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ONE ALONG SIDE THE OTHER: THE COLLECTED LETTERS OF
WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS AND KENNETH BURKE

by

James H. East

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in Partial Fulfillment
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Approved by

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EAST, JAMES H., Ph.D. One Along Side the Other: The Collected Letters of William Carlos Williams and Kenneth Burke. (1994) Directed by H.T. Kirby-Smith.

The collected letters of William Carlos Williams and Kenneth Burke from the Beineke Library at Yale, the Pattee Library at The Pennsylvania State University, and the Kenneth Burke estate, which span the entire forty-two years of their relationship from 1921-1962, have been collected, collated, annotated, and introduced. The introduction describes their first meeting, offers a brief look at their lives and works, and contrasts their relationship with that of the attenuated image created by the John C. Thirlwall Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams (1957). The introduction goes on to examine the nature of their relationship as reflected by The Collected Letters and information gathered from interviews with Kenneth Burke, Michael Burke, and Bill Williams, Jr., as well as other sources and concludes with a brief characterization of the nature of their collaboration.

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APPROVAL PAGE

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First Contact

On 2 January 1921, four slender figures made their way southward, by foot, from Rutherford to Newark, New Jersey, through "the great swamp."¹ The mid-forty degree temperature made for a comfortable walk, made it warm enough to release the pungent odor of nearby marshes. Along the ten-mile hike, which paralleled the route of the Hackensack-to-Newark trolley line, the hikers could easily see, though the day was cloudy, the Hackensack river, eastward, winding through the meadowlands below; to the west, closely parallel to the roadway, the Passaic river headed toward its union with the Hackensack and Newark Bay. Contrastingly, in the foreground, they witnessed:

. . . dilapidated factories and warehouses, grimy railway yards, coal bunkers, and mountains of rubble and tin cans; in short, one of the ugliest and most blighted areas in all America.²

The youngest of the group, Matthew Josephson, had instigated the first meeting between Kenneth Burke, his friend and former classmate at Columbia, and William Carlos Williams, whom he had interviewed in December for the Newark Ledger.³ Williams as well brought along his companion and co-editor of Contact, Robert McAlmon, whom he had befriended two years

earlier at one of Lola Ridge's parties in Greenwich Village.⁴

As early as 1918, Burke had heard of Williams through a correspondence with his lifelong friend, Malcolm Cowley. In a note sent from Harvard in March of that year Cowley wrote:

And oh God read Al Que Quiere (Williams). It is the framework and the suggestion of much good poetry, much excellent, superexcellent poetry.⁵

The enthusiasm spread to Burke; a couple of years later he wrote to Cowley: "I am thinking of hatching up some sort of a club-article on Eliot, Williams, and Masters".⁶ And by September 1920, in a letter written from Asheville, North Carolina, Burke's critical interest had blossomed into a full-fledged Emersonian manifesto:

Our school is INTEGRALISM, the emphasis of the unit, the vision of art as a succession of units or integers. A scherzo I wrote while in Asheville exemplifies the far reaches of Integralism. Willy-Nilly, W.C.W., is our first Integralist and we should write and tell him so. His illuminating sentence, published in Little Review in one of his Notes to "Improvisations," runs something to the effect that 'the poet, slashing about in his thin exaltation or despair, often realizes an acuteness of expression by which the contact is broken, rather than established.'⁷ This is the very heart of Integralism. By striving for essences, by attempting to fix one entire facet of approach in a few sentences, we thus attain a unit, so distinct that it almost gains complete independence of the form as a whole. These units fall together exclusively by emotional laws. Between us, the one great difficulty to overcome in Integralism is the attainment of organism; and again between us, it is a difficulty

which will never be overcome. But Integralism, by its very nature, by the very nature of present conditions, must attain its valor in spurts, or remain villainous. Integralists or Post-Late Victorians--we have our choice.⁸

Were Williams the recipient of this manifesto, all in one mouthful, from an enthusiastic, wiry man with large blue-gray eyes, fourteen years his junior, he could not have covered his amusement or his appreciation: at 38, he was eager for recognition and new directions.

McAlmon, on the other hand, would have found nothing of value in such formulaic approaches. Josephson's account of the meeting recalls the tension that the 25-year-old McAlmon brought to the walk. Freshly escaped from the claustrophobic Methodism of the University of Southern California, this son of a Midwestern Presbyterian minister of Scottish descent had been attracted to the life of Greenwich Village through a correspondence with Emanuel Carnevali and introduced to its social circles by Williams.⁹ He had little patience for conventional restraints--social or artistic--and so could have found little comfort in Burke's shouldering up to his fatherly companion, Williams, with his cerebral tendencies, typical of the Eastern aesthetes McAlmon so heartily deplored.¹⁰

Of the many topics upon which they agreed or disagreed that day--humorous tales of spurning Marsden Hartley's

impulsive approaches or those of Baroness Elsa von Freytag von Loringhoven, and Harding's impending inauguration-- Josephson remembered "contact" was central to their talk.¹¹

Above all he [Williams] desired to "contact" nature and life as swiftly and as directly as possible, without much rationalizing or analysing, and to give evidence of such contact in racy native speech. Thus he outlined his fairly simple ars poetica. . . .¹²

Though we have only this excerpt as a record of what transpired that day under the heading of "contact," McAlmon's letter to Williams near the end of 1921 preserves, in content and tone, what must surely be a significant remnant of the interchange.

The idea of contact simply means that when one writes they write about something, and not to write "literature" because it is a day of publications, and publishing houses. Burke wanting a manifesto,--hasn't he, or anybody else, copulated, desired, thought, detested, been abused, enough by actual experience, to say something about existence that has a quality that is his own. . . . it isn't lack of contact that condemns most writing. . . . It's lack of an individual quality that makes the stuff worth reading, and presence of too much desire to be a "literary figure." . . . And when people justify "conscious art" and an eternal talk about "form" and technique, by mentioning the painstaking Flaubert, they overlook the fact that Flaubert's bigness rests a great deal more upon the fact that he created his characters, understood the psychology of people, and got the drama of his drab situations. Burke would say that was howling about the great throb drama of humanity. . . . the situation is made art by the understanding and ability to note how the characters spoken of react emotionally. Flaubert was simply able to be both a formalist--which means a

good deal pedantic regarding "style"--and an observing psychologist and intelligence.¹³

So, Williams' appreciative reception of Burke's ideas must have left McAlmon a little chagrined, perhaps even caused him to drop back a little in the procession or to turn the conversation, as he did, toward his upcoming marriage with the rich heiress, Winifred Bryher, in March, and how with his "McAlimony" he would establish a press "for the advanced writers who were rejected by commercial publishers."¹⁴ Williams' comment, as best we might conjecture, still echoed in a letter he sent to Burke complimenting him for his essay on Laforgue:

Laforgue is a new Laforgue in America. Our appreciation of him creates him for us and this I feel in your work. You have taken what you want from the master in order to satisfy your needs and your needs are the product of your environment. (I wish to God I dared print this note somewhere in the next issue where your paper will be used. What do you say?)

You fairly illustrate what Bob and I mean by contact. Why, the last paragraph, the quotation, is a perfect exemplar of our attitude. Laforgue takes what he has and makes it THE THING. That is what we must do. It is not even a matter of will. It is fate. We are here under one--Hell, you know all of that as well as I.¹⁵

Whether or not McAlmon had wittingly contributed his name to this appreciative note we are left to guess.

As evening approached, they stopped at a tavern and drank bootleg beer. Williams did not drink, but continued,

as Josephson recalls, to tell them tales of his medical practice in Rutherford, peopling them with the same figures who would later appear in his long poem, Paterson.¹⁶ What Josephson might have added was that the tavern's location was very near the spot of Paterson IV's climactic episode where the trolley bridge crossed over into Newark and the Passaic below, with its poisonous flotsam, was threateningly dragging Dr. Paterson towards oblivion and the "blood dark sea."¹⁷ The conversation sputtered on their return walk; McAlmon continued his "anti-intellectual pose"; they had grown tired of "tramping for hours amid the dun winter scenery and pungent stench of the great swamp."¹⁸ But there was no mistaking the fact that the meeting, there in the surroundings they all hoped to rejuvenate with ambitious literary projects, had been a successful one. As The Collected Letters will attest, until Williams' death forty-two years later, he and Burke remained (with Josephson as well), close literary and personal friends.

Many of the letters assembled here have already found their way into the scholarship that surrounds Williams and his works. It appears that no major study on the poet has overlooked the correspondence--published or unpublished--between these two men. Additionally, in 1957, Williams and John C. Thirlwall published The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams, a volume which included

only eleven letters to Burke. As we might expect, the letters in these works were used to point up critical positions of the poet or biographical details of the poet's life and creative dilemmas. Indeed, the letters to Burke in The Selected Letters will be shown to be nothing more than forums that would enable the poet to set out for posterity his aesthetic position with regard, for example, to things European. What is missing, then--and, in all fairness to the scholars, what they did not intend to explore--is a clearer picture of a long-time literary friendship. In short, The Collected Letters, while supplying us with critical details that may lead us to more definitive assessments of their influence on one another, represents the first step toward a reconstruction of the human relationship between these two influential voices of the modernist period.

Burke's Life and Works

Since no formal biography of Kenneth Burke has been undertaken, we are left to assemble his life's story piecemeal from family accounts and several partial views prefacing critical works and letters: most notably those of Armin Frank, Merle Browne, and Paul Jay. Even with these sources, a more comprehensive work would be needed to capture the full sense of this intensely productive and vivid character; it seems that no one who had the opportunity to meet him could relate the experience in other than superlative terms.

Burke was born in Pittsburgh in 1897 to James Leslie and Lillian Duva Burke. His father was, among other things, an inventor, who had designed and built useful time-saving devices such as the one that would separate an egg from its shell without leaving any fragments of shell behind. His most practical invention, one that gained wide use, was the string-zip method for opening paper packaging such as gum packets, but he lost recognition and remuneration for his work through the artful dissembling of his patent attorney, who, as was later discovered, represented the other disputant to the patent title.

Young Burke attended and was graduated from Peabody High School, where Malcolm Cowley was his classmate. After a year as a bank clerk, he went on to Ohio State University and Columbia College, both for only a brief time. At Ohio, under Ludwig Lewisohn, Burke first encountered the works of Thomas Mann, Oswald Spengler, and the French authors--Baudelaire, de Gourmont, and Flaubert--all of whom would remain central to his theoretical approaches to literature and language studies.¹⁹ In part because his parents had moved to New Jersey, where his father took a job with Westinghouse, and because he was impatient for a more invigorating literary scene, Burke left Ohio without taking a degree and moved to New York where he entered Columbia College. There, before an assembly of its literary society, "The Boar's Head," Burke had recited a poem on the sorrows of repressed sexual desires, and John Erskine, then head of the English Department, stood up to defend the genteel tradition that this young student had so disparaged.²⁰ Immediately, a thin fellow with dark hair rose on behalf of Burke, arguing that one could no longer write such poems as Elizabeth Barrett Browning's in the modern atmosphere of Freudian psychology. Erskine, more enraged by the defense than by the poem, stood up and called Freud a charlatan who had corrupted the minds of our youth. Then Burke, with his newly found friend, Matthew Josephson, left the assembly,

departing from the window rather than by the door, as a way of giving emphasis to their departure from the legatees of the genteel tradition, and headed off campus for a beer at the Red Lion.

Still feeling that college was too regimented for creative growth in the spring of 1918, Burke left Columbia. Josephson's version suggests that Burke's parents were less interested in higher education as a means of "moving up," and that it was economic reasons that had forced Burke to make a virtue of necessity by declaring that he had "spared himself the dire fate of a college teacher's life, which might have been ruinous for the budding writer in him."²¹ However, Michael Burke recalled his father's saying that James Leslie Burke would have made available to Kenneth the same amount of money regardless of what he decided; thus Kenneth took the money to educate himself.²² In any event, he went off to live a Bohemian existence in Greenwich Village after the fashion of Flaubert. He had a room in Clemenceau Cottage with Matthew Josephson, who was commuting to his clerk's job at a Staten Island shipyard while waiting to be drafted.²³ Clemenceau was a center for some of the Village intellectuals such as Max Ernst of New Masses, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and James Light, another friend from Burke's high school and Ohio State days, who would become known for his capable direction of Eugene O'Neill's plays.²⁴

Burke soon became, along with Cowley and Josephson, part of an avant garde group composed of Slater Brown, Hart Crane, Allen Tate, Robert Coates, J.B. Wheelwright, and G.B. Munson.²⁵

The following year, in May of 1919, he married Lielie Batterham, a tall, self-sufficient woman and trained mathematician from Asheville, North Carolina, by whom he would have three daughters. In June, they packed themselves off to Candor, New York, where a back-to-naturist, Jim Butler, whose mother was the foster daughter of Claude Monet, had offered his restored cottage to the Village crowd free of rent when he had decided to return to France.²⁶ They went up with a hundred dollars and lived on grits, peas, dried codfish, and an occasional stew made from woodchuck or from turtle caught from the nearby stream. The Batterham family's summer habit of staying in a cabin on Craggy Mountain just outside of Asheville had prepared Lielie to undertake these annual migrations from the city, and we may assume that her ease with camp-style living must have mystified as well as educated the young man from Pittsburgh; thus, Lielie's economies allowed them to live on a budget of fifty cents per day.²⁷ After returning to New York, they lived for a time in Weehawkin, N.J., just across the river from the city. In 1922, they undertook a seasonal Thoreauvian existence in the hills near Andover where they

purchased a dilapidated farmhouse, without electricity or plumbing, on eighty acres for \$1,500. Until the mid-forties, they would spend April through September there and return to the Village, usually near Bleecker Street, for the harsh winter months. In the early forties, they took up residence there permanently.

Kenneth Burke's first notable publications and literary work came during his association with several of the little magazines and newspapers such as Broom, The Little Review, Secession (which he co-edited with Josephson in 1923), The Nation, and New York Evening Post. In the mid to late twenties he became closely associated with The Dial and its editor, Marianne Moore. Though he was never the editor himself, in 1927 he became the music critic, and was able to publish many of his early experiments in that magazine: several stories, essays, and the first six chapters of Towards a Better Life. Throughout these years, he was part of a heady group of litterateurs who staffed and wrote for the little magazines. During the winters of 1924 and 25, a crowd of twenty or more, with Allen Tate, Hart Crane, Malcolm Cowley, Kenneth Burke, and Slater Brown at their center, would meet twice weekly in the Village to drink at Poncino Palace or to eat at Squarcialupi's Italian restaurant on Perry Street where a basement room was reserved for "the dinner of the Aesthetes." These were

boisterous occasions with plenty of talk and bootleg alcohol, perhaps some of Crane's battering on an upright piano,²⁸ or in a fit of mock indignation, Burke, who did not find an attentive audience for one of his lectures on Robert Louis Stevenson, might leave the party and take a table in the corner, though still in earshot, and talk to himself, ". . . moving his lips rapidly like an old priest saying his prayers."²⁹

The late twenties and early thirties were a mixed blessing for Burke: he received the Dial Award in 1928, and published three books--White Oxen, a collection of experimental short stories; Counterstatement, which comprised most of his theoretical output from 1920-31, and Towards a Better Life, his completed novel. Despite these achievements, Burke had written Malcolm Cowley in 1927 that an "aesthetic paralysis has spread to my letters, and silence seems even gradually to be encroaching on my speech."³⁰ The Dial's folding in 1929, the psychological strain of producing his novel and its subsequent failure, as well as the indecision over his life's work--fiction or theory--all took their toll on him. He had written Williams in October 1931 that he felt an eagerness ". . . to spend a couple of months on a long political tirade, but who would want it?" And whether it was symptomatic or causal, his relationship with Lielie ended with divorce in 1933; shortly

after this he married her younger sister, Libbie, by whom he would have two sons.³¹

During the mid-thirties, Burke turned his energy toward the political arena, specifically on behalf of communism. Armin Frank argues that his was a species of romantic communism, which included a measure of bohemianism and agrarianism.³² And it is true that he had had modest impulses toward socialist activism throughout his career. In the summer of 1917, he and Josephson had joined the Guillotine Club, an anti-war group populated by socialists and pacifists. Yet when the operating procedures took a decidedly militant turn because of America's declaration of war and the members were asked to swear allegiance, Josephson recalls their moment of decision as they were detained outside of the meeting hall:

The leaders then let them in one at a time. Burke went first. Ten minutes later he returned, looking a bit flushed and shaken. They had asked him if he was willing to kill for the movement. When he said no they abruptly told him to leave.³³

It was Burke's esoteric approach toward activism that later, in the Marxist's heyday of the thirties, so infuriated Josephson, who wanted him to employ his pen for "the cause"--it brought on, in large part, one of their frequent ruptures.³⁴ Burke held firm to his convictions, however, confiding to Cowley that his work, Permanence and Change,

had "communist objectives," but the "approach was his."³⁵ Nevertheless, though he disapproved of communist orthodoxy, and in spite of the fact that his "Revolutionary Symbolism in America" attacked many of their propagandistic strategies, he was elected to the executive committee of the League of American Writers in 1935 and on two subsequent occasions, an affiliation that would prevent some teaching opportunities for him in the future.³⁶

After the Stalinist purges, the Soviets' share, with the Nazis, in the invasion of Poland, and their attack on Finland, Burke shifted away from political affiliations altogether and turned toward a more conventional existence in the academic community. As early as 1937, he started teaching at the New School of Social Research in New York. The following summer he was at the University of Chicago where he would return in 1949. From 1943 until 1961, he held a steady position at Bennington College in Vermont, a job which caused him to commute between Bennington and Andover on alternate weeks. Interspersed among the semesters of steady work at Bennington, he taught summers at Kenyon College, and after 1961, he was affiliated with, among other universities, Penn State, Stanford, Indiana University, University of California at Santa Barbara, and Harvard.

With astonishing regularity and energy, Burke published, between the thirties and sixties, a remarkable

collection of works: Permanence and Change (1935), Attitudes Toward History (1937), Philosophy of Literary Form (1941), A Grammar of Motives (1945), Rhetoric of Motives (1950), The Rhetoric of Religion (1961), and Language as Symbolic Action (1966). For the general reader, and even for some who are more schooled in academic jargon, Burke's abstruse theorizing and meta-language of "dialectical biologism," "dramatism," "identification," and "God-terms," make many of his works, at the very least, difficult to paraphrase; Williams himself carried A Grammar of Motives with him for years and never finished reading it, and poets who were reviewed by Burke often confessed that they did not understand what he had said about their works. Even in the academic community disagreement occurs over his relative worth. The structuralist, Frederic Jameson, denounced an incipient resurgence of bourgeois individualism in Burke, especially where Burke, who constantly reaches outward to make exterior connections between a work and its author or community, relies on what Jameson felt were the superficial middle class beliefs in the "American myths of the self" and "its identity crises and ultimate regeneration"³⁷ Frank Lentricchia, on the other hand, who argues that politics ought to be going on inside our universities as well as outside, that the academics ought to "bring their learning, their cultural insights, their rhetoric to bear upon the

rhetoric of the civic arena," promotes Kenneth Burke as his model for cultural activism.³⁸

It is generally agreed, nevertheless, that Burke's ideas--an eclectic blend of Freud, Marx and linguistics--have reconceptualized rhetoric by removing it from the arid neo-Aristotelian catalogues of persuasive devices and, by reconstituting its history, applying it to all forms of language, including such diverse disciplines as literature and human sciences.³⁹ Inspired, in part, by Van Wyck Brooks' The Days of the Phoenix and Joel Spingarn's Creative Criticism, both of which lamented the division of specialists and their language from the masses, Burke's underlying principle upon which the majority of his works were based was conciliation. Burke's version of these two authors' views took shape in his early collection of social theories, Permanence and Change, whose central proposition states that technological orientation permeates our thought, behavior, and language, and that we must get beyond this orientation insofar as it has caused and will continue to cause modern man's dissociation of thought.⁴⁰ Burke felt the proper tool for this transcendence was rhetoric. He launched his project in A Rhetoric of Motives:

In part, we would but rediscover elements that had become obscured when rhetoric as a term fell into disuse, and other specialized disciplines such as

esthetics, anthropology, psychoanalysis, and sociology came to the fore. . . .⁴¹

He reasoned that if he could "convince us that we are all using words combatively for our own ends" we might be purified by seeing that we were all one in this.⁴²

We all fight a divisiveness we inherit with the neurological structure of our bodies. If we were aware that we were out to swallow up other souls with our symbols, we'd become more tolerant and Neo-Stoic!⁴³

Thus, he would argue in both A Grammar of Motives and A Rhetoric of Motives that every form of expression, from scientific essays to poetry, intends to motivate.⁴⁴ Significantly, in his attempt to identify the various motivations, Burke voices no intention of destroying them; mere observation would do. Thus, in the introductory passage to A Grammar of Motives he writes:

Feeling that competitive ambition is a drastically overdeveloped motive in the modern world, we thought this motive might be transcended if men devoted themselves not so much to "excoriating" it as to "appreciating" it.⁴⁵

Such assertions would cause critics like Merle Browne to state that, "Burke's unifications [were] verbal and rhetorical, whereas the actual divisions were deeper and involved whole men."⁴⁶ Fanciful or not, we can discern here

and in other works of his, through the use of overarching terminologies, an attempt to narrow the distances between the disparate elements of his modern cultures' individual orientations. And as we shall see, though Burke's formulaic approaches would draw, in turn, spitting anger, abstract response, and long inscrutable silences from his new acquaintance, in time, he and Williams would come to realize that their respective projects held much in common.

Williams' Life and Works

Record and commentary on the life and works of William Carlos Williams, unlike the background material for Burke, are plentiful. The author supplied us with a wealth of information about himself, his family, and acquaintances in various works such as his Autobiography (1951), Selected Letters (1957), I Wanted to Write a Poem (1958), and Yes, Mrs. Williams (1959). Hugh Witemeyer's Selected Letters between Williams and his New Directions' publisher, James Laughlin, as well as Paul Mariani's William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked, have supplied us with wonderfully complete portraits of most aspects of the poet's life. What they reveal to us, in our glance at the relationship between Burke and Williams, is that while Burke was just starting his career in 1921, Williams, at 38, had already been practicing medicine for fifteen years.⁴⁷ Born in 1883, to William George Williams, an advertising manager for a cologne company, and Rachel Elena Hoheb, of Puerto Rico, Williams made his life-long home in the city of his nativity, Rutherford, New Jersey, just outside of New York City. Though he had, with his younger brother, a significant year of schooling in Switzerland, he finished his secondary

education at Horace Mann High School in New York. In 1902, he attended medical school at the University of Pennsylvania, a circumstance which allowed him to meet Ezra Pound, Hilda Doolittle, and Charles Demuth, all of whom would come to play important roles in his life. In 1906, he started his internship at a hospital in New York City. After securing an engagement of marriage from Florence ("Flossie") Herman, in 1909, he set off for a year's medical study in Leipzig and returned to establish a practice in his father's house in 1910. Williams and Flossie were married in 1912 and in the following year purchased the house on 9 Ridge Road where they would raise their two boys and Williams would conduct his medical practice for the next forty years.

Between 1909 and 1962 Williams published more than forty books, an astonishing number when we consider that he continued to practice medicine well into his sixties. In the early years, however, he, like Burke, was associated with and was able to place his works in many of the little magazines: The Poetry Review, The Egoist, Secession, Others, Broom, Poetry, and The Little Review. For a time, he and Robert McAlmon edited and published their own magazine, Contact, which ran through several issues between 1920-23 and was revived briefly by Williams and Nathanael West in the early thirties. More important than mere forums for the

young doctor who wanted to write a poem, the people who staffed these magazines were vital coteries of "think" for the avant garde artists and writers. Others, for instance, was staffed by the Grantwood group--Man Ray, Orrick Johns, Malcolm Cowley, Walter Arensberg, Mina Loy, Maxwell Bodenheim, Marcel Duchamp, and Williams--and was edited by Alfred Kreymborg. In 1915, conversations at their weekly gatherings, in Grantwood, N.J., contained for the young poet the very kernel of his lifelong project: words can mean and produce an artistic effect, Kreymborg had stressed, "depending on the musical design and not on the values noted and connoted by the words themselves."⁴⁸ Although Williams would go on to become a publisher of books, he continued to support and contribute to, often for gratis, little magazines until the last.

After some early Whitmanesque and Keatsian experimentation, Williams published four significant books of poems in the late teens and early twenties: Al Que Quiere (1917), Kora in Hell (1920), Sour Grapes (1921), and Spring and All (1923). In fact, future anthologists would tend to draw more from these works than from his later ones. Poems such as "Tract," "The Widow's Lament in Springtime," "To A Solitary Disciple," and "The Red Wheelbarrow," along with a half dozen others, represent the standard fare on undergraduate reading lists. They do contain, it is true,

the essential themes and issues that the young poet would continue to wrangle with throughout his career. Some, for instance, take on the instructor's hortatory tone with regard to methods and devices for a new poetry, or, as David Perkins has observed, "as demonstrations or metaphors of poetry."⁴⁹ "No wreaths please--/especially no hot house flowers," sings the shrill injunction of "Tract," whose narrator proposes to teach his townspeople the correct method for burying a corpse and as well inveighs against a poetry of ornamentation--like flowers grown out of season in unnatural circumstances being used to solemnize the passing of a man who never "had come to that" in his own life.⁵⁰

Clarity, vivid images, common subjects, and everyday speech, as well as the downward-tending glance, are everywhere apparent in his early works. As if in perverse contradistinction to the romantic or ecclesiastical habit of belief with eyes glazing transcendently upward, Williams' poems, if they could be described linearly, tend downward into the soil: his belief, in "Tract"--a deliberate pun that juxtaposes an ecclesiastical treatise with a measure of land--that his townspeople are educable derives from their having a "groundsense necessary"; the "stark dignity of entrance" salvaged in the desolate March wasteland of "Spring and All" comes from a knowledge, perhaps prompted by a pediatrician's insight, of vegetal gestation: "rooted,

they/ grip down and begin to awaken."⁵¹ Even when the poet admits the upward glance into the context of his works, he does so in an attempt to hasten the readers' descent, to ensure, as it were, his contact with the world, an idea which Williams emphasized in his well-known policy, "no ideas but in things."⁵² Thus "The Widow's Lament in Springtime" achieves its effect of pathos through the juxtaposition of conventional images of renewal--blossoms and springtime--with the inconsolable grief of a widow, concluding with her desire to go among the flowers--the conventional poem's moment of whirring wings and transcendence--only to "sink into the marsh near them."⁵³ "To a Solitary Disciple" trades on a similar strategy where the narrator in order to achieve the fullest expression of "the jasmine lightness/ of the moon" has first to teach "mon cher" how to observe "the oppressive weight/ of the squat edifice" below.⁵⁴

During the early- to mid-thirties, though he was publishing at a fairly steady rate--The Knife of the Times (1932), Collected Poems, 1921-1931 (1934), over twenty poems in various magazines (1935)--recognition on a grand scale continued to escape him. Even though he had won the Dial Award for his "Paterson" poem in 1926, and Louis Zukofsky had featured him in the Objectivist issue of Poetry magazine, he still had no steady publisher; Burke had

refused works of his, and his three-year opera project had fizzled out. He wrote to Burke in 1935 of their difficulty getting published: "There ought to be some more simple, some shrewder, inventive method of getting printed. Hell, we act like a lot of lost sheep." To make matters worse, in 1935, Robert McAlmon, who was back in New York after the inevitable failure of his marriage, lingered unproductively in drunken dissipation, as if a living metaphor to the failure of their early ambitions. Additionally, Ezra Pound, from various locations throughout the world, bellowed his insistent basso continuo that Williams was wasting his life by staying in America.

Yet, in the mid-thirties he began to take on new projects. Like Burke, he flirted with political activism. As early as 1934, perhaps over-influenced by the ex-patriot Pound, he wrote an essay at Waldo Frank's behest for America and Alfred Stieglitz wherein he discussed America's abortive contribution to world culture and the difficulty of an indigenous, local culture's attempt to make itself felt.⁵⁵ In more substantial ways, he found himself, like Burke, taking on the socialist rhetoric and "joining" spirit. The first of what might be termed revolutionary verse came with his publication, in 1935, of An Early Martyr, whose title poem takes as its subject the idolization of a boy who steals from "Exclusive stores" in order to feed his family,

and it closes with a call to action that might have been used to head a Marxist propaganda bulletin: "Never give up/ keep at it!"⁵⁶ Again, in "The Yachts," after establishing an image of ease and luxury, one "naturally to be desired," he quickly inverts the poem's tone through the transformation of the sea:

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...⁵⁷

Decidedly proletarian stuff. In April 1935, he would even go so far as to attend the American Writers' Congress, though he limited himself to observing from the back rows. Perhaps motivated by the same instinct that caused his cagey avoidance of Burke's attempts at formalizing his poetry in later years, Williams remained evasive politically--his "objectivist" poetry would be attacked for similar reasons--so, similar to Burke, he was not taking up his pen for "the cause." What is more, when the Partisan Review solicited from him a contribution to their forum on Marxism in 1935--"What is Americanism: Marxism and the American Tradition"--Williams' response, one strikingly similar to Burke's note to Cowley, took a surprising turn: "It is this same democracy of feeling which will defeat Marxism in America and all other attempts at regimentation of thought and action."⁵⁸

Despite such repeated abnegations, it is interesting to note that later, in 1952, Williams' early affiliations with these movements would cause a frustrating delay in his promotion to the Consultant's position at the Library of Congress.⁵⁹

After the attacks and counter-attacks for his anti-party line, Williams, in the late 30's, withdrew from political debates. In the fall of 1937, exhausted with his doctoring across six townships and four burroughs and plagued by the fear that his gift for poetry had dried up, Williams had a series of successful reversals. James Laughlin, the founder of New Directions Books, published The White Mule and the publication was soon followed by several good reviews which caused the first edition to sell out in four months. Williams also met and visited the studio of the Russian surrealist, Pavel Tchelitchev. He was fascinated by Tchelitchev's Phenomena--a huge canvas covered with grotesque figures that were clearly struck from real people, and had in the foreground, in stark contrast, a delicate girl dressed in a pink bathing suit.⁶⁰ Recharged once again, he resumed his long-time search for the elusive American poetic and idiom.

In a way, he had already started by clearing the field, taking his battle to the obstructionists: the academies and all that they represented. In 1935, at

Barnard College, though ostensibly an address on the "anti-sonnet," his anti-academy pose left little doubt that T.S. Eliot, then at Harvard, ought to be included in the list of antagonists; the following year, in a lecture at Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Letters with Marianne Moore--who was visibly upset by his cursing--he took on the subject of a new language he had spent years trying to get down on the page.⁶¹ His only manner of qualifying his claim came in the murky explanation that our American language as yet had not been "broken to poetic form," followed with an illustration of overheard speech used in his poem.⁶² During this period, he presented ten lectures at Vassar having to do with form in modern verse, and in the same year he spoke at a Bread Loaf writers' conference in Vermont, only to be snubbed by Robert Frost who, though visibly present at the rest of the conference, had made a pose of avoiding Williams' talk.⁶³

The culmination of the poet's search, Paterson, resulted from a convergence of disparate impulses and events, both public and private. The commencement of war had brought a strange and renewed energy to him; much like the Futurists' spirit from the early decades of the century, Williams seemed to embrace, perversely, the whistling, centrifugal, and demolitionary powers unleashed by blitzkrieg and Luftwaffe. Indeed, his poem "An

"Exultation" lyricized the revenge brought on London for its years of brutal colonization. In a personal sense, he found validation for sticking doggedly to his own soil against Ezra Pound's privileging of European art and literature, for when the cultured sympathiser for the fascists could not answer Williams' outrage over the bombing of Guernica, Williams' vindication and independence were complete. Still, while casting around for clues for a new poetic, his reading during these years reflected an earnest attempt to come to an understanding of tradition; thus, he read and explored the forms of the Aeneid, Troilus and Criseyde, Faust, and Hyperion among other works. But it was at home, in the environs of Rutherford, Paterson, and the Passaic, where he would find his inspiration, form, and idiom, derived from such sources as the Historical Collection of the State of New Jersey, the real-life Paterson figure, George Lyle, the marriage of prose line and jagged poetry of Byron Vazakas, an MGM movie on Madame Curie's discovery of radium in pitchblende, and most importantly, the letters of Marcia Nardi, which would take the form of the Cress letters in his long poem.⁶⁴

The result of Williams' efforts between the years of 1946 and 1958 is a sprawling five-book poem, Paterson, which might be loosely classified as an epic, with

occasional moments of coherent radiance but, ironically, approachable only by the community Williams held most in contempt: the specialists and academicians.⁶⁵ Abbreviated conversations, concrete images, isolated historical accounts, unconsummated loves, reflective lyrics, failed speech, and so much more, conveyed by incongruous juxtaposition, ironic understatement, altered voices, and recurrent images leave the conventional reader for the end of a Proustian periodic sentence searching. However, in a ventriloquial plotting scheme similar to the myth of the Fisher King lurking behind the five-part set of The Wasteland, Paterson's episodes are held together through the amalgamated persona of the poet/doctor/city who, in an attempt to release the language of beauty that is locked away in the minds of the people, engages in a quest to find this language and method. He starts his journey at the waterfalls, on Easter, works his way down through the city where he finds its denizens wholly divorced from the language of beauty. Next he moves off to the park, female to the city, but discovers there lethargic men and ranting evangelists, incapable of consummation. Thus, he carries his search to the library in the city, where he discovers only the dead past, and that it is only from its destruction by fire that beauty might be released. The next movement begins on the river shore leading to the sea

where the poet rejects a brief experimentation with the pastoral mode--yet one more degenerate European form. At the close of this section, the poet is nearly washed out to sea, but swims back to shore, reunites with his dog, fortifies himself with some plums and heads inland to start his project anew, realizing that the sea, a figurative representation of the European influence, is not his home.

Though Paterson failed, in a popular sense, the poem's technical innovations and intentions had succeeded in enlisting many younger poets to its cause. Above all other technical devices attributed to the poet that of the "variable foot" has been advanced as his greatest contribution to American verse. Yet, so inarticulate was Williams' definition of this innovation that it soon became ridiculed as a "rubber inch." "The American Idiom . . . the Variable Foot," were the chants Williams repeated to Hugh Kenner and others of the long procession of visitors that made pilgrimage to his house in the final years.⁶⁶ Kenner claimed, twenty years after the poet's death, that the incomprehensibility of these terms rested with the terms themselves: "idiom" and "foot" were only in the "vicinity of what he meant."⁶⁷ As Kenner explained it, both Frost and Eliot had recognized that a poem's rhythmic pattern was the most fundamental kind of

communication a poet has. Williams' tendency to end lines with prepositions, he felt, echoed the rhythm of American speech. Thus, Kenner offers the example of how a British poet might have phrased the confessional line of "This is Just to Say":

I have eaten the plums
that were in the ice-box⁶⁸

By contrast, Williams' lines reflect the American tendency toward rising inflection:

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the ice-box⁶⁹

Williams' emphasis here is two-fold: 1) different speakers of the English language pace their stresses differently 2) a rising inflection is a form, loosely taken, of what we call stress. Thus, an essential part of his argument was that we cannot fit an intra-national metrical unit to a rhythm that attempts to capture the patterns, or idioms, of regional voices, hence, "the variable foot."

It was his insistence on making and re-making poetry in our own image, for instance, out of the very historical texts which described our past, that drew so many followers to Williams. Louis Zukofsky, Robert Lowell, Allen Ginsberg, Randall Jarrell, Denise Levertov, and many

others had, in varying degrees, played temporary son or daughter to his "pater," and he, in turn, was an inspiring father to them. In a talk, entitled "The Poet's Poet," delivered to the Williams' centennial conference held in 1983, Diane Wakoski defended her title:

Yes, the poet's poet, in the sense that he gives us challenges, ways of seeing in our own work possibilities we may not have thought of. He also gives permission, as we need it over and over, to accept ourselves, our native language, a geography which is unique.⁷⁰

Likewise, Denise Levertov remembered how in her visit to the poet a few weeks before his death he had the power still to send her reeling from his house in a state of creative exhilaration.⁷¹ No better example of this parental relationship exists than in the very text of Paterson itself, where in Book IV the poet-doctor-city includes among his many lyrics that explore the reasons for the failure of culture and language a letter from a shy, young novitiate, Allen Ginsberg. Beyond its obvious contributions to the loosely plotted story of the poet's having found a potential son, the letter's mixture of styles, with the author's conscious transformation of them, must have struck the poet as the very "thing" he was after in the poem. Thus, the young Ginsberg knowingly commences in the old high style with its elevated diction

and smooth pacing, yet quickly descends to the chuckling rhythm evoked by the elements of the local scene:

Not only do I inscribe this missive somewhat in the style of those courteous sages of yore who recognized one another across the generations as brotherly children of the muses (whose names they well know) but also as fellow citizenly Chinamen of the same province, whose gastanks, junkyards, fens of the alley, millways, funeral parlors, river-visions--aye! the falls itself--are images white-woven in their very beards.⁷²

While much of Paterson's Book IV functions like the apologia of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan"--whose narrator wishes he could have fused both shadow of dome and cave of ice--at moments such as these where Williams gathered up a musical line from the letter of a growing poet, a passage whose natural progress nearly transforms itself from the stifling influence of traditional form to a new rhythm and focus and does so in the voice of a real-life citizen in the local scene, Williams has achieved, albeit too infrequently, the contact he so urgently sought.

The Limited Perspective of the Selected Letters

Not surprisingly, little scholarship has seen fit to study the mutual influences of these long-time companions. The abstruse lucubrations of Burke's rhetorical projects seem a field apart from the interests of the students of Objectivist poetry. Though very few works on Williams ignore the fact of his having been associated with Burke, most citations drawn from their correspondence reveal strictly biographical details, or focus on issues outside of their relationship. Besides the information from personal accounts of family and friends, John Thirlwall's Selected Letters of Williams, Paul Jay's letters of Burke and Malcolm Cowley, and references in these Collected Letters, we have little else to go on except the general context of their works from which we might make a comprehensive statement about the nature of their long-time literary and personal friendship.

Warrant enough for further study, it would seem, derives from the forty-two year duration of their acquaintance. During those years, the letters and secondary accounts confirm that many congenial gatherings took place on Sunday afternoons, mostly at the Burkes'

Andover farm, between 1922 and 1960. Before the literary disputes or shared readings, they would often play a game of tennis, or Burke would lead the gathering on a long walk up and through the woods.⁷³ Williams, in 1948, revealed the power these gatherings held for him:

The life he has led on his old abandoned farm in Andover has always fascinated me. I approve of it. I admire the mind that conceived and carried out such a life. We'd meet there Peggy Cowley who'd be bitten by a rattlesnake and yell for me before she'd be taken to the hospital to be cured, Mattie Josephson, Malcolm Cowley, Gorham Munson, in striped pants and carrying a cane in that country place. All afternoon would be spent in argument, we hugging our glasses of apple jack. Reactivated, I'd go home to the eternally rewarding game of scribbling. Thought was never an isolated thing with me; it was a game of tests and balances, to be proven by the written word.⁷⁴

More often than not, before they had entered the door and had time to warm themselves with the Burkes' homemade rice wine, even before they had disembarked from their cars, Burke would deliver his first lecture, which he had ready as if impatient for listeners after having been long alone. During one meeting

he spoke with so much verve and at such great length that afterward, as he said, he had neither strength nor will to write down the big ideas he had talked out.⁷⁵

Michael Burke remembers how the far end of the living room in their house at Andover became a stage when friends visited; there Malcolm Cowley would sing bawdy songs, or Ralph Ellison would read a chapter from Invisible Man.

. . . Williams read "A Sort of a Song" on one of his visits. . . . and as I had come to expect when my father's friends arrived, there was laughing, drinking, and eventually a big meal. The party began at the door of their car, with so much animated conversation that it took an hour to get from the car through the yard and into the house. . . . KB would take the group on the "Grand Tour," a trail he had cleared through the woods, along the rock walls, and the fallen barbed wire fence, by the little house on the hill where he courted my mother, and back across the field to our back porch. Everyone would gather in the kitchen, and as the evening arrived gravitate into the dining room for the evening meal. Upon arriving for one of these visits, Bill announced that he had a new poem to read, and it was postponed until after dinner, when everyone moved towards the far end of the living room, where Butchie and I were moved out of the best chairs to make room for the grown-ups . . .

Seated on an old straight back chair, with the caning just beginning to unravel, Bill Williams recited his new poem. A few false starts were necessary till everyone reasonably quieted down. No-one ever managed to get through a poem, or piano piece, or story without everyone in the room adding a little something along the way, and several attempts were usually necessary. He bent forward to read from his notes, and with a high and melodic voice, read with a meter that was part song and part story-telling. He began a poem about a snake and a rock.

Bill described the rock, shaping it with his hands, and repeated the last line. His gestures were precise, and I can still see the large gray boulder, with tiny blossoms peeking out of the

cracks, sitting on the wooden floor next to the front hall post. "No ideas but in things," . . . I remember the thing so well it still sits in my memory in the corner of the living room.⁷⁶

Even when such an evening was complete and Williams had returned to work at the hospital to wait for an expectant mother to deliver, his weekend foray would still be churning in him:

. . . if the fit was on me--if something Stieglitz or Kenneth had said was burning inside me, having bred there overnight demanding outlet--I would be like a woman at term; no matter what else was up, that demand had to be met.⁷⁷

In contrast to these personal accounts, the letters Williams and John Thirlwall selected from the poet's correspondence with Burke to be published in 1957 seem essentially devoid of such emotion or domestic warmth. This is a very significant observation insofar as the eleven letters that Williams and Thirlwall selected represent the most extensive source to date upon which to base any insights into the relationship of Burke and Williams. The project of Thirlwall's Selected Letters evolved in a backhanded manner. At first, with the long interviews and collation of manuscripts, Thirlwall had intended to write the poet's biography. Williams wrote to

friends and collectors formally announcing the undertaking as well as entreating their support should they be called upon by Thirlwall. The poet conveyed his admiration for Thirlwall's energy in a letter to Norman Holmes Pearson of Yale University, one of the primary players in the assembling of Williams' manuscripts.⁷⁸ As early as September 1953, Williams had written to James Laughlin, from whom he had become estranged as a result of his move from New Directions to Random House:

John Thirlwall who has taken an interest in writing a new biography of me and as a matter of fact has already been working on it for half a year seems a person that can be trusted with any available materials.⁷⁹

Coincidentally, in August of 1954, Kenneth Burke received letters from Williams and Malcolm Cowley at approximately the same time requesting similar information. He wrote to Cowley:

Quite a batch of your letters are already collected in one pile. Some months ago, Shorty [Libbie] began going through all the letters here, as Bill Williams wanted his.⁸⁰

When it came time for the actual composition of the biography, however, Williams' "diminished Boswell," as Paul Mariani dubbed him, became creatively paralyzed.⁸¹

Moreover, Thirlwall's attempted middle step of composing an introduction to the Selected Letters initially met with Williams' rejection.⁸² To make matters worse, Thirlwall heard that names of alternative biographers had been bruited about, and finally, because of his misplacing documents and his publishing materials without authority, he lost the support of Williams' wife who, after the death of the poet, broke off relations with Thirlwall altogether.⁸³ Though the conclusion of their twelve-year association appeared to end with a humiliating dismissal, John Thirlwall had, to his credit, completed two very important projects with Williams: the recovery of some sixty lost poems and the collection of letters.

In his introduction of Burke's letters within the Selected Letters, Thirlwall remarks on the sheer volume of his correspondence with the poet:

[Burke] has written and received perhaps more letters to and from William Carlos Williams than anyone living.⁸⁴

Yet, astonishingly, from an estimated two hundred letters, Williams and Thirlwall used only eleven, all from Williams to Burke. Thirlwall did not feel compelled to explain this one-sided exchange, but it may be ascribed to Burke's

characteristic delicacy in matters of public display. As his son, Michael, and others have attested his father was an intensely shy man. We can observe an example of this trait in Burke's letter to Williams contained in this volume, 8

July 1960:

Positively helndamnation NO, as regards publishing my "3 A.M. Impromptu on Zukofsky." 'Tis too untrimmed. And above all, when and if I air my reservations on Eliot, I want to do so in ways that don't give The Enemy so many opportunities to smack back.

In Williams' slim selection, with the exception of a few lines, Burke emerges as the philosopher-qua-philosopher more than the intellectual sounding-board and companion of thirty-six years. A precedent for this treatment already existed in Williams' Autobiography (1948) where the poet mentions Burke a scant three times: one, he mistakenly claims that Burke became the editor of The Dial after Marianne Moore; two, including Burke among their number, he disparages the intellectuals who "began to intrude upon the terrain opened by the lunatic fringe"; three, he compares the Thoreauvian lifestyles of Josephine Herbst and John Herrman to that of Burke's in Andover.⁸⁵ Each cursory reference in the Autobiography seems almost accidental, or

gratuitous, so that the resultant image of the philosopher of Andover is sorely attenuated. Likewise, the eleven letters selected by Williams and Thirlwall tend to distill, in the mode of dramatic monologue, a nearly abstract relationship between a poet and a philosopher.

In half of Williams' letters to Burke the subjects hinge on the old poet-philosopher/critic/scientist dichotomy. (It seems, by the way, that Williams indiscriminately lumped together the terms philosopher, critic, and scientist, especially during one of his harangues.) Thus, for example, in his letter of 27 April 1931, Williams praises Zukofsky's criticism of Pound's Cantos by contrasting it with that of other critics:

I'm sick of this God damned hair splitting that so many of the critics, the erudite critics, go in for. All that means nothing to me.⁸⁶

The complaint in his 26 January 1933 letter conveys a sharp response to Burke's request that the poet forward any compositional notes he had used for creating his poems so that the philosopher might analyze his methods for an article he was preparing on Williams. In his refusal, Williams draws a sharp distinction between "S and P" on

one pole and poetry on the other where he relegates the scientist and philosopher to subordinate positions.

. . . from a man partially informed, that is, not yet an artist, springs now science, a detached mass of pseudo-knowledge, now philosophy, frightened acts of half realization. Poetry is the flower of action and presents a different kind of knowledge from that of S. and P. If I am wrong then it is just too bad--but I should never want to write reading matter that would be dull: hence my reluctance to show anyone my notes save as "my mode of procedure."⁸⁷

Once again, in his letter of 23 January 1952 (the last letter to Burke in Thirlwall's Letters) Williams describes a talk he gave before the National Institute of Arts and Letters:

I damned near DIED reading my 10 pages to the wolves. I could hear them growling before I had got half way down the first page.⁸⁸

In the tradition of Emerson, Williams had called for a focus on what was truly American in art (he spoke specifically about abstract expressionism) and before he was finished with his introduction, boos and howls rang out from an essentially academic audience.⁸⁹

Three of the eleven letters are concerned with Williams' curious brand of ethnocentrism. On 26 January 1921, he writes a congratulatory note to Burke for his

"The Armour of Jules Laforgue," published in Contact that month:

The Laforgue article pleases me. I object to appreciative articles on foreigners being written for us from Europe. The environment gets into the writing every time and it is inimical to me. I resent the feel I get from the composition and so I am led to antagonism against the appreciated.⁹⁰

And the last two letters in this group represent a salvo fired from Rome and Vienna during his 1924 European trip.

In the letter from Rome his complaint centers on the allure of the European tradition, echoing Lambert Strether's dilemma or the force that drew artists like Eliot and his friend, Pound, away from their home country:

I never so fully realized as in the smell of these relics of the old battle, how maimed we are, and how needlessly we are crippling ourselves. Frascati in full "wildflower" yesterday won me again just as I have been won over and over here by the bits of wisdom that I've seen even in museums. . . . We love it. That is the "Shit" of it. We eat it, lie in it. Sing about it and build our monuments on it.⁹¹

Three weeks later, while in Vienna, Williams first congratulates Burke for a story of his that appears in Secession; the rest conveys, again, Williams attitude toward things European:

These people are totally ignorant of things American, barring the names of you newer writers. . . . Of everything else American they live in an ideally black ignorance. . . . It is very nice over here, as I said before. Oh well, why not? I'll be glad to get back--in spite of it. The only sensible thing to do over here would be to go mad and kill yourself. . . . I have heavy bones I am afraid . . .
. . Vienna would be still more wonderful if I could only want to forget everything on earth.⁹²

These passages, much like those on the poet beleaguered by philosophers and academics above, were clearly forwarded primarily to highlight, to abstract, Williams' aesthetic position; that they are letters addressed to Kenneth Burke seems a matter of secondary importance.

Though many of the letters contain fragmentary references to the correspondent as an individual--"Damn it man you encourage me" (1/26/21), "Good Christ you are curiously a whole man to not mind the crap you hear" (3/26/24)--only three seem selected primarily for the purpose of defining their relationship. On 22 March 1921, two months after their first meeting, Williams writes:

It would be a pity not to have some traffic between the poles. I have long wanted to have a correspondence with someone very dissimilar to myself, the thing to be planned as a dialogue criticising the universe (literature), which might be published later. Procrus vs. Aprocrus. In any case I should like very much to write, though I feel, without meaning to spoof, that I'll be the

gainer rather than you. . . . But after all it would be no use. We are too far apart yet to indulge in talk profitably.⁹³

The inauguration of their correspondence, from Williams' perspective at least, continues what we have heard in the howling voices and ethnocentrism above; it characterizes their relationship as a necessary and emphatic opposition, all done congenially of course. Yet does the human side of Burke emerge? The epic imagery of "traffic between the poles," followed by the presumptuous renunciation of the proposed intercourse are metaphysical positions drawn in the New Jersey snow, hardly the stuff of human relations. Indeed, in the early years of their union, Williams, in the Thirlwall Letters, continued to set Burke in the neighboring field as a theoretical "haystacker" whose attempts at codification were impinging on a poet's freedoms. Thus, he wrote in the letter from Rome cited above:

One night, you are right, I let loose and said what I have said before: "to hell with Ken Burke, I can't see what it's all about (his short story theory). If he'd write and to hell with his mechanics etc., etc."⁹⁴

For posterity, it seems Williams wanted to leave little doubt as to whether or not he had any intention of playing Whitman to Burke's Emerson.

The letters he and Thirlwall include from the later stage of the poet-philosopher relationship continue this denial. He responds sternly to a segment of J.W. Mackail's Virgil and His Meaning for the World of Today Burke sent him:

We each of us do what we can. My approach, as a poet, is just as valid as your approach as a philosopher to whatever mass of material is presented to us to work with.⁹⁵

Again, a line in the snow. Yet, a conciliatory and progressive tone emerges in letters exchanged twenty-six years later, both from 1947. "We seem to get on much better by indirect rather than the direct approach," Williams begins a response to Burke's criticism of Reich's The Function of the Orgasm:

What you reveal in your letter over the Reich book is to me thrilling in the extreme, it seems to state or does state what seems to be the basic reason for our interest, our sustained interest in each other which has never been explicit--a desire on both our parts to find some basis for avoiding the tyranny of the symbolic without sacrificing fullness of imagery.⁹⁶

For once in his correspondence an acknowledgment emerges, albeit tacitly, that Burke's methods may be an equally valid means of attaining a similar end:

My whole intent, in my life, has been as with you to find a basis (in poetry, in my case) for the actual. It isn't a difficult problem to solve theoretically. All one has to do is to discover new laws of the metric and use them.⁹⁷

Still, in the conclusion of the same letter, we discover that while the poet has achieved a level of mutual regard for the philosopher, he continues to keep Burke a little to one side.

We, you and I, have nothing to quarrel about once we get by the simple beginnings (the universal activity of the mind--analysis is merely an adjunct to that). At that point we may begin to use each other at will--or perforce if you prefer. My whole contention, so far is that we keep separate in order to be of as much use to each other as possible--to penetrate separately into the jungle, each by his own modes, calling back and forth as we can in order to keep in touch for better uniting of our forces.⁹⁸

Whatever the reason we might attribute to Thirlwall and Williams' decision to omit Burke's letters to the poet, the resultant image of their relationship from the partial view seems flat and contrived. Surely Burke echoed this

sentiment when, upon receipt of his copy of the Selected Letters in August 1957, he sent this note to Williams:

Shopping around among same [the letters], I see your selectivities emerging nicely. You knew what you were after--and I'm sure that's one big reason why you got so many good things done.

From the perspective of the Thirlwall letters, their early correspondence reveals a mixture of sentiments that seemed too volatile for any cohesive compound called "influence" to develop. Though the Selected Letters exclude Burke's responses, it is instructive to eavesdrop on his view from the vantage point of the selected letters of Burke and Cowley. Eight months after their energizing inaugural meeting, Burke went to Rutherford to visit Williams; he sent this troubling account to Cowley:

The doctor, having wearied of calling me cerebral, became suddenly charmed with my wares and talked rashly of a literary correspondence. I came here and started off quite bravely, maintaining quite a variety of things. Doc answered in the capacity of a vigorous young American, making much of certain things being beyond him, or beside him, or beneath him. Then at times I would get two irate letters, the second trampling the first one's heels, cursing, steaming, stamping about, and affirming generally that there was too much to be said, that it simply could not be harnessed, that he had gone up in smoke. For a whole summer, Malcolm,⁹⁹ I patiently poured my most valuable discoveries into the sewer.

And in a letter written to Cowley on 23 December 1921, Burke complains of an unsuccessful attempt to draw the poet into a more formal declaration of the meaning of "contact":

He quotes from "The Great Figure Five," uses it as perfect example of "Contact." And I take the word contact to mean man without syllogism, without the parode, without Spinoza's Ethics, man with nothing but the noumenon and the eye to make the noumenon a phenomenon. . . . I see now just why I am interested in Williams: because he has frequently done to perfection just the sort of thing I do not want to do. In other words, in him I find a superb adversary, thus making one less likely to grow lax in his own productions. . . .¹⁰⁰

Perhaps it is no accident that Burke's "in him I find a superb adversary" echoes Williams' own words written a few months earlier, mentioned in the letter above, where he told Burke, "I have long wanted to have a correspondence with someone very dissimilar to myself."¹⁰¹

It was clear their approaches would be different from the start. Burke's theoretical interests were an attempt to diminish (by a reductive linguistic legerdemain, some would argue) the distance between his culture's disparate orientations--the languages of specialization, for example, seemed to be taking us farther away from one another into a sort of post industrial Babel: hence, his

attempt to ignore minor distinctions and to drive toward common denominators such as the universal "motives" that exist beneath the surface of our language. Burke sensed this division when he admitted, in a rather left-handed salute, that Williams did not enjoy his "weakness for definitions and fixations. He feels things; but my joy does not begin until I formulate them."¹⁰² For Williams' part, the poet would not be overarched with any formulaic terminology: indeed, the idea of a pure poetry of "contact" must preclude any esoteric theorizing. His drive always was earthward and his inspiration found its source in the immediate experience of the human particulars and local setting. It was not enough, for example, to include references to intimate correspondence and local history in Paterson, Williams included the very things themselves. Once beyond this barrier of approach, however, as we experience only fleetingly in the Selected Letters, they settled into a life-long friendship characterized by great mutual affection and constancy, even though these disputes continued. When we turn to the Collected Letters, we find evidence of a warmer and more cooperative relationship, one Burke seems to anticipate in a letter he wrote to Cowley, posted less than two years after the one cited

above, wherein Burke attempted to lure Cowley out for a bash with Williams:

Friday night I got semi-puffed with Williams and Waldo Frank, and we talked five hours on fornication. . . . The two men took so halely to each other that I felt rather like Pierre Loving when he introduced Goethe to Schiller: delighted but a bit to one side.¹⁰³

The Collected Letters

Before discussing how the Collected Letters might augment or modulate the image we have of the relationship between Burke and Williams, a word about their provenance and physical appearance is in order. The collection comprises two hundred and forty-seven letters. Williams' estate sold their sixty-nine letters to the Beineke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale some time in the early sixties, but according to Patricia Willis, the curator of American Literature there, the details of the purchase are unavailable.¹⁰⁴ One hundred and seventy-seven letters were sold to the Pattee Library of The Pennsylvania State University in 1969. Charles Mann, the Chief of Special Collections, reported that this collection was purchased at the prompting of Burke's long-time friend, Professor Henry Sams:

. . . who was head of the English Department at Penn State for a dozen years. Before that he had long been associated with KB at the University of Chicago. It was Sams who brought KB to Penn State to teach from time to time.¹⁰⁵

Nearly all the letters at the Pattee Library still have envelopes with them, a fact which proved helpful in dating those without headings. The envelopes were useful as well in

determining points of origin and termination, a task made easier by the fact that both Williams and Burke, after some early changes, maintained the same respective addresses their entire lives. Happily, a majority of the letters in both collections are typed on standard eight by eleven sheets; a few are handwritten and many of those are either on postcards or, as in Williams' case, on prescription pad paper. One errant letter, 21 November 1955, was discovered by Michael Burke while he was closing the affairs of his father in Andover.¹⁰⁶

Interesting patterns of proportion and frequency develop throughout their forty-two-year correspondence. Williams' share of the exchange comprises more than twice that of Burke's, which leads us to conclude--since many of Williams' letters clearly are responses to missing queries--that either Burke had already made selections of valuable letters and discarded the rest, or that there are still letters as yet unearthed. The patterns of frequency provoke curiosity as well. In the four years between 1921-25, fifty-three letters were exchanged, but in the next seventeen years, 1926-43, only forty-two letters were exchanged, twelve of these written in 1933. In the last seventeen years of their correspondence, 151 letters were exchanged. In an attempt to explain these anomalies through the content of the letters, we will discover some

interesting themes that recur, and certainly a picture of their relationship slightly modified from the common perception.

The Collected Letters discloses a more sincere portrait of human friendship in general than that of the Thirlwall letters: periods of enthusiasm, anger, estrangement, and intimacy. Although a close analysis reveals periods of silence within every decade, in toto the letters show us that Williams and Burke were fast friends during the twenties and during the late forties and fifties, but that through the thirties and early forties, for reasons about which we can only guess, they were not close. Only twenty letters in the decade of the thirties were saved, and we have little evidence of their having visited each other much during those years. Even though the Burkes were living in the city during the winter and thus close enough to dispense with the necessity of writing, at least four of the letters were posted during winter months. Additionally, the tone in their correspondence during this period sounds remote: in answer to Burke's news about a house for sale near their Andover retreat on Amity road, Williams writes, on 16 February 1930, that he and Flossie were no longer searching for a summer cottage. An April 1930 letter asks Ken "Watchadoin these days?" On 11 November 1935 Bill writes:

There's no overpoweringly great news to pass on--no great victory won--just guerilla warfare as usual--and common in an uncivilized and overgrown terrain. But the boys are in college and I have my garden all in order for spring. My best to--whoever remembers me.

The only reference to a visit during the thirties comes in Williams' letter of 16 November 1936 when Burke announces his wish to interview the poet for The New York Times Book Review.

No evidence exists to suggest that their friendship had undergone a rupture. We might speculate, however, that Burke's darkness during the early thirties and then his subsequent political enthusiasms had contributed to the temporary separation. Moreover, the addition of two young boys to his share of the responsibility for three daughters surely must have limited somewhat the forays to Poncino Palace or to Squarcialupi's restaurant; indeed, it may have been the primary cause for his accepting the position at Bennington in the early forties. In 1941, Burke would send this note along with his return of an unidentified document of Williams':

Going through my sack, I came upon the enclosed, which you asked me to return. Here it is.

I guess we mean well, you and me. And maybe we even really intend now and then to have a session together. But we just go along his or her individual way. It's too bad probably.

Williams, for his part, was busily raising a family, writing, and doctoring. In his 14 August 1943 letter to Burke, while giving a mixed reception to the Bennington appointment, Williams addresses his own plight as a doctor on the home front:

But the work is very hard and will get much harder in the coming winter with more of the men in the profession going into the armed forces. The impossibility of meeting all situations emotionally has been a great lesson to me. I have to a great extent succeeded in keeping my body at a sort of ease even when I am harrassed to the point of complete exhaustion.

As if in celebration of the war's conclusion, their correspondence increases dramatically after October 1945: it represents over sixty percent of the entire collection.

"Damn it, I must run up to see you now the war is over and gas is free-er," Williams wrote on 15 October 1945, suggesting that his visits would soon be renewed. The tone and frequency of the letters during the mid-forties seem in accord with these claims, and with the exception of a few months of separation interspersed among the remaining years of their friendship, they maintained a fairly constant and congenial interchange until the last. When the letters disclose evidence of their having made fifteen visits with one another during this period, mostly to Andover, we may assume that there were many more besides.

Clearly, most of the gatherings occurred at the Burkes on Sundays, an obvious arrangement when we recall that Williams lived and practiced medicine in the same house--a short walk down Ridge Road toward the river reveals that even though he was officially closed to business on Sundays, his house was near the crowded apartments of his importunate indigents. Moreover, Burke's house had already been established as the central meeting spot for many of the New York crowd. The significance of these visits to Williams can be measured in part by his reaction to the sudden prevention of one, thus on 2 November 1945:

I suppose this is going to be another one of those things. It's now 1:25, the sky somewhat threatening and I've decided not to make the trip. If I don't do it today I know I won't do it this year. That's that. I'd like to see you and talk with you--maybe I'd be happier if I did, I know I should be. . . . I'll end by putting on old clothes and going into the backyard, drink my own Bourbon--take a hot bath. Cough my guts out. And wish I had gone to see you in Andover. The worst is you'll be expecting me.

As Michael Burke's essay attests, many of the visits were ultimately centered on literary discussions. Random selections of passages make mention of essays or poems that had been packed along with wine and steaks. In Burke's 6 June 1948 letter, we find evidence that Williams had been rehearsing his "variable foot" on his favorite philosopher;

Burke, interestingly, had delayed his response until the poet returned home:

Your essay sounded like a good act. I could even see where you cunningly laid plans for some of your most winsome spontaneous boyish effects. (Spontaneous! You old whore!) Main thing that bothered me, only thing in fact, was this:

You seem to put it all down too much to a matter of Rhythm. For the whole story, I'd like to see you decide just how many ingredients there are in the recipe for a poem. . . . When you talk of the Foot, you obviously mean a lot more than the book on versification does (including, I suspect, some double entendres that might best be revealed by psychoanalysis on the foot as phallus).

Another interesting feature revealed by a study of the various visits derives from an incipient darkness that made its way into Williams' comments about his sojourns to Burke's in the late fifties: in the 8 September 1955 note we sense the poet slipping into the weariness of old age:

It was a good afternoon, I wish it could be repeated. I wish for impossible things: that we could communicate in ways that would surpass ordinary communication. That is where I feel my inadequacy: I'm not up to it any more--if I was ever up to it. . . .

