"news from poems": the Significance of Small Things in the Poetry of William Carlos Williams

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Abstract

One of the most prominent poets of the Imagist and Objectivist tradition, William Carlos Williams consistently attempted to present "the thing itself" as accurately and vividly as possible. In his poetics, he tried to address the subject/object, imagination/reality dichotomies: the function of imagination is not to tamper with reality but to successfully transform it into something - not necessarily sublime - different. And it is by letting imagination dance over a commonplace thing, he believed, that one may experience a new significance in the thing in particular and/or a fresh perception of life in general. The present paper reviews Williams' poetics and reads in it an active, optimistic attitude to life: understanding his poetry demands readers' going through experiencing similar invocation of sensation and imagination, discovery and invention, that the poet had gone through. The readers are invited to explore significance in every particular object and incident, which may render the world of objects we live in fresher, more alive, and more meaningful. In this age of media hegemony and digitized communication, the adamic vision of Williams' poetry has the potential to provide people space to explore the power of sensitivity and imagination.

so much depends upon

a Rhodora, a leaf of grass, a blue fly, a tuft of flowers ...

The purple petals of a Rhodora floating on a pool leave Emerson contemplating on the nature of Beauty and the Transcendence. A simple leaf of summer grass leads Whitman to a self-spreading mystical adventure. The buzzing of a blue fly transports Dickinson to an almost existentialist reckoning of life here and there after death. A simple tuft of flowers teaches Frost the essence of communication, the message of universal love.

Image - an object, an event, often simple - has always appealed to the American imagination. Many of the Native American songs and poems consist of an image. For example, the following Chippewa song:

A loon I thought it was
But it was
My love's
splashing oar
VanSpenckeren (1994)

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Having an indigenous legacy and a handful of English predecessors like Blake and Wordsworth, American poets locate special meanings in things one usually neglects. Their attitudes to the larger scheme of things may vary: some may find in it design, some may perceive chaos, or coincidence, or uncertain surety, or certain uncertainty. But there is an intense, impulsive conviction, especially in Emerson and Whitman, that if one has the urge and sensitivity to perceive a thing intensely and honestly, one may discover the universe there, a conviction that every single thing and being has its meaning, its place, its purpose, its purport. Sharing (and transcending) this semi-romantic/semi-imagist stance, William Carlos Williams' poetry commits itself to discover and invent what he calls "the radiant gist" (Doyle, 1982) of an image: an object, an incident, or a picture.

One of the most prominent poets of the Imagist and Objectivist tradition, Carlos Williams consistently pursued "the thing itself" accurately and vividly in his poems. In his poetics, he attempted to address the subject/object, imagination/reality dichotomies: the function of imagination is not to tamper with reality but to successfully transform it into something - not necessarily sublime - different. And it is by letting imagination *dance* over a commonplace thing that we may experience a new significance in the thing, a fresh perception of life. The present paper re-reads three of Williams' deceptively simple poems and reviews his poetics. It argues that Williams' poetry exudes an active, optimistic attitude to life; it is active and optimistic in the sense that perceiving his images demands readers' experiencing similar invocation of sensation and imagination, discovery and invention, that the poet or persona had gone through. The readers are invited to read significance in the seemingly trite, to perceive an edge beyond the palpable boundary. In this age of media hegemony and digitized communication, it is significant to re-orientate the 'adamic' vision of Williams to reinstate the power and potential of sensitivity and imagination, the development of which may render the world of objects we live in fresher, more alive, more meaningful, and humane.

