To create and perpetuate the present, Williams destroys an absolute sense of either past or future.

The opening and closing lines of the introduction blur the distinction between beginning and ending, as each is simultaneously suggestive of both positions. The first sentence, "If anything of moment results--so much the better" (CP 1: 177), is not indented; it appears to begin in the midst of things. Moreover, Williams focuses attention from the start on his results. The indefiniteness of the words if, anything, so, and much makes the beginning of this text uncertain and, thus, makes beginning itself unclear. The introduction's final sentence, likewise, disappoints conventional expectations: "And so, together, as one, we shall begin" (CP 1: 178). Although And so indicates conclusion, the last word begin denotes starting. By so confusing beginnings with endings and vice versa, Williams creates, formally, a temporal fusion.

To intensify the experience of a permanent present, Williams also manipulates mechanical aspects of writing, specifically capitalization and punctuation, the
conventions governing sentence beginnings and endings. He does not consistently observe, for example, the common practice of capitalizing the first word of a sentence, and upper case letters erupt in the midst of sentences, as in the following:

If there is an ocean it is here. Or rather, the whole world is between: Yesterday tomorrow, Europe, Asia, Africa...

Rhyme you may perhaps take away but rhythm! why there is none in your work whatever (CP 1: 177).

Both the capitalized *Yesterday* and the uncapitalized *why* enact the sense of being in the midst of immediate writing. Williams achieves the same effect using punctuation, as the last line of the introduction shows:

And so, together, as one, we shall begin (CP 1: 178).

With commas, Williams fashions a rapid series of separate moments, each of which contributes to a unique, four-part expression of unity and simultaneity.

These formal machinations are one of the means by which Williams sustains the instantaneousness Ezra Pound wrote of in "A Few Don'ts." Pound himself explores the implications of imagism, using similar strategies to confound beginnings and endings in "Canto I." "Canto I" begins with "And then went down to the ship..." and ends with "So that:" (1, 76). Beginning, literally, *in medias res* with a conjunction and the second term of a compound verb, Pound achieves a timelessness that endures through the poem's end, a colon signifying that something will follow. What is contained within the conflated beginnings and ends of Williams's and Pound's texts, however, bespeaks their divergent poetics. Pound's poetics are international; "Canto I," rendering anew Odysseus's catabasis, includes Homeric features, Greek names, and Latin phrases. Williams's poetics, however, are American; the introduction to *Spring and All*, denigrating European tradition, is written in conversational American English.

To enhance the *eternal moment* of his introduction to *Spring and All*, Williams amplifies the experience of simultaneity, a quality also characterizing *Kora in Hell*. 
Because an early drawing by Stuart Davis presented "an impressionistic view of the simultaneous" expressing, "as close as possible [his idea] of the Improvisations," Williams chose it to be the frontispiece for that text (I Wanted to Write a Poem 29). In Spring and All, Williams purposely invents expressions comprised of words which, as conventionally understood, pull in opposite directions. He yokes terms disparate in meaning into various grammatical relationships. Doing so, he creates contemporaneous experiences. For example, the highly self-reflexive term positively repellent (CP 1: 177) expresses both attraction and repulsion. Positively repellent also describes itself, as well as Williams's overall style. Words, as he uses them, attract and repel each other: annihilation of life, distracts the attention, and We are one (CP 1: 177, 178, 178).

Making sense of these expressions requires viewing them through the imagination by which the eternal moment of them becomes reality. In places, Williams's positively repellent terms are separated by a distance greater than that in the examples above. Six paragraphs, for example, separate constant barrier from its "other," vaporous fringe (CP 1: 177, 178). Such separations necessitate going back and forth and back again to determine the reality Williams is presenting in this text, and they reflect the enlargement made possible by the imagination. By employing these syntactic arrangements, Williams acts as a "composing/—antagonist" (CP 1: 186), to borrow a term from one of his poems. Throughout Spring and All, Williams composes expressions antagonistic to convention, yet meaningful in the imagination.

Awareness of Williams's use of unconventional techniques to intensify the experience of immediate writing may also aid his reader in experiencing the full impact of the introduction, which moves by advances and retreats, rather than linearly, as practiced by classical rhetoricians. Williams does not present a step-by-step argument with transitions to make its parts cohere. Instead, he keeps his text always on edge, always in the present, as he addresses the subject of art, specifically writing. So immediate is the introduction that bits and pieces must be taken from various places to get the whole
meaning. About writing, Williams asserts that nearly all of it, from its advent to the present, "if not all art, has been especially designed to keep up the barrier between sense and the vaporous fringe which distracts the attention from its agonized approaches to the moment" (CP 1: 178). Agonized, indeed! Writing has been a "beautiful illusion" standing solidly as a "constant barrier" or immovable impediment to its audience's "consciousness of immediate contact with the world" (CP 1: 178, 177, 177). Therefore, Williams condemns writing for being mediate and secondary, as remote and massively obstructive as "the tower of the church at Seville, the Parthenon" (CP 1: 177). These references also suggest a European cultural snobbery which Williams counters with his more democratic, less pretentious American prose. Intent on doing away with the "constant barrier" in his own writing, Williams embraces the imagination as the means to achieving immediacy in writing; the imagination makes the written eternal moment both possible and understandable, for words may "occur in liberation by virtue of [the imagination's] processes" (CP 1: 234). No longer must words be used as they have been in the past; they are cleaned, freed, by the imagination so that new meanings and forms are created by them. Nor must artist and audience be separated by a mediate art; now they will be "locked in a fraternal embrace" in the imagination (CP 1: 178). In his introduction, Williams announces his intention to create imaginatively immediate and American writing; the introduction is, itself, an example of this idea. Williams has prepared, therefore, for the experience of the remaining pages of Spring and All: "the harvest already planted."
THE NUMBERED CHAPTERS

Nobody

to say it--
Nobody to say: pinholes (CP 1: 187, Poem IV)

The theme Williams states and performs in the introduction is everywhere evident in his numbered chapters. Immediate writing, however, must be consistently characterized by things uniquely present. In these chapters Williams further departs prosaic orthodoxy, introducing new things as he concentrates on doing the groundwork necessary to prepare for spring. Ironically, spring, that very traditional metaphor for newness, is the vehicle by which Williams subverts tradition. He does so by imaginatively creating anew spring itself. From the fanciful annihilation of all that has gone before in the European tradition to the first appearance of life in his unconventional and American spring, Williams invents myriad eternal moments.

