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“Corridor to a Clarity”: Sensuality and Sight in Williams’ Poems

WILLIAM MARLING

The poet should be forever at the ship’s prow.
—Prologue to *Kora in Hell*

Among the women whom William Carlos Williams recalls in his *Autobiography*, none seems to have terrified the poet like the baroness Elsa Freitag von Loringhoven. A German émigré on the fringe of the *Little Review* circle around 1920, Loringhoven has been described by Jane Heap and Margaret Anderson, who published her poetry, as eccentric and promiscuous, but hardly dangerous. They seem to have sicced her on Williams as a playful test of his sexual liberality, but her offer to give the fastidious doctor a dose of syphilis—thus freeing his mind for art—sent Williams backpedaling. He could not evade her, however: she laid siege to his home and haunts, springing on him at inopportune times and imploring him for money, which he gave.¹

The baroness remains for most readers of *The Autobiography* a picturesque character in a crowded life, but she troubled Williams so much that he wrote an essay about her. “The Baroness Elsa Freitag von Loringhoven,” in Yale’s Beinecke Library, reveals a good deal of biographical information that explains Williams’ paranoia, but is of greater interest because for Williams the core of the baroness’ threat concerned the relation of his sexuality to his vision.

Williams begins this essay with a meditation on friendship, admitting that he has deceived male and female friends alike with a promise of promiscuity on which he does not deliver, railing against the sexuality of painter Marsden Hartley, who apparently tried to seduce him, and of the baroness. After several pages of this free association, Williams realizes that he “uses” women for poetic ends: “So when I see

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a woman who offers me a passage—I offer her morning. A thing I have found true—talk chiefly—the bond is likely to be sealed. . . . But the place is not empty. At least I have not found it so. There is an inhabitant, a presence—”²

When Williams finds this theme of “talk” and sexuality, the tangents and associations give way. After pages of strikeouts and hesitancy he concludes with these stunning paragraphs:

Therefore to me the sex is a useful thing whose function is that of a corridor to a clarity; of tremendous importance but passing interest. It is the thing beyond, which I share in common with children, not childishly, which I desire. I wish even to pass rapidly. I find I cannot hold the other satisfaction long. The way to it must be passed and repassed like a path to a well. But there is no lingering with sex with me. Affection is strong, in those I must use sex must be illuminated by what I desire beyond it. Then let us hurry with the business &&&& lingeringly enough to say that it is true, a thing in itself, justifiable that others may stay here and find it an art or a universe, I do not know—but for me I wish it to pass, its fever to subside. The mind afterward is my field. Coming to that with the satisfaction of performance ensanguined in me the mind is lit, serene, the eyes are as if released from cages, the breath comes unobstructed and the mind rushes to its inventions.

I know well that this delight is passing also and that it owes to the completion of the round, through the tunnel, and that it will occur again but—again I will run swiftly.

The odors, the lights the filamentous stimulae of the sexual contact, the languorous delights are well known to me. I know the building up of the constriction in wvwey phase [sic] from the first electric shock to the fainter, refused parries. I see that it is a country. I too have lived there. Nevertheless it is not my country. The serenity of morning and the people who inhabit that Urania I love best. I desire them continuously even through the sexual tropic.³

Williams' argument seems to be that sexual foreplay and coitus offer a way of gathering and discharging biological urges, emotions, conventions of thought and emotion. After sex comes clarity. There is ample biographical evidence that since adolescence he felt himself swayed by all strong feelings, a victim not only of sexual passion and a Romantic conception of love, but even of his parents' and his brother's opinions. He complained in his first book that strong feeling condemned him to “mad excess” and a “wayward press / Where Action's brazen helmet solely shines.”⁴ A theme of Williams' second book is

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already the difficulty of securing clear vision, though in "Postlude" he suggests a process for inducing it. This poem begins in the clarity of postcoital vision—"Now that I have cooled to you / Let there be gold of tarnished masonry" (*CPI*, p. 3)—and ends with a striking conjunction of forces and forms that Williams would explore for several decades.