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1 *Referring to Ralph Waldo Emerson's "The Rhodora": "if eyes were made for seeing, / Then Beauty is its own excuse for being" and "[I] suppose / The self-same Power that brought me there brought you"; to Walt Whitman's* ***Song of Myself,*** *Section 6: "A child said What is the grass? ... I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, ... Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord, ...Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic"; to Emily Dickinson's poem no. 465, "I heard a Fly buzz-when I died-": "There interposed a Fly- // With Blue-uncertain stumbling Buzz- / Between the light-and me- / And then the Windows failed-and then / I could not see to see-"; and to Robert Frost's "The Tuft of Flowers": "'Men work together,' I told him from the heart, / 'Whether they work together or apart.'"*[1]

"Saxifrage is my flower"[2] : the poetics

Theodre Roethke, while commenting on the nature of modern poetry, once wrote: "There are areas of experience in modern life that simply cannot be rendered by either the formal lyric or straight prose ... We need the eye close to the object, the poem about the single incident" (Vinson 2). Williams' poetry is an adequate response to this modern demand. His friendship(?) with Ezra Pound, his medical profession, and his strong interest in painting - all these contributed to help Williams shift from his earlier Keatsian romanticism and escapism to a concentrated awareness of *isness* and *nowness*. His poems in and after *Al Que Quiere!* are informed with keen, perceptive eyes and ears for nuances. They were born of a perception of reality as a conglomeration of objects leading to his famous poetics-capsule: "No ideas but in things."

Understandably, this dictum is Imagism re-visioned. Influenced by the Japanese tanka and haiku, Imagism in the 1920s successfully jerked poetry out of Victorian sententiousness and oppressive length: poems became short and intense, irregular in rhyme scheme yet musical, concentrating on concrete things, and freezing fleeting moments of feeling or perception. In its most successful demonstration, as in Pound's "In a Station of the Metro," an imagist poem is an image - hard, precise, there - presented accurately and without wordiness. An imagist image is then like a Chinese ideogram[3]. In Pound's words, an image is "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time," or saying it more accurately, an "image . . . is a radiant node or cluster; . . . a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing" (quoted in Vinson,)[3]. To understand Williams is to develop imagination and sensitivity to capture that vortex. *Click!!*

Now to say that "ideas" rush "from ... through ... into" an image does not suggest that a poem necessarily offers an idea. Many of Williams' poetry do not. To him, a poet's chief job is not to make comments or generalization or to present an idea but to (re)present an object/image with its "concrete particulars," devoid of simile or metaphor or symbol, and "let the ideas - if there were any - take care of themselves" (Baym et al, 1165). Ostrom summarizes it neatly: a typical Williams poem is "completely free from interpretation or comment - the images stand alone, the things in themselves" (Ostrom, 1966). What then Williams strives for is vividness:

> Poetry should strive for nothing else, this vividness alone, per se, for itself. The realization of this has its own internal fire that is 'like' nothing. Therefore the bastardy of the simile. That thing, the vividness of which is poetry by itself, makes the poem. There is no need to explain or compare. Make it and it is a poem. ***(Doyle, 1982)***

2. *From Williams' "A sort of a Song."*
3. *Unlike most linguistic systems based on phonemes/alphabets, Chinese language uses ideogram which presents an integrated and unitary image of a whole thought/action.*

Conforming to this, the finest of Williams' short poems present images being independent of figurative languages and direct authorial comment: certain meaning is privileged but not ascertained.

Are his images then simply vivid photographs? True that during and after the Imagist movement, Williams was almost obsessively attracted to objectivism in literature, as the following extract from a 1932 essay would testify to: "When we are forced by a fact ... it can save us from inanity, even though we do no more than photograph it"; and some of his late 1920s poems, haiku-like, are wordscapes: "winter, winter / leather-green leaves / spear-shaped / in the falling snow" (Doyle, 1982). Meanwhile, he had framed his dictum "No ideas but in things" in the short poem "Paterson" that appeared in the *Dial* in February 1927. Soon, however, Williams became aware of the fact that pure objectivism rather renders an object more commonplace and threadbare leading to what Eugene Jolas would call "artistic sterility" (Doyle, 1982).