Newness is present in the numbers Williams assigns his chapters. The first is "CHAPTER 19" followed by IIIX [sic], VI, 2, XIX, and I. Such section designations indicate being situated in the midst of the text because they do not begin at 1 or I, nor do they progress by regular increments to form a numerically sequential series as they do in Kora. Although the improvisations are numbered sequentially in twenty-seven sections, Williams's "patterning denies the importance of numerical progression" because of the "recurrence of threes...matching the cyclical themes of the work" (MacGowan 65). What is new in Spring and All is Williams's deliberateness in disrupting expectations of beginning and sequence; he has stripped the very designators of order and progression of their functions. As has been noted by many commentators on Spring and All, these chapter numbers have a Dadaist randomness about them, but they also seem purposefully chosen. The numbers 19, 6, and 2 are unencumbered by traditional associations, such as adhere to the numbers 3 and 7, for example. Although 13 and 1 are traditionally significant, Williams cleans each of them of such significance; he reverses and overturns
13 (III), and he places 1 (I) in the final position among the numbered chapters in the midst of the text. By these alterations, he makes both 13 and 1 novelties and takes "a step over from the profitless engagements of the arithmetical" (CP 1: 210). In The Descent of Winter (1928), Williams uses both dates and numbers to designate sections of this journal-like text. The dates progress from 9/27 to 12/18; however, they do not do so regularly. Instead, they communicate spontaneity, for Williams does not write an entry for each day, nor does he write only one entry for a day. There are no passages, for example, dated 10/24, 10/25, or 10/26. There is one paragraph dated 10/27, which is followed by four entries of varying lengths and forms dated 10/28. Because the dates reveal only the month and the day, they are not firmly fixed in the progress of time traditionally expressed by years before and after the birth of Christ.

The initial experience in CHAPTER 19 of Spring and All is Williams's creative destruction of the "constant barrier" that he argues European traditionalists have erected between the reader and the world. This obstacle to newness must be destroyed for the imagination to regain its power to create a unique and immediate spring. Spring, to Williams, is not merely the seasonal recurrence of life emerging after winter; he calls this concept "perfect plagiarism" (CP 1: 181), for traditional writers have written about spring in the same manner over and over again. His spring is a new and American occurrence, "experience dynamized into reality" (CP 1: 220), made possible by the creative, galvanic force of the imagination, the agent which kills "the English, the Irish, the French, the Germans, the Italians and the rest" (CP 1: 179).

Linking words with outlaw appropriateness, Williams begins CHAPTER 19 with an unindented, uncapitalized sentence recalling the introduction: "o meager times, so fat in everything imaginable!" (CP 1: 178). To praise the power of the imagination, he violates the proprieties of meager with the incongruous fat. So connected, these antithetical adjectives provide a perspective of simultaneous deprivation and fullness; his exclamation may mean that the great potential power (fat) of the imagination has been
limited (*meager*) by what writers have traditionally done. To make the imagination predominant and to make the world anew, Williams proposes the following:

The imagination, intoxicated by prohibitions, rises to drunken heights to destroy the world. Let it rage, let it kill. The imagination is supreme. To it all our works forever, from the remotest past to the farthest future, have been, are and will be dedicated. To it alone we show our wit by having raised in its honor as monument not the least pebble. To it now we come to dedicate our secret project: the annihilation of every human creature on the face of the earth. This is something never before attempted. None to remain... Then at last will the world be made anew (**CP 1**: 179).

Most notable in this passage is Williams's connection of *intoxicated* with *prohibitions*, which, when considered together, create a moment characterized by both unchecked enthusiasm and restraint—a new moment. It is an American moment, too, for Williams wittily alludes to Prohibition (1920-1933), which led, ironically, to lots of illegal intoxication and drunkenness.

Having empowered the imagination with the words *intoxicated by prohibitions*, Williams has converted the restraints of tradition into limitations that excite newness. The last, lengthy sentence of CHAPTER 19 shows his own excitement, presenting a crescendo of *eternal moments*, created largely by his diction and syntax:

With what magnificent explosions and odors will not the day be accomplished as we, the Great One among all creatures, shall go about contemplating our self-prohibited desires as we promenade them before the inward review of our own bowels—et cetera, et cetera, et cetera... and it is spring—both in Latin and Turkish, in English and Dutch, in Japanese and Italian; it is spring by Stinking River where a magnolia tree, without leaves, before what was once a farmhouse, now a ramshackle home for millworkers, raises its straggling branches of ivorywhite flowers (**CP 1**: 180).
The overall effect of this passage results from the simultaneity of the disparate. *Great One* (singular) is enclosed by *we* and *all creatures* (both plural); restraint and impulse are linked in *self-prohibited desires*; display (*promenade*) contacts introspection (*inward review*). Under the aegis of the imagination, the "oneness of experience" (CP 1: 194) finds expression. Even in the repetition of *et cetera* this is true. By thrice repeating that term, Williams freshens, rather than reinforces, its meaning; also, with self-conscious irony, he deflates and mocks his own rhetorical excess in the immediately preceding clause. Traditionally, *et cetera* suggests the absolute, for though denoting that there is more, it is, itself, the final word. Williams subverts this convention, diminishing the term's finality by repetition, which is also, possibly, another means by which he both mocks the mimetic nature of traditional writing and suggests that he will continue subverting it with the new. Williams does just what he indicates he will, for following this triple repetition is the first occurrence of the word *spring* in *Spring and All*.