Again, in his 26 September 1956 letter:

Well I guess that's all I have to say for the moment, we had a good time and enjoyed a delicious meal, I'm not much on the drinks nowadays if I ever was, but they also went the way of their kind with the same effect that Socrates and his friends enjoyed before us but we didn't loosen up the way we have done in the past. Maybe it was your feeling of

loss in the absence of your two boys away at school that caused it. Who can tell? After I have reached 80 there may come other times if not long before that. I have always heard that old age is garrulous, tien!

Although this kind of weariness ought to be expected-- Williams was 73 at the time--the poet's continued decline in health must surely have been responsible for such sad notes. Still, it is a measure of how intimate his relationship with Burke had come to be that he felt he could let down his guard when they were together. I hasten to add, however, that many of the other visits referred to in the letters suggest that such tendencies toward the morose were exceptional; even in the late fifties, their correspondence contain references to enjoyable picnics and swims that still had the power, for Williams, of provoking a poetic response such as that, for instance, recorded in this 2 July 1957 thanks to Libbie with which he had enclosed a new poem--"The Birth":

We had a good quiet time, I enjoyed it including the drinks and the dinner, which was delicious. The thunder shower and the scamper with you under the towel to shelter left me breathless but I enjoyed it.

Although we do not know the last time Williams was able to visit Andover--in the later years young Bill would often drive his parents over--we do know that in the winter of

1960 both the Williams and the Burkes rented places together in Sarasota, Florida. An incident that occurred on one of their many walks there came to supply Burke with the crystallizing moment for his eulogy on Williams two years later. His having watched the poet-doctor minister to a limping dog, who had picked up a sandspur, offered a convenient image on which to build his closing impression of the "imaginative physician and . . . nosological poet": "And here I've learned one more thing about Williams' doctrine of 'contact'," he wrote (Doyle 361).

Amusingly, Burke's preoccupation with Williams' double life as poet and physician may have been more self-revealing than the philosopher expected--one of Burke's famous pronouncements, one played out in his Towards a Better Life, centered on the idea that a poet's work was essentially a "dramatistic" disburdening of his own concerns. We might conclude, and Burke would allow, that such a formula could be applied to the writings of a rhetorical theorist as well. For Burke's physical ailments make up a noteworthy portion of the letters' contents. Indeed, on 24 August 1950, one of the letters offers this quid pro quo:

Every once in a while (as regards the ailments), I discover that I'm a breath behind.

If WCW the doctor can keep Ignatius Burpius alive, Ignatius Burpius will in his ignatian-buropian way sing of WCW the poet.

Burke, above all people, would have enjoyed our turning his eclectic Freudian/linguistic analysis on his own letters.

Although, in itself not enough to warrant a conviction for hypochondria--after all it would seem quite logical to direct one's medical questions to a doctor friend--it remains, nevertheless, remarkable that nearly thirty pieces of their correspondence have to do with the medical ailments of Kenneth Burke and family! As early as 12 May 1921

Williams responds to a question about the source of lockjaw:

No, dearest anal--asist (with apologies to farmer in the Dell Floyd) lockjaw does not come from skin wounds, barking of the nuckles, splinters in the glands or any such light affair. . . . It delights in deep wounds the external opening of which has closed up leaving a focus of infection deep in. This is the reason that one is annoyed when a four inch spike penetrates the shoe and the foot carrying the manure etc. deeply in there to lodge and do harm. If you are thus wounded put your foot in your mouth and yell for help. Meanwhile suck the foot as hard as you can . . . continuing in this way till you are unconscious from loss of blood.

The letter continues to address another ailment, rheumatism, as if Burke had passed Williams a list of symptoms; finally, the doctor concludes with this disarming prescription:

"Shift your cud, you have a cold." Williams' opening with "dearest anal--asist" suggests already that Burke seemed preoccupied with his health. Indeed, we may, while pondering the cause of their 1940's reunion, owe more to Burke's preoccupation with health than we do to the conclusion of

World War II. For, astonishingly, of the twenty letters that exchanged hands in 1945, eleven concern themselves with his physical ailments. In all fairness to Burke, he was in on the joke from the outset; most of his complaints are accompanied by self-disparaging comments, such as his having been the first to discover the "migratory symptom"; he, too, was aware of the frequency of his inquiries. On 30 June 1950 he wrote:

this is a hell of a way to pipe up. . . . I seem to turn up thus, every once in a while, with a burden which I would plague you with.

On 12 October 1945, in a humorous description of his latest ailment, he first launches an elaborate analysis of possible causes--reaching all the way to his infancy--for a lump on the roof of his mouth; he concludes with the genuine source of a hypochondriac's discomposure:

Anyhow there is the egg, and I'm finding it more and more difficult to give priority rating to my other worries. So, if you had someone to suggest? Particularly some thoughtful soul like me who might be more prone to diagnosis than action.

What should not escape our attention from this group of letters is their disclosure of the humanitarian side of Williams--a disclosure that prompts us to consider how many times such communications were repeated among his many other correspondents. Throughout the years, Williams ministered to

the protuberances on Burke's mouth, his eustacian tubes, his son's hernias, his mother's plugged ears and cancerous cysts with selfless promptitude: hence, the central image for Burke's closing eulogy.

The article that Burke had finally completed represents another leitmotif of the Collected Letters. It had started as a pledge and become a standing joke between the men for forty years. In no less than twenty letters Burke made mention of his promised essay with increasing embarrassment as the years went by. In October 1935: "Bill I am still resolved, by the way, that I shall some day do that essay on you . . . using the cluster business." An escalation of such promises occurs in the mid-forties where in October 1945 he writes:

Bill would it be correct to say that you have learned how to make a poem out of notes for a poem? . . . I hope that, some time before I'm through, I'll be able to carry out my plans to do one of my studies of 'equations' in your work.

In 1950, on his way out the door to a lectureship, he wrote Williams, remembering his note to Cowley in the early twenties:

Years ago, I decided that I'd like to do a kind of "tryptich" on you three [Stevens and Moore]. So far, I've only contrived somewhat of one-third, on M.M. But, bejeez, I do avow: I'm taking all your books with me this summer (to Indiana U.), plus all the notes I have already husbanded or wived or

whatever--and I'm going to try my damndest both to get the article lined up and to try it out on the dog by peddling it in the classroom.

He continues these assurances well into the early sixties where on 31 December 1960 he writes:

Bill, the story is purely and simply this: I owe you an article, an article about you. And if Bigshot but grants me the time, I'm going to do it. . . . And so, I'll write that eloquent article about you that I have long been taking notes on and getting up steam for.

Still, Burke had not learned. His chasing after "clusters" and "equations," the terms of his current enthusiasms revealed in Philosophy of Literary Form, was the tone of the eastern aesthetes that had so angered McAlmon years ago. Even after Williams' spitting responses or protracted silences, Burke persisted; in June 1948, he renewed the project:

I wish you'd try writing a poem, as fast as you can, on Rhythm and the Foot. Or the New Rhythm, the New Foot, etc. Including your doctrine of the stress upon Change. Knock it off at top speed. And send me a copy of it. I'd really be tremendously interested in seeing it. (For I still hope to do a really thorough analysis of your work, from the standpoint of my elucubrations on Motives.)

A few years later, after a gap in the letters that makes it seem as though their disagreement over these approaches had continued undisturbed, in October 1951, Burke adopted the

strategem of composing a poem along the lines he felt that Williams would have chosen and presented it to him for his analysis:

I know, Prima Donna Dawlink, you're mad at me. But, natheless, I'm first of all for accuracy--and to heck with the rest. . . . If, on looking over that poem, you have any notions (spontaneously) as to where in your opinion it's not in your groove, and how you would tinker with it, to make it more along your lines, bejeez I could I'm sure get some angles by your saying so.

With only slight variations, Burke offered many such dodges and lures to the poet well into the sixties; however, we have no sign that Williams took up the gambit. Finally, near the end of the poet's life, the story of Burke's recurrent project climaxes in this plaintive note on 14 January 1962:

Have just read the article by Robert Lowell on you in the current Hudson Rev. . . .¹⁰⁷ It gives me a chance to say why I haven't written the article on you that I have long wanted to write. . . . I have not written it because I'd love to have done a long piece having exactly the quality of those warm and brilliant and thoroughly just pages by Lowell. . . . Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa. Forgive, Bill . . .

Again, it is a measure of the quality of their friendship, attested to in this episode and many others besides, that such avowals or historical fatalities were not allowed to interrupt its continuity.

The Nature of Their Collaboration

Beyond a more sincere portrayal of the personal backgrounds of these two men, and perhaps more important to the interests of scholarship, these Collected Letters take us a step closer to an understanding of the collaborative relationship between Williams and Burke, a step, by the way, that Williams and Thirlwall found of little interest during their arrangement of the Selected Letters. Although it is not my purpose here to resolve, definitively, the issue of influence, it would be instructive to set down what might be some fruitful lines of development. Toward this end, we will discover that the letters disclose a collaborative relationship that ranges from the mere solicitation of submissions for their respective periodicals, to informal criticism of one another's works, as well as giving us evidence for some direct influence, especially with regard to the locus of ideas that may have generated certain aspects of Paterson.

At least ten letters contain requests for the submission of articles. As early as October 1925, we have two letters of Williams' soliciting essays or poems from Burke for his second edition of Contact. One interchange

gives us an insight into publishing history among the writers on the fringe during the thirties. In an effort to counteract the blight to publishing caused by the depression years, Burke and others established a manuscript-publishing venture that would allow authors to place their works with little cost to themselves as well as to release them from contractual obligations should their work prove to be popularly successful. On 5 January 1933, Burke enclosed the manifesto of "Manuscript Editions" in a letter to Williams and asked:

. . . I also wonder whether you might have any addresses of the various young-bloods (such as wrote for the Caravans, for Pagany, and your past and present Contacts) to which you would let me send this circular?

Williams' enthusiastic response, sent off the next day, contains his offer of a work "lying here in my strong box just screaming to get out": The Embodiment of Knowledge. Though it might be tempting to speculate that Burke's refusal of this manuscript (26 January 1933), as well as Williams' White Mule (6 June 1933), may point toward their diminished communication throughout the late twenties and early thirties, such speculation is deflected by the next series of letters in 1933, wherein Williams offered Burke, and Burke accepted, a chance to introduce Charles

Reznikoff's Testimony to be brought out by the budding Objectivist Press in the same year.¹⁰⁸

Among other such requests for submissions, one of great interest occurs in 1953 when Williams, in June of that year, asked Burke to submit an essay on Whitman for Milton

Hindus's Leaves of Grass: One Hundred Years After.¹⁰⁹ The significance of this request stems from the fact that the work marks one of the few occasions that Williams and Burke were to appear together under the same title. Their essays offer us a noteworthy study in the contrast of approaches, and though the degree of their collaboration seems minimal, their subjects suggest that they had compared notes. If nothing else, we certainly sense the vestiges of a discussion. Both authors discuss Whitman's position in America relative to Shakespeare's in England. First, Williams' article, "An Essay on Leaves of Grass," sets Whitman's technical achievements in an historical context with Shakespeare's perfected iambic pentameter.¹¹⁰ Second, he imagines Whitman's poetic campaign, like his own, as one against European tradition in adversarial terms:

But his chief opponent was, as he well knew, the great and medieval Shakespeare. . . . [he] presented Whitman with a nut hard to crack. What to do with the English language? . . . Unlike Whitman, he was or represented the culmination of an historic as

well as literary past whose forms were just coming to a head. . . .¹¹¹

Burke's essay, "Policy Made Personal: Whitman's Verse and Prose-Salient Traits," struck a very similar chord with Williams' when he argued that Shakespeare's poems seemed to Whitman "poisonous to the idea of the pride and dignity of the common people" and that to Whitman he was the "singer of feudalism in its sunset" and thus Whitman's project was "to offset chivalry."¹¹² Disappointingly, the letters contain no comment about the final content of their articles. But in a very real sense their publication under one title established in actuality what Williams had hoped for in figurative terms when he had expressed the wish that he and Burke would continue their relationship so that their ideas might be laid "one along side the other."¹¹³ Another interesting feature of the letters surrounding this project derives from Burke's mimicking of Whitman's style, in a letter sent on 19 July 1954, as a means of analyzing Whitman's methods and directions. Read alongside his controversial mimickry of Williams' poetry, to which I have already referred, this points up a consistent pattern in Burke's methods.¹¹⁴

With the exception of a few heated exchanges, the letters reveal a congenial collaboration with regard to

criticism of one another's works; interestingly, their appreciation is often coupled with a veiled dig or incitement. Burke's comments, especially when he was mindful of Williams' explosiveness, were mostly appreciative although he was conscious that, as he would say, it took a "constant sitting on the lid"; thus, in his 24 May 1940, he held his fire:

Yet, it's a good poem, and I could use my calipers on it until you cried out that I was as delicate as a coroner's jury.

And in the very next paragraph he threatens:

I am still resolved, by the way, that I shall some day do that essay on you I once wrote you about. Using the "cluster" business (or did I mention "clusters"--anent Coleridge--in the Freud piece, and with mention enough to make it apparent what I had in mind?)

For his own part, Williams had a way of constantly reducing the theorist's work to subordinate status as we can see in a note sent to Burke on 14 October 1940:

I'm glad somebody is interested enough to think and to write in the manner and with the authority which you wrote in Poetry on the matter of verse making. That sort of thing, taken as an act, is indispensable to any civilized society. It indicates the way growth takes place. No poet would be likely to stop to think as the philosopher would think of the materials he, the poet, uses. But he can accept the support he gets from that kind of thinking and,

in turn, reward that thinking by example. There's a word for it perhaps symbiosis. . . .

Many letters make direct reference to the borrowing of materials from one another. As early as 6 December 1922, Williams wrote that he had used one of Burke's suggestions--one that is lost to us--to overcome a problem with the soliloquy in his operatic project, The First President.¹¹⁵ Another such reference occurs on 12 July 1943, when Williams sends an appreciative note in reference to one of Burke's articles:

I enjoyed the coolness of your developments in the View piece. My piece was written before, during and after my reading of what you said there.

Of those borrowings that are easier to trace, on 20 April 1946, Williams reported to Burke that he had used his ideas on the four tropes during a review of Parker Tyler's The Granite Butterfly, where he noted in two of Tyler's stories "a trope that might be described as allegorical overlay. . . . it lets in the light."¹¹⁶ Michael Weaver finds in this borrowing from Burke that Williams was intrigued with Burke's renaming the tropes metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. His new names--perspective, reduction, representation, and dialectic--reduced their stylistic importance and emphasized their role in the search for

truth.¹¹⁷ Williams appreciated the play of perspective he had discovered in Tyler's dialectical definition of surrealism as an art form that combined representational value (images) and symbolic value (symbols) in a play of both values.

This interacting perspective on reality Williams regarded as the artistic device or trope which Surrealism offered as a means of raising to the imagination an otherwise unintelligible inner and outer world. But he insisted that the trope as dialectic be well spaced, and not 'massively,' 'materially,' 'compounded'; that is to say, it should not be mathematically engineered after some doctrinal plan, either Marxist or Freudian. The elements of conscious and unconscious material should be unified by conflict (Burke employed 'dramatic' synonymously with 'dialectic'), and not by mere linkage.¹¹⁸

Weaver goes on to assert that Williams' ultimate use of these would be found in Paterson.

To the extent that Paterson is a poem based on the three-personed figure of N.F. Paterson (Noah, Faitoute, and the Poet/City) related to a manifold experience of women (including the woman-mountain) it is an extended trope in which the elements, conscious and unconscious, representational and symbolic, collide and recoil continuously, compounded neither into a fixed level of awareness nor into a single mode of expression.¹¹⁹

This borrowing from Burke evidences a significant convergence of the ideas between these two men, insofar as Williams takes up the aspect of Burke's redefinition that emphasized the release of truth, a release that reminds us

of Williams' explanation of "contact" in his Little Review article from 1919 referred to above where he held that

By the brokeness of his composition the poet makes himself master of a certain weapon which he could possess himself of in no other way. The speed of the emotions is sometimes such that thrashing about in a thin exaltation or despair many matters are touched but not held, more often broken by contact.¹²⁰

Yet it is interesting that the poet also included the injunction, after the fashion of Shelley, against the formation of monolithic metaphors, that might follow doctrinally a design of Freud or Marx. This injunction was clearly directed toward one of his favorite readers, the psycho-linguistic theorist from Andover.

Burke, as the letters attest, often used Williams' works and ideas both in his classroom discussions as well as in his texts. On 25 August 1951, he wrote to tell Williams of his plans to use an excerpt from the poet's recently published Autobiography. The passage to which Burke refers has to do with Williams' discourse on the objects of his poems, the people of Rutherford.

They were perfect, they seem to have been born perfect, to need nothing else. They were there, living before me, and I lived beside them, associated with them. . . . It isn't because they fascinated me by their evil doings that they were "bad" boys or girls. Not at all. It was because they

were there full of a perfection of the longest leap,
the most unmitigated daring, the longest chances.¹²¹

It is instructive to compare this with Burke's own lines
from his Language as Symbolic Action:

The poetic motive does indeed come to a head in the principle of perfection. . . . But the principle of perfection should not be viewed in too simple a sense. We should also use the expression ironically, as when we speak of perfect fools and perfect villains. . . . [this shows a] tendency to search out people who, for one reason or another, can be viewed as perfect villains, perfect enemies, and thus, if possible, can become perfect victims of retaliation.¹²²

One of the most interesting passages that has to do with the issue of borrowing comes from the exchanges which occurred during February of 1947. When Williams was wrangling with the form and procedure for Paterson II, he apparently turned to the hills of Andover for aid. Burke referred the poet to a section of John Mackail's Virgil and His Meaning to the World of Today.¹²³ Although we are not certain which passage was sent, we do know that Burke used the following excerpt from Mackail's description of Virgil's plan in his own essay, "Poetics in Particular, Language in General":

The work must be a national poem. . . . It must establish and vindicate the vital interconnection of Rome and Italy. . . . It must link up Rome and the new nation to the Greek civilization. . . . It must bring well into the foreground of the picture the

historic conflict between Rome and Carthage. . . . It must celebrate the feats of heroes. . . . It must find expression for the romantic spirit, in its two principal fields of love and adventure. . . . It must exalt the new regime.¹²⁴

Predictably, Williams' response denies the supposition of such premeditated form:

I do not believe you think Virgil formulated any such preliminary plans as this before beginning composition in the Aeneid. He was an alert and intelligent citizen of his times and besides a gifted poet; he saw a need (he also saw words) and must have felt a tremendous pleasure of anticipation. In composing the poem he felt an undoubted pleasure--of various sorts: sensual, sociological, historical identifications and so forth. He may at an outside guess have indulged in a bit of logical philandering--if he found the time for it in a dull moment! But that he set down a primary scheme and followed it I can't for a moment believe.¹²⁵

After such a sweeping negation, however, Williams wrote to thank Burke for the citation and that he might find occasion to use it in the part of Paterson, Book II, he was then composing. The author's own hand bears testimony to his having had Burke in mind during production where on the first page of the manuscript to that Book we find this cryptic note dated 2 May 1947: "Dear Ken: what few 'get' your difficulties (as philosopher) begin where mine (as poet) end. . . ."¹²⁶ Williams again has put the poetic act

prior to that of the theoretical formulation in this marginal note.

Although no direct reference to Virgil occurs in this book, the Klaus Ehrens' story bears many of the earmarkings, though subverted, of the epic journey of immigrants to a new world. After the poet-doctor-city has witnessed the unavailing efforts of a woman, significantly named Mary, to stir her lover from his post-prandial impotence--"Come on! Wassa Ma'? You got broken leg?"--he walks upward to observe a sermon in the park.¹²⁷ Klaus Ehrens, a Billy Sunday style evangelist, is preaching from a promontory there, and inscribed within his sermon is the history of many of the immigrants who had come in search of riches to America through New Jersey.

Great riches shall be yours!
I wasn't born here, I was born in what we call
over here the Old Country . . .

. . .

My family were poor people. So I started to work
when I was pretty young.¹²⁸

At the same time, in a collage-like juxtapositioning, Williams inserted prose passages that set up, contrapuntally, a voice of exploitation, where the historical passage reveals the cunning design of Alexander

Hamilton to exploit the natural resources of the region around Paterson as well as that of its citizens:

He came out with vigor and cunning for "Assumption," assumption by the Federal Government of the national debt, and the granting to it of powers of taxation without which it could not raise the funds necessary for this purpose.¹²⁹

The significant alteration of "Assumption" should not escape our attention; in one sense, it echoes Hamilton's seeming act of benevolence unveiled for its truly confiscatory motive, hence the shift from upper case to lower case. In another sense it harkens back to the first scene in the book where we witness a diminished version of the assumption of the Virgin Mary. In both cases, we sense Williams' using traditional elements for subversive purposes; he refused to be a party to the kind of poetry, or poetic forms, that idealized the national experience after the fashion of Whitman or Virgil; simply put, it would not have been an apt portrayal of the modern scene. (Of course it would be uncharitable for us to point out that while Williams made a great deal of his opposition to the lessons of the academies and the poetics of Eliot, our appreciation of these passages depends, to a great extent, on a knowledge of these traditions.) Nevertheless, if it holds true that the Klaus

Ehrens' episode was inspired by the citation sent from Burke, we find another clue for the way in which they came to use one another, and more interestingly, Williams' constant subordination of theory to something rather like a handmaiden or messenger to the creative act of the poet seems compromised by the evidence.

The last example of explicit borrowing we will take up leads us to what may prove to be the most fruitful line of development with regard to Burke and Williams' collaboration, that of literary "form." Indeed, in our continued search for the reason for their reunion in the early forties we might find the most important clue in Burke's publication of The Philosophy of Literary Form (1941). In a note posted on 5 May 1940, after four years of relative silence, Williams wrote of his interest in one of the essays to be included in the book:

I will read your essay. I'm already 1/3 the way through it--among the usual distracting interruptions. It fascinates me and looks to be something valuable in my case. I want to see more of you this summer. I'll run up soon.

Again, Williams affirms his enthusiasm on 21 April 1941:

By the way, I have ordered your book from the U. of Louisiana Press. I always want to have a talk with you over those things which concern us jointly--I have already told you how much I liked the essay in

Poetry which appeared a few months ago--so that now that you have assembled the essays on poetry I shall make a special effort to get up to Andover this year.

Though the war had intervened and four years would pass before Williams would make mention of the subject again, after a walk together in 1945, he sent this letter in November:

I saw the beginnings of many valuable conversations between us sticking their heads up as we passed them by yesterday--I particularly liked your manner of explanation when you lowered your voice and spoke quietly of the elementals that interest us both, the human particulars of realization and communication. I woke in the night with a half-sentence on my metaphorical lips "the limitations of form." It seemed to mean something of importance and to have been connected with what we had been saying.

In Ken's response nine days later, one that is preceded by another plea for medical assistance, he attempts an explanation of the poet's experience:

Your vatic awakening, with the words of the anonymous spokesman, "the limitations of form," suddenly reminded me that I forgot to mark down a reference I had come upon in Aquinas a few days ago. His three (quoting Aristotle, I believe) were: symmetry, order, limitation. Anyhow, the scholastics equate "form" and "act"--and, to apply your localization business in another way, one can act only by not acting all over the place. As a matter of fact, the dream words doubtless went back to the old battles of you and McAlmon vs. Matty and me, which were always about "form," though God only knows what we meant by it. I, the same night, was

dreaming of being chased by some nameless thing that finally turned out to be a big and very friendly dog. The amusing thing is that you, the imagist, dreamed a concept, and I, the idealogue, dreamed an image.

At every turn of The Philosophy of Literary Form, we can sense the mutual interests of the two men merging under the general rubric of language. In the first segment, "Situations and strategies," we seem to see the two standing side by side in Burke's opening comment that "critical and imaginative works are answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose."¹³⁰ Such a comment takes us back to the very first appreciative note Williams sent to Burke on his Laforgue essay.¹³¹ Too, Williams must have found here renewed verification, against the constant harangues of Pound, of his insistence on the local as the setting and source for his new poetic among the denizens of Rutherford. Burke's segment on "Symbolic action" distinguishes itself from the school of poetry of the same name, insofar as that school's belief implied "the unreality of the world in which we live, as though nothing could be what it is, but must always be something else"; such a renunciation could not have pleased the editor and general practitioner of Contact more. Burke was advocating a more dynamic, or in his case "dialectical," concept of the

"symbolic": he came to call the "symbolic act" the "dancing of an attitude."¹³² Thus, Coleridge's habit of choosing crooked mountain paths, instead of direct ones, upon which to take his walks are reflected in the outward form of his poetry!¹³³

In this attitudinizing of the poem, the whole body may finally become involved, in ways suggested by the doctrines of behaviorism. . . . Do we not glimpse the labyrinthine mind of Coleridge, the puzzle in its pace, "danced" in the act of walking--and do we not glimpse behind the agitated rhythm of Hopkins' verse, the conflict between the priest and the "tyke," with the jerkiness of his lines "symbolically enacting" the mental conflict?¹³⁴

Although many other possible links occur between the the subsequent work of Williams and this single book of Burke's, the segments "Beauty and the sublime" and "'Form' and 'Content'" seem most suitably tailored to the interests of Williams' epic project, Paterson. In the first of these segments, Burke dispenses with what he classified as a 19th-century notion of beauty: "decoration....as a ritualistic way of arming us to confront perplexities and risks. It would protect us."¹³⁵

Let us remind ourselves . . . that implicit in the idea of protection there is the idea of something to be protected against. Hence, to analyse the element of comfort in beauty . . . we must be less monistic, more "dialectical," in that we include also...the

element of discomfort (actual or threatened) for which the poetry is medicine. . . . As soon as we approach the subject in these terms, we have in the very terms themselves a constant reminder that the threat is the basis of beauty. Some vastness of magnitude, power, or distance, disproportionate to ourselves, is "sublime."¹³⁶

Here, Williams must surely have found, taken together with his memory of Tchelitchev's Phenomena, confirmation for some of his early notions revealed in Paterson's many oppositions of virgin and whore imagery. Thus, in Book III of Paterson, the book where Williams sets out to find the language that will make the modern replicas of beauty vocal, the poet-doctor has answered an emergency call to treat a wounded girl and finds her downstairs by the laundry tubs:

But you!
--in your white lace dress
 "the dying swan"
and high-heeled slippers--tall
as you already were--
 till your head
through fruitful exaggeration
was reaching the sky and the
prickles of its ecstasy
 Beautiful Thing!
And the guys from Paterson
 beat up
the guys from Newark and told
them to stay the hell out
of their territory and then
socked you one
 across the nose
 Beautiful Thing
for good luck and emphasis
 cracking it
till I must believe that all

desired women have had each
 in the end
 a busted nose
 and live afterward marked up
 Beautiful Thing
 for memory's sake
 to be credible in their deeds¹³⁷

Or, again, in a prayer that William's promised Burke he would include in Book II, one either addressed to the deity of the earth, or to the Beautiful Thing:

It does you
 justice--a prayer such as might be made
 by a lover who
 appraises every feature of his bride's
 comeliness, and terror--
 terror to him such as one, a man
 married, feels toward his bride.¹³⁸

We find many other such oppositions trading on a similar strategy throughout the work, thus it is only at the library's burning that the poet finds the release of beauty that no amount of studious effort could render, and again, in the source of the radiant gist: pitchblende.

The possibility for influence exists also in Burke's segment on "'Form' and 'Content.'" For as the author signified by the primary terms of his title in quotation marks, Burke challenged the fixity of such terms:

To know what "shoe, or house, or bridge" means, you don't begin with a "symbolist dictionary" already written in advance. You must, by inductive

inspection of a given work, discover the particular contexts in which the shoe, house, or bridge occurs. You cannot, in advance, know in what equational structure it will have membership.¹³⁹

In this segment, Burke seems to return the provenance of form and content to the poet at his creative moment and in his immediate setting. He called the approach a pragmatic approach in that it

assumes that the poem is designed to "do something" for the poet and his readers, and that we can make the most relevant observations about its design by considering the poem as the embodiment of this act. In the poet, we might say, the poetizing existed as a physiological function. The poem is its corresponding anatomic structure. And the reader, in participating in the poem, breathes into this anatomic structure a new physiological vitality that resembles, though with a difference, the act of its maker. . . .¹⁴⁰

This fusion of "form" and "content," the assertion that everything is made new according to its context and that "form" is ultimately dictated by "context," certainly squares with the poet-doctor's claim in Paterson II:

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. . . .¹⁴¹

Finally, Burke's anatomic metaphor, one repeated throughout the many segments of his book--while again gesturing ironically to his hypochondrial preoccupations, especially in his repetition of "disease" and "medicine"--certainly must have appealed to the understanding of a poet-doctor. Moreover, if Williams had not yet devised the primary elements of his epic poem in 1941, the seeds for the amalgamated poet-doctor-city persona might be attributed to talks that arose from, or indeed themselves generated, this extended metaphor in Burke's essays.

Clearly, greater mutual influence exists than has yet been ascribed to the relationship of these two men. The Collected Letters disclose valuable patterns to their collaboration. The record of solicitations, borrowings, and suggested influences, doubtlessly represents a pool of thought to which they both contributed and from which they both borrowed. Future scholars will discover, as these letters evidence, many fruitful avenues of exploration between the works of these two representatives of the modernist movement. Indeed, such inquiries might shed new light on some of the organizational elements of Paterson. Certainly a more complete vision of the human aspect emerges from these letters; through the accounts of their many visits, physical obsessions, delayed projects, and much more

besides, we sense in greater detail the rhythms of their lives together. Rendered thus, collected in toto, with the many disjointed particles of unanswered queries or incomplete thoughts, they come to remind us in their ragged way of the immense energy these two men brought to their living, and too, how that energy was necessary to their respective creative potential. Thus Williams, lashing out at the encroaching threat of the "Estoteric," wrote of the two together in his poem "At Kenneth Burke's Place," and referred once again, by way of a bushel of apples, to the common source of their inspiration ("the earth under our feet") and perhaps also to their reunion:

There is a basketful
of them half rotted on the half rotten
bench. Take up one
and bite into it. It is still good
even unusual compared with the usual,
as if a taste long lost and regretted
had in the end, finally,
been brought to life again.¹²⁷

A Note on the Text of the Letters

The symbols [P] and [B] at the head of every letter signify the Pattee and Beineke collections respectively. Whenever possible, through evidence extrapolated from the content of a letter or discovered on its accompanying envelope, the point of origin and date, when not included within the context of a letter, have been placed within brackets. Finally, where intentional word play has contributed to eccentric spellings, we have let them pass; other misspellings have been silently corrected.

Notes for Introduction

¹ Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists: A Memoir (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1962) 72.

² Josephson, Life 77. At the time of their first meeting, Josephson was 22; Kenneth Burke, 24; William Carlos Williams, 38; Robert McAlmon, 25. Dr. William E. Williams, Williams' son, who still lives and practices medicine at 9 Ridge Rd., remembers that even in his early youth the river ran "a different color every day." Dr. William E. Williams, personal interview, 18 November 1993.

³ Josephson, Life 72.

⁴ William Carlos Williams, The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams (New York: New Directions, 1948) 171.

⁵ Paul Jay, ed. The Selected Correspondence of Kenneth Burke and Malcolm Cowley (New York: Viking Press, 1988) 63.

⁶ Jay 75.

⁷ William Carlos Williams, "Improvisations," The Little Review 6.2 (June 1919): 52-59. The actual lines read:

By the brokenness of his composition the poet makes himself master of a certain weapon which he could

possess himself of in no other way. The speed of the emotions is sometimes such that thrashing about in a thin exaltation or despair many matters are touched but not held, more often broken by contact. (57)

⁸ Jay 77.

⁹ Robert E. Knoll, McAlmon and the Lost Generation (Lincoln: U. of Nebraska Press, 1962) 103. Emanuel Carnevali was Harriet Monroe's associate editor on Poetry. Williams describes his first meeting with Carnevali in his Autobiography (266-69).

¹⁰ Josephson, Life 74.

¹¹ Marsden Hartley (1877-1943), American painter and long-time friend to Williams. Baroness Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven (c.1870-1927), eccentric artist in dadaiste tradition who first encountered Williams in her review of Kora: "Thee I call 'Hamlet of Wedding-Ring': Criticism of William Carlos Williams' 'Kora in Hell' and why--", The Little Review 7 (1921): 48-60. For Part II, see The Little Review 8 (1921): 108-111. See Mariani's account of their peculiar relationship, 160-164.

¹² Josephson, Life 73.

1³ John C. Thirlwall, ed. The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959).

1⁴ Josephson, Life 77.

1⁵ 26 January 1921

1⁶ Josephson, Life 74.

1⁷ William Carlos Williams, Paterson (New York: New Directions 1968) 237.

1⁸ Josephson, Life 77.

1⁹ Armin Frank, Kenneth Burke (New York: Twayne Publishers 1969) 19.

2⁰ Josephson, Life 32-33.

2¹ Josephson, Life 37.

2² Michael and Kenneth Burke, personal interview, 17 November 1993.

2³ David Shi, Matthew Josephson, Bourgeois Bohemian (New Haven: Yale University Press 1981) 31.

2⁴ Armin 21.

25 Armin 21.

26 Josephson, Life 67.

27 Josephson, Life 71.

28 Shi 98.

29 Josephson, Life 65.

30 Jay 153.

31 Michael and Kenneth Burke, personal interview, 17 November 1993.

32 Frank 24.

33 Shi 29.

34 Shi 174.

35 Jay 154.

36 Malcolm Cowley, The Dream of the Golden Mountains (New York: Viking Press 1964) 279.

37 Herbert W. Simons & Trevor Melia, eds. The Legacy of Kenneth Burke (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 1988) 20.

38 Simons 19.

39 Simons 8.

40 Kenneth Burke, Permanence and Change (New York: Prentice-Hall 1935) 44.

41 Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (New York: Prentice-Hall 1955) xiii.

42 Merle Browne, Kenneth Burke (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1969) 7.

43 Browne 8.

44 Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, eds. The Rhetorical Tradition (Boston: St. Martin's Press 1990) 913.

45 Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives (New York: Prentice Hall 1947) 3.

46 Browne 10.

47 It ought to be stated here that though much of the information on Williams' life has been gathered from various sources, including a personal interview with the poet's son, W.E. Williams, M.D. in November of 1993, most of the biographical information is drawn from Paul Mariani's excellent biography: William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 1981).

- 48 Thirlwall 33.
- 49 David Perkins, A History of Modern Poetry
(Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1976) 547.
- 50 William Carlos Williams, Selected Poems, ed. Charles Tomlinson (New York: New Directions 1985) 18.
- 51 Williams, Selected Poems 39.
- 52 William Carlos Williams, The Collected Later Poems
(New York: New Directions 1966) 7.
- 53 Williams, Selected Poems 34.
- 54 Williams, Selected Poems 23.
- 55 Paul Mariani, William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 1981) 368.
- 56 Williams, Selected Poems 89.
- 57 Williams, Selected Poems 102.
- 58 Mariani 389.
- 59 Mariani 651.
- 60 Mariani 403.
- 61 Mariani 395.

62 Mariani 394.

63 Mariani 452.

64 Recently, Marcia Nardi's letters to Williams have received comprehensive treatment in Elizabeth O'Neil's The Last Word: Letters between Marcia Nardi and William Carlos Williams (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press 1994).

65 Book 1 of Paterson was published in 1946; Books 2, 3, and 4 were published in 1948, 1949 and 1951 respectively. Book 5 was published in 1958.

66 Hugh Kenner, "The Rhythm of Ideas," Sagetrieb 3.2 (Fall 1984): 37.

67 Kenner 38.

68 Kenner 38.

69 Kenner 38.

70 Diane Wakoski, "William Carlos Williams: The Poet's Poet," Sagetrieb 3.2 (Fall 1984): 46.

71 Denise Levertov, "William Carlos Williams," Nation 196 (1963): 230.

72 Williams, Paterson 204.

73 Michael Burke pointed up one of the interesting paradoxes of life at Andover, that while they did not have indoor plumbing installed until the late 50's, they had discovered a sizable clay deposit near the house that allowed them, with little effort, to construct a fairly decent tennis court. Too, in their outhouse they boasted a hand-carved paper dispenser by Alexander Calder (b.1898) the developer of the mobiles and free-standing stabiles of interpenetrating sheets of metal.

74 Williams, Autobiography iii.

75 Josephson, Life 305.

76 Michael Burke, letter to the author, 2 December 1993. This passage is excerpted from an unpublished essay by Michael Burke.

77 Williams, Autobiography iii.

78 Mariani 685.

79 Hugh Witemeyer, ed. William Carlos Williams and James Laughlin: Selected Letters (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 1989): 206-207.

80 Jay 322.

- 81 Mariani 685.
- 82 Thirlwall xxviii.
- 83 Mariani 686.
- 84 Thirlwall 48.
- 85 Williams, Autobiography: 164, 171, and 270.
- 86 Thirlwall 115.
- 87 Thirlwall 137.
- 88 Thirlwall 311.
- 89 Mariani 643.
- 90 Thirlwall 48.
- 91 Thirlwall 60.
- 92 Thirlwall 105.
- 93 Thirlwall 51.
- 94 Thirlwall 60.
- 95 Thirlwall 251. John William Mackail, Virgil and His Meaning to the World of Today (Boston: Marshal Jones Co. 1922).

96 Thirlwall 257.

97 Thirlwall 257.

98 Thirlwall 257. In 1947, Williams was working on the second part of Paterson: "Sunday in the Park."

99 Jay 101.

100 Jay 109.

101 Thirlwall 51.

102 Jay 90.

103 Jay 146.

104 Patricia Willis, letter to the author, 10 March 1994.

105 Charles Mann, letter to the author, 26 October 1993.

106 Michael Burke, letter to the author, 5 May 1994.

107 Robert Lowell, "William Carlos Williams," Hudson Review (Winter 1961-62): 530-37. (The volume also contains four poems by Williams, 527-29.)

108 Charles Reznikoff (1894-1976) was among the group of objectivists that founded the Objectivist Press, the original publishers. Testimony: the U.S., 1895-1915 (New York: Black Sparrow Press, 1978).

109 Milton Hindus, ed. Leaves of Grass; One Hundred Years After (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1955). Williams' essay included in that volume: "An Essay on Leaves of Grass", 22-31. Burke's essay in that volume: "Policy Made Personal: Whitman's Verse and Prose--Salient Traits", 74-108.

110 Hindus 22.

111 Hindus 28.

112 Hindus 75.

113 31 January 1947.

114 15 October 1951.

115 Williams and an Hungarian composer Tibor Serly tried to write an opera based upon the life of Washington. Although The First President was never completed, Williams' libretto was published in 1936 in Alfred Kreymborg's The New Caravan.

116 William Carlos Williams, rev. of The Granite Butterfly, by Parker Tyler, Accent 6 Spring 1946: 203. The usage to which Williams refers may be found in Burke's A Grammar of Motives, 503.

117 Mike Weaver, William Carlos Williams: The American Background (Cambridge: University Press 1971) 143.

118 Weaver 143-44.

119 Weaver 144.

120 See note 7.

121 Williams, Autobiography 288.

122 Kenneth Burke, Language as Symbolic Action (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966) 38-39.

123 John William Mackail, Virgil and His Meaning to the World of Today (Boston: Marshal Jones Co., 1922).

124 Burke, Language as Symbolic Action 37.

125 25 February 1947.

126 Neil Baldwin and Steven L. Meyers, eds, The Manuscripts and Letters of William Carlos Williams in the Poetry Collection of the Lockwood Memorial Library, State

University of New York at Buffalo, (Boston: G.K.Hall, 1978)

215.

127 Williams, Paterson 73.

128 Williams, Paterson 84.

129 Williams, Paterson 84.

130 Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form
(Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 1967) 1.

131 26 January 1921.

132 Burke, Literary Form 8.

133 Burke, Literary Form 8.

134 Burke, Literary Form 10.

135 Burke, Literary Form 60.

136 Burke, Literary Form 61.

137 Williams, Paterson 153.

138 Williams, Paterson 92. See Williams' letter dated
20 June 1947.

139 Burke, Literary Form 89.

140 Burke, Literary Form 90.

141 Williams, Paterson 65.

142 Williams, The Collected Later Poems 257.

1921

[P]

[Rutherford¹]

Jan. 12, 1921

Dear Ken Broke,

This time it is my fault, not Bob's.² I received your story from him last week and have neglected to remit it to you because the weather has been cloudy and clear by turns of late. I enclose it. Bob has given up the idea of getting out an issue of Contact, at least for the present, but he didn't like the story. Perhaps some day when I have so reduced my residue of sense that I have more money than it I shall continue Contact here among the skunkcabbage where it belongs. Until that time I'll buy books. I hope you sell your story.

I met that Russian, Gilbert Seldes, ten days ago for the first time.³ He told me that The Dial was preparing to use your essay on my place in our America. He did not, most positively, say that you would put me in my place. They are also printing two new poems of mine. Damn you, if your article slams me my poems will show you up, so there!

Should you be planning to move to N.J. I hope you will give me the opportunity, as a native of that state of introducing you into its mysteries. They resemble in some measure the Eleusinian, the celebration being by means of a liquid core extracted from the center of a barrel of frozen cider, etc. etc.

I did not see the article in The Times.

I send the books at once. I read De Gourmont's novel with the greatest pleasure; it is très agréable. The poems I should like to read had I ever the time to do so but time is too swift in passing. The few I did read and absorb, though they fascinated me, did not invite my study as closely as say the present day work of Scribe whom I admire most among the Frenchmen that I know at all.⁴ I suppose I am somewhat influenced in my shyness toward Laforgue by a knowledge of what a too close study of his work has done to Eliot--and others, even Pound--the unhappy cripple. But I intrude upon your game park. As a poet I prefer--well, Scribe. Is Scribe a Jew? I can't imagine that he is one but somehow--No I am sure he is not, he is so little ornate.

Well, as I have said so often before--Well, this is the end.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

January 24, 1921.

Dear Williams,

Enclosed find documents. I am afraid they may make McAlmon froth a bit. The essay, "The Armor of Jules Laforgue," is sent purely as a matter of orientation.⁵ It carries the double stigma of having been written to sell and not having sold. However, it is much nearer the issue than McAlmon's claim that the appreciation of Laforgue is based on one's familiarity with Flaubert.... As to the long story, it was done last summer, and is a bit too much Huysmans and Little Review to satisfy me completely now.⁶ Still, it has turgescence, and I am anxious to know your reactions to it. Let me especially call Chapter V, "Tonnage," to your attention, in case there is too much measles and child-birth this week for you to read the entire shaydevver. I realize that it is too long to serve in CONTACT, and am sending it, also, for purposes of orientation.... I do hope, however, that you will agree with my little three page "Tone-Picture," in spite of its somewhat Griegish title.⁷ For it is thoroughly representative of the sort of thing I am writing at present. And I do not think that the direction, scherzando, is idle, as it signifies the basis for my excursionial dips into a sort of artificial

emotion.... The other thing I am enclosing is a poem of Cowley's, somewhat Jules Romains but still very much Cowley.⁸ It is my personal opinion that 7 and 8 should be reversed; I remember that Cowley once agreed with me in this, but I see that he has not changed them.

The French books are being mailed at the same time.

Burke.

[P]

[Rutherford]

Jan 26, 1921

Dear Burke,

God bless your bloody American heart I want to print all you have sent--and shall sooner or later in some way or other. The Laforgue article pleases me. I object to appreciative articles on foreigners being written for us from Europe. The environment gets into the writing every time and it is inimical to me. I resent the feel I get from the composition and so I am led to antagonism against the appreciated. Criticism must originate in the environment that it is intended for. Laforgue is a new Laforgue in America. Our appreciation of him creates him for us and this I feel in your work. You have taken what you want from the master in order to satisfy your needs and your needs are the product of your environment. (I wish to God I dared print

this note somewhere in the next issue where your paper will be used. What do you say?)

You fairly illustrate what Bob and I mean by contact. Why the last paragraph, the quotation, is a perfect exemplar of our attitude. Laforgue takes what he has and makes it THE THING. That is what we must do. It is not even a matter of will. It is fate. We are here under one--Hell, you know all that as well as I.

The stuff apart from the Laforgue thing I have not yet read though the story where I have dipped into it seems to be full of well formed blocks rich with good words. I want to look it over more carefully with a view to bringing it out in installments. We'll see.

Damn it man you encourage me. I want to go on and on with this damned magazine as long as men like you can be doubtingly approached and dragged forward against their wills. It is the way it must be done. Bob and I thought that geniuses would rush forward and fling masterpieces at us.

We will be the greatest gainers by this venture if we learn what CONTACT with the Americans we want to meet means. It's a hell of a job meeting each other. It's a battle. We have not means of transit.

Shit. Cowley's poem is also good. I agree with you however that 7 & 8 should most decidedly be transposed.

We'll use it though either this time or next but please try and have the man do what you suggest.

If you see Bob tell him what I have said here. Oh of course you won't. You're an American. Never mind.

I haven't forgotten the promised evening at that place on 3d. Ave. Next week, is it? on Friday.

THERE IS HOPE! It's a damned lie. There is BURKE.

Yours,

Williams

Don't mind this god damned letter. I really mean something or other, as you shall see. W.

[P] [134 West Fifteenth Street⁹]

January 27, 1921.

Dear Williams,

Judging conservatively from the excessively fervid tone of your letter, it ought to take just about two weeks for you to cut me on the street. McAlmon, however, assures me that the case is not so serious. Still, I can't help conjecturing the exact nature of the cross I am to be Jeezuz to.

I am writing you to make a suggestion which I woke up with in bed last night, and which I can't nurse until next Friday. As follows: we assemble a group of men for the purpose of getting out of a periodical. Each of these men

buys a certain number of pages in each issue. Thus, the 24-page CONTACT which McAlmon says the De Pamphilis press would get out for seventy-eight dollars could be portioned among twelve or twenty-four people. Each of these men has his own page, is his own editor, and pays the expenses of printing this page. At the figure of the De Pamphilis press, twelve people could divide up a 24-page magazine at a cost of about seven dollars each, surely a nominal amount. And any outside contributions in the way of money could be used to pay distributing costs and perhaps even a bit of advertising. Such a paper would exist formally as a permanent symposium, and could adapt its size entirely in accord with its list of contributors. In this way, each man could unburden himself without in any way involving the others, and the paper could be issued entirely free of the necessity of ass-licking, a predictament which I suspect stigmatized CONTACT at its very inception. Was sagst du daruber? I am pleased with the idea because it would be a business proposition, and I don't see why the echt-Amerikanisch in art should differ from the echt-Amerikanisch in anything else. And I, personally, should be willing to give up smoking to own my page in such a venture.

The organization of such a paper would be a sort of American Unacademy of Arts. After the original group was formed, each new man would be admitted by the consent of the others, the one requirement being that the candidate's output should represent something more affirmative than a masturbatory adolescence. Also, in the interest of all these seven-dollarses, the only censorship would be to stop the publication of anything which would cause the total suppression of an issue. Each contributor would guarantee to take a certain number of pages regularly, although arrangements would be permissible among the various contributors whereby one man could transfer his pages to another in one issue and have them paid back in another, thus enabling the publication of longer articles without running them serially. (Surely, a most business-like system, which I learned from my study of the Tidewater Coal Exchange, and which I have explained exhaustively in my article on Exporting American Coal, to appear in the March issue of Dun's International Review. I must certainly send you an inscribed copy.) However, what do you think of the idea? And are our avid self-expressionists really avid enough to remain keen in the face of a seven dollar expenditure?

McAlmon came in last night, and I took him around to Cowley's but things went off quite funereally. In this spiritual copulation both parties failed to come. Cowley, I suppose, was still a bit disgruntled at the rap McAlmon took at him in the last L.R., and no doubt doubly so since McAlmon's objections had been anything but clearly formulated, so that there was very little grounds for discussions.¹⁰ So we all contented ourselves by a barren litany of the people we should care to shit upon.... As to the arrangement of the stanzas, by the way, Cowley is perfectly agreed to having 7 and 8 reversed, and asked me to tell you so.

I am enclosing the Dadaiste litterature I have here, with the original copy of an analysis of Dadaisme which I sold to the Tribune, and which--I pray in the interest of the fifteen dollars involved--will appear some day. It is, as you will note, criticism doped up for Sunday supplement consumption, but nevertheless it says something. It should be read in the following order: front of first sheet; front of blue sheet (insert found in handwriting on back of blue sheet); back of first sheet; and front and back of second sheet.

I shall see McAlmon later on in the week and make definite arrangements for our meeting at McSorley's.

Good luck,

Burke

I had a number of the Dadaiste Litterature here, but I can not find it.

[P]

[Rutherford]

Thursday [1921]

Dear Burke,

Nothing doing for this Friday night. Things have happened too rapidly since we last met for me to be able to arrange them in order. Have you spoken to Bob lately?

Your article goes into this issue of Contact. We intend to print this time. If possible I want you to correct your own proof but if you prefer I will be glad to do it for you.

In any case keep all that should be up, up until betters days.

Yours,

Williams

[P]

[Rutherford]

[February 24, 1921]

Dear Burke,

You're a damned irascible Irishman with more sense than you deserve to have. Of course you have Typhus; couldn't anyone tell it by the smell of your letter?

Meanwhile--am awaiting death--I'm damned sorry for your eyes & your headaches. I want to see you and talk with you. I have a few old soiled pairs of underdrawers under the lounge or piano or somewhere which you can mop your tears on.

And quick as you are, you have been as quick to interpret my idea of Contact, etc. I want to see you. Last Friday was an impossibility for me. Bob's sudden demise etc.¹¹

You haven't known me long enough to know how I have been knocked out by Bob's going away.

You call me a Whitmanite (Jezus Christus what lightning like penetration) then you want me to admit Josephson to my cellar closet--I am raw and stupid--¹²

I like you.

C'est tout.

Yours,

Williams

[P]

[Rutherford]

March 22, 1921

Dear Burke,

Wont you and your wife and baby come out to spend the afternoon with us a week from this coming Sunday. Arrive here sometime about noon. We'll have dinner then after which

we can disport ourselves as may best suit our fancy. And wont you solus lift yourself to this province of darkness and cellars and four-months-old puppies that are mistaken for senile hounds sometime earlier. Come out Friday late in the afternoon if you like, this Friday and stay for supper. Let me hear from you.

We shall hear from each other this summer. It would be a pity not to have some traffic between the poles. I have long wanted to have a correspondence with someone very dissimilar to myself, the thing to be planned as a dialogue criticising the universe (literature), which might be published later. Procrus vs Aprocrus. In any case I should like very much to write, though I feel, without meaning to spoof, that I'll be the gainer rather than you.

As a rule I detest argument--no one is ever convinced by it since it is nearly always a mere confusion of terms, like a football game. But your objections to McAlmon on the score of his general ignorance of French literature and Remy de Gourmont's 1890 satires in particular almost stirs me to reply. But after all it would be no use. We are too far apart yet to indulge in talk profitably. Perhaps someday we'll get some sense out of each other.

I like your ill natured jabs at myself so come on out and lets fart around for a couple of hours and see if we

can't amuse each other--perhaps even complement each other in something serious.

I received word from Bob in London. He's having a noble time of it. My word what a chance!

Have you received notice of Stuart Davis' new periodical--SHIT?--¹³ Two hundred copies to be privately circulated each month. Come on in the shit is fine.

Don't forget to let me hear from you, Mr. Whitman.

Yours,

Oscar¹⁴

[P]

[Rutherford]

March 31, 1921

Dear Burke,

Sunday then, before noon. I'll try to be at the station to meet you but should this not be possible I hope you'll not get lost. It is only a very short walk.

May the day be bright; in this day of popular neuresthenias the weather is one of the few things a man can tolerate at its best. I'll try to have all the crocuses up, the narcissi also and all leaves neatly brushed and polished.

I hope you're not a vegetarian or cannibal or any of that ilk. If so you'll be good enough to tell me what you DO

eat at once by return mail that we may have the dish you prefer before you. Speak up young man.

You make me tired with your Whitman guff. But then I suppose you make very important distinctions between merde and shit, so I can't quarrel with you. Art is so complicated. My God I stepped in some the other day. It was on my first spring walk. Some American gentleman had dropped it beside the road at the entrance to a culvert. Bla! It was not nice. I had an immediate and almost irresistible desire to study French literature--Oh well, how can one help waxing enthusiastic over such a subject. Please pardon me.

Should anything arise to prevent you from showing up on the Sabbath please call me up by ten (10) A.M.

Regards to your wife.

Yours,

Williams

[These words next to a cartoon of a bearded man with a naked woman inscribed within the outline of his beard: The American Ideal!]

[P]

[Rutherford]

[Between March and May, 1921]

Sunday

Dear Burke,

Dear Ken,

Please send story or anything else you have on your mind or elsewhere to Bob:

1 South Audley St.

London, EG.1.

He is mad, insane, hipped. He has hit Paris and remains unconvinced that America is banal! Jesus--a Daniel come to judgement. Write direct and at once.

Send a car load of MSS.

I am ill with Shit³ x Hell = NoY^x Writing

Wife in hosp. small operation on neck.¹⁵ O.K. now. My eldest son danced at a local function last night: Peter rabbit.

Yours before Cream of Wheat,

Bill

Tell Gould to write Bob.¹⁶

[P]

[Rutherford]

[March 23, 1921]

Dear Burke,

That thing of yours in the present Dial is breathless in its power to hold.¹⁷ Very good Eddie.

Were not Thayer a helpless false-alarm he would accept your new story at once.¹⁸ It is by far the most modernly gripping thing of yours--or any one elses I have seen in years. Your reference to myself makes me think my Improvisations may have interested you. Well, God is kind and gives us a few men of sense every generation. He is kind too in refusing recognition to them while they live.

But the final bolt that fastens up your tin image in my "chur'", as my Greek boot-black calls the temples they dig up in their gardens at Samos (pardon the digression), is that goddamned cuntlapping shitwaggonhound Floyd Dell's dislike for you.¹⁹ He is to me the last syllable of the universal fart. Now I KNOW you amount to something.

You should hear my Greek speak of the blocks of stone two miles from the sea, the sea having receded during the past two thousand years, where "them fellas" used to fasten their boats. It is thrilling. Ancient Greece does not live in Homer as it does in that man's talk.

I'm sorry you can't come out on Friday but I can wait.
I know all about babies so don't let that concern you.
Someday you may even understand what--What?

Yes SHIT is the immortal word. Imagine a temple to SHIT with little booths ranged along the sides. But after a meal, what more important compartment exists in the two great N.Y. railroad stations than that where one may shit. Eat and shit. Someday they will dig up these stations and investigate our sad, disused toilets--into which man has slowly disappeared from year to year, teeth and all. It is too sad.

Yes, do not forget the diapers.

Yours,

Williams

I have read your story all through again--yes it is a very tight jobby. Congratulations.

[P]

[Rutherford]

April 27 [1921]

Dear Burke,

In Maine yet? Well, I'll know if you answer. I don't blame you for waiting until July Fourth before a comeback in view of my own lack of speed. I haven't written a word to a soul for a month. How flattering that always looks.

Then again I wanted to curse you for implying what you implied about my remark anent the Freeman. I know nothing of an article about my book which Fletcher has written and probably never shall know anything about it.²⁰ I said the Freeman was not so bad because I enjoy its political bunk. As a literary magazine it is of course non-existent. I like to read political bunk when it is served frankly as a viand.

May I use your very good spring poem in the next issue of Contact? Do not refuse. The issue I speak of will appear in May sometime.²¹ I'll surely mail you a copy.

Your damned theorizing about--about--about--Well, what the hell do I care whether you theorize or not so long as you occasionally write something I like. Anyhow all I want to say is that your theories are very pretty especially the one about screwing your sister in the Pullman car.

I can tell you all about how hair grows on the female pubis and that's about all I can tell you these days unless it be--what? Something else, I suppose.

Just damned rot--

I went in to see a picture show--not the movie kind--a show of pictures by Stuart Davis etc. very nice but rather disappointing.²² All French--somehow. God when will an American be born? Quoth the Raven: Nevermore. It will have to be a Mongolian I suppose. Not a mongol tho'. I bought two

books the other day. A corking normal physiology and a great (in bulk) treatise on the brain and all it does to itself. You and your inhibitions make me tired. The world has fucked itself with Freud too long. The two most useful things I can think of right now would be to destroy Freud and the French by some capable Manifesto. Somebody ought to be able to invent a full stop before the whole works dribbles out--

Anyhow, it's a letter--

Yours,

Williams

[P]

[Rutherford]

May 12, 1921

Dear Burke,

Bob is about to bring out an international issue of Contact in London. Please send us a story or anything else you want to send. I'll give it my best backing with Bob so that I am sure it will go through. Remember however your international reputation will be at stake. You will be judged in Jerusalem and Bangkok by the quality of what you send--etc. tempo rebato D.C. con fuoco

Wurtlebacheimerdoodlesacmachergeselle--etc. i.e.

1/2c*/?1/4@5#\$%&"*--bla! Come across.

No, dearest anal--asist (with apologies to farmer in the Dell Floyd) lockjaw does not come from skin wounds,

barking of the nuckles, splinters in the glands or any such light affair. Tetanus is the result of infection with the tet-anus (ha, ha!) bacillus, an anaerobic bug which cannot grow or do harm until it is in a location from which the AIR is excluded. No, I did not say vagina. It delights in deep wounds the external opening of which has closed up leaving a focus of infection deep in. This is the reason that one is annoyed when a four inch spike penetrates the shoe and the foot carrying infected horse manure etc. deeply in there to lodge and do harm. If you are thus wounded put your foot in your mouth and yell for help. Meanwhile suck the foot as hard as you can being careful not to bite it off at the ankle as men are not crabs and a new foot would not grow on the stump in the old one's stead. Spit out the blood and bacilli as soon as your mouth fills up continuing in this way till you are unconscious from loss of blood. At that time your foot will automatically unbutton itself from your lips and you are cured.

Rheumatism is hopeless. You probably have it already and will not live more than eighty years from today. Unhappily rheumatism does not kill but causes the poor sufferer to writhe with agony twenty five hours a day so that if he is not a poet at the beginning of his illness he

rapidly becomes one, witness Esop and Paul Scarron, so that death approaches in the end as if it were dawn.²³

Shift your cud, you have a cold.

Yours,

Bill

I'll be glad to have you read proof on Contact. Thanks.

[P]

[Rutherford]

June 10, [1921]

Dear Ken,

Read Victor Hugo. You remember in Les Miserables how beautiful the gardens were where the city emptied its sewage? In other words instead of piddling from the porch and killing the grass why not shit among the beans and do some good in the world. The cucumbers of course may need special treatment but a soliloquy on Shitting among the Beans by Moonlight, should make Beethoven green with affection.

Thank God you have the woods and water to rest you. The antiphony from Paris should not bother you in the least. Have you not read my Improvisations.²⁴ I have said there at least five hundred times that all things have their perfections and that perfection and perfection are equal. It is my sole contribution to the world of my own senses.

Drink.

Here the world of art is non-existent. I have had a fine rest of late fighting the town in order to get the shitasses to take their hands off the lid long enough for us to get a new high school built. It has gone through at last. We are to have our school. The net result to me is that I have had to address two large and excited audiences, 900 souls, to this effect that I have found myself using words like fine instruments to cause an effect. I felt cool, detached, able to feel each word as it appeared and I uttered it with conscious knowledge of its purpose and effect. It was queer and delightful to be standing there quite collectedly and steering my words into those ears just as I would drive a car through the street. I never had that sensation before. It only shows how unexpectedly such a valuable experience can come to the surface, even in a local school fight. I am wealthier for having faced the music. And I won the fight.

I couldn't help feeling though all the time: Ah, if this energy were only going into art! If only this excitement had some literary matter for its concern!

---* Bla!

You might know it. The first literary pleasure I have enjoyed in weeks (this letter) has to be interrupted because

some bastard of a butcher is bleeding to death, has cut his wrist. Yet I have written these last four lines. Good-bye.

Write more. Tell me more.

Yours,

Bill

[P] [Rutherford]

July 6, 1921

Dear Ken,

Bob is in Paris having an illuminating time of it--judging from the two letters I have had. He is meeting the best of them constantly and it is having a serious effect on him. He will develop--wait and see.

The MSS of your story is in his hands. He is holding it but cannot bring out another issue of Contact until he has more American material. I'll mention your story in my next letter and tell him to send it back if he can't use it soon--

(Third interruption)

I'll have my issue of Contact out some time or other.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Monday [August 1921]

Dear Ken,

I suppose I am very dense to the literary impact, everyone, including the Barrenass, says so, so it must be true.²⁴ I see almost nothing in what I read except short leaps of the machine when it leaves the ground for a word or two. The Dadaists are very proud but they fly very little--even they.

Well, to tell all that is in my head about your things (the two stories) now that you have defended them--would take a week of academic talk. I can't do it.

Send along more stuff please. I may find the key later on. So far, I feel these stories as cerebral brickabrack--to hell with them.

I leave here in 8 days.²⁶ Why I go back is hard for me to say.

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Friday Noon [August 1921]

Dear Ken,

By the speed of your reply to this letter I'll know whether or not to mail you proofs of the new Contact.

c/o E. Haslund

Wilmington, Vt.

Fine weather

Yours,

Willie

[P]

[Wilmington, Vt.]

August 10, 1921

Dear Ken,

I won't send the proofs which I am returning to the printer at once. It will be the best printed affair I have yet been identified with.

I want your stories with interest--let us see.

Thanks for your "honey" speech. I say "thanks" because surely beggars are a nuisance.

Yours,

Bill

[P] [Wilmington, Vt]

August 23, 1921

Dear Ken,

Your horrible allegory so disturbs me that I can't tell whether it is good or bad. I don't like it a bit though bits of it seem like hell itself let through. It is too unreal, too granitelike, bloodless for my taste. It is perhaps bad because it is based fundamentally on a moral issue. That is all I can say.

The other piece also I dislike. It is too uneven. I feel the places between the bricks. In places I feel your genius but you seem to thwart yourself senselessly for some meaningless external purpose.

I feel angry at you for not shitting more gaily. You take it too much to heart.

Yours,

Bill

[P] [Rutherford]

Oct 21 1920-21

Dear Ken,

Congratulations on the sale to The Dial. May the god of all good men shine in the minds of that editorial staff until you get tired of writing essays--which I hope will be never. I enjoy your essays.