The characteristic feature of imagist poetry that Williams often maintained in his poetry is the economy and precision in expression. Impatient with irrelevant gimmicks, Williams once went as far as calling a poem a machine "made of words": "When I say there's nothing sentimental about a poem I mean that there can be no part, as in any other machine, that is redundant" (quoted in Larrissy, 1990). This statement, however, does not offer a stringent policy of precision that his friend poet Zukofsky once proclaimed: "Don't write, telegraph" (Doyle, 1982). Being short and precise, Williams' imagistic poems are not impenetrable hieroglyphics: the words are chosen and placed thoughtfully and significantly, and only that many words are used - counted and measured - without which the image cannot be presented vividly.

When there is a comment, it is so integrated into the texture of the image that it rarely appears intrusive or didactic. A casual reading, for instance, of "The Red Wheelbarrow" or "The Term" gives the feeling that these are more than telegraphic wordscapes, there is something more, because the first poem opens with an assertion that "so much depends upon" a red wheelbarrow and the second one finds a car-smashed roll of brown paper "[u]nlike" a human being. However, it is the innovative arrangement of words and stanzas that speaks more than the assertion or the simile. Williams' images honestly conform to Pound's idea of image as an "intellectual and emotional complex." Now, Williams attains the vortex-effect not chiefly by analogy or erudite symbolism but by defamiliarization, as Ostrom puts it: it is the "method of their [the images] arrangement" that gives "(implicitly) an understanding of their 'meaning' (reality)" (Ostrom, 1966). In his essay on Charles Sheeler, Williams clarifies his stand:

> To be an artist, as to be a good artisan, a man must know his materials. But in addition he must possess that really glandular perception of their uniqueness which realizes in them an end in itself, each piece irreplaceable by a substitute, not to be broken down to other meaning. Not to pull out, transubstantiate, boil, unglue, hammer, melt, digest, and psychoanalyze, not even to distill but to see and keep what the understanding touches - as grapes are round and come in bunches. To discover and separate these things from the amorphous, the conglomerate normality with which they are surrounded and of which before the action of 'creation' each is a part, calls for an eye to draw out that detail which is in itself the thing, to clinch our insight, that is, our understanding, of it. ***(Doyle, 1982)***

Williams then might paint a thing as he sees it[4] but not as a written version of a photograph, because he knows that there are "distinctions between *copying* nature and *imitating* nature" (italics in the original; Doyle, 1982). What he does is to defamiliarize the image so that it attracts our attention, makes us curious, invites us to penetrate the solid surface to reach the essential, and all is done without any wordiness. "A Sort of a Song" (1944) may well summarize William's poetics:

Let the snake wait under
his weed
and the writing
be of words, slow and quick, sharp
to strike, quiet to wait,
sleepless.

-through metaphor to reconcile
the people and the stones.
Compose. (No ideas
but in things) Invent!
Saxifrage is my flower that splits
the rocks.

(Baym et al, 1989)

Like a snake, the image is waiting there - in the world of objects, and in a poem - quiet but alert, slow but sure, waiting to be touched and to strike in a flash. What is needed to make the touch happen is invention. That is, merely composing an image runs the risk of being journalistic or photographic; to transcend the prosaic, the poet needs to invent new ways of seeing to discover what has been "heretofore unrealized" ("I Wanted to Write a Poem," quoted in Larrissy, 76) and invest the observed with that new insight.

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4. *One of Pound's famous instructions to the poets: "To paint the thing as I see it." [Quoted in Doyle 1982: 3]*

Figure 1: Pablo Picasso's Portrait of Ambroise Vollard (Picasso u.p.)