In the context for the debut of *spring*, Williams communicates that *spring*, for him, simultaneously signifies linguistic and seasonal newness. He calls attention to language in his list of languages—Latin, Turkish, English, Dutch, Japanese, and Italian. He may also be subtly attacking the texts of "Ezra and Eliot," whose work he considers to be "rehash, repetition" of "Verlaine, Baudelaire, Maeterlinck" as well as "cribbing from the Renaissance, Provence, and the modern French" (*Imaginations* 24). In *Spring and All*, spring occurs endlessly on paper, in lines or sentences forming its new reality and in words erupting as discreet verticalities from the horizon of every typed line, as plants do from the ground. Each of the expressions Williams constructs, as he does *intoxicated by prohibitions*, emphasizes separateness on a unified horizontal line. Absent are the derivative details codified in conventional renderings of spring. Williams presents a river named Stinking apposed to a fragrant magnolia, and a decayed farmhouse juxtaposed to the freshness of ivorywhite blossoms. His spring is not a description in which "words
adhere to certain objects, and have the effect on the sense of oysters, or barnacles" (CP 1: 234). Instead, it is a new picture-creation of spring, "all a unity" (CP 1: 198). In his creation, Williams achieves eternal moment by shifting his focus rapidly so that the foreground and background are confounded. Stinking River gives way to the magnolia tree, which gives way to the farmhouse, which gives way to the home, which gives way to the tree's branches, and, ultimately, to its flowers. Rapidly overlapping things, Williams simultaneously shows change and endurance; all of the images he presents in this clause are both foreground and background, and, therefore, they are always present together.

Moreover, in diction and phrasing, this final clause of CHAPTER 19 sounds new, like the poems that appear later in Spring and All. If arranged differently on the page, that is, if recast as poetry, these lines could join the twenty-seven poems of the text:

- it is spring
- by Stinking River
- a magnolia tree
- without leaves
- before
- what was once
- a farmhouse
- now ramshackle
- home for millworkers

- raises its
  - straggling
  - branches of ivorywhite
  - flowers

Compare such a presentation with Williams's often anthologized Poem XXII:

- so much depends
- upon
- a red wheel
- barrow
glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens (CP 1: 224)

Each of these word pictures presents a series of moments contributing to the effect of simultaneity. Expressing relationships among things, Williams foregrounds prepositions, which are conventionally subordinate to meaning-carrying nouns and verbs. In the former example, from the end of CHAPTER 19, before is the crucial term; Williams uses it to indicate both time and place. The ramshackle home used to be a farmhouse, and the tree stands in front of that structure. In Poem XXII, beside functions similarly. The poem creates a place in which the wheelbarrow and the chickens stand in apposition; however, the words wheel/barrow and white/chickens are physically separated by glazed with rain/water. Williams, therefore, has empowered and freed beside, using it both conventionally and imaginatively.

Williams foregrounds prepositions (and other words) by his placement, or displacement, of them. In William Carlos Williams and the Meanings of Measure, Stephen Cushman claims that the "straddling of lines by sentences...disguises and reveals connections between words and objects" in Williams's poems (17). To illustrate his claim, he focuses on Poem II of Spring and All, in which the word above functions as before and beside do in the examples above:

petals radiant with transpiercing light
contending
above

the leaves
reaching up their modest green
from the pot's rim

and there, wholly dark, the pot
gay with rough moss (CP 1: 184, from Poem II).

Cushman makes the following observations about the functions of above:
The displacement of "above" breaks in—"amidst transpiercing radiance"—on the visual observation of...flowers. The moment is epiphanic. Above is more than the opposite of below; it is the direction of transcendence. The possibility that "above" is an adverb lingers after it descends into prepositionalism, toward the leaves and the moss. In Spring and All, II, typography intensifies a particular moment in the poem, a moment when observation is suspended in revelation" (Cushman 60-61).

Typographical displacement, according to Cushman, creates the epiphany of Poem II, the moment in which observation and revelation meet. He argues that "spatial displacement strips [a word] of familiar associations with words around it, associations on which simple emphasis depends" (60). Cushman then discriminates between the effects of emphasis and typography to draw a connection between the functions of typography and enjambment:

Emphasis limits the range of possible meanings. Typography breaks those limits. In this way typography performs some of the same work as enjambment, although typography often does it more effectively (60).

While Cushman's discussion of Williams's typography and enjambment is useful in relation to Williams's poems, it is not useful in trying to account for Williams's presentation—in prose—of the river, tree, and building at the close of CHAPTER 19. As Cushman asserts about Poem II, the poetic ending of CHAPTER 19 presents a "moment when observation is suspended in revelation;" however, typography and enjambment are not responsible for that effect:

...it is spring by Stinking River where a magnolia tree, without leaves, before what was once a farmhouse, now a ramshackle home for millworkers, raises its straggling branches of ivorywhite flowers (CP 1: 180).

Instead, syntax and punctuation create the commingling of observation and revelation.

That Williams is able to achieve the same effect in poetry and in prose calls into question
the nature of each genre as he creates it, and, ultimately, the nature of genre itself. Williams later comments, as I will, on some distinctions between prose and poetry. At this point, however, whether his presentation of the river, tree, and building is prose or poetry, Williams's strategy is the same: a vital simultaneity is created by means of words which stress a state of dynamic tension. They work together to express disparate ideas and things in isolate moments which are unique, new, and, at all times, unified. A deathliness, expressed in *stinking*, *without leaves*, *ramshackle*, and *straggling*, hangs over the emerging life in the *ivorywhite flowers* of CHAPTER 19. Such simultaneity is characteristically Williams; it is present, for example, in "The Botticellian Trees," from *Della Primavera Trasportata al Morale* (1930), a poem in which Williams manifests, with word-harbingers, the difficult entrance of spring:

The strict simple

principles of
straight branches

are being modified
by pinched-out

ifs of color...(*CP* 1: 348)

Also, in "Death the Barber," Poem XIV of *Spring and All*, growth and death mingle in the barber's talk of "the newest/ways to grow/hair on/bald death--" (*CP* 1: 213). Similarly, in "Death," from the same sequence as "The Botticellian Trees", Williams presents what seems to be a living corpse, which will lie with "his head on/one chair and his/feet on another.../like an acrobat--" (*CP* 1: 347).

