

"Music it for yourself:" Poetic Measure and Embodiment of Knowledge in the Language of William Carlos Williams' *Paterson*

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The industrialized early 20th-century society of William Carlos Williams' America drives ahead in pursuit of scientific knowledge and new technology, both creating and collaterally suffering broad-scale human calamity. Responding to the post-Depression and post-World War II era of America, Williams reports on a crisis in the field of letters: "the construction of our poems... is left shamefully to the past" (*Essays* 337). Such an ineffectual state of affairs for poetry is for Williams symptomatic of a more general crisis in human knowledge, the pursuit of which has been co-opted by political institutions and by industrial enterprise, which lack any artful linguistic or communicative elements. In updating the "construction" of poetry, Williams recognizes the need for new bases of knowledge and the language that both instantiates it and, he will find, is also one of its constitutive elements. Such a need can only be satisfied for Williams by a thorough attention to poetic process and poetic act; indeed, there is call for a technique of constructive listening, having its anthropological basis in music as a cultural practice and artifact. Williams must recover his poetic project from the failure of outdated forms, taking from the raw material of modern noise the reality of a modern poetic measure itself. New form in this sense can only be derived from content given, but it requires in this a new approach to poetic expression in order that the form is not abstractly free or chaotic. Williams' attempt at uncovering this approach is to use the artifice of poetic measure to create a space, which, in its inception, enacts a language of a modern urban reality, namely the "resemblance between the mind of modern man and a city" (*Paterson* xiii). In essence he must inhabit the poetic process itself in order to engage its subject and make its language "recognizable" (xiii). This paper aims to show how Williams' treatise on measure is borne out in the musical versification of language in *Paterson's* five books. Particular emphasis on *process embodied in place* emerges from Book Two with "Sunday in the Park" and the pacing walk of Mr. Paterson. This innovation of organic form operates to the end of Williams' broader philosophical commitments to music in language, knowledge, love, and culture.

When Williams speaks of a poem as a "field of action" (*Essays* 280), he treats the crafting of poetry itself as a disciplinary field or area of knowledge, but expresses a more literal sense of the word, 'field,' as place for growth or space for development. He invokes a fidelity of or fealty to experience and process, where knowledge and meaning are at least partly fluid and contingent upon present experience. Williams is concerned with guidance through chaos, a "new measure consonant with our time and not a mode so rotten that it stinks" (*Essays* 339), which can allow his living poem and life in poetry to continue. In this he also speaks to a general cultural malaise, having its vein in an anthropological project that recognizes the ethnography of place—the revelation of the dynamics within a city, *Paterson*, New Jersey, from early settlement through to its place in contemporary industrial America and a man, the titular figure who Williams projects as "N. F. PATERSON!" (*Paterson* 15) and reveals through "THE GRRRREAT HISTORY of that / old time Jersey Patriot" (15).

Paterson is no partial treatment by Williams, though it remains unfinished. This later work treats of Williams' career-long pursuit of meaning in action through rhythm, an early example being his notes on "Speech Rhythm" in 1913: "No action, no creative action is complete but a period from a greater action going in rhythmic [sic] course, i.e., an Odyssey is rightly considered not an isolate unit but a wave of a series from hollow through crest to hollow. No part in it's [sic] excellence but partakes of the essential nature of the whole." (1). It is remarkable that there is a ratio of rudiment between allegory to archetype implied in this statement, even as Williams does not fully explicate what he means by "an Odyssey." Williams' approach demands our attention to be flexible and to be current, and this demand stems not from random irregularity of verse, but from measuring sound in its invention by spoken language. Stephen Adams in *Poetic Designs* contrasts meter and rhythm in a way that may help us so define measure: "'Meter' refers to the abstract model for poetic measure, 'rhythm' to the actual sound and inflection of the free give-and pauses within line" (2). Taking it as a verb, measure then is

best viewed as an acting or bearing out of meter. This interpretation—there is no measure but in the act—stands to compare to musical applications, where measure is both the enactment of musical meter *and* the space in which this act is defined. Rhythm, in its substance, makes the act possible. Amiri Baraka, the African-American poet and an early disciple of Williams' ideas about prosody, in "How You Sound??" sums up the project: "...all this means that we want to go into a quantitative verse...Accentual verse, the regular metric of rumbling iambics, is dry as slivers of sand. Nothing happens in that frame anymore. We can get nothing from England" (645). Far from "rumbling iambics" (Baraka 645), Charles Olson and other post-WWII, postmodern contemporaries of Williams are committing to an organic or Open Form, derived from particular prosodic content present in prosaic speech, which by its measure is creative of a holistic attitude to poetry, with an emphasis on poetic function in its commonality, its ubiquity. *Paterson* then may be read as an early pro-genesis of the prosodic sensibility required for developing the Open Form as these later poets have done, where the poet's act of measure is both essential and emergent, while it is neither inherited nor reductive.