As soon as SOUR GRAPEs appears you shall have a copy.²⁷ It should be out at any moment--but it may not be out for a month. It would be fine to have you do it. I have been least interested. For this reason, perhaps, it will turn out to be one of the best, though I think not. It has been more "composed" than any so far, which, if it is discoverable, should please you. The fact of its appearance is due more to the pressure of ordinary circumstances, such as having a lot of stuff lying around than to anything else. Yet, one hopes--proof that I am not yet an artist. An artist is always beyond hope--please do not remind me of it.

You "haystackers" are the naive children of genius. Yes, medicine pays. Bless your heart, it is easy for me to admire you, surrounded as I am with paying dirt in the form of grippe, tonsilitis. Each to his own filth.

I'll see you someday--I expect soon.

Do you want to come out for a rest and a meal some day?

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Nov. 10, 1921

Dear Ken,

Bravo! Best yet. S.O.B. not to show it to me. Quite right, though. Read it almost all without knowing it was you who had waked me when I was so damned heavy eyed I could scarcely see the page. Capsicut.

Most interesting to compare it, in texture, with French stuff in same copy. Your quotations from De Gourmont stand out awkwardly against Morand et al. It is America stroking its cock--But that is not what I want to say.

What I want to say is that I take great pride in saluting you as--well, the foremost writer of your place (Is it an anticlimax?) Yes, it is. T&h\$e G#r%r&r*e%"t(e)s#t WRITER--*#68%# of your time--Shit. When all I want to say is--All I want to say would be so much more hydrocephalic than basilar lues is likely to become by looking at a "the" through a prism. In other words, intelligent and all knowing as I am I find your David Wasserman brilliant, thrilling, interesting and the best you have yet accomplished.

I wrote Bill Saphier that your story laid upon the French stuff in the L.R., as a group, resembled woolen fabric upon linen.²⁸ I warn you that I wrote this to him in a letter today, in case you should meet him.

Now let me suggest that--ha, ha!

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Nov. 19, 1921

Dear Ken,

I accept your apology.

English being, as you imagined, the lousiest language on earth, you thought to write well by writing lously. You wrote better than you imagined. If I could tell you why, I would, flower from the craned wall, tell you all you don't know.

Besides, didn't you once tell somebody that the only reason my own work was readable was that it was so damned mediocre--in tone, that is, with itself and its natural circumstances of being?

I suppose I am at heart a mystic. But who isn't until he clarifies his meaning or dies trying to. Even the Arabs or the Phoenicians, or whoever it was that invented the rule of three, were mystics until they found out pretty damned clearly that they were fooling themselves and so had to invent the science of mathematics to save their faces. Contemplate that last sentence awhile and you'll know a hell of a lot more than I knew--once.

I like your theories--they're so puerile that they don't count, so you have plenty of opportunity to write and save your face. Kiss me again Merdito. Because you CAN write.

I'll do all you ask concerning Bob. In fact, I have sent your stuff on already.

No, I have not contributed to Alfred's Broom.²⁹ I may someday soon. I haven't much to send.

Crazy about your Mathew Arnold tid-bit. You really delight my heart. Do you think me a fool if I say that at present I find you to be the only interesting character writing in America today. Paul Rosenfeld seems good in his way but he has no flare or flaire or insanity to temper his bricklaying.³⁰ Yes, writing is bricklaying.

L'architecture c'est poser un cailloux sur un autre. You like that? My brother handed it to me.³¹ I wish he really knew what it means.

Up Irland! You knife.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Dec. 5, 1921

Dear Ken,

I'm really ashamed.

Yours,

Bill

Notes for 1921

¹ Most of Williams' letters originate from 9 Ridge Road, Rutherford, N.J. where he lived and practiced medicine most of his life. His son, William E. Williams, M.D., lives and practices medicine from the same house.

² Robert McAlmon (1896-1956) "first broached the subject to Williams of starting a new little magazine with him now that Others was finished" (Mariani 174). Williams and McAlmon were co-editors of Contact I-V.

³ Gilbert Vivian Seldes (1893-1970). Author and sometime associate editor of The Dial, from 1920 to 1923 he was the editor.

⁴ Augustine-Eugène Scribe (1791-1861): French playwright.

⁵ Kenneth Burke, "The Armour of Jules LaForgue," Contact III (1921). Reprinted in Contact I-V, (New York: Kraus Reprint Corp., 1967): 9.

⁶ Joris Karl Huysman (1848-1907): French novelist.

⁷ Edvard Grieg (1843-1907): German composer and author of several works on music.

⁸ Malcolm Cowley, "Day Coach," Secession (Spring 1922): 1-3.

⁹ 134 West 15th St., N.Y., was the second of Burke's addresses in 1921; his first was 989 Boulevard East, Weehawken, N.J.; the second was 50 Charles St., N.Y.

¹⁰ A reference to Robert McAlmon's "Essentials," Little Review 7 (1920): 69-71.

What has Djuna Barnes, or Bodenheim, or Malcolm Cowley, or Witter Bynner, Ben Hecht, Mark Turbyfill, and a few others to leave? Omit their names from their work,—all that any of them has even done, compiled in a book,—and who would recognize it? They produce neither conscious, accidental, nor perverse art. (69)

¹¹ 13 February 1921, Robert McAlmon married Annie Winifred Ellerman (Bryher). The couple departed for Europe the next day.

¹² Matthew Josephson (1899-1978): editor of Broom and associated with Secession. After interviewing Williams for the Newark Ledger (Josephson 73), he instigated the first meeting between Burke and Williams, which occurred (in the

company of himself and Robert McAlmon) on a Sunday afternoon walk through the New Jersey countryside, 2 January 1921.

13 Stuart Davis (1892-1964): Davis is also noteworthy for having been the artist of the descriptive frontispiece for the original Kora in Hell which may be seen in the Williams' edition of the Briarcliff Quarterly, (October 1946): 193. See also Williams' description of his first encounter with the artist--I Wanted to Write a Poem: 29.

14 Oscar Williams (1900-1964) poet and anthologist whose name was often confused with Williams'.

15 Florence ("Flossie") Herman Williams (1890-1976): Williams' wife.

But Floss's neck problems had also been the direct result of Williams' fast driving, when he'd hit a railroad crossing at a clip and sent Floss's head smashing against the tin roof of their Ford, crushing one of her neck vertebrae. (Mariani 183)

16 Wallace Gould (d. 1944): poet from Maine.

A great mountain of a man.... He was a superb cook and for a time supported himself by baking three kinds of pound cake which he sold by mail. In Farmville, Virginia, he lived with Miss Mary Jackson...whom he eventually married. (Knoll 374)

17 Kenneth Burke, "Approaches to Remy de Gourmont," The Dial, February 1921: 125-138.

18 Scofield Thayer (1890-1982): with their financial backing, he and James Watson saved The Dial from closure. Scofield was the editor, 1919-1925. Noteworthy is the fact that the first issue of the refurbished magazine featured a story by Burke for which he was paid \$100 (Bak 153)!

19 Floyd Dell (1887-1962): Prolific author, literary critic, and co-editor of the Masses.

20 John Gould Fletcher (1886-1950): from Arkansas, a poet-leader of the Imagist movement in England and critic for the Freeman and other little magazines.

21 Kenneth Burke, "Ver Renatus Orbis Est," Contact 4 1921: 9.

22 Ironically, Williams admired Davis' work so much that he used his drawings as a descriptive frontispiece to his 1920 Kora in Hell and again as a center piece for his "The Five Dollar Guy--A Story", New Masses, May 1926: 19.

23 Paul Scarron (1610-1660): French comic playwright.

24 William Carlos Williams, Kora in Hell: Improvisations (Boston: Four Seas Company, 1920).

25 Baroness Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven (c.1870-1927). Eccentric artist in dadaiste tradition who first encountered Williams in her review of Kora: "Thee I call 'Hamlet of Wedding-Ring': Criticism of William Carlos Williams' 'Kora in Hell' and why--", The Little Review 7 (1921): 48-60. For Part II, see The Little Review 8 (1921): 108-111. See Mariani's account of their peculiar relationship, 160-164.

26 In August, the Williams often vacationed at the Haslunds' family farm (Florence's mother's side) in Wilmington, Vermont (Mariani 202).

27 William Carlos Williams, Sour Grapes: A Book of Poems (Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1921).

28 Kenneth Burke, "David Wasserman," The Little Review, Autumn 1921: 24-37. Jean Cocteau and Paul Morand were some of the French authors to whom Williams referred.

29 Alfred Kreymborg (1883-1966): founded Others in 1915, co-founded Broom with Harold Loeb (1921).

30 Paul Rosenfeld (1890-1946): music critic on The Dial (1920-1927).

31 Edgar Williams (b.1884), the poet's brother, graduated from MIT with honors in architecture, won the Prix de Rome to study three years at the Academy there.

He provided the poet with an increasingly antagonistic example. He proved to Williams that "classicism" could be adapted to an "American practice," yet he illustrated the shortcomings of the formal training that encompassed that classicism. He was not flexible or creative--his pattern would not hold Williams. Since they were competitive, Ed pushed Williams to the opposite pole. (Marling 21)

Perhaps a more significant source for their competitiveness was the poet's long nurtured grievance for the loss of his early "intended", Flossie's older sister, Charlotte, to his older brother, an event that left on Williams, as he recalled it years later, "a deeper wound than he should ever thereafter in his life be able to sound. It was bottomless" (Mariani 78).

1922

[P]

[Rutherford]

Feb. 3, 1922

Dear Ken Burke,

It is perfectly proper that you should have answered, as you have, the letter that I have been sending you for a week past. This is the proof positive of the existence of the soul for which all men have sought since Jesus' ass was wiped--or before the first anthropoid's was licked. The trouble has been to find the words. I have carried your sentences in my head--also my spleen (some of them) ever since I had my advance copy of The Dial.¹ You have pleased the little tin--No, that's not it (I'm in a hell of a rush, writing in the kitchen because I happened to leave the machine there last night)--in a damned wordless rush to get--That's why I waste so much time I guess.

I enjoyed reading your article because it went at the work as if it were an interesting problem and not a sign board to be painted--therefore you thought enough about what you were doing to keep the facts scientifically before you.

Come out² at once and show me your throat. I mean at once. I would come and getch you--or go and fetch you but I

really think I'll be able to take you home again even if I can't do the first.

Wallace Gould is here.³

Come out for supper or something. Call up first. Come out in the morning if you like or any time at all--lunch is a good time. So is breakfast.

Please phone first--not that I have to make any adjustments but Flossy must go out and buy the pickles.

I fell at once for the propositions in the tail (under the tail) of your letter. To write of the aesthetic of writing has always fascinated me. You could do it and be interesting. Do it.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

[June 10, 1922]

Dear Ken,

Glad you opened your shell again. There is a nice story about my friend Columbus in the book of Leopardi's dialogues, which I read, alas, in translation only.⁴ On the Santa Maria with the admiral, it seems, there was a certain Guitierrez, an officer of the Spanish crown, a gentleman and

a philosopher--a philosopher. After they had been sailing westward for a month he one night arrested the admiral in conversation; he asked Columbus how much longer he intended to sail westward in view of the increasing dangers and the likelihood of a not far distant death for the entire outfit. Columbus replied that he intended to sail westward until he found India. But, answered Guitierrez, we shall all die. Hard luck, answered Columbus. I believe he was referring to himself. You see he had so much to lose.

I know the road to Cranberry lake very well.⁵ I shall be with you some day before July first.

We have had serious illness in the family during the past two weeks. The smaller boy has been on the verge of a mastoid operation but happily seems so far to have escaped.⁶

Sorry about the apple blossoms and azalias. Best luck.

Yours,

Bill

I'm writing poetry.

How do I write?

By the weather.

Fine days fine verse

Dark days, better.

[P]

[Rutherford]

[June 20, 1922]

Dear Burke,

Which Frenchman is it from whom you imitated your contempt for Columbus? Blaa! Let's start a new radical magazine. Blaa! Let's make it pay. Blaa! Let's imitate Dada! Blaa! Let's purify our philosophy until we discover the way home! Blaa! Let's ask Josephson to contribute to it! Blaa! Why not turn your penis inside out, fur-side outside inside, inside juice-side outside, treat the act seriously, sincerely--Imagine having the entire surface of the body secreting semen, or laved with it. Then imagine one big juicy cunt to crawl into where one can shake himself as a dog who has been drenched. Why do you upbraid me when I do not answer every letter that comes? Who the hell is Munson?⁷ And what the hell difference is it to him whether I contribute to his sheet or not? Who the hell am I? I am busy thinking. The ship is sinking, Columbus has diarrhoea and has built himself a small shack near the wheel. Guitierrez must have time in which to wax his moustaches.

But if Munson really wants something from me I think I have it. It is in French. I went to school in Switzerland

when I was fourteen so that I assure you what I have to contribute is in French.

One thing only I would insist on: my contribution must be kept from all eyes save the editors until it actually appears in print--THAT MEANS YOU. And it must not be translated, not even in camera. Its meaning must not even be surmised. If the editor sees the word quand he must close his mind to it, it must mean bread to him until it is in print. Under those circumstances I have an epochmaking contribution to the new magazine--perhaps it will pith the thing.

Family is well. I'll surely see you before July first--if you are there when I arrive. Best wishes. Yours.

[P]

[Rutherford]

[6/15/22]

Dear Ken,

You're a fool but then, so am I: you make me tired but apparently so do I you. And your accuracies are the remainder. Such is my enjoyment. This morning, in any case, I am in your hands. What I have to dispose of shall be sent to you for Munson's use. I really have very little work ready to be shown.

My trip to your farm is one of the incidents in the imagined farce of my existence. It is a trip that has more possibilities unmade than made I suppose--since I do not make it. But the composition of bank books is the drip from uneaten apples. It is stupid to remain here waiting for butcher's wives to calve while my plans wait and nothing happens in the end anyway--the woman misses her time--but such is my life.

Returning to Munson's project: I haven't a grain of interest in it aside from your letter this morning--how could I, of course, not having seen it? I suppose you sung me a little with your favorite taunt of 'poodpulling'. It seems so, damned if it don't. In any case, I'm interested and amused. Two or three poems, more or less finished are in my case together with a quantity of prose notes on the subject of "contact" with which idea I have not quite finished. But this is very uninteresting. I'll look over the things.

The fourth stanza is sympathetic. What do you know of a Frenchman called Blaise Cendrars?⁸ He seems to have heard of me in some way, not from my friends. I presume he must be a leader in French fashion! --literary fashion. I hear that he has collected an anthology of African Negro poetry. Having

exhausted that he turns to New York. It is soul destroying to imagine what might be done, in French, with my masterpieces. It seems he wants to translate me. Am I not interesting?

Best luck,

Bill

I am sending a single poem--all that I have--one that Demuth wants dedicated to himself: Demuth is one of my longest standing (tours Eiffel) friends.⁹ Please rave about it.

It is about a year old.

[P]

[Rutherford]

Monday [July 1922]

Dear Ken,

When in city call me up Lenox 10195. Please do not hand that phone number on indiscriminately; I am in a sort of retirement here. My address is 54 E. 87 if you want to write, which would be better.¹⁰ Might still arrange to go out with you to Andover, would like to very much in fact if we can arrange it.

Have you seen the slam I got in Poetry?¹¹ Pound has also just finished shitting on me in a personal letter. Also

McAlmon's book and his story in L.R. haven't made me feel exceptionally fine. I enjoy Bob however.

Have you seen the complete Contact publishing list. Hemingway is a star I think.¹² His poems especially are noteworthy but the prose is thrilling. Who is he anyway?

My best wishes to your good wife--that climbs cherry trees and picks cherries.

Yours,

Bill

[P] [Rutherford]

July 15, 1922

Dear Ken,

Thank you a thousand times: my work is diseased and theatric, as if taken out of a hat. It's what I've been trying to say for five years. I am really grateful to you.

I want to see you soon and get the rest of it.

Congratulations on the birth of your daughter.¹³

You may not believe it but you've done me the most considerable favor by your acute criticism of my verse that I have known in recent years. I feel free as a condor or a pee-wee or something.

Bless you. I'll call you up some day soon, you may depend on it.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[undated]

Dear Ken,

What about this Sunday? If the weather is fair I shall try to get away from this sunspot fairly early in the morning, to be with you for broiled chicken. As usual my word is so much tissue paper but I think I can make it this time--probably it will rain, not having rained for a month.

Try to worm something out of Seldes about the stuff I sent him recently. Lola has been hauling me over the coals a little since I promised the poem to her and then sold it, so to speak, to a higher bidder.¹⁴

Then, damn it, it maybe isn't sold at all. I wish I had it back. Shit.

By--No, not that.--Just that I have been reading Cummings' Enormous Room and enjoying it--for the most part, greatly. It is atrociously written in places: impossible sentence constructions--but there are other places of great

intensity; while through it all there is a lovely New England Sunday effect à travers le Monmartre [sic], which I greatly appreciate.

Drop me a line--the contemplation of my navel is growing a little thick this week. Is it a perversion to be happy with a pencil and paper? Ah, it is an old question.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[54 E. 87th]

Tuesday [Oct. 3, 1922]

Dear Ken,

I'll be out to see you Wednesday eve or Thursday morn. I'd say surely Wednesday eve if it weren't for the walk from the station. I suppose there is a train sometime. I'll get hold of a timetable today.

Must be back here Friday in time to take Floss to see Mary, Mary. We'll fart and talk and walk in the usual literary way I guess. But I'm glad you said Pound should not have shat on me. He won't get a second chance this season, in any case.

Don't have supper kept for me on Wednesday. If I get there at all I will have had supper. If it rains the game is off.

Best wishes,

Bill

[P]

[54 E. 87th]

Wednesday

Dear Kennebunk,

Happy to hear from you. I know I am forgiven when I say that all my omissions in keeping promises to write and visit are due to causes from beyond the dragon sky.

Will you take tea with me in the Abstract City this Friday: I will call for you at the Dial office. Wouldn't it be possible to have Munson with us? Any time before seven P.M. I am to meet Mrs. Williams at the Grand Central at 7:36 or whenever Poo Bah admits the train to his garden.

Secession is well worthwhile. I want to give myself to you all. I do so in fact most heartily. I can't help my antipathy to Josephson whom I heartily dislike and in whom I do not believe for one moment. It was my irritation at his image appearing above Munson's first letter which caused my first failure to erect.¹⁵ You will of course look into my

Jewish ancestry and invoke Freudian aid in order to explain my emotion but the reaction is far simpler than that as you will find out later I am sure. In any case that is all past and I hold back nothing now. God bless you all, may the frogs die quickly. Be sure they won't.

Also, I have not by any means given up my wish to see you in the Jersey wilds. Some Sunday soon.

Cummings in the present issue of Secession is most delightful.¹⁶ I haven't read the whole issue as yet since I have only been able to sit down by moments since my appearance in these parts day before yesterday.

I had a rest such as one might liken to a long draught of spring water on a hot day. I feel ready to drive the cow across the barnyard with my final shove--reaching to the region of her neck, inside. It is done every day--in the mountains. Ya ya.

Best luck

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[54 E. 87th]

Sunday 1:30 P.M.

Just home from halfway to your blood dunhill.

W

Dear Ken,

Goddam. I left here Sunday morning promising Florence to call her up after I had been an hour on the road. I got as far as Rockaway and had to return.

My regrets are two: the first that I did not see you, the second that you may have prepared a dinner which may have partly gone to waste. The next time, perhaps on the twelfth--oh, blessed thought--I shall arrive sans announcement of my arrival. At least I now know how much time to allow for the trip.

The hour of Columbus' discovery was two A.M. but if I arrive at your crisp farm it will be at another hour--When? Je ne sais pas: so don't prepare for me.

WILL YOU BE AT HOME ON THAT DAY?

I'd like to tell your bunch of thirteenth street pimps what I think of them and to yank my poem and prose back across the river--but I'll wait till I see you first--Why in Christ's name should I wait for anything?¹⁷ Like all excuses it is hollow.

Wont you loosen up on a newsy letter? What about
Secession--What about everything? What about this winter?
Where? When? Why? Who?--but I know that.

Yours at the breech--in a few minutes.

Horatius

WCW

Notes for 1922

¹ Kenneth Burke, "Heaven's First Law," rev. of Sour Grapes, by William Carlos Williams, The Dial February 1922: 197-200.

² This invitation suggests that Burke was still living in the city, close by the Williams' Rutherford home. However, in 1922, the Burkes would alternate between their Andover house during the summers and New York City apartment during the winters until the early 1940's when they would take up year-round residence in Andover.

³ Wallace Gould stayed with the Williams in Rutherford for the winter of 1922 (Autobiography 165).

⁴ Giuseppi Leopardi (1798-1837). Williams used Leopardi's work as one of the background sources for his Columbus segment of In The American Grain.

⁵ Cranberry Lake is situated four miles from Burke's house in Andover, New Jersey.

⁶ Paul Herman Williams, "Bobby", the Williams' second and last child, born 13 September 1916.

7 Gorham Munson (1896-1969): founder-editor of Secession (1922-24) and associated with Broom as well.

8 Blaise Cendrars (1887-1961): French novelist and poet.

9 Charlie Demuth (1883-1936): the painter of flowers and "The Great Figure" to whom Williams dedicated Spring and All (1921); in that volume, "The Hothouse Plant" is the poem referred to here. In 1902, while at medical school, Williams met Demuth at Mrs. Chain's boarding house on Locust St.

I have had several but not many intimate friendships with men during my life, patterned, I suppose, on my youthful experience with my brother. There have been Ezra Pound, Charles Demuth, Bob McAlmon and a few others. (Autobiography 55)

10 In order to prepare for the composition of In The American Grain, Williams took a year off his medical practice and rented a house in New York from September to January; they planned to travel to Europe during the second half of the year (Mariani 208; Autobiography 179).

11 Yvor Winters, "Carlos Williams' New Book," rev. of Sour Grapes, by William Carlos Williams, Poetry 20 July 1922: 216-220.

Despite all Dr. Williams' passion to the contrary, he is greatly influenced by his contemporaries and

predecessors--by which I do not mean to condemn him, but simply to indicate that he, like any good writer, is inextricably caught in Mr. Eliot's 'tradition'". (220)

- 12 Ernest Hemingway (1898-1961): McAlmon had just published Hemingway's Three Stories and Ten Poems.

Hemingway was the biggest on his (McAlmon's) list..., and bringing out Hemingway's first book was his most memorable publishing achievement. (Knoll 4)

- 13 Eleanor ("Happy") Duva Burke, 2 July 1922.

- 14 Lola Ridge (1871-1941): Arriving from Ireland in 1907, Ridge "wrote poems on the beauty and brutality of New York life, and her consistent theme was the martyrdom of the downtrodden" (Knoll 379).

On Fridays, which was my day off, I'd stop over sometimes for a party during the evening. The group often met on the second floor of a small Fourteenth Street apartment, most often at Lola Ridge's, that Vestal of the Arts, a devout believer in the humanity of letters; narrow quarters where anyone might on occasion show up. (Autobiography 163)

- 15 Burke acted as co-editor of the third number of Munson and Gorham's Secession (Mariani 210). For a reason which remains unexplained, Williams had conceived a momentary dislike for Josephson, and it was Munson's mention of Josephson in his letter to Williams that had upset him. Nevertheless, in 1925 he would be quick to support

Josephson's counterattack on Mencken and Boyd in Aesthete 25
(Shi 101-2).

¹⁶ E.E. Cummings, "Four Poems," Secession, (July 1922): 1-4.

¹⁷ The offices of The Dial were located at 152 West 13th St., New York City.

1923

[P]

[Rutherford]

[1923]

Dear Ken.

What about Wednesday or Thursday--for visit to Andover,
I mean? The roads are too congested on the Sabbath. Are you
there all day or in N.Y.--or what? Answer pronto, yes?

? ??

?

Am sending copies of CONTACT V--perhaps you have
already rec'd--

Pound says my novelette will be out soon.¹

If THAT don't please you then there is no use our
recognizing each other any longer between the sun and the
moon.

Ain't the juice a various pricker though? Now we write
a ream and now we--Or is it I only. No I cannot flatter
myself with eccentricity any longer. Now a poem and now five
years gone by without a ripple to show a wind to interest a
fish.

Oh but Evelyn Scott sells a novel fairly regularly and
her husband goes on writing and I even saw a cheap circular

of some jobbing house making a public bid for sales of
Kreymborg's PLAYS for marionettes--²

Somehow you survive my hatreds--I knew you'd be pleased. It WAS a nice thing to have Christ feed the crickets that way--then flit off, fairy like, over my house into the sunset.

W

[P]

[Rutherford]

Friday night [June 18, 1923]

Dear Ken,

Once more ye laurels and once more ye myrtles ever sear--I come to say that THIS Sunday I cannot visit you. I am the slave of circumstances: half the M.D.'s in town are vacationing which leaves me possessor of the seat of crap.

Have you seen THE GREAT American Novel? It is out. It is in America. It is beautifully gotten up. The best of the series I think. Does The Dial get a free copy or not? Speak, O Andoverian!

I'll call perhaps in two weeks, perhaps in the fall Flossie appreciates your frau's kind wishes and says she will come with me when I next go--and with pleasure.

Best luck,

Bill

Notes for 1923

¹ In February 1923, Ezra Pound informed Williams that William Bird of Three Mountains Press had sent Williams' Great American Novel to press (Mariani 205).

² Evelyn Scott (b.1893) and Williams "had an affair that had lasted for over a year and had only recently ended" (Mariani 215).

Alfred Kreymborg (see note 28 for 1921) was a central figure in the Grantwood group.

Several writers were involved, but the focus of my own enthusiasm was the house occupied by Alfred and Gertrude Kreymborg to which, on every possible occasion, I went madly in my flivver to help with the magazine which had saved my life as a writer. (Autobiography 135)

An explanation for Williams' use of "marionettes" derives from Kreymborg's Puppet Plays (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company 1923). Williams once played a role opposite Mina Loy in a Kreymborg dadaist play, Lima Beans. Williams had had a rupture with Kreymborg in 1918 caused by Kreymborg's selecting Edna St. Vincent Millay's Da Capo, instead of a Williams' play, to be performed by the Provincetown Players. Even though Williams would dedicate Sour Grapes to Kreymborg in 1921, they never recaptured their former intimacy (155).

1924

[P]

March 26, 1924

Rome¹

Dear Ken,

Leaving this ripe center of everything in a couple of days, to my sorrow, but I think I'm carrying away half of antiquity with me. The other half is what we have left today. I never so fully realized as in the smell of these relics of the old battle, how maimed we are, and how needlessly we are crippling ourselves. Frascati in full "wildflower" yesterday won me again just as I have been won over and over here by the bits of wisdom that I've seen even in museums, the statues, the whole colossal record of their old time fullness and our unnecessary subserviance to our crippledom. We love it. That is the "Shit" of it. We eat it, lie in it. Sing about it and build our monuments on it. "Gentle Jesus Bacchus' whore open up your "cellar door".

Well, so here we are again back where I started.

One night, you are right, I let loose and said what I have said before: "to hell with Ken Burke, I can't see what it's all about (his short story theory). If he'd write and to hell with his mechanics etc etc." I said what was

uppermost in my mind at the time. But Caracalla built great baths to wash himself in.

Good Christ you are curiously a whole man to not mind the crap you hear. What to hell?

Your letter was really in a fine climbing mood. I'm thrilled when I think of you planning your house in the mountains. That is you for me. Someday you'll write twenty words with that in it and I'll say you are Prince of Cranberry Lake and ask you to meet me in Paris for a good bottle of Pommard (Vieux) 1883.

You have the right idea about a magazine. The print shop in the cellar is the only way and what will come off that press will be good for delight.

In fact, Ken, your letter was the perfect answer to my present need. Everything I am doing now is unprintable. To hell with printing and selling work. McAlmon is with us on that, or we with him. There is a perfect unanimity there on all sides; no use to quarrel there, nor can there be offense to fastidious preferences of humor. Print and distribute here and there until we all land in a (patriot's?) jail, it will come to that in the end, you wait and see. That or Paris for us all. But never silence.

That sounds heavily serious but it isn't, don't give it a thought.

The print shop must be forwarded [sic]. And it amounts to this: how much?

I think you must have received my last letter by this time so I shall not attempt to remember it. The point was only that your story ("January Broom") seemed to rise up out of the dead wood of your theories, so I wrote the letter.

Yes, my Gr. Am. Novel never found a beginning. It was that I must have wanted to say. And that's how you get me, one of the ones with that that I am after. It's got to be said to be read. I am trying to speak. To tell it in the only way possible, but I do want to say what there is. It is not for me merely to arrange things prettily. Oh purple anemones! (you get what I mean? I mean "Shit." But I'm through with that now. No more "shits." It is dead, that kind of slang.)

Rome that did shit, in its later emperors should make us humble forever. We may pick, there I go again. But I'm another man today.

It's all too new yet but no more "shits". Get out your printing press, that's all.

Fucks and booze, and whatever else we can gather of ourselves and a printing press, Christen it with Champagne and semen if you must but not shit.

Write again, I'm delighted that you are south and that Dial will give you money. It's its only use now as far as I see.

We go to Vienna in 2 days.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

April 14, 1924

Vienna, Austria

Dear Ken,

Secession No. 7 was handed to me here the other day by one Gaspar co-editor (apparently) with Kassak of MA--or AM or whatever it is.² My excuse for this ignorance is that they had never heard of James Joyce.

Anyhow I was astounded to find your story, "A Progression," so thoroughly enjoyable and so--able. Please pardon my astonishment. In this piece you have done a fine thing in retaining a classic (or Gothic or Persian) hold on the material of composition, on each word, I mean, and on ideas--but at the same time you use the latest way of composition--I begin to see a little light.

I don't know whether it is that I have gained better insight into writing and things by my present experiences or whether you have improved. Perhaps it is something of both.

The MA people speak very highly of your works. I had only a glimpse of them and their wives in a café, I'll see them again in a few days.

To my further astonishment I was completely captivated by Munson's work also.³ I think he has a blind spot toward Waldo Frank, but it may be that he knows it (judging by the Scientific trochee he hands us on the back cover).

These people are totally ignorant of things American, barring the names of you newer writers: yourself, Munson, Cowley, Josephson and E.E. Cummings. Yes, they had heard of me. Of everything else American they live in an ideally black ignorance. They want reproductions of our paintings, they asked me if any of our men admired the newer Frenchmen, if there had been any exhibits in America! I didn't believe such questions possible.

They are trying to get hold of "Our America."

It is very nice over here, as I said before. Oh well, why not? I'll be glad to get back--in spite of it. The only sensible thing to do over here would be to go mad and kill yourself. At least that is the way I feel about it. I have heavy bones I am afraid--there's little here for me--gravity must drag me down--over the horizon--I'm too slippery--and it doesn't matter--but so it seems.

Paris would be wonderful if I could be French, and Vienna would be still more wonderful if I could only want to

forget everything on earth. Since I can't do that only America remains where at least I was born.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Monday 15th [September 1924]

Dear Ken,

Once again I must put off my visit, this time for a week only. This week must be counted out because of an appointment I have, this Friday, for the removal of my tonsils. By Sunday I may or may not be on my feet but I shall certainly not be able to talk. The only hope is that my throat may not be sufficiently healed from a recent tonsilitis to permit the digging and pulling and tying, but I fear it will be in perfect condition for the assault.

Your note concerning meat has been read and proper need has been given. I'll write again, from the hospital!

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Tuesday [September 23, 1924]

Dear Ken,

Thanks for the book The White Oxen, it has just arrived.⁴ By Sunday, when I expect to see you, I shall have

read it, the result of which reading will be at once apparent to you in my face. It was good of you to think of me.

Dinner with you will be out of the question. I am in fact going in another man's car to a Sunday afternoon party at Cranberry Lake so by noon at the latest it will be necessary for me to pull out of Burkes Center. Perhaps I shall not arrive before eleven. In an hour, however, I am paralysed from the knees up at most meetings--especially today, so for the moment say, I'll see you for an hour this Sunday morning should the weather be clear.

If however I feel strong enough after my recent loss of tonsils, sleep, and food, I MAY drive my own new car up to your door by nine a.m. on the appointed day. I'll do it if I can because I really want very much to see you and to talk with you, the frequent postponements mean nothing save that the distance is awkward and the stars crooked. I presume that you do, also, want to see me.

The snipping out of the tonsils was amusing to me in a small way since there was no pain to speak of and the sensation of having a pleasant fellow cutting little chunks of flesh out of your own throat was novel--with a pretty sidelight on other people's states of mind, in retrospect, under similar conditions. The recovery since Friday on the contrary has been anything but amusing. My throat has hurt

like hell. Only today have I been without fever. My knees are still very feeble and my heart beats madly even as I lean to pick up a pin--so that I shall have good luck.

If you have anything important to say to me please squeeze it into small compass so that in our hour there may be chance for at least one full series of questions and answers.

Best luck and best wishes to you all.

Sincerely,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Wednesday [September 23, 1924]

Dear Ken,

I am trusting you to return the enclosed to its living father after you have read it. I have just this minute typed it out of my fertile bean--and can't be bothered to read it over. Look at it, say the neat word and let me have it back. It will show you at least that I am still militant, in spirit. God damn it to hell, twice as much, god damn it to hell!

And so summer is passing.

Yours,

Williams

[P]

[Rutherford]

[Sept. 1924]

[To Ken]

I wrote you a letter but my wife confiscated it. She said you'd only tear it up but she wanted to keep it: ain't that a wife? Have you read the pages I lent you? Return them then Sir Kenneth--the Scotch Heine. I received word from Woodstock about a new magazine with copies of said mgzn.⁵ My return is too fresh upon me to do anything yet.

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

[Sept. 1924]

[To Ken]

Your letter and the returned MSS have just caught up with me. Thanks. We give each other no credit for sense or virtue. It is embarrassing but not necessarily fatal, just gauche and assinine. I liked your letter hope to see you soon.

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Oct. 21 [1924] cold as the state of letters!

Dear Ken,

I should say I did notice those lines of Winters', they were a breath of fresh air to me, the strongest impression of reality I have had since the journey.⁶ I wanted to write to him at once but not having his exact address handy and needing to put time upon the reorganization of my practice I let the opportunity slip by. If you write to him, provided you have not done so already, put my name beside yours in homage.

Your letter was a good one. No time now for a lengthy reply. I agree with everything you say this time. More heft to your spade when you would "dig deeper."

But it is an event in American letters when simultaneously two men in the desert have come with such a violent and ready rush upon such a tiny spring as Winters' lines afforded us. We are at least beginning to communicate on some kind of an intelligent basis. It gave me nearly as much pleasure to have you speak so whole heartedly of Winters' achievement as it did to read the lines in the first place. They DID stand out like a pyramid, didn't they!

How long will you be in the hills? I'm hoping to see you there once more and for the day this time.

Yours,

Bill

Notes for 1924

¹ Williams and Flossie travelled in Europe from January through June, 1924.

² Andreas Gaspar and Lajos Kassak were "co-editors of MA ('Today'), an avant-garde magazine published in Vienna" (Mariani 231).

³ Kenneth Burke, "A Progression," Secession 7, Winter 1924: 21-30. Gorham Munson, "The American Murkury,": 32. In response to an attack on Aesthete; Model 1924, Munson's ad hominem salvo is directed both toward the audience of The American Mercury and its primary author, H.L. Mencken.

⁴ Kenneth Burke, The White Oxen (New York: A & C Boni, 1924).

⁵ Edwin Seavers had announced from Woodstock, New York, the founding of 1924 (Bak 321). It was a weekly magazine that lasted only July-December (Jay 161).

⁶ Yvor Winters (1900-1968), Secession 8, "The Testament of a Stone," 1924: 1-20.

1925

[P] [Island Falls, Maine]

Aug. 28, 1925

Dear Ken,

I thought you were in Europe.

What's the use of meeting or seeing anyone in a degenerate country such as ours? It makes me weary to go expecting to hear or to say something and then to piss against some other poor bastard's shin and leave him.

I have just had a letter, after seven years or so, from Alfred Kreymborg and I wish he hadn't written.¹

Still, I want to see you if only to look at your lawn and to say that Carnevali's book, A Hurried Man, is the best thing I have seen this year.²

Not that I feel alone: I should feel so perhaps but I do not--it is merely that we are neither primitive nor cultured, just inarticulate.

Yours,

Bill

Go see my friends, the Spences, on Cranberry Lake some Sunday. They will be glad to see you.³

[B]

[152 W. 13th St, N.Y.⁴]

September 27, 1925

Dear Bill,

Poppycock.

When you talk with a literary man, go a scouting for literature, the way you would in talking with a nigger mammy or a one-legged trainman. You might find that Burton Rascoe has his finger on the pulse nearly as often as the usual dementia praecox hebephenic.⁵

Signed,

Senex.

No, no Nanette!

Unsigned

Parallax

P.S. What the hell are you talking about?

Inferred to your cynicism of a former letter,
concerning literary commerce, artistic intercourse.

Ever onward,

Exlax

[P]

[Rutherford]

Oct. 8, 1925

Dear K.B.,

Yesterday at The Dial they said you were in the wilds
for three days or more.

May we visit you on Sunday, boys too, also Florence? If you will wire or phone us, or send special delivery letter at once it will ease our spirits. Rain Checks attached to all tickets; we'll come, in that case, another time.

Ask Mrs. B. to arrange her dinner to go with a sirloin steak.

And will you let me have some new work for the second Contact collection to be published in New York.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Oct. 14, 1925

Dear Ken,

Suppose Friday should be a fine day and suppose that I should drop in at about one o'clock, at the farm, would you be there? Or, are you at the farm when you are not Dialing?

There is no great hurry about new work for another Contact. In a month.

Yes, I'll see you in N.Y.

Yours,

W.C.W.

God Knows(?) When my début.

[B] [152 W. 13th St., N.Y.]

October 20, 1925

Dear Bill,

Sure, make it Friday, although once again you happen to hit upon a quasi-relative day. One of my sisters-in-law is coming over for the day. If you are coming alone, this would not matter, however, as you and I would saunter off after lunch.

How about Sunday, with all the family? That is, if others are coming with you. If you are coming alone, then come alone still, and come on a Sunday with family. But I hesitate to invite family on Friday without first consulting the Mrs., as I do not know what she plans to do with her sister. Sometimes they drive to the Gap, and so on.

Write me at Andover, so that I hear from you Thursday morning, or at the latest Friday morning. Come with an empty belly and bring no meal. I am sorry that all this business makes us look inhospitable, but we really do hope that you and entire outfield will come out sometime. But I would not say Friday without first consulting the Mrs. So come Friday and then all come again, and write me your note.

It's damned fine out, on way over, and we could walk over by the lake, and I have three cherry trees to cut and haul to the house, and I'll have one of them for you. And being in the publisher's trade I learn from the inside that

young Mencken is to honor me next month with a scathing attack on The White Oxen, and I wish that he had a head like Ernest Boyd's so that I would pull it, and I wish I could pull Ernest Boyd's.⁶

Yours, as ever, for DeTay. It's when I think of Mencken that I yearn for pure--material power--like, say, the Hearst papers.

KB

[P]

[Rutherford]

[October 23, 1925]

Dear Ken,

Sunday midday

Sirloin

if clear*

family 4

W.C. Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

December 13 [1925]

Dear Ken,

What ho! what ho! Where in hell is your contribution to the new Contact collection that you can't sell to anyone else (nor to us) and has Dial fired you yet and if not why not? Answer in one word--and don't say maybe.

D'ja read my book any?⁷ Is that why I haven't heard from ya? Others have survived and written to me.

Best wishes to Madame Burke and to the small ladies.⁸ Is it cold up there? There has been no snow to speak of, at any rate. A man I know who is more than half an Indian and whose job it is to rescue agricultural lore from Indian memories then to rediscover the lost species of plants the Indians used to cultivate--this man wants to send out seeds of forgotten American food plants for cultivation. I have put your name on his list. Next spring you may hear from him.

New work is stirring, in my insides, soon 'twill out I hope, leaving me again at peace.

I may send you a couple of stories to read soon, work of a youngster John Riordan whom you may meet some day in N.Y.⁹ He is strong for you as I believe I have already told you.

Loosen up on something for the Contact collection!

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Dec. 16 [1925]

Dear Ken,¹⁰

Your enemies know where you are while your friends look for you. Tomorrow, Friday, evening I may be in New York; if I succeed in getting away from my work, I'll look you up at your new place about six or six-thirty by the clock; there may be a friend along with me; do not eat till you've given me a chance to arrive as I'd like you to come out to supper with us.¹¹ I'm writing to Cowley to come too, but that is only a chance shot.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

December 31 [1925]

Dear Ken,

If Malcolm Cowley leaves some MSS. at your house for me put them in a corner so that I may find them when I call.

This midwinter period of celebration and general distraction being over we shall have to go on with our conversations. Do not forget that I want something of yours for my Contact C. Josephson sent me a chapter from his book.¹² It is worth printing I am sure. I'm sending it to Baer.

The French publication containing Joyce's bit I'll bring in when I call again for a punchino and a talk. The last evening was well spent, must try another.

Hope your bratlettes are coldfree and that Mrs. B. keeps able.

Yours,

Bill

[P] [Rutherford]

Oct. 29, 1925

Dear Ken,

It rained. See you in the city soon.

Enclosed submitted to The Dial.¹³

Yours,

Bill

Fight

Get into a fight
with a man
and you feel light
in the tail
Blaze up
about a woman
and your back
is broken.

William Carlos Williams

Notes for 1925

¹ See note 2 for 1923.

² Emanuel Carnevali (1898-1942?). Williams characterized him as one of the "prominent one-book men about New York" (Autobiography 266). Contact Editions published his A Hurried Man in 1925.

³ Madeline and Andrew Spence were members of the Polytopics Club started by Williams in the early twenties. Young Bill Williams would marry their daughter, Daphne, in 1949. See Mariani, 137-40, for a description of the club's activities.

⁴ This letter and the letter dated October 20 are on Dial stationary.

⁴ Burton Rascoe (1892-1957), authored a column for the Herald Tribune: "The Bookman's Daybook" (Bak 282); he may have been with Williams and Isabel Paterson during an interview she had with Williams in late July (Mariani 285).

⁵ The source of tension between Ernest Augustus Boyd (1887-1946) and the little magazine crowd found part of its source in the American Mercury's first issue, December 1923, where Boyd's "Aesthete: Model 1924" attacked the modern

aesthetes (Bak 294). Boyd authored a biography on Mencken--H.L. Mencken (New York: Robert McBride, 1925).

⁶ In The American Grain (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925.)

⁷ Lielie Mary Batterham (b.1893), from Asheville, North Carolina. Burke met her in Greenwich Village and they were married in May 1919. She was the first of two sisters to whom Burke would be married. By Lielie, he had three daughters: Jeanne Alspeth Chapin (1920), Eleanor Duva "Happy" Leacock (1922), France Batterham Burke (1926)

⁹ John Riordan (b.1903) as a young graduate of Yale Sheffield Scientific School in the early 20s, Riordan struck up a correspondence with Williams that continued for many years (Mariani 248).

¹⁰ This letter and the letter dated December 31 are addressed to 40 Morton St, N.Y.

¹¹ Williams introduced John Riordan to Burke on December 17 (Mariani 249).

¹² Matthew Josephson, Zola and His Time (New York: Macaulay Co. 1928).

¹³ "Fight" was never published in The Dial.

1926-1929

[P]

[Rutherford]

April 13, 1926

Dear Ken,

These tickets are for you--use them or--as you are able.¹

I'm to speak at St. Mark's on the Bowery this coming Sunday at 4 p.m. Party.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

March 15 [1928]

Dear Ken,

We have designs on your wife, we want her out here to speak to a small social club on gunplay in and about a Carolina schoolhouse, or something of that sort. Come along with her a week from this coming Saturday night, come to supper with us. If necessary bring the children, modern life must regain the old flexibility of social intercourse even at the cost of final disaster--we'll find a place for the kids somewhere. Lemme know how you decide, each and both.

The review was worth reading, that is it was worth my while to read it--which is doing well for a review. Whether

or not anybody else read it is another question. I disliked the title as too flat a statement of the facts. I thought I had altered the original matter with enough historic material to have escaped the bald statement "Subjective History," perhaps I miscalculated.² The distinction between hero and genius is worth remembering. I didn't like the implied association between poetry and bravura. I liked well your careful desire to say something intelligent and truthful. I wish however that you had sensed a sweep to the book as a whole. Maybe it isn't there but one or two friends have gotten it. The ideology seems to me not so low in the evolutionary scale as you believe; it is simple and more over the writing than in it--which induces an imagistic style that can never be satisfactory to you I know--but it is there. It is not complicated however, not worked out, you're right. I have never been sufficiently devoted to that life.

Sold a story to the New Masses.³ That is they have kept one of my new stories, they say nothing of paying.

Boni Brs. have finally quit on the American edition of Contact Collection.⁴ I am about to return the MSS. to the various contributors. You escaped an annoyance by refusing to contribute. Hope to see you soon.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Nov. 14, 1929

Sure Mike,⁵

We'll be up for stew on Sunday if the weather doesn't look too unpleasant.

Do we swim? Yeow!

Didn't see your betrayal in the Trib.

A Pollock from Passaic brought us a case of beer made by his Ma-in-Law in her kitchen (usually Temp. 110 by the stove all summer and through the winter--the kitchen, not the beer) maybe we'll bring up a flask or two or three or so.

No particular news. Cowleigh is quite interesting at times in his these here Sunday talks. I like his account of the savage tribes of young men who cock suckingly inhabit all the large cities of the Up Stuck States of the Umpty Stump, or what have you not?

Say, Pagany is going to be interesting. Yea, take it frum you Uncle Dudleigh.⁶

Yop, I got the check from the Horny Hound.⁷ Many thanks.

Sure, Wall-nut Street has been plucked and the sound of the cracking remains with it still.⁸ I hev a few stucks but es I owen um outrite I jus sez to meself Dial or no Dial m

sez I, I aint a gonna sell em, not ef I has to use em instid
uv corn cobs in the old cannery next year.

See you Sunday about noon.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

June 29 [1929]

Dear Ken,

All you say in your letter has been duly (what does that mean?) noted and mentally registered (I know what that should signify).

While you were writing to me I was writing to you. What does that mean? I wrote to you at Andover after paying your house a visit. I wrote you a very nice letter too and left a French magazine inside the screen door at the rear of your domicile. If you do not find it there this weekend, I'll send you another for I want you to see it and to have it.

The poem for The Hound and Horn was written last winter.⁹ It is not about a chancre but about life, thus you see it amounts to the same thing. Or do you find heart disease more convenient?

At the present moment I am suffering from the after effects, so to speak, of a double circumcision, performed

not upon me but upon twin Yids of my recent acquaintance.
They had good whisky and excellent cigars.

I have a book of Gide's, Si le Grain ne Meurt. I will
read it this summer. I'd like to read, Les Faux-Monnayeurs
but I read too slowly to read more than one French book of
any size each year.¹⁰

We'll be out to see you some time in July no doubt. And
you are quite wrong, the cider was excellent.

Write again. I have not seen Ruth Laughlin. Please
greet your wife for me, I really expected to have a nice
talk with her last Tuesday.

Yours,

Bill

Notes for 1926-29

¹ The tickets were for Madeliene Heyder's piano recital at Steinway Concert Hall, 109 W. 57th St., 15 April 1926.

² In Burke's review of Williams' In The American Grain, for the Herald Tribune, he had called the work a "subjective history" (Mariani 252).

³ "The Five Dollar Guy," New Masses 1 (May 1926):19, 29. This is the story over which Williams lost a \$5,000 law suit owing to his failure to alter the facts of the story enough to disguise its actual source (Autobiography 241-242; Mariani 253-54). Stuart Davis produced a descriptive drawing for this story as well.

⁴ Charles and Albert Boni of New York were Williams' first commercial publishers.

⁵ "Mike," like "Pat" or "Spick," was a friendly slur.

⁶ In 1929, Richard Johns started Pagany, with Williams as editor, in honor of Voyage to Pagany (Mariani 291).

⁷ Williams' joyced version of The Hound & Horn (1927-34) a title derived from Ezra Pound's poem "The White Stag."

⁸ A reference to Wall Street's Black Thursday, 24 October 1929. Williams' son, Bill, related the account of his father's having papered his attic study with stock charts which recorded the declining market published in the daily newspapers.

⁹ "Rain" was the title of the poem.

¹⁰ Andre Gide (1869-1951), Si le Grain ne Meurt (Paris: Gallimard, 1928); Andre Gide, Les Faux-Monnayeurs (Paris: Gallimard, 1925).

1930

[P]

[Rutherford]

Sunday [February 16, 1930]

Dear Ken,¹

Many thanks for thinking of me re. the house to let at Andover--or thereABOUTS (mere slip of the shit key). We have recently lost our zest for tying ourselves up with a place in the country.

(Erratum: "shit" in third line above should read "shift"--awfully sorry.)

But do not for that reason lose your spontaneity in suggestion, we do and I do appreciate your thinking of us. I should like nothing better than a crib for my bones in your valley where one year is divisible into two summers. I am restless divided against myself. I shall never be able to sit down. Yet that seems my desire.

They tell me, ask me, confide to me things about you
(1) You despise a certain Calverton.² Why? He seems a decent enough chap.(2) Why do you not send some work to Johns, 109 Charles St. Boston. He is well worth your attention? (3) You were at the Peggy Joyce tea, drunk as a Senator (should be l.c.)

Cum on, send something to Johns. And if your antipathy to Calverton is not too well founded, forget it--tell you why later, unless you already know. Oh hell, would you make one of a group to write chapters of a modern symposium re. American letters? Say yes. (prisoner) Yes.

My best to your wife and her sister.³

Lots of new magazines. Met Horn and Hound a couple of weeks ago. The Miscellany is well printed.⁴ Second number of Pagany will be better than No.1, so 'tis said.

The Last Imagist Anthology is to be published March: original contributors only. Rebecca West answers my attack (see Bookman: Jesus some answer.)⁵ Nice gal too. There should be a better answer and I like her dog. England can't be so bad after all.

Buttercups and daisies. Is that the way to spell daisies? Don't literature play hell with splqelling [sic] anyway? Doesn't it?

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

April [1930]

Dear Ken,

Glad to hear from you. Glad you are on your way toward summer. I suppose "glad" is a Saxon word, sounds like it. I

have been reading bits of translation centering around Beowulf recently. I like the place where Ethelwyn (is it?) comes down to the shore to tell the Danes to go to hell and they have to wait till the tide goes down before they can begin fighting.

Glad the new magazine is on or about to be on. What's its policy? Pro anything or just anti? Anyhow I have work for you whenever you want it. I write and there it lies, I don't even try to get published anymore. But I haven't much poetry, just one short thing that's any good. But I have a ten page story that I like muchly--yes, I like it plenty and it aint even censorable.

Did you see Zukofsky's criticism of Ezra's Cantos in the recent Criterion?⁶ I think that it is fine stuff after he gets going. I'm sick of this God damned hair splitting that so many of the critics, the erudite critics, go in for. All that means nothing to me. But when Zuke speaks of Pound's excellences and lays the thing open for the eye and the ear it is clear and it has power and I can feel the weight of it and enjoy. If you haven't read the thing, do so. Skip the first page or two.

Then, as a diversion, read what I myself said on the same subject in the last Symposium.⁷

I've been looking for your name recently but found it not. What t'ell? Whatchadoin these days? And yes, we'll be

up to see you soon. It may be age but I've been physically fat but this spring. Not that it has made much difference in what I have done--only spring aint what it has been other years. Probably a good sign. Let 'em bloom, is the way I feel this year.

My best to your lady and the brats.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

June 20 [1930]

Dear Ken,

I wasn't trying to snoot your party last Sunday. I'd like to have come over but I was too damned lazy, too blarsted tired to move off my backandbuttocks to get over there. We'd been up too many nights immediately prior to that particular flight from Egypt--or whatever the hell you want to call the flight from the present dominion of the machine and brain environment.

But the chief reason I am writing is that I don't want you not to wish to invite me again. Yes, we have our bananas.

So let me say that the visit has been postponed and that within a week or two or more you'll have the blistering delight of seeing me and I thou.

For after all Proust's letters do show him to have been not only a little but very much of a climber. Not that I have read them. And what has that to do with it? So many, so many, so many.

This spring has been a sweaty one for me. I don't seem to be doing much but it uses up all the time and me along with that. Perhaps it's my advancing years or the fruit of the borem-borum tree. Anyhow I'm weary as hell, haven't much to say, couldn't rape a jar of orange marmalade--not even if I tried.

(A kid was clipped by a car in front of the house just now so I had to beat it--excuse the interruption. He was not badly hurt--just knocked blotto for a moment)

To resume: what about the new magazine? and why? Why not? But anyhow, what about it? Transition is about to resume, so I hear, and then there is The New Review.⁸ What are you writing? What are you thinking? How's the swimming? I'll bet it's good this year. I'll be there.

Best to the family.

Yours,

Bill Williams

Notes for 1930

¹ This letter is addressed to Room 3006, 61 Broadway,
N.Y.

² V.F. Calverton (1900-1940).

³ Though this sounds innocent enough, it may well be a veiled dig at the complicated domestic arrangements in the Burke household. Lielie's sister, Libbie (1897-1969), would soon become his second wife (18 December 1933).

⁴ The Miscellany (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1930).

⁵ The Last Imagist Anthology (New York: Covici, Friede 1930).

⁶ Louis Zukofsky, "The Cantos of Ezra Pound," Criterion, 39 January 1931: 424-440.

⁷ William Carlos Williams, "Excerpts from a Critical Sketch: The XXX Cantos of Ezra Pound," Symposium, April 1931: 257-263.

⁸ Transition (1927-38) was founded by Eugene Jolas (1894-1952) and Elliot Paul (1891-1958). The New Review (1931-32) was founded by Samuel Putnam (1892-1950).

1931

[P]

[Rutherford]

July 29 [1931]

Dear Ken,

Did you ever say anything about Ezra Pound or his work that you'd like to see reprinted? If so where did it appear? I'm collecting that sort of thing--with an unterior motive in mind--or--in view, perhaps.

I'd like to see you Sunday, you and the others, but as usual the stars are relatively against it. Howsoever, if--and if--and again, if--the weather--the this, the that--I may drop in anywhere between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. But don't count on me for dinner--I won't be there for dinner.

The thing is I'm passing through that country on the 5th--so feel disinclined to jog the eighty odd miles there and back on a Sunday--but by starting early and returning early--pussossibly I'll do it. I'd like to.

It's been interesting to hear about your writing projects. More power to you. I'll even buy a copy of the Declamations--maybe two--when the thing appears.¹ I'm curious to know what happened there.

If I don't get there, please remember me kindly to Mavis and Jawn.

You know, I just came across a medical article which I know will interest you. It seems that men are not, of course all male, as women are not all women. Well, the proof that men are not all male goes something like this: remove the ovaries of a female mouse. Let the gal recover. Then take a pint of male piss. Extract it with alcohol or acetone or ether or what not--I've forgotten. Do this again. Then again. Finally evaporate the stuff down until it is a thin jelly. Of this jelly take a tenth of a cubic centimeter and inject it into the muscle of said mouse. The mouse starts to menstruate!

Now this is due to the fact that men excrete female hormones in their urine. Aint that something. So always take a piss before or after you jerk off or you might end some day by finding yourself pregnant--with an acstrated mouse perhaps.

Anyhow this is all true.

Regards,

Bill

[B] [381 Bleecker St., N.Y.]

October 15, 1931

Dear Bill,

Katherine Anne Porter, whom I earlier in the season asked for contributions when it seemed that we were to get

out a gazette, has sent the enclosed, which I think has considerable quality. I send it to you because she asked me, in case we could not use it, to pass it on to Pagany, and I assume that you are still now and then assembling material for that organ--though I hope Katherine Anne fares better on eagle-day than I did.²

Harcourt, Brace have accepted my Declamations, which are to appear around January or February. I am not at all modest about them--and the editors have promised to give me a nice fancy book, with type, paper, binding and format of my own selection. So I shall at last have a book of mine done in such a way as I should like to sleep with--and I don't give a damn if I have to sleep with the whole edition.

My book of essays, Counter-Statement, is out.³ The first reviews appear, I believe, this week. So far, the volume sleepeth on.

What next? Am eager to spend a couple of months on a long political tirade, but who would want it? All poets should now attempt to write Areopagiticas, proclaiming anew the dignity of their craft, outlining the good life, and villifying every authority and public institution that fails to place the aesthetic far above the practical. The reign of business is over--and we return to the erratic, the unpractical, the picturesque, the Bohemian and mad. We now have the documents. We saw the thing at its best. We know

that, even if Black Friday had never come, it would have been a hell of a way to live. But now that Black Friday has come besides, the Taylor system is without rejoinder.⁴ All poets should sally forth, to taunt, to reaffirm, to make the debacle unforgettable through the use of skilled metaphors. This is the year for obtrectations from the sewers. Above all, this is the year for attacking the growing myths of Fascism. The damned country went to the devil because of centralization, and now they want to cure things by making it more centralized still.

But I am sleepy. I was out of town too many months. I have forgotten how to sleep in city noises. So I toss all night, and then nod like Homer over my typewriter.

Greetings,

K.B.

[P]

[Rutherford]

Oct. 19, 1931

Dear Ken,

And when I die (and when I die!) don't bury me all (don't bury me at all) just pickle my bones (just pickle my bones) in al co hol: 'tis a consummation devoutly to be wished.

I'll be glad to be the purchaser and owner of a copy of your Declamations which I have always admired. Good luck to you.

My poems--the droppings of a decade are going the rounds in N.Y. I suppose somebody will take them some time or other. Or at least the supposition being pleasant appears to me to be reasonable.

In answer to your high advocacy of the poet's present duty may I say that perhaps I may have published this fall a "Political Poem"--

Or something.--(in al co hol)

Yours,

Bill

I'll take care of the Porter thing.

Notes for 1931

¹ Kenneth Burke, Towards a Better Life (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1932).

² Katherine Anne Porter, "Bouquet for October," Pagany, January-March, 1932: 21-22.

³ Kenneth Burke, Counter-Statement (Los Altos: Hermes Publications, 1931).

⁴ "Black Friday": 24 September 1869 was the day Jim Fisk and Jay Gould, using Grant's prestige, tried to corner the nation's gold supply. The Taylor system to which Burke refers may be that of the states' rights agrarian philosopher, John Taylor (1753-1824), who held that property should be used for producing useful goods and that government and business should be separate.

1932

[B] [381 Bleecker St., N.Y.]

January 11, 1932

Dear Bill,

As things look now, on the twenty-eighth of January, Thursday afternoon, about five o'clock, Harcourt Brace plans to have a little alcoholic tea for gents only, and I hope you will be willing to be among them. This is the day when the Declamations are coming out, and 'twould be nice if you could let a few people die that afternoon and yourself be present at the vernissage.¹

When the book comes out, I want to present a copy to you, as one who was kind to it in its earlier stages.

Greetings, dear Bill, greetings, Bill the Bold, greetings, Bilious Billiam, greetings, two-gun Will, good-night, ladies, good-night, sweet ladies, good-night, good-night.

K.B.

[B] [381 Bleecker St., N.Y.]

January 18, 1932

Dear Bill,

Oot do hell? Aren't you coming to the five o'clock? Busy? Mad? If not, why so? If so, why not? You have no

reason to be mad at me just because you got out a magazine and didn't invite me to contribute to it.² You should be charitable, and forgive me for that.

Be a nobody, and say yes.

Thine,

K.B.

[P]

[Rutherford]

Jan. 19, 1932

Taint fair! Who the hell ever pays any attention to me and my doings. Here an obscure little book shop wants to start a small literary organ and I very hesitatingly takes the job on.

Well, of course I'm coming to your party. Do you expect me to send an engraved acceptance?

And let's see if you'll send me script--

Yours,

Bill

I kept the mag. dark expecting to ask my friends for contributions later--if they approve--and

W.

[P]

[Rutherford]

March 3, 1932

Dear Ken,

It's been a pleasure to read your "Better Life" which I finished last evening. It's been a mixed pleasure, for often I didn't know what to think. There was an uneven effect of stark reality breaking through masses of words. That is, there were two effects, the words as word calling for a reaction to pure thought and a very human story--which left me floating at the end.

But no doubt this was your desire. Certainly the demonstrations of a method makes a solid effect. Nothing is trivial. You have found a method for using complex and accurate words for subtleties of thought without making the reading either "English" or precious. It is good straight writing of a satisfying kind. It is what it is by purpose.

In places the emotional force is wonderfully effective, precisely so because it has been bred (the effect that is) in the rhetoric. Perhaps this is special writing. It is very human tho. It has been a pleasure.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

7/20/32

Dear Ken,

Thanks for letting me see the speech. It is a speech, and as I read it I realize that that's its chief virtue. We can't use it much as I'd like to. It should be "given" rapidly, in a hall, an armory etc. in a loud voice. That is its place.

But this job of rejecting scripts is disgusting me with my job. Often a rejection comes from no more than a vague feeling (in me) made up of things like--"no space," "we have one like that", etc., etc. (and acceptances the same: reversed) it's hell.

I tried to find time to drop over for a visit this Sunday but--but

Shit.

W.C.W.

Notes for 1932

¹ Kenneth Burke, Towards a Better Life (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1932).

² In 1932, Williams revived and co-edited Contact with Nathanael West (1903-1940).

1933

[B] [381 Bleecker St., N.Y.]

January 5, 1933

Dear Bill,

I wonder how the enclosed might strike you, and whether you have any MSS you would care to see issued in this way.

And I also wonder whether you might have any addresses of the various young-bloods (such as wrote for the Caravans, for Pagany, and your past and present Contacts) to which you would let me send this circular?

This might turn out all right. In any case, as you will note by reading our song, an author regains the rights to his MSS after four months, and so does not tie himself up, to his regret, in case of subsequent glory.

And perhaps also, if something comes to you which is too long, and which you nonetheless greatly prize, you would refer the author, with his wares, to us?

Franklin Spier, who is trying to make this go, is an old hand at book promotion (does the advertising for Farrar and Rhinehart, for instance). He thinks that the facsimile feature gives him the chance to make the books "collectors'

items." Dunno. Only know that he must know more about it than I do, which obviously is grand--and I should like to get together twelve books that I liked.

Ever thine,

K.B.

[MANUSCRIPT EDITIONS]

This is to announce the tentative formation of a new publishing venture, and to make a request for the submission of manuscripts, preferably of average book length.