But you there beside me—
Oh how shall I defy you,
Who wound me in the night
With breasts shining
Like Venus and like Mars?
The night that is shouting Jason
When the loud eaves rattle
As with waves above me
Blue at the prow of my desire.
(*CPI*, p. 4)

While it is difficult to point to a single aspect or adventure of Jason that mediates definitively between the opposition of Venus/Mars that Williams imposes on his lover, we may note several details from the myth consonant with his spatially oriented closure. The prow of Jason's ship, the Argo ("swift") was formed by Athena from a piece of oak endowed with oracular powers, including speech. By feats of priapic heroism (passage between the Cyanean rocks, plowing the field of Ares), Jason carried off the golden fleece, but his life afterward with Medea contextualizes for Williams the enmeshing social obligations (and eventual tragedy) of his actions. We may recall that Medea arranged her brother's death so that Jason could obtain the fleece, and that in some versions Jason dies while asleep under the stern of his ship, which collapses on him.

"Postlude" begins by thematizing Jason's conundrum: "I have cooled to you." Williams' mind "rush[es] to its inventions." His eye moves from the masonry to the "wall flowers" to his lover's hair, then he realizes that interruption by her is the greatest threat to his clarity. He asks how he shall "defy" his lover, thinking of her as embodying a network of social obligations, old habits of seeing and pre-voyage aspirations. Since she has for him two aspects—love and war, Venus and Mars, sexual liberation and deaths foretold—he is "wound[ed]" "in the night," which at first seems a mere prepositional phrase. But as the poem fails to achieve closure on its mythic allusions, the spatial implications of such elements as "night," on repetition, play greater roles. Jason connotes action against night, but also absence of vision. In the strikingly spatial resolution that Williams then achieves, the night is

cut by the homologous shapes of the "loud" eaves and the prow of desire. The first triangular shape is "above" him, the second implied to be below him. This doubled triangle, up and down, silence and voice, mediates sexuality and vision for Williams and has its own history.⁵

Though Williams did not describe the "passage to morning" until his essay on the baroness, it represented a distillation of sexual experiences that dated from adolescence. The conjunction of "night," "eaves," "waves," and "prow" gives way, by a kind of spatial inversion, to the "corridor," "tunnel," and "path to a well" of the baroness essay. A critical incident in this transformation is given in *The Autobiography* when Williams describes his sexual molestation at age fourteen by a pederast in Geneva:

One day Mother took us for the *tour de Lac*. I have never seen bluer water, nor whiter swans. The Alps were to our right—the Mole, especially familiar to me, in the middle ground, with its anthill-like summit that I climbed with the other kids, racing up the last hundred feet to try to beat them. I think I came in second at the top. The clear day, the breeze made me especially happy as, in my usual way on a trip of this sort, I jammed my body into the very foremost angle of the ship's prow to get the effect of which I was so fond—of being alone, no ship, no person, no sound but the wind in my ears as I flew with a slow lifting and falling over the crystal-clear lake. It was a thrill beyond anything I could imagine and I was enjoying it to the full.

Then I became aware that I wasn't alone in my narrow heaven. Some one else was there trying to crowd in beside me. I was angry at the intrusion and determined to fight it out for my place. Turning a little to the side I saw it was a little old man with a beard, a man strikingly well-dressed and wearing a modish hat. I could have knocked his block off if I had to. He had a walking stick and using it as a fulcrum, he had somehow shoved his right hand into my crotch, from the front, putting on considerable pressure.

Neither of us said a word. I merely backed away and left him, disgusted. Poor mother didn't know what to make of my story and told me in fact that I had imagined it. I avoided the shrunken up little creature for the rest of the trip, but the incident impressed me. (A, pp. 33-34)

Like his essay on the baroness, this passage contains a rich blend of spatial forms, physical forces, and emotions. It also shares organizational strategies with the essay and "Postlude," as all three attempt to subsume the sexual moment to a stabilizing form. In fact, this passage

provides a spatial key not only to the baroness essay but to many of Williams' poems. As in "Postlude," one is struck by Williams' notion that sex interrupts vision and, in his visual construction, the juxtaposition of the horizontal, triangular shape of the prow with the vertical, triangular shape of the eaves or mountain.

Williams associates the vertical triangle of the "Mole" with juvenile, competitive aspiration: he arrives at the top "second" in a footrace. As biographer Paul Mariani has taught us, "second" was significant in Williams' life. Williams felt second in artistic ability to his younger brother Ed, a prizewinning architect. Ed won away Williams' intended bride, Charlotte Herman, leaving the poet her younger sister Florence. Would she be his Medea, dispatching the brother between the poet and the fleece? The sibling rivalry was fierce and lifelong, and takes its visual icon in the vertical triangle: a peopled world, one of artistic striving and competition, in which a consciousness of others and of one's conventional and social relationships in space prevails. Here Williams rarely feels "the satisfaction of performance ensanguined in me." He is too often second.