The meaning of prosodic device, over literal narrative, is speech meaning, which we take up in technique and simple measure. Denise Levertov defines organic form, in part, to be "based on an intuition of an order, a form beyond forms, in which forms partake, and of which man's creative works are analogies, resemblances, natural allegories. Such poetry is exploratory" (629). The poetic process, for adherents to an Open Form philosophy, enacts such an intuition by bringing it back to body, to experience. 'Embodied' knowledge in this sense depends upon a 'body' of language, a poetic embodiment structured through prosodic elements, which live in temporal space as sound, shape and cognition. Knowledge in the craft, the act of creation, depends on a sense of language used *as* experience, beyond its transparent application in conveying the meaning of experience. In his introduction to Williams' *The Embodiment of Knowledge*, Ron Loewinsohn describes Williams' approach to knowledge as "making a case for...a nonreferential theory of language in the 'field of letters'" (xvii). In other words, rather than simply symbolizing, or standing for objects in their bare meaning, signs for Williams enact objects. The linguistic school of Russian "formalism" had a similar emphasis on texture and the uses of poetic language over practical language (Eichenbaum 1066). Taken

referentially, 'meaning' and apprehension arrest the experience of language, and disembodies it to irreducible formula, something of the atomic, radiant "gist" celebrated by nuclear physicists (Williams, *Paterson* 184), which our poet compares to the vacuous concept of money or credit. Ecologically speaking, language so employed denotes knowledge by "dissection" as opposed to knowledge by "creation" (Berry).

Wendell Berry critiques the usefulness of knowledge derived from analytical science in a recent essay, "The Melancholy of Anatomy." As it stands for pure reason, such knowledges "within the welter of our experience is limited and weak" (Berry). Referring to our contemporary economics, Berry argues that industrialization prevents us from recognizing holistic experience. The way industries regard "landscapes as sources of extractable products" represents for Berry "the disembodiment of thought," by which "the scientific-industrial culture, founded nominally upon materialism, arrives at a sort of fundamentalist disdain for material reality" (3). He frames his argument in the tradition of William Butler Yeats and other modern poets, whom he quotes: "We only believe in those thoughts which have been conceived not in the brain but in the whole body (introduction to Ezra Pound and Ernest Fenollosa's *Certain Noble Plays of Japan*)" (Berry). For Berry, the modern industrial age begets Nature as commodity and we even begin to perceive our experience of it as such; Yeats' "foreboding...mechanical sequence of ideas," like a coldly-calculated view, is the "mentalization" or ideation¹ which Berry attacks at large in the order of the Western world. Yeats, Pound, Eliot, H. D., Moore, Williams and other of their contemporaries are influenced philosophically by a modern alienation from nature, taking their cue from Emerson, who asked, "Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe?," since "[t]he sun shines to-day also rises" (496). Emerson's essay "Nature" argues for a "NOT ME" definition of "NATURE," "that is, both nature and art" (497), and that the "Soul" accounts for all experience of self (cf. Cartesian dualism), as distinct from these both. We may use this dichotomy to reflect on Williams' crisis of disembodiment, self separate from nature as form has been separated from content in the making of poetry.

With regard to prosody, mechanized production may be the new background; but it has