If such work as we are seeking comes into our hands, we plan to publish a succession of twelve volumes, at intervals of a month--and as far as possible we want these volumes to vary greatly in both subject and treatment. While we have in mind primarily prose fiction, we would not limit ourselves to any one category--criticism, verse, biography, history, etcetera also falling within our range. And while we wish to have work apropos to contemporary situations, we are aware that there are very many ways in which a work can be apropos without necessarily being a circumstantial account of such happenings as one reads about in the daily press.

Accordingly, we should be interested in sound work of any sort--so long as it is sound, and can be felt to involve the apprehensions, wishes, speculations, bewilderments, ennuis, or any other aspects of thinking or feeling that are

stimulated or irritated or soothed by the processes of living.

The only difference between our purposes, in this respect, and the purposes of other publishers, is that we are deliberately concerning ourselves with such ways of involving the stimulations, irritations, and soothings as are likely to confine a book's appeal, when it is first issued, to a public of 1000 to 1500 readers.

The depression has caused this kind of book almost to vanish from the current publishers' lists (except insofar as the publishers may grievously miscalculate, and end by selling a thousand copies of the work with which they had planned to flood the country). As a matter of fact, conditions in the publishing business as a whole have got to the point where the representative publishing plant is as thoroughly geared to mass sales as the manufacturer of any nationally advertised commodity. Thus, it is not editorial bad taste that is causing the elimination of many valuable books from the publishers' lists--it is the economic factors involved in the conditions of production and distribution.

To combat such disadvantages, some of which have accumulated out of the past while others thrive by their own right, publishers have been gradually forced to eliminate more and more of the books whose virtues are not deemed to be of a sort making for a wide and ready acceptance. In this

policy they are thoroughly justified. To issue the sort of books which we have in mind, and which they are being forced to neglect, one either must be subsidized against loss or must alter the conditions and methods of publication. It is the second course which we propose to follow in MANUSCRIPT EDITIONS.

In the light of the past publishing experience of those connected with this venture, we have reason to believe that we can organize, by mail, the minimum body of readers necessary to guarantee the minimum public necessary to the workings of the plan. They will be asked to subscribe in advance for the entire twelve books.

The books themselves are to be issued by methods which will cut the expenses of manufacture considerably, eliminating type-setting charges entirely and reducing almost to zero the costs of binding. They are to be facsimile reproductions, page by page, of the author's manuscript--thus not made by type composition and letter press, but by photography and the litho-offset process. The pages will be clamped together, and laid in a cardboard folder.

The author will receive an advance of from \$100 to \$200 (depending upon the nature of the manuscript). He will receive in royalty a flat 20% of the receipts, his earnings being paid regularly and promptly, bimonthly after

publication. Should we, finding ourselves happily in error in our calculation of sales possibilities, discover that the reception of a book justified a regular printed edition, we should ask only the conventional agent's fee for placing the book with a publisher. (In this respect, MANUSCRIPT EDITIONS might be said to give an opportunity for a "trial run.") Otherwise, four months after our date of publication, full rights revert to the author.

In substance, we plan to organize a group of discriminating readers that should provide an audience for authors whose books might not otherwise get a hearing under present conditions, or even under improved conditions, unless some such devices as we propose are adopted.

The Editions will be printed on good paper, will be neat and easily read, and will have the added appeal of the facsimile. They will not be merely substitutes for printed volumes, but will have distinct and unique qualities to recommend them to the collector, as well as to the general reader interested in substantial literature. Thus we hope to profit by a double advantage: increasing the allure of the volume itself and cutting the cost of its manufacture, both at once.

Manuscripts, accompanied by adequate return postage (or inquiries of any sort) should be addressed to:

Manuscript Editions

2 E. 45th Street, New York

Kenneth Burke,

Franklin Spier, Editors.

(This circular is printed by the process we intend to use for MANUSCRIPT EDITIONS.)

[P] [Rutherford]

Jan. 6, 1933

Dear Ken,

Nothing could have come more pat, I have the book you want lying here in my strong box just screaming to get out--has been waiting to piss itself forth on the world for twenty moons or more--

THE EMBODIMENT OF KNOWLEDGE:

(First Writing)

THESE ARE THE WORDS.

--that's the title. It is a series of writings--very random in general arrangement but with one burning theme running through the whole with many historical and other examples--such as French painting as a whole--the character of Shakespeare and the precise value of his work--the education of the American male--and all the agglomerate and

conglomerate bellyaches I have suffered for the past ten years--to one end that there is no knowledge (everyone else to the contrary) but my own, and may God pardon me!

The only drawback is that it is typed on foolscap. And if I have to have that book length script retyped--well, I'll have it done if you want it.

I could hug you for the opportunity to have the thing presented to the to-be-stunned-to-extinction reader in EXACTLY the format in which it now lies generating purple mold. And if the need for what you plan can be a criticism of its timeliness and other virtues in the case of any one writer, your scheme has about it the earmarks of genius.

Besides which I'll keep a sharp lookout for the work of others in a dilemma similar to my own. Can it be that dawn is at hand? I should say not. So, many thanks for switching on the light.

To which you may add that I'm always and in a clean way glad to hear from you--which can't be said in all cases--that of recent communications to me from Yvor Winters for example with whom I hope to have broken forever--he is buried and stinks, nice as he is personally.¹

I'm thrilled to be quit of Contact which is "out" as far as I'm concerned.²

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Jan. 26, 1933

Dear Ken,

Yes, of course. The examples are missing tho' present in my head as circus performers, net makers--anything but machines--possessors of knowledge in the flesh as opposed to a body of knowledge called science or philosophy. From knowledge possessed by a man springs poetry. From science springs the machine. But from a man partially informed, that is, not yet an artist, springs now science, a detached mass of pseudo-knowledge, now philosophy, frightened acts of half realization. Poetry however is the flower of action and presents a different kind of knowledge from that of S. and P. If I am wrong then it is just too bad--but I should never want to write reading matter that would be dull: hence my reluctance to show anyone my notes save as "my mode of procedure."

I thought what you were after was a something to print which would amuse, puzzle, entice people suffering from the depression of their equivalents in some other category. I didn't expect you to be convinced, I sought only to present to you an object.

Your letter would make an excellent prefatory note with my own abject apology following it. My object in much that I do has also an ulterior motive. I have to go on and want to

go on living for a few years more perhaps. As I grow older I hope to get rid of medicine--the sooner the better if only I can fulfill certain obligations and still have enough money for bread, wine, honey, beefsteak--travel, adultery (tho' that's cheap enough) and a nice garden, maybe a swimming pool--and guest rooms. So, I have gradually made enough notes, here and there to keep me busy clearing them up and developing them for a long time after I retire--if ever. I should dread an old age divorced from the thoughts and actions of my more vigorous years. Age should be a commentator and what better than to comment upon one's own existence. Thus I have many projects in mind. And if I never catch up with them--wouldn't that also be a misfortune. But I intend to try to do so. These notes on what the hell would then be straightened out, illustrated. I do want to make the thing clear and I fully intend to drive myself into all the corners possible. What the hell, I'm no bigot. If I could convince myself or have anyone else convince me that I were merely following in the steps of Dewey, I'd vomit and quit--at any time.³ But for the moment I don't believe it--the poetry is offered not too confidently as proof.

If you want the object to print it's yours, if not I have absolutely no feeling about it. Send it back I'll love you just the same.

Regards to the family, I doubt that I shall be able to come in on Sunday, these are working days.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Feb. 11, 1933

Dear Ken,

Since the script I sent you will not do (and, by the way, you are the only one besides myself that's seen it) perhaps you'd care to use the first seventeen chapters of White Mule, the original (corrected) scripts in most cases--complete.⁴ Together these comprise the first year of the infant's life.

Or you might care for a full size book of poems--all my unpublished (in book form) poems that have been collecting for the last ten years--and more. Plenty!

But if either of these attracts you I'd [sic] want to go over the copyright phase of the thing very carefully as I already have conditional offers on both of the above. Which shouldn't affect your plans.

In any case, I agree with you relative to the subject spoken of in your letter: the good President, etc. etc. The only drawback to living in the country is the lack of city life with all its heats and humors--odors, perhaps would be

the better word. You may rub it hard, you may scrub it well,
etc. etc. Yet we all desire it--in season (an'out!)

And--I am still waiting to receive my Embodiment of Knowledge back home. Everything I have said above is contingent on that coming back first.

Yours,

Bill

[P] [Rutherford]

3/6/33

Just to let you know I'm not idling my time away but, on the contrary, that I have been working steadily--if not always hard--to clear the way for sending you the two scripts. It turned out to be more of a task than I had anticipated involving much typing, copying, checking and rechecking. I may be able to send one of the items off by Saturday, I hope so at any rate.

Bill

[P] [Rutherford]

3/21/33

It's been a task to dress the carcasses for you. They are about prime now however so I'll be shipping them by express in another two or three days. If you don't get them Saturday it'll be Monday surely. I think you'll like them but if the work isn't satisfactory it won't be because I

haven't given the time to it. Hope your friend is satisfied. The White Mule may be a little tough in spots due to a lot of checking I tried out and the other may be against your taste but it's the best I can offer. Pretty good too I think.

Yrs.,

Bill

[P] [Rutherford]

April 3, 1933

Dear Ken,

No doubt the messy scripts have reached you by this time. The poems I have sent to Maxim Lieber along with the clean scripts of White Mule.⁵ I thought it best, after all, to let him handle the whole matter of disposing of these things for me if possible. It would be best for me not to prejudice his chances of placing the work by a separate distribution of them, in any form. He says he knows you. You may wish to speak to him of the matter. Or maybe you'd better not just yet. I don't care only I don't want to create confusion.

The thing is this: I have considered your venture quite a separate one from the usual publishing game. Am I wrong in this? I have felt, or understood, that you wanted facsimile scripts as such for their direct interest value as much as

for their content. That is why I have sent you the things I did. I gave Lieber the poems and the first fifteen chapters of W.M. I did not tell him that you had the scripts of W.M. so, if you please, if the matter comes up don't get me in wrong at the start. I'll tell him too.

Sincerely,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

April 15, 1933

Dear Ken,

Maxim Lieber says he is showing you my scripts as a first step in his selling campaign. Can you not do them both? I wish you would and so an end to it. If I could be assured of this, that you'd give both scripts the light, I'd be extremely happy.

Sincerely Yours,

Bill

Please show this note to Lieber when he comes in.

[P]

[Rutherford]

[June 6, 1933]

At least return the corrected "original" scripts of White Mule--since Lieber has (or says he has) shown you

the final scripts of it. Please do this by Express. Best regards.

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Oct. 9 [1933]

Dear Ken,

Would you do an introduction to Reznikoff's Testimony, the stuff copied from the law records, bits of which you have seen, and of which I spoke to you recently?⁶ If so kindly write, yourself, to the man, saying you are interested and that you'd [sic] like to see his script. He is difficult through diffidence--of a sort. Wouldn't bother anybody etc. etc. Mention my name as the intermediary. It would be of great help to our budding Press if you'd take on the job.

Yours,

Bill

Charles Reznikoff
3900 Greystone Ave.
Bronx, N.Y.C.

[P]

[Rutherford]

Dec. 6, 1933

Dear Ken,

The Pap of our Country's coming along fine--in a general way.⁷ There has to be so much strategy employed though that the actual weaving together of the words and music seems to be almost incidental. The first act is scheduled to begin intercourse on or about January first, in other words I have promised to have the revised revised revised revised revised libretto of the first act ready by then. May I say that your hint relative to soliloquy may prove helpful.

And what about the Reznikoff introduction. Have you done it. I hear very little of what's going on in the city but the fact that R's book is in the page proof stage and that no one has said anything about what you've written makes me wonder. I hope your plans haven't fallen through.

My own book of poems has just been corrected in the galleys. By moments it flares up before me as a real entity--then it falls apart again as so many printed pages. There will be no answer until the thing is finally printed. Stevens' preface is surprising. It is not what I expected but I think I detect general appeal in it. It may sell the book yet--especially if the right Sunday Supplement guy sees

it and falls for it. Paradise by the back door! Or who assed you in.

Reminds me of the stories I enjoyed at 12: The height of impudence: Shit on a woman's doorstep, then ring the bell to ask her for a piece of paper to wipe your ass. There was one about the height of improbability but I can't remember it. But why I'm remembering these things is more than I can say. Perhaps it is that I wrote a short story for the little mag. Blast.⁹ I sent it to my pal Miller last week. It was quite a story with plenty of Communism (unorthodox) in it. I think it probably wounded the guy. Hope not; I'm sleepy from child-birth, pneumonia, and all the other posies.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Dec. 22, 1933

Friday

Dear Ken,

Reznikoff wanted to give you some sort of gift. I suggested cash. He said, How much? I said, twenty five. He looked at me. Well, I said, there's no reason for giving him anything; make it ten if you want to, but I think he could use the money better than anything else--provided you like what he has written.

I've been going mad this afternoon searching for the clean script of White Mule when it flashed across my mind: The guy who was going to bring out Manuscript Editions has it. Verify this for me and get me the clean script back again if you have a soul. I have the carbons but, if I remember rightly, there are various corrections on the script your side-kick has which are unique. The mass of script which you gave me when I saw you at Andover is the original, very much corrected copy--that is not what I mean. What I mean is the stuff which my agent at the time, I've forgotten his name, sent to you direct. Max Lieber. Please don't delay in at least reassuring me that the thing is safe.

My book will be out Jan. 15th.--unless it doesn't come out till later.

The season's greetings, color of brick-bats, color of verdigris. And little red balls on twigs of holly.

Yours,

Bill

Notes for 1933

¹ Though in the early twenties Winters was a "young disciple" of Williams and he had admired some poems of Winters introduced by Burke (Mariani 245), it is likely that Williams never forgave Winters for his Sour Grapes review. See note 11 for 1922. Still, Williams did not allow this animosity to prejudice his selection of manuscripts for the last number of the revived Contact, where a work of Winters was included.

² Contact 3, co-edited with Nathanael West, came out in November, 1933.

³ Williams sent his The Embodiment of Knowledge to Burke as a potential publication for the MSS Editions. "Burke had spotted John Dewey's influence in the Embodiment as a weakness" (Mariani 336).

⁴ Since Burke returned The Embodiment, Williams tried The White Mule on him--it was only partially completed. But he would not publish the later until 1934 when The Magazine (Beverly Hills) published nine chapters over a one year period (Witemeyer 2).

⁵ William Carlos Williams, Collected Poems 1921-1931 (New York: Objectivist Press, 1934). Maxim Lieber was a New

York literary agent and anthologist who briefly represented Williams. With Barrett Harper Clark (1890-1953), Lieber edited three editions of Great Short Stories of the World.

⁶ Charles Reznikoff (1894-1976) was among the group of objectivists that founded the Objectivist Press, the original publishers. Testimony: the U.S., 1895-1915 (New York: Black Sparrow Press, 1978).

⁷ The First President was the name of Williams' operatic project: (New York: New Directions, 1936).

⁸ see note 5.

⁹ Blast, not to be confused with Wyndham Lewis' London Blast, was a proletarian magazine founded by Fred Miller, an unemployed tool designer, and his wife, Betty.

...though they were still struggling to keep Blast alive, they did not have enough money even for rent. So, on May 1 [1934], [Williams] drove to their apartment, took them and their daughter and their few belongings, and then drove them up to his unheated summer cottage at West Haven to give them a place to stay for the summer. (Mariani 355)

1934

[P]

[Rutherford]

Jan. 3, 1934

Dear Ken,¹

Lieber, I think, is mistaken, so are you, unless I, in turn, am mistaken, mistaken.

The script which Lieber gave to Martin Jay was a script of the poems, not the script of White Mule. That of the latter was turned over to the man who was working with you on Manuscript Editions. He it is who should have it now.

Please verify this, I haven't the name.

Meanwhile, I have asked my friend Bud Miller to get in touch with you re. the same. If the script is located you may safely let Miller have it.²

My book of poems will be out in a few weeks.³

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

[January 6, 1934]

All's well. Lieber had the script right in his office all the time. Not that there is a chance to publish but I

want Miller to see the new chapters. Best wishes. I have
made a note of the phone address.

Bill

Notes for 1934

¹ Both communications for 1933 are addressed to Burke at 78 Bank St., N.Y.

² See notes 3-5 for 1933.

³ See note 5 for 1933.

1935

[P]

[Rutherford]

May 7, 1935

Dear Ken,

Yezir, I'll be good for five bucks toward the book and I'll come to the party if I can, where'll I send the check?¹ What in bloody hell are we all going to do? The shits get the prizes (Yeah, you got a prize. I know that.) and all we get is the shits. And it's too far into the distance to pray for a pre-literary Communism--which would probably vote for just another set of shits. There ought to be some more simple, some shrewder, inventive method of getting printed. Hell, we act like a lot of lost sheep. Yet I have no answer. Are we so impotent that we can't do anything but yell for a Lenin or else go pantsless? There must be some way, some regular (in the sense of historically practiced) way of getting on.

I've begun to think it's inside myself. I can't be thinking straight. I'm not interested in being a martyr and I'm not resigned to my fate, not by a damned site. But where's my invention, my imagination. Even a cheap advertiser knows the ropes better than we do? I think we're crazy--or really impotent. We should really work, really

sweat for each other. If we did that we'd damn soon get attention. But we haven't the least sense of solidarity or loyalty. Every man for himself seems to be the stupid rule. I wish I knew how to get us together on even the most purely selfish front--barring theory or god damned economics which has Pound ball-tied and cock-trapped.

I'll be seeing you this summer. If I hear of anyone who wants to live in your barn I'll tell them.

Regards to the family and good gardening to you.

Sincerely yours,

Bill

[P] [Rutherford]

Aug. 5, 1935

[To Ken]

Somebody says you'd know the address of the Southern Review or Wm. Penn Warren or something.² If you do may I? If not never mind or mind or spirit but & hole. So tell me: 9 Ridge Rd, Rutherford, N.J.

W.C. Williams

[P] [Rutherford]

Nov. 25, 1935

Dear Ken,

Fer God's sakes! What in 'ell 'ave you been drinkin'? Any time to want to do that review, critique--and my! how

I'd like to see what the lucubrations of the philosophic Meester Burke would do with me--say the word and I'll send you the books you haven't got, if any.

Many thanks for the good word. I saw Dr. Latimer a few weeks ago who told me of your physical misfortunes this summer. It sounded as though you really had something this time but I suppose the bugs got mixed up trying to get through the intricate maze of your psychologic entity and just lay down and died of starvation without reaching the spot where they could piss on your essential fires. Anyhow the lady doc said you were in a bad way for twenty four hours or so.

There's no overpoweringly great news to pass on--no great victory won--just guerilla warfare as usual--and common in an uncivilized and overgrown terrain. But the boys are in college and I have my garden all in order for spring.

My best to--whoever remembers me.

Yours,

Bill

Notes for 1935

¹ Kenneth Burke, Permanence and Change (New York: New Republic, 1935).

² Southern Review was founded in 1935 by Cleanth Brooks, Jr. (b.1906), Robert Penn Warren (b.1905), Albert Erskine, and Charles Pipkin (1899-1941). Kenneth Burke published an article in the first number of the journal: "Recent Poetry" rev. of No Thanks, by E. E. Cummings, July 1935: 164-177.

1936

[P]

[Rutherford]

Sep. 4, 1936

I may be up your way for a call or so Sunday.

W. Williams

[P]

[Rutherford]

Nov. 16, 1936

Dear Ken,

Thanks for laying yourself open to a visit by yours truly of the New York Times Book Review, etc. etc. and points west. The only times that look to be possible for such a visit would be the Tuesday before Thanksgiving and the Friday following--Maybe the Saturday following. If I find it possible to get away I'll arrive around five o'clock and stay for a couple of hours. I'll come alone, most likely--and try to let you know before hand. Most uncertain.

It's good news about the book and you have my best wishes for its success.¹ Hell, you don't want to do me. Why in hell should you? In about ten years it might be worthwhile but right now there's such a whale of a lot of work for me to do to get my head clear--or clearer--just

beginning--that I don't know that anything would do me much good. Hope you do me anyhow.

Yours,

Bill

Notes for 1936

¹ Kenneth Burke, Attitudes Toward History (New York: New Republic, 1937).

1937

[P]

[Rutherford]

Nov. 22, 1937

Dear Ken,

My thanks for your worthwhile redefinition of newspaper terms in the New Republic, there's a lead that cries for a follow up, you hit something that time--and what a book it would make!¹ It is just such primary work that is needed in the laborious campaign toward a really better life, for the well intentioned but preoccupied reader of today hasn't the skill to clarify his own terminology but with assistance could be counted on to act with commendable precision in the good cause. How many people are there who realize the full significance of words? And since they do not differentiate between the meaning which they seek and the false term which misleads them they remain tools in the hands of the thieves and liars. A breath of truth here comes close to being a veritable blast of genius. Go to it, it isn't everyone who has the power. Floss joins me in sending you this greeting.

Sincerely yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

December 29, 1937

Dear Ken,

Yeah, I heard about Butch from a patient here in town only last week.² It was the wife of a Russian-American sea-captain; why 'n Heck don't send out announcements? The brat has a natural immunity against diphteria until about the age of ten months or so. After that let someone (maybe next summer since most dip comes in October) give him two doses of the alum-precipitated toxoid--a month apart. I prefer to shoot at the buttock, more meat there. If you dont' want to wait too long start shooting in April. I'll do it for you if you want me to, but any clinic or other private doc will do.

Nothing else to think of for the moment unless you care to improve the time by giving whooping cough vaccine: six doses, two each time for three times. Right in the ass--as most things come in this world. If you want to start that now he'll be all set for the dip shots in the spring. Take it or leave it, it isn't essential.

Scarlet fever immunization isn't advised. If the kid by extraordinary chance gets a vicious case of that there is a serum that will cure him--usually in twenty four hours if given at once. This is not given in mild cases. They're mild.

Vaccination against small-pox can be delayed until the kid is ready for Mexico City or school.

What else? Tuberculin test. Fer Chrisake! We all got T.B. more or less, tha's what makes us so able to keep going. It's the truth I'm tellin' yuh. I actually feel a bit uneasy because my son Bill has a negative test for T.B.³ I don't like it. He'll have to be unusually careful, I think, because it means he has no acquired protection against it. Paul is, on the other hand, positive for it. I'm just tell' yuh how it is.

Then there's syphilis, gonorrhoea, chancroid, the itch, impetigo contagiosa, athletes' foot, poison ivy and liver spots--no cure for them except a healthy life in the fog and mist, lots of salt fish, snails fried in onions (no kiddin') and--Vodka!

So the world degenerates and I'm doing an essay on the development and significance of Spanish poetry.⁴ What a subject! And how much more important to us than the blight of English literature under which our cocks have all but rotted away into each others ass holes.

Yours,

Bill

Notes for 1937

¹ Kenneth Burke, "Reading While You Run," New Republic 93 (November 1937): 36-37.

² Anthony "Butchie" Burke (b. 1936): Burke's second son by Libbie.

³ William E. Williams (b. 1913). Dr. Williams still lives and practices medicine at 9 Ridge Rd.

⁴ In April of 1939, Williams would find occasion to use his studies during his address to the First Inter-America Writers' Conference in Puerto Rico (Mariani 446).

1940

[P]

[Rutherford]

May 5 1940

I will read your essay. I'm already 1/3 the way through it--among the usual distracting interruptions. It fascinates me and looks to be something valuable in my case. I want to see more of you this summer. I'll run up soon.

Bill

[B]

[Andover]

May 24, 1940

Dear Bill,

I admit it, it's a very nice poem. Since people got everything backwards, poetry is the art of getting backwards what they got backwards, so that it will be frontwards. Hence, manoeuvres for turning the inside out, so that us tough bums can be peered at by virgins (we-looking-at-the posies becomes posies-looking at us). Yet, it's a good poem, and I could use my calipers on it until you cried out that I was as delicate as a coroner's jury.

I am still resolved, by the way, that I shall some day do that essay on you I once wrote you about. Using the "cluster" business (or did I mention "clusters" --anent Coleridge--in the Freud piece, and with mention enough to

make it apparent what I had in mind?). I.e., I should look for "blue," "yellow," "room," flower faces, etc. elsewhere, to make sure by citable scissor-work what is telescoped here. I wouldn't dare to interpret "cherry" frivolously, for instance, unless I could offer substance from other passages.

Also, I had an especial desire to get the essay done right away, that time I saw the Horton crack and your crack back.¹ I ran across the guy who has Horton as his understudy at Harvard (or had then), and gave him hell for letting Horton be so stupid. And I felt it wrong that you had to do the chastising yourself.

Sure, let's arrange to have you declaim some of your poems here. You can pass the hat and probably pay off that lawsuit.² We'll set a definite date later--and I'll arrange to get some extra people here over the week-end, to augment the ones that usually accumulate in the summer.

Sorry you couldn't stop at Syracuse. My friend Leonard Brown is there (English dept.) and you would have enjoyed talking with him.³ Also, Eaton is very nice. (I've been up there for a week three different summers, and am scheduled to be there this summer, but may have to crab, in that I

seem to have got to a point where several days of consecutive verbalizing get me too bestirred.)

Meanwhile, turn up--and greetings,

K.B.

[P] [Rutherford]

Oct. 14, 1940

Dear Ken,

I'm glad somebody is interested enough to think and to write in the manner and with the authority in which you wrote in Poetry on the matter of verse making.⁴ That sort of thing, taken as an act, is indispensable to any civilized society. It indicates the way growth takes place. No poet would be likely to stop to think as the philosopher would think of the materials he, the poet, uses. But he can accept the support he gets from that kind of thinking and, in turn, reward that thinking by example. There's a word for it perhaps its symbiosis, I'm not sure. Very good exposition, very useful. I don't know why I don't see you other than my inability to exist in two places at once.

Bill

Notes for 1940

¹ Philip Horton, Hart Crane's biographer, attacked Williams a New Republic article, December 1921; Williams' response was published in the January 11 issue.

² Burke is referring to the usual Sunday gathering of the New York crowd.

³ Leonard Stanley Brown: anthologist and professor at Syracuse University. Charles Edward Eaton (b. 1916): poet. In later years, Eaton gave Williams an account of Frost's warning his students (Eaton was one of them) away from Williams' works (Mariani 454).

⁴ Kenneth Burke, "On Musicality in Verse as Illustrated by Some Lines of Coleridge," Poetry, 14 October 1940: 31-40.

1941

[P]

[Rutherford]

April 21, 1941

Dear Ken,

The enclosed more or less explains itself. May I add that Floss and I have been to Puerto Rico where I attended an Inter-America Writers Conference.¹ We returned not two hours ago, the motion of the plane is still in my semi-circular canals.

The notice which I received just before we set sail last week concerning your new book touching the general problem of modern poetic form suggested to me that you would be an excellent one to take my place at the N.J. Writers Conference to be held at Princeton next Saturday and which I cannot assist at.² I disagree with Mrs. Hutchinson that any slight is implied in asking you to take my place, we approach the subject from different categories of thought. I wish you would accept the office and carry on the good work, it is a legitimate opportunity for the forwarding also of your book on the subject. Please do not turn me down.

It might be expeditious for you to reply direct to the letter from Mrs. Hutchinson.

By the way, I have ordered your book from the U. of Louisiana Press. I always want to have a talk with you over those things which concern us jointly--I have already told you how much I liked the essay in Poetry which appeared a few months ago--so that now that you have assembled the essays on poetry I shall make a special effort to get up to Andover this year.

Yours as ever,

Bill

I'd be curious to know what you think of Hem's new seven decker.³

W.

[B]

[Andover]

December 20, 1941

Dear Bill,

Merry Christmas.

Going through my sack, I came upon the enclosed, which you asked me to return. Here it is.

I guess we mean well, you and me. And maybe we even really intend now and then to have a session together. But we just do go along his or her individual way.

It's too bad, probably.

Anyhow, best seasonal greetings--and know we'd always
be glad if you dropped around some day.

Sincerely,

K.B.

Notes for 1941

¹ See Mariani 446-47.

² Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1941).

³ Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961), For Whom the Bell Tolls (New York: Scribner, 1940).

1943

[P]

[Rutherford]

July 12, 1943

Dear Ken,

Criticise this and make it more effective. How ah yuh?
I enclose postage for return mail. Or if, being a
professional, you don't want to touch it, leave its cherry
intact.

The war goes on and more and more of our youth become
involved. Paper is scarcer and a book of poems next to
impossible to get printed--yet the very youth are the ones
who demand the poems. I feel gratified but thwarted.

The writing goes on--mostly in the small magazines as
usual. I can sell isolated poems. The difficulty is, as
usual, to find time for the writing. This job of being a
doctor is worse than the Japanese beetles, it eats up all
the foliage.

Haven't you anything to say about Pound and Eliot--or
skip Eliot. It seems to me that Pound today as a logical
development of Pound yesterday holds an interesting position
for the philosopher bent upon investigating the means of
expression. My little dribble wanted to mention Pound and
his end products as of today but--it didn't fit.

I enjoyed the coolness of your developments in the VIEW piece. My piece was written before, during and after my reading of what you said there.

As ever,

Bill

[B]

[Andover]

July 30, 1943

Dear Bill,

How.

Gladda hear fromya. Why don't you breeze in this way some time? Or we'd be glad to make it a definite time if you'd prefer it that way. Say, for dinner, some time during the week? Or week-end? No matter.

The article--I don't know? It isn't among your mightier compositions. No? Maybe my trouble is this: when Eastman and Dewey write on international politics, I can never feel that they write as philosophers, simply as small-time politicians out of office.¹ Thought it got better towards the end, though I challenge you to parse the final sentence.

I guess what threw me off is that you don't suggest what a despicable figure Eastman is. (I admit I never had anything to do with him personally. But I felt that his Digest line merited simple contempt. As for Dewey: he's done

a lot in the past that I respect, but when he talks about Russia he is simply a prisoner of Hook and his ilk.)

You speak of Pound. Didn't he simply get into it step by step? Not as a "philosopher," but simply as a literary prima donna. (I.e., did some good writing, but wanted it to do more for him, in lay channels, than he should have.) Then, as the result of dialectic, he found himself saying this because somebody else said that, and that because somebody else said this. Which was a harmless enough thing for one to do in the realm of pure art, but has all sorts of surprises in store for anybody who lets it be amplified against the sounding board of contemporary politics. First thing one knows, a few innovations in the writing of a sentence have become transformed into treason against one's country (I don't mean that the innovations are treason--I mean that the banding-together, which came as the outcome of them, happened by the accidents of political exploitation to put Pound in a band on the other end of the seesaw. And what was in the twenties literary expatriation becomes in the forties the placing of oneself at the disposition of conspirators. But "essentially," this man functioning as a political traitor is still motivated by the motives of the literary twenties.)

Maybe your article puzzles me because I don't know what you want. "What should we do next?" I do indeed agree that

we should go beyond the kind of thinking done by Eastman in the Digest whoredom; but I don't think you give any concrete ways of doing so. (Lerner mopped up Eastman in P.M.)

I guess the main thing to be said against the article is that it has no twist. As per your use of the anecdote about Grant and the whisky. A good anecdote--but isn't some twist needed, if one would use it again? (Or am I talking like the twenties myself?) (I guess I'll always talk like the twenties.) (Datsa mah home.)

Speaking of such: went up to Newton last night, and saw Joan Fontaine in her latest.² After she died, I came home and lay awake two hours feeling very melancholy. That wasn't very professional, was it? Her mobile face--made Boyer look like a billboard.

Hello. Best greetings,

Sincerely,

K.B.

[B]

[Andover]

August 12, 1943

Dear Bill,

Have arranged to take a teaching job.³ Hence, after Aug. 26th my times here will be quite irregular. So if you're minded to be in these precincts, hope you'll be so minded before that.

If you're grouchy about what I said, drop around and tell me why you think I'm an s. of a b. Topics like that are always good for a couple of bright hours, aint they?

Meanwhile, goodes gluck.

Sincerely,

K.B.

[P]

[Rutherford]

Aug. 14, 1943

Dear Ken,

Damned nice of you to write again. I didn't in the least object to your comments on my little article, in fact I thought you were very mild, perhaps too considerate.⁴ I expected you to tear it to shreds.

Delmore Schwartz, now taking Dwight Macdonald's place on the editorial board of Partisan Review wrote saying they would use the article or communication with a reply to it by someone and would I object?⁵ I told him I would be delighted and hadn't the least compunction in saying whoever attacked me should be given free rein. My only object was to bring the subject into the light. I told him also that you did not at least froth at the mouth at my amateurishness or at my opinions.

I'm rather glad you're taking on a teaching job. It may be a poor way to earn a living but, properly guarded, it might prove stimulating to your thought.

I wish I could see you sometime at leisure but more than ever this has become close to impossible. I went to Cranberry once this summer for a short visit but you know how it is, the time is eaten up by swimming, fishing and canoeing, talking to one's host and friend--then there's a rush to get off in order to be able to get home on time. I thought of you but didn't want merely to say hello good bye which was all I should have had time for.

During the past six months or more I've been collecting, sorting and arranging various poems of mine that have not heretofore appeared in a book. It makes a rather formidable collection but no one will print it (did I tell you this in my last?) I am not greatly concerned--just passing on the news.

The work at my profession is hard, very hard and trying but so far I have managed to survive and still keep an edge for writing. I suppose I'll never give up that, come what may. But the work is very hard and will get much harder in the coming winter with more of the men in the profession going into the armed forces.

The impossibility of meeting all situations emotionally has been a great lesson to me. I have to a great extent

succeeded in keeping my body at a sort of ease even when I am harrassed to the point of complete exhaustion. I have even had the experience of going into the office after twelve hours of continuous hard work, for evening office hours, and coming out three hours later refreshed. Now that's an odd thing. It is pure emotional restraint that makes it possible. I suppose with a little more practice I shall be able to chirp like a cricket even at the very moment when my bones and muscles finally collapse.

I was telling the girl on the obstetric floor this afternoon that when I get old I'm going to look for a job as houseman in a whorehouse. I'm still crazy about the women, I just like 'em around and having enjoyed them and given them some enjoyment I feel now that I have earned the right to be right in among them no sexes barred--just for the relaxing hell of it. Rabelais is my patron.

Best luck, Ken, and if they tear me apart in Partisan Review don't forget to send them a polite letter in rebuttal--if it should amuse you.

Your old friend,

Bill

Notes for 1943

¹ Burke is referring to William Carlos Williams, "A Fault of Learning," Partisan Review (September 1943). Max Eastman and John Dewey were part of a group centered around Partisan Review.

² In 1943, the same year she made Jane Eyre, Joan Fontaine (b.1917) co-starred with Charles Boyer in The Constant Nymph.

³ From 1943-1961, Kenneth Burke taught at Bennington College (Ray 257).

⁴ See note 1.

⁵ Delmore Schwartz (1913-1966). The response to Williams' article was titled: "The Politics of W. C. Williams," Partisan Review (October 1943).

1945

[P]

[Rutherford]

10/5/45

Dear Ken,

A swell bit in Sewanee Review--that Swiss Cheese (you remember the holes) to me the best thing in the issue.¹

If only I could read, read, read as I'd like to but my special destiny, at that, saves me from that I suppose.

But I think of you at these times with the warmest regards.

Yours,

Bill

Regards to the ladies. What a work they are doing!

[B]

[Andover]

October 12, 1945

Dear Bill,

Thanks a whole lot for your note. That means something to a guy.

Many times I have wondered why you don't mosey over this way. And I wish you would.

Incidentally, I wonder if you could suggest whither I might wend anent this one: Always asking what is to be the death of me, I think I should not neglect much longer

getting someone in the know to diagnose a bony protuberance in the roof of my mouth. I first noticed it, I believe, about 30 years ago. Gradually it has got bigger, until now, bejeez, it seems damned near as big as a jelly bean. So I guess I should consult some sawbones, begging to be assured that it aint really so bad as all that--whereupon I could go back to worrying about my heart trouble. Do you have any place to suggest? Some place where, if there is chiseling to be done, most of it could be done on the roof of my mouth?

Whether accidents could have started the thing, I don't know. I am the proud possessor of a broken neck, as disclosed by X-ray photographs taken at a hospital some years ago. I had a bad fall when about three years old, and spent many years of my childhood in terror, a sense of being elsewhere, or dropping through the bottom. I guess the fall did its part in that. And I wonder whether it may also have got things to growing a bit wrong too, as my head sits awry. And then at another time I had my front teeth batted out, an accident that might have dislocated the maxillary bones a bit. Anyhow, there is the egg, and I'm finding it more and more difficult to give priority rating to my other worries. So, if you had someone to suggest? Particularly some thoughtful soul like me who might be more prone to diagnosis than action. I'd be very grateful for the tip.

Am just about at the end of the business of seeing my Grammar through the press.² I hope very soon now to be at work on the next volume, the Rhetoric--for which I have all the notes already, and which I hope to write within a year. (We hope to bundle the kids, the notes, and the typewriter into the car sometime in December, and roll down U.S. 1 to somewhere in Florida.) Finishing a book always gives me an end-of-the-world feeling; then there is this dismal fall; then there is the fact that I gave up my teaching job, for a year at least, to write full time again (and when that great amt. of externalizing, in personal relations, has become a bit of a habit, the many more hours with the self make one all the more mindful of the self's burdens--how nice it would be to be worrying about other people, and then all of a sudden be gone, except insofar as the sudden going itself might inconvenience those about whom one had been worrying, say we legalistically).

Meanwhile, weather permitting, I sally forth with my scythe each afternoon, to clear the weeds from the fields about the house. I have driven the wilderness back quite a bit, since the last time you were here (at least in some places, though it is patient, and ever ready to catch me napping, and moves in here as soon as I go there). So, while scything, in a suffering mood, I worry about our corrupt newspapers, about nucleonics (for where there is power there

is intrigue, so this new fantastic power may be expected to call forth intrigue equally fantastic), about things still to be done for the family, about a sentence that should never have been allowed to get by in such a shape.

But duty calls. I must stop this letter now, and turn to less joyous matters.

Best greetings,

Sincerely,

K.B.

[P]

[Rutherford]

Sunday [Oct. 14, 1945]

Dear Ken,

If you want to get here next Sunday somewhere around 11 a.m. we'll go up and see DeBell. Stay to lunch if you will when we'll give you a drink and plan between us when we might best run up there for a visit--I realize there's not much time left before the cold weather but every season has its compulsions and attractions for the imagination, we'll go when we can. Which, by the way, means just what it says.

Someday! Someday! we'll be free: no babies will be being born, no one will have a cold, no one will have miscarriages--there will be no committee meetings or clinical conferences--or cocktails or Anais Nin or Shapiro writing about Rime or rime on the windows or sumack or talks

to be given at Briarcliff or printers or even Shakespeare to tempt us and torment us. There will be only philosophers and bombs.

Quote, Mrs. Androla (after I had told her we would all in all probability be blown to highgrade manure before her baby shall be born and only a few Esquimaux be left to carry on): Maybe those barbarians will do better than christianity did.

I love the past tense of it. It has already happened in many minds.

RSVP

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

10/15/45

Dear Ken,

A hell of a good younger man is a Dr. DeBell a friend of mine in Passaic. Maybe some Sunday morning.

Or, if you want to go to a clinic, the Memorial Hospital in N.Y.C. at E 68th is headquarters for all lumps, knobs, buttons, protuberances. You'd need a note from me.

Damn it, I must run up to see you now the war is over and gas is free-er.

You depressed, you a philosopher? And when you have taught yourself to write so lucidly and well? Your other

piece in Kenyon is fully as interesting and well done as the other.³

Tell me what you want to do and I'll make the arrangements and I will definitely try to make the trip to Andover during the next few weeks.

Both my boys still in the Pacific area. Wish they were here.

Yours,

Bill

[B]

[Andover]

October 17, 1945

Dear Bill,

How! All this time I had been thinking that philosophy was the road to freedom; yet you would have it deny me my constitutional right to bellyache. And does not no less an one than Goethe praise above all else fear and trembling? (I used to like to cite the gag I found in Aulus Gellius. Of the philosopher and the merchant, in a dreadful storm at sea. The merchant took it quite calmly; the philosopher was very agitated. Then, after the storm had been successfully weathered, the merchant began twitting the philosopher. "You, who are supposed to be an exemplar of philosophic calm--look how much more frightened you were than I was." And the

philosopher answered: "True, but look how much more I had to lose.")

Fact is: all is tolerable when I'm moving ahead in my work. But at the moment I'm lying sluggish sans breeze, not yet having got the new direction going for the next book. And at that stage I'm just a plain simple taker of my own pulse.

Thanks very much for your suggestions. I'd like to take you up on that jaunt to Passaic some Sunday morning. Any one you suggest. (Not counting this coming Sunday, as I might not hear from you in time to come then.) I'd drive down.

And some time when you can come out here, let us know beforehand--and arrange to come with the wife and stay for dinner. What say?

I did not know your boys were away off there. Glad to hear that they're safe. I have one son-in-law and one prospective son-in-law who have seen quite a bit of action on the continent of Asia, and are now in China. Another, a strapping guy that would make about three of me, turned up with a minor leg ailment, and has been placidly playing his drums in a jazz band at army training camps in U.S.

Best luck--and many thanks indeed for your prompt reply to my piercing outcry.

Sincerely,

K.B.

[P]

[Rutherford]

Oct. 23, 1945

Dear Ken,

Talking to DeBell, the surgeon, today he said--after I had described your palatal lump to him--that it was in all probability what is called taurus palatinus, a fairly common appearance (though I have not seen it), non-malignant and of no particular importance unless it proves annoying. He said it can be knocked off any time you like with a mallet and chisel like any other osteoma.

I'd be inclined to think from this that you needn't bother to come down on Sunday unless you feel like it--we're always here. Drop me a note.

Yours,

Bill

[B]

[Andover]

October 24, 1945

Dear Bill,

Many thanks indeed for your note. Old Falling Apart will plan to be there, then, as you suggest, circa eleven next Sunday morning. One possible hitch is that he plans to come in his car, which has been acting up a bit of late. So there might be delays due to the agues and shiverings of Falling-Apart the Second. I hope not. I shall leave early

enough to give me plenty of time. (The ailment in the case of my pal is a leaking water-pump, which I am trying to get replaced, but which probably will not be replaced by that time. Ah! would that old Falling-Apart Sr. could likewise get his pump replaced.)

But don't bother about lunch for me. I'll just bumble along back hither. But I'll gladly take you up on that drink.

Yestiddy, went to the Great Market and there gave final O.K. on proofs for my book.⁴ Due to appear in early December. I was recd. with smiles by men in the sales dept., which is about the most Olympian thing that can happen to an author. It seems that the advance orders from booksellers have been quite good.

Yes, by all means, we'll arrange Sunday about your visit here.

Sincerely,

K.B.

[B]

[Andover]

October 24, 1945

Dear Bill,

Holla! Just got your latest, with the bit telling my fortune.

Palatine bull! That's fine! Sounds just like me. So now I can joyously return to my heart trouble.

I'll not trek thither on Sunday. Particularly inasmuch as the car is so unwell. But how about your trip in this direction? Do say the word, and pick your time.

Many thanks.

Sincerely,

K.B.

[B]

[Andover]

October 31, 1945

Dear Bill,

Many thanks indeed for sending me the W.C.W. number of the Quarterl. Rev. of Lit.⁵ I read your poems with my usual delight, and your critical bleats with my usual bepuzzlement.

I remember how, some years ago, in the fall, when I was in one of my just-about-through moods, and was trying to bring myself to say good-bye to this world, I got a note from you, telling how you had the garden all cleared for next spring. That was a good jolt, though at first it made me feel even more about-to-depart. (It stinks, and I am ready to de-pot, was my then motto.) Well, I thought of that note again, when reading the last lines of "The Bitter World of Spring." About the shad, "midway between the surface and

the mud," and "headed unrelenting, upstream." A good fable, is that poem. Isn't that what "objectivism" finally gets around to? Or isn't it? Anyhow, I think the poem is a byoot. The first is good too, but lacks the final twist. Or perhaps the second is the first's twist. And "The Goat" and "The Hurricane" are also two sturdy evidences that your diagnostic savoring hath not lost its salt. Just what you are making of your clouds, I am not yet quite sure. The heavenward glance is decidedly qualified. Shrewd rather than pious?

Would it be correct to say that you have learned how to make a poem out of notes for a poem? I have in mind particularly such a one as "The Rare Gist."

As for me: I hope that, some time before I'm through, I'll be able to carry out my plans to do one of my studies of "equations," in your work. I'd like to do you and Stevens, somewhat along the lines of an essay I did on Marianne Moore.

Hope you'll be turning up before long. And we can hear more on you on Eliot on place. Didn't you start off too soon? There are also some remarks in "Little Gidding," on England, mind, nowhere and everywhere--and these also might figure in?

Have been, for better or worse, batting away on the
Rhetoric. Finally got started.

Sincerely,

K.B.

[P] [Rutherford]
11/1/[1945]

O.K. Ken,

It is the opposite of piety that I am concluding in "The Clouds"; the unknowability of knowledge and the professional asses who trade on that basic fact--pontifically proclaiming this or that. Did I say "asses", I beg the donkey's pardon.

Disease has no connection with medicine, nor philosophy incapacitated from knowing anything of disease. To him it is "cute" or "important" or something else. It is never disease, as it is to the person who has it. The proof is that when the physician is diseased the disease comes to him as her lover to a virgin. He can't understand it.

In something after this argument I look upon the metaphysician or religionist who uses--the mystic might be the better term--who uses poetry, as that prime mental shit Eliot uses it, for his own purposes. My resentment toward him is as deep as I am. I stake everything I've got on it.

He is a subtle defamer of poetry, the more contemptible in that he is smart enough to wrap it in his stop-gap religion.

The man as a man is plaintive, unable. I do not hold that against him. But when the weak hold their resentment against the strong as a virtue, I resent it--profoundly. It is all right that he must live as he can and write as he is able to write and of the things that concern him, that is his own business--but Jesus Christ, that doesn't make the world outside his restrictions an evil thing.

It is evil to him, of course--etc, etc.

And when this permeates down through a plastic technique to torture its modes--and the distortions of thought and plastic, shielded by subtlety and "knowledge" presented to the exclusion of other work as the norm. At this point I attack.

Eliot as a mystic is to poetry a disgusting disease. But if it is the idea of disease only that we are considering then perhaps we may, logically, speak of placelessness. He hides his disease well, but it is hidden, not cured. Take off his mental clothes and I think "place" will get a new meaning--in his case. I have not heard that even at Loudes do they cure chancres by prayer.

Tomorrow, Friday November 2, Floss and I will make an attempt to reach you in your isolated valley around 3 in the afternoon--the weather permitting. Don't bother to "feed"

us. Sure, we'd like a cup of tea and damned if I won't bring a bottle of spirits for general cheer. See you then. Bad weather would be a bar.

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

11/2/[1945]

Dear Ken.

I suppose this is going to be another one of those things. It's now 1:25, the sky somewhat threatening and I've decided not to make the trip. If I don't do it today I know I won't do it this year. That's that.

I'd like to see you and talk with you--maybe I'd be happier if I did, I know I should be--

Nothing much else I can say--except that I dread the expense of energy, of time of--unknown involved. My knees ache, my tongue is coated, my brain (I should say my skull) is over crowded.

I'll end by putting on old clothes and going into the back yard, drink my own Bourbon--take a hot bath.

Cough my guts out.

And wish I had gone to see you in Andover. The worst is you'll be expecting me.

I may even deliver a baby (3 overdue) and use the excuse of being out of town to avoid going to a committee

meeting on revision of the by-laws of the Senior Staff at the Passaic General Hosp. at 5 p.m.

I may even work on my play.

Bill

[B]

[Andover]

November 6, 1945

Dear Bill,

Why not try it this Friday, weather permitting? And plan to stay for dinner.

Incidentally, just for safety's sake, might add that we'll probably be away Monday and Tuesday of next week.

Sorry you couldn't get around last week, though I must admit it wasn't a very undiscouraging day.

In haste, as 'tis time for me to get back to the Grind. Lost yesterday; had to go to Babylon, and weep by the waters.

Sincerely,

K.B.

No use sending special deliveries here, unless you just like the ritual of the thing. However, the postman assures me that at least they don't arrive any later than other mail.

Do think on this Friday.

[P]

[Rutherford]

Nov. 10, [1945]

Dear Ken,

We both enjoyed seeing you all. Three things: to get the information as to whether or not the "bull" can be carved off the roof of your mouth under local, how much follow-up there will have to be, the time element, etc.; second, to copy out the poem containing the lines you want and send it to you; three, to say that if we come again it'll be on a Sunday, earlier in the day so that we may get home before dark--it takes too much out of my aging carcass to do it this way. The next three weeks or not till next year. We shall see, though the chances are, after all, slim.

I saw the beginnings of many valuable conversations between us sticking their heads up as we passed them by yesterday--I particularly liked your manner of explanation when you lowered your voice and spoke quietly of the elementals that interest us both, the humane particulars of realization and communication. I woke in the night with a half-sentence on my metaphorical lips "the limitations of form". It seemed to mean something of importance and to have been connected with what we had been saying.

You'll hear from me again in the next two days.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Nov. 18, 1945

Dear Ken,

Dr. DeBell says he can carve that lump off the roof of your mouth under local anesthesia any time you want him to do it--provided I help him. No hurry about it. He'd do it some Sunday morning between now and Christmas or next spring or at your convenience.

Any news on your proposed flight south? Let me know what's up. I dashed off a sketch for a poem following our visit to you week before last, if and when (if ever) I finish the thing I'll send you a copy. Did you like "The Visit"? Any further visit by me to Andover before next spring seems more and more unlikely the more the season advances.

Our best to your wife and kids.

Bill

[B]

[Andover]

November 19, 1945

Dear Bill,

Many thanks for your note, with expert enclosures. We were sorry indeed to learn that the trip turned out to be burdensome to you. Here's hoping 'twas not so much so as to discourage you from taking another. Incidentally, it may be

that the Cochrans (Tom Age of Enterprise Cochran) and the Josephsons (Mathew Robber Barrons Josephson) will be here on Sunday Dec. 2nd.⁶ So, if you wanted to be here then, for Sunday dinner, that would be excellong. (I could let you know definitively, later, lest you be induced thither by added attractions that are fraudulent.)

I await your info. anent the excavating of oral cavities. Await same with much gratitude for your efforts in my behalf, and also with some trepidation. Wd. like (a) to get the damned obstacle knocked out immediately, within the next ten minutes, and (b) to put it off forever. It is really getting to be a mouthful. And as one who works constantly with ideas, I am vastly more worried by the idea of the thing than by the thing itself. I can't keep myself from expecting it of a sudden to disclose urgently malign properties. Suppose, I ask myself quaintly, it were growing in some other direction too. (Maybe that is simply a ghastly way of taking the childhood pun of "bonehead" seriously.)

Have been batting away at the Rhetoric. (It will become, I guess, a study devoted to showing how deep and ubiquitous are the roots of war in the universal scene and the human psyche--a study extending from our meditations on the war of words.) The Grammar is due any day now.⁷ And I dare tell myself that I actually might, when the reviews start appearing, be sufficiently involved in the Rhetoric to

be no more than mildly irritated by the misrepresentations of the criticasters and the horesesasters. (I have learned to expect criticastering as a matter of course, somewhat as one expects cold weather in winter.) And though one might grumble at the cold, one does so with quite a different feeling than he would if he had expected that winter would be like summer. The fact is that the trilogy can build up a fairly comprehensive abstract of human relations I am convinced. And if I but get a fair enough treatment from the critics to permit me to go on getting the volumes published, I'll be content. I worry mainly about the reception of the middle section, on the philosophic schools. The pages on Kant and Spinoza may raise much trouble for the reader. For though I am trying to show how the use of our five pet terms assists radically in disclosing the basic structure of a philosopher's system, my ways of simplification are not those of Will Mansions of Philosophy Durant by a damned sight. And insofar as they are not, I may expect resentment on the part of the reviewers. For other reasons (vestiges of the old Stalin-Trotsky battles) I shall expect to see the book beturded by the stinks who get out the Phartisan Repuke. Rhetoric. The War of Words. Logomachy.

Your vatic awakening, with the words of the anonymous spokesman, "the limitations of form," suddenly reminded me that I forgot to mark down a reference I had come upon in

Aquinas a few days ago. His three (quoting Aristotle, I believe) were: symmetry, order, limitation. Anyhow, the scholastics equate "form" and "act"--and, to apply your localization business in another way, one can act only by not acting all over the place. As a matter of fact, the dream words doubtless went back to the old battles of you and McAlmon vs. Matty and me, which were always about "form," though God only knows what we meant by it. I, the same night, was dreaming of being chased by some nameless thing that finally turned out to be a big and very friendly dog. The amusing thing is that you, the imagist, dreamed a concept, and I, the idealogue, dreamed an image.

Glad to have the line anent the concealed weapon. However, strangely enough, I believe I got the quality of the interview better from your telling of it than from the poesy. Why was that?

But to the other notes, which I must get out before the postman arrives.

Sincerely,

K.B.

[B]

[Andover]

November 23, 1945

Dear Bill,

Jeez, thanks very much indeed for yours anent the deboning. What would you think of Dec. 9th? Or, if you thought there was any likelihood of your coming out here on the ninth, then the 16th? (We still hope you all may think fondly of the second, though I do not yet know about the others.)

Figuring out what I missed in "The Visit," I'd say tentatively it was this: It was really an incident that required filling out in terms of dramatic action, to make it fully live for a reader who had not himself been through it; but you treated it rather in terms of imagistic impression which is perhaps the best way of summing up the quality of the experience for one who had been through it.⁸ Does that mean anything? And if so, would you grant any justice in it?

Your Improvisations always struck me as the most revealing spot, methodologically, in your poetry. And looking back at them again now, in the light of the formula I just offered, I'd say that in those who were (sometimes almost schematically) dividing your poem into a dramatic half and an imagistic half, one half telling the situation explicitly and the other half giving the impression that was distilled from it (if one can distill an impression!). After

the Improvisations, you reverted to the allusive method of letting the situation be glimpsed through the impression. But where the give and take of the dialogue itself (the form of such sparring) is itself the main interest (as, it seems to me, should be the case with "The Visit"), then the summarizing imagistic impression cannot make up for the omission of the dramatic minutiae.

If that all seems too tangled, let's try it again.

Incidentally, I thought afterwards, the dream I told you about may have been left far too ambiguous in my telling of it. Recall that, one of the few other times when you were here, an old woodsman, Gene, stood holding up his hand, with my mean little dog hanging to it as though it were an old rag. And you had to patch him up. The dog was shot the same day. And the whole episode left an extremely troubled memory with me, particularly as I was much worried by the thought that a mean dog reflects on the state of mind of its owner--so I felt mean (a) for having such a dog, (b) for having him killed, and (c) because I was actually in quite a bothersome situation. So, that all had to be patched up somehow--and it took the form of (was summed up in) an imagistic impression involving the happy character-change of a dog. (Among the enacted puns that have beset me, incidentally, is the one which, when I am loudmouthed, could be joyced as *Kennel Bark*.)

Well, we gave thanks yesterday--and I'm not as much of a wreck as I thought I'd be, as I lay tossing in the night. So I'm back at work on the Rhetoric today. Hence, shall say no more for this time.

Incidentally, am I right in assuming that I could plan to drive in Sunday morning, and then drive out again after the bopping (i.e., bring Shorty along to drive the car on the way back, in case I was too full of myself)? Meanwhile, could I say that I'm very grateful to you, too, for offering to join in the fray?

With best greetings to you and your wife. And remember, if you can trek hither again, we'd be delighted should any of the others you spoke of be able to come too.

Sincerely,

K.B.

Incidentally, I think that "The Cod Head" is a very good poem. I don't believe I ever got around to telling you so before. But would you, for the sake of some of my own liguistic speculations, tell me whether it was literally a cod head? Or was it simply a fish head, which you thought might sound best if particularized as a cod? If it was a cod, I'm not better or worse off than I was before. But if it wasn't cod, or if you didn't know just what kind of fish it was but wanted to call it a cod, then I'm a tiny step farther along. I'm embarrassed to be so pedestrian and

pedantic about the matter. But if physicists are willing to blow up the world for the advancement of science, I might at least be willing to ask a blunt question in the same noble cause.

[P]

[Rutherford]

Sunday [1945]

Dear Ken,

Did you ever notice that the most brilliant screen representation you ever saw were those in the "advance notices" they show between the regular pictures? With me at least it's always been so. The reason is that the distracting context of any reel has been blasted away and we see the photography as it is, without a "story."

The explanation for your disappointment with my line as seen in the finished poem is that when I first spoke of it you fitted it instanter into a context of your own--to which it applied perfectly. In the finished work you resented a context which was foreign to your first brilliant conception. At least so I believe.

I am sorry but I knew the cod head was a cod head and not just a fish head--for I knew that cod was the only thing being caught at that place and had seen many of the assistant fishermen cutting up the preparatory to laying the flesh out on prepared boards to be sun-dried.⁹ I saw

hundreds of the heads thrown back into the sea. You might, in the same poem have wondered about the "red cross". But there is actually a plainly marked red cross, just like the ordinary "plus" mark in arithmetic figured on the back of the large jelly-fish or stingeree, seen so commonly in the waters of Labrador.

Dr. DeBell says any time Sunday morning on Dec. 8 or any Sunday thereafter, he'd be glad to do the job for you. It won't be a particularly difficult or shocking piece of work. He says you will be all right to drive back home immediately after. Bring "Shorty" though to give you assurance.¹⁰ Get here not later than 10 A.M.--here at my house in Rutherford. You know the place.

The "Improvisations", I can see, have a conceptual quality which might be satisfying to a man dealing more with concepts than images--but as compared with my "Novelette" they appear rather static to me today. Have you ever seen the "Novelette"?¹¹ Send you one if you want it.

Not much chance of our getting up there again this season--but we'll keep it in mind.

Yrs

[B]

[Andover]

November 30, 1945

Dear Bill,

You got me wrong. I wasn't disappointed with the line. It serves my context as well as I thought it did. But I felt that the poem as a whole did not reveal the incident in toto as well as your impromptu account of it did.¹² And what I was trying to say, in my laborious distinctions between narration and summation, was that I thought the account of the incident would have profited by a particularized sequence of give-and-take (what she said, then what I said, then what she said, etc).

I don't know whether you wholly got the sort of speculating I had in mind anent cod. I was concerned with speculations that have to do with the joycing of cod-head as God-head, plus phallic implications of cod (as per codpiece, properly placed btw. the two stones).

No, I have not seen the Novelette. But I'd be delighted to read it.

Many thanks for info anent "my operation." We'll plan to be there next Sunday (Dec. 9). Unless one of these damned northeasterners turns up at the last minute, and seals us in. Had I been due yesterday morning, for instance, I just simply could not have made it. But I have hopes that the weather has been adequately psychoanalyzed for a while now,

and will take more than a week to develop new tantrums. And I'll take every human precaution to be there on time.

Sorry we can't expect you to appear here any more this season. Both the Cochrans and the Josephsons are due tomorrow, and possibly Dave Mandel, a Perth Amboy lawyer who you probably know--though I am half expecting word sometime today that the newest meteorological developments have scared them off.¹⁴

Sincerely,

K.B.

[P]

[Rutherford]

Dec. 14, 1945

Dear Ken,

Whatever the hell happened to you? I thought I might get a card from Whippanny or Succasunna during the week giving me hope that you were on your way and expected soon to get there. But nothing! Nothing at all! Can I have a spare part taken in to you on muleback. Only send me word and I'll do the impossible to rescue you. My mechanic here in Rutherford said we should have broken the opposing blade off by hand, any way we could. THAT IT WAS NOT HARD TO DO. Had we only known!

Drop me a line so that I may know all is well. As for the small black-silk suture, it has probably fallen out long

since, but on the chance that it is still in place, untie the knot with the tip of your tongue--or have your wife snip it loose with a pair of nail scissors, the kind used by beauticians, cuticle shears! Tin shears would be too heavy.

It was a pleasure to have you here even though the occasion wasn't a particularly pleasant one. At that it must be a pleasure to get rid of that annoying lump in the roof of your mouth. DeBell did a good job on it. He'll be sending you a bill one of these days--not too much either.

I enjoyed opening your Grammar at random and reading here and there for the pleasure of the study as I often do. I happened to hit the Socrates, really a beautiful exposition of the resources at work in that tragic dilemma. Or would you call it tragic, I wonder. I think not, not any more than Socrates found it so at the end. This book is extraordinarily congenial to me as it is a book I used to dream when I was a child at the supper table hearing the wild arguments that used to cross our board. I wanted to invite a stranger, a referee to live with us, at a salary, to lay down some simple rules for us. The stupidity of discussions when no one acknowledges the rules that should govern any controversy used to drive me mad. Any youth, any intelligent child who should be started in life with such a book as this of yours at hand should land in the middle of life ten years ahead of the best I did and ten times as well

armed for the fray. The intelligence, a naked flame if you will at its best, needs such shucking as this before it can even reach the metal for its play. Good luck to you. This is a book I shall never entirely put down.

Wrote a poem (first draft) after I returned from my visit to you up there. Some day I hope to be able to sit down to it for the final puttin in shape. I'll send it to you then. It looks pretty good.

Best luck all around,

Bill

[B]

[Andover]

December 15, 1945

Dear Bill,

Your Dr. DeBell was more than right: though the chunk out of the roof of my mouth never even lost me one meal, the car is still ailing gravely. After leaving you, I found a garage man who removed the opposite blade for me. But by that time the whole mechanism was so dislocated that, some miles further along, another blade flew off, making for such eccentricity as was never before found outside of surrealism. And we have not yet been able to get the parts necessary for the repairing.

But I am writing this to say, I much regret I am such a horse's ass at stating my thanks to you. But I am indeed

very grateful to you for your trouble--and more, for your kindness. It is a noble business you are in, Bill, even down to the nagging of the telephone. I am words or nothing; you are words and medicine. Then, eliminating words, as the constant here--ooof!

But I was disgusted when you started talking down your next book, while I had such a face full of blood and gauze that I could not defend you against yourself. What bad advertising!