Juxtaposed to this reified world is the horizontal formlessness of the waves, the triangular prow in which Williams finds himself alone, not-in-the-world, conscious of an out-of-body forward motion, but seeing, or soon to see, clearly. In his wedge of motion toward clarity, pure sensation prevails. It is a "narrow heaven" of timelessness, of smooth flight over matter, in which constituent "reality" can be transformed or patterned: at the apex of the wedge one screens the essential from the tumult of experience.

But Williams is interrupted. The sexual moment prompted by the "fulcrum" which is the cane of the pederast vanquishes out-of-body forward motion and vision. It may seem natural that this visceral sensation should lead to overt sexual consciousness, but the fulcrum of the other disrupts Williams' solitary ecstasy—"the place is not empty." The "fulcrum"—the point of rest, typically triangular, on which a lever turns in moving a body—links the horizontal and vertical worlds. But it is only the coitus that makes vision happen, leaving him *alone* at the "well," in the "field," dissipating conventions as "the mind rushes to its inventions."

In the phenomenology of perception, it would be more accountable if Williams had experienced out-of-body forward motion toward the horizon, been interrupted, and raised his matrix of perception to the vertical—to a realm of socialized artistic competition and consciousness of others. In this way the result of his bracketing experience—what

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Husserl calls *epoche*—would be the reconstruction of the world in a new fashion. In the terms of phenomenology, an *eidetic* insight would reveal a new *eidos*.

But this happens neither in the *Autobiography* nor in the poems to be examined. Instead the spatial sequences replicate the experience that Williams had in Switzerland: they move from the vertical triangle to the horizontal triangle to the sexual fulcrum, then cast a faint, cold, almost retrospective light on the bare outlines of things, persons, or emotions—like paintings by Edvard Munch. Williams' rejection of social sanction extends even to the deeply seated, positivistic cultural consensus, for which he substitutes his own experimentally based paradigm.

In retrospect, the satyr of Geneva with his phallic stick seems more than a convention, perhaps a self-projection, a doubling that permitted Williams to escape from the insoluble dichotomy of fixity and formlessness. As innocent child and dirty old man, he could occupy both the triangle of arousal and the triangle of "Urania" with its clear emplotments and morning view. He can turn the fever of pure sensation on the object of eyes "released from cages." This transformation depends on the distracting touch, the postcoital stirring, as Williams is joined (interrupted) by the other. Someone, something presses behind and, as the poet turns, is *implicated* by his vision. The details that his freshness of vision seizes from this distraction are related to the preceding dynamism spatially. What had seemed dynamic is now reified, creating a profane twin. Williams flattens the perspective, he adds a foreground that begins in the moment of formlessness and narrows to the details of the "little old man with a beard, strikingly well dressed and wearing a modish hat." Standing forth in cold, lithographic precision, such details are Williams' way of "having at a distance"—what Husserl called *avoir*. In them he possesses not only the sought visual clarity but also the cold, satisfying, antisocial power to knock "his block off if I had to."

Williams' quest for an expressive visual/spatial vocabulary was buttressed by developments in modern painting. The English translation of Wassily Kandinsky's *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* owes to the *Little Review*, which Williams later identified with the baroness, and with painter Marsden Hartley, whom he associated with the sex/vision question. "Kandinsky's work was, of course, well-known," Mike Weaver writes:

It was quoted in the *Little Review* in 1914. But it is not often recognized that it was Marsden Hartley who was the first person to introduce it to the English speaking world. In Germany in 1912 and 1913 Hartley met the Blaue Reiter group of painters, notably Kandinsky and Marc, and writing to Alfred Stieglitz about his visits to them, said that he knew that what he did himself coincided with Kandinsky's theories. In April, 1912, the first extracts in English appeared in Stieglitz's review, *Camera Work*.⁶

It is unlikely that Williams saw anything but reproductions of the painter's work up through 1920, when he quoted from Kandinsky in *Kora in Hell*. "The poet should be forever at the ship's prow," wrote Williams in his introduction. Kandinsky's influence on Williams seems to derive from the latter's discussions of the sex/vision question with Hartley, and to be due to the Russian's prose explanations of his spatial paradigms, rather than to his art.