¹ See *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary*, "ideation, *n* (1818): the forming of ideas (as of things not present to the senses)"

rhythms, symbolized by Williams in *Paterson* as "twos and fours" (45), industrial inputs and outputs, "up and down /...using such plugs" (164-165), as if in a body performed with mindless logic. Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer documents a contemporary description of this emerging sound experience in his work *The Soundscape*, quoting Luigi Russolo from 1913: "machines create today such a large number of varied noises that pure 'sound,' with its littleness and its monotony, now fails to arouse any emotion" (Schafer 111). This notion of "reversal of figure and ground," which Schaeffer recognizes, means that mechanical noise is foregrounded. Here then is one category of material "noise" for Williams, working in a way that can be measured, a type of new ground against which to establish textured response. For Williams, modern poetic process requires a "footing" on which to withstand the dominance of 'Science and Philosophy' as categories of knowledge in the economic, political and cultural life of early-twentieth century: "[the] predominant influence upon our lives attributable to these two categories of understanding has grown...to the virtual exclusion of other categories—notably art—is demonstrable daily" (*Embodiment* 85). With respect to ideation, he is not saying that we should treat 'mental activity' as such with any prejudicial disdain, but in fact that we must beware the "end" to which scientific and philosophical pursuits themselves "preclude thought" (85). Williams likens the purpose of art to a "head" that is lacking from the "anatomy and physiology" of science and philosophy (85). This head alone is able to will such knowledge into action, through a process of embodiment.

Stephen Cushman addresses Williams' poetic process, an embodiment to break down the duality of form and content, as it may be described from reading "The Desert Music." He is careful to point out that, by measuring and counting, Williams' goal is not to arrive at any abstract formula of quantification. Rather, Cushman argues, "measure is a trope of mimesis:"

Williams establishes a metonymic relation between how the poem says what must be said and the idea of measuring....How shall we get said what must be said? By means of measuring what we must say with imitation. Although formal scheme will inevitable figure in the mimetic project, it is only a part of that project. Many misreadings of Williams, as well as some of his own confusions, originate

here, in the inference that he is saying reductively, the way to make poems that say something is to invent a nonmetrical formal scheme based on pseudo-quantitative theory. (138)

Imitation departs from quantification by way of iteration. Alliteration is especially a creative force for Williams, even as the poet tips his hand in a kind of obliteration, to reveal the meaningless acts entailed in the process: e.g. "how [howl]" (*Paterson* 17), "beauty –/ torn to shreds by the / lurking schismatists" (71), and "The descent / made up of despairs" (79), the "inarticulate" (54).

This re-living without repetition is the poet's 'muse:' "Music it for yourself," the persona of *Paterson* implores us (29), and to do so one need look no further than to simple prosodic device. Alliterative phrasing, for example, in its self-referential quality, offers a kind of condensed unit of measure. As a phrase, "a bush shakes" (19), provides more than just an example of onomatopoeia. It is also an example of the poet's statement on knowledge and identity, as a bush sounds in / responds to its environment. It is resonant, living, "green" (19). Hence, we are discussing measure in a metaphorical sense, as Cushman points out. However, the consonance of "sh" as a sound in the spoken verses provides at least a self-reflexive measure, a repetition of textural features in their spoken, temporal qualities (cf. "nonsense language," Eichenbaum 1068).

In *Paterson*, the Poet's challenge is to create beauty through such uses of language as embodiment of experience out of "complexities," the "particulars" (3) of experience. He can speak, as poet, of a "certain knowledge," to be dispersed in saving his self from the "undoing" of ignorance (4). Such knowledge is "engaged" (85) with its subject. It is not a priori, formed purely in the mind. Nor is it ensconced in the Library, as "The Library is desolation" (101), knowledge so filed is disembodied, having been devised, in a sense, "to lead the mind away" (96). Williams' central thesis grapples with language, which "divorced from their / minds" (12), leads *Paterson's* "thousand automatons" to drift, through ideation, out of the body of their experience and the texture of their voice in it. Invoking his creative persona, he places the subject's behaviour on the plain of "just another dog" (3), being vulgar and base in its expression. As poet William considers himself a "lame" one, on "three legs" able to speak but not follow, in a sense (3). He *could* be of even lesser value than those other agile dogs in his park scene, yet he is superior in his measure of the situation,

and in his responsiveness to the many other dogs, capable in the knowledge that "the beginning is assuredly / the end" (3), and capable in creating his basic measure. Indeed, for the promise of embodiment, an act of love for the poetic must likewise be an act of destruction, e.g. in naming as "Beautiful thing!" a burning building of books (100).