This technique of defamiliarizing has some affinities, and strong contrasts at the same time, with Cubism. A cubist painting, for example, Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) or *Portrait of Ambroise Vollard* (1909-10), creates an "ambiguous sense of space [and object] through geometric shapes that flatten and simplify form, spatial plains that are broken into fragments, and forms that overlap and penetrate one another" (Cernuschi u.p.). This distortion of space and object - never accurately presenting the thing as it is - is the way to perceive thing as *thing;* the distortion of reality is a way to perceive reality afresh. Overlooking the Cubists' radical departure from nature and reality, Williams improvised upon Cubism's spatial experimentation and came up with innovative structural strategies; for example,

- *A long line broken into three or four segments* (the three-line stanza pattern which Williams invented for *Paterson* is called "triadic" or "stepped line"):

It is only in isolate flecks that
something
is given off
No one
to witness,
and adjust, no one to drive the car

(Baym et al, 1989)

Words broken and separated (for example, the way the words in "The Red Wheelbarrow" are placed - seemingly broken - suggests a sort of dissection and invites the reader to scrutinize vivid particulars of a commonplace object at a commonplace setting):

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

beside the white
chickens
(Baym et al, 1989)

A sentence broken and repeated with a difference:

munching a plum on
the street a paper bag
of them in her hand

They taste good to her.
They taste good
to her. They taste
good to her.
(Williams, 2008)

Fluid continuity of the image through broken stanzas (one cannot stop when a stanza ends; the effect (for example, "The Term") could be a visual recreation of the image - its motion or action - as the image here develops gradually like the rolling of a paper, or it could be, as in "Young Woman at a Window," to focus readers' attention to each of the particulars and the relationships between them):

She sits with
tears on
her cheek
her cheek on
her hand
the child
in her lap
his nose
pressed
to the glass
(Williams, 2008)

Line or stanza arrangement itself recreating the image or action (the way the image in "The Term" develops through broken stanzas giving the impression of the rolling of the paper, or the four stanzas of "The Red Wheelbarrow" each consisting of two lines - the first three-word long line and the second single-word line - themselves picture four wheelbarrows balancing against each other).

- *Beginning a poem with its conclusion* (for example, the concrete details of "The Red Wheelbarrow" gain reverberation and what I call 'new significance' due to its opening: "so much depends/upon").

- *Meaningful employment of alignment, mechanics and capitalization* (for example, the omission of punctuation in "The Red Wheelbarrow," or the spatial positioning of two outsides in the following extract from Paterson, II. i reinforcing the sense of outside and expansion):

Outside
outside myself
there is a world,
he rumbled, subject to my incursions
-a world
(to me) at rest,
which I approach
concretely-
(Baym et al, 1989)

Rightly does Williams name his poetics as saxifrage. Flower is always an important image in Williams as it is rooted to the ground but reaches out; it has its place and it blooms and regenerates. But saxifrage has something more to do; it comes out of rocks in the hills by splitting it open while growing upon it. A typical Williams poem then, though imagist and/or objective, speaks; it defamiliarizes the image and invites readers' attention and imagination to work over it to reach the essence.

dancing over the object : the role of imagination

While the stress on things, not ides, aligns William's poetics with the empiricist approach, the strong relationship between subject and object, imagination and reality, the mind and the senses lends peculiar Romanticism to his poetry, to the extent that it lets imagination dance. Influenced by the painter Juan Gris' attempt "to separate paint from representation (imagination from a limited sense of 'reality')" (Doyle, 35), Williams understood that the only realism in art is of the imagination, and that the "imagination transcends the thing itself" (*Kora in Hell,* quoted in Larrissy, 66). This focus on imagination[5] does not, however, suggest a way to escape or to meddle with the reality. Imagination transcends, not escapes, reality: a poem is made of words, and words are, to Williams, things: "it is words you are made out of" (Larrissy, 1990). The merit of a poem re/lies not on the emotion and idea it embodies but on how vividly the 'things' (words) paint the 'thing' (the world of objects). If to paint is to re-present one thing as another by some

5. *"Imagination is wrongly understood when it is supposed to be a removal from reality in the sense of John of Gaunt's speech in* Richard the Second: *to imagine possession of that which is lost. It is rightly understood when John of Gaunt's words are related not to their sense as objects adherent to his son's welfare or otherwise but as a dance over the body of his condition accurately accompanying it" (Williams in* Springs and All, *quoted in Larrissy 65-66).*

linguistic or structural innovation, it is imagination that is at work there, and imagination *is* creation. Williams himself puts it more succinctly: "Creation is speech. God spoke the world by uttering the Word. The poet, therefore, imitates the act of creation itself, in creating his poem, and what he creates is real: imagination is real" (Doyle, 1982).