Kandinsky's "little book" was startling, in its time, for its Bergsonian relation of spatial forms to social forces. Its first section was a long meditation on and rejection of art for art's sake, in which Kandinsky denounced artists dedicated to "means" or materials alone. He rejected positivism and materialism, urging artists to press forward in visionary, prophetic fashion. The object was not representation: "The artist sees what will be, and makes it seen." As exemplars he chose Wagner, Debussy, Maeterlinck, Schönberg, and von Webern, Rossetti, and Böcklin. These were the leaders, standing at the apex of a triangle that Kandinsky used as a metaphor for society. The harder the apex pushed upward, the more the mass of humanity was pulled along. The triangle was Kandinsky's paradigm for society and an essential icon in his painting. "Form alone," he wrote, "has . . . a power of inner suggestion." Horizontal lines were inherently peaceful, while vertical lines connoted a sense of action or emotion.

Kandinsky concluded his book by describing the three roles of the artist within his triangular conception of society, which Williams repeated verbatim in his "Prologue" to *Kora in Hell* (I, p. 26): "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."⁷ But even as he appropriated, Williams was remodeling. The change he wrought valorizes the profane twin, the satyr. As he writes in a 1955 letter to Henry Wells: "the trinity always seemed to me unstable. It lacked a fourth member, the devil. I found myself always conceiving my abstract designs as possessing four sides. That was natural enough with spring, summer, autumn and winter always before me" (*SL*, p. 127).

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The instability of the triangle for Williams is not rectified by incorporating the devil, of course, but operationalized: made *eidetic*. Sensation piled up formlessly at the prow, and another person invaded his "narrow heaven." But after climax, that monumental absent term in Williams' poetics, the new perception, a stark delineation of fact, here identified with winter: the cold, the black and white, the devil. It was the hitherto suppressed, the term opposed to coitus, the hideous truth embraced: "I turned and ran," his use of the baroness, and her revenge on him.

Williams can be said to step on the stage of American poetic tradition with "January Morning" (1917) from *Al Que Quiere*. It is also a poem that deploys the pattern of triangulation, out-of-body forward motion, interruption, and a resulting new realm of detail. The poem opens on the ferry to Manhattan. As if remembering the "Mole" in Geneva, Williams glances back at his social milieu on the Jersey shore:

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.

(CPI, p. 100)

The domes crowning the transepts and mixed with spires provide the vertical element of triangulation. Sections II through VII deliver precise scenes and sharp details set in the New York City to which the poet travels, at which he has not arrived. They anticipate the future, as Kandinsky advised. This prevision is as important as their appearance in the poem. The poet knows what he will see, evidence of what Heidegger termed *dasein*, an intentionality with relation to "being in the world."

In Section VIII Williams' field of vision contracts to the ferryboat, lingering on allusions that connote his conventional intent: "Arden," the quest for "the North West Passage—and through!" In Section IX his glance falls to the water—"the sky has come down to you"—and his visual narrowing renders most acutely the sensation of disembodied forward motion.

"The young doctor is dancing with happiness" as the tenth section commences. He is "alone / at the prow of the ferry." In this purely experiential realm, he "notices" the textures of "curdy barnacles" and "broken ice crusts." He contrasts the winter scene with its opposite, but he keeps sensual summer at a distance. The fourth term, the spatial

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enlargement or cold detail, may not be achieved until Williams turns on the fulcrum, makes his perceptual pivot—and in this poem, the explicit posting of the turn follows the vertical and horizontal triangles.

It happens that in Section XII "long yellow rushes bending / above the white snow patches" make "an angle" that replicates the angle of the prow the poet occupies. Such explicit doubling designates the moment of contact, the fulcrum, but here the poet will not "turn" until he probes the stasis of his form:

what an angle
you make with each other as
you lie there in contemplation.

Williams then proceeds to a profane vertical: in the constricted space of the prow, he contemplates the claustrophobic view of someone dead

staring up under
[a] chiffonier at its warped
bass-wood bottom.

The spatial reversal produces a dramatic effect: the first view is *down* on crossing yellow rushes that evoke the illusion of "the distant wood," the second view is *up* only inches at a "warped" wood bottom.