Consider now the 'finishing touches' of any so-called perfected form, which leaves nothing for fashioning exchange, to the touch, to struggle with—old forms are too neat, too calculated, Williams might argue. Modeled upon the "resemblance between the mind of modern man and a city," Williams conceived *Paterson* in "four books following the course of the river," but he was "drawn on" by the theme of the poem, the "noise of the Falls [that] seemed to be a language which we were and are seeking" (xiv). He could not stop writing, or he could not finish—in any case the project was not complete with Book Five, and partial drafts of a sixth book were discovered at Williams' death. This is the spark of continual regeneration necessary to engage art on a 'modern' footing, where "the serious poet has admitted the whole armamentarium of the industrial age to his poems—" (Williams, *Essays* 282). A serious reader of poetry meanwhile gives her own breath to the enactment of the language, in a voice that is responsive to every line; her participation is required to complete the composition, taking up its shapes and signs. Denise Levertov, a correspondent and late contemporary of Williams, describes such participation as "discoverable only in the work, not before it," as the "state of dynamic interaction [of content and form]" (630). This process, too, is an "intimate" one that for Williams is never quite suited to public reading (MacGowan, *Letters* 281), but requires complete subject engagement. It seems to be the spirit in which Williams names his first collection, *Al Que Quiere!*, which he translates for Marianne Moore in a 1917 letter as "To him who wants it," with the sarcastic sounding alternate English title, "The Pleasures of Democracy" (*Selected Letters* 40). Relative to the project in *Paterson*, Williams' career preoccupation is with the relationship between letters and democracy, poetry and its many voices. Knowledge, in a human way, "a common language" is only palpable within the field of the poem, and so, in truth, "men die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found there" (Williams, *Collected Poems* 318).

Language, then, with its obligation "to speak in a language we can understand" (xiii), is the living concept of the *Paterson* project: to

"unravel" such a language in its generative, creative use (7). Treated as imitation, this process derives from mimesis, which we may distinguish from diegesis and language in its expository, practical use. The project represents a form of dialogism for Williams, in which "the dialect is the mobile phase, the changing phase, the productive phase" (Williams, *Selected Letters* 291). For the poet exploring place, in "a roar that (soundless) drowns the sense" (Williams, *Paterson* 97), there is productivity in meaninglessness. Still, the project runs against and must contend with the use of language in its practical, purpose-laden use.

The poet reveals at times the extent to which the text is a direct result of measuring: "I cannot say / more than how. The how (the howl) only / is at my disposal (proposal)" (17). An assonant rhyme in this case is a rudimentary metrical equivalence experienced in the poet's use of language. Here, specifically, the "how [and] howl," or "disposal [and] proposal" also share some identity in function to Williams' poetic process. There may be no syntactical reason for the rhyming iterations, but paradigmatically they strengthen the sense of each sign in a way that amplifies their didactic qualities.

In Book I, *Paterson's* "thoughts the stream," are asleep, "abed," a dream but having "no language" (Williams, *Paterson* 23), unobserved, un-arrested. He is unconscious, and yet there is peace in ideal thought: "there moves in his sleep a music that is whole, unequivocal" (59), having no particular object; this is pure noise, a "roar" or "voice" as a generative force. In *Selected Essays*, Williams also discusses dream qualities as the language object in poetic composition: "the *subject matter* of the poem is always phantasy—what is wished for, realized in the ['dream'] of the poem—but [the structure confronts] something else," (283). This "something else" is reality or, namely, the material texture of language, which we can describe as prosody, or speech in some particular resonance or responsive embodiment. Our poet's imperative at the start of book one, "—Say it, no ideas but in things—" (*Paterson* 6), is an emphasis of the necessary experiential genesis for our language.

In Book II, Williams includes excerpts of correspondence, letters exchanged with Marcia Nardi, who is trying to find work in the field of letters and whom Williams in fact is unable to aid, defaulting in fact with recommendation "to apply to one of the Federal Employment Bureaus and let them instruct you" (Williams, *Paterson* 268). The poet and his interlocutor are at an impasse or

"blockage" creative capacity because of a non-response: "the outcome of my failure with you has been the complete damming up of all my creative capacities in a particularly disastrous manner such as I have never before experienced" (45), she writes. For her, there was no regenerative force, or sounding act in response to the letters, their "real contents" ignored. And yet *Paterson* is the response to those particulars—"exiling one's self from one's self – have you ever experienced it?" (45), she asks, to which the persona responds with poetic profession and knowledge as proof: "How do I love you? These!" Williams responds indirectly through the outset shell of Mr. Paterson, exiled poet as he is, grappling with the perceptions of the characters he has imbued:

(He hears! Voices . indeterminate! Sees them / moving, in groups, by twos and fours – filtering / off by way of the many bypaths.). (45)

Against this clatter of aimless purpose Williams introduces the idea of Poet as auditor, "*I listen to the water falling (No sound of it here but with the wind!) This is my entire occupation*" (46), creating a new ground in a kind of leveling act in which new figures may emerge. Listening so, with such technique, is the way for poet as a bearer of language to ward off the "indeterminate" animalism of the voices on "the many bypaths." There is something about the even division of "twos and fours" that Williams finds transparent, bland, lifeless and uninspired. The "filtering" through these phenomena presents a truly boorish quality to the voices that take the same paths, taking their lowest common function.