Imagination is, however, more than creation; it's re-creation. Here it transcends the realm of fancy and fantasy. That human beings, being human and not snowman, cannot shed subjective interpretation and so may not see things as they really are is ironically explained by Wallace Stevens in "The Snow Man." Williams seems to extend the notion and finds that the act of perception is interpretation energized by imagination and association of ideas and feelings. In Williams' poetics, the referents - the objects - remain physically impenetrable and untampered; it is by defamiliarizing the signifiers - the words and the mechanics, the logos and the locus - that the signified goes through imaginative (and radical) transformation, and attains -

> a sort of renewal
> even
> an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new
> places
> inhabited by hordes
> heretofore unrealized
> of new kinds- [6]

The wheelbarrow in "The Red Wheelbarrow" is just a wheelbarrow, but it seems to appear as something else, something different, when imagination dances over it. Imagination is not then "a removal from" reality "to avoid" it: "poetry does not tamper with the world but moves it - It affirms reality most powerfully"; since reality "exists free from human action" and choice, it is imagination - that psycho-intellectual creative energy in human beings that make things come out - that "creates a new object, a play, a dance which is not a mirror up to nature but- As birds' wings beat the solid air without which none could fly so words freed by the imagination affirm reality by their flight" (Larissy, 1990). The poet's enterprise is to invent new ways to embody reality, to make it new, more real. And it is by letting imagination dance over a commonplace thing - an image (an old woman eating plums), a picture (Brueghel's *The Fall of Icarus*), a thing (a red wheelbarrow) - that the reader may experience a new significance in the thing, a fresh perception of life, leading to new insights.

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6. *From "I Wanted to Write a Poem," quoted in Larrissy: 75-76; in the poem, however, the subject is 'memory,' not an 'object.'*

A poem of Williams should then sound - and look - challenging and inviting. In the pursuit of presenting "the thing itself," his finest poems tend to avoid symbolism and intend to defy generalization or paraphrasing. Understanding and appreciation of the potential of an image relies chiefly on the readers. Read from a different perspective, the "Compose" and "Invent" in "A Sort of a Song" may then appear as instruction to the readers: a person must develop composure of mind to concentrate, to get the idea of the thing, and since there is no/little comment coming from the poet, the reader must let the imagination work to invent the meaning. To do this, s/he needs not be a mystic or an academic or a literature student; s/he only has to let the imagination fly to invest the thing with new insight, and in doing so s/he encounters that experience that the poet went through during creation:

	The Poet	The Reader
Experience	through senses	through senses
↓		
Sensation	feeling into	feeling into
↓		
Imagination	re-ordering	re-viewing

Williams' poetry thus combines strategies of two early American poets, Whitman and Dickinson: it *extends* consciousness by *concentrating* on vivid particulars, exploring with all the apparent casualness of mind improvising upon experience. Let us now re-read (NOT interpret) two of Williams' often anthologized poems: the imagist classic "The Red Wheelbarrow" and the *found poem* "This Is Just to Say."

sky mirrored on the footprint[7] *: the poetry*

So much depends upon how we see a thing as seeing is imaging and imagining at once. William's motto "No ideas but in things" leaves a thing infinitely interpretable. It discourages the fixity of 'meaning' and mobilizes the politics of representation in which every individual can initiate Bakhtinian dialogue: the thing, the referent, is open for renegotiation and new interpretation. The signifier slides endlessly modulating sign, the meaning. This minimizing of the importance of signs at once insists on seeing "the universal as inherent in the local and particular" (Draper, 1999) and urges to explore the potential a thing is invested with. True that "The Red Wheelbarrow" may adequately, if not satisfyingly, be seen as simply a vivid presentation of an image: "a red wheelbarrow, glazed with rain water, beside the white chickens." But ... yes, you got it ... the poem is not presented the way it is