Incidentally, the operation proved to me that my fear of injections in the throat was not mere fantasy. For something must have gone wrong with the shots injected by the dentist, since they did gag me, whereas there was no gagging this time, even though the injections were much deeper in the throat. (There is, however, some neurosis involved too. I had a very bad case of whooping cough when young, did the blue-in-the-face stuff--and that might have left a treasure of memories for the semi-unconscious. And then again, the broken neck sometimes seems to raise some obstacles to swallowing. I remember how, about the age of fourteen or so, it was not unusual to try swallowing sweet potatoes, and have them come back through my nose.) All this by way of apology for the idiotic position of my left arm, which, in the grammar of posture, in some vague way

indicated that I was waiting to find that the injections had completely choked me.

As to my business; the word-slinging only: news from the publisher continues to be encouraging about the booksellers' attitude towards the Grammar, though so far as I know no reviews have appeared yet.

Maybe, I'm wrong, but I think you are a bit irritated at some of my tentative speculations concerning possible ingredients of symbolism in your imagery of objects. In part, this is justified, for in my tentative speculations I usually allow myself much more leeway than when I finally get around to the stage of demonstration. Primarily, however, my assumption when approaching an imagist poet is that the imagery is vital insofar as it contains personality. And in its role as personality, it will, in some way or other, embody the ways of appetition typical of persons. That principle, I take as gospel. But in the applying of the principle, there are opportunities for all sorts of stupidities. Despite that, in my desire to figure out the workings of language, I believe that one should risk some of these stupidities, rather than playing safe by purely "appreciative" criticism.

So far, I have not received by billet doux from your D. DeBell. But I'll be promptitude itself when same arrives.

Meanwhile, do be thinking of a possible voyage here
some time. And--our best seasonal greetings to you and to
Florence, and to the new generations.

Sincerely,

K.B.

Notes for 1945

¹ Kenneth Burke, "Container and the Thing Contained," Sewanee Review 53 (1945): 56-78.

² Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives (New York: Prentice Hall, 1945).

³ Kenneth Burke, "The Temporizing Essence," Kenyon Review 7 (1975): 616-627. (From his final chapter of A Grammar of Motives). Burke also published two reviews in the same volume: "Careers without Careerism," a review of Eric Russell Bentley's A Century of Hero-Worship; "The work of Regeneration," a review of Margaret Young's Angel in the Forest.

⁴ The "Great Market" here would be Prentice Hall.

⁵ The Quarterly Review of Literature, II, 2 (1945). The piece contains several poems by Williams; an article by Williams, "The Fatal Blunder," which is a criticism of "place" in Eliot's "Ash Wednesday"; Kenneth Rexroth's review of Williams' The Phoenix and the Tortoise entitled "In praise of Marriage".

⁶ Thomas Childs Cochran (b. 1902) published over ten books on American business, one of which was The Age of

Enterprise, a social history of industrial America (New York: MacMillan, 1942). Among Matthew Josephson's publications is The Robber Barons; the Great American Capitalists (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1934).

⁷ Kenneth Burke, Rhetoric of Motives (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950).

⁸ William Carlos Williams, "The Visit," The Collected Later Poems (New York: New Directions, 1944). This poem treated Williams' uneasy feelings stemming from Vivienne Koch's interviews, which were preparatory to a New Directions' critical biography (Mariani 510). "At Kenneth Burke's Place" (CLP 256) is the sketch he dashed off (Laughlin 122).

⁹ William Carlos Williams, "The Cod," The Collected Earlier Poems (New York: Objectivist Press, 1934): 333-34.

¹⁰ Libbie Burke.

¹¹ William Carlos Williams, A Novelette and Other Prose (1921-1931) (Toulon, France: To Press, 1931).

¹² See note 8.

1946

[P]

[Rutherford]

April 20, 1946

Dear Ken,

After struggling with the facets of the Ezra Pound presentation even your illnesses seem comparatively simple to me.¹ I've just finished a letter to a Pound fan (female) living in Elmhurst, New York. He still pulls 'em in, poor guy. She has him down for the modern Jesus. No use trying to explain to her that it's a matter of prose style.

What you complain of seems to originate in your Eustacian tube or the naso-pharynx near its opening. If it is serious enough to warrant a trip to New York and a ten dollar fee, I'd call on a Dr. Miles Atkinson somewhere in the 70s near Park Ave. He's an expert. Look him up. He's good.

That aside, you could do worse than see Dr. Edward Ehrenfeld in Passaic, not far from DeBell's address. Eddie knows his stuff. His number is Passaic 2-2597, you could see him either during the day or some evening.

Yes, I've read one or two reviews of your GRAMMAR, to me they stink. I don't know what the hell you philosophers want. One thing surely you don't want and that is each

other. The sole intent seems to be to destroy; not to work hand in hand for the general enlightenment but to tear everything down to a sort of Caesar's Triumph for the one and only brilliant mind in the world, "my own". In that the philosopher and the poet (not to mention the Jesuit) are one. Oh well.

But what little of your book I have read I thoroughly enjoyed--I have not as yet finished reading it. When? Christ knows. It is looking at me now across my desk.

You know Aiken, why don't you write him a note telling him you miss my name among his lights.² Forget it.

I have a poem coming out in the Spring Book number of New Republic--a longish poem.³ Look it up.

And there'll be an appreciation of a long poem by Parker Tyler in ACCENT sometime in the future.⁴ I mention it because I used your statements on the 4 tropes very freely there. Look that up too.

We'll be out to see you this year. Now the old car is having clutch tightened, equivalent, I suppose to a good massage of the prostate in man.

Best luck. "Make your own rules and win!" That's the new Williams motto.

Yours,

Bill

[B]

[Andover]

June 1, 1946

Dear Bill,

I'm a bum. The primary victim of my own bad management. I shoulda written you before this, long before this, to acknowledge your letter sent in answer to my pleas. (Incidentally, I have not yet been to see the gent you mentioned, because things have eased up with the easing of the weather. So, in accordance with my one principle, to which I scrupulously adhere, Never do today what can be put off until tomorrow, I have done naught, as yet. I can have that to look forward to, next fall.)

Also, I wanted to say that I read your bearing-witness on Russia, and found it quite moving.⁵ There are some strange twists in it, though, that I'd like to ask you about some time. Almost as though your surrender were like that of a girl, asking a Don Cossack to come and lay her. How did that creep in? And another twist, it seems to be, in a roundabout way, saying "Come hither" to death, but the death is made palatable by being given the guise of a political (i.e., temporal) future. Or am I reading too much into it? In any event, I can't take it just as an "occasional poem" such as it would seem to be on its face.

Incidentally, I don't know Aiken. (I met him once, and we dragged out a few words dutifully--otherwise rien.) But

what I have been thinking about is a few lines to the NR correspondence columns, saying what the hell all this nobility stuff about Pound, etc. when old inside W.C. was thus o'erlooked, to say nothing of the mood of one-night standers Aiken slapped together, doubtless a bunch of reviewers who said a kind word for him. Am looking for a moment. Wish I had seen the anthology when the issue was in blazing headlines.

Car fixed? Ours is gasping again. There are various settlers scattered about the countryside now. Think of voyaging hither.

Sincerely,

K.B.

[P]

[Rutherford]

Monday [July 26, 1946]

Dear Ken,

Glad to get your letter. You'll meet Auden perhaps at Bennington this year.⁶ What you say about Paterson so interests me that I've got to put the finishing of Part II at the top of my work list--but Laughlin says production problems make any near publication unlikely. I don't know how you could have said anything about the poem I'd rather have heard than what you did say--that the blood is still circulating in those veins, nostalgia, constipation,

achievement, the flower pressed perhaps between the pages of a book but still retaining a suggestion of the color and even (if you put your nose to the pages) a faint odor through the dryness.

Floss and I are going away for a two weeks rest up a little further north.⁷ We'll be home toward the middle of August. During the two weeks that follow we're going to visit some of those friends whom we have wanted to see for a year or more but have been prevented from seeing by the luck of our lives. You're right there--if it'll suit you. Sometime during the last two weeks in August. I'm really looking forward to it.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Aug, 9 1946

See you sometime later in the month. Enjoying Schlesinger's The Age of Jackson. A good book. Fine spot here.

W.C.W.

[P]

[Rutherford]

Wednesday--8:30 A.M. [October 9, 1946]

Damn it Ken,

This just HAD to happen. At 4:30 this morning Alma Cole of 95 Lawrence Avenue, Lodi, N.J., age 26, Para I whose last period occurred January 26, 1946 and whose Wassermann was negative 5-16-46, who weighs 137 lbs, whose urine is normal, whose blood pressure is 110 over 80 and the heart tones of whose belly borne fetus are at 128 in the ROA position--called me on the phone to say she was having pains every ten minutes.

I sent her in leisurely fashion to the hospital whose delivery floor I called just now. They warned me away saying it was a "madhouse" at the moment but that my patient was doing nothing in particular (except, I'll bet, getting an earful of shrieks, groans, lamentations (and jazz from the doctors' rest room)).

That means in all probability that I'll be sitting on my ass all day long waiting for this gal to come down where I can handle her. And the worst of it is that she was due on the 2nd of this month and should have left me in the clear long ago.

But there is a good side to it also, as there is always a good side (they say) even to death, that is that I haven't another maternity case on my schedule before the 20th of

this month. THEREFORE I plan, rain or shine, snow or tornado, to drive out to Andover this coming Friday IN THE MORNING to stay and eat with you at mid-day and talk with you and yours for the daylight hours. Floss will be with me.

Which is all very American and infraideational and RIGHT. Our greatest leader was not an intelligence, all our greatest intelligences have always been marginal. Our two party system which saves us from boredom yearly is a subintelligent manoeuvering. THUS we are left to be based solidly on the unvarying emotional substratum of the midbrain area, therefore we are REPUBLICANS today and slaughtered in the field tomorrow. Bitter as it may be it is in many ways what the world is in its seasonal fluctuations, each season bringing emotional relief from the last by thus stimulating the intelligence to every athletic exercise known to apes in a cage--thus insuring the future of the race, I suppose. At least it induces to books--which I like. We are now approaching winter. Thank God I don't live in the tropics.

Cheerio and chuck chuck (but the groundhogs have gone to sleep long since I imagine.)

Best to you all,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Friday [Oct. 18, 1946]

Dear Ken,

Communication (?) from Ezra Pound enclosed, I presume he is referring to one or the other of his two recently published Cantos. You're a philosopher, what about it?

It should be possible (something it hasn't yet been this fall) for me to get away for a jaunt to the country next week. I've been tied hand and foot. I still have serious obligations to consider but these should be at least predictable by next Monday, surely, so that I may be able to tell when I'll be free and consequently in a position to tell you what I can do about it.

Two weeks ago yesterday I rushed away to Buffalo to be cited by the University there and presented with an honorary LLD.⁸ I put up a rather feeble fight against it, holding out for an LHD but they said they were giving only the one medal and that I could take it or leave it so I took it. I tore out there by sleeper and back by sleeper the following night--costing me, with the two maternity cases I missed in consequence, \$160. (I took Floss and my son Bill along as witnesses.)

Thus literature pays for itself--a year's earnings.

Briarcliffe Quarterly is bringing out a special issue over me, they have everything except a picture of me with my

pants down taking a crap, even my eyes, which Rexroth thinks are like those of St. Francis--animaloid.⁹ I wonder if they got a note on my work by T.S. Eliot, the cheap shit.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

10/21/46

Dear Ken,

Not a glimmer of a chance! My only time free would be a Friday or a Sunday and both this Friday and Sunday seem already bound worse than Gulliver by the Lilliputians.

I might just seize some other day than the two mentioned but not while maternity cases are pending. I hope to finish up a residue of those within the next six to eight days. Will you be around during the week of November 2 to 9? Let me know for both Floss and I would really enjoy driving out to you for a visit.

There's a lot of crap we could rehash--Horace Gregory's new book, Josephson's new book--oh hell, anything.¹⁰ Even Auden's course on Shakespeare's plays at the New School.¹¹

The trouble is I tire if I drive myself too hard physically (as by driving) and I find absolutely no time for work on my play which I've got to get retyped finally (after revision) if I'm ever to get it to a professional copier to

put it into shape for an agent. I just can't find the time
any longer for my writing.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Andover]

Sunday [1946]

Dear Ken,

Wednesday, unless it storms--at about mid afternoon. Or if something prevents that, then Friday--but I haven't read your Grammar--not all of it.

Yrs,

Bill

[P]

Sunday [Dec. 22 1946]

New York Hospital

Der Ken,

This is my last day here and this is my last sheet of writing paper. I came here 9 days ago to have my hernia done over again after last spring's operation which was unsuccessful. I wanted to write you before I left.

First I want to say I'm sending you a book. Throw it out after you've read it. Not a book I have written but one by Yvor Winters on the verses of E.A. Robinson.¹² It is something unique which I think only such a man as you could

appreciate, the blankest, most stupid piece of "informed" writing I have ever encountered. It amazes and bewilders me by its complete arrest of the intelligence it represents, and not only that, it besides that gives a perfect summary of its own ineffectiveness in stated words within its own context p.21. It is as I say, not only a book but a psychological phenomenon on the pathological side, Winters' critical rages showing his impotence.

Of course the effect is heightened by Laughlin's miserliness in refusing to pay royalties to Macmillan in order to have permitted the use of the poems themselves (which Winters quotes) instead of merely references to the poems--which is completely stupid.¹³ If the poems had been used, the quotations Winter's wanted, they would have distracted the attention from his own atrophies--but there it is, amazing!

The rest concerns the work of V.S. Reches, his The Function of the Orgasm which if you have not read it, do so.¹⁴ The paper's at an end.

Yours,

Bill

Notes for 1946

¹ Williams may be referring here to his article recently published in defense of Pound: "The Case for and against Ezra Pound," PM 25 November 1945: 16.

² Conrad Aiken (189-73). Though Williams' poems conclude Aiken's first anthology (A Comprehensive Anthology of American Poetry, 1944), the revised edition overlooked his work (Modern Library Anthology of American Poetry, 1945).

³ William Carlos Williams, "Russia," New Republic (29 April 1946): 615.

⁴ William Carlos Williams, rev. of The Granite Butterfly, by Parker Tyler, Accent 6 Spring 1946: 203.

...the best poem written by an American since The Waste Land....certainly by far the best long poem of our day. Perhaps I had better have said, the first long poem by an American that has managed to emerge since the sweet blight of The Waste Land. (203)

⁵ See note 3.

⁶ W.H. Auden (1907-1973) became a citizen of the U.S. in 1946 and made his money, in part, by teaching.

⁷ The Williams stayed with the Abbotts in Buffalo. Charles Abbott (1900-1961) was head of the library at

University of Buffalo where Williams began to deposit his manuscripts and notes in an attempt to keep them in one location (Laughlin 100). Williams' account of his visits with the Abbotts clearly indicates a close and longtime relationship (Autobiography 323-28).

⁸ October 1946, The University of Buffalo awarded Williams an honorary LLD.

⁹ Briarcliffe Quarterly, Vol. III, No. 11. October 1946. Kenneth Rexroth's "A Letter to William Carlos Williams" is included in this issue:

Dear Bill:
When I search the past for you,
Sometimes I think you are like
St. Francis, whose flesh went out
Like a happy cloud from him,
And merged with every lover--

(193)

¹⁰ Horace Gregory, A History of American Poetry 1900-40 (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946); Matthew Josephson, Stendahl; or, The Pursuit of Happiness (New York: Doubleday, 1946).

¹¹ The New School for Social Research chartered in 1919, founded by Thorstein Veblen, Charles Beard, John Dewey, and James Harvey Robinson. Burke started teaching there on a part-time basis in the early thirties (Jay 154).

¹² Yvor Winters, Edwin Arlington Robinson (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1946).

¹³ James Laughlin started correspondence with Williams in 1933; Laughlin's New Directions published White Mule in 1937. Their relationship, professional and personal, continued for the rest of Williams' life.

¹⁴ Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957), Die Funktion des Orgasmus (New York: Simon Shuster, 1973).

1947

[B]

[Andover]

January 8, 1947

Dear Bill,

Glad to hear from you, and to learn that you are on the mend. (Though I had not known that you were off to be worked over.)

If the old household superstition has any validity, that a good-sized grouch is the sure sign of recovery, I take your letter to signify that you were getting along splendidly. I guess I'm too ailing myself. For I swear I can't get a quiver out of the Winter's confession. Not even the horror you marked on p.39, where the Buddha said:

The vice is the vice of pride in one's own identity, a pride which will not allow one to accept a greater wisdom from without even when one recognizes that the wisdom is there and is greater than one's own; the result is spiritual sickness.

I think the gent here is concerned with a real enough situation. And sometimes the response to it takes the form that we, on superficial inspection, call "pride," though I'd rather call it "fear" (fear of the loss of one's identity, a quite reasonable fear to have, though the possession of it often makes us think and act unreasonably); and I'd take

"pride" to be an over-hasty attempt to protect ourselves against such a risk, so that we get into the habit of deflecting alien things even without asking ourselves whether we could assimilate them.

Or perhaps you were objecting to the formula as applying to that particular poem by Robinson. Not having it here, I can't utter on that; but I will say it would seem to be quite typical of a New Englander's temptations in confronting the whole muddle of our cultural importations.

Say more.

And also do please say more on Reich. I haven't read his books, have only heard of them, through a bright, too-bright youngster who seems to see in them a sanction for picking up tail, though he doesn't phrase it thus. A devastating attack on him by Wertham, in the NR, of about five weeks back, gave me great satisfaction.¹ For I did believe that Wertham had been fair in noting how the whole structure of our political necessities was being obscured. But you, as a medico, might have some other angle to suggest. Say more. This "greater wisdom" would, I admit I fear, threaten my identity as I now take it to be. But maybe not. I think nookie is excellong, but I can't see that it is so important as Reich apparently makes it out to be. Human beings seem to have other gratifying ways of short-circuiting, leaping gaps, and just plain broadcasting

of rays out into whom-it-may-concern space. The important thing is, of course, to eat when one is hungry--but the Reich sort of thing seems to make one think he is hungry for a lot of things that he isn't really very hungry for at all. Maybe not. I speak only from hearsay. But do tell me what is good in the gent, why I should plague myself with him, etc.

If you're too busy to write it (for me, or for the world in general--that's it, why not write an article for the world in general?)--but if you're too busy to write, maybe you'll tell me about it sometime, viva voce. We intend to be in NY from the seventeenth to the twenty-sixth. We'll be staying at Tom Cochran's place, 111 East Tenth Street.² It is in the phone book, not under Cochran, but under Saint Mark's in the Bouwerie. If you're going to be in town some time then, with some free time, announce.

Meanwhile, best greetings,

Sincerely,

K.B.

[P]

[Rutherford]

January 9, 1947

Dear Ken,

I'm no expert on Reich's theory of the function of the orgasm for I have not even finished reading his book on the subject. All I can say as a physician moderately well

informed on the analysis of clinical material is that as far as I have read his reasoning upon his findings seems sound. Perhaps I am justified in going a little further, in saying that I find his discoveries (clinical data) extremely enlightening on several points, knots of old confusions that have baffled me all my life but which, I think, he has very satisfactorily unravelled.

I haven't read the criticism of Reich's work in the New Republic. If you have the issue containing the article of which you speak in your possession I wish you'd send it to me. I'll return it promptly. But if the criticism is of a political nature I'm afraid it won't interest me much. I'm afraid I'd be inclined to classify it with the objections of the Episcopal Church to The Descent of Man.

In reading this book of Reich's I have been deeply impressed by his criticism of Freud's later work. He is in no sense an off-shoot from Freud like Jung or Adler but remained Freud's staunch defender to the end. But he strongly differed from Freud when, as an old man, the Master came out with his theory of the death instinct as well as the theory of sublimation, that art, for instance, is a so called sublimation of sex, the artist unable to satisfy his sexual impetus diverts it into music, let us say. This, personally, I have always found to be the bunk. Reich confirms me in that opinion. Art is NOT a neurosis.

Certainly sexual denial with an outcropping in some other area is not the history of the artist, the epoch-making artist, in general--or do you believe Beethoven and Dante (because they didn't get their women) produced neurosis in the forms of their arts? I don't.

All Reich has done is reason from his clinical data after which he has used his findings in treating his cases--with outstanding success (or so we are led to believe). You can't go wrong, or very far wrong, in following a man's discoveries from his objective findings, step by step, to his conclusions in the field. Why anybody should fear to take revolutionary steps in scientific discovery, the reports of the sense, I could never see. Reich himself says, for Christ's sake, don't believe a thing I say for authoritarian reasons.

As far as screwing is concerned it's a minor part of his work. Of course that's precisely the part any superficial observer flies to as butterflies fly to a horse turd. All he says about screwing is that we generate energy, biological energy, at our genitals and that it "informs" the whole character of man or woman; that neurosis is a stasis from lack of orgastic release and that it leads to disaster of various sorts to the individual and to society in general. Of course, it is sidetracked into science, religion

and art--BUT you got to have something to sidetrack first, the orgasm is the source.

AND he doesn't claim to have come to the end of the track. All he says is that his clinical observations have led him inevitably to the conclusions at which he has arrived as they have disproved some of Freud's later findings. He admonishes his followers NOT to quit at his findings but to carry them through relentlessly until they can be disproved as false or developed into whatever final form they will take.

As far as the man has gone I find him amazingly enlightening and enheartening, he demonstrates health as against pathology--in my own mind I don't know a book more likely to give you, personally, a lift than Reich's The Function of the Orgasm which I will be very happy to lend you at your convenience.

Mind you, I'm not urging you to read it. It is a medical treatise more than anything else (with political and sociological overtones to be sure--but with what enlightening glances into those fields you will be amazed to see) and you may not want to give time to a book of that sort.

I had a strange letter today from some German, a woman I think, who had seen some comment of mine on Goethe's so called last words--(I have forgot what I said or even that I

had said anything). But this person told me that I had given perfectly what the spirit of his dying words had been!

The so called last words "Mehr licht!" were the invention of some journalist. What Goethe really said was (to his little--but let me quote from the letter), "Goethe's last words were spoken to Ottolie, his daughter-in-law. They were,

"Gib mir deine Kleine Pfate!"

approx. Let me hold your little paw!

The information comes by word through the following family channels,

Ottolie was a friend of Minchen Henzel in Jena who was friend of my grandmother and her sister Sofie and Anna Kieser in Jena.

(end of quote)

O.K.?

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Jan. 10, 1947

Dear Ken,

Criticism, like most intellectual exercises, had better be a full time profession; snippets of comment such as the stuff usually exhibited in the backs of magazines of which the comment on Reich's book, of which we have been speaking,

as an example are seldom worth reading. I don't think this one amounts to much.

A solid point against Reich's presumable position is made: when we attempt to enlarge on that which applies to the individual and try to apply that to the masses we are, definitely acting politically, it is in effect politics.

But, did Reich say otherwise? I doubt it. I haven't read his book (and I grant he may have slipped into such a statement as that credited to him, that all politics and politicians should be abolished) but I suspect that what he really said is that all politics as at present constituted should be abolished.

In any case I have not read the book in question and in all probability I'll never read it. The man may have fallen from grace. Even if he did come out against politicians in precisely the way it has been said against him I'd still feel that he was speaking as a clinician and that what he meant is that our ills are political in their essence and that we have in ourselves the cure, clinically speaking again, which if we would pay heed to it would lead us back to grace.

Now this is a theoretical position. But the theoretician, if his point be well taken, has a perfect right to use that as a fulcrum from which to pry apart or out of the way all heterodox opinions. From his standpoint

Russia is headed straight for neurosis among its individuals which in turn leads to mass neurosis, which in turn leads to a reliance on "leadership", which in turn leads to war. He sees war from his partis-pris as the inevitable effect or affect of Russia's denial of his basic stand that uninhibited (not profligate) sex freedom is the only way in which neurosis can be eliminated.

Maybe he's wrong. But I'd rather (not having read his book) believe in him, since I know the man he is, rather than his stumpy reviewer.

Bill

[B]

[Andover]

January 30, 1947

Dear Bill,

Back from Babylon.

I'd love to take you up on that offer to let me look over the book on nookie by the imperial Reich. Since you won't tell me what in the hell the guy says (or rather, since you seem to take back in par. 2 what you put forth in par. 1), I guess I'll have to see for myself.

Our trouble is, I suppose, what it always was. All your life you've been railing against philosophy. And all my life I've been saying: "Listen to that guy philosophizing. Every time I hear him, he's philosophizing. Like Roethke, he

thinks he's against philosophy; but all he's really against is good philosophy. He hands out bad philosophy by the barrel full."

From your last letters, I think I begin to see the point a little clearer. That is, your equating poetry and health. I used to think that your poetry was the rounding-out of your medicinating (sorta the grace atop nature). But now I think I see it all more accurately: poetry is for you the antithesis of your pills. That's why you have to shout, ever more urgently as ills creep up, "Poetry equals health."

Well, you worked out an economy. You are perfectly entitled to put poetry in the bin antithetical to your vocation. (In this you offer a variant of the vacation-vocation antithesis I mention in the Grammar with reference to Wallace Stevens.)³ Anything goes, if it works, along the lines of these personal alignments. But that's just the equation for you (and your ilk). It's not the one and only. Poetry is also, or can also be, ye grande bellyache. (And thank God for that, says this poor gent, who wants some viaticum to help him on his way.) If I may quote myself: a person writes about that which most interests him, and few things interest us more than our burdens, hence poetry becomes the ritualistic unburdening of burdens. Doesn't have to. And there can be ways both direct and

indirect (with the direct-guys hating the indirect, saying there's no room for them in this here one world, and v.v.).

Poetry equals health? Pedetter. It can also be a way of dying well. Too often today health means Miss California Fruit Growers Association. (Recently, have got interested in Virgil again; how much more mature his man-politics-nature line-up was than the many fragmentary things of that sort we get now.)

Must expression be antithetical? Can't it also be of a piece with one's conditions? Why can't poetry ail in proportion as the poet ails, etc.? Or is only philosophy allowed to do that?

Why not come around, some fine day, and let's haggle about it? I wrote answers to almost every sentence in your last couple of letters. But it seemed anticlimactic to type them out. So come around, and we'll say them.

Sincerely,

K.B.

[P]

[Rutherford]

#1

1/31/47

Dear Ken,

I have nothing to say about philosophy--except that it had better keep its hands off that which does not concern

it--for to do otherwise leads only to confusion, beside our difficulties.

All (I hope) I have ever said about phil. is that I sense its interfering hand in the difficult art of getting said in verse that which can be said only by the closest attention to the exigencies of verse, the inventions which philosophy tends to prune away in its attempts to find "meaning". There just ain't no sense to that.

Never in my life have I tho't to equate poetry with health. All I said was that the tentacles of poetry are signs of a living tissue, perhaps comparable to the same thing in the best philosophy (i.e. the least interfering).

Bill

#2

1/31/47

It is impossible for me to contradict myself--except logically which means nothing.

W.

And surely there must be somewhere in philosophy a def't which says: "Hands off!" It's to that that I appeal.

W.

#3

But I'd enjoy, perhaps benefit, by analogizing my wit as poet with your wit as philosopher--never articulating

anywhere with you but laying the one thing by the other. By this exercise and no more (no closer articulation) something valuable in me--in pleasure, enlightenment might it, I hope will (as it has already happened between us), result.

W.

[B]

[Andover]

February 1, 1947

Dear Bill,

The patient's symptoms were very bewildering. Obviously, the most expert criticism was necessary. They called in the Great Diagnostician. Tell us, they asked.

The Great Diagnostician pondered, then spoke. In the first place, he said, the patient must be operated on immediately. In the second place, there is nothing wrong with him at all.

They were all a-fluster. But there happened to be a logic-chopper present. He didn't know an appendix from an appendage, but he could chop a logic any time. He spoke up to the Great Diagnostician, asking: Aren't your two statements contradictory?

And was he promptly slain? He was. For the Great Diagnostician smacked him down thus (I quote his actual words, as written to me in a letter):

"It is impossible for me to contradict myself--except logically, which means nothing."

The G.D., I believe, did not deign to answer.

Otherwise, where were we? Our sudden flare-up of controversy vastly interests me, because it reveals to me the unexpected possibility of my finding a whole new set of lines (i.e., times when you and I, when talking about the same thing, draw the lines at strategically different places). I'm not just trying to make you grouchy-wouchy (though that's what I do seem to be doing). I'm trying to find just where you draw your lines. If "logic" meant to you what it means to me, for instance, your remark quoted above should strike terror in the hearts of all who depend upon you. Hence, it must mean something different. To you it must mean the opposite of the practical; to me it is the necessary aspect of a rational act.

Perhaps you had in mind the fact that an image, in a poem, can "contain opposites"? If a religious fanatic, for instance, burned for a woman whom his beliefs did not permit him to enjoy, he might, in dreaming of a fire which he had set and which "unintentionally" caused her death, both have her and prevent himself from having her, in one and the same symbol. Or an image of rain might be, simultaneously a weeping for the departed and a furtive symbolizing of fertile preparation for the New Love. Similarly, as per my

elucubrations on the "paradox of substance," the simple either-or's of logic can become involved in dialectical switches. But such matters don't apply to the situation which we were suffering under, and which was thus:

The G.D. said that he greatly admired Reich's book. The L.C. said to himself, "Here's a gent who knows his business, so let's ask him what's good about Reich's book." The L.C. asks. And, to his vast bewilderment, he receives from the G.D., not the clear bing-bing-bing answer he had expected, but first, a fog, and second an oath in the dark.

What I hoped to learn, in particular, was his way of lining up the love-war business. When a male animal is most a-loving, I grant, that's also the time when he's most a-fighting. And the female fights most over her beloved offspring. So I grant that the love-war entanglement is central. My own scheme (mentioned in passing on p. 286 of ye Grammaire, par. beginning "On the Symbolic level...") finds it necessary to worry over a trio, "love, war, work," with all the conflicts of property which, since property is necessary to love and work, are forever getting us into war. There is a passage in Coleridge's "Religious Musings" which (if you can pardon its philosophic nature) suggests the pattern quite well:

But soon Imagination conjured up
An host of new desires; with busy aim,

Each for himself, Earth's eager children toiled.
So Property began, twy-streaming fount,
Whence Vice and Virtue flow....

Then follows a genealogy of invention and disease (quite in keeping with our interchange on the double aspect of poesy)...and then, finally, his reversal and apotheosis:

From Avarice thus, from Luxury and War
Sprang heavenly Science; and from Science Freedom.

'Tis a bit nineteenth-century, but it does well suggest the really rich (not Reich?) tie-up.

My own notion, reduced to its simplest form, would run like this: The individual, to be moral, social, communicative, etc., identifies himself with "property." Property may be of many sorts. Capitalist property, property in methods of working, property in wife and children, property in convictions, property in one's job, etc. Such properties lead to conflict, (as one man's area of integration encroaches upon another's). Under certain special conditions, such conflicts can lead to war (in the modern, imperialist sense). Important among such conflicts is the conflict over nookie (though not since Troy, I guess, has it directly led to war. A Marxist could show that it didn't then either, of course; but I was being gracile.) Petty bourgeois American women, equating the "higher standard of living" with perhaps the stupidest way of life

known to the history of human decadence, fall into the tangles of this business in ways which show, clinically, purely and simply as sex neurosis. Hence, the clinician might tend to draw the whole difficulty from the sex source alone. But it is political, rather than purely sexual, in the sense that property is political.... The Rhetoric, if it turns out as planned, should show the many ramifications of property. Theory is: maybe we can mitigate the imperialist itch, the ultimate frenzy of property, maybe not; but at least we must accurately contemplate the source of our fantastic ambitions. Property in sex is a major one of these, but in a familial rather than purely physical sense. The physical gratification is as essential, perhaps, as food (no; in the natural state, I guess sex doesn't become important until food allows for an extra?); but the physical gratification, as translated into terms of set social relations, involves property--and the big wars are wars of property.

As to Philosophy, and your demand that it keep "Hands off" poetry: pick up the NY Times; read the hundreds of thousands of words of "news" and advertisements (another kind of news); then turn to the Editorial Page, and read the little poem for that day: twelve doggerel lines, a kind of rhymed editorial, the day's quota of poetry. There, in that proportion, the newspaper has spoken. It has put poetry "in

its place." Then read that prime journalistic hack, J. Donald Adams, asking himself where to place the blame.⁴ And where is the blame to be put? Echo answers: On philosophy. And from across the stinking swamps, the Billious Echo answers: On philosophy. Itshay, say I--and I'm speaking not figuratively, but literally.

There are many kinds of poetry. If I happen to like Lucretius, I am not forcing philosophy upon poetry; I am but recognizing and enjoying a kind of poetry that has actually been written, and well written. I also like Imagistic (Objectivist?) poetry. I recognize that it has its virtues and, naturally, its limitations, like any other kind. But if an Imagist (Objectivist?) poet wants to insist that all poetry should be of his kind (not even allowing for the many ideas in dramatic poetry as traditionally existing), then, say I, "Hands off." This theorist should keep hands off the other kinds. Yes, philosophy believes devoutly in the principle of hands off. In fact, Aristotle's whole method was built upon that principle, as he attempted to take into account the situation that the Greeks confronted in their day as we do in ours (though they confronted it much less drastically than we): the vast number of specialized disciplines, with the need for the autonomy of each, for principles and methods intrinsic to it alone. Kant, too, was directly concerned with the same problem of science (and in

the Introduction to Cr. of Pure Reason, takes some cracks at the muddling of the disciplines). One may, however, be over-strict in defining the resources of his medium. Poetry, for instance, being in words, can handle ideas as easily as pie, if it wants to. There is at least no strain on the medium here. (Perhaps we must here distinguish between the nature of the medium, in the Lessing sense, and the aims of particular school or esthetic doctrine, which may even want to deny itself some intrinsic aspects of the medium while trying to get a percentage of music, architecture, the graphic, etc. more easily got in other mediums.)

But maybe this is all offen the subjick. The trouble with letters is that one must carry out a direction without conversational hints when he is wrong. Maybe we're just in violent agreement?

K.B.

Addendum: Thought afterwards, how I must be on guard lest dialectical pressure get me into defending more than I would, or otherwise than I would. For instance, my primary interest is linguistic rather than philosophical. Or rather though my approach to the poet's expression may not be quite what the poet would have it be, the divergence is not flatly that btw. "poetry" and "philosophy" (which, though they have often been allied, and quite seem so to me, today seem generally at odds to most, who would perhaps allocate

concepts to science, images to poetry, and ideas to philosophy--and the images, along Kantian lines, wd. be taken as nearer to science than to the ideas of philosophy, since they would involve "intuitions of sensibility," which Kant also includes, along with "concepts of the understanding," in the materials that form the basis of experience in empirical science; though the other day, reading an essay by Hazlitt, I came across "ideas of the imagination," which would draw the lines quite differently, nearer perhaps to the way Coleridge would have drawn them). However, coming up from that dive, let's get back to the simple beginning: whereas a linguistic interest in poetry may differ somewhat from the poet's own interest in it, such an interest does not attempt to find "meaning" in the restricted sense of the term. It begins with the poem as act rather than as a proposition; it recognizes that the image can state an attitude (hence, can be the lyrical substitute for an act); and, since ideas are also involved in action, in the practical or moral realm, it recognizes that an image may, in some roundabout way, serve as substitute for an idea. One of my main interests in Roethke's work, for instance, is in my lurking for things of this sort. (The strongly tonal nature of his poems also encourages me to believe that I may legitimately look for unconscious puns, as were he to say "voices" for "vices," or at least have

"vices" as a subsidiary meaning in "voices." The substitutions, of course, would be allowable only if they can better account for the entire development, or structure, which they sometimes do, I think.)

I am quite sympathetic with the aims here. They correspond, I think, to the way of teaching expression in dance: "Try to gesture good-bye without waving your hand," "Try to show anger without curling your lip," etc. But there are many other things going on here; and above all, there is the tendency to make images as abstract as the ideas they are avoiding. Sometimes this happens too. Blackmur wrote one really important piece: his analysis of the imagery in Cummings.⁵ He was, as I understand him, there concerned with something of this sort.

As for the other problem: the problem of getting an expression that maturely encompasses the modern scene, and permits of sustained, organic development in the monumentalizing of such a statement, I can't see how it can be done in any way except along Virgilian lines. The esthetic of youth, or of dream-sincerity in its purity, etc., may be able to meet these tests but at least it hasn't done so. It is free to go and do so. Nobody is stopping it. I think it is being stopped, not by "philosophy," but by the fact that the esthetic itself does not, intrinsically, allow

for such possibilities. But the proof is in the doing;
poetry is as poetry does.

K.B.

[P] [Rutherford]

Tuesday [February 4, 1947]

Hat and coat--and scarf on at my
desk (just took off my hat and
changed my glasses) all set to go
out on calls: 3.30 p.m.

Dear Ken,

I welcome your philosophy more than I could ever
welcome philosophy. One of my difficulties (generally
speaking) is that I do not understand your terms since I am
not skilled in them. BUT since I do not find it necessary to
bother about your terms and have to do the best I can with
you (and them) to keep up my end (and in my own defence) I
throw them out the window.

But I think I can turn your own logic against you when
I say that logically, Reich is unassailable. It is only in
the practical application of his principles that he can be
attacked: in an illogical world all logic is suspect.

Your trilogy, with him, is a four part affair: WORK,
TENSION, ORGASM, RELAXATION. The function of the orgasm is
not nookie, not pleasure but the (the words fail me)

summation, the recurring assertion of the psycho-somatic individual as one, as a whole. It resynthesizes (at its best) the at-loose-ends man into the individual. It also charges his organs with an equivalent of electrical energy in a very real manner.

It also as it "recreates" the man, theoretically makes him want to assume responsibility (since his world is completed in that cycle--that's what he knows).

In other words he does not have to ask someone else (the politician) to lend him something, to "grant" him equality with others. He does not need a Furer, a Duce. Those bastards can only practice their arts on an incomplete man (robbed by the cute bankers, by the nifty systems by which men are always robbed) therefore no politicians.

HOWEVER I do see Coleridge's contention (that's all it is) that war does actually lead to science and science to freedom, etc., etc., round and round inside the cage.

(Gotta go.)

Note: Stan Meusel could talk easier with some champion of pelotta, I think, than with some fifth rate ball player. Aristotle must 'a bin good. I agree with him.

Note: All I say in this line sounds like crap to me, inexperienced babbling, fiddling with the keys of a piano when all I can do is play the violin--but if you want it...I don't know how to express myself well.

By the way I have been realizing recently that a man can think without words. I know perfectly well what I want to say but I don't have the words to say it. I have always felt that in an argument the expert has an unfair advantage over the unskilled. Unfair is the word that I want to emphasize.

(to continue)

Thus as between logic and a poem that appeals to men (as a poet) as new, an innovation, an invention in my scheme of things, even tho' illogical (unacademic!) I take the poem.

Reich can say, in my scheme of things sexual completion removes the need for wars but work is essential. That would answer Coleridge if "work" is taken for "war". But War, in Reich's sense, would be illogical, wasteful, a superfluity--pathological--a diversion of the sense.

The orgasm is (in Reich's scheme) however essential and he is planning to prove by quantitative measurements of the discharge, discharge of biologic energy quotients, an identity with the life process itself.

(to go back to your letter)

Each of us by skill in technique wishes to gain himself freedom in his field and does do so to a limited extent. For

myself I want to "escape" those who press too hard on me everywhere and I seek to develop my own resources, my own "property" of ability in poetry beyond the possibility of being overtaken by anyone else: as I believe.

Let me tell you a little story: Auden came to the party given by Bonnie Golightly for me last December.⁶ He was very polite but quite friendly in his manner. He, quite unsolicited, even went so far as to give me his New York address. I was pleased since I recognize him to be skilfull in his field--more skilfull than I am though I feel not the slightest jealousy toward him (as I do toward Eliot whom I despise as a liar and a [successful] faker.) But to go on about Auden. I had an idea one morning shortly after our party, an idea concerning poetry in our day. It was this: that four or five men, "master" poets such as Auden and myself might profitably get together here, at my house, over a week-end to discuss the technical advances that had been made in the writing of poetry in modern times. I have several theories that seem sound to me and I believed that others, competent poets, had other theories or ideas to contribute.

I told Auden that, avoiding a discussion of technique, which is each man's private affair, but keeping ourselves to technical matters we might be in a position to advance the writing of poems twenty years in our time. My feeling was

that by this we could avoid all the amateurishness of the usual poetry magazines, cut out the empty "criticism" that such magazines deal in (especially Poetry) completely sidetrack metaphysics, philosophy and all such side issues and get down to brass tacks, to the skilfull making of poems. Reams of incompetencies could be wiped out in a day and some sort of basis for a true criticism of poems as technical constructions could be arrived at.

I suggested that we take five texts for study: Milton's "Agonistes" (because of the amazing technical skill with which his choruses are made there), one or more of Pound's Cantos (because of some technical phenomena I wanted to point out there), Eliot's Quartets (for technical reasons) and Breton's "Young Cherrytrees Protected against Hares" (in French and English) to show how ideas, "advanced" ideas can be negated by formal poetic treatment--I have forgot the other text.

Auden never replied. I wrote twice. No answer.

I thought of you as one of the group--even tho' you are a professional philosopher.

Chas. Abbot, when I told him about this said that Auden was probably scared out by my desire to have 5 men there.⁷ If I had offered to discuss the question alone with him he would probably have accepted the bid. Auden is covertly very shy, says Abbot. I can't understand it.

You see, we've got to step up our argument to a higher field if you and I are to agree, to a field where poetry and philosophy will merge. I don't think that field is logic, not ordinary logic which applies to a much smaller field. We've got to get up somewhere where "the life," not just life, is paramount. I can't bother with the internal arrangements of philosophy within its own sphere which are your bread and butter--and caviare. I am too deeply concerned with the field of poetry which, I believe, offers unguessed opportunities--opportunities such as Mozart realised in music. I think poetry has a technical future which old fumbling Bridges only "goosed".⁸ It is blocked by ordinary thinking and by all metaphysics: Eliot to me is a traitor, a backslider, a weakling who has evaded the really thrilling possibilities of the art or the science if you prefer.

With this in mind I don't give a damn what the philosophers say about my meaning, my "beautiful" or otherwise body of thought. I want to think as well as I can but that isn't the point: the point is HOW am I to embody that thought in the technical matrix of the poem, how NEW to embody ANY thought in the INVENTION of the poetical body alive! For only by invention IS the body of poetry kept alive.

By the way, we have a new 12 tube Magnavox Radio. It's a beauty. I made some records of my reading at the Library of Congress two years or more ago.^{XX} I wasn't prepared for it but did my best. When I heard the records at first I was sick, they have been on a shelf in a back room ever since. But on Sunday, urged by a friend, I brought them out and tried them on our new machine. They knocked me over. I have never heard such recordings. Not that I was good, I wasn't but these records on this new machine are extraordinary. You've got to hear them some time.

Well, Ken (I never did go back to your letter) come at me again--and again if you care to. I am interested and interested in what you want to know that I can help you with.

Reich does not touch morals, he specifically says he is not concerned with morals. Just recently I have seen in an English periodical an indirect reference to Reich's work. The critic or poet or whoever he was said that man might be generated by a spark from the sun (Reich's biological energy which he has recovered from sand and which, he says, makes the sky blue!) but that his responsibility, his moral responsibility, still remains to be explained.

No, you can't lay every dame who presents herself. But, Geezus! if you're not neurotic you won't (we hope) want to. And then, again, it may be that the dame will invite you.

(We're not talking about the present day world, the present day world is almost entirely neurotic in its make-up; we're talking of a biologically functioning world in which relationships between the sexes are uninhibited by "property" let us say.)

Naturally I can see whole areas of disagreement cropping up in your mind. But, Ken, your world, the world from which you are arguing is, in Reich's sense, largely pathological.

AND FOR THE LOVE OF GOD DON'T MAKE ME OUT A PROPHET FOR REICH. I am merely presenting something that interested and satisfied something in me as best I am able to present it. It rooted a neurotic slant of thought dealing with suicide clean out of my head. Suicide is not only a stupidity but a non-entity if you once realize what the new physical conception of the universe is likely to be. Life is so far more important, astronomically, than anything to me but poetry, that I am thoroughly humbled in one (personal) sense and raised to an infinity in another.

Yours,

Bill

P.S. As to the analogy between philosophy and the editorial page of the newspaper, that's crap. Philosophy is a serious adversary, on a serious (intellectual) basis, the

newspaper editorial page is only serious in its practical effect, not intellectually. It is just a breakdown of the presses (figuratively), has no effect on the mind whereas philosophy teases and diverts the mind, the good mind, from the poetic problems, failures and successes.

Here, enclosed, is a letter received in the same mail with yours, also attacking my position (not me). It is from the boys, avowedly homosexual, at Cummington school.⁹ I like them and approve of them but they both disliked, violently, my editorial printed in the Williams issue of the Briarcliff Q. which if you haven't seen it write at once to Normal Maccloud and get it--it will be a rare item in a few months.¹⁰

Please return the enclosed letter.

Bill

[P]

[Andover]

February 7, 1947

Dear Bill,

You're a hard guy to race with, for you start running before the gun goes off, and in any old direction. But at last methinks we're beginning to get somewhere (in the great problem: How to find out what Reich says in his wonderful book?).

You have now got down to four key terms. (That, incidentally, is what I always find myself looking for, in poets as well as peasants: key terms.) Work, tension, orgasm, relaxation. They are, I gather, a series, or cycle: Work leads to tension; tension leads to the need of orgasm; the orgasm, when it comes, brings relaxation; and relaxation is the condition for new work. Is that the line-up? Work might start getting more out of tension (effort is more stimulated by a condition of hunger quite as it requires a prior gratification to provide the energy!)

I'd like to stop at that, saying no more until I get your answer: one move in each letter, like playing a game of chess by mail.

Or are they aligned, rather, in a proportion, thus: Work is to relaxation as tension is to orgasm. That is, might we really have but two terms here, operating on two different levels? For instance, if we thought of some generalized, formal process, like "building-up" and "letting down," might we say that human experience shuttles back and forth between these two, first "building-up" in either the reproductive order or the productive order, and then "letting-down" in either the reproductive order or the productive order. And if you don't properly complete this process on the one level, (the physical or "reproductive"

level) you are not "freed" to complete it on the symbolic level (the "productive" level).

Or is there still some other arrangement among the terms? Or does the arrangement shift in the course of the book (a dialectical resource that is often resorted to, consciously or unconsciously).

So, how about, for our next step, you're telling me just what the relation among the four terms is? And then also, what the relation btw. work and property is? And then, finally, how the division of labor (making for fragmentary jobs rather than complete jobs) lines up with the ideal of relaxation. I had assumed myself that modern man usually sought relaxation vicariously, via the "amusement industry," because the work itself was not a complete act, hence would not allow for gratification in its own terms. And I took the great stress upon sex ("Love Among the Machines") to be a compensatory striving, an attempt, albeit a frustrated attempt, to find in the sexual orgasm the kinds of fulfillment that could not possibly be got in typical modern work (on the assembly line) or typical modern leisure (subsidized unemployment).

As for the place of politicians in this line-up: I took them to be a necessary adjunct of this same specialization, or extreme division of labor. Specialists in political coordination are an integral part of a specialized culture.

I took this for granted. But of course the whole business might be lined up differently. I then merely ask: How?

My own notion is that liberalism (which grows out of specialization as well as out of money), must always stumble upon the principle of interference (which, however it may be in itself the cause of neurosis, is necessary to the world as a going concern, hence also helps to prevent neurosis). And since this principle is usually, in our society, or in any society for that matter, strongly embodied in political government, the politico takes the rap for a lot that is not his fault at all. And, ironically, the entire misunderstanding of his place in a dislocated business structure can in itself be a major cause of his corruption. As even Thurman Arnold pointed out, many normal necessities of administration in our society are still defined only in terms of corruption.¹¹ "Horse-trading", for instance, is a political necessity in our society, yet is looked upon as something that a truly honest man would not descend to. Think of how much finagling, in the privacy of his study, the poet does with his text; this is taken as normal and proper; yet when the politician, in a goldfish bowl, shifts his opinions, alliances, tactics (in other words, does in the political medium the same kind of revision that the poet does in the literary medium) his ways are treated as mere shiftiness, corruption, lack of principle, etc. God knows,

there is a lot of corruption in politics; but part of the blame can be laid to the naively anarchistic frame in which haphazard liberalism (à la down-with-philosophy, up with mood-fellow stuff) considers this entire problem. I can't say that I know a great deal about medieval philosophers; but what I do know makes me realize how much more civilized they were than their detractors. They began by recognizing the sort of necessities it takes to run a world. (And some of the most "intellectualistic" of them, incidentally, could write powerful poetry.)

...our interest in Reich--as aspect of criticism, or philosophy (a terminology of motives). My interest in medicine generally is of this sort...his clinical views as aspect of criticism. Also, as aspect of dialectic (as all philosophy of criticism or terminology is). Hence, our interest in his key terms, and their relations, and the resources and embarrassments indigenous to them.

Our idea of teaching philosophy:

Get key terms, then speculate as to the various ways they may be manipulated. This along with noting the particular way in which the given writer manipulates them. This method (a) enables one to call the plays, (b) enables one to see limitations of a given use, (c) enables one to see how other terms shd. be spawned and spun (or are spawned and spun).

[P]

[Rutherford]

2/7/47

Dear Ken,

The trouble as between me and the "placed" critics is that they think I am fooling or rambling or at best uninformed. To put it in its "academic" light: ignorant. I am ignorant but only of inessentials, I haven't had time in my life to bother too much with them.

But I am neither uninformed nor unguided in the essential matters that concern me as a poet. Rather the others are infants to me and the more so because of their "training", their learning (which has taken so much of their time).

To me they are freshmen who because of irrelevant learning think themselves competent to write a poem. They know very little of the difficulties involved, deal only crudely with the materials and have let themselves be led astray by their faulty approach to a very difficult subject.

Not that the approaches are difficult to me. As between a squirrel and a fox-hound the matter of trees as compared with fields presents, to each, diametrically opposed facets: a dog cannot run up and down a tree. But to the squirrel it is very easy. It is my one "natural" field of endeavor, I do not overlook the modes of approach, the cylindrical and perpendicular nature of my racetrack. At least it is all the

safety I have, they are unlikely to catch me there--from what I have observed.

Here's more "logic": The skilled physician examines his patient very carefully. Every sign indicates an acutely inflamed appendix. Does he refuse to operate? Certainly not. He follows the logic of the matter and opens the patient up. The appendix is normal. So what, so what for logic--in the field in which we are investigating? In a vacuum he acts logically. Actually he acts illogically.

W.

[P] [Rutherford]

[1947]

Dear Ken,

We seem to get on much better by the indirect rather than the direct approach. What you reveal in your letter over the Reich book is to me thrilling in the extreme, it seems to state or does state what seems to be the basic reason for our interest, our sustained interest in each other which has never been explicit--a desire on both our parts to find some basis for avoiding the tyranny of the symbolic without sacrificing fullness of imagery.

You know the dead serious sort who know nothing of the symbolic. Or is there such a sort which does not postpone its heaven to another world--the deadliest symbolism of all?

My whole intent, in my life, has been as with you to find a basis (in poetry, in my case) for the actual. It isn't a difficult problem to solve theoretically. All one has to do is to discover new laws of the metric and use them. That's objective enough and little different from the practical deductions of an Edison. The difficulty lies in the practice.

For myself I reject almost all poetry as at present written, including my own. I see tendencies, nodes of activity [obviously intentional], here and there but no clear synthesis. I am trying in Paterson to work out the problems of a new prosody--but I am doing it by writing poetry rather than by "logic" which might castrate me since I have no ability in that medium (of logic). There is no reason, besides, why I should do otherwise than I am doing. That is, if I succeed, the effect will be the same no matter what the approach.

Well, I'm glad you can use the Reich material. Best of luck to you--your letter was a revelation.

Sincerely,

Bill

[P]

[Andover]

February 14, 1947.

Dear Bill,

Dawlink, be my valentine.

Came home from Babylon yesterday (where I had two teeth gouged out, and I mean gouged), to find your cry from the desert. All night long, half asleep, half awake, while the outraged jaw growled, I kept answering you. So now, alas, by the accidents of history, your letter has become equated, for me, with an irritating pain in the pain-receiver.

But by all means, let's consider the Reich Case settled, or at least indefinitely postponed. Since you refuse to tell me what Reich says, and refuse to lend me the book, there's nothing to do but wait until I get a less ill-starred opportunity to improve the mind on this sumjick.

Having been signed up to give a talk on "Ideology and Myth" at school next term, and having become more and more interested in the notion that Virgil (rather than the Greeks or the various primitives) might be nearest prototype to our situation in past poesy, I used some of my time, before the brutal professional attack, to go through J.W. Mackail's little book ("Virgil and His meaning for the World of Today").¹² If you ever happen to see it, I wish you'd take a glance at pages 74-76, and tell me how they struck you. He here lists twelve important "motives" (Mackail's term) which figured in the Aeneid (presenting them, not so much as accomplishments, but rather as problems-to-be-met, though the assumption is that the problems were met handsomely).

His chapters on the Bucolics and Georgics are also worth looking at, particularly if you can imagine the academic idiom translated into a somewhat nimbler equivalent. My point about Excavation Man is treated, with regard to the strong archaeological interest, derived from the Alexandrian schools. (Virgil's treatment of the gods is interesting because, like the typical educated Roman, he did not literally believe in them, yet they had a positive stylistic function.) The political rhetorical awareness was highly developed, along with the pure poetry of man and nature. All told, a combination considering--and it is, of course, the sort of thing I immediately think of, when you would scare me with that "hands off!" admonition, warning villainous me to unhand the naive virgin. The Georgics were actually written, among other things, to popularize a back-to-the-land movement among the upper classes. To be reminded of such things is especially good for me this year, this being Rhetoric Year in my project.¹³

My one real disgruntlement with you is this: You seem to assume that my method of analysing books is "academic." I can agree with this only if you will, at the same time, be willing to recognize that our schools now are not academic.

You made a confession about the Reich book; I'll make one about my own method. Some years ago, I suffered from a most damnable symptom. When I read certain words, I would

"hear" totally different words. I recognized the word as it was, but at the same time I "heard" this other one. And apparently this outlaw word would always be the same. (Though I know I had something here, I was really too frightened to encourage the dislocation by taking notes on it. Rather "waste" it, I thought, and try to kill it, than "cultivate" it, perhaps to my permanent confusion. But I do, in spite of my resolve, remember one such outlawry, such dissociate association: every time, in the newspaper, I read "industry," along with this word, I heard "insanity," just as clearly as though it had symptoms of the same sort: I would wake up in the night, for instance with the suddenness of a shot; some word had been spoken, and this word awoke me. And then something would occur which I can best suggest by calling it a zigzag flash of lightning. For of a sudden, spontaneously, I would remember a whole series of "connected" things (things that I had never before thought of as connected, or often things that I had not remembered at all, but that seemed "connected" from the standpoint of this "key" word that had awakened me). The zigzag might connect, for instance, something that had happened yesterday, something I had written in a review, something I had said in an argument or as a wisecrack, some hitherto unexplained response to another person, something out of my novel, something out of my childhood, etc. On these, too, I

started to take notes; and then I quit, because the symptom was increasing--so for months I resolutely refused to take a single note that thus occurred to me spontaneously, aside from the hours that I had deliberately assigned for my work.

Eventually, I got my life and myself straightened out somewhat. And finally I got far enough along to dare looking back at this period and studying it somewhat glancingly (like looking at the Gorgon's head, I found that I could look, without being turned to stone, so long as I looked indirectly, watching the process as reflected through the study of others' works, etc). So I developed a new modus vivendi (I am convinced that my high blood pressure had its psychogenic origins in the kinds of repression I had to use, or thought I had to use--but hell, an out-an-out physical symptom is so consolingly real, as compared with that damned jumpiness, that I could even make peace with it, use it, one might say, as a motive that helped me to a kind of resignation, or better let us say a cult of resignation, for it takes all the cult of resignation I can muster to keep me fairly even).

Anyhow, for better or worse, there was the start, in personal experience of all my concern with "equations," "clusters" of "key" terms, etc. (De Gourmont's essay on "The Dissociation of Ideas," which I had read many years before, was probably the start, so far as critical method is

concerned.)¹⁴ To build out the whole works, I have done what I could to develop an understanding of the purely formal, or dialectical, aspects of terms, as well. For a book is, at the very least, a set of words. And according to my notions, to understand it properly we must, at the very least, know what it is doing just as word. This accounts for my notion that, in order to call the plays in a given set of terms, we should first have clear ideas about the resources of these terms in general. Such knowledge, I feel, can help us better to place their use in particular. To study the particulars, one must trail through the zigzags (someday I shall publish my notes on Coleridge, showing how much zigzagging I did in the preparatory reading of his books). But at the same time, there are formal principles which these zigzags are embodying, so one tries to place the particulars with reference to these generalizations too.

For better or worse, I guess that is all I know. Perhaps I am a crank on this subject. But I believe that all our unnecessary turmoils are rooted in spontaneous "equations" that happen to draw the lines at the wrong place. You, for instance, seem to need to deny yourself certain areas of civilized literature which, whatever their excesses, can also be amenities (and with others who draw the lines differently, can be assimilated without distress). And you seem to need to call certain things "illogical"

which are not illogical at all. That example you gave about the physician who read the signs wrong, for instance, was no example of an illogical act. He was certainly being logical in interpreting the signs as he did; so much so that, if any sharper observer were able to draw a new line in one of the symptoms, showing how to distinguish between this symptom when it meant appendicitis and the slight modification of it when it didn't, this same diagnostician would have no difficulty at all (if the distinction were clear, methodical, and implemented) in adding it to his diagnostic methods. To read the signs in accordance with the best known methods for reading the signs is quite logical; it is also quite logical to be ready to recognize that we may not, for all situations, have all the distinctions necessary for the proper reading of the signs. It is beyond me to understand what cock-eyed mental medicine it is to you, to place such a matter in terms of the "illogical." An "illogical" element would enter, I think, if someone were able to propose the subtler discernment here, and to offer his demonstrations for it, and the physician were to refuse to listen, insisting upon his rights as a master of intuition, and denying that the mistaken diagnosis should be more closely studied at all.

My notion is that, if life is worth living, it is worth being meditated upon. That is, it is worth having "key

terms" for all the important motives in it (such as love, poetry, property, dreams, war, work and its problems, etc). It is worth our asking ourselves how all these things are or should be related to one another. And since such a line-up must be done by words, for both appreciative and admonitory purposes we should want to know how the nature of the words themselves may both favorably and unfavorably affect the line-up. I see no reason why anybody should, in principle at least, feel insulted or confined or sullied by even the mere attempt to study such matters.

As for poetry: in such an approach, I grant you, poetry would be but one department. (It would figure, not as poetry, but as poetics.)

And I further grant you that, in the last analysis, the test of poetry is in the writing. Poetry is as poetry does. In this sense, nobody has his foul hands on the pure virgin of poesy. You are free to write what you want. No critic can prevent the poet from writing the greatest poem in the world. All he has to do is write it. And that's his answer.

Hence, insofar as the poet wants to write poetry, there is no issue.

But suppose the poet begins to theorize about poetry? Suppose he wants to write about writing poetry? At that point, he falls into a new department. And suppose that (like Wallace Stevens in his Sewanee essay) his writing

about poetry happens, some 150 late, to have put forward strongly Kantian theories of poetry (as the entire Imagist movement is saturated with post-Kantian thought, I am coming to see with greater and greater clarity).¹⁵ Can the poet himself consciously or unconsciously build upon a philosopher's aesthetic, and then yipe "Hands off!" the moment one wants to discuss this statement as a philosophy of poetry?

But we could run around and around in this circle forever. So let's give it up, as hopeless. My conviction is that you are still trying to think of poetry, like Stevens, as a "virile young man," whereas you should now think of poetry as a "mellow old man." If you won't do this, you're just painting your face, like Von Aschenbach. And making yourself unnecessarily miserable, while denying us all the advantages of your own mature experiences. True, you're not as old as I am, by far. Working at a girls' school makes one feel as ancient as the Alleghanies (and as worn down). Yet you are surely confronting the same situation "in principle."

If you ever get a chance to look at those three pages on Virgil, please do. And please tell me how they struck

you. Among other things, your reaction to them might help enliven my scheduled talk.

Meanwhile, best greetings, good luck,

Sincerely,

K.B.

[P]

[Rutherford]

Feb. 25, 1947

Dear Ken,

At least we are in perfect agreement--or almost. I don't want to have to call you the philosopher of Andover but that aside nothing remains as an obstruction between us.

You see, the moment you drop logic, as an incentive, at least, to action, you become convincing. Instinctively you sent me the summary of Virgil's plan (an instinctive plan, no doubt) for the composition of a long poem. I am delighted, not to say thrilled by both the summary as you copied it out and your thoughtfulness in doing so and sending it to me.

But when, logically I suppose, you think I will be furious over the matter, plan and action, you are absurd.

I do not believe you think Virgil formulated any such preliminary plan as this before beginning composition in the Aeneid. He was an alert and intelligent citizen of his times and besides a gifted poet; he saw a need (he also saw words)

and must have felt a tremendous pleasure of anticipation. In composing the poem he felt an undoubted pleasure--of various sorts: sensual, sociological, historical identifications and so forth. He may at an outside guess have indulged in a bit of logical philandering--if he found the time for it in a dull moment! But that he set down a primary scheme and followed it I can't for a moment believe.

The thing is, Ken, and in this I am sure we perfectly agree, there are not many things we poor human bastards can do. Or shall I say there are not many approaches we have to our satisfactions and not one of them all is of any more worth than the other. We each of us do what we can. My approach, as a poet, is just as valid as your approach as a philosopher to whatever mass of material is presented to us to work with.

Now, Virgil having written a poem, someone comes along later (it could just as well be himself after the work is completed) and fools around in it like a squirrel in a box of birdseed for something he can use in his own economy. That's fine granted the beast knows that the seed was not put there for him--or he might get shot--oh well, let that pass. I only object to the philosopher when he tries in the making of poems to insert his dictum before the poet composes and would reject the poem before it is a poem, of words. His function, to the poet, except in a very general

way (important as it often is) comes after the poetic deed. For if the poet allows himself to fall into that trap (of listening too early to the philosopher) he will inevitably be of little use to the very philosopher himself as a field of investigation after he, as a poet, has completed his manoeuvres.

The nascent instincts are the feelers into new territory--even Einstein has recently acknowledged or stated that. Deductive reasoning is in the main useless to us today or if not useless at least secondary in value.

Yes, words. I accept your differentiation between a fact and a book or train of reasonings about those facts. The book is only a defence or reasoning in support of the findings. I know all that and as you must realize (having lived in the age of Gertrude Stein and Joyce) all that is primary to me also.