The problem Williams sees lurking in the European convention of seasonal spring as a metaphor for newness is repetition--re-creation, not creation. In CHAPTER VI, he asserts that conventional writers are guilty of dull duplication, of producing a "miracle of miracles a miraculous miracle" (*CP* 1: 181). This indictment, a chiastic example of polyptoton, performs its meaning. Although there are changes in the form of the word
miracle indicating progression, the root word remains the same. Nothing has occurred in writing about the idea of spring, except "perfect plagiarism" (CP 1: 181). Williams disdainfully calls this "art." To create art (unqualified by quotation marks), such repetition must be destroyed so that "everything IS new" (CP 1: 181). The typography of this declaration draws attention to the only thing in which Williams is at all interested, the eternal moment, the immediate, the present. Newness occurs in being, in the present tense of to be.

Death and life conventionally take their meanings from their ideal opposition to each other. Williams, however, narrows the gap between the two by including a second chapter numbered as 19. In CHAPTER 19 (Arabic number) complete destruction takes place; in CHAPTER XIX (Roman numeral) spring occurs. CHAPTER XIX is noticeably new, for it is comprised of two prose parts enclosing the first poems of the text. In these two poems spring arrives. These four parts present one endlessly suggestive eternal moment. In general, the chapter is an integrated web of life and death, of barrier-breaking spring on paper. Prose and poetry alike are replete with words and ideas defying old verbal linkages and manifesting the unique, the irrepeatable. The words themselves function paradoxically. Because they are printed on the pages, they confine the moment, but they cannot completely imprison meaning when cast in the suggestive tropes of oxymoron, paradox, and catachresis. The overall moment of CHAPTER XIX, therefore, is eternal, limitless. What Williams creates in this chapter is wholly unlike the "miraculous verisimilitude" of which "traditionalists of plagiarism" are guilty (CP 1: 182). He focuses first on the deathly conditions from which new life comes, and then the lively emergence of newness, a pattern repeated in "The Botticellian Trees" and "Death." With such a dual focus, he minimizes the differences between death and life:

In that huge and microscopic career of time, as it were a wild horse racing in an illimitable pampa under the stars, describing immense and microscopic
circles with his hoofs on the solid turf, running without a stop for the millionth part of a second until he is aged and worn to a heap of skin, bones and ragged hoofs—In that majestic progress of life, that gives the exact impression of Phidias' frieze, the men and beasts of which, though they seem of the rigidity of marble are not so but move, with blinding rapidity, though we do not have the time to notice it, their legs advancing a millionth part of an inch every fifty thousand years—In that progress of life which seems stillness itself in the mass of its movements—at last SPRING is approaching (CP 1: 182).

In his wholly unconventional way, Williams captures the approach of spring first in the image of the live horse racing to death and then in the image of Phidias's men and beasts, frozen in marble, advancing to life. Death and life are separated—in time and space—by but a "millionth part." Forming one eternal moment with these two images, Williams also attacks the "traditionalists of plagiarism," who have, in their "art," killed life by "repeating move for move every move that [has been] made in the past" (CP 1: 182). The conflation of time is part of Williams's way of making the European tradition and achievement valueless for American art. Williams expresses his condemnation of the art of these traditionalists in strikingly unrepetitious language: "miraculous verisimilitude" (CP 1: 182). In this term, Williams commingles the unique with imitation, creating a laudatory condemnation that imaginatively avoids plagiarism, that is, the mimetic redundancy of convention. Ultimately, the paragraph communicates that "art" has been the death of life, life which is the essence of the eternal moment. To express life's imminent triumphant appearance, Williams returns to the strategy of manipulating typography: "Suddenly it is at an end. THE WORLD IS NEW" (CP 1: 182). The dramatic difference between conventional writing and his American writing shows boldly in the physical contrast between lower and upper case letters, as well as in the contrast in the meanings of end and NEW. The announcement "THE WORLD IS NEW" springs forth to herald a spring in ink on paper. This statement also implies that Williams's
spring is an American spring, for the world is new might also be expressed as the new world.

As dramatically, Poem I appears next; its typography, which is more vertical than that of the prose passages preceding it, indicates the assertion of spring. As he did in the prose section preceding it, however, Williams presents death and life together. Beginning with "contagious hospital" (CP 1: 183, Poem I), his use of terms conventionally considered mutually exclusive is in full bloom. Also, because this is the actual name of the hospital, Williams communicates his belief that the "features of a landscape take their position in the imagination" (Imaginations 20), which also evident in Paterson, in which the city of Paterson, with its river and falls, is a character (I Wanted to Write a Poem 72). Life and death inextricably mix in the oxymoronic contagious hospital. Contagious expresses the intense vitality of an easily contracted, perhaps deadly disease; hospital, conventionally associated with the sterile, may be a place of cure or death. Perhaps, too, Williams is suggesting how sick European literary tradition is and that a cure is available, or that the traditions of literature are thriving, ready to kill whatever contacts them.

From this oxymoronic yoking of death and life, Williams moves to the traditional poetic subject, the coming of spring. His creation, though, is wholly different from the conventional European one; by commingling winter and spring, he creates an American scene in American English, rife with potential, moving from the sky to earth. His description of the conditions from which the new life of spring will emerge manifests this potential:

under the surge of the blue mottled clouds driven from the northeast--a cold wind. Beyond, the waste of broad, muddy fields brown with dried weeds, standing and fallen
patches of standing water
the scattering of tall trees

All along the road the reddish
purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy
stuff of bushes and small trees
with dead, brown leaves under them
leafless vines—(CP 1: 183)

The tension of potentiality in these lines results from Williams's characteristically unconventional diction and syntax. The cold wind departs the European tradition of warm Zephyrus; the fertility usually associated with fields is challenged by waste and dried weeds; standing water conflates the vertical and horizontal, the stagnant and the life-giving. The language, however, is primarily "word of mouth language, not classical English" (I Wanted to Write a Poem 75): patches of water, a scattering of trees, color names converted to adjectives with -ish, the common catch-all noun stuff. From such conditions, spring advances:

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
dazed spring approaches--(CP 1: 183)

Characteristically, Williams creates, in the very center of his first poem, new eternal moments in the constructions lifeless in appearance and dazed spring. The former, its modifier ambiguous, brings death to life by expressing that spring only appears to be lifeless, when it is actually alive. The latter is a succinct term for the simultaneous presence of death and life; dazed dulls the vital suddenness suggested by spring.