7. *Translation of "গোষ্পদে বিম্বিছে আকাশ", referring to the open-endedness of interpretation and significance that every being and thing carries.*

above in a single, flat, unbroken sentence. The opening statement and the experimentation with typography and mechanics leave the image speak for itself. The object is as it is retaining what Williams calls its "fixity" and "finality" (Larrissy, 1990); what imagination does is to lend the image rhythm: "tides, waves, ripples" ("English Speech Rhythms," quoted in Larrissy, 72). So the very appearance of the poem whispers that there something more-than-precise-vividness is involved. Let us see, say, at least thirteen ways of looking at the red wheelbarrow:

i. Take it as an everyday picture - a photograph of a rustic setting - just after it pours.

ii. Both the wheelbarrow and the chickens look fresh as the rain washed away dusts and stains. It gives the feeling of renewal of life and mobility.

iii. If so, at the same time, it suggests that all resurrection is followed by a threat (as the barrow may crush the chickens).

iv. If the wheelbarrow represents civilization or human effort towards progress, then the rain water glazing on the barrow may suggest divine affirmation while the presence of chickens or the animate beings suggests that civilization/progress being blessed by the divine is there to help human beings or life on earth.

v. It may also suggest that to be constructive or helpful for humanity, civilization or machine age needs to be balanced by the spiritual (the rain) as the scene captured may suggest, otherwise it may be destructive for the humanity as the very crucial positioning of the barrow and the chickens (that the chickens may get smashed by the barrow's wheels) suggest. That is, the material is important but it should be tempered by the spiritual.

vi. The colour contrasts may speak: "red" (usually but NOT apolitically) meaning violence/lust/fire, and "white" (usually but NOT apolitically) meaning peace/sense/snow; we could then read the poem as a subtle protest against violence; or that even after rain (something divine?) the situation stays the same: the chickens are in danger beside the (relatively innocent) wheelbarrow.

vii. So much depends upon the interdependency (see the way the first line balances over the second line in each stanza and the way each stanza is balanced by each other, rhythmically) of human-made wheelbarrow and god-made chickens (e.g. chickens take shelter under the barrow during rain).

viii. The chain of existence of the spiritual/unearthly (rain), the inanimate (wheel barrow) and the animate (chickens). It may be enriching to note that the production of rain is itself cyclic, combining the heaven and the earth.

ix. After the last interpretation, the human body is absent in the picture and the interdependent positioning of the three elements may suggest that human's survival depends on the spontaneous interaction between these elements.

x. Also that all these non-human elements, to exist, need to be seen or interpreted by humans (it is a human who looks at the scene and a human who is reading).

xi. And also that humans need all these things to incite their imagination and to create.

xii. The wheel barrow is man-made, standing for civilization and mobility, and is blessed by god, the rain.

xiii. The 'red' barrow may suggest revolutionary spirit and the 'white' chickens the possible/expected future peace which is, ironically, in constant threat.[8]

It is this open-endedness, this having infinite space to be re-viewed now and now, that makes the poems alive, vivid, and "legitimate," surviving the risk of becoming "a godforsaken curio" [9] .

"This Is Just to Say" is about an incident, a "commonplace material - commonplace almost to the point of seeming trite" but is "presented in such a way as to compel new attention" (Draper, 1999).