We, you and I, have nothing to quarrel about once we get by the simple beginnings (the universal activity of the mind--analysis is merely an adjunct to that). At that point we may begin to use each other at will--or perforce if you prefer. My whole contention, so far is that we keep separate in order to be of as much use to each other as possible--to penetrate separately into the jungle, each by his own modes, calling back and forth as we can in order to keep in touch for better uniting of our forces.

Do you know the story of the two French military officers conducting a column of infantry through the desert? It was a hell of a three day march in the broiling heat, with rebellious troops and heavy work to be done. One of the two officers in charge asked the other at daybreak of the third day: Are you going to march in the van today or the rear? I intend to take the opposite post or else I'll murder you.

Bill

Many thanks, really, for the bit you copied out for me. I may use it in the part of the Paterson I am working on now.¹⁶ Very helpful.

[B]

[Andover]

March 12, 1947

Dear Bill,

Glad you liked the Mackail cite.

But I'd be vastly grateful if you could hand on to me any remarks about the ways wherein you wd. accept, modify, or flatly reject its various clauses, as regards any analogous recipe for today. (I mean: assuming that a poet could do just exactly what he decided to do, what sort of corresponding "ideal pattern" might he set for himself now? Though I grant you that, in the working out, new things can be expected to turn up. "On s'engage, puis on voit.")

Fact is that I'm preparing a talk on Ideology and Myth. And I sent copies of the recipe to various types of correspondents. And am getting some interesting replies, which I intend to discuss somewhat in my talk. Anything you wanted to say (on ways in which the 12 points, ideally considered, would be a fit or a misfit with present conditions, the local scene) would be discussed either explicitly as statement by you, or anon., as you preferred.

At moment, am wondering what Caesar Augustus Tr-m-n is going to say to the Congress at one o'clock. In behalf of the pox Americana. Meanwhile, as ever, yours for the non-aggressive and non-expanding extension of the Monroe Doctrine to the Mediterranean, the Pacific, the North and South Poles, Iran, China, Korea, the Near East, the Moon, Jupiter, and Hell.

Sincerely,

K.B.

[P]

[Rutherford]

March 21, 1947

Dear Ken,

Exhibits 1 and 2. The oil pamphlet was an afterthought. The original intent was to have you see the Reflections on Poetry by Thomas Good. My own poems in the issue are

incidental. Please return the Poetry issue--the other you may chuck.

Also a justified criticism of Aiken's work by Julian Symons, something long overdue. The English do, at best, use their English well. But they also use it in the most atrocious manner ever permitted by God to an atresic world. They use the language to tie themselves into constipated knots in a way no American would ever fall into. It must be "convention" and much bastard reading (reading to avoid all freshness) that does that. Perhaps it is the uncompleted university product abetted by renegade Americans which causes that. Horrible, the rigors of death long overdue.

But the Thomas Good thing is well worthwhile pondering. I thought it might be of assistance to you.

Bill

[B]

[Andover]

June 11, 1947

Dear Bill,

Oof! Have been super-commuting. Schedule still calls for one more month of same. So I shall go on word-slinging, somehow. But wd. like to crawl into a hole with my notes for the Rhetoric, and grouch and glum them to completion, otherwise saying nothing but please pass the please pass the.

I have a gazette of yours, England's Poesy, which I shall send to you as soon as I get the proper sized envelope. Have been trying to send it back to you for something like four months now--and by God, I'll do it yet.

If you ever feel like sauntering out this way, do. Shall be here the rest of this week. Then schedule calls for return to Bennington until Friday (i.e., trekking thither next Monday, and back thither the following Friday, to be hic et nunc until the Monday thereafter).

Yours in behalf of all the new diseases.

Sincerely,

K.B.

[P] [Rutherford]

June 20, 1947

Dear Ken,

Going, next Saturday, to Utah, probably by Buick (1940), as hero of Writers Conference: or so the prospectus seems to indicate.¹⁷

If I return (or even get there) you may expect a report in August or later.

Meanwhile Paterson II has been completed--more or less--and sent to Laughlin for the printer. It contains the "prayer" you wanted me to write.¹⁸ Now you'll have to wait to see it--unless you want it before publication.

Life isn't sweet anymore but at times the garden
is--especially in the early morning: sometimes too in the
evening when the nicotianas are breathing hard.

Have been reading Saintsbury's Manual of English Prosody in preparation for bouts with Tate who will be also at Utah--so's not to be caught with my pants too far down on technical matters. It is a superb piece of work--and amazingly revolutionary in implication viz a viz our plight today following Whitman.

Yrs,

Bill

[P] [Rutherford]

Nov. 4/47

Dear Ken,

Love to come! for lunch. How about Friday the 14th? We'll get there by 11. Natch if it storms too violently we'll let Jove have his way and duck it. But you can pretty well count on it for all that. Say the word.

Last Friday, by the way, we drove out to Erwinna, Pa to see Josephine Herbst in her colonial house there.¹⁹ You know her? She's one of the best, has an old brownstone, sandstone farmhouse of the colonial period situated up a narrow valley just west of the Delaware. The rich have bought in all

around her but she has been able to stick it out for one unknown reason or another.

Jesus how it rained that day!

More when we see you.

Glad you wrote,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

November 7, 1947

Dear Ken,

Floss says, following the receipt of Libby's card: Why not Sunday?

Sooo! Sunday let it be--especially since I find that next Friday is taken. We'll try to get there by 11.30 at the latest.

Unfortunately I am in all probability too late for you to receive this before Monday. Thus, assuming it is now Monday. We really had a nice visit. It was a pleasure to discuss the personal, national and international situation with you and to hear your views on the relationship between abstract ideas and practical affairs which so often appear to be quite unrelated as the racoon washes its hands. The parallelism between poems and philosophy, as you said, is more fancied than real and lucky the man who realizes it before too late in his career. For as Pope objected in his

First Epistle Shakespeare is reprehensible in that he wrote for mercenary reasons and there's no use being too bedazzled by his, by either his fame or his accomplishments.

But assuming that this letter has arrived on Saturday as I hoped, we'll see you tomorrow. They say some person by the name of Morgan has besmeared me in the Sewanee Review.²⁰ Now ain't that too bad for Mr. Morgan, what a chance he missed to get in on the ground floor and praise me while yet there was time. St, st, st, st, st, st!

I hope that red headed woodpecker will be flinging himself back and forth from tree to tree on the approach to your farm as he was doing last year.

Sincerely,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Monday [November 10, 1947]

Boy! Here's one for a philosopher. See if you can follow it.

Yester was a bitch of a day--but contained its own cure (in the enclosed letter's delay).

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

November 9/47

11 A.M.

Dear Ken,

After fierce preparations "the work" and no car finally licked me. I presume that I am not as yet (if I shall ever be) inactive enough to command my own time and engines. The worst of it is I doubt that I can get away next Friday--and this is such a day that nothing would have pleased me more than to be out in the country visiting you and yours.

A maternity case, after I have sworn that I will take no more of them (but the human plea was too much for me) has had me on edge for three days. I love the woman and her Catholicism which I would not betray for any devil, so that I could not leave her in the middle of her 5th labor--a long drawn out inconclusive sort of process which had me puzzled.

12 Noon

The mechanic came in the middle of the last sentence. I had left my car on the curb (it cannot be geared in reverse) we started it in second, got it to his shop and found the shift-lever to be snapped off short. I could have used the car but with a loose piece of metal wobbling in my hand I didn't feel secure enough to take the chance. As soon as tomorrow comes he'll get me another lever, slip it in place and I'll be on the road again.

By the way, a use for a novel mechanical principle came up in the discussion: I asked him how he was going to get the loose end of the lever out from the housing where it lies. It's loose in there, he replied, we'll use a magnet. Thus sometimes in composition a little used means must be employed.

Next Friday Robert Lowell is coming up from Washington for a visit, he'll stay until Sunday when other guests also will arrive from New York.²¹ The following Sunday will be the 22nd. Would you be at home that day? For if you plan to be home that day I'd like to come then. And if we come it might be that I'd have my son and grandson with me instead of Floss or in addition to Floss.

I'm getting the records I made in Washington, so says Lowell, this week.²² You have a machine for them haven't you? When I finally come I'll bring them along. It is said that they are good, something of Paterson I as well as a section from the as yet unpublished Paterson II--which should be along pretty soon, they say the galleys will be returned to me or sent to me before Thanksgiving.

Thus ends another happy dream, I would so much have liked to have got out to see you today.

Any walnuts or butternuts lying around going to waste on the ground up there these days? Tell the kids to pick me

up a peck of them and I'll pay the usual market price or the prevalent market price for them.

Sincerely,

Bill

O yes, the baby, named Monaham, arrived very normally at 9:30 this morning. So that, after all my apprehensions of hydrocephalus or the necessity for an immediate transfusion, nothing happened but the tensions within myself. I could even have kept my date with you had it not been for the disabled car.

[P]

[Rutherford]

Christmas

is here [1947]

Dear Ken,

Quite so, quite so. Room enough for both. Thanks for copying out my lovely sentence, I wanted to see it again. Your comments, continued, might make fine reading if done at length in the manner of Mozart or Bach or whoever it was that would write variations on a theme. Really quite wonderful even as it is. I enjoy your achromatic lens.

Whenever you write the thing you want me to see, send it on.

The book is, as usual, delayed. With me it seems always the same: obstetrics one way or the other and always difficult deliveries.

So I say, let us die talking, do I? Go ahead and die then if you think it's so damned smart. People talk about death as if they know somebody who had died. [The following was crossed out: But I guess it's only because they're dead themselves. After all there is no master but experience. But as to the nature of talk.] Ah, I am at one with you there, my deah boy. Talk might even convince a virgin that she is ready to cast her light into the dark heart of ye poet. And when this happens, America will be cut open and found to be full of mushrooms. [The following was crossed out: Yes, I am one of these, i.e. Mushrooms. Talk is not the drip it is for, it is a drip that may not be a drip but the trip of ye jazz, quite right. Nebuchadnezzar--blaaaa. But TOMORROW--GL00000000ORY--000000000000]

Meanwhile see if you do not like my interpretation of the Apollo.

What shit I really do spit.

Spit

Spit

Oh. Ah

at last

a poem

Yours truly,

William Carlos Williams

Order is heaven's first law

(Order is heaven's first law)²³

Tweet tweet

After this, I really cannot bring myself to send you the
poem questions.

Notes for 1947

¹ Frederic Wertham, "Calling all Couriers," rev. of The Mass Psychology of Fascism, by Wilhelm Reich, New Republic, 2 December 1946: 734-37. A portion of the review is given over to Reich's The Function of the Orgasm.

² See note 8 for 1945.

³ Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1945).

⁴ James Donald Adams (1891-1968), The Shape of Books to Come (New York: Viking Press, 1944).

⁵ Richard P. Blackmur (1904-1965): Princeton professor and critic.

⁶ Bonnie Golightly owned the Washington Square Bookstore in New York. The cause for the celebration was the Williams' issue of the Briarcliff Quarterly (Laughlin 132).

⁷ See note 7 for 1946.

⁸ Robert Bridges (1844-1930). Williams was very taken with Bridge's essay "Testament to Beauty," but he felt that Bridges had fallen short of achieving his aim (Mariani 547).

⁹ Harry Duncan and Paul Wightman Williams (the "Cummington lassies") ran the Cummington Press, located in Cummington, Massachusetts. They published The Wedge (1944) and The Clouds, Aigeltinge, Russia, &c. (1948).

¹⁰ Norman McLeod, married to Vivienne Koch, was the Editorial and Publication Director of The Briarcliff Quarterly. The name of Williams' article was "Literary Intelligence" (205-208).

¹¹ Thurman Wesley Arnold (1891-1969) published several works on government and economics: The Symbols of Government (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1935), The Folklore of Capitalism (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1937), The Bottlenecks of Business (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1940).

¹² John William Mackail, Virgil and His Meaning to the World of Today (Boston: Marshal Jones Co., 1922). Burke used the passage to which he refers in his "Poetics in Particular, Language in General" chapter of Language as Symbolic Action (Berkeley: U. of California Press 1966): 36-37. Interestingly, the passage he does cite seems strikingly appropriate for Williams' project and may have been the selection he sent him:

The work must be a national poem.... It must establish and vindicate the vital interconnection of Rome and Italy.... It must link up Rome and the new

nation to the Greek civilization.... It must bring well into the foreground of the picture the historic conflict between Rome and Carthage.... It must celebrate the feats of heroes.... It must find expression for the romantic spirit, in its two principal fields of love and adventure.... It must exalt the new regime.(37)

¹³ Burke is referring to his Rhetoric of Motives to be published in 1950.

¹⁴ Remy De Gourmont (1858-1915), Dissociations (Paris: Editions du Siecle, 1925).

¹⁵ Wallace Stevens, "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet," Sewanee Review, 52 (1944): 493-529. Stevens' essay is the third part of a three-part symposium: "Entretiens De Pontigny: 1943".

¹⁶ Book II of Paterson was published in 1947.

¹⁷ Flossie, her sister Charlotte, and Williams drove out to Salt Lake City Utah where he was paid \$500 for his presence at a writers' conference hosted by the University of Utah, July 7 to 18, 1947 (Laughlin 141).

¹⁸ The prayer in Book II begins: "If there is subtlety,/you are subtle. I beg your indulgence." Paterson (New York: New Directions, 1963): 92.

¹⁹ Josephine Herbst (1892-1969).

Jo and he [husband John Herrmann] put down what cash they had on a small, seventeenth-century sandstone farmhouse nestling in a narrow valley near Erwinna, Pennsylvania, just over the Delaware from Frenchtown, N.J. An old covered bridge spanned the river at that point at one time, but such idyllic things can't last in our day....They'd grow their own vegetables, live cheap, do their own work (o shades of Kenneth Burke), be, in short, the new peasant. Autobiography 269-70)

- 20 Frederick Morgan. "William Carlos Williams: Imagery, Rhythm, Form", Sewanee Review 55 (1947): 675-690.

A poet who deprives himself of meter as well as of the full resources of imagery finds his range of expression severely limited.(690)

- 21 Robert Lowell (1917-1977). Lowell wrote an appreciative essay on Patterson I: "Thomas, Bishop, and Williams," 55 Sewanee Review (Summer 1947): 493-503. This essay caused Williams to begin a correspondence and friendship with Lowell.

- 22 On 5 May 1945, Williams recorded forty-nine poems on acetate discs (Wallace 259). Lowell, as the consultant in poetry for the Library of Congress, was having the recordings made for the Library (Mariani 550). Interestingly, Lowell attempted to pass on his position as consultant to Williams, but Williams' bad health prevented it (Laughlin 151).

- 23 See note 1 for 1922.

1948

[P]

[Rutherford]

May 10, 1948

Dear Ken,

Various things have happened since you were south, among them an illness, a prize and an engagement to attend a literary conference this July in Seattle.¹

For the latter I've prepared a ponderous essay which if you care to have it so I'd like to consult you about. No need to feel obligated in any way: if it would amuse or interest you to glance over my fumblings, well and good; if not--the top o' the marnin' to ye. I could mail you the carbons, running to about 50 pages, then, at your convenience, drive down or up to see you for a pow wow.

What I should like, specifically, would be to have you line up my echelons a little better than I have them, make a sharper line between my strategy and my tactics and--blue pencil the script up as you may see fit. In other words, as the seniors at various colleges continue to write to me, you write my thesis.

Por favor.

My ticker gave out. I was on my back for 5 weeks--wondering, much of the time, whether the cobweb above me contained a live or dead spider. I found, as soon as I

could wield a broom-handle that the speck I was looking at was a dead mosquito, a Tu-an-kamen of his world. I insisted that he be not removed until I was well enough to investigate his state in person.

The prize, which is to be bestowed upon me the 21st by the Institute of Arts and Letters is the Loines Award or, as Allen Tate puts it, 1000 dollars.

I attacked your Grammar of Motives again while in bed and made some progress but have not yet finished it. I look to it, however, as a guide where it sits enthroned in my thoughts--literally. I hope the winter in the south was fruitful for you, the winter here was unspeakable--no doubt it was the direct cause of my downfall. I'm better.

A book of new poems (containing--"At Kenneth Burke's Place") is being set up by Wells College and Cummington Press jointly.² It shd be out by early fall--or sooner. Other things are on the road, Paterson III among them. The last play is being printed (not performed, alas!)³

Best all around,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

May 13, 1948

Dear Ken,

No use pretending I can go south next winter. I gotta work--unless I should break down again which I hope won't take place. Or if I go south it will be for no more than a couple of weeks during the worst of the snow--which finished me this time. But I believe, with Bill here, I'll be able to go along working for awhile yet or until he gets well established.⁴ But next winter won't be the time for me to quit.

My "discourse" enclosed. Maybe you can "think out" some of my leads and help me align them better than I have been able to do by myself--unless you want to junk the whole business. Don't do that!!!

We'll take a run up for a dose of pertinent questions after another couple of weeks.

You are quoted more and more as time goes on--present by Bently, by Fergusson and others.⁵ More power to you. I'll get this famous book read before the other is out and then go on to that.

My profound admiration is yours for what you have done and are doing. Please do not let vague if virulent doubts (and certainties) as to the brains of newspaper-men and their bosses spoil your sleep.

I go on writing. I'll bring Paterson II with me when I come.

Best,

Bill

[P] [Rutherford]

May 27, 1948

If rain there be

Think not of me

But day be fine

We'll come to dine

Most happy we

For such a spree

[From Williams]

[P] [Rutherford]

May 30, [1948]

Dear Ken,

11 A.M., our theoretical starting time: it's raining so the trip is out. Is there any particular moment more favorable than another for me to see you next week? What about next Friday, if other day lacks?

(That's as far as I got. For the rain stopped, we had lunch and at the last moment Bill and I decided to chance the trip--as you know.)

It was nice to see you all again and to sit and talk. After Bill gets through with his State Board exams we'll have to drop in on you for another set to.

Thanks for looking over the script of my talk.⁶ You didn't have a great deal to say about it but I presume that to be more or less approval, that is, general approval of the writing as something that could be listened to without embarrassment. That in fact is what you implied. I propose then to start at the beginning and let fly. When I feel that the moment has come for a pause I'll pause--watching the clock. At the end of an hour I'll blow the whistle and stop.

It was a pleasure to talk with Mrs. ? "Granny", your wife's mother. Do they make women like that any more? Or do they get that way only with time, especially after their husbands, God pity them! have died? I liked your unmarried daughter too. And the turtle!

How many lovely things that bomb is going to blast!

Bill

[P]

June 1, 1948

Humphrey Clinker down and is the novel whose name I couldn't recall. Now I'll take on Moll Flanders.

Bill

[B]

[Andover]

June 9, 1948

Dear Bill,

I guess it's my age. Some years ago, I'd have told you how to write your poems. Now I even hesitate to neb in a gent's work when he's more or less muscling in on my own racket. I tend to say to my honorable self: Hell, he's getting something said his way; if you persuade him to bring in other things, maybe he'll just be neutralized and get nothing said.

Your essay sounded like a good act. I could even see where you cunningly laid plans for some of your most winsome spontaneous boyish effects. (Spontaneous! You old whore!)

Main thing that bothered me, only thing in fact, was this:

You seem to put it all down too much to a matter of Rhythm. For the whole story, I'd like to see you decide just how many ingredients there are in the recipe for a poem. (As Old Ipse Dixit picked the Plot, Character, Thought, Diction, Spectacle, Melody batch to name the elements of Tragedy.⁷) When you talk of the Foot, you obviously mean a lot more than the book on versification does (including, I suspect, some double entendres that might best be revealed by psychoanalysis on the foot as phallus). For a complete

critical job, I'd like to see you separate out all the components lurking in your term, and discuss each in turn.

On the other hand, your method is more like one of your own poems. You talk about one thing, leaving other unmentioned things flitting about the edges, to provide resonance. The method works. So what the hell? But to me, your essay was closer to an imagistic poem than to "total" criticism.

You know what I wish you'd do, at least for heuristic purposes? I wish you'd try writing a poem, as fast as you can, on Rhythm and the Foot. Or the New Rhythm, the New Foot, etc. Including your doctrine of the stress upon Change. Knock it off at top speed. And send me a copy of it. I'd really be tremendously interested in seeing it. (For I still hope to do a really thorough analysis of your work, from the standpoint of my elucidations on Motives. As soon as I get through the Rhetoric, I shall then be free to concern myself wholly with the Poetic and Symbolic matters that delight me most--the stuff for Vol. III--and my thoughts on the Rutherford Cricket-eater shd. go there, along with, among other things, my notes on Ted Roethke, who is, at the moment, I suppose, sulking in his tent because I haven't yet written on his new book.)⁸ My notion is that, if you slapped down such a poem, and then began to take it apart, you'd find very quickly what other elements besides

feet, in the versifier's sense, are in the same package with your ideas on Rhythm.

Meanwhile, I am much interested in your project for a list of poetic "Devices." (At the moment, in my Rhetoric, I am writing a list of what I call rhetorical "Devices," with illustrations of each--a kind of "post-Aristotelian" list, for God knows his batch in his Rhetoric certainly cleaned up all the metropolitan districts, leaving only marginal farms for us.) Don't you think that Yvor Winters (the stinker) proposes a few of them in that essay of his written atop my theory of form in Counter-Statement? (The Winters' essay is reprinted in Schorer-Miles Anthology of Criticism recently published by Harcourt-Brace.) At least, you might look at those, and if you don't agree that they are Devices in your sense, you could get some added precisions by deciding just exactly why they are not. (The great trick in our racket is that you can use anything, if you merely learn to shift among "therefore," "and," and "however.")

Glad you turned up. Sorry you didn't turn up for longer. Hope you'll turn up again.

Meanwhile, back to the grind.

Sincerely,

K.B.

[P]

[Rutherford]

August 9, 1948

Dear Libby,

I don't know whether or not I wrote you last week. If I did then this will be a second letter--to say the same thing. But I do want you to get one or both of the letters.

We couldn't come that Sunday. I had just returned from Seattle and what with the office a shambles, the carpenters, painters, plumbers having done their worst--Bill at the hospital working up his future duties there.

I don't know when we'll be able to come. Paul and his family are on vacation visiting in New England (costs less to visit than to do something else).

The trip west by train was an eyeopener--saw much that this beast, man, has devastated. The brainlessness of the entrepreneur was never so forcibly jammed down my gullet. He is no different today, he merely has better lawyers (tell that to Kenneth--that the lawyers will be the main ones to read his works to turn them against the public. That ought to put him into the abyss for years on end).

All that remains to us is the barren mountains, the sea the sky and--lots of weather.

So there you are. Best (what's best) to all.

Bill

Notes for 1948

¹ In February, while shoveling his car out of a snow drift, Williams experienced pains in his chest that were subsequently diagnosed as "anterior thrombosis" (Mariani 556). The National Institute of Arts and Letters awarded Williams the Russell Loines Award for Poetry. In August, Williams gave an address at the University of Washington in Seattle (Autobiography 370).

² William Carlos Williams, The Clouds, Aigeltinger, Russia, & (Cummington, MA: Wells College & Cummington Press, 1948).

³ William Carlos Williams, Many Loves and Others Plays (New York: New Directions, 1961). The Cure, included in this volume, is the play to which Williams refers.

⁴ In the summer of 1948, Williams' son, Bill, began to take over his father's practice at 9 Ridge Rd.

⁵ Arthur Fisher Bentley (1870-1957) social psychologist, author of Relativity in Man and Society (New York: Putnam and Sons, 1926).

⁶ This may have been the address Williams was preparing for the Seattle Conference: "The Poem as a Field of Action" (Mariani 563).

⁷"Old Ipse Dixit": Aristotle.

⁸ Theodore Roethke (1908-1963), The Lost Son and Other Poems, (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1948). Burke met Roethke at Bennington where they were both teaching, and he recommended the six-foot tall poet to Yaddo (Jay 276). Williams stopped by Bennington on his way home from a journey to Cummington (Mariani 493). As an illustration of how close the three had become, Roethke dedicated Praise to the End to both of them (Garden City: Double Day, 1951) (McLeod 7).

1949

[P]

[Rutherford]

Feb. 15, 1949

Dear Ken,

Your last letter went unanswered--for no particular reason except that I intended to answer it. I was bogged down with this, that and the other. Paterson III has had me on its hip.

Now that that has been thrown I come up for air.¹

If the snow isn't too deep on Sunday we'll make a try at Princeton. I'd like to go as would Floss and with Bill here to take over it shouldn't be too difficult for us to get away. But the thermometer being 76 on our back porch right now I foresee a vicious blizzard for Sunday.

Nothing new except that Ez writes me from the hospital that his gums are receding and J. Laughlin is going to Switzerland to skii for a month. The rest of the world lies between.

See my pitcher in Vogue for February?² Borrow one and look page 213. Floss sez that's what I get for sticking my long nose in among ladies underwear.

It's been wonderful to have Bill here with me beginning to take things over. Best all around.

As ever,

Bill

Will phone if we're coming.

[P]

[Rutherford]

[July 8, 1949]

At Hudson Guild Playhouse, July 19 for 2 weeks (perhaps) a play of mine, Loves Labors Aborted (sic) by a group of youngsters ("We Present" professionals): 430W27 CHickering 4-0795 (for 1st night at least)--wish I c'd send some passes, I'll try later but since no gravy, no meat. I ought to be at least amusing and so the world pisses and passes. We'll see you later in the summer if we survive it.

Best,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Sunday [August 6, 1949]

Dear Ken,

Just finished reading your translation of Death in Venice.³ But I don't want to write like that.

We're here at Chas. Abbott's--in the country near Buffalo (corruption of Beau Fleuve) trying to recover our wasted strength--it can't be done.⁴ After reading that story

I had a bad night. More and more as I grow older I have "bad nights" after my reading. Is it the reading or is it the man? Hard to say. Or is it hard after all? For as there grows to be less and less of the man, the reading grows more and more powerful and the man succumbs.

What a beautiful place this is and without pretence, without fake of any sort yet with about it an aura of culture well corrected by chickens, ducks and prize sheep.

All I wanted to say was that I had read your translation.

Best,

Bill

[B]

[Andover]

August 16, 1949

Dear Bill,

Why not write like Death in Ven? What's the sin of same? Spick.

Incidentally, Francis Golffing, whose poesies were recently published by the Cummington lassies, has written saying that he will be passing this way next Sunday. Also his wife, Barbara Gibbs. Any chance that you and Florence might care to be about? We cd. feed you too, if you said definitively when.

Dint get into NY to see your play. Have been a-glumming and a-ailing. (I promise not to ask you for free medical advice, having decided that doctors, like philosophers, are merely to help one die well).

How about this: He might think of heaven, but objectively, in terms of clouds. The clouds would be seen not by looking up, but as reflected in a puddle. His pudency might carry him even a step further, as were the puddle under a horse. Can you guess who is it?⁵ And do you sanction the formula?

Spick.

Sincerely,

K.B.

Sanction it--just for a first rough approximate? Or do you say neigh?

[P]

[Rutherford]

Wednesday [August 17, 1949]

Dear Ken,

Not this Sunday or any Sunday--without a foot of snow on the ground to slow up traffic. Sundays are impossible on the road. In the fall, on a Friday we'd enjoy seeing you again, sez Floss.

"Heaven" is a bad word, it has too many connotations of inaccurate meaning to be well used in a sentence such as

you propose. The moral implications prevent any possibility of objectivity of perception. A cloud isn't heaven and can never be for a Christian, even such a Christian as I am (not). But if you say, objectively, "sky," then your sentence becomes nonsense. I don't know whom you mean--certainly not Mr. Cowley! He wouldn't recognize down from up. And don't tell me you mean yourself. Freud perhaps. Hoss piss ain't no different from any other liquid when it comes to reflecting the sky; where's your physics, Mister?

Doctors and chicken broth, Sir, are both means to help a man to die well and--later. What the hell do you want? You want to be "cured". Why you're just an infant, nobody is cured, not even by philosophy. Not even by Christ, by Christ. Only Mr. Eliot has been cured (nuttied). Or did Christ do that? Or the stuttering King or the Archbishop? Shit.

Go jump in the lake.

Best,

Bill

Notes for 1949

¹ William Carlos Williams, Paterson III (New York: New Directions, 1949).

² Vogue (February 1949): 213. The commentary beneath this photograph taken by Joffe (incidentally, one of the best portraits of the author in his later years) could not have pleased Williams, especially the segment that described him as "one of the important, although comparatively unknown, contemporary American poets" (213).

³ Thomas Mann, Death in Venice, trans. Kenneth Burke (New York: Dial Publishing Co., 1924).

⁴ After his latest stroke, Williams convalesced at Abbotts' place in Buffalo. See note 7 for 1946.

⁵ This is Burke mimicking Williams in an effort to provoke an interchange on the matter of the poet's key terms or strategies.

1950

[B] [Gambier, Ohio]

June 30, 1950

Dear Bill,

Greetings from old Gastric Juice (who somehow or other keeps repeating).

Am here, peddling my wares for six weeks, maintaining, in these days of not-at-war, that what the world needs is to buy more of my books.¹

As for you, jeez, I can't open a litry society-column any more without reading of your doings, and your very very well-deserved successes. (Proudly, as regards the infamous Pound-controversy, wd. say that, from the start, I avowed the prize should have gone to you: for your humanity, as vs. his inhumanity.² Part of Pound's glory was developed, I think, thus: Eliot avidly proclaimed Pound to be the Great Forerunner, a delicate diplomatic maneuver for suggesting that he himself was the flowering of all that Pound presented in its incomplete stage. By making Pound into a John the Baptist, Eliot suggested that he himself must be... but you get the point. You're an intuitive baystard.)

I wonder if you would have any person to suggest who might help me out of this difficulty: It turns out that my

son, Butchie has a slight hernia.³ We have been told that only an operation can remedy such a condition. And I wondered if you could suggest someone, in NJ or NY, (preferably NJ if he was as satisfactory) whom we might consult, and who would do the operation if it is necessary. (I always dare hope for some other way out.)

If you do have any suggestions, I'd be vastly grateful to you for them. (Hope to come home for a few days in the middle of my term here. And thought the operation, if necessary, might be done then. So, to save time, if you do have any suggestions, wd. you please send them direct to Shorty, at Andover, N.J., so that she could start negotiations forthwith?)

This is a hell of a way to pipe up. (I seem to turn up thus, every once in awhile, with a burden which I would plague you with. But I dared hope that 'twould require only a line or two of your time, e'en while drawing upon all your expertise.)

Meanwhile, best greetings. And you really ought to flit out our way once in awhile. (Blackmur and the Fergussons were up from Princeton, just before I trecked hither.)

Sincerely,

K.B.

[P]

[Rutherford]

July 3 [1950]

Dear Ken,

I aim to be useful. Your best bet would be DeBell in Passaic, the same who chiseled the excrescence off your hard palate. He's good and at the same time reasonable in his charges. 3 days at the Passaic General Hospital, semi-private, would do it. It's the only answer--if you don't want him to be a Henry James for life--to boast about it as a great injury, something to be mortally ashamed of like piles. Or shit to the literary profession.

Yes, I ought to meet Blackmur, I dislike him enough to make it almost obligatory.

Sorry the newspapers and their diseases have to speak of me. It wasn't my fault.

Best,

Bill

[P]

[Saratoga, N.Y.]

Monday

Aug. 1, 1950

Dear Ken,

Here at Yaddo, with Floss (Guests of the Corporation) for two weeks--almost over--working on Paterson IV which I have lined up and almost finished; a very profitable

occasion.⁴ Ted Roethke is here also and several others, writers, painters and musicians--good crowd, male and female--the females nearly all deaf for some inscrutable reason.

The Sewanee Review (Winter, 1950) which had hitherto escaped my notice I found here also and read (am reading) your stuff on Ted and his poems.⁵ Very illuminating on the first part and beautiful on the second. These are two exhibits I am glad I didn't miss.

This has been a rewarding experience for me inasmuch as I have never, you might say, in my life had any leisure for writing. I quit practice, hopped in my car, drove up here and immediately plunged into the work. At first I thought I was dying! My back ached from sitting in one spot for hours at a time, my asshole bulged, my eyes began to drop from their sockets and my stomach felt as though it had swallowed a decayed rat. Age, sex I to myself, has at last got me. I'm through. All the fakery I practice now that it has the full light of day upon it is being revealed to me for all the shoddy that it really consists of. I was in agony of mind and the rest of it.

But, after finding that mornings are the best time for me, and not trying to push myself too hard after noon, I have done very well, in my own opinion. At least I have destroyed a lot of paper. We do what we are able to do. Day

after tomorrow we go on to other fields. Back home by August 16.

I suppose you know something of this place and its history; very impressive. Did you know, for instance, that Poe completed his Raven here--not that that is anything devastating but it's amusing?

All I wanted to say is that I was impressed with your analysis of Roethke's work. He's getting to be one of the best--a tremendous improvement, in my opinion, over his earlier work. He seems stable enough here though last winter, as you may know also, he had a severe bust up.

Regards to wife and kids--did you do anything about seeing DeBell? Try my damndest to reach you up there either in August or early September. I never seem to shake myself loose once I arrive home, I have to go nearly to Canada to untangle my legs.

Best,

Bill

[B]

[Andover]

August 24, 1950

Dear Bill,

Two words, to thank you very much for expert advice anent Butchie. All seems to be going quite to perfection.

And I think that to-morrow (Friday) we can bring him home, all ready for the Next Phase.

Incidentally, if you do feel like flitting out this way, do let us know. Or even, if you're willing to take pot luck on meals, don't bother to let us know. Main thing is that, after Sept. 6th, I resume my treks to Bennington, which means that every other week I'm absent from Monday to Friday. But, except possibly for the first week-end, I'm scheduled to be here every week-end.

What a year! 'Twas supposed to be my year off--but I never worked harder in my life. Every once in a while (as regards the ailments), I discover that I'm a breath behind. So far, each time, I've been lucky: I manage, by a quick intake, to catch up again--but every once in a while it seems as though I just did make it. So, hurrying on, I casually wonder: what if, just once in all the while, I didn't quite make it. (Hurry, hurry.)

You were right to vanish presto, when I got on the sumjick of the politico-military. Medicine and poesy maybe; but medicine and that, oof! Or anything and that! Or even just that! So much, oofitude.

Glad you liked the Roethke article. It's the honest-to-God's truth, Bill, that I want to do one of those on you; I've wanted to for years; and all the more so, as I begin to see how rare humanity is and how much of it there

is in your work. I'm disgusted, because I have, on the side, been plugging for you quite zestfully, quite along those lines (also incld. your skills)--but if and when I get my artikkkel done, all I'll seem to be doing is to some lumbering up in the rear. My scheme has been to do three of them, as a set (Marianne Moore, whose work I did deal with somewhat in an article reprinted in my Grammar; Wallace Stevens; and YOU). But there are a lot of accidents in this business--and as a result of them, certain things get done and other things don't get done. But, if I continue to catch that almost uncaught breath, I'll finish that artikkkel, begeez: I owe it to myself. (This sounds like a high-jacking proposition: If WCW the doctor can keep Ignatius Burpius alive, Ignatius Burpius will in his ignatian-buropian way sing of WCW the poet. To say as much is to realize that I'm in danger of getting an overdose of arsenic. What a chance you fellows have! For perfect self-expression.)

Where were we? (To be exact, we were at the second glass of port, before lunch, a time when I--parsimony-minded always--have learned that one can get the maximum befuddlement--or, in other words, clarity--at the minimum cost.)

But, the postim is due. So I desistee-wistee. Best greetings, to one and all. And do, if you feel so inclined, venture hither.

(Incidentally, if you want to do it all in an organized way: later, the Cowleys are coming over from Cuntcunticunt and the Tates are coming up from Prnctn. And if you were interested in a general gatherum omnium, we might arrange to have some others also at the same time from Prnctn. But all that wd. involve negotiations that at the earliest moved us into late Sept., since Cowley can't come before the 12th. We cd. do all that anyhow. And, in the interim, if you were trek-minded...etc.)

Sincerely,

K.B.

[P] [Seattle, Washington]

Oct. 24, 1950

Dear Ken,

Don't be so god damned coy. They're mad to have you come out here and talk to them, for a day, a week, a month or longer.⁶ They tell me you won't do it.

Now listen to me and come. You can get a week off from your present assignment during an interval of one sort or another. These people pay well. Say yes, to them. They deserve it more than most of the slippery guys from down our way, believe me.

Or maybe you won't believe me. Go on knocking your brains out for pimps, then, if that's what you like. Or

maybe we're all apeing the great monsters of our time, just that. It's possible. Come on out and tell 'em about it. You must have the address around because I've been told that you know the score.

I wouldn't be a prof. for anything on this earth but since you are one come on out and profess. They need you.

Love & kisses,

Bill Williams

of Rutherford, N.J.

[B]

[Andover]

November 1, 1950

Dear Bill,

So that's where you are, dawlink.

But this winter, I simply must hole up (in what I graciously call, I mean dub, "self-imposed heart-conscious house-arrest").

I must besick myself monument-wise. I must get it all smacked into shape. Uddawise, I'll splatter like a cow-flop.

All last year, I was supposed to take off. And one thing or another turned up, and lo!--all my papers got into more and more of a blown-about condition. And when my papers are that way, how can I, a word-slinger, have a character left? I mean: integrity.

Hence, I must stay home and cultivate my ailments.
Gulp, gasp, gag myself into a document Towards Health (on paper).

How about a dialogue btw. Ab Ovo and De Novo? How about (since I am buying a tape recorder) a series of imaginary now-it-can-be-told monologues addressed to various Ones I have known? (This just on the side, for setting-up exercises, while continuing to codify our bellyache on Man As Symbol-Using Animal? And our lore now on Catharsis wd. put a leading Chain Drug Store to shame.)

I see you say c/o Rutherford. So I send it thus. When back? And let me know if you feel like sauntering hither some time. (The one day the damned machine worked, I had an ecstatic time. Then the thing collapsed; and ever since, I've been in such frustration as no Freudian psychologue cd. e'er conceive of.)

More anon. Please give my very best greetings to fellow-thinkers thereabouts. I do hope some time to be able to join in the enterprises there. Apparently 'twould be vastly pleasant. But this year, must linger here.

Sincerely,

K.B.

Incidentally, if you know anyone who is looking for a copy of my Philosophy of Litry Form, do please pass along

word that the L.S.U. Press found 750 unbound copies, and is issuing them soon.

[P]

[Rutherford]

December 20, 1950

Dear Libby,

No rough stories this time, I don't want to be injured!

Glad Ken's to be home. We often think and talk of you.

Some fine day we will make the trip, try out my new (954 miles) Dodge. (I was surprised when Doc took that light car, I thought he'd go for a delux model.)

Tomorrow's the shortest day in the year. Let's not blaspheme but it can't be short enough for some of the things we're facing (hope not).

What's this new (?) mood I've got myself into?

Glad you like the stories. I'll bring you a book of the poems when I get there--tho' I did want Laughlin to send you a graft copy of them first.⁷ We'll see.

I prefer it here to any place on the West Coast except Seattle. The rest of that climate (maybe you could except San Francisco) breeds dopes and Hearsts i.e. a dope is not vicious. But the crack-pots, the religious nit-wits that come up for "visiting poets" in his fan mail must come from SOMEwhere. Why not, then, the climate, the fact that there is no winter, no cold, no stiffening to the mood, to the

intelligence? The flabby wishers are not killed off, the coddling pleasantness of the nights flatters them, it is just as one finds in the phenomenon of Christian Scientists going on breathing solely because of the sanitary laws which forbid yellow fever, plague, cholera, typhoid and scarlet fever. It becomes a business. It becomes a, passion, their only passion: to go on breathing. The male must squirt his sperm over the eggs in some warm metaphysical river where they breed, for it is not known that they cohabitiate.

Be seein' yuh. Greeting to Pop and the kids.

Yours,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Dec 29/50

Dear Ken,

That's a heluvathing to say to a poet, that he makes what ain't there seem real, i.e the "spirit". But I've always suspected these metaphysicians. Damn site rather be a physician and get my hands on it even if it ain't for me. It's a nice feelin' no matter how many times removed, a vurry nice feeling, a vurry comforting feelin', makes you feel good to know it's there, anyway, and no foolin' about it. That ain't my understanding of what a poet is, let alone being' a physikan.

I'd like to see what you got to say. Wanna be in my autobiography?⁸ I'm writing it now. Save a place for you if you're going south this year.

Certainly let your mother come to me. How about some Saturday afternoon around 2 p.m. Call me up first so I won't sneak out on you. What I'll probably do after I look at her is to send her to my close friend in Passaic, Dr. Albert Jahn. He's an Xray man but he's also got sense and decency and is a top diagnostitian. From there on we'll take off as we find it necessary or not to go further.

Happy New Year and don't let nothin get you down. I hear T.S.E. will be teaching at Chicago U. next spring or fall or something.⁹ Geezes! Or maybe it ain't as bad as that. What some men will do! And what others will let them do!!

Best,

Bill

Notes for 1950

¹ This letter is typed on English Department stationary from Kenyon College.

² Williams' reception of National Book Awards' first Gold Medal for Poetry was announced in January, hence the stir of publicity referred to in the previous sentence. Ezra Pound was awarded the Bollingen Prize for poetry in 1950 for his Pisan Cantos. Though these kinds of contradictions have lost their ability to startle us, the controversy centered on the fact that the government sponsored award was to be given to a man who was being held for treason by the very same government (Mariani 576).

³ Anthony "Butchie" Burke (b. 1936) is Burke's first son.

⁴ From July 15 through August 2, Williams was at the Yaddo writers' colony in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. (Mariani 609).

⁵ Kenneth Burke, "The Vegetal Radicalism of T. Roethke," Sewanee Review 58 (1950): 68-108.

⁶ Williams spent five weeks at the University of Washington, in Seattle, giving readings and lectures

(Mariani 624). This letter is written on stationary from the Hotel Edmond Meany.

⁷ William Carlos Williams, Make Light of It: Collected Stories, (New York: Random House, 1950); William Carlos Williams, Collected Later Poems, (New York: New Directions, 1950).

⁸ William Carlos Williams, The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams (New York: New Directions, 1951).

⁹ In November 1951, T.S. Eliot gave four lectures on "The Aims of Education" at the University of Chicago (Ackroyd 302).

1951

[P]

[Rutherford]

January 4, 1951

Dear Ken,

Your mother and father were here today. She's marvellous and beautiful too, I fell immediately in love with her--and he's as straight about it and as thoughtful of her as any man could well be about a woman. A very moving pair.

I got the story from the beginning. It looks as though she may possibly never have had any malignancy in the jaw at any time but a benign bone cyst. I don't say this is absolutely so but it is a possibility. Dr. Pool's report, if what your father says is accurate, seems to say that there is no malignancy there now. This, of course, I shall have to check with Pool himself which I intend to do before Monday afternoon when your father will call me for my report on that detail. Much will depend on what Pool says or what I can get out of him.

If the cyst which your mother now undoubtedly has on the jaw is benign the question then arises, what is to be done about it? Shall we leave it alone or remove it--for aesthetic reasons. If in spite of what appears to have been

said Pool thinks it IS malignant--though I don't see how he can believe such a thing in view of the reported findings--another course must be followed. An extremely favorable thing is that in 7 years there is no discoverable metastasis.

I asked your mother about her eyes. They seem to be normal for her age. I asked her about her hearing. She said that on the left side her hearing had deteriorated very greatly during the past year and that she had a heavy feeling in her head--that, in fact, bothers her more than anything else. It seemed to be that which had begun most to discourage her. I examined both her ears. The right drum looked normal but I could not see the left because of the inspissated wax filling the canal.

So I decided to remove the wax. It was very dry showing it had been there a long time. With syringing with hot water, I loosened it and finally drew it out in one piece with a small pair of forceps. You'd be surprised. It was like a rock with all sorts of crumbly looking stuff behind it. Her hearing immediately returned and the "dull" feeling in her head disappeared forthwith. It may be all that, in that quarter, is the matter with her. Your father said she looked 3 years younger than when she had come into the office. I hope her symptoms were due to something as simple

as that. Isn't it strange that no one looked into her ear.
It's an old story.

As I have warned you the ultimate outcome of the case may not be as sunny as I am saying it looks now to be. There is an undoubted lump under the woman's jaw. It has not been proven to be benign even though Pool is reported to have said it is so. We've got to do more work on the case before I for one shall feel safe, but at the moment the favorable symptoms outweigh the others. Your mother weighs 112 pounds, has not lost weight in several years; her color is fine. We'll go ahead with her on that basis.

If you see Sewanee Review, next issue, look for my paper in it on Ford Madox Ford's Parade's End.¹ I'm real proud of it.

More when I know more. Best luck all around.

Sincerely,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

Sat. 6 January, 1951

Dear Ken,

The revised report is this. I called Pool in New York as I t^r - you, he replied by phone yesterday. He was extremely prompt in this and when I got talking with him I

found him to be extremely interested and wanting to be helpful. Sounded like a swell guy.

He told me, first, that he hadn't seen your mother since last March, which was a surprise--I understood that she had gone to him only a few weeks but, of course, I was mistaken. In reply to my questions he said that undoubtedly your mother had had a malignant growth on the jaw but that it had been either cured or arrested by the Xray treatment. The present lump has nothing to do with the original lesion but is due to blocking of the salivary duct by the Xray treatment of if not of the salivary duct itself then of some other structure of similar nature. It is not malignant.

The only question now is: will the cancer recur? It is a possibility that must be guarded against by occasional reexaminations which HE will make under my supervision. That's the way things have been left. There appears to be nothing to do now except, following that plan, other than to send her to him, to Pool, at her earliest convenience. This she should do, to his private 54th (St) office with which she is familiar.

The gal may not want to do this but if you will explain to her that I am not surrendering the case to Pool but will continue to see her from time to time as she may wish to have me follow her I think she will submit. Get after her

and make her behave for Pool is keenly interested and seems to be a very reliable and understanding guy.

So there we are. Your father is going to call me on Monday when I shall tell him exactly what I have written here for you.

Are we living or dead, any of us?

Yours,

Bill

(among the quasi-living)

My grandson just chopped down 4 of his father's young fruit trees. What does that make him, a criminal or 4 times a hero?

[P]

[Rutherford]

Jan. 20, 1951

Dear Ken

here we are again

women won't be women

till men become men

I was much excited by Blackmur's recent Hudson Review thesis, "The Lion and the Honeycomb" (which is the only unclear portion of the whole; a bum title).² I very much enjoyed the work and felt myself elevated by it to a level of understanding heretofore unattained in the area he covered.

And when will men
seizing pen
expound a world fitting
for the intelligent-

ce to live in, then
go out and
build it?

The answer is beyond our ken.

The enclosed letter from Doc Pool sounds good to me.
File it or send it to your Dad as you think best.³

The autobiography is up to 1119 pages of longhand
script. Hope to get a book out of it by March 1st. It's
wonderful to live without brains!

Sincerely,

Bill

Fine summer day! Wish I wuz up visiting you. New York
bound.

W.

[P]

[Rutherford]

January 24, 1951

Dear Ken,

The reason I haven't been seeing anyone recently is, as I may have told you, that I'm doing my autobiography. March 1st is the dead-line. It's been a battle.

If you know Blackmur well enough for it, ask him to send you my two page letter to him written last week following my reading of his paper. Tell him the circumstances, of your having written me etc. My letter to you wasn't intended to be informative.

But if you must have a direct answer: with my feeble brain he gave me something at least that I could follow. For the first time I clearly understood the difference between criticism and scholarship--a trivial matter, no doubt, but one that appealed to me. Then, following his major theme, I was glad to have someone that I could understand point out for me a possible analogy between a presumable correlation among the Greeks between criticism, scholarship and rhetoric, a balanced relationship, and our mind destroying incoherence among these parts of a presumptive whole; he at least let it be known that SOME sort of relationship is desirable--a thing no one seems to remember in our day. It is all elementary to you but to me it needed saying in a

broadly comprehensive manner, like the names Europe, Asia, Africa on the map. It may be window-dressing but I liked it.

Finally, I have just discovered, within the last two years the significance of Aristotle's use of the word "imitation". It has overwhelming importance to the writer and to the artist generally and is for us a "new" word. The imagination has to imitate nature, not to copy it--as the famous speech in Hamlet has led us to believe, there is a world of difference there. The whole dynamic of the art approach is involved, to imitate invokes the verb, to copy invoked nothing but imbecility. It is the very essence of the difference between realism and cubism with everything in favor of the latter.

And, Blackmur used one specific word, iamb, at the beginning of his paper and never clarified the reference further. I was seized by his reference to the iamb and furious at his neglect to make clear what he meant in that case--I wonder if he knew what he was saying and how drastically important it is for him to go on. He didn't. Does he know what he inferred? I wonder and I asked him to go further on the chance that he might bring light into an area where I am looking for instruction.

I read, last night, the stenographic record of your discussion of the New Criticism.⁵ I particularly noted your part in the discussion which interests me as much as

anything else stated there. You lifted all that was said to the dignity, the unconscious dignity, of a seriousness which otherwise was largely lacking. I particularly noted the silence which followed at one point of your remarks. I want to read the second part of the discussion, please send it to me when it appears. Your contribution was not pacifying but peace giving to the whole, I went out into an open place--a freshly "discovered" place where the mind could exist without restrictions placed upon it by outside circumstances, not its own necessary ones.

You see you stopped short as you yourself were well aware of doing--space! was what you needed to bring the ends of the discussion together in your "hierarchy" of meaning. I'd like to see you do it.

When you do, my feeling is that Davis, in spite of his unbalanced statements, will have sustained his point as against the others--his persistence of staying within his references while the others tried their best to route him out was a high point in the whole display of wits. Some good points were developed, quite apart from the rhetoric of the discussion at large, for the casual reader.

Blackmur did get off some pretty bad writing in his piece, I acknowledge that. I merely skipped that sort of thing. What the hell else can you expect of a philosopher?

Best,

Bill

P.S. Had a small talk in N.Y.C. an evening last week over the Blackmur thing with a Prof. Thompson English, at Columbia and R. Penn Warren--who also, both of them, tended to slight Blackmur on the "religious" tone of his paper.⁴ Why not go whole hog like, you know, what the hell's his name? the German guy, the Englishman and, for that matter, T.S. Eliot. They at least took a definite (false?) stand in favor of religion as the literary butt. etc. etc., instead of pussy footing around coyly with it. O well. "Sacred books" etc., phooey, they said.

[P]

[Rutherford]

June 23, 1951

Dear Ken,

What you've done in the Roethke criticism is what you do in all you accomplish: make the elements of a criticism, a possible "new" criticism, articulate, in that you give it terms to work with.⁶ It is a heroic accomplishment (not a fight to make etc. but a "made"). It is a laying out of terms that can be worked with.

In that way and in a sense you don't say anything about Roethke's poems, you are interested in correlating them with a comprehensive purpose into which they will fit as an integer. That is a laying of the foundation in a critique which has not yet got to a stage which appears above ground.

I wonder what you'd do with some of the buildings of a Frank Lloyd Wright? His buildings are ONLY that which appears above ground. You never think of his foundations. My brother, for instance, thinks him a fake.⁷ He has no foundations, physically or ideally, he is all "show".

So when you go at Roethke you go at the reasons and you clarify. You clarify by relating him, his imagery, to past ideas, you anchor him to the past (Dante, Kant, Lawrence). IT is a generous gesture as from you to him, it is a liberating gesture in that you PUT a foundation under him, you buttress him, give him confidence in that you discover the old in his new.

That, at the same time, clarifies the old by showing it still active in new forms.

The thing you leave out is the shape of the language: the thing which has made your revaluation necessary. Naturally, you don't leave it out since you choose the instance of Roethke as important enough to comment, but you don't treat it directly.

In other words, the CONJUNCTION of the poems WITH what you are doing is the future (the present). It behooves us to stick together against regression: against, against--isn't it a shame we have to say "against" and not "Io!"

(Poor old Longfellow with his banner sadly proclaiming his slogan for shaved wood furniture stuffing: Excelsior!)

An excellent piece, full of cheer, hard as a rock and as warm as a firm breast.

My fingers hit the wrong keys, sorry.

Bill

P.S. Louis Zukofsky has recently sent me a letter and a piece of writing which you may like to see.⁸ Return them both with any comment you care to make.

These two specimens represent the opposite, complementary, facet from your writing--or what I take to be the completion of what you say: the whole which makes us necessary to each other; the full "act".

It was a good session on Thursday. I took the poem out there to get a little confidence from you, if possible, on which to go on working, to move ahead on. You see all my problems at the present time are technical.

Zukofsky wants me to summarize the technical advances made and to be made--even an extension of Aristotle is needed. We have suffered in our instruction from the fact that Aristotle was cut short (by the accidents of time) from

commenting on dithryambic poetry. His record is terribly incomplete, maimingly so. He also spoke of the various meters as "natural" to certain kinds of verse. That is not scientific, it is mere instinct. It is his failure to go on, as Aeschylus, if he had written a technical instruction book for some of his apprentices, might have done that has stalled us in the accomplishment of a FULL prosody.

It is on that phase AND ALL THE DIRECT IMPLICATIONS TO THE KIND OF THOUGHT WE FOLLOW which is my principal care. The thought will be liberated by the technical, the thought which is stalled in our inability to find the means with which to think (in a poem) which makes me stress structure. By structure I mean the thing with which we think is missing. It is to invent that that I engage myself. You show us how to think, I want to supply the material to think with. It isn't ever the terms, the terms can be ambiguous as there may be two kinds of terms, it is the shape, the context of the terms that engages me not their "meaning" as such.

After all you ARE able to differentiate such things and you are willing, generous, toward their study. You WANT to join with another to elucidate such interests. Most don't even know what you are talking about but get stalled on primary considerations or bide or are lost in the phase,

never standing back to see how one phase meets another to complete the "thing" which is beyond any one capability.

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

July 12, 1951

There's only one thing better than a lot of talk and that's a lot of fishing. But some pretty good boys never did anything else but talk (never wrote a word) didn't they? And people still talk about them. I often think I'll never say anything again, just write my piece, make it as tough as I possibly can (no explanation) and when I meet a friend spend my time talking about something else. We're going off for a couple of weeks at the shore. The good old salt water, makes a noise at that. A good obscure noise. No explanation. Best luck.

Bill

[B]

[Andover]

August 25, 1951

Dear Bill,

Bulletin: Chapters 43-44, superb summings-up on Motivation.⁹

P. 288, on "perfections" wd. neatly serve some purposes of mine. (My notions as to what Aristotle meant by the "entelechy," which I assert is a necessary element in his

view of "imitation." Cf. paragraph marked on p.7 of the item enclosed herewith.

So, should like to lift paragraph three, for use in the Poetics section of the Symbolic.¹⁰

All told, I find the litry gossip entertaining; but the Fitzgerald-peddlers can do it better. But always, the medico-angle is a wow. At end of Chapt. 44, bejeez, I wept with delight.

End of bulletin.

K.B.

[B]

[Andover]

September 19, 1951

Dear Bill,

Holla!

Jeez. In my study alone, all is more of turmoil than if all the hospitals of Greater NY were suddenly scrambled into a hash. How do you do it!

(We have added the hospital angle, too. My mother, when visiting here, had hemorrhages--and since then many further upheavals have been in order. She seems to be convalescing OK now. But the normal chorefulness of this prehistorically accoutred outfit is further augmented consid.)

Writing this to say that, natheless, somehow, I've dug down among my booksnpapers to the Wms. layer--and it's

testify or bust. (Recd. autobiograph. from publisher recently--and shall include references to that also.)

Best greetings. More anon.

Sincerely,

K.B.

[B]

[Andover]

September 21, 1951

Dear Bill,

Am finding many interesting moments in your autobiog.

But I'm a slow, note-taking son of a bitch, who has never learned how to read fast (not even a book as fast-reading as yours), so I'm only on p. 222.

Your song-and-dance anent the chastity of profligacy (p. 221), however, filled me of a sud. with one last flutter of hope. Maybe I can get that guy to see what sorta thing I'm puzzling over, after all," I whisper to self. So I enclose the relevant document, asking only that you read the passage marked on p. 224. Here's what I mean by the twists and turns of the "hierarchal" motive, dawling, as considered in my Rhetoric. (As for document itself, use once and throw away. We must be hygienic.)

Incidentally, top of 164: quite wrong. Marianne Moore did for a while get me to fill in for her, while she was on vacation. But she was the last editor of The Dial; and

never, throughout the history of the gazette, did the name of Kennel Bark ever fly from the masthead. (At an earlier period, I substituted for Seldes. Indeed, over the years, I did all sorts of substitution jobs, even at one period doing sheerly secretarial work for M.M.--typing letters and returning MS.)

Best greetings,

Sincerely,

K.B.

[B]

[Andover]

October 2, 1951

Dear Bill,

Sorry to be plying you so with brief sporadic bits. But since I'm working on your stuff now, I sorta somehow have you on my mind.

Would you, on the enclosed card, tell me when the Collected Earlier Poems is likely to appear?¹¹

Incidentally, in the course of my indexing the Autobiog., I find on p. 270: "o, shades of Kenneth Burke." And on p. 97: "Oh, shades of old Krumwiede!" Well, I'll be damned.

And do you, by any chance, know (off-hand) whether you anywhere use "rhyme" as a verb, literally or figuratively

(as were you to say that one person or idea rhymes with another)? If so, I'wd. be grateful for the info.

Here are some puzzlements I find quite interesting (in my zest for trying to discover the correlations within a given poet's terminology):

When speculating on your title, "Make Light of It," I naturally noticed that on pages 45 and 54 of the Later Poems you have other titles containing "It." (These are the only ones I found, though I have't yet looked among the various of your earlier poems I have.) I noticed also that both these poems have rhymes. (A rhyme in one of your poems is about as hard to spot as a right to the jaw.) Then, lo! on p. 79, the old baystard doth inform us (in a poem with a rhyme that practically steps on itself, it comes so close): "When Structure Fails/Rhyme Attempts to Come to the Rescue."

Incidentally, I asked Butchie what "Make Light of It" means. He apparently didn't know the idiomatic usage, and said: "It means to explain it, to make it clear."

All told, then, we so far have three meanings: (1) as per the idiom; (2) illumination; (3) the ambiguities of "it"--whereat we are reminded, lo! that the old hoss, on p. 37 of Later, doth trip forth beauteously: "...enormous night/ that makes/ of light and fruit." Makes light a fruit. Makes light af (ru)it.

I doan no. And naturally, I aint after saying that that's litry criticism, not old style at least. But I find it engrossing to trail such correlations down, when one is dealing with a person who selects his words scrupulously, in keeping with his own (mostly intuitive) canons of judgment. Maybe I won't even use any of this in the final artikkell. But I thought you might find it of some interest.

Incidentally, bejeez, the other day (or rather, two successive nights, while insomniac), I made me a Gedicht auf Deutsch. And I copy it out herewith. N.B. "Faust's fist," which is my contribution to the lore of the reflexive. (Greenberg was here yesterday; and I sprung this conceit on him when he was a bit under the infloonce--whereat he did avow that I had in that formula summed up the essence of 50 years of Faust-criticism.)

Faustkunde¹²

Wenn ein Mensch in seinem Bette liegt,
So denkt er an sehr furchterliche Dinge;
Fragt sich ob grosses Unglück ihn umbringe,
Während in den Wogen der Ewigkeit er wiegt.

Wen ein Mensch auf seinen Füssen steht,
So denkt er an fast irgend etwas night.
Lachelnd nennt er sich einen Bosewicht,
Während Galgenweg entlang er frohlich geht.

Was mich betrifft: Seitdem ich Alter bin,
Beim Sitzen denk' ich, wie in Jugendtagen
Mit grossem Jammer und viel, Unbehagen
Ich Faust's Faust war, die eigene Verfuhrerin.

"Faust's fist, seductress of the self!" Vive la
Faustkunde--and naturally, all other kinds o kunded.

Yours for the Neck's Faze,

K.B.

[B]

[Andover]

October 15, 1951

Dear Bill,

Bulletin Bulletin Bulletin

While working on your poems, I caught, I think, summat
of your accents. As to wit namely this:

Mercy Killing
Faithfully
We had covered the nasturtiums
Keeping them beyond
Their season

Until, farewell-minded,
Thinking of age and ailments,
And noting the lack of lustre,
I said:

"They want to die;
We should let the flowers die."

That night
With a biting clear full moon
They lay exposed.

In the morning,
Still shaded
While the sun's line
Crawled towards them from the northwest,
Under a skin of ice
They were at peace.

I know, Prima Donna Dawlink, you're mad at me. But, nathelss, I'm first of all for accuracy--and to heck with the rest.

So, I wondered, thus:

If, on looking over that poem, you have any notions (spontaneously) as to where in your opinion it's not in your groove, and how you would tinker with it, to make it more along your lines, bejeez I could I'm sure get some angles by your saying so.

So I send this, just in case.

Sincerely,

K.B.

Here's one, by the way, in a different groove:

Night Piece
O pulsant autumnal jungle
Restore me to thy rhythm
Teach me to the knack.

I have stood on the edge of the jumping-off place
Waiting.

Have looked down
To see still stars at the bottom of a lake;
Looked out
Upon dark riddle within.

O mad, dreaming, absolute City
O Nature's Babylon
Make me of thy rhythm
Make me of thy pageantry.

Scene: two o'clock at night. Papa pickled, alone. All decent citizens in bed. Stands by shore of pond listening to the insect-roar from without, and the Alky-roar within.

[B]

[Andover]

November 15, 1951

Dear Bill,

Helndamnaysh. I swore I'd bother you no more about my troubles, knowing that you had enough of your own.

But bejeez, this situation with regard to my mother is becoming gruesome. And I wondered whether you could tell me if you have any notions at all as to where I should turn.

She has had a series of hemorrhages that are bleeding her white. And financially, they are bleeding me white.

Just this much, then: Do you have any notion how I should go about it to get the maximum easing for her, with the minimum financial drain upon myself?

The little I have laid aside, against the needs of sending the boys to college, has already (has it not?) been cut by a capital levy of about 50% (inflation being the delicate capitalist, free-enterprise way of doing what otherwise must be done by blunt socialist confiscation).

The last step: We went to Pool. Pool suggested Memorial. I said yes--and lo! I am finally informed that arrangements have been made for a room at Doctors' Hospital.

They all sounded alike to me. And lo! there we are, with a room with private bath and all the swankeroo of the Hotel Pierre--and me each day pulling up the floor boards to get something to cover the checks.