What enters first in Williams's spring on paper is They, the unwritten antecedent of which could be "the poet's perceptions, the first growths of spring, the poem's newly minted words, and the first entrance of the pioneers onto the soil of 'the new world'" (MacGowan 97). Considering Williams's conviction that the newness of spring is essential to imaginative writing, it makes sense that words would "enter the new world naked" (CP 1: 183). They should be unencumbered by "crude symbolism" or "strained
associations" (CP 1: 189), without other words adhering to them to produce "the effect on
the sense of oysters, or barnacles" (CP 1: 234). With naked and immediate words,
Williams manifests their potential: "One by one objects are defined" by words that "grip
down and begin to awaken" (CP 1: 183). These last words of Poem I, begin to awaken,
express a liminal condition. Life, however, prevails over death at this point, for no
terminal punctuation follows awaken to "terminate" it or to separate it from Poem II.

What awakens in Poem II is Williams's verbal creation of the watercolor "Tuberoses,"
painted by Charles Demuth, to whom Spring and All is dedicated. Demuth's painted
pink and white flowers are created in this poem with words; they become, therefore,
Williams's new forms existing in the condition of "imaginative suspense" (CP 1: 206).
The eternal moment of Poem II depends on Williams's dynamic diction: flowers and
flowers reversed, shaded flame, and gay with rough moss (CP 1: 184) being rich
eamples uniting life and death. Instead of producing "layers of demoded words and
shapes" (CP 1: 188), Williams presents the "oneness of "experience" (CP 1: 194) and
rases distinctions between art forms. Although Williams's later comment about
dedicating Spring and All to Demuth--"it was his turn for a dedication and tribute" (I
Wante to Write a Poem 36)--may not seem to bespeak the high regard Williams had for
his long-standing friend, Poem II and the following prose pay him homage. Williams
affectionately refers to Demuth as "Charley" in the "Prologue" to Kora: "Charley Demuth
once told me that he did not like the taste of liquor, ...but that he found the effect it had
on his mind to be delightful" (Imaginations 28). This anecdotal comment suggests that
Williams and Demuth are like-minded, both of them perceiving the simultaneous quality
of experience. Demuth is named by Williams (in one of the subsequent prose passages)
as a spokesman for "the new order" that is trying "to point out the error" of the
"traditionalists of plagiarism," who do not understand that "design is a function of the
IMAGINATION, describing its movements, its colors--" (CP 1: 185-86). Through the
remaining pages of Spring and All, Williams discusses painting and writing together,
announcing that he himself seeks to "enter the lists" in the "hard battle" Demuth is fighting with the European traditionalists. With Demuth's tuberoses dynamically created anew in words, the imagination is "freed from the handcuffs of 'art,' [to take] the lead!" (CP 1: 185).

In the final numbered chapter, CHAPTER I, Williams shows "How easy [it is] to slip/into the old mode, how hard to/cling firmly to the advance--" (CP 1: 191, Poem V). He presents this idea by creating a fanciful picture of Samuel Butler trying to recapture governance of art, that is, to perpetuate the European tradition which Williams calls the "solidarity of life" (CP 1: 185). Butler wishes to cling to the "proven truths, even to the twice proven, the substantiality of which is known" (CP 1: 186). Williams asserts how false this tradition is by the words twice proven, as well as by the ironic assertion that the substantiality of these truths is known. Substantiality harks back to the introduction of Spring and All, to tradition's constant barrier, that deadly impediment to experiencing the vital eternal moment. A foil to Butler, as Demuth is, Williams clings firmly to the advance (spring), declaring that amidst efforts to perpetuate tradition, "SPRING, which has been approaching for several pages, is at last here" (CP 1: 186). The smothering X's of CHAPTER XIX have fallen away from the unique, assertive I.

The numbered chapters discussed in this section present Williams's annihilation of European "art" in and with words. That death prepares for the art of SPRING. No one remains now to write what was written repeatedly about the season of spring, which had become, in Williams's view, an all-too-hackneyed metaphor for a supposed newness. In essence, the annihilation is so complete that no one remains to write any overworked comparisons.

The Easter stars are shining  
above lights that are flashing--  
coronal of the black--  

Nobody  
to say it--
Nobody to say: pinholes (CP 1: 186-187, from Poem IV).

The stars of the European tradition, pinholes in the cloak of darkness, are replaced by William Carlos Williams's New World12-stars:

stars of tinsel
from the great end of a cornucopia
of glass (CP 1: 187, from Poem IV).

THE REMAINING PROSE SECTIONS

The aggregate is untamed encapsulating irritants (CP 1: 212, from Poem XIII)

It is difficult to say with certainty where CHAPTER I ends, because it is the last such heading in Spring and All. Perhaps this heading applies to the remaining fifty pages of prose and poetry interspersed, the and All following Spring.13 Given the stylistic nature of the text—"inclusiveness without redundancy" (CP 1: 202)—and Williams's unwavering interest in the eternal moment, it is likely that CHAPTER I, bespeaking the "oneness of experience" (CP 1: 194), governs what follows it. Like the "artist figure of the farmer," Williams looms over the remaining poems and prose of Spring and All as their "composing/—antagonist" (CP 1: 186, Poem III), rooted in the American landscape and the imagination. The poems of these pages are numbered sequentially, except the seventh one, which has no number. Williams keeps the poems "pure—no typographical tricks when they appear—set off from the prose" (I Wanted to Write a Poem 37). In contrast, the prose looks to be unconventional, its sentences at times truncated or enjambed in defiance of conventions. With liberated imagination, Williams moves "at will from one thing to another—as he pleases, unbound—" (CP 1: 207), inventing new, immediate forms in the prose and poems alike. His subject is still art, writing especially, and among his assessments of several painters and poets, he gradually expresses his own aesthetics, which center on the imagination as the artist's source of, and the audience's
means to, "immediate contact with the world" (CP 1: 177). Although his aesthetics have an American emphasis, Williams praises the efforts of the European painters Juan Gris and Paul Cézanne, both of whom see their art as "related to its own definite tradition, in its own environment and general history" (Selected Essays 157). In short, their aesthetics are founded on the same principle as Williams's.