A 'certain' knowledge prioritizes embodiment over recognition; truly, for any dog or so 'animated [an] automaton,' death is required to be "well in...body" (Williams, *Paterson* 3-5). By contrast, learning confined to abstraction, to the 'safety' of mind alone may well be a different way of death, in its fixity, being flat and "unwilling or enable" to take shape, as "like beds always made up" (5). As the poet must beware "the craft, / subverted by thought" (4), we all must beware the primacy of thought (itself) as it may be calculated toward use of language. Williams will illustrate this well, measuring this stance as if it were to marriage, itself one act, to be made and not maintained, ownership of man over woman: "A marriage riddle: / So much talk of the language—when there are no / ears" (106). Yet the 'dog' here makes poetry; his scope is 'poetic knowledge,' metonymic of all craft. In the

Emersonian sense, such knowledge is not of self and self-identity; it is rather an ongoing commitment to the nature of 'not self' (cf. Eliot). Williams' early commitment to such a new relationship with knowledge is in his emphasis on time, and more precisely experience *in time*, by which the truth of certain knowledge claims must be continually tested and reproved. Williams contrasts the products of poetry to those of philosophy and science in an essay from 1929, collected in *The Embodiment of Knowledge*:

Obviously there is no tolerance for sham or lies in either science or philosophy. But within the category of each there is the same congruence as the infinitely more sensitive relationships of great art—in which only does the time element enter, in that the same truth in art must be restated continually in each age in the materials of that age to be true: whereas the crudity and grossness of both philosophy and science is that they attempt to do away with time in an absurd absolute which—by the very lack of time makes them—to say the least inhuman.

(*Embodiment* 88)

To insist that time is necessary to our experience is a conspicuously obvious statement, yet in his emphasis of *the experience of knowledge* acting in time, Williams demands our full attention. This, in short, is a kind of artistic temporization;² it is part of the organic structure of poetic experience that anyone engaged with reading poetry is also engaged with its subject. Knowledge of this subject has no objective standard, moreover, rather it is the reader who supplies her own relative measure. This function is dialogic, inclusive of the reader and the subject embodied in language.

The composer John Cage holds that music by nature in its ephemeral characteristics offers a promise of development in space: "instantaneous and unpredictable, nothing is accomplished by writing, hearing or playing a piece of music; our ears are now in excellent condition" (621). The process itself, then, is its own product, its own result. Engagement therein is *relative* to the presence of a listener, outside of which there is

² If we derive from two definitions, "to act to suit the time or occasion" and to "temporarily adopt a particular course in order to conform to the circumstances" a term, 'to temporize' implies a measure of present time and a suspension of prior knowledge ("Temporize").

nothing left to become old or stagnant. We may compare this to the walking step of Mr. Paterson, which embodies musical time purely in action, willful though not cognitively deliberate.

If language itself has a body, then it is also based in temporal dimension. Words on a page are spatial, but language *in use* is temporal. Temporal perception in verse relies in essence on some measure, which is not to say some subjective measure, purely at the whim of the reader. Rather what we are discussing is that which may often be referred to as 'implied.' Indeed, "measure implies something that can be measured" (Williams, *Letters* 337). Its meter then can be consciously and objectively established as measure gets enacted.

Throughout "Sunday in the Park," the voice of the poem is one persona, but its perspective changes (mostly) between Mr. Paterson and the figure of the Poet, third and first-person, respectively. When Paterson speaks in the opening lines, he speaks in the first-person voice, but the frame is self-referential—"myself / my"—and looking "outside" (Williams, *Paterson* 43). Here the poet's voice takes over, describing what Mr. Paterson sees in a third-person narrative. The poet persona is observing Mr. Paterson as "he moves, / his voice intermingling with other voices" (56), and in this sense it is purely descriptive or object-oriented, one among particulars, "Voices! / multiple and inarticulate voices / clattering loudly..." (54). This revelation of process is limited to a passive receptivity, as are "the binoculars chained / to anchored stanchions" at the limits of the park (55). Mr. Paterson, in body, is like an apparatus in the process of the poem.