Anything, I thought, to get those hemorrhages stopped. So that was the one clause I put in the contract. Evidently, over and above the condition of the jaw, there is a cancerous condition of the lungs--and it is beyond treatment. But if at least we could stop these gruesome hemorrhages. So, when Pool said he could do just that, I found a sufficient dismal comfort in his assurance.

Now--an hour ago--I have talked with him by phone. And, with much embarrassed coughing, he retracts. The hemorrhages cannot be stopped.

He did, however, suggest about three X-ray treatments a week. But he said that, if she stayed at Doctors Hospital, it would only be for these--hence, since the day-to-day costs would be so great, we may as well take my mother home, and try to find some mode of treatment nearer home.

Do you have any notions at all, Bill? As to how I might proceed, to the best advantage of all concerned? As things line up now, I am to drive into NYC on Sunday morning and bring my mother back home, to an address in Weehawken, where my parents have lived since they came to this area in 1915.

Looking over the letter, I note one possible ambiguity. The hemorrhages are not of the lungs, but of the jaw. I presume the treatments would be to lower their frequency. (I realize now that I did not ask Pool what they were to do, explicitly.).

So, if you have any notions whatever as to how we might inquire into arrangements for these treatments, and possibly into some hospitalization generally (for the old man is not competent to deal with the calamities, and I really do not see how, with our sparse resources here, we could do an adequate job).... I'd be grateful, slavishly, for a word from you. If you wanted to phone, you could call us here, reversing the charges, Netcong 709-J.

Pool, by the way, said that he'd be glad to discuss the case with anyone who wanted to know of his experiences with it.

Oof! Meanwhile, best luck.

Sincerely,

K.B.

[B]

[Andover]

November 17, 1951

Dear Bill,

Herewith the "arguments" for chapters in T.B.L. (Turd's a Beddy Love.)¹³

Imagistically, there's a lot of internal relations I did not consciously contrive at the time. Note, for instance, the close of Part One (on p. 60). It is completely "prophetic" of the story's later development, though I had no such schematism consciously in mind. The rustle of water, heard behind the mist, attains its fulfilment in the final words of the book. The barking dog is the yapping of the hero (notably in passages like pp. 140-145--a dismal variant of that gent I call "Kennel Bark"). The "twitter of unrelated bird-notes" is in the very form of the last chapter. (Birds also as "augury." Nay more, as nursery word for turd, which lurks also in Towards of the title. For such a bird, see form of Brancusi's "Golden Bird.") The meeting with Alter Ego, etc., is aspect of the regressive, masturbation theme. (See also same theme in the story-within-a-story, with the "dummy policeman" as symbol for the sense of guilt.) For corrosion theme, cf. the many aspects of rodents; also p. 157, on "slow acids of the mind." And on p. 209, even God (always a term for ultimate motivation) is classed as a rodent. Middle of 210: I'd now interpret the "eye" as also ambiguously "I." (An internal aspect of the person, dissociatively tracking the lonely ego. Also, of course, as a God, or principle of moral judgment. After I finished the book, by the way, the obsession of that eye pursued me terribly. And I damned near

went to the priests for help. But there were reasons whereby I could not have solved my personal tangle by this route. So I kept hanging on, until finally I worked out other ways, ways that required such sitting-on-the-lid as resulted in the years of hypertension.)

Could also trace a course of progressive dissociation through the book. (What I call, for analysing such plots generally, the "separating-out.") Simplest instance: passage where he is talking in public telephone booth, speaking in a dismal voice while smiling in order to mislead a stranger who is standing outside looking through the glass. Or at end of p. 102.

Enough--thought I could go on. One thing certain: There is something much more drastic than the merely "intellectualistic" going on in that book. And eventually, I dare hope, I'll be able to teach people how to read it. And I'll swear to God, Bill, I have never for a moment doubted this fact: Once people know how to read that book, they will know that it is one of the fundamental works of fiction in our literature, generally in the line of Hawthorne. And it is made for spouting, "as a gargoyle would speak which, in times of storm, spouted forth words," an expression on p. 9 that already involves us in the storm-piss-diction nexus, and all the ultimate relationships btw. style and eating, sucking, spewing, farting, belching, and other bodily

processes of intake and outgo. (I originally wrote, by lapsus typewriteri, "relationships.") O, vive Rabelais, who knew that you really do eat beefy diction; and further knew, as our toilet-idealists don't, that there are the same by-products from the assimilation of words as scrupulous theologians worried about, with regard to the Eucharist.

Shinny, shinny, shinny.

Meanwhile, Bill, let me here again say on the page, as I have said by phone: I am grateful to you, beyond words, for your good offices as regards the problems with relation to my mother.

Sincerely,

K.B.

Am still, among the many interruptions, working back through your books again. I've got in deep enough to want to do a really thorough job. Tentatively, have decided on this procedure: Spin from Al Que Qiere. Try to formulate and illustrate every essential motivational strand in that book. Then treat the others in terms of it (noting modifications, transformations, additions, etc. in the later volumes). According to my interpretation, by the way, the element you are trying to specify in the prose theorizing of Spring and All is what I would call the "socio-anagogic" motive ("natural" things as seen through the perspective supplied by man's social pageantry).

I already have enough notes to do a dozen articles. But this thing is out to be as "definitive" as I can make it. Hence, its completion is still some weeks off. But, Deo Volente, it's going to be, and it's going to be by somebody who is ready to recognize the spirit and honesty of every step along your way. And by somebody, you baystard, who will have read you more closely than you ever read yourself. (Did you ever index the steps in your poems?)

Notes for 1951

¹ William Carlos Williams, "Parade's End," Sewanee Review, 59 (1951): 154-161.

² R.P. Blackmur, "The Lion and the Honeycomb," Hudson Review, 3 (Winter 1951): 487-507.

³ Dr. Pool examined and treated Burke's mother.

⁴ A. Hamilton Thompson (1873-1952); Robert Penn Warren (b.1905).

⁵ The manuscript to which Williams refers would become part of a forum entitled "The New Criticism" that included Burke, Hiram Haydn and others in The American Scholar, April 1951.

⁶ See note 5 for 1950.

⁷ Edgar Williams (b.1884), Williams' brother, was an accomplished architect. His firm built the administration building for the 1939 World's Fair in Flushing, N.Y. (Mariani 398).

⁸ Louis Zukofsky (1904-1978). Pound sent him to see Williams. They first met in a restaurant, 1 April 1928,

where Zukofsky asked Williams to read one of his poems (Oliphant 116).

⁹ William Carlos Williams, The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams (New York: New Directions 1951). The passage to which Burke refers has to do with Williams' discourse on the objects of his poems, the people.

They were perfect, they seem to have been born perfect, to need nothing else. They were there, living before me, and I lived beside them, associated with them.... It isn't because they fascinated me by their evil doings that they were "bad" boys or girls. Not at all. It was because they were there full of a perfection of the longest leap, the most unmitigated daring, the longest chances. (288)

Compare this with Burke's own lines in Language as Symbolic Action (Berkeley: U. of California Press 1966):

The poetic motive does indeed come to a head in the principle of perfection, as exemplified most obviously in the aim to produce a work in which the parts are in perfect relationship to one another.

But the principle of perfection should not be viewed in too simple a sense. We should also use the expression ironically, as when we speak of perfect fools and perfect villains....[this shows a] tendency to search out people who, for one reason or another, can be viewed as perfect villains, perfect enemies, and thus, if possible, can become perfect victims of retaliation. (38-39)

¹⁰ Kenneth Burke, Language as Symbolic Action (Los Angeles: UCLA Press, 1966): 16-17.

11 William Carlos Williams, The Collected Earlier Poems
(New York: New Directions, 1951).

12 "Faust Science"

When man lies in his bed
He thinks of very terrible things,
Asks himself if great misfortune surrounds him
While he rocks in the waves of eternity.

When man stands on his feet
He thinks of almost nothing.
Smilingly he calls himself a scoundrel
While he walks along the gallows' path happily.

What concerns me now that I've become older,
While sitting I remember how in the days of my youth
With great lamentation and much discomfort
I was Faust's Faust, my very own seductress.

(Translated by Adam Steiner)

12 Kenneth Burke, Towards a Better Life (New York:
Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1932).

1952

[B]

[Andover]

January 22, 1952

Dear Bill,

Prithee, I pray, do let you give me leave
To speak in iambs pentametrically,
Avowing you have robbed me of my rights
In saying not how much it is I owe
By way of bills to Honest Doctor Bill.
(including not only the wear and tear, but also the
phone calls.)
Spick. Quos ego---

Otherwise, how are you?

Sincerely,

K.B.

Sorry I couldna get there, to hear your bleat.¹ But was
keeping myself turned towards a song-and-dance I was
shedyuled to give on the 17th.

[P]

[Rutherford]

Jan 23, 1952

Dear Ken,

Your iambs are wasted on me
redundant, excessive but since you

since you labor the point I shall see if Floss will not send you a bill.

I damned near DIED reading my 10 pages to the wolves.² I could hear them growling before I had got half way down the first page. I was nervous enough as it was, I had not taken a cocktail thinking I'd keep my tongue free, I didn't eat what was on my plate, but as the pressure mounted my old heart began to torment itself until it was a painful lump in my chest. I had to grit my teeth and grind out the words from a parched throat.

They wanted to kill me. That Irishman, Hacket, former editor of the New Republic I think was the only one who defended me at least vocally.³ It was a stand off otherwise, half the guys went away scowling, the other grinning. I felt better as soon as I had finished the reading.

Ho hum,

Bill

[B]

[Andover]

January 25, 1952

Dear Bill,

Herewith the herewith. And many thanks for the bestirrings.

But what would you say about a guy who, after witnessing so many ultimate moments, testifies that he damn near killed himself trying to kill off blank verse?

Haint there many langwiches? And haint that one of them?

Thank God somebody else goes nuts once in a while, so that I can get a chance to sit back and feel normal. Up here in my study, I get damned sick of throwing myself down with a dull thud. How I'd have enjoyed sitting there watching the young man avow that all verse should be generically Rutherford, specifically W.C.W.

Remember the savant who, writing in English, tried to decide (without prejudice) whether it's more natural for the adjective to follow the noun, as in French, or to precede it, as in English. One guess as to what he concluded.

(Am in a jam for the time being. So have had to delay my elucubrations on you. But I'll get there, bejeez, I oath. And before long.)

Sincerely,

K.B.

Just happened to note title of a poem in recent Hopkins Review. "Posterity as Breath." Assuming that the title is accurate, here's what I would expect, in advance: "Posterity" would have furtive connotations of "posterior." "Breath" would thus be such kind of pneuma, or spirit, as is

in humbler, non-cryptological parlance, called "farts." But heck, I enclose the poem herewith. Maintaining that the stranded dead whale is a toyd, whether the lady knows it or not.... Yours, as ever, for poetic treasure.

Come to think of it, the next poem seems to have its fingers in such substance, too. Or am I just a King Midas, with a Midas touch that can turn everything to such problematical gold?

[P] [Rutherford]

May 25, 1952

Dear Ken,

I took the bull by the cock, without your permission, and signed your name to my nomination of Kenneth Beaudoin for the Gold Medal to be given by the Institute in poetry in 1953.⁴ I'd like to see the guy get it which he hasn't the vaguest chance of doing so long as there are such pushers as blah blah blah is in the field.

Maybe I shouldn't a done this. If you object, say so and I'll withdraw your name.

Hope to see you during this open season.

Best,

Bill

[B]

[Andover]

[June 4, 1952]

Dear Bill,

Thanks for relevant documents. Am pondering same, and letting my judgement mellow.

More soon.

Meanwhile, wd. say: I grant that the items are by a good workman.

But am still wondering, as regards the Official Trumpets. (Where's the scope? Or where's the succinct statuary? Learn me, dawlink.)

KB

[P]

[Rutherford]

June 11, 1952

Dear Ken,

When I'm able I'll come up and see you--before July 4. 'S a promise.

Meanwhile don't worry about the guy. I'll withdraw the nomination. I don't even know if he was eligible but he didn't have the vaguest chance of getting it anyway. I was merely caught short and rather liked his informal approach. He's better than you may think but I'll acknowledge, you have to see more of his work.

A better guy, if I had thought of him or even known of him, is Louis Grudin whose "GUST ON SPRING STREET" is one of the really powerful poems in the modern language. (From THE OUTER LAND Dial Press.)⁵ Why don't YOU nominate HIM? I'll be your backer.

Anyhow, forget Beaudoin.

Yrs,

Bill

[B]

[Andover]

June 12, 1952

Dear Bill,

Two words, in haste, to say: Am all in a flutter, slapping things together for my six-week stint at Indiana U., beginning in about a week.

As for that golden medallity: There are three people who ought to get it in a row (I don't care about the order). They are Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, and you. (Or have some of you three been honorably bumped off already?) I understand that Marianne Moore has suggested Stevens. What I'd like to do is to suggest this club-offer. If you know of any way of my officially doing so, let me know. In the meantime, until that Necessary Business is out of the way, I don't think I'll plug for anybody else. (Years ago, I decided that I'd like to do a kind of "tryptich" on you

three. So far, I've only contrived somewhat of one-third, on M.M. But, bejeez, I do avow: I'm taking all your books with me this summer, plus all the notes I have already husbanded or wived or whatever--and I'm going to try my damndest both to get the article lined up and to try it out on the dog by peddling it in the classroom.)

If you ever read Chamisso's Peter Schlemihl, and have any brand new things to say about it, do rush them hither.⁶ I am giving a public lecture on it (a subject of my own choosing) on June 25th, at Bloomington. (In case you haven't read it, it's about a gent who became separated from his shadow. I say as much in hopes that maybe you haven't read it, but might like to extemporize on Shadows, which is or are the morbid subject of my smiling talk.)

In case you can trek hither before I decamp (and here's hoping you can):

As things are now, we're expecting the McKeons (from U. of Chicago) for midday meal on Monday, June 16th (that makes a lot of ems).⁷ So, if you and Floss could turn up then, all to the good. (We're having tokey. Perhaps, should add that at this writing there are no local ailments. In the evening, we go to see the younger son enact a very thought-provoking major role in "Wild-Cat Willie Gets Girl-Trouble," a graduation play which has enticed me, as a Specialist in Sin-Ballix, because I am informed that at a strategic point

Michael Wildcat Willie when shaving nearly cuts off his nose.

If you'd negotiate, may I repeat: Netcong 2-0709-J
In haste, to meet the mails.

Sincerely,

K.B.

[B]

[Andover]

November 11, 1952

Dear Bill,

Good luck, you old stinker.⁸

I love you just like nothing at all, and that's the greatest of all.

Could I persuade you to look on the other side, and read one of my prose poems?

Every honor you get gives me profound delight and makes me ashamed all over again, that I haven't got that article done yet. But I'll get it done. And the other side will make it apparent why I must, God willens.

A toi,

K.B.

November 11, 1952

Dear Marc Connally,⁹

Sorry I can't be there, to vote on the golden medal for poesy. But I have a notion--and I offer it for what it may be worth.

I think we should make a three-year decision.
(I say this, realizing that my ignorance of the conditions may invalidate what I have to say.)

I think we should give the medal, in some succession or other, to three I consider a triptych: W.C.Williams, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens. I don't care what order, as long as it's all part of one parcel. But tentatively I'd suggest the order I have here used.

Maybe this suggestion musses up the rules. I don't know. But I devoutly believe every word of it.

Sincerely,

[P]

[Rutherford]

Nov 1/52 [postal mark reads Nov 19]

Dear Kenneth--Yes, do come to see us. Tuesday or Monday. Bill gets tired very easily, so I'll just say he wants to see people but not for long visits. Looking forward then to next week.

Sincerely,

Floss

[P]

[Rutherford]

Nov 18/52

Dear Kenneth,

When I wrote the first card, Bill didn't think he was up to having you come to lunch. Now he says please come, or come late in the afternoon and stay for supper. I think lunch would be better, but I'm doing as he asks. He can't write himself, but he is going to in time. Again, until next week.

Floss

Notes for 1952

¹ On 11 January, Williams gave a talk at the University of Pennsylvania (Mariani 645).

² The title of Williams' talk was "The American Spirit in Art," published in Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts and Letters, 2 (1952): 51-59. Reprinted in A Recognizable Image: William Carlos Williams on Art and Artists, ed. Bram Dijkstra (New York: New Directions, 1978): 210-220.

Emerson had called for a national literature as long ago as 1837 in his address to the Harvard divinity students, and here was Williams at the end of 1951 again insisting that the National Institute heed what was truly distinctive in the American art experiment. [He was referring to the American expressionists.] Williams had hardly read through the opening lines of his speech, however, when the catcalls and boos began. (Mariani 643)

³ Francis Hacket (1883-1962) was an editor for the New Republic in the early twenties.

⁴ Kenneth Laurence Beaudoin (b.1913).

⁵ Louis Grudin, The Outerland (New York: Dial Press, 1951). Although little is known of Williams' relationship with Grudin, it is perhaps telling that Grudin authored an attack on T.S. Eliot: Mr. Eliot Among the Nightingales (Paris: Drake, 1932).

1953

[P] [Rutherford]

6/8/53

Dear Ken,

It was nice of Libby to invite us for a day in the country. We have it in mind as soon as it shall be possible.

Meanwhile here is this--whatever it may mean. It comes, as I receive it, from E.P.¹

What did you think of Elizabeth Bowen's address at the Institute affair--I saw you leaning back with your eyes closed as if listening.² I was very much moved but the audience seemed not paying much attention. So it goes.

Best,

Bill

[P] [Rutherford]

[June 1953]

[From Williams to Burke: the following was sent with the letter which follows. The first sentence is the only part typed by Williams.]

It may mean something that signatories are almost all from small "state" universities.

ALARMED by the neglect of the Greek and Latin classics, milleniar source of light and guide in judgment of ideas and forms in the occident; by lack

of curiosity concerning what is current in contemporary foreign languages both in the west and in the orient; by growing carelessness in the use of language both private and public, and insensitiveness to the values of the literary arts which serve to maintain language in a healthy condition for civilized use; by the torpor of a pseudo-scholarship which does not mean any activity of the mind but mere retrospect.

WE URGE, TOWARD A REORIENTATION, that instead of hunting out the provenience of every bit of rubble used in the construction of literary works, the student of literature ask, and answer on the basis of evidence supplied by the works themselves, these three questions:

1. To what degree of awareness has the given author attained?
2. What was his aim and purpose in writing at all?
3. What part of his discoveries is of use now, or is likely to be of use tomorrow, in maintaining the life of the mind here or elsewhere?

Clark Emery (University of Miami)

Ashley Brown (Washington and Lee University)

Hugh Kenner (University of California)

Rudd Fleming (University of Maryland)

L.R. Lind (University of Kansas)

Amiya Chakravarty (University of Kansas)

H.M. McLuhan (University of Toronto)

W.F. Stead (Trinity College)

Margaret Bates (Catholic University of America)

Robert Stallman (University of Connecticut)

As our means of disseminating this statement are limited, we ask those who receive it to give it what publicity they can, especially by reprinting it in full, and to express their agreement or dissent in as lively a manner as possible. We request that any communications be addressed to: W. James, P.O. box 6964, Washington 20, D.C.

[B]

[Andover]

June 9, 1953

Dear Bill,

How.

Sure, you must come out, as soon as you feel like it. Can make the decision at the last minute, if you phone us (Netcong 2-0709 J). Or we can arrange it beforehand, whereat you might fare better banquet-wise.

We're expecting Dick Lewis and his wife up from Princeton soon (around the fifteenth).³ It would be nice if you came then. But we don't yet know exactly when it will be. (Incidentally, there are few trains to Cranberry Lake now, a little less few to Netcong, but plenty to Dover. So when you think of coming, look at all three spots along the line, take the nearest one if it fits your schedule, but if you have chosen one further down the line, we'll be glad to meet it. And in any case, we'll certainly use the whole range for your trip back. Difference btw. Cranberry Lake and Netcong is completely negligible, and difference btw. Netcong and Dover is so nearly so that we somewhat incline to think of that as the norm.)

I'm glad that I seemed to be listening to Elizabeth Bowen's address. For I was, most earnestly and respectfully, doing just that. But her slow pace, heroically undertaken to take account of her impediment and outwit it, got me so

nervous that I simply couldn't follow the sentences. I tried again and again; and every bit I heard sounded good and solid; but I just couldn't stand the strain--so I kept getting lost, not after a few sentences just, but after a few words. So I still don't know what she said. But I do know that what she said wasn't the usual piffle that is at those doings usually pooped forth. I knew I was in the presence of something I should respect; I got that from the sequences I did contrive to follow. But honest to God, Bill, that pace, which was slower than Roosevelt and Churchill put together, got me so godam nervous that I could have followed her better had she been talking too fast in French or German. Perhaps if I hadn't been medicated besides--but with that dimension added, too...well...

But that brings us to our next subject. Thanks indeed for the Statement, urging toward a Reorientation. The three questions are not bad. But breathes there the question putter with soul so dead who never to himself hath said: "I can put three better ones"?

My three would be:

1. What equals what in a given work? (That is, what is "good," what "bad," what desirable, what undesirable, what heroic, what villainous, what cowardly, etc. I mean. I mean, not what judgments do we have about the work in these

regards, but what judgments does the work itself seem to have about such matters?)

2. What is the work a cure for? (All works are "medicine." Otherwise, why bother to write them? But I won't try to explain that to you, for I realize that it's out of your field.)

3. What are the stages of the work's unfolding? (For by its process, the work "processes" us, if I may borrow from the most indecent modern cant.)

Am writing an article for which, at this point in my first draft, your item seems so fit that I think I'll snatch at it. I'll quote theirs, pay it my respects, then add the inevitable. However, as per the vid. sup.

Meanwhile, Bill, the pond is plenteous, the land is lush, and I for the moment am mellow, with pen in one hand and drink in the other. And, having turned off the radio, what more could I ask for, besides fame, and ten million dollars, and a bit less heart-consciousness?

May we somehow, Dopo, always forever flourish.
Meanwhile, the best from here to you and Floss--and spick.

Sincerely,

K.B.

Yes, I thought Bowen was very good--chopping out bit by bit sentences that really flowed as she had written them. Your coming doesn't have to have any link with the Lewis's

visit. Only any time we know in advance of anyone's coming whom you might like to see, we'll let you know. But hope you'll just come up on your own very soon.

Love,

Libbie

[P]

[Rutherford]

Oct 12/53

Dear Libbie,

If this coming Sunday is o.k. with you, we can drive up to Cranberry Lake with our Mr. Bill. Then if you could meet us at the store or the club house, that would be wonderful. Possibly it would be best to phone you when we get there, as young Bill is often later in getting away than he plans, being an M.D. like his dad.

So, if the weather is good and you are in a receiving spell, we'll see you Sunday. It will be a pleasure. I know you will find Bill greatly improved and barring the unforeseen I have hopes of even more return to normal.

Our best to you all.

Florence

[P]

[Rutherford]

11/4/53

Dear Ken,

The enclosed letter from Norman Pearson explains itself.⁴ If you will risk your record and go to the trouble of forwarding it to him I am sure that it would be properly handled and promptly returned to you. I would be extremely grateful to you for the service.

Perhaps you would like to write direct to Pearson yourself. If so do so as it would be better than carrying on the necessary arrangements through a third person. But if you dislike the whole idea I'll tell Norman about it.

The expense of it will be my responsibility though I shall have to ask you to make the necessary initial outlay. We had a swell time at your place though as usual the very moderate amount of liquor I imbibed seems to have gone to my tongue. I apologize.

Best to Libby and the boys.

Bill

31 October 1953

Dear Bill,

I may or may not know my own strength (which isn't much), but I obviously don't know Yale's (which can sometimes be surprising). At least I ought to have made full inquiries before writing Floss about my query of a copy of Burke's recording of your poems. For I find that the Library is going in whole hog for recordings, in connection with what the university likes to call audio-visual education,

and is assembling a vast series of collections of many sorts. They are eager to have this recording, or others like it; and if Burke could send me the wire recording, I will have it back to him promptly with a disk for him, and one for you too if you would like it. Yale's own copy they will take off on another wire, since they prefer the fidelity of wire transcripts, as well as finding them easier to store and make available to the students. They will play off Burke's once, and take the recordings off their own wire so as to save wear on his. You write him, or I'll write him, if you send me his address.

As to the Quevedo, we'll wait until my introduction is off the press, which should be in a few weeks.⁵ Then we can see. I'll send you one, though you won't need to read it.

Have just been in Boston to a meeting of the New England College English Association, before which you spoke in Hartford, and heard your name on all sides. Samuel Morse French was very excited about the fine essay you sent him on Wallace S., and someone named Milton Hindus told me proudly that you had either written, or promised to write, something on Whitman for him.⁶ They had a Whitman session on the program, which I chaired, or rather rocked.

Thirlwall sent me an immaculate précis of the Paterson material, which answers my immediate purposes nicely.⁷ French told me that a part of the 5th part was either out, or just to appear, and thought it one of your very best. That's being alive in the finest sense! Let the juices keep on running!?

Yrs,
Norman

[P]

[Andover]

November 5, 1953

Dear Bill,

How.

Delighted to hear from you. Was afraid that I had tired you, with my ways that tire me. But, blee me, I recall no lingual laxations. (Have we ever thus indulged, really,

since the easy early days? The days ohne souci, or sans Sorge. Oh, were there ever such...)

But as regards The Record, tell 'em I am Imperious. If Pearson will arrange for me to bring it into NYC, at some Official Place, I'll be glad to participate. (Only requirement being that they must agree to excise my horrendously nasalized interpositions. Can I be wholly as bad as that?)

Under these conditions, there'll be no charge--though I guess somebody ought to buy me a drink. But I won't mail it, or otherwise ship it--and my experience with these machines leads me to think that they should record from my machine, which I would bring with me. (Incidentally, my machine is not wire, but tape. A Brush.)

This is the first time in my life I've ever had a chance to be a prima donna. And it's wonderful. Jeez, what you poets get away with! As regards you, I'm all for it. But when I think of politics like Tate...oof!

Meanwhile, am preparing for a lecture on Bentham, whose attempts to drive the Imaginative element out of language were much more imaginative than most poets' attempts to keep it in.⁸

Best greetings to you, and Floss, and the family.

Sincerely,

As regards a discussion we were having: "Midnight" wouldn't be an ideal example of an accent on a short syllable, since the two consonants, "dn" would make a long quantity, so far as Latin scansion is concerned. To be a perfect example, it would have to be "mi'night," if there were such. Opening Paterson, I note: "To make a start,/out of particulars." "Particulars" would be a perfect example of an accent on a short syllable. Heck--not perfect example. To be perfect, the "u" of "particular" should be short, since long "u" has a "y" sound that slows up the "c" by adding to it. Though the "o" of "of" is short, the syllable would be counted long in Latin scansion because of the f-p. So I guess "out of" would be, in English, something midway between a trochee and a spondee (as regards the kind of tests I had in mind). "-ulars" would be midway between an iamb and a spondee. By mere accent, the first line would be merely two iambs. But by quantitative tests the sounds would be much subtler. For instance, the long "o" of "to" would place "to make" midway btw. iamb and spondee. Lots of chances here, yes?

Notes for 1953

¹ Ezra Pound (1885-1972): between 1945-1958, the Department of Justice kept Ezra Pound confined at St. Elizabeth's asylum. Sporadically, he would fire off gnomic, scornful notes to Williams.

² In May 1953, Elizabeth Bowen (1899-1973) delivered her "Blaysfield Address" to the American Academy of Arts and Letters (Glendinning 263). Burke was elected a member of the Academy in 1946; Williams was elected a member in 1958.

³ R.W.B. Lewis (Richard Warrington Baldwin Lewis) may originally have met Burke at Bennington College. Interestingly, he would cite Burke's The Grammar of Motives in his The American Adam two years later (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1955): 98.

⁴ Norman Holms Pearson (1909-1975), 1938 editor of The Oxford Anthology of American Literature (in which he included eleven of Williams' poems), professor at Yale (1941). As a collector for the American Collection at Yale, Pearson remained associated with Williams over the years, once asking him for a play that a colleague of his might use at the drama department, and in an editorial capacity, he submitted a selected list of poems he felt should be

included in the poet's The Selected Poems, published in 1949 (Laughlin 147). The recordings Williams refers to here may be those eight poems and one selection from Paterson that were recorded at Kenneth Burke's house, 21 June 1951 (Wallace 261-262).

5 Don Francisco de Quevedo, A Dog and the Fever, trans. by William Carlos Williams and Raquel Helene Williams (Connecticut: The Shoe String Press, 1954).

6 Milton Hindus, ed. Leaves of Grass; One Hundred Years After (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1955). Williams' essay included in that volume: "An Essay on Leaves of Grass", 22-31. Burke's essay in that volume: "Policy Made Personal: Whitman's Verse and Prose--Salient Traits", 74-108.

7 John C. Thirlwall, professor of English at CCNY and editor of The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams. Interestingly, Thirlwall was to write a Williams biography, but when the poet saw Thirlwall's first draft of his introduction to the Selected Letters, he realized it was not to be. Prior to that realization, Thirlwall had worked with Williams for at least a decade in preparation for such a project and thus had access to all the manuscripts squirreled away in Williams' attic study (Mariani 685).

⁸ Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), English philosopher, political theorist, and founder of utilitarianism. In Burke's A Rhetoric of Motives (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Co., 1950), he attacks Bentham's view of rhetoric as mere metaphoric deception.

1954

[P] [Rutherford]

May 11, 1954

Dear Ken & Libby,

Here it is spring again--an inch of snow on the ground and two blankets on the bed. Hail to thee blithe spirit! even though it may not be the sky-lark! We'll have to be seeing you one of these days. By the way, have you read Ezra Pound's translation from the Greek of Sophocles, "The Women of Trachis" (in Hudson Review) very interesting.¹

The Columbia Broadcasting Co., it may not be the right name, has been after me to make a recording of a reading of my poetry.² It came to me that I might ask you if I could not induce them to take their apparatus up to your farm and do it there using the reading that you have already made--and which I shall never be able to do for anyone again.

I haven't yet got their consent to do so but they may call up any day now. I want to be ready for them.

Apart from that how are you both? Recently we journeyed to the national capitol (Not to see the prize ape recently active there) for a short stay of just three days. I had been given a commission to write an article on an exhibition of American Primitives.³ Very impressive. Those old boys

(and gals) had a lot to put down in paint about the world about them. I was thrilled with them and only hope I did them credit. The article is to be printed in one of those swanky art magazines costing a dollar or two, see if I can get it to you.

There have been other activities on the writing front which I'll report on time. Poetry has accepted the Coda of a long, 30 p., three part poem which will not be published till next year, etc. etc.⁴ It's slow work but after all it's only to keep busy that I write at all so I have no kick--the panic occasionally comes over me that at any moment I may find myself with no more projects to occupy my seething brain and then--as in the past, all my life--I turn and look behind me to try and see how far the hounds are behind me.

It's heartening to realize that I still have two or three (or more) friends I can turn to when I want to spill over. Is your older boy at college yet. I occasionally think of him and his younger brother wishing them luck. My older boy's wife expects a baby any day now--he said it is not fair to bring up an only child: most men do not look for such an excuse for their rutting. Same to you.

Best luck,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

June 9/54

Dear Libbie,

Can't remember if Kenneth is here or there just now, so will you be kind enough to call it to his attention?⁵ (The enclosed letter.) I suppose M. Hindus wants to know for sure if K.B. is going to add his bit.

Still hoping to get up to see you all some day. We'll make it eventually!

Floss

[P]

[Rutherford]

6/17/54

Dear Ken,

How did you make out with the Librarian of Rutgers? Did he arrange to have the record of my reading re-recorded?⁶ Has there been any hitch to the proceedings? Lemme know the details.

And what about the man from Brandeis? Are you going to write the note for him on Whitman?⁷ Drop him a note so that I may be able to face him.

? ? ? ?

Wishing you the same.

Your pal with a question mark about his neck,

(better than a dead albatross)

w.c.w.

No! I'll be damned if I do

Bill

[B]

[Andover]

July 19, 1954

Dear Bill,

How.

Is this, the herewith, a sin? Trying to decide whether I could make precise my feeling that Whitman's first lines are always different in rhythm from the typical developments in his verse, I copied out a batch of first lines.

And when I looked at them "en masse," I saw that, with but a bit of rearranging, they could be made into a medley.

(Am in a Whitman swirl at the moment. Have done the first draft of an essay on the Vistas, am now trying in general to sum up the Leaves, and then for a wind-up I'd like to analyze the "Lilacs." But I still am not sure whether I can meet the deadline, though sometimes I am. Do you know if anyone has made anything of the fact that the trinity of images in the Lincoln poem--lilacs, star, and singing bird--are scent, sight, and sound respectively? References to scent are rare in Whitman, though there are indications that his leaves of grass may have had strong

olfactory connotations for him personally. Some passages clearly show a strong identification of scent with woman, too, though he also liked the sniff of his own armpits, he says. Your star-lines that Stevens quotes, by the way, are much better than the ones he writes on them, though his are quite good, too.)

Yours for ensemble-Individuality,

Sincerely,

K.B.

Everything is in a fantastic jam hereabouts at the moment. Granny had a stroke recently, and is still in bad shape, though slowly recovering somewhat. Carpenters have ripped a chunk of our house apart, for patching and an addition. And I am uncomfortably trying to pick my way through a jumble of notes, while leaving enough mail unanswered to complete my wretchedness at public relations.

Oof!

Though savants have denied that the bird Whitman heard singing really was a thrush, we should certainly take him at his word when he says that it was a hermit.

Don't bother to return the Whitmaniana.

First O Songs for a prelude

by W. Omnific Whitman

As I ponder'd in silence,

Starting from fish-shaped Paumanok where I was born;

As I ponder'd in silence,
Starting from fish-shaped Paumanok where I was born;
As I lay with my head in your lap, Camerado,
Thou who hast slept all night upon the storm;
Vigil strange I kept on the field one night,
This moment yearning and thoughtful sitting alone.

Over the carnage rose prophetic a voice
From pent-up aching rivers.

A march in the ranks hard-prest, and the road unknown,
Spirit whose work is done--spirit of dreadful hours!

(Now list to my morning's romanza, I tell the signs of the/
Answerer
An old man bending I come upon new faces.)

Lo, the unbounded sea!

Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face!

In cabin'd ships at sea,

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,

Over the Western sea hither from Nippon come

As I ebb'd with the ocean of life,

Facing west from California's shore,

Rise, O days, from your fathomless deeps, till you loftier,/ fiercer sweep.

Give me the splendid silent sun with all his beams/
full-dazzling.

O to make the most jubilant song!

A song for occupations!

(Ah, little recks the laborer.)

A song of the rolling earth, and of words according
I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear.
These I singing in spring collect for lovers,
Trickle drops! my blue veins leaving!
America always! Always our old feuillage!

Come, said the Muse;
Come, my tan-faced children.

I sing the body electric,
Weapon shapely, naked, wan,
Scented herbage of my breast,
Myself and mine gymnastic ever,
Full of life now, compact, visible,
I celebrate myself and sing myself;
Me imperturbe, standing at ease in Nature.

On journeys through the States we start,
Among the men and women, the multitude,
In paths untrodden,
The prairie grass dividing, its special odor breathing--
Not heaving from my ribb'd breast only,
Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road.

You who celebrate bygones,
Are you the new person drawn toward me?
Whoever you are, I fear you are walking the walks of dreams.

Behold this swarthy face, these gray eyes;
Passing stranger! you do not know how longingly I look upon you.

To get betimes in Boston town I rose this morning early,
When lilacs last in the door-yard bloom'd
On the beach at night
By blue Ontario's shore.

Respondez! Respondez!
Here, take this gift--
Come, I will make the continent indissoluble.
O take my hand, Walt Whitman!
As Adam early in the morning
To the garden anew ascending.

[P]

[Rutherford]

July 24, 1954

Dear Ken,

Here in the country by the sea--your letter was forwarded to me (on rereading this, it sounds like the beginning of a Millay sonnet, I must be losing my manhood even more rapidly than I suspect). I write to urge you not to fall by the way but to complete the essay on Whitman before the deadline shall arrive. I count on you to do this. You wouldn't let an old pal down. I would love to read what

you have to say and would count it a privilege to appear in
the same book with you.⁸

No, I never saw mention of the trilogy being associated
with the 3 senses. Good for you. It is interesting.

That's all I have to say. I hope the reconstruction is
going well. Find time to finish the article is the ardent
wish of your co-defendant,

Bill

William Carlos Williams

Notes for 1954

¹ Sophocles, "The Women of Trachis," trans. Ezra Pound, Hudson Review 6 (Winter 1954): 487-523.

² Five audio recordings were made by Williams in 1954; the first was a reissue of a 1949 recording; the second was made for the NBC radio program, "Anthology" (March); the third was again for NBC--two days later; the forth was a recording made at the University of Puerto Rico (March); and the fifth, the most likely candidate, was done by International Broadcasting Services for the Voice of America (June) (Wallace 262-264).

³ William Carlos Williams, "Painting in the American Grain," Art News 4 (June, 1954): 20-23.

⁴ William Carlos Williams, "Of Ashphodel," Poetry 86 (April 1955): 99-107.

⁵ Between 1943 and 1961, Burke taught at Bennington College, as well as at Kenyon College during some summer sessions.

⁶ No record exists of such a recording by Rutgers.

⁷ See note 5 for 1953.

⁸ See note 5 for 1953.

1955

[B]

[Andover]

[May 4, 1955]

Dear Bill,

Many thanks indeed for your generous note. And thanks to Floss, too. And best luck to you on your trip.¹ (Me, I'm now getting ready for a one-night stand at Cornell this Friday.) When you get back, we hope that we can arrange for another visit from you and the Thirlwalls. Here's looking forward to then.

Sincerely,

K.B.

[P]

[Rutherford]

June 29, 1955

Dear Ken,

This ain't the letter I promised you. That's coming when I find the time to think for a time first.

This is merely to bear a request for a young woman that wants a recommendation from you for a Guggenheim fellowship. Blame it on me, she never even thought of you as a possible sponsor. If you receive the request, after you have seen her work, act on it as you think best.

The name is Denise Goodman.² I think she has the makings.

We had a good time last week or so ago that Sunday--it might have been in the time of Aristotle since it is part of the infinite past. We have been talking of your proposed trip to California after your younger son goes to college next year. Good luck to you and Libby at that time. Be sure to stop off at Santa Fe on your way! You ain't seen nothin yet.

See you again as soon as we are able.

Best,

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

[July 12, 1955]

Dear Ken,

You had every reason, from what I have since discovered in your book of poems, to refuse to accept my casual opinion of them given in such an offhand manner when I was at the farm.³ I have been reading them again as I told you I would and have been much moved, I have just started to reread them beginning at the back of the book with the "Rhapsody Under the Autumn Moon" which I find now to be seriously good as anything I have ever read. If I ask you to change the insignificant inversion in the 6th line you'll know how to

take the poem being so superbly well conceived and executed. Beautiful work. I was full of admiration for what you had done and made available for me and for anyone who can read and enjoy such a poem.

Now that I have begun I'll go back slowly as I am able and what I discover I'll tell you about as I am able. I like the controlled freedom of the line you have used in the poem of which I am speaking. Very good.

Best,

Bill

[B & P]

[Andover]

July 18, 1955

Dear Bill,

Heckaroo, that's a bonus! Many thanks for the kind words. But you violated the rules. The rules were: You were simply to tell me what you considered to be the "soft spots" and why. I wasn't fishing for some more kind words. I was fishing for some statements about your own aversions.

Point is:

The one claim I make for the book is that it has brought the most unusual diversity of responses, with some persons even loathing what others have said that they prefer.⁴ So, in keeping with my Criticaster's Guile, I have begun trying to use it as a Personnel Director might, to

size up the characters of my subjects. Now I've probably spoiled the magic, but that's what I had in mind. In briefee weefy, I had hoped to get some formulas about yourself by yourself, while you were supposedly busy formulating me. Then you go and spoil things by thinking that you had hurt my feelings, and reporting on things that you like.

Jeez, strange as it may seem, I ain't averse to your suddenly liking something I wrote, and saying so. As a matter of fact, God bless you, even if you did violate the rules.

May you rot in hell, however, for giving my name to the lady poet. I agree with you that she is good. (Above all, I liked her description of the kids getting out of school and busting loose. But it's a very subversive idea--and since she published it, I trust that she already has a dossier in the F.B.I. files.) My bellyache is that, when I get to writing up one of those things for Moe, I spend more goddamn time on it than needed to write a chapter, and then, to cap it off, my batting average there has been pretty rotten, for years.⁵ In any case, now that the damage has been done, count me in. And my song in her behalf will be as sonorous as my cracked voice permits.

Wd. say: it was good to see you and your party, and to see you fresh from the benignity of being sunned upon by

audiences. Best greetings, and to Floss. And I think you still owe me that report on soft spots.

Sincerely, personnelly

[P]

[Rutherford]

[July 19, 1955]

Dear Ken,

It'll be a hard job to tell you exactly what I mean. That is why I haven't written you in detail before this and that is, I understand, exactly why you want to hear from me. It has to do with advances in the art of writing down a poem, as I conceive it, over what has been done in the past--even the very recent past. The way you think about a poem, the way you conceive of it in relation to the thought it contains, betrays you.

After all you cannot look in my writing for anything but the most advanced feeling for the art that I am capable of and you cannot look to my appreciation of your own work being my intimate and most understanding friend from any other standpoint.

To take a flier, I am completely through with the concept and the practice of blank verse. The counting of the five regular syllables makes me grind my teeth. So that in your later, longer poems when you adopt the form I can hardly read what you have written without a feeling of

defeat. I don't care what you're saying, it means nothing to me. That is why I praised in the poem I spoke of in last letter the loose treatment of the lines as being so refreshing.

And the whole effect of, taking such a form as blank verse, and using it to contain a poem as one would contain evaporated milk in a can, is wrong. A poem is a construction and not what the poet has to say. That is a tough nut to crack but I believe and trust that you can crack it.

In other words, all my objections to your poems when they exist have to do with technique as if that can be spoken of separately from the body of the work itself--which is impossible. I'll send you a copy of one of my latest poems, in fact, the last--written 5 months ago and to be contained in my last book. If it means anything to you or not, keep it for as far as I know it may well be my last poem.

Cheerio! and pip pip!--I am going to devote myself to some prose from this time on as I am able. Best to Libby.

Yours till hell freezes,

Bill

TRIBUTE TO THE PAINTERS

Satyrs dance!

all the deformities take wing

centaurs
leading to the rout of the vocables
in the writings
of Gertrude
Stein--but
you cannot be
an artist
by mere ineptitude .

The dream
is in pursuit!
The neat figures of
Paul Klee
fill the canvass
but that
is not the work
of a child .

The cure began, perhaps,
with the abstractions
of Arabic art
Durer
with his Melancholy
was ware of it--
the shattered masonry. Leonardo
saw it

the obsession
and ridiculed it
in La Gioconda.
Bosch's
congeries of tortured souls and devils
who prey upon them
fish
swallowing
their own entrails

Freud

Picasso

Juan Gris

The letter from a friend

saying:

For the last
three nights
I have slept like a baby
without
liquor or dope of any sort!

we know
that a stasis
from a chrysalis
has stretched its wings--
like a bull

or the Minotaur
or Beethoven
in the scherzo
of his 9th Symphony
stomped
his heavy feet

I saw love
mounted naked on a horse
on a swan
the back of a fish
the blood-thirsty conger eel
and laughed
recalling the New
in the pit
among his fellows
when the indifferent chap
with the machine gun
was spraying the heap.

He
had not yet been hit
but smiled
comforting his companions.

Dreams possess me
and the dance

of my thoughts
involving animals
the blameless beasts
and there came to me
just now
the knowledge of
the tyranny of the image
and how
men
in their designs
have learned
to shatter it
whatever it may be
that the trouble
in their minds
shall be quieted
and put to bed
again.

W.C.Williams

[P]

[Andover]

September 5, 1955

Dear Bill,

Confession. You had carefully clamped the pages of your poem in the wrong order. And it had me puzzled until this blunt truth dawned on me.

Now, getting them straight, I see that it is a very lovely poem, and very moving. (psst: though Marianne Moore warns against using "very".) Thanks much indeed for letting me see it, and letting me keep the copy.

I think I understand your resistance to corseted verse. The kind of straight-forwardness, or "naturalness," you aim at is to be got only by the methods you have so well developed. So far as your own work is concerned, you prove your point irrefutably.

My only faint answer is that there are other kinds of effects to be got. In my "Liber Momentorum," for instance, 94btm-95tp, the three lines at the top of p. 95 are substantially blank verse, concealed somewhat by the fact that the first three syllables are printed as a line by themselves.⁶ It seems to me that this particular kind of formalism is proper, as an offshoot from the preceding paragraph of prose. And something similar takes place, in the shift from free verse to rhymed, corseted verse on my "Invective and Prayer" item, on pp. 32-33.

Similarly, it seems to me that even today one may have a sonnet mood, and at such times let him write a sonnet. Or he may have a jog-trot contemplative mood--and then let him do post-Wordsworthian blank verse.

I am aware that I speak merely as a dilettante, hence sans authority. But frankly, if I could write the sort of thing I most urgently want to write, it would be a piece of highly fluctuant prose (ranging from narrative and fantasy to the most abstruse abstract reasoning) interspersed with versifying interludes that sometimes got the kind of effect you get so well and sometimes got wholly formalistic effects (as with Baudelaire's mighty "La Geante" sonnet, or a Goethean ding-dong lyric, for instance the formalistic yet dreamlike musicality of Mignon's song, "Kennst du das Land"). If I could get you to agree that such a form is allowable, then next I'd plead for individual corseted forms as fragments of such a totality.

Here's betting you'd like a lot the last chapter of Edward Sapir's book on Language (Harcourt, Brace). I copy out this neatly summarizing bit: "Latin and Greek verse depends on the principle of contrasting weights; English verse, on the principle of contrasting stresses; French verse, on the principles of number and echo; Chinese verse, on the principles of number, echo, and contrasting pitches. Each of these rhythmic systems proceeds from the unconscious

dynamic habit of the language, falling from the lips of the folk." He defines thought as "nothing but language denuded of its outward garb." And language is "the collective art of expression."

It was good to see you all the other day, and I hope you're none the worse for wear to do with the trip. Also, the visit came just right for me, as I had finished with all my odds and ends of work, and was ready to turn in the direction of preparations for the teaching bout (which begins on the twelfth). I cleared the slate by the simple but drastic decision to forget about my book until the long vacation this winter. Meanwhile here I sit, drinkless at cocktail hour, but mildly Serpasilious, though not unmindful that the smell of ripening grapes rises to rebuke my a-Dionysiac lethargy.

Best greetings to you and Floss--and let's plan for another visit.

Sincerely,

Your reference to dreamlike thoughts of animals interested me a lot. Why not try to pin them all down? (Or perhaps you are doing just that.) I once started to tell Harold Rosenberg about a dog.⁷ He interrupted me by saying "Oh, I know what you're going to say. You're going to say that dogs have the characters of their owners." I was going to tell him about a very mean dog I once had.

[P]

[Rutherford]

Sept. 7, 1955

Dear Ken,

Thanks for the tip out of Marianne's cook book, it is a good one that I'll profit by. I'll never use "very" again without scrutinizing the context carefully. It's amazing how careless or asleep we can be about those things. By the way, I never hear from the Moore any more I wonder what, if anything, has happened. She used to send me her books whenever published and I always did the same for her. Has she outstripped me in the number of her publications; therefore? I refuse to change my ways unless convinced that my contributions, and someone convinces me of it, are no longer welcome. We should see each other oftener.

Keep the poem. I meant it for you when I sent it.

Of course you are right, there are many ways to write a poem. All I meant to say is that I do not like blank verse as a recourse when I face the modern poem. There is so much that should come first. Undoubtedly I am prejudiced in favor of a more experimental approach. There is so little time, why repeat the forms of the past?

I am so harrassed with or by the serious guys with their intellectual troubles that they think anything they say in whatever form they think they are adopting so long as they are permitted to speak at all, that they forget that

the form of the poem is the poem...that I have become sensitive, hypersensitive, to a very common situation. (That "very" again).

I'd rather not write at all than use an--a spent form in making or attempting to make my constructions. Can that be why M.M. is through with me? since she cannot agree with my experiments? It is along the line of our discussion.

But I'm too impatient. I detest doctrinaire formula worship which it is not when a friend is using a convenient verse for to speak his mind. The fault is mine, but you so pleased me in your epigrammatic verses and the one longer piece of which we have already spoken that I became impatient when I thought you slow to win the rest of my approval. After all you are my friend, I wanted you to succeed in everything, even to teach me in my own art.

It was a good afternoon, I wish it could be repeated. I wish for impossible things: that we could communicate in ways that would surpass ordinary communication. That is where I feel my inadequacy: I'm not up to it any more--if I was ever up to it, but these engineers and physicists that ignore the profundities and simplicities of the human intellect give me a swift pain in the ass.

Bog, go bury your bone,

Bill

Tell Libby, I'm working day and night--with necessary layoffs for recuperation--on that "long short story" I outlined for her and hope to have it finished in a month--at least a first draught of it. I warn her that I am feeding on her warmth. Where else shall we find comfort but out of a woman? Many women! Ha!

W.

[B]

[Andover]

Sept. 8, 1955

Dear Floss and Bill,

I think this is going to work out fine. Have you any objections to my proceeding along the lines in my letter to Hannah?⁸ Do you have any people who would definitely want a copy of the record--you mentioned some fellow up at Yale, I believe, who might be interested?

It was good to have you here last week. We shall see you again when we all go up to Thirlwall's some time later in the fall--but if you can get a ride with your young ones any time do come up again sooner.

Love,

Lib.

[B]

[Andover]

Sept. 8, 1955

Dear Hannah,

Many thanks for all the information about the records, and all your trouble in getting it, and in such good detail so that we know just what is involved.⁹

I think we should go ahead with the Audio-Video people. I will play the recording carefully again, and get an idea about the exact time it takes, maybe getting Butch to do a little cutting in between pieces to make it fit.

The whole business of an organization to sell the records won't come up at this time at all, as the only reason we want the acetate made is to get the perishable tape recording onto a matrix, to avoid re-recording and the terrific loss in fidelity when this is done.

The financing of the \$54.25 can, I think, be easily accomplished by having people who want copies of the record divide up the total cost. If we had say 15 records run off, two to go to the Library of Congress, and then collect \$5. a piece for the others from people who want a copy (I can think of four or five among our close friends who would be eager to do this)--the cost would be covered, and the acetate could go to Bill for his use in the future, whenever he wants it.

Would the Institute be willing to pay ten bucks for its two records, or would it insist upon the wholesale price?

I'll clear with Bill, and make a careful time check on the recording, and write you again in a couple of days.

As I said before, this recording is really good; much better I think than any of the other readings by the modern poets--it brings out the character of the reader marvelously, and adds a lot to the understanding of the poems too. We wouldn't be so anxious about getting it on permanent records, if it weren't so good.

Some day when all has calmed down here, I'll write you a personal letter and bring you up to date on family activities.

Love,

Lib

[B]

[Andover]

Oct. 6, 1955

Dear Bill,

I have disappointing news about the recording. Rickie Leacock took the tape into some of his experts in this field with the idea of filtering out machine noise and polishing up the sound for recording, and they say that the original recording is made so light that when it is blown up sufficiently for recording on regular records, the noise of

the machine makes too much interference--and that because the recording was made so light, it can't be blown up successfully. But they can make duplicate tapes, just like the one we have, without any loss in fidelity, and I am asking them to make one for you. This you will have for use if anyone does decide a record can be made of it. This is all the more disappointing because these fellows in the movie and recording business thought the reading was very very interesting.

Before I got this report from Rickie, I had found out from a good recording company, that the making of the stamp and records from it would have been around or over a hundred dollars, because of its length, etc.

So we are just about back where we were in the beginning, which burns me up. Except we shall have a couple of good tapes to preserve the reading just as it is. I'm passing on this info to Hannah Josephson, asking her if a tape could serve her purposes.

The commercial reproducing company says that the usual way of reproducing now, is on tapes not records. But of course this won't serve people who have record-players, and not recorders. So again *#%\$&%*) ("\$_\$&%'_-(with your four-letter word vocabulary, you shouldn't have any trouble filling in for me.)

We received your beautiful little new book and it is very fine indeed both inside and out.¹⁰ KB has already read it and will write you soon.

We hope to see you before too long. Love to you and Floss,

Lib

He was very pleased with long poem, which I have not yet read.

[B]

[Andover]

November 7, 1955

Dear Bill,

Yes, you were right. I see it now. The kind of thing you were after in this new book (and the kind of thing you got beautifully) makes iambic pentameter seem almost ludicrously malapropos.

The first time I read the "Asphodel" poem, it seemed so completely dissolving that I actually began to feel faint. All the little nodules of fight had been melted, turned into a succession of breathings-out (each tercet being in effect one such moment). The most disarming kind of utterance one could imagine. Ironically, however, your "titular" moment is iambic tetrameter:

Of asphodel, that greeny flower,
I come, my sweet, to sing to you!

What shall we make of that?

I have delayed writing you, not just because I have been busy (I have been being fantastically busy with the schoolwork), but also because of embarrassment. This is not the sort of book that one can merely be "complimentary" about. It is a profoundly moving book. And everything I started to say seemed inadequate, so inadequate that I couldn't bring myself to say it. Indeed, I'd like to avoid the issue still longer--but I'd better say something, just to avoid misunderstandings.

The coda of the "Asphodel" poem sums up racingly. Its swift introduction of all the essential elements (each one dwelt on just long enough) is marked by a mixture of fervor and skill that has the quality of perfect fulfilment. Here, I felt, the sheer Logic of Language was speaking, using you--one might say--as its medium, and under the sign of a brave naturalism (poet merging with scientist).

Of the shorter poems, I most preferred "The Sparrow". Its accuracy, its comicality, the poet's democratic identification with a mutt among birds: that all makes one feel good. In the first poem, were you in effect saying that, as the negress was of a marigold tinge, so marigolds are negroid? (I mean: as regards the sheerly visual dimension of the poem, not its possible figuring of a dark realm beyond the "objects.")

Incidentally, might I ask whether, in the closing lines of "Asphodel", you in any way thought, however fleetingly, of your earlier lines on the saxifrage? I refer to the associations that are by you connected with "and begun again to penetrate/ into all crevices." (Jeez, all of a sudden I realize, too, that the refrain you quote from Spencer's "Prothalamion" is iambic pentameter--and fits quite neatly as parenthesis to your remarks on "the pomp and ceremony/ of marriage." It is another kind of "summarizing" line, like your "titular" statement.)

This is just "on account," Bill. More later. And I am all the more determined that I must pull all my notes together and try to finish up that essay I've been planning for, on your verse. I owe it to myself to get that done. Meanwhile, I at least have the satisfaction of plugging for you with my students. One of my "counselors" took a spontaneous shine to you--and we are discussing your verse in our conference periods. The class itself I have been able to "alert" only secondarily this term (via Marianne Moore's pages on you in Predilections), since we are now stressing other aspects of the subject.¹¹ But I hope it will be different next term, when we stress Poetics.

Meanwhile, whenever the thought of our adventures abroad makes me uneasy, I am heartened all over again by the thought of your verse (and of your prose, too, for that

matter). I tell myself with patriotic fervor: There must be something sound in a country that could produce a guy like that.

But to my chores (and they are manifold). More anon.
And best greetings, and to Floss.

Sincerely,

K.B.

Also, I'll send some, more formal, lines to McDowell.

November 7, 1955

Mr. David McDowell, Editor
Random House, Inc.
457 Madison Avenue
New York 22, N.Y.

Dear Mr. McDowell,

Thank you greatly indeed for sending me a copy of William Carlos Williams' new book, Journey to Love.

Since receiving it, I have read it several times, both for itself and in connection with a study of Bill Williams' poetry on which I have been taking notes for some years.

I can well understand why he lays so much store by the long "Asphodel" poem. The trouble is: I found it so profoundly moving, everything I would say about it seems inadequate.

To begin with: Its rhythm has dissolved all the little nodules of fight, becoming like a perfect succession of breathings-out. And its coda sums up racingly. The swift introduction of all the essential elements (each one dwelt on just long enough) is marked by a mixture of fervor and skill that has the quality of complete fulfilment. Here, I felt, the sheer Logic of Language was speaking, using the poet as its medium, and under the sign of a brave naturalism (poet merging with scientist). The whole is a retrospect that has the quality of a call towards the future.

Of the shorter poems, I most preferred "The Sparrow." Its accuracy, its comicality, the poet's

democratic identification with a mutt among birds:
that all makes one feel good.

This is summational poetry, yet done face to
face, wholly without official posturing. And out of
simple things, it builds the visionary.

Here are some ad interim notions that occur to
me now. If any of them can be of use, you're welcome
to them. But it is a fact, alas! that all these
remarks seem woefully wooden, when I turn back to
the verse itself.

Sincerely,
Kenneth Burke

Dear Bill,

Here's the note I wrote to McDowell. Heck, it's got a
lotta woodenhood. But I figure that some of the spots, taken
out here and there, might be serviceable.

Incidentally, here's a paragraph in a letter by someone
I don't even know, written to someone else I barely know.
Most of what this writer says has to do with technicalities
of printing, typesetting machines, and the like. I never
read anything so circumstantial. He evidently lives happily
in a world of minute technological particulars. And the
genius of his attitude shows through here, too:

Just the other day I was looking at some
pictures you took at my mother's home in Everett.
You and I are trying to balance a croquet ball on
the head of a mallet. Helen and Jean and my mother
are bent over looking for four-leaf clovers. She was
only a little girl at that time. It doesn't seem
possible that so many years have passed.

(The "she," as made clear by the previous paragraph, is
Jean.)

How times does fly,

K.B.

[B]

[Rutherford]

Nov. 17, '55

Dear Ken & Libby,

You, Libby, have nothing to feel self conscious about in appearing in your swimming suit among company. The photos were quite interesting. All I remember of the incident was the soreness of my tail from sitting slightly askew on the hard ground for an hour or more. The snap-shots didn't show THAT.

Thanks, Ken for the notice on my book of poems, I never have met up with a publication that has happened with as little fanfare as that one. Aside from a simple notice in the Times two lines, on the publication date it was as if a mere garbage scow had been launched. Private letters from friends is all I have to show for it and not too many from them. So your enthusiastic letter was welcome. Something you might enjoy hearing about is the (relative) popularity of "The Sparrow" among my male friends: in addition to your liking the poem, Win Scott of Santa Fe also likes and spoke of it.¹²

We've just been out to Buffalo on the Phoebe Snow, quite a come down for Floss after her two month's plane ride of last summer all over the west coast.¹³ The cars are unconscionably slow after air travel though even Floss was inclined to hesitate after she had read of that latest wreck

outside of Denver. When she heard that it was brought on by sabotage she was relieved, no reason why she may not travel by air in the future.

I'm plugging away at the compositions I outlined for Libby when I saw you last. There were three of them--including the play which may never be written though when I was in Buffalo I saw the nurse who is to be one of the protagonists and questioned her about one of the minor female characters who is nevertheless important to me. What I am actually working on now is the first of the short stories. It's going slowly ahead, all too slowly. The second story I haven't even touched.

The weather at least continues ideal, the bareness of these fall days with their clear days is to my taste perfect. Take care of yourselves.

Bill

[B]

[Andover]

November 19, 1955

Dear Bill,

Godammit, Bill. Here, after having been so long in acknowledging your book, here, after that apparently unpardonable delay, here I am writing you, and hoping for a soon answer even. If you think I should simply go f-q

myself, I'll humbly accept your judgment, and act on it to the best of my abilities. But I dare fondly hope otherwise.

Point is:

I have a student who is studying poetry with me. Did I say "studying poetry"? No, rather, she is studying one poet; namely, your σξλφ.¹⁴

She likes your poetry so much, it is a delight to work with her. And though her major is chemistry (which marks her as a rarity at Bennington), she is showing an unusual perception in her analysis of your verse. She is a very genuine student, and her way of liking you is a tribute both to you and to herself.

Well, anyhow, after going over your poem, "The Birth of Venus," we were left with two questions.¹⁵ First, in the last line of the first stanza, we weren't quite sure how to interpret "without cost." Second, in the first and third stanzas, you have a relation between small waves and pebbles; in the last line of the first stanza, there is a corresponding relation between "long swell" and rock. And we wondered what you had in mind, as regards these two sets. It's understandable why, if pebbles went with wavelets, rocks would go with swells; but just what might be the relation btw. pebbles-wavelets and rock-swell? (Incidentally, they seem like an imagistic analogue of the relation between particular and general.)

If you felt like giving us a helping hand on those points, we'd be grateful and entranced. So I'm sending you this note, just on the chance that you might feel inclined and have the time.

(Incidentally again, the relation is not just btw. long swell and rock, but long swell and rocks's teeth. But we particularly noticed rock because the place of "rocks" in the opening poem of the volume (Collected Later Poems) made it one of the words for us to watch especially.)

Here's hoping you'll feel moved to spick. Anyhow, best greetings. (The more I think of your "Sparrow" poem, the more felicitous it seems to me.)

Sincerely, and to Floss,

K.B.

[P] [Rutherford]

Christmas card for 1955--

To you all--we did enjoy our visit with you and wish it were easier to do it oftener--

Bill and Floss

[16]

Nov. 21, '55

Dear Ken,

I'm afraid such deep dyed literary intentions can never be ascribed to me. Subconsciously, I mean everything I put

on the page, but during composition I am as near UNconsciousness as the ghosts of both my mother and father have prescribed. I fight to come awake but it is not until the act of composition has been accomplished that I can look around and see where I am at. Which does not mean that SOMETHING has not precisely expressed itself but I do not recognise its identity until I become sober again.

Let's see what I can make of the passage from the poem you speak of:

Certainly both the pebbles and the waves, simultaneously, greeted me that morning. The poem was written at Villefranche in front of Nice where I was confronted by the scene as it lay before me. I was not happy. Female beauty, the waves of the sea playing upon the rocks that were the incontrovertible facts of my male existence were, as they always are for me, reconciled by the overarching poem.

That reconciles everything--though the battle is never resolved.

The "rock's teeth" is all that is opposed to our gentler natures, what is classically conceived as the female in us. The incongruity of the Clytemnestras or the Lady Macbeths among us are not thought of here.

--OR

(when I come to think of it, and since I want to give you the facts as best I can) maybe the poem wasn't written at Villefranche at all, but years afterward. What difference would that make? I really don't remember but the internal evidence is against it. I was certainly there in my mind.