Following his creation of New World "stars of tinsel," Williams turns his efforts to creating anew the sky in which these stars are situated, insisting that the sky of tradition has long been clouded with "layers of demoded words and shapes" (CP 1: 188). The brokenness of the following lines shows Williams's dismissal of the conventions of prose forms:

So long as the sky is recognized as an association

is recognized in its function of accessory to vague words whose meaning it is impossible to rediscover

its value can be nothing but mathematical certain limits of gravity and density of air

The farmer and the fisherman who read their own lives there have a practical corrective for--

they rediscover or replace demoded meanings to the religious terms (CP 1: 187)

Two truths are told in this passage: traditional form will not allow new experiences, and new form will not allow traditional experiences. Dismissing the conventions of prose form, Williams asserts that form in prose "ends with the end of that which is being communicated--If the power to go on falters in the middle of a sentence--that is the end of the sentence--Or if a new phase enters at that point it is only stupidity to go on:" (CP 1: 226). Williams's new, immediate sky appears several paragraphs later: "A very clouded sentence" (CP 1: 189). In addition to mocking obedience to conventional grammatical constructions, it also offers multiple perspectives by its violation of sentence completeness. Clouded, a noun turned verb turned participle, asserts a thing, an action,
and a characteristic in one richly efficient term. Williams's sentence is clearly clouded; the sky, now an imaginative sentence, is no longer an "accessory to vague words" (CP 1: 187). Imaginatively, Williams has overturned tradition: instead of a sentence carrying a metaphor about the sky, the sky carries a metaphor about the sentence. 16

In a number of places throughout the remaining prose parts of Spring and All, Williams praises Marianne Moore, because "the purpose of her work is invariably from the source from which poetry starts" (CP 1: 230), the imagination. Williams believes that poetry "has to do with the crystallization of the imagination--the perfection of new forms" (CP 1: 226), and Moore's poetry is characterized by crystallized images made of words that "remain separate, each unwilling to group with others" (CP 1: 231). Williams is describing his own use of words as well. Cushman notes that Moore, like her contemporary Williams, uses enjambment "in bold ways" (18). As Williams's words do, Moore's straddle lines so that her poetry, too, "disguises and reveals connections between words and objects" (Cushman 17). 17 The following lines from her poem "Poetry" show this similarity:

One must
make a distinction
however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the
result is not poetry,
nor till the poets among us can be
"literalists of
the imagination"--above
insolence and triviality and can present

for inspection, "imaginary gardens with real toads in them,"
shall we have
it (Moore 267).

Not only does Moore focus on the imagination as Williams does, but also her use of above recalls Williams's use of the same adverb/preposition in Poem II ("petals radiant with transparent light/contending/above/the leaves"), which I discussed earlier. In the
hands of Moore and Williams, above remains unwilling to group with the verb form preceding it or with the object following it.

Williams's poem "Marianne Moore" (1920) pays tribute to Moore's relationship with words and her extraordinary ability to create new forms with them. The subjective and the objective commingle in this poem as Williams writes about Moore's poetry writing:

Will not some dozen sacks of rags
observant of intelligence
conspire from their outlandish cellar
to evade the law?

Let them, stuffed up, appear
before her door at ten some night
and say: Marianne, save us!
Put us in a book of yours.

Then she would ask the fellow in
and give him cake
and warm him with her talk
before he must return to the dark street (CP 1: 129-130).

The rhetorical question of the first stanzas states that words, lowly rags worn out and buried in a remote place, will be inspired by the pervasive power of Moore's mind to plot escaping their inanimate state. Then, forming themselves into the shape of a man, the words approach Moore's mind, speaking their plea for entry to achieve union with the ultimate reality of her writing. By inviting the words in, giving them physical sustenance, and quickening them with her own words, they are transfigured from rags shaped like a man to the animated "fellow" now capable of returning "to the dark street." Shaping words for one of his own poems, Williams himself performs what he states Moore achieves; therefore, "Marianne Moore" manifests the like-mindedness of these two American poets.

Writing about writing in the prose parts on either side of "The rose is obsolete" and
Poem VIII, Williams asserts his interest in the art of Juan Gris. He praises Gris's painting for marking the modern trend in art:

the attempt is being made to separate things of the imagination from life, and obviously, by using the forms common to experience so as not to frighten the onlooker away but to invite him...things with which he is familiar, simple things--at the same time to detach them from ordinary experience to the imagination (CP 1: 194, 197).

In the midst of this paradoxically expressed compliment (between him, and things), Williams presents two poems, within which he also achieves in writing this separation of common things from life and the attachment of them to the imagination:

Somewhere the sense
makes copper roses
steel roses--(CP 1: 195, seventh poem)

The sunlight in a
yellow plaque upon the
varnished floor

is full of a song
inflated to
fifty pounds pressure

at the faucet of
June that rings
the triangle of the air...(CP 1: 196, Poem VIII)

Williams continues his praise for Gris in the prose following Poem VIII, noting the overlapping quality of Gris's painting, which allows recognizable, tangible things to be "in some peculiar way--detached" (CP 1: 197). Juan Gris's work, "drawn with admirable simplicity and excellent design," remains "--all a unity--" (CP 1: 198).