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

8. *Some readers may frown: Williams' poems cannot be interpreted this way; it is a violation of his intention. To them, let me humbly tell, I have already stated that it is reading, not interpreting, and the thirteen observations above are observations (mostly made by students while I was teaching this poem), not the meaning of the poem, and everyone has right to present one's observation: when we see a thing we perceive it with our personal associations; an object is never photographed the same way by three people.*

9. *Williams' "Death": "He's dead / ... he's dead / the old bastard- / He's a bastard because // there's nothing / legitimate in him any / more / he's dead / ... he's / a godforsaken curio / without / any breath in it // He's nothing at all / he's dead" (Norton 1173-1174).*

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

One may ask if any meaning is privileged here. First, it just describes a boy's stealing a plum. Second, it is just a message left by the wife/husband who ate the plum to the husband/wife who was sleeping; the casual tone in saying "Forgive me" is then convincing. Third, more generally, it is just a typical refrigerator note informing the owner that someone ate the plum secured for breakfast; the "Forgive me" is there not to seek forgiveness but to finish the message in a formal but casual way (the title also suggests this casualness). Fourth, it is just a poem of the original sin, of Eve's eating apples which were delicious but cold; the tone then betrays audacity and lack of repentance. Fifth, it is just a casual acknowledgement, if not confession, of a sexual experience, or, rather more convincingly, of sexual violence as the phrases "in the icebox" and "saving for breakfast" suggest: the object was "delicious" and "sweet" but "cold," suggesting either indifference (if it is about post-marital sexual relation) or unresponsiveness (if it is about forced encounter). Sixth, it is just a celebration of physicality against the backdrop of spiritual or puritan philosophy. Seventh, regarding the time it was written, 1934, the poem may have some social import, referring to post-Depression mass' urge and necessity to snatch food from the store-houses of the rich.

Referencing multiple layers of association in the seemingly commonplace, these poems are classic illustrations of the power of poetry to engage imagination that liberates the possibilities of meaning. There is an assertion of the carriage and import that every thing and being wears, like rainwater stagnated in a small footprint of a cow reflecting the whole sky: *"গোষ্পদে বিম্বিছে আকাশ"*. The emphasis here is not on "the accidental but the indispensable ... qualities of the scene" (Doyle, 1982). Williams had strong confidence in human's "innate abilities and worth" (Draper, 1999) which, if activated and accompanied by renewed vision, may realize the immense possibilities of prosperity and happiness.

"Hear me out" : the reader

Williams' insistent and consistent focus on the power of human imagination - *individual imagination*, speaking precisely - is adamic in orientation and political in essence. In his book *The Continuity of American Poetry,* Roy Harvey Pearce offers a distinction between the "mythic" and the "adamic" modes of poetry. While the "mythic" poetry, for example Eliot's *The Waste Land,* upholds and advocates the values and notions sanctioned by the "established" discourses - history, culture, art and religion, the adamic poetry, for example Williams' Imagist poems and *Paterson,* encourages and

celebrates creative imagination as "an act of self-definition" (Rath, 2003), thus destabilizing the "established." In Pearce's pragmatic conception, the "established" is not "the absolute"; it is "only the instrumentality of life" and is "justified only by the service it renders to life and has no meaning apart from vital needs" (Rath, 2003). Sharing the spirit of Whitman, Williams' poetry moves away off the established and concentrates on what Emerson calls "the near, the low, the common" (in "The American Scholar"). Both as a pediatrician and a poet, Williams believes in the particular, the thing, the human being - alive and there - while idea and abstract nouns are corollaries. Discarding conventional poetic modes and forms, his poetry presents a thing with its thingness, radiating a halo of associations with certain meanings privileged but not identified. This imaginative "contact with the actual" (Rath, 2003), the everyday circumstances in life, at once undercuts and mobilizes romanticism: perceiving a thing afresh demands creative imagination and sensibility, but it does not lead one away off reality through fantasizing. It happens in Williams poetry, because he lets "the coffin," the poem, lie "by its own weight," asking the "townspeople," the poets, to "walk behind" the coffin ("The Tract"), to let the poem be read and meant by the readers themselves. The readers are invited to read new meanings and significance in the otherwise mundane, to re-examine notions of reality, to re-view the visible. This is a wonderful re/discovery: that living is not merely feeding one's body, that life does offer, that life's end does not end in computer or newspaper headlines or share market disaster or divorce, that there is still - always - a lot to explore, to walk to, to love, to be, to die for, to live for.