In the roar of the falls, a force of nature in action, his thoughts give way against a the new current or ground, to the noise or howl of pure voice needing expression in language, where only certain figures emerge. "[The] voice in his voice" (56) is the active voice, the first person persona, or poet, watching Paterson and addressing the poem. Sometimes he is in step with Mr. Paterson; however, the poet must also depart. His outward view does not have its end in containing or aggregating all voices. For this poet, living persona, complexity and multitude are too indeterminate or perhaps too dissonant for common language to reflect knowledge; simple "elemental" measure, rather, is the goal, and the approach must be concrete. This persona knows that Paterson's time is kept in his walk—and not knowledge of walking, i.e. 'how to walk,' but the activity, "Walking—" (44, 45, 47, 52, 58).

Repeated on the hard left margin or, notably, the limit of the text, this phrase becomes a type of prosodic cadence, or resolution, by which measure takes its leveling, "by twos and fours—filtering" (45). Against it, grounded so, the conscious and creative persona may mark time, where the reader may take its measure. The effect on Williams' part is a verse and 'Metaverse,' hung on indentation, punctuation, dashes and double-periods (e.g. 44).

Mr. Paterson's voice is "unheard" (55), but voicing, counting, stepping is "kindling his mind more / than his mind will kindle" (56). For the poet, this kindling must find its equivalent in language (that is, in prosody, embodied language).

Still yet such discovery is an act of invention and innovation, whereby, in a dialogue of imitation and meaning, a creative capacity or creative environment emerges. He is composing, in John Cage's sense of music of the world, in an act of "Purposeful purposelessness" (622).

Williams describes this as a "field" of knowledge: "[the head is] art—the palpable shape of our lives presented in the only way which as sensible creatures we are capable of making it objective" (*Embodiment* 85). Poetry is a 'field' of objective ontology (by count, by temporization) and subjective epistemology, where knowledge is held. The "poet's proof" (287) is made as it is heard and experienced. For example, when he speaks "— a flight of empurpled wings! ... invisibly created ... — aflame in flight — aflame only in flight" (278), he shows the measure, in this case of temporal limits, to be both a condition for and substance of the experience.

Nonetheless, such measure requires an intimate technique. The persona's imploring, vocative case addresses each reader—"you"—keeping them in close proximity in the act of creation and the temporization of poetic knowledge. Invention in this case is in no way static, since it requires new experience; it requires innovation:

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

(Williams, *Paterson* 50)

Without invention, the necessity for space does not register, and yet a space is necessary for invention; therefore the creation of space, or conditions, for invention must be part of the invention itself, as it is with play in music. This

then is the purpose of counting, for Williams, which in order to innovate needs to become conscious again and again, to be something we find in the experience. Reflecting to Cid Corman on the dominance of older forms, Williams notes, "Instinctively we have continued to count as always but it has become not a conscious process and being unconscious has descended to a low level of the invention" (*Essays* 340). Along with measure, by one means counting, "music-ing" or sounding becomes the force for change—not for strictness of new figures, but for their interpretation. Book III of *Paterson* provides space for the noise of desolation, disembodied language—the "roar of books" (Williams, *Paterson* 100)—the lifeless environment where only a mutable form can survive: "What language could allay our thirsts, / what winds lift us, what floods bear us / past defeats / but song but deathless song?" (108). In music, this Open Form that Williams explores, causes our ears to be "jogged" (*Essays* 340) and we are compelled to listen if we are at all to enter the field of the subject. This activity comes built into the artifact, like a dance required for the experience.