As Williams discusses the overlapping unity of Gris's painting, he is performing that idea with words. The pattern of this section is prose-poem-poem-prose. The first prose section is separated from the first poem by only a comma:
The modern trend is to use the forms common to experience so as not to frighten the onlooker away but to invite him, (CP 1: 194)

Unnumbered, the seventh poem begins immediately, and it concludes with no terminal punctuation, but leads directly to Poem VIII. Poem VIII ends with the image of "a partridge/from dry leaves," an edge unpunctuated and leading immediately to the continuation of the prose sentence preceding the seventh poem. The relationship between prose and poetry here is intimate, as intimate as that among the overlapping objects in Gris's painting. Shortly thereafter, Williams admits that he has spent his life "seeking to place a value upon experience and the objects of experience that would satisfy [his] sense of inclusiveness without redundancy--completeness" (CP 1: 202). The aforementioned section of Spring and All manifests clearly that inclusiveness; prose and poetry appear in what Williams later calls "a unification of experience" (CP 1: 207).

There are several places in the remaining pages of Spring and All where prose and poetry are similarly united and where Williams addresses directly the topic of genre. His discussion of it bespeaks the New World, for, as he does in the introduction to this text, he advances and retreats, producing the effect of conversation and avoiding the convention of writing discourse that flows toward an ever-deferred meaning. Williams has "[entered] a new world, and [has] there freedom of movement and newness" (CP 1: 219). He begins discussing genre with the following:

...prose has to do with the fact of an emotion; poetry has to do with the dynamization of emotion into a separate form. This is the force of the imagination.

prose: statement of facts concerning emotions, intellectual states, data of all sorts--technical expositions, jargon, of all sorts--fictional and other--

poetry: new form dealt with as a reality in itself.

The form of prose is the accuracy of its subject matter--how best to expose the multiform phases of its material
the form of poetry is related to the movements of the imagination revealed in words—or whatever it may be--

the cleavage is complete (CP 1: 219)

In this "conversation" about genre, Williams struggles to distinguish between prose and poetry, defining the former in terms of fact, the latter in terms of imagination. His summation is ambiguous, however, as it both separates and unites the two: "the cleavage is complete" simultaneously expressing division and adherence. In the statements that follow, Williams again divides prose and poetry and conflates them. After asserting that "the subdivisions of experience" are lost to the modern world, Williams claims that he expects "to see prose be prose," and then declares that poetry is "something quite different" (CP 1: 226). Moreover, he comments that "there is nothing to do but to differentiate prose from verse by the only effective means at hand, the external, surface appearance" (CP 1: 229). This comment is answered by "Or it may be argued, that since there is according to my proposal no discoverable difference between prose and verse that in all probability none exists and that both are phases of the same thing" (CP 1: 230). Williams then counters "both are phases of the same thing" with "Yet, quite plainly, there is a very marked difference between the two..." (CP 1: 230). Williams's conversational debate with himself in Spring and All ends, but remains unresolved, as he shifts his attention to words, the components of both prose and poetry:

I can go no further than to say that poetry feeds the imagination and prose the emotions, poetry liberates the words from their emotional implications, prose confirms them in it. Both move centrifugally or centripetally toward the intelligence.

Of course it must be understood that writing deals with words and words only and that all discussions of it deal with single words and their association in groups (CP 1: 231).

In the final prose paragraph of Spring and All, Williams returns to the terms Pound uses to define the image in "A Few Don'ts":
The word is not liberated, therefore able to communicate release from the 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 (CP 1: 235).

The imaginative manner in which Williams uses words in *Spring and All* makes its poetry prosaic and its prose poetic. What Brian Bremen argues to be characteristic of *Paterson* is also characteristic of *Spring and All*; there is poetry hiding in the prose (Bremen 10). The opposite is also true in *Spring and All*; the poems include prosaic terms. In Poem X, for example, one of the lines is "July 1, 1922" (CP 1: 205), and Poem XXV begins "Somebody dies every four minutes/in New York State--" (CP 1: 231). Words as Williams wields them manifest the "crystallization of the imagination--the perfection of new forms as additions to nature" (CP 1: 226). In the prose sections and poems occurring after CHAPTER I, Williams presents an unruly assemblage that harbors nettlesome things. The poetic invades the prosaic, the prosaic the poetic. The whole of *Spring and All* remains spirited because "The aggregate/is untamed/encapsulating irritants" (CP 1: 212, Poem XIII).

After writing *Spring and All*, Williams continues, through the 1920s, to explore the relationships of poetry and prose. "From: A Folded Skyscraper" (1927), for example, is a four-part sequence in which Williams alternates between poetry and prose, both of which have an American flavor. Prose and poetry overlap each other in the final prose section of this text as Williams comments on Ezra Pound's self-deception that "he had found poetry in the *quattro cento* in Dante, in them all of those old countries" (CP 1: 276). His musings about Pound give way immediately to the telling of a story expressed in the American idiom.

A poem and a speech comprise Williams's 1928 "The Atlantic City Convention." Within the poem, Williams includes the prosaic business talk of those attending the convention:
The Nominating Committee presents the following resolutions, etc. etc. etc. All those in favor signify by saying, Aye. Contrariminded, No.
Carried.
And aye, and aye, and aye! (CP 1: 280)

Surrounding this talk is Williams's description of and reaction to the waitress:

—and the movements under the scant dress as the weight of the tray makes the hips shift forward slightly in lifting and beginning to walk—(CP 1: 280)

Wait on us, wait on us with your momentary beauty to be enjoyed by none of us (CP 1: 281).

This poem abuts a prose speech, which has the "generative effect" of Kora. In discussing the relationship between oratory and poet's prose, Stephen Fredman notes Emerson's contribution of the panharmonicon, which he claims "breaks through the classical proprieties of diction, of the sentence, and of literary genres" (35). It is "a model of the generative sentence," its orator providing "a model of the poet who speaks from the inherently risky moment of lived time, bringing to it a heightened attention to the act of composition" (35). The concerns behind "The Atlantic City Convention," therefore, are consonant with those Williams explores in both Kora and Spring and All.