Therefore, despite the very quality of thingness, Williams' poetry proffers adamic vision, buoying up individuality and subverting universalized, hegemonic meaning. Now and there, often was Williams vocal of the exigency of an artist's "socially useful, and therefore positively committed, role" (Doyle, 1982). Not that the artist is a popular leader "in the Rousseauan sense" or as revolutionary as a Shelley, rather s/he "builds a structure of government using for this the materials of [her/his] verse. [Her/His] objective is an order. It is through this structure that the artist's permanence and effectiveness are proven" (Doyle, 1982). Poetry functions through imagination, and the poet's job is to vividly record intense vision of the facts, of the things, which in turn motivates visions in the readers. At the end of *Asphodel, That Greeny Flower,* Williams asks his "sweet" to "[h]ear [him] out," for what concerns "many men" concerns the poet too:

It is difficult
to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day

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10. *From Asphodel, That Greeny Flower: "Hear me out/for I too am concerned" (Williams "From" u.p.).*

for lack
of what is found there.
(Williams, 2008)

This statement was never as true as it is now, the 21st century. Communication system has been attaining an unthinkable expansion and media has become the strongest 'god' with the ability to create and uncreate wars. Knowledge is reduced to data collection; knowledge is news. We know; we do nothing because we know in isolation; we feel irritated; so we prefer ignoring; we are disgusted because we cannot ignore; we are disgusted because similar news appears on the next day newspaper, and the next day. Life gets stressed to the point of snap, and the stress-managers - entertainment and media - leave people, the "bewildered herd"[11] , perplexed, numb, a kind of cyborg. Poetry, the precisely chiseled form of literature, has been becoming a matter of history and academia; it does not sell. Still, however, it survives! In the world of super fast MTV and 2-minute noodles, poems may not be as overtly 'informative' as a Discovery Channel programme, may not be as startlingly 'interesting' as a 9/11 news, may not be as 'exciting' as a MaxPayne adventures, and even if there is something so, it may not be as 'easily discernible' as a soap opera. But ... there is something!

There is something, only to understand it one needs to invoke imagination and sensitivity, two qualities that the present day "consent manufacturers"[12] - state governments, business moghuls, intelligentsia, and media empires - suppress among people. Imagination is an active process which, by stimulating creativity and ordering experience, forms an image to reach or produce meaning; sensitivity is feeling for, feeling into, and responding to feelings of others. Hegemony is always uncomfortable with these operations of human mind as they carry the potential of query, individuality, and vision which may lead to resistance and liberation. In order to order the "bewildered herd," the specialized class has substituted popular query and resistance by equally exciting "necessary illusions" and "oversimplifications" (Chomsky, 2004) in the form of technologized media: a Harry Potter, a Himu, a Lara Croft, or an *Independence Day*[13] . What can still salvage what is still left to salvage is filling in the "lack/of what is found" in poetry: the need to dispense with the mystifying myth, to dive deep, the urgency to reach the essential, the ability to separate sand from grains, to distinguish between pixel and meditation as essence: one is a fragment, a part of the whole, the other a complex, the whole in a part. The politics of the finest of Williams' poems is that they not simply invite, they involve the readers, to concentrate on the particularities of thing through which to perceive

11. *A term meaning 'public' coined by Walter Lippmann (Chomsky 16).*
12. *From Chomsky's phrase "manufacture of consent," referring to the hegemonic way people's consent is made, strengthened, and typified by the "specialized class": state governments, business moghuls, intelligentsia, and media empires.*
13. *Referring to the blockbuster Harry Potter film and book series, the character Himu created by Humayun Ahmed, the computer games like "Tomb Raider," and the phantom of doomsday in the Hollywood film Independence Day.*

the essence of thing and being, to demystify the mythic mode of knowledge, to bring individuality within the depth of field, to invoke the power of perceiving, so that one can see afresh, one can commune.

To a conscious, curious reader, a Williams poem may work out epiphany.

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