Consider further an imposition of time from "Sunday in the Park." "Time! Count! Sever and mark time!" (Williams, *Paterson* 56). The persona of the poet in action asks us all to listen and measure, hearing how language gets made. Composition and painting of experience is required to inspire belief in such thought; "We believe always by coming, in some sense, to see" writes Berry (1). Order of counting, realization of meter—implied or deliberate—is required to generate poetic experience, just as it is to perform music. As meter is for music, for verse to be 'in' a certain meter implies qualities of size and number. When reciting passages of verse, even if the verse is not regular, one relies on a sense of rhythm, if generated purely from the word stress and prosodic long and short that are raw textural features of any spoken line. Williams' world evokes the call of poet persona—he invokes listeners to "(use a metronome / if your ear is deficient...)" (55)—"his voice" suggesting that an applied meter obviates the space in which phrases, words and their syllabic rudiments (phonemic, morphemic) become discernible objects of experience. Knowledge of and *in* experience depends on a creative event; to express knowledge at all, we must in this sense make it together.

For Williams, invention in poetry requires a new craft or poetic process, of which measure is both a device and a goal. Reflecting on traditional

approaches, Williams bemoans the ideality of structure:

The one thing the poet has not wanted to change, the one thing he has clung to in his dream—unwilling to let go—the place where the time-lag is still adamant—is structure. Here we are unmovable. But here is precisely where we come into contact with reality. Reluctant, we waken from our dreams. And what is reality? How do we know reality? The only reality that we can know is MEASURE

(*Selected Letters* 283).

Williams' discussion of the meaning of dreams is indirect here, meaning purity and ideality in thought, but the dream of structure is so established that it easily mobs the individual experience:

Signs everywhere of birds nesting, while in the air, slow, a crow zigzags with heavy wings before the wasp-thrusts of smaller birds circling about him that dive from above stabbing for his eyes

(Williams, *Paterson* 46)

For the following excerpt, the metaphor of rumours can be interpreted too as voices colliding; "conversant with eccentricities," "bearing" asymmetries as natural phenomena, and yet struggling to meet one another in representation, in meaning of common language. The following lines demand to be heard and scrutinized with a technique of listening and interest in knowledge within the field of the poem.

one unlike the other, twin
of the other, conversant with
eccentricities

side by side, bearing the water drops

and snow, vergent, the water soothing the
air when

it drives in among the rocks fitfully—
(Williams, *Paterson* 25)

This verse and those preceding it offer a phenomenal metaphor for the relationship between language and object, between speech and thought: "by the flood" we know "the storm" (25). By the steady flow of the stream, the air and water are as "brother / to brother, touching as the mind

touches" (24), in basic correspondence, but there is also a relationship defined by what the river "brings in...[it] brings in rumors of separate / worlds" (25), leaving something behind, which, for Williams, shows a measuring relationship. This parallel correspondence underlies an idea of analog knowledge (e.g. in artifact, in apparatus), with measure at the basis of the meaning. Also, at the falls they encounter something else: a language in embodied speech, in sound.

The verse texture,³ how each line *sounds*, is born out in recitation. An effect of rhythmic tension and resolution in this case depends upon a strong implied pulse (of three), and a syllabic pulse (of four), which gives the line momentum, as in the phrase, 'pass the salted butter.' A bi-rhythm of four beats against three can be represented in musical notation as follows, where the accented notes 'resolve' or come together every twelve subdivisions (*Drums* 103):

There is a 'phasing effect' at places with the least stable resolution, such "and snow, vergent, the water soothing the air when" (25).

We may say that these qualities of bi-rhythms (4:3), moving apart and coming together, among other elements of prosody, satisfy a test for onomatopoeia. Eichenbaum, in describing tenets of 'Russian formalism,' posits prosody to have an "independent oral function" in verse that is not "merely onomatopoeic" (1068). The expression or texture of the language is behaving like the object expressed. But how so? In the case of a bi-rhythm, two 'unlike' numbers are locked in a temporal relationship. The sensation of the spoken rhythm is of bouncing, colliding, but it is most apparent precisely through the possibility of resolution; a measured view depends on perspective, on actual reading of the verse, creating the space for hearing it, even counting if necessary. The structure or "texture" of the thing remains still *relative*, or subject-dependent, however, even while there is specific material to be resolved measured by the reader. Such an approach to measure may be compared to approaches to musical rhythm outside of the Europeanized tradition. According to Montfort,

"The concept of time in African music has a different emphasis than that of the West:" "the African approach to rhythm does not limit itself to one meter at a time," and "one pulse," but instead has a "larger *time span*" as a "unifying principle" (7). Such music is, moreover, derived from cultural practice and has "developed as part of community life. Poetically speaking, the measure depends upon an act of sound (cf. Olson, "ear to the syllables," 215). To derive the bi-rhythm, in this case, is not necessary to experience its effect. Yet it may be done as counting functions as a meter, much like a ruler—except that length represents time—by which we may group and subdivide.