As in *The Autobiography*, Williams imagines an intruder. Here it is his English grandmother, aged and approaching death, the "devil" in the prosaic sense because she undid the domesticating efforts of Williams' mother (Mariani presents the evidence). Williams equated her life with obstinacy, intransigence, a limited depth of field; in a Yale manuscript, "The Three Letters," written around 1921, Williams developed a comparison between his grandmother and the baroness, as "interrupting" women. Williams' valorization of the intruder (and "the flapping flags," a vertical motif, at "half mast for the dead admiral") sets up the opposing intensity of the horizontal, out-of-body motion toward the horizon of

the young girls [who] run giggling
on Park Avenue after dark
when they ought to be home in bed.

If they were "home in bed," sensation would not pile up as formlessly as it does "giggling / on Park Avenue after dark." This is a poem that "makes the round," that brackets detail at its center, ending on motion, on a reopening of vision onto the "corridor to a clarity" that produces it. The poem achieves part of its sense of giddiness by this reversal of visual strategies for containing motion and detail.

Although Williams was too curious a craftsman to dwell on one

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pattern, the spatial template of "Postlude" and "January Morning" is found in other poems, especially "The Attic Which Is Desire." The title of this poem, standing grammatically parallel to the first line, introduces the subject and the spatial matrix of triangulation, but takes a colder view of the potentiality the form holds than do the previous poems. This triangle is

the unused tent
of

bare beams
beyond which

directly wait
the night

and day—
Here

from the street
by

* * *
* S *
* O *
* D *
* A *
* * *

ringed with
running lights

the darkened
pane

exactly
down the center

is
transfixed

(CPI, pp. 325–26)⁸

No "loud eaves" rattle here. This triangle is "unused," an "attic" in which desire becomes merely "bare beams." Clear vision has been socially marginalized by expectations of a "SODA." Williams does not linger: the point is that the shape is reduced to eidetic bareness; it is a vessel of potentiality. This poem concerns itself with *interruption*, with what Peter Schmidt has termed "the machinery of stimulating desire." The poet's prevision passes through the attic peak, an anticipated height whose inexpressibility he indicates by aposiopesis and descends

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to the opposed point of view. The view up / the view down, as in "January Morning," has a linear element, a "corridor to a clarity" that squares the triangular and leaves the poem running outward. "SODA" will light, presumably, in a moment, but it leaves the reader at a state of attention. Interruption is anticipated, not achieved. This technique, borrowed from contemporary painting, especially the ready-mades of Marcel Duchamp, privileges the "erotic atmosphere." Williams adapts the technique to his own spatial biography: to the initially triangular, barren attic, perceived from within, he opposes the subsequent "darkened / pane" whose light is imminent. This corridor *will* produce a clarity, but the critical interruption has not yet occurred. The reader must "see" beyond the edge of the page. The diction that gives rise to this effect is cold and winterish: "darkened pane," "down the center," "transfixed." If we await the word to appear longer than meet, we may realize that "soda" is not simply sweet, but also sodium carbonate, a bitter leavening agent.

Of the many other poems in Williams' oeuvre amenable to this reading, none is better known than "The Yachts." It is widely remarked for the way in which the preservation of the poem's "false start" leads to the poet's discovery of his real subject.

Now the waves strike at them but they are too
well made, they slip through, though they take in canvas.

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

until the horror of the race dawns staggering the mind
(CPI, p. 389)

The discovery of the faces in the waves, across which the prow of the yacht cuts, is not simply thematic. It is also a spatial resolution consonant with the pattern of triangulation described above: Williams considers first the vertical triangles of the sails and fails to find a race (that is, an "interruption"), then turns to the horizontal. In the waves he finds material he had ironically "passed over," the faces, perhaps, of the baroness, Hartley, and others, cut by the "craft" to which he sacrificed them. Only seeing "as with waves above me" is Williams in command of the second perceptive matrix that makes the poem.