In The Descent of Winter (1928), Williams again addresses the topic of genre directly, echoing some of the observations he presented in Spring and All. "The realization [that poetry should strive for vividness alone] has its own internal fire that is 'like' nothing" (CP 1: 302) harks back to "[Empty work] is typified by the use of the word 'like'..." (CP 1: 188). His insistence, in Spring and All, on the importance of using words cleaned of their conventional, demoded layers of association is matched in the following:
To be plain is to be subverted since every term must be forged new, every word is tricked out of meaning, hanging with as many cheap traps as an altar (CP 1:312).

The American emphasis that is in Spring and All is strong in this text, too. Williams describes The Descent of Winter as "a big, serious portrait" of his time (CP 1:295); this portrait is rooted, as Williams is, in the American landscape: in Fairfield, Williams imagines, "...an oak tree grows out of my shoulders. Its roots are my arms and my legs" (CP 1:296).

William Carlos Williams's continuing poetics in his prose/poetry structures of the 1920s, and subsequently of Paterson, grow out of the bold experiments of Kora in Hell: Improvisations, and particularly, Spring and All. As the central concerns of the texts themselves do, these works both chart a series of particular explorations of time, landscape, and the contemporary American moment—and at the same time represent a unified response to the challenges Williams saw facing the American writer.
Notes

1 Originally, *Spring and All* was a 93 page text published in Dijon, France by Contact Publishing Company.

2 The following studies provide the most thorough investigations and analyses of *Spring and All*:


3 Williams used this expression in the "Prologue" to *Kora in Hell: Improvisations* to express the positive effect Marianne Moore had on the direction he took in his writing. Williams writes,

   Together with Mina Loy and a few others Duchamp and Arensberg brought out the paper, *The Blind Man*, to which Robert Carlton Brown, with his vision of suicide by diving from a high window of the Singer Building, contributed a few poems. In contradistinction to their south, Marianne Moore's statement to me at the Chatham parsonage one afternoon—my wife and I were just on the point of leaving—sets up a north: My work has come to have just one quality
of value in it: I will not touch or have to do with those things which I detest.

In this austerity of mood she finds sufficient freedom for the play she chooses (10).

4 Perloff identifies words often repeated in the poems of Spring and All, primarily color names. She could very well have applied her idea to the prose of this text, for Williams also repeats words therein, e.g., dynamize, experience, value, and discover.

5 Ezra's Pounds imagist manifesto "A Few Don'ts" was originally published in Poetry, March 1913.

6 Throughout this section I have referred frequently to the "Prologue" of Kora in Hell, which is really an epilogue because Williams wrote it after completing the improvisations. It is appropriate that it stands between Kora and Spring and All, for its tone and ideas are consonant with those in Spring and All.

7 Williams continues his strategy of obscuring endings through Spring and All to its last word, woman (Poem XXVII), which is unmarked by terminal punctuation.

8 Williams's deliberateness shows in his selection of Seville's cathedral and Athens's Parthenon. Created by artists, both of them are sacred places that provide mediation between humans and their gods. They are, therefore, "constant barriers" separating mortals from the deathless gods. Williams may also have chosen them because of their specific locations. Seville stands on the western border of Europe, Athens on the eastern one; all western European creations, therefore, are encompassed by the cathedral and the temple.

9 In The Collected Poems, Volume I, Litz and MacGowan note that the last paragraph of the next numbered chapter, IIIX, was first published as a poem, "The New Cathedral Overlooking the Park" (507). In two of his numbered chapters, 19 and IIIX, Williams indicates the imminent emergence of spring in "poetic edges."
Paul Mariani takes the title of his biography of Williams, *A New World Naked*, from this passage; this biography argues that Williams is a pioneer, as the first settlers were pioneers.

For discussions of Williams's interest in visual arts and his relationships with other artists, see the following:


For the *American* reader, *cornucopia* calls to mind Thanksgiving, a national holiday associated with the pilgrims' arrival in the New World from England.

That Williams's modernist manifesto *Spring and All* is an *American* one is evident in the title; *and all* is an inclusive expression commonly used in American speech.

In *Poet's Prose* Fredman asserts that Williams's writing and Cezanne's painting are related in principle:

Williams finds this abolition of fixed connections and isolation of individual
words a welcome development in modern poetry, akin to Cézanne's breakthrough in modern painting. For both the modern writer and painter the materials of the craft become more tangible and at the same time more abstract, since the materials themselves become to a large extent the subject matter (16).

Any reader of literature cannot avoid encountering the demoded words and forms about which Williams is writing. Literary catalogs are full of such. Homer's creation "rosy-fingered dawn" begins the tradition, which also includes codified descriptions of the sky as the domain of Phoebus Apollo, for example.

Williams's machinations in "A very clouded sentence" are similar to those in Gertrude Stein's "More Grammar for a Sentence," in which Stein creates the following:

To go on with going on with it.
A little at a time.
What is a sentence. (The Yale Gertrude Stein 240, 242, 251)

As Stein's sentences do, Williams's sentence manifests its meaning, its words functioning independently from the layers of conventional demoded meaning and association. Though Stein was an expatriate American, Williams "pays homage to Stein" in the seventh poem of Spring and All, a poem in which he "liberates the word rose" as she did in "A rose is a rose is a rose" (MacGowan 112). Williams's liberation of the word claims the following:

The rose is obsolete
but each petal ends in
an edge, the double facet
cementing the grooved
columns of air—...

The rose carried the weight of love
but love is at an end—of roses (CP 1: 195).
Both Williams and Stein aim "to divorce words from the enslavement of the prevalent cliches," as Williams later writes about her (*The Embodiment of Knowledge* 143).

17 To show the enjambment strategy of Marianne Moore, Cushman uses her poem 'The Fish' (27). In this section, he establishes the *difference* between Moore's and Williams's techniques.
Works Cited


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