One of Williams' tactical solutions to uncovering a process of measure in *Paterson* is to "write carelessly so that nothing that is not green will survive" (129). This is a challenge to linguistic structuralism—for example, to Roman Jakobson's claim that "[poetic] function, by promoting the palpability of signs, deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects" ("Linguistics and Poetics" 1264). Uncovering what is "green" or living in poetic language depends may depend for Williams upon a measure of non-intention, but the consequences of the language are still concrete, they still "may destroy the world" (Williams, *Paterson* 129). This leads us to ask, even where the poetic function is onomatopoeic, whether 'structure' itself and its emotive content are meaningful in a semantic way, or whether these are merely texture? Williams might argue that this relationship is real and is sprung from the subject's own experience or embodiment of knowledge. In this example the "rumours" are object-voices which the persona foregrounds at their most intermingled state, "vergent, the water soothing the air when / it drives in among the rocks fitfully—" (24). The dash breaks the line, an arrested resolution from the now forward rolling triplet meter, which itself resolves from the tension created by preceding enjambed lines. The effect proves a mimesis of the objects discussed; language too becomes a 'fitful' place for ideas at the moment the reader takes their resolve in its "auding:" "the process of hearing, recognizing, and interpreting spoken language" ("Auding"). There is an interplay of the receptive and the creative, in the responsive voice, the act of saying-in-meeting.

"The stone lives, the flesh dies" (Williams, *Paterson* 49). Stone represents potential. It can take shape and be given shape. This is "love," "a relationship...a weight, a substance, endlessly in flight" (49); it has neither a fixed identity nor a

³ cf. Dundes, "Text, Texture and Context"

conspicuous one and therefore it has a kind of permanence. And yet there is identity in an embodied use of voice. Language takes a measure to have literal significance or to behave concretely; and from the concrete substance, "the stone," comes possibility of "invention:" derivative construct (measure) vs. "aimless," inarticulate rhythm (Williams, *Essays* 337). In order to arrive at the 'common language,' the "voice within the voice" sifts through the vulgarity, wanton pleasures and calculated violence; the poet has to "Cut / out that stuff" which is destructive (Williams, *Paterson* 52), as "feet . . . aimlessly/ wandering" are to poetry (54). He compares this with dogs' behaviour, basic but persistent: "I took sticks and stones after the dog but he wouldn't beat it" (54). Language is simply a noise of referential multiplicity unless it is engaged with purposeful measure or "counter-weight" (48).

Williams writes to Denise Levertov: "a poem is made up not of the things of which it speaks directly but of the things which it cannot identify and yet yearns to know" (*Letters* 8). This suggestion implies a sought after, spontaneous but ultimately unstable resolution through poetry, in order to have "an elucidation by multiplicity" (Williams, *Paterson* 61); such potential must be counter-weighted by a raw noise, un-instantiated voice or material of measure. Cushman's etymology of "measure" is "to be meet, that is, commensurate, fitting or appropriate" (139), speaking with material weight. Corydon admonishes, "If th i s were rhyme, Sweetheart...But the measure of it is the thing...and without batting an eye / . ." (Williams, *Paterson* 163)—she is struck out here from actually continuing at the implied fourth beat of this idiomatic cadence of narrative.

Only through attention to language may one "Music it" for oneself (29), and the knowledge which therein takes its body is of a *relative* kind. Cushman's description is perhaps narrow if it refers to some particular, authored, or original poetic act of imitation, since this would preclude the reiteration of sounding out the poem. This may be by way of interpretation, but more likely by that of accent and meter, and therefore offers variations on structure within the metered Gestalt. "If structure," John Cage writes, then "rhythmic structure" (623). If only by heartbeat or gait, each of us has a natural rhythm and each brings a unique sense of timing to the structure of the poem. For Williams, nonetheless, language resides in a commonality of exchange that makes it far too important for its serious treatment to be

relegated to art alone. However, art and, in particular, music offer by far the richest possibilities for ensuring that the dialogic process of imbuing language with meaning does not stagnate. Only in a body of musical technique can poetic language find its necessary capacity for life. Poetic measure, then, is not just about mimesis of equivalence for its own sake, but is a home for real knowledge and indeed the most common experience.

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