Williams' tendency to "close" the movements and spaces of his later poems via triangulation makes his earlier experiments with the form the more interesting. "Danse Russe" is usually remarked for the changes it works on the sonnet form, its painterly influences and self-confident

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narcissism, yet it is also a poem in which a change in the poet's spatial embodiment plays a major role. As commonly explicated, the poem begins in a sense of social responsibility: the poet's wife and child and maid are sleeping, while he has risen early to write. The long "if" clause containing these details associates them with the sun "above shining trees." The dominant element of this initial motif is the unseen, vertical "flame-white disc" of the sun "in silken mists." The principal transformation work of the poem will change the poet into a generative sun himself. The mediating presence of rectilinearity appears when the second "if" clause associates the pronoun "I" with "north room" and "mirror." These shapes give the poet an image of himself in motion ("waving," "singing"), satyr-like and "alone" in an autoerotic pleasure framed by the rectangle of "yellow drawn shades." By a kind of autochthonic power, Williams appropriates the sun from the room, mirror, and shades. He terminates his metamorphosis, using aposeopsis again, holding an image of himself *within* the corridor of "the yellow drawn shades." Williams etches no details here because there is no interruption. The rhetorical question that closes the poem—"Who shall say I am not / the happy genius of my household?"—emphasizes that this place is empty, as well as indicating satisfaction with the spatial transformation he has effected.

"To a Solitary Disciple" has been the object of exegesis concerning its relation to Italian futurism and paintings by Charles Demuth, for its advocacy of cubism over impressionism, for its somewhat polemical demonstration of how poetry provides what painting cannot. Yet the spatial relationships within the poem also command attention, and there is more subtlety to them than the antithesis of squat church and jasmine moon.

Rather grasp
how the dark
converging lines
of the steeple
meet at the pinnacle—
perceive how
its little ornament
tries to stop them—

See how it fails!

(CPI, p. 104)¹⁰

The lines do more than pass through the limiting (in both the architectural and social senses) ornament of the spire: they pass into a realm of infinite motion—"receding, dividing"—when they form the

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inverted twin of the triangle of the steeple. Within this second, illimitable and superior triangle, the moon has its cold, actual "eaten" imperfection. While Williams' conclusion recurs to the question of impressionistic color, his final words oppose the ineffable lightness of disembodied being in the second, superior triangle, to the "oppressive weight / of the squat edifice." The auditor to whom Williams addresses his explanation plays the role of interrupter, turning the poet from disembodiment to embodiment.

The "embodiment of knowledge," as Williams called it, is one of the hallmarks of his poetry. While one could draw the spatial scheme too rigorously in a single poem, the many prows and attics and steeples and "crossed sticks" of Williams' works have a logic. In such later poems as "Tapiola" Williams was still writing of the "attic room under the eaves" where the poet went "to defy the devil of emptiness." "To Daphne and Virginia" concerns itself with "a woman's world / of crossed sticks, stopping / thought," which is to be fecundated by the "odor of box," surely used in a punning sense. Williams also relived the journey across the Lac in "View by Color Photography on a Commercial Calendar." Triangularity caught and held meaning for Williams, sequestered it from the flow of formlessness. He then made the form, already a privileged icon in Western art, the richer by his private rebellions against it. No appreciation of his dialectic with the form is complete without the realization that these spatial evocations and analogues for emotion are all artfully suggested, not in their customary plastic media, but by mere words.

¹ William Carlos Williams, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New York: Random House, 1952), pp. 163-69.

² William Carlos Williams, "The Baroness Elsa Freytag von Loringhoven," p. 282, above.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 283-84.

⁴ William Carlos Williams, "July," *Poems* (Rutherford, N.J.: Reid Howell, 1909), p. 20.

⁵ Williams' ability to evoke physical forms and spatial relationships within his poems has received a good deal of critical examination lately. See Marjorie Perloff, "Lines Converging and Crossing" in *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981); Thomas Whitaker, "Spring and All: Teaching Us the Figures of the Dance," *William Carlos Williams Review*, 10 (Fall 1984); and Peter Schmidt, *William Carlos Williams, the Arts, and Literary Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1988).

⁶ Mike Weaver, *William Carlos Williams: The American Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1971), p. 231.

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⁷ Wassily Kandinsky, *The Art of Spiritual Harmony* (London: Constable, 1914), p. 5.

⁸ Peter Schmidt's reading of this poem ("Some Versions of Modernist Pastoral," *William Carlos Williams, the Arts, and Literary Tradition*, pp. 38-39) places it within the pastoral tradition, which, if I understand him, shifts registers to comprehend the "coercive" and "ironic." While I think he places too much emphasis on phallic imagery and "mass market commodities," his contrast of Williams' and Sheeler's precisionism is most apt.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.