I don't know that I've helped you or your student at all. I am very grateful to you for bringing the subject up between you.

Best,

Bill

Notes for 1955

¹ Williams undertook a three week western tour, starting the second week in May. It was a grueling reading tour that took in schools at St. Louis, Seattle, Chicago, Santa Barbara, San Francisco, and more. Noteworthy, too, is that upon his return, the staff at Passaic General Hospital presented him with a new electric typewriter to help counteract his stroke enfeebled hands (Mariani 688), a fact which explains the altered typestyle for the remainder of his letters.

² Denise Levertov (b1923). In the following years, Denise Levertov would publish over fourteen books with the New Directions Press (Laughlin 234).

³ Book of Moments was published in 1955.

⁴ See note 3.

⁵ Henry Allen Moe was a trustee for the Guggenheim Foundation.

⁶ See note 3.

7 Harold Rosenberg (1906-1978). Distinguished art critic and member of League of American Writers with Malcolm Cowley, Burke, and others (Cowley 298).

8 This refers to the following:

[B]

The American Academy of Arts and Letters
633 West 155th Street, New York
Sherman
Sept. 1, 1955

Dear Lib,

Here is the dope: Louis Untermeyer can get Decca Records, as a favor to him, to do the Williams Record on two sides, (ten-inch) 10 minutes each side, at \$20.00 per side for the acetate and \$2.00 a piece for the pressings, minimum of 10 records, total about \$60. to \$70., depending on the number of records made. Audio-video, at 730 Fifth Avenue, (Mr. Merson is the man to speak or write to) will do the acetate at \$17.50 per side, (ten-inch) 10 minutes each side, and \$1.85 a piece for the pressings, minimum of 11 copies, the same price up to 25 copies, and less, I believe for a larger number. That would amount to \$54.25 for 11 copies, as you see, one or two of which would have to be sent to the Library of Congress for copyright. A twelve-inch record would be higher.

What could the Academy do toward paying for this? I am not authorized to do more than purchase what records I need, and I could justifiably say I need two records for the exhibition, in case I want to play both sides for the exhibition. But who would put up the other \$45.00? You need an organization to sell even a small number of recordings. I have tried unsuccessfully to sell the idea to Caedmon, and Decca, Untermeyer tells me, does not want it. I shall write to the National Council of Teachers of English one of these days, and ask if they would try to market it, but of course they would want all the poems to be classroom material, and I just wonder about Apres le Bain.

Let me know if you have any further ideas.

Love,

Hannah

[Hannah Josephson (1901-1976), wife of Matthew.]

⁹ On 6 June 1954, Williams recorded eighteen poems for Caedmon Publishers. It is difficult to determine whether or not these eighteen are the subject of Hannah Josephson's correspondence.

¹⁰ William Carlos Williams, Journey to Love (New York: Random House, 1955).

¹¹ Marianne Moore, "Things Others Never Notice," Predilections (New York: Viking Press, 1955): 136-139.

¹² Winfield Townley Scott (1910-1968). In early June of 1955, on the return leg of their Western tour, the Williams visited Scott at his Sante Fe home (Mariani 688).

¹³ Williams gave a reading at the university and he and Flossie stayed with the Abbotts (Mariani 691).

¹⁴ "brightness"

¹⁵ "The Birth of Venus," The Collected Later Poems (New York: New Directions, 1950): 187.

¹⁶ While closing up Kenneth Burke's affairs, Michael Burke discovered this letter among his father's papers. It had been inserted in a volume of Williams' The Collected Later Poems. Michael Burke, letter to the author, 7 May 1994.

¹⁷ See note 15.

1956

[P] [Rutherford]

Sept. 26/56

Dear Ken,

We thank you and Libby for a good time last Saturday, it was a superb day as to weather. I must have Druid blood in my veins nothing makes me happier than a walk alone in the woods such a walk not of very serious proportions but as enjoyed beyond the cleared place back of your house and garden. I came out across the road from what you still call the barn and ran into your daughter, I didn't realize she was there. Jack didn't know she is a proff at C.C.N.Y. and is going to look her up.¹

As to that operation, see DeBell at once and get it done. Don't forget to mention that you want a local.

Well I guess that's all I have to say for the moment, we had a good time and enjoyed a delicious meal, I'm not much on the drinks nowadays if I ever was but they also went the way of their kind with the same effect that Socrates and his friends enjoyed before us but we didn't loosen up the way we have done in the past. Maybe it was your feeling of loss in the absence of your two boys away at school that

caused it. Who can tell? After I have reached 80 there may come other times if not long before that.

I have always heard that old age is garrulous, tien! Have a successful operation. Best to Libby.

Bill

[B]

[Andover]

[1956]

Dear Floss and Bill,

Yes, do please scold us. We have it coming to us. But the guy was a "prominent" New York surgeon with forty years of experience, and he had treated KB for tension and knew and understood the problems involved--so we thought. Some day I must have a long talk with Bill and find out just what the "relatives of the patient" can do when everyone in the hospital who comes in to see the patient says he needs attention badly "but we can't do anything for him until the doctor sees him," and this goes on for twelve hours (third day after the operation with only one visit from the Dr. early the 2nd day before the swelling set in), and when I call the Dr. I get his wife who says don't worry, you know he is a difficult patient and a very tense person and I say--that's just why I AM worried--and finally the Dr. has KB's phone cut off at the hospital so he can't bother him (Are Drs. supposed not to be bothered?)--and at just what

point can a relative of the patient get in another doctor--as far as I can make out, never. Well, anyhow he finally saw KB and realized that the guy would just die if he didn't do something, and he talked the whole thing over with him (KB was scared, and so was I), gave him relief from both ends of the alimentary canal (another question for Bill, Just how long can a person lie bloated with no action either way, without developing gangrene or something? Three days? four days?) and proceeded to pull him out of it. The telephone was connected, the Dr.'s wife told me to just call them any time I had anything on my mind (I said: "I don't like to bother you.") But for several weeks KB had painful trouble with elimination and we were worried. He seems perfectly all right now. But I shall be very scared to ever let him in a hospital again unless I have someone like Bill to advise me. He can go into shock and never pull out of it, if he feels he has an unsympathetic doctor. The reason this surgeon was "unsympathetic" was that he had forgotten to come to the operation (he admits he is forgetful) and he knew that KB knew that he had forgotten to come. Bad situation from the start.

Enough of wailing.

It is so good to have Floss's note saying that all is well with you. We too feel pretty good, waiting for the boys to come home for the holidays--the phone will ring any time

now--and after then we go to Florida. The only thing that can keep the Florida trip from being a success is if they charge just much too much for everything--we are prepared for the worst--but they may go beyond what we think is the worst!

Wish we had had another visit with you this fall. I'm afraid we WERE a little sad at that time, not able to make it the truly happy day it should have been, for we do so much enjoy those days when you come. We shall work out a new way of life, given a little time. You are lucky to have your boys not too far away, even with their problems it is better not to have that feeling that they are in another part of the world. I am wondering how these problems have worked out. Next winter we go to California, Palo Alto--some Ford foundation behavioral group--good deal financially as KB can do his own writing, but such a long long way from Harvard University! It is surely the kids that kick the parents out of the nest.

Take care of yourselves. And do write. Mail will be forwarded whenever we have an address (KB says to everyone our address in the south will be General Delivery, Segregationville) (I wouldn't be surprised if there were such a place). And if we find a heavenly place, we shall surely let you know about it if there were the least chance of your joining us.

Your generosity ("I had planned to ask you to stay with us") makes that goddam hospital experience just a little worse in my memory--we have put DeBell on a pedestal around here since this fiasco.

I am sending you a 35 cent book worth a million. Do please read it.

Best of love, from KB and me.

Libbie

[P]

[Andover]

October 15, 1956

Dear Bill,

How. 'Twas good to see you, though I grant, however reluctantly, that it was not one of our happier occasions.

Meanwhile, my silence has been due to the fact that I committed a grievous Dummheit.

I went to a local guy for a diagnosis of my hernia. He diagnosed it as bilateral, inguinal hernia--and in the same breath said that he could do the operation for two hundred dollars plus hospital expenses, and could arrange for me to go to the hospital the very next day.

On the grounds that it was a minor operation, and could be over with so soon, while DeBell was so much farther off, thereby involving more difficulties about visits from Shorty, etc., I bought the proposition.

So far as I can make out, from things we know and things I heard while lying three-fourths anaesthetized in the operating room, the operation, which was originally scheduled for 10:30, was moved ahead to somewhere around 8 or 8:30. And this caused a slip-up whereby, as I lay doped to the gills and all but ultimately out, on the operating table, everybody began asking where the hell the surgeon might be. And he was home having breakfast, nearly three-quarters of an hour away. Various things involved in this delay gradually worked me up into a fury, so that apparently I was squirting adrenalin during the operation. Anyhow, we know that I was in the operating room for two hours, for an operation that should have required much less time--so I had quite a batch of dope to get out of me afterwards.

All that, let us say, is hidden behind the fog of my anaesthesia and the mystique of "medical ethics" (which is supposedly designed for the protection of the patients, but so far as I can see functions splendidly for the protection of the doctors). Anything to do with all that part of the job was behind a wall of total silence. For me to so much as mention any of my experiences in the operating room was to say an unforgiveably dirty word. One intern, at one point, growled that "writers talk too much,"--which of course is the truth, but still....

Anyhow, point is: Whatever went wrong there is hidden in conjecture, and that's that. But the next step is brutally clear: That for some reason best known to himself, the dirty bastard purely and simply denied me adequate sedation--so I lay there day after day, night after night, in stony steely vigil, following the hospital noises, in an anguish of unremitting wakefulness. I was not his patient, I was his prisoner--and the experience was something little short of terror.

Home now, I find my insomnia (which was a problem before) increased to between two and three times its former grandeur. And, two weeks after the operation, my urine scalds me.

How much damage has been done to me, I do not know. But my mind is like a steel trap, and I have not yet found the trick of relaxing it. True, now that I am out of the hospital my clown has prescribed sufficient sedation (after disappearing for a week on a grouse-hunting trip in Maine)--but even at that, I have had to take twice the amt. prescribed. (I was to take 1 1/2 gr. of Nembutal at bedtime; but when, after taking such a dose at 11 o'clock, I found myself still busily buzzing at 1:30, I decided that more was needed--and with the dose doubled I got five hours' sleep, and might have got more had it not been for the scalding effect.)

I hate, I hate, I hate.

Oh jeez, fellow, could I but have had a humane guy like you to attend me. Jeez, what a beating I took from this clown, this bedside-manner shirtfront. Oof!

Meanwhile, best greetings to thee and Floss. And the weather here now is fantastically beauteous--if only I weren't somehow mulling over some ineffable fury, somewhere in my depths.

Sincerely,

[P]

[Rutherford]

Oct. 17/56

Dear Ken,

It's over anyhow, though you did have more discomfort than should have been necessary but the comfort that Libby meant to you was worth it. I must say that your surgeon could have been more on the job in the follow up than he seems to have been. The urethritis sometimes can be annoying but should be easy to take care of. Let me know if it doesn't soon disappear. It sounds from here as if you had recently passed through an Inferno! You didn't tell me that you had had the damned thing on BOTH sides.

They say that for a loving husband every baby his wife has he suffers as if it was his own. I wonder how Libby feels after this experience, as if she had had twins

perhaps? I know it's not a joking matter but at least you're home again. You don't have even a baby to show for it.

The country must be superb this year, even here in the suburbs it would be hard to beat it. This is one time I miss the car--but I really don't even then for I would be able then to pay you a visit. Maybe it will be instead to be in Florida.

Cheerio (as much as you can manage it)

Sincerely,

Bill

[P]

[Andover]

December 24, 1956

Dear Bill,

Merry Christological (post-Christological) greetings, and hopes for a happy annual rebirth. Meanwhile, I continue to envy you your opportunities to be thus in different scenes. It's what I need, to help me add the necessary angles to my speculations on scene-act and agent-act ratios.² But I must go on sublimating, by reading metaphysicians and theologians and such, with their brands of scenic over-allness (what John Wild, a philosophy guy at Havvud, would call their "overarching" terminologies).³ And you should have picked up much lore for subtilizing thoughts on the "hierarchal psychosis.".... Can't remember whether I

previously sent you the glad tidings, that I have reduced my racket to a somewhat free-verse definition of man, thus:

Man is
the symbol-using animal
inventor of the negative
separated from his natural condition by instruments
of his own making
and goaded by the spirit of hierarchy.

This fall, a batch of medical expenses swiftly made us poorer by One Grand--so I consider myself permanently maimed. However, we have decided that the only known cure for such an ailment is to act just a little bit as though one had several oil wells. So, after the young gents return to Harvard following the holidays, we're going to drive south in our elegant 1950 Pontiac, and look for an inexpensive hole we can crawl into, until it's time for us to return as a Welcoming Committee for the boys during their Easter vacation. I can already hear myself wailing, each time I pay a bill. However, the anguish is eased somewhat by the fact that I have been offered a one-year fellowship with one of the Ford Fund projects (at Stanford, bejeez), my tenure to begin next fall. This opportunity comes at a most beauteous moment, from the standpoint of my own "project" on the Motivorum bizz. So I got my scheduled return to Bennington postponed for a

year, and dare think that I can get one book, and maybe two, cleared away before I return to teaching. (My dream is to have the whole thing done, and to spend a year trying to find out just how simple I could make my notions, from the pedagogical angle.) At present, am in the thick of speculation on Catharsis. It's a gruesomely easy subject to gas about, so I'm having one devil of a job trying to condense it into solidities, while at the same time permitting it its range. Very vexing. The only cheering thought on the subject is that so many Greek tragedies were lost, so one can become an authority almost by confining himself to the two-volume Random House edition of the Greek plays (plus some Loeb editions for tracking down "key terms" in the ones which are to be given special attention). My greatest contribution to date is to have figured out (by theorizing doubtless to be scored as unsound) that the missing pages of Aristotle's on the subject would be different, depending on their place in his Poetics (namely: whether they came before or after the crucial definition in Chapter 6 of the treatise as we now have it). But I must stop now, as Shorty is leaving for town. And if this doesn't go off now, it'll linger here for at least two more days.... Best luck.

Sincerely,

Notes for 1956

¹ Eleanor "Happy" Duva Leacock, Burke's daughter, was a professor of anthropology at C.C.N.Y.

² "Scene-act and agent-act ratios" are part of Burke's study of motives called Dramatism--A Grammar of Motives (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1945): 15.

³ John Daniel Wild (1902-1972).

1957

[B]

[Andover]

[January 8, 1957]

Dear Bill--We have heard tell that you picked up Five Grandeurs, though we haven't yet heard from what source. Meanwhile, am sending this quickie to record our rejoicing (as if that were necessary!). Maybe we'll be seeing you in Florida (you can wave to us on the other side of the R.R. tracks). I'll tell you where we are when I know where we are. (We're scheduled to leave about Wednesday, D.V.) Incidentally, I have been happily hit, too (by a wholesome portion of the Ford Fund bounty, but it doesn't EVENTUATE for some months). Today we cleaned the car--and, surprise! under the mud there was still a gleaming garb, so we'll start out proudly.... Best to you both.

Sincerely,

K.B.

[P]

[Rutherford]

July 2, 1957

Dear Libby:

We had a good quiet time, I enjoyed it including the drinks and the dinner, which was delicious. The thunder shower and the scamper with you under the towel to shelter

left me breathless but I enjoyed it. Floss has plans for a visit in August which she will write you about.

Enclosed you will find the poem. Hope you can find something to enjoy about it. And when you find the time please show it to Ken's daughter Francis who applauded, with an affirmative nod and a grin, when I confessed that I am a feminist.

Take care of yourself. And Ken.

Affectionately,

Bill

THE BIRTH

A 40 odd year old Para 10

Navarra

or Navatta she didn't know
uncomplaining
in the little room
where we had been working all night long
dozing off

by 10 or 15 minute intervals

her great pendulous belly

marked

by contraction rings

under the skin

No progress.

It was restfully quiet

approaching dawn on Guinea Hill
in those days.

Wha's a ma', Doc?

It do'n wanna come.

That finally roused me.

I got me a strong sheet

wrapped it

tight

around her belly.

When the pains seized her again

the direction

was changed

not

against her own backbone

but downward

toward the exit.

It began to move--stupid

not to have thought of that earlier.

Finally

without a cry out of her

more than a low animal moaning

the head emerged

up to the neck.

It took its own time

rotating.

I thought of a good joke
about an infant
at that moment of its career
and smiled to myself quietly
behind my mask.

I am a feminist.

After a while
I was able
to extract the shoulders
one at a time
a tight fit.

Madonna!
13 1/2 pounds!

Not a man among us
can have equaled
that.

W.C.W.

[P] [Andover]

August 19, 1957

Dear Bill,

The typewriter is still throbbing with a heartfelt note
I wrote to Jack about the Wm. Wms. Letters.¹

Shopping around among same, I see your selectivities emerging nicely. You knew what you were after--and I'm sure that's one big reason why you got so many good things done.

The next time you're out, you must inscribe p. 105 to me. 2

Incidentally, as I told Jack, I am taking all your books with me on my trip west, in the hopes that, sometime btw. now and spring, I can put my many notes on you into shape as an article.

The thing that comes through quite convincingly in the letters is your vigor (which is, I suppose, a subdivision of your directness). The thing I didn't understand about your "Contact" line (when we used to haggle about it decades ago) was its subterranean relationship to your profession as a medico. I can only say in my defence that you yourself often talked about "place" in a way designed to obscure this relationship.

I gave several reasons to Jack why your letters to me made me gloomy. But I think I forgot the main one; namely: that I'm trying to do a stretch sans alky, and the serpasil that helps hold me down seems to act not just as a "tranquilizer," but also as a flattener-outer.

Incidentally, we much enjoyed that poem you sent to Shorty, though it seemed to have lost some of the sharp lines it had when you were describing to her the incident

around which it was written. Why not go back and look over some of your earlier drafts, before you started cutting? Though Revision by Omission is Rule No. 1, I guess it haint always right.

In a little over two weeks, we start our long drive west, not being due back here until late June.

Best luck, and to Floss.

Sincerely,

If this is a niggardly letter, I can only say in my defense: I have just read advance copies of a Knopf reprint of Phil. of Litry Frm. A very nice job indeed--yet I haven't yet been able to work up a letter thanking the editors for their valiant work. I'm so "tranquil" I'm sullen.

[B]

[Andover]

November 23, 1957

Dear Bill,

Holla! While people are waiting on five phones, I take time out to dictate this hurried note. For I discover that my usually Better Half was a bit unbetter, in telling you of "sensarionism" where the text had said "sensationism." So I write in haste, admonishing, lest you tree the wrong bark.

At moment, am all in a tizzy-wizzy while, encased in serpasiliousness, I get ready to Defend my Honor at the Center next Tewes Day.³ Shall speak on my proprietary

medicine, Dramatism. (Usually, to defend it, I have to show that it doesn't imply a disrespect for Lyricism. On the contrary! But this time, I am sure, no one will attack from that quarter. This time I guess I'll have to prove that it's as far from Lyricism as the human mind can get outside the laboratory.)

Meanwhile, yes, 'twas good to see the Wmses--a goodly bit of lil ole N. Jersey. Yes. Sorry we were so non compotes as regards finding a place whereat to eat. But jeez, we obviously meant well--all over the place.

Holla! Yes! Be sinyuh both, afore long.

Sincerely,

K.B.

Notes for 1957

¹ The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams (New York: McDowell, 1957). Burke is having great fun here; page 105 contains a letter from Williams to Pound on 11 August 1928 where the poet predicts the decline of the New York group: "Josephsons and Burkeses and Cranes and all of them."

² See letter from Williams to Burke: 14 April 1924.

³ The heading on Burke's letter reads: "Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences" at Stanford University.

1958

[P]

[Andover]

October 18, 1958

Dear Bill,

Hello, bejeez!

I wonder if you have any ideas anent the enclosed. For instance, what should I throw out? (Not all of it, I hope.)

In particular, I wonder about the "Concluding Apostrophe," which was not in the original at all, but derives from my teaching a pretty student here about the all-importance of pood-pulling in Faulkner. (Long live the Beauty Clinic, as regards the Thinking of the Body.)¹

I was mighty sorry that we had to miss the celebrating of your seventy-fifth revolution about the sun. But I was in the thick of things here. (In fact, that's about the only way one can be here, as regards the relation to things.)

Meanwhile, wd. say:

It's been a long time.

Fond greetings to you and Floss from both of us, yes.

Sincerely,

[P]

[Rutherford]

Oct. 24, 1958

Dear Ken,

Your animadversions on the subject of disgruntlement received, laid out as I am by a further stroke if not flat on my back at least thinking to be as I am able. It should happen to a dog! poor pup.

Me, I'm more of the anapestic strain than the iambic so although I sympathise with you I can't wax too enthusiastic about the poem. What the hell, I'm in no mood for philosophic poetry or at present for poetry at all, God forgive me.

Sorry to be in such a mood. Let's hope I recover. Best love to Libby. I did see poems sent to me, a small booklet, in a letter by Louis Zukofsky that I do thoroughly approve of.² Do you know him well enough to ask him to send you a copy of it, the only way you will ever see it.

I only wish we could meet again as we used to. Maybe across the table over a beef stew we could come to grips over this poem of yours for which I thank you. Keep a stiff upper lip.

Affectionately yours,

Bill

[P]

[Andover]

November 3, 1958

Dear Bill,

Helndamnaysh! Take it ease.

Seventy-five revolutions around the sun--you ole revolutionary! And many more to go, each time putting a black curse upon my attempts to get you to agree to my attempts at violation of your Rule No. 1, "no ideas but in things" (that is, no ideas but in images).

Meanwhile, the only thing that is keeping me from suicide is the fact that all this paper-work is just about killing me--so I must fight like a fiend to keep alive.

We have a date for next summer. (School here ending near the end of June.)³ In the interim, take it ease. And don't answer fan-mail from guys like me,--just go non-responsive, just as though you hadn't been not only a poet (for whom phones never ring) but a doctor (for whom phones never stop ringing).

No, that didn't quite turn out right. Phones ring for Rutherfordian poets, too. It's only in principle that they don't ring. (For critics, phones positively un-ring.)

Meanwhile, I keep wondering: What kind of pests are anapests? And if the damned word believes in itself, why is the accent on the first syllable?

Good luck, ole dope. And all our love to you and Floss.

Sincerely,

[P]

[Rutherford]

Nov 25/58

Dear Libbie,

We were happy to have your letter and to get news from you all. Bill is coming along slowly this time. The depression following the cerebral episodes are the worst feature of the thing. It was a real tragedy to Bill to have to miss the Johns' Hopkins festival and the reading he was to have given in Wash. D.C. the following Monday--We had not seen the clipping you sent. Bill's comment was--I'll bet Robert Frost and Winters were the two mentioned in the paper!--Maybe it was just as well that Bill didn't get there, for between Frost and Winters, Bill would have been an outcast, and how!

How nice that you will be in Boston for awhile--it's a fine city--it has dignity--I always feel good when I'm there, by which I mean self respecting. People are polite--considerate--and most helpful about everything. And there is much to see and beautiful towns in every direction of historic interest. I know you'll love it. I've missed not seeing you--this summer--family matters can create havoc--can't they? We had many years of it with both our mothers (not alcoholic but senility)--one 102 years old and one 84--both crippled with broken hips--and handicapped by deafness. It's something! The mental lapses are the hardest features to cope with. At first I was shocked--when my mother slipped--she had been so keen--alert--independent but

gradually I accepted and didn't react. The same for Bill's mother. Let's hope Kenneth's dad can be deprived of the liquor--which I have come to believe is the very devil to all who over do it. You'll have to assure K.B. that there is nothing for him to fear for the future. He and Bill are fortunate to be creative men--and age doesn't cut them off from what they have been doing--as it does to men like Ken's father. They are lost souls--and it's a blot on our set up.

I didn't intend delivering a lecture. Excuse it. We had tentative plans for a trip either to the West Indies or S. America this winter, but we have been advised by Bill's physician not to attempt it this year. So we will be at the above address where the door is always open--but you never come!

Our very best to you all--

Affectionately,

Floss

[P]

c/o Edward Richman,
Dudley Road,
Bedford, Mass.,
December 28, 1958.

Dear Bill,

Greetings, old toughie.

My institutional battle is over until March. So, in the meantime, all I need do is fight with myself, the which I do in more ways than you could shake a stick at.

The world is run by platitude, with less and less of latitude, and more and more ingratitude, to be--and less and less beatitude, and more and more white ratitude; and there you have my attitude, for free. (But lest we educators suffer guilt, we educate our students to the hilt.)

Where was we? I was saying you're good, and you were saying I stinnick. Manifestly, I was losing.

Anyhow, for the time bean, here I am with the Concord river flowing through my back yard. (Within a stone's throw, literally.) The owner of a big house (as rambling as one's guts) has gone south--and our job is but to keep the place reasonably and decently occupied. We're doing it as reasonably and decently as we can, except that he seems to have poisoned the rats just before he left--and many an untoward breath has thus necessarily been in and exhaled. Anyhow, it's nice to walk on the water (that's how we take our constitutionals each aft). My troubled dreams--are they because I was so exhausted from my term's work at Bennington, plus the still more exacting relaxation afterwards? or because I smell the poisoned rats in my sleep? (I sometimes dream of trying to step among a whole wilderness of thick, ripe, honey-colored turds) or because

this winding house is a perfect setting for a murder mystery? (the first night, I awoke in terror, hearing a knock down there somewhere in the dark, and would I dare go down to answer? I shiver anew, even as I write of it) or because of the books I have been reading? (such as Jonathan Edwards and his urgent sense of sin) or because of my entangled speculations? (showing how, if you peer long enough into the same word, you can dimly make out there either free will or determinism).

There's still so much to be scraped up. Why don't they make quick with the bombs? And save us the trouble.

If only I could persuade myself that heaven is a place where one can swill bourbon without a hangover, then I could figure out some reason for things. Otherwise, I'm greatly bepuzzled. (Anyhow, only the other day I was peddling you on the morning star that dissolves into dawn--what a quick beauty! And the first thing tomorrow, I review you on "The Use of Force." I'm getting ready for next term, too.)

Meanwhile, good luck, Dopo. And more anon.

Sin erely,

Notes for 1958

¹ Kenneth Burke, "Apostrophe Before Desisting,"
Collected Poems (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1968):
243-44.

² 4 Other Countries was the title of Louis Zukofsky's
booklet (Mariani 744).

³ Burke taught at Bennington College from 1943-1961.

1959

[P] [Rutherford]

Jan. 1, 1959

Dear Ken & Libby,

This is a personal letter to you Ken but since I'm thinking of you both together far off in the literary sticks of Harvard and adjacent New England places about Concord (never realized the significance of the word before this) I included Libby in my general address.

That was a beautiful letter you sent me, all the old nonchalance and verve came to life again. I needed just such a letter in my present state, it did me good, rescued me from myself and allowed me to breathe again--deeply. When a man has such understanding friends he can never be licked.

Come on let's go again!

Your note on the house you're living in gives me too the creeps, I betcha Libby never woke up when the tap on the door interrupted your dreams. Who was it? A special delivery? Or just nothin' but your own over-wrought imagination, poor sons of bitches that we are all caught in the same trap. I don't blame you for paling up with your Benedictine friar in Sussex and trying to make a go of it. Our Carolinians are Baptists so I have recently read.

I'm about ready to launch that new book on my mother's notes. I deceived her into allowing me to jot down under her specific interjection about 20 years ago. McD. is to bring it out in June.¹ Its name will be: YES, MRS. WILLIAMS, a personal record. It'll run to a little more than 200 pages with a 20 page introduction by yours truly and a note on Mother as translator from the Spanish.

The worst thing to do about my present life is that with this most recent stroke, although I can sleep fairly well I am eternally so depressed that I can't live with myself, and my slightest error in conducting my life is exaggerated until it becomes an obsession. Everything I do goes wrong and I never seem to learn by experience.

Are you going to stay up there until New Jersey opens up and the boys will be ready to return? The older boy seemed to be headed toward physics, what about his brother the Freshman--or is he already a soph?

Floss reads to me since I cannot read for myself--but I dread over-tiring her. We're going out tonight for supper at Bill's mother-in-law. My stupid mind keeps doing pinwheels without rest. It is fatiguing. When I can sleep (as I usually can) it is bearable. Last night Floss tells me I slept through the New Year's racket. God be praised.

That was a wonderful letter, old friend, try it on again when you have the time. And love to Libby from both

Floss and myself. Oh I have A PLAY SCHERDULD FOR PRUDUCTION any day now at a N.Y. Off Broadway theatre, MANY LOVES which came out in New Directions about 20 years ago.² It will be advertised in the papers now that the strike is over. I don't dare think of it.

Bill

[P]

[Rutherford]

August 25/59

Dear Kenneth--Just a note to tell you that Bill is in N.Y. Hospital while he was operated on for cancer of the sigmoid (lower bowel). He is doing well and we think that barring the unforseen he will be o.k. I don't know why Bill insisted that I write to you, but he did. So, am doing so. He hasn't wanted to tell anyone.

Hope you all are having a good summer--with plenty of water in the pond!

Best to Libby and the boys too.

Floss

[P]

[Andover]

August 26, 1959

Dear Bill,

Helndamnaysh! Greetings from Burke the Bellyache to Toughie Two-Gun Bill. Tochangethefigure, I hear from Floss that America's Most Human Poet has been under going a slight

revision. That aint fair. Time after time, I have started to write you all about my symptoms, but always desisted because they kept changing (I at least think I invented the concept of the Migratory Symptom, though mine change like the position of the hands on a clock--each moment unique yet circulating so that they keep coming back to the same situations).

Only a week or two ago, we got a card from Jack Thrillwell, escaping somewhere in Europe and I wondered about your next trip here, when he gets back. Would that be feasible soon?

My year at Bennington (the first time I ever taught full time) nearly slew me. As a result, I came home seeing double and the mere thought of a pretty young college girl was enough to make me freeze at 98 in the sun/ "From now on," I susurrously exhaled, "call me Old Meanie. Down with Eros--long live Thanatos." Then, after clearing away a couple of overdue reviews, I got tangled in an essay ingeniously entitled "Body and Mind"--and a glance at the motionless cyclone of my room would be enough to tell you what a state the mindless body of that essay is in. I have been trying to decide just what is the relation between sheerly verbal action and sheerly physical motion. Just what is the difference, for instance, in the meaning of the words, "taste of an orange," if said or heard by someone who

has tasted an orange and by someone who hasn't? It involves the Existentialist essence-existence bizz, but I hope without the Existentialist bulshide....Trying to decide--though what the hell's the difference what I decide? Also, I had an offer to teach a term at Berkeley--but I decided that I really must take this whole year off and try to get these godam books and things out of the road. (We'll probably canter down to the Gulf side of Florida for the peak of the winter.)

Meanwhile, take it ease, me frenn. And we'll be looking for you hereabouts before long. The pond so far this year has been ample. You'd think water grew on trees. We've had water to burn. Come out and feed the mosquitoes by our idyllic shores.

Shorty joins me in sending fondest greetings.

Sincerely,

K.B.

Best to you and Love,

Lib.

Notes for 1959

¹ William Carlos Williams, Yes, Mrs. Williams (New York: McDowell, Obelensky, 1959).

² William Carlos Williams, Many Loves (New York: New Directions, 1942). The play, directed by Julian Beck, opened at the Living Theater in New York, 13 January 1959, and it ran for nearly a year (Many Loves 432).

1960

[B] [Tampa, Florida]

3/11/60

Dear Bill,

Naturally, I can't be sure that this will reach you. For you're a bit more than a stone's throw away. Two stonethrows, in fact, which is certainly our nearest for any length of time.

God knows, as regards beginnings, "A" is certainly a species of same.¹ Then comes "Round of fiddles playing Bach." That, then, presumably, is what we are to be about? (As I said today, I think that, somewhere along the line, it shd. involve the distinction btw. dance rhythms and verbal rhythms, plus their possible overlaps. That's the only way his problem makes ultimate sense to me, so far as sheer words are concerned, except insofar as one suicidally hopes by words to transcend words, as we all somehow do while also not wanting to do anything of the sort--for how be the Bible-book animal, sans words?)

Might not that start be said to come to a head, (44btm) where, when on the sumjick of transferring "the design/ Of the fugue" to poetry, our hero says:

At eventide

Venus come up

(the few bits thereafter puzzle me a bit, but seem reasonable).

See on complex and simple, p. 53. and note what all it grows out of, on that very same page.

62. "in terms of mathematical/function." Every time he aims at rediscovering the art of Lucretius, I naturally glow, though I also grant that it's a tough job.

91. Nice Spinoza-stuff, as also elsewhere in the text. Spinoza is the best Jew next to the guy who dictated the Bible--and besides, his text hasn't yet got garbled, as Big Shot's did.

99. "writing its signature different/ each time so/ you cannot get your money back." There our hero names his problem. It's the problem of all Eternal Rebeginnings (along with the fact that we live only by rerebeginning repeatedly).

P. 100-101. This I must copy out, to use:

Most honorable Sir,
We perused your MS.
with boundless delight. And
we hurry to swear by our ancestors
we have never read any other
that equals its mastery.
Were we to publish your work,
we could never presume again on
our public and name
to print books of a standard
not up to yours.
For we cannot imagine
that the next ten thousand years
will offer its ectype.

We must therefore refuse
your work that shines as it were in the sky
and beg you a thousand times
to pardon our fault
which impairs but our own offices.

Signed, Publishers.

109. "What is music which does not In any sense
progress?"/

144tp. music as upper limit, speech as lower limit. I
have already suggested how I would reduce this./

152-3. "His name sounded/very familiar,/But I got used
to it." As thus amended, splongdeed!

166 and thereabouts. Was much interested in his
reduction to terms of teaching. Maybe it's not the very best
reduction, but there are certainly many not nearly so good.

173. Good on senses.

203. "I grow sick hearing myself/Unable to stop." Yes,
the cruelest cut of all. And that reminds me of his best
assorted wisecrack, on p. 28:

Saying, It's a hard world anyway,

Not many of us will get out of it alive.

214-216. The story of the dog is beautifully told. And
it grows neatly out of the stuffo on the guilty geezer who
had read Das Kapital.

221tp. "I have to reread several times/ to find out
what I meant." He said it, I didn't.

I like in principle his every attempt to round out images with ideas. (There's no necessary reason for his thus qualifying your slogan, "No ideas but in things": but it allows for a freer step from lyric to drama, in case that is what one does happen to want.) And I was happy to see how things got to swinging towards the close. Or rather, I was for a while. Then it began to seem like logorrhoea, at which point I found myself wanting an astringent, at which point he threw in the kitchen sink. Eauque, if that's what he really wants. But does he?

Dubito, ergo sum.

In any case, I agree with you, he writes an honest line. (That's what you teach us, insofar as we are able to learn your lesson. And it's most interesting to see how, by remembering you when reading Pound, he brought in Charlie Marcus instead of the Douglasite bulshido, though necessarily sans certainty.)² But jeez, if you don't consider pp. 112-117 absolutely hideous, then prithee learn me!

Where, then, was we?

I was saying yestiddy that the guy is good insofar as (a) he can let it roll out nachurl and (b) he's entangled with the problem of beginnings (as every good Jew shd. be, if he begins with Genesis). I mean I was thus bleating earlier this very day, that now seems so long discarded.

How many years has it been, since we thus this aft
yiped togidda?

And I was saying how I loathed Eliot in his later phases, not for his religion but for his advertising of it. (I'll wholly respect any man's religion if, like Valery, he keeps quiet about it. But, whatever virtues I concede to the Quartets, I despise (and I mean DESPISE) our hero's stylistic tricks for saying in effect: Please leave me alone to pray here all by myself all here alone just me and my God, I'll be there at such-and-such an hour, and if you want to look in and photograph me, you can, but please respect my privacy, and I promise you that, if you don't press the bulb, I'll do it for you, after my fashion, like Cinarra, and thereby I, rather than you, will get the revenues for my conversion which, I am sure you will agree, is most important to me, if not in the afterlife, at least in the late years of my life here and now.)

O.K., good guy. I admit, we couldn't get together enough to work these things out. I admit, I owe you a damned good article on you, whereas you owe me nothing. I admit, you are preeminently entitled to demand that I recognize how good you are, whereas you are not required to know one poopin thing about what I'm after, all my years out

there on the commuting fringe. Peccavi, peccavi.

Dawlink!

Sincerely thine,

K.B.

[B]

[Andover]

April 8, 1960

Dear Floss and Bill,

Back at the Old Stand, after plowing through a fantastic amt. of rain-water all the way home. 'Tis good to have your friendly notes, and to be assured that we didn't give you a bum steer in persuading you to risk a month among the unrealities of Florida real estate.³ (As the world retreats more and more into the realm of sheer Symbolism, I seek solace in the thought that, at least, one's ailments are real enough.)

We were most fortunate in having you there, to help make the bad weather be as though mellow.

Bill's "Song" is a Delight.⁴ And it should inaugurate our proposed investigation under Auspicious Auspices. The last stanza puts a surprising lot together, suggests many possibilities.

At this stage, however, I think I should resolutely suppress all asseveration on my part, and should confine myself merely to some questions.

My job, at this stage, is to ask questions without, as far as convenient, indicating what I may have in mind. However, for later comparison, I should knock out some notes which I don't send at this time, but which I shall send later, after we have "explored" for a while.

The first questions, then, would be:

Would you give me a set of synonyms, kindred images, related anecdotes, metaphors, etc. for "ear" and another set for "eye"? I mean in general, not necessarily as related to this particular poem. For instance, but no, there I'd be horning in already!

The second question:

Would you give me some similar improvisings as regards the idea of merging division?

Third question:

Though I recognize that the word "lie" in the penultimate line has nothing to do with falsehood, suppose the last line of the poem got lost. Could you imagine a scholiast who, with only this garbled text to go by and unaware that there was a lost last line, sought to explain why ear and eye "lie"? Could you, arbitrarily, think up an argument for him?

Toot toot! Ding ding! We're on our way. And I betcha we can have some fun, in our old age.

Sincerely,

K.B.

[B]

[Andover]

4/13/60

Dear Floss and Bill,

Thanks so much for following us all the way--it must have been good for us for we came the whole way without even a minor accident or up-set though we drove constantly in a pouring rain. We thought of you, too, on your way home, and were a little worried because of the crowd at Sarasota. So glad all went smoothly.

We are very glad to be back home--all the bulbs are bursting out of the ground--and everything smells so good. KB says how wonderful to look out and see all that fine soil that things can grow in. The boys were here and we had a happy week with them.

Bill's poem is very very fine and lovely. So much said in few words, and gently.

How's the racalcitrant hand? Keep at it. The way now is from the felt object back to the brain--not vice versa--and this is the way it was in the beginning, amen! And who am I to be reminding the wise Dr?

The moles are on their way out (thanks to Butch for tieing the strings)--but they are taking their time, clinging on for dear life.

When we get back from Penn State--and spring is really here, then you must come up.⁵ We'll find a way.

Till then, take care. And please more poems.

Love,

Lib.

Have you ever tried doing the same thing with both hands at the same time?

[B]

[Andover]

And/or,

4/16/60

Dear Bill,

How's our project going?

Meanwhile, jeez what a jam I'm of a sudden inny winny! Just back from Philadelphia, where I gave a talk under the mouthful of title, "The Philosophy and Psychology of Language," I now find myself squoze by a dozen chores before we leave next Tuesday for my nine-day stint (or Roving Commission, or whatever) at Penn State.

The head of the Poetry Class there has asked if I'd officiate at one meeting. And I'm wondering if you'd let me read 'em your charming "Shell Song."⁶ (My idea is that I'd

read it, along with items by some others, sans giving names of authors, then let them comment for a while, and then end by divulging names of authors.)

I hope that those questions I asked, by way of warming up, didn't seem too far afield, or such. And I hope that you and Floss are enjoying the Northern stirrings, so different from Florida. (Last week, for several days when I should have been working on my notes, I did some ecstacatic puttering around in the woods--and so far I haven't missed the derned old sea one particle.)

I'd be grateful if you'd send a quick Yes or No to me via the enclosed envelope. Here's hoping...

Sincerely,

K.B.

[B]

[Andover]

5/31/60

Dear Bill,

Jeez, how wrong you have been, in saying all those stinko things to darling Floss about me and my not-answering.

Your poem went over beautifully. And I was so happy that it did. And I admit that I should have said so. But bejeez, Bill, I've been runragged.

So I dint get around to telling you about it. Ats all.

Of course I'm sorry you wouldn't play my game. But why in the heck should you? (I refer to those questions in an earlier letter, questions that even I myself thought of as but ways of beginning to get ready to begin.)

You ole duffer, it's a beautiful poem. That's beyond question. But there are some twists and turns still to be considered. The main problem is: I had some notes I wanted to send you, and where the hell are they?

I'll run across them, when I'm looking for something else. And then I'll send them along.

But in the meantime...how about coming out here, whenever it suits your fancy? Call us up even, on the spur of the mome (just to make sure that we're here).

You grand old bloke, with your grandesse blokess, come on out, and let's mill and mellow around, and mull and mule and maggle to our hearts' content.

Ah, shinny! Maybe I just can't tell you how nice it was for us that you and Floss came to muss around with us there in Florida. Maybe I'm too stinko twisted. But you have imagination, so figure it out for yourself.

Look, you baystard. The only thing I hold against Jarrell is that I was saying, for years, in my classes, that you were our most humane poet.⁷ God damn it, I did just that. Then that late-comer can pop up and file the claim.

...

6/3/60

Found, some days later, among my Unfinished Business.
Hell, Bill, how can we go on, except by Unfinished Business?
Meanwhile, you ole stinkeroo, good lucktyuh.

Sincerely,

K.B.

[B]

[Andover]

June 24, 1960

Dear Bill,

At last, I got clear of the jobs for a day or two.
Also, I located my notes on your (enthusiastically
acclaimed) "Song" anent shells and such.

But I haint gonna transcribe my notes now (the notes
that led me to ask you those tentative questions). Rather,
I'm hoping that I can spring them on you some time this
summer, maybe, and see where we go from there.

In the meantime, there's one consideration of mere
business. The second stanza seems to suggest that "scallops"
and "lion's paws" are in different bins, whereas "lion's
paws" are a species of scallop. Thus, so far as the sheer
"logic" of the alignment is concerned, "scallops" are to
"lion's paws" as "shoes" are to "tennis shoes." But though I
doubt whether that's what you consciously wanted, my theory
of the poem's underlying alignments can go along with your

usage. For there is a sense in which such a line-up in the second stanza implicitly contains the line-up in the third.

I see the development along these lines:

Stanza One. Writing a poem about shells, our hero astutely writes it about "one" shell. Next, instead of saying "This one shell is beautiful," he turns things around, and supposedly starts by talking not about shells but about "beauty." So, whereas things started a long way off, we are given as a starter, within the conditions of this symbol-system, "Beauty is a shell."

Next, she turns into a girl. She is la beaute. But things move fast. So, before the stanza is over, "she" is under the "sway" of an "it." (I refer to the formula, "its way," in which I beg leave to hear "it sway.")

So, all told, as regards the first stanza, we have an opposing of feminine and neuter, in terms of a shell, which is equated with beauty.

As regards the second stanza: "Lion's paws" are certainly gents, though under the sign of subsidence ("retreating waves"). The neuter isn't as neutral as it might be. And, if "lion's paws" are gents, then at first glance "scallops" are ladies (except for the sheerly technical problem I have already mentioned in this regard).

Now, then, what happens in the third and final stanza? "Retreating waves" will become transformed into "undying

accents." That is to say: the masculine and/or neutral principle will have its way, poesy-wise. In one sense, "retreating," in another sense it will be "undying." (Secondarily, that's the difference btw. "waves" and "accents," as regards total translation of these motives into terms of imagery.)

Next, all of a sud., what of "ear" and "eye" turning up here in the third stanza? Well, first of all, it's probably ear-and-eye because eye-and-ear wd. be the cliche (including maybe medically on the side, eye-ear-and-nose).

We have gone from connotations of feminine and (neutrally) masculine to talk of ear and eye lying down together. We started with a lady shell which, whatever her sway, is presumably sheathlike, since shells mostly are.

But lions-and-scallops also suggest lions-and-lambs. And in their way, as regards the realm of the "undying," they will lie down together, too. So, all told, both sexual and non-sexual ideas of lying down together are here enabled to lie down together.

But why "eye" and "ear" particularly? Might there also be included here a merging of the motives associated with painting and the motives associated with poetry? (And would the personal equation for the ego-eye of painting be such motives as are represented by painters like Harley and

Demuth?) Or is the ear penetrated, and does the eye penetrate?

Now you know how much subtlety and complexity I see in that lovely, simple poem. And possibly you also know what I meant when I said that I wished you'd try, as an experiment, improvising on the word "lie" as if the "down" had been lost.

Meanwhile, I wanna say in my defense: I did not ask Mrs. Hermes to send you those books of mine. I go by a rule of this sort: If a critic doesn't know a poet, it's the critic's fault; and if the poet doesn't know the critic, it's the critic's fault. Needless to say, it's an ironic rule.

But thanks much indeed for sending us those copies of the Nashon.⁸ Also, incidentally, on receiving a copy of their anthology recently, I was happy to see that we were both in there though here's hoping that you got more for your pages than I did for mine. (Psst: I got nothing.)

Holla!

Sincerely,

K.B.

[B]

[Andover]

June 25, 1960

Dear Bill,

Helndamnaysh! I don't think I got my point across at all, in my note of yesterday. So let's try again. At one stage in my godam novel, TBL, the guy says:⁹

Even at this moment I realized that for any act, or any way of thinking, there is a tender word and a harsh word, equally applicable. Caution may be called vacillation, acquiescence may be called toadying, sturdiness may be called obstinacy. I knew there was deceit in my using the harsh words only--but unless we adopt a false position, we cannot get our truths stated.

Or, in my Rhetoric, when discussing Carlyle's doctrine (in Sartor Resartus) treating all appearances as "clothes":

This doctrine brings him to the ultimate mystery, the Symbol as Enigma, as both clarification and obfuscation, speech and silence, publicity and secrecy. For it simultaneously expresses and conceals the thing symbolized.

Then I quote, from Carlyle:

Of kin to the so incalculable influence of Concealment, and connected with still greater things, is the wondrous agency of Symbols. In a symbol there is concealment yet revelation: here, therefore, by Silence and by Speech acting together, comes a doubled significance.

(See in particular his two chapters on "The World in Clothes" and "Symbols.")

I take it that the psychology implied in the esthetic of Imagism fits perfectly with what Carlyle says of "Symbols." Hence it becomes a way of both saying and not-saying, a mode of "truth" that is also in a sense a "half-lie." And particularly because of the double meaning of "lie" in English, whenever a writer says something such as, "Behind such-and-such, there lies such-and-such a principle," I often try, for purely experimental purposes, reading the verb in the "wrong" sense (frequently with revealing results!). The same "spying," of course, goes for my own past uses of the word. (Recently on occasion I have consciously used the ambiguity.)

As regards your poem, I am naturally much interested in trying to see how many motivational strands might be implicit in the principle or ultimate unification stated in terms of eye and ear (including also the enigmatic merging of sexual antithesis in old age while, in my own case at least, there is an association of seeing with "penetrating" and of hearing with "being penetrated").

The steps in the poem seem to strike a series of glancing blows, as each moment of stability is found to contain an element of instability that requires you to hurry on. And though the "lying" down together of eye and ear is a perfect "solution" for the poem as poem, obviously we're but

beginning, once we ask what all might be implicit in that image.

"Division" and "Unification" each have their peculiar kinds of problems, with varying kinds of ad hoc "solutions." And I think that this lil "Song" of yours is a byoot for the way it stirs up those waters.

Strangely enough, I was particularly boisterous yesterday because I had just finished revising a dialogue, "Prologue in Heaven," the first draft of which I wrote in Englewood last winter.¹⁰ It's a discussion between The Lord and Satan, with The Lord telling Satan of his plans to create a symbol-using animal on Earth, and explaining how, though he would make the best possible of worlds, he can't make a symbol-using animal without allowing for the kind of orneriness that is intrinsic to symbol-using. Satan, who is a young hot-head admirer of The Lord, is indignant about human vices. He considers people "revolting." And though he doesn't mind all the stupid things they will say about him, he is indignant at what he takes to be self-importance with regard to The Lord. (I found it amusing thus to revise the character of Satan, and to "prophesy" how things were going to turn out, as the result of man's "symbolicity.")

But, to the grind.

Sincerely,

K.B.

[B]

[Andover]

July 8, 1960

Dear Bill,

Herewith a quickie to depose (I'm trying to line up some talks I'm scheduled to give at Georgetown U., on 11th, 12th, 13th inst.):

(1) Your poem anent the "Ultimate Bear-Hug" is most impressive.¹¹ In the style of German der Tod rather than French la mort! More on that when we next confabulate.

(2) I expect to be back sometime on Thursday, the 14th. Any visit any time thereafter wd. be grand. (There's probably going to be a bright young anthropologist and famille here on Sat. and Sun. He's a slavish admirer of your work--and I'm sure he'd pee his pants with delight if you turned up while he is here. He did a poem on you which I tried to get Mack Rosenthal to take for his W.C.W. number of The Nation--but no go.)¹²

(3) Positively helndamnation NO, as regards publishing my "3 A.M. Improptu on Zukovsky". 'Tis too untrimmed. And above all, when and if I air my reservations on Eliot, I want to do so in ways that don't give The Enemy so many opportunities to smack back. Besides, you're a better man to review the book anyhow. After all, you're a poet full time. And you're the guy who told me to learn how to write from Zukovsky. If, in the course of your review, you want to

quote a bit of my letter, specifically from parts to do solely with Zukovfsky, that's ok with me, though I'd like to get a chance to pass on whatever excerpts you used. You could give credit to "a guy who has just finished a dialogue between The Lord and Satan, but who insists that it is purely imaginary."

Best greetings, and to Floss--and we'll hope to be seeing you both soon.

Sincerely,

K.B.

[B]

[Andover]

Aug. 8, 1960

Dear Bill,

The play is a beaut--all of it: trusting husband, frustrated woman, the bum, the hot number, the cop--all--and the stage arrangements, if properly worked out, could be extremely effective--the busted house, the cellar hole--the room around it.¹³

And I am engrossed with Yes, Mrs. Williams--the slow building of a character and a situation between mother and son.¹⁴ Some beautiful passages. Will have more to say about Mrs. Williams when I finish the book.

Did you want me to return the play ms. after KB has read it? Or can we pass it on to others who might be interested?

We did not hear from the guy about the tape.

Rereading your letter, you say you want the ms. returned soon. KB will read it tonight, and back it will come to you. I am so glad you let us see it.

Best love to you both,

Lib

I told the plot of the play to the Cowleys who have just been visiting with us and they were much amused and interested.

Tues. Letter from Princeton guy received. Still hope you've located your tape of reading. Will tell him so.

[B]

[Andover]

Aug. 11, 1960

Dear Floss,

I am so glad you found the tape--it was made by professionals in a New York studio and is an improvement on the original (they were able to remove some of the hum). However, as I wrote Mr. Francis, any technician making a record of the reading might want to return to the original and do his own job of screening out background noises.¹⁵ Until then, it is good to have this copy to lend around to

interested people. We were delighted that it (ours) had kept in such good condition. Do let me know what Mr. Francis thinks of it--he should be very pleased with it. Bill does a fine job.

So glad Bill had a good time in Indiana.¹⁶

By the way, the original recording was made 6/21/51 (not 55) and I don't know the date of the professional copying of the tape. The '55 might have been our mistake since KB's handwriting is so bad on the original, the '51 could have been taken for '55.

In haste, but with lots of love,

Lib.

I am working on a bird drawing--it might turn out to be a crane instead of a pelican!

[B]

[Andover]

Oct. 24, 1960

Dear Floss and Bill,

Being confined to my bed for a couple of days last weekend with a sore throat (the boys were here and they took over the cooking). I read right straight through The Build Up and found it a fascinating book in many many ways.¹⁷ How sorry I am I can't immediately ask you a lot of questions to fill out the story from where you leave off, but I believe Floss has told me some of it and I'm trying to remember and

piece it all together. The flavor, the tone of the book is perfect and brings back the feeling of the whole era wherever you are, or were. To me, Bill was the instrument but the book is actually written by Floss through her eyes (except for some few passages)--it is Floss telling the story of her family and they are all wonderful characters.

I am so curious to know if the house of stone was built in Monroe (we drive right through there on the way from Andover to Bennington and I have always remarked what a beautiful spot it is--got lost up around the head of Greenwood Lake once and came down a mountain side right into Monroe) and if so, whether it is still there.¹⁸ And what happened to "Joe"--I remember Floss' saying she had taken care of her mother for years in her own home. What a woman she must have been, tho' one is really endeared to the father. And is your artistic nephew the son of "Ives"? The drive behind Gurlie was very characteristic of that period, in Asheville as well as Rutherford, and my parents, from another country, also involved in it tho with a somewhat different emphasis, and it was always drilled into us that we had to "prove" ourselves intellectually and there was always the background of the struggle to "belong" and to belong well--in some way. I can't be sure, but I do believe it's somewhat different now with the same age group. The

drive, or the reasons for any drive, seem to be elsewhere--I'm not exactly sure where.

Well, Michael goes off to the Army on Nov. 15th for two years. He may spend them at a desk job in Fort Dix (sorting mail or filing papers--after basic training) or be sent abroad. He'd like to go to Germany, but is afraid he might be sent to Korea. Butch is well and happy with his star gazing via intricate machines, telescopes and cameras and new chemicals.

Was reading somewhere yesterday that whale oil is an extremely important ingredient in certain car-lubrication compounds, in the making of plastics, and of cosmetics--i.e. our wonderful machines must have a little of it to run the way they should. Also they now have extremely efficient ways of harvesting it--tho there was no word mentioned of plans to assure its continued production.

Please write news of both of you, and of the sons and grandchildren too. Hope their problems are getting solved and that the kids, too, are growing up OK. And that Bill is working. We hear of his poetry going to be read at a poetry center in NY soon and of something honorary at Nat'l Arts Foundation (?) in Feb. (?).¹⁹

Best love to you both,

Lib

And many thanks for sending the book. And autographed, too. KB says he is writing when the midterm papers and grades are done.

[B]

[Bennington]

[17 December 1960]

Bill, you generous old rummy. I've been trying for some days to write you a letter. But the graciousness of yours, plus the mad seventeen-things-at-once situation we're now in as the term explodes (I'm now frantically reading papers and writing reports), must perforce "necessitate" (to use a favorite word of the students) my delaying until the rush is o'er (December 21st). Meanwhile, this is just a quickie to say thanks, jeez thanks. Also, as I'll explain later, your poem has a spot which I can quote to great advantage in connection with an essay I have to write soon (for a textbook edition of Timon of Athens). Meanwhile, best love to The Bill and the Floss, or whatever that book was called.

K.B.

[B]

[Bennington]

December 31, 1960

Dear Bill,

Now it can be told, you mellow generous old baystard, you. The family has gone shopping, and I snuk a coupla slugs

of Old Grand Dad (jeez, I can't even spell it!), and the year grinds to a close.

Our countryman, Barnum, admonished that one should never give a sucker a break. So, my first impulse was to ship you a bbl. of my latest versifyings.

But for all the crudity of my befuzzlement, I'm just somehow decent enough not to do ennithing of the sort. (Since you said that you liked the middle ones best, I even bethought me of a shrewdness wherin, to get the blessing, I'd tell how I had come across a whole new batch of middle ones, whereupon I'd parade some of my later sputterings.)

Bill, you're such a mellow generous old baystard, you're so riddled with humanity, you're poetry is so charmingly different from what I despise more and more in that shrewd God-seller, Eliot, I'll just tell you a story about local doings:

We have arrangements here whereby we have (if I may use a subversive word) Contact with a few students, technically known as "Counselors." One of my such, a remarkable girl who has been on all kinds of forced marches (even unto Tashkent, in the course of her odysseys), of a sudden showed me a poem she had done. I was astonished, on several scores. But most of all I was astonished on these two scores: (1) Although an exchange student from Poland, she was much tougher than I

would ever be about distrust of "propaganda"; and (2) she wanted to write poetry a la Wallace Stevens.

I says, says I: "So that's what you'd do? And a good move it is. But could there be a better move?" And without waiting for her to ask me what such a move might be, I went on, to say (I mean: I goes on to say): "Look. Stevens is an excellent poet. But he's a mixture of poetry and insurance. How about a guy who is a mixture of poetry and medicine?"

There was your contact, you baystard. And you did such a beautiful job of it, the A.M.A. would have thrown you out, except that the fishbones were never that accurate. (Ironically enough, this student's surname is Fischbein, through no fault of hers.) Or fishlegs.

Well, at this point, the rest of the family turned up, and broke the continuity. They turn out to have been the equivalent of that visitor from Porlock who turned up at Coleridge's and broke the continuity exactly when he was writing down his dream of Kubla Khan. But this was no dream. For critics are insomniacs.

Bill, the story is purely and simply this: I owe you an article, an article about you. And if Bigshot but grants me the time, I'm going to do it. And if He grants me the time, He'll also grant me the eloquence. And so, I'll write that eloquent article about you that I have long been taking notes on and getting up steam for.

Poetry and medicine! I watched you finger that dog's paw down in Floridoh, looking for sand burrs, with your weaker hand yet--and I saw how quickly the dog knew that here was guy who knew his business. (In my philanthropic worries a bit sooner, I nearly got bitten.)

Yet, I'll bet it never even crossed your mind what an act that was. Probably you were just having Contact, in this case with a stray mutt on the beach.

That's what you demanded of us all, in our work. And it's what you got, in yours. And you were proved right right right. (Well, not as right as all that; for now and then I wish you were a bit more to the left, e.g., with regard to Cuba.)

Dear Bill, I respect you so much, and I am so grateful to you for your typically spontaneous letter, I will not ask you to repeat one word of it in public. Let the others batten and fatten on your kind assurances.

You're a mellow one, you baystard. And it is my boast that I know how mellow you are, in line after line (along with your cantankerousness, of course!).

And now, ending the old year and/or starting the new year right, I would say, for the both of us, who love you both: Do flourish; and do let's have lots of good moments yet, come next year.

Sincerely,

K.B.

Notes for 1960

¹ Louis Zukofsky (1904-1978). "A/ Round of Fiddles" are the first two lines of Zukofsky's "A 1-7."

² Carl Friedrich Von Marcus (1802-1862): German physician. The "Douglasite bulshido," in contrast to Marcus the healer, may be a reference to Norman Douglas, author of High Wind Over Jamaica and who held the belief that "the best thing a parent could do after bringing a child into the world was simply to die" (Mariani 228).

³ In February, Williams and Flossie spent a month with Burke and Libby in Tampa, Florida (Mariani 754).

⁴ William Carlos Williams, "Song," The Selected of William Carlos Williams (New York: New Directions): 170.

⁵ Burke taught briefly at Penn State.

⁶ See note 4.

⁷ Burke's comment may have been provoked by the fact that Lowell had nominated Jarrell for membership in the National Institute of Arts and Letters this year (Jarrell 443).

⁸ M.L. Rosenthal, "Salvo for William Carlos Williams," The Nation, 31 May 1958, 497-502. Included in this celebration of Williams' 75th anniversary is an open letter from Louis Zukofsky (500) and a poem from Richard Eberhart: "To Bill Williams," (501). The index to which Burke refers includes two entries of his own works: "Civil Defense", 24 September 1960; "The Poet, on his Grand Climacteric," 11 March 1961.

⁹ Kenneth Burke, Towards a Better Life (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Co., 1922)

¹⁰ Burke writes Malcolm Cowley on 23 June:

Today, in a way, I guess I finished a book, though I'm not sure that I'll use this last section in the book. It's a dialogue between The Lord and Satan, in which both of them talk suspiciously alike, because both of them talk suspiciously like one K. Burke, in a mood of weighty academic levity. (Jay 335)

Burke was debating whether or not to include this essay as the last section of The Rhetoric of Religion, published in 1961.

¹¹ William Carlos Williams, "The Ultimate Bear-Hug," Pictures From Brueghel (New York: New Directions, 1962).

¹² See note 8.

¹³ William Carlos Williams, Many Loves and Other Plays, ed. J.C. Thirlwall (New York: New Directions, 1961). The

Cure, included in this volume, was started "in 1952 when Williams was recuperating from a superficial stroke," (436).

14 William Carlos Williams, Yes, Mrs. Williams (New York: New Directions, 1959).

15 The tape to which Libbie refers here was recorded, as her later comment verifies, on 21 June 1951 at Andover; the recording contained eight poems and one selection from Paterson (Wallace 261).

16 In July, Williams and Thirlwall went to the University of Indiana to hear Mary Ellen Solt discourse on Williams' variable foot (Mariani 758).

17 William Carlos Williams, The Build Up (New York: Random House, 1952).

18 The home of Flossie's family was in Monroe, New York, forty miles from Rutherford.

19 In February 1951, A Dream of Love was staged by the National Arts Club (Mariani 761).

1961

[B]

[Andover]

August 22, 1961

Dear Bill,

Ja, die Welt ist dummm.

Aber nein, du hast mir kein Buch gesandt.¹

Back from Chicawguh, I have by now got 25 pages of my godam Poetics definitively revised.² (Or more or less definitively.)

The Latin word for "man" (vir) means a male of arms-bearing age. From it we get the word "virtue." The Greek word for "Mars" (Ares) comes from the same root as the Greek word for "virtue" (arete).

Our word "Beauty" goes back to the Latin word for "war" (belloum), and beyond that to an earlier form, duellum. Both are tied up with the Latin word for "good" (bonus, earlier duonus).

Am I wrong, or is it true, that English has no word to rhyme with "music"? (Not quite: I made up a reference to "the Falls at Hoosick," but the poor Indians helped out with that one.) Anyhow, we got good rhymes for "sit and think."

Holla!

Sincerely,

K.B.

[B]

[Englewood, Florida]

[December 1961]

Dear Floss and Bill,

We didn't get out any Christmas cards this year because we were involved with packing and moving down here just before the holidays. We have a fine house (inside plumbing! and central heat) and will be here until April 1. Then we shall return to Andover for a long spring, which I am looking forward to.

KB is finishing the Symbolic ms. and I am typing it.³ He has just enough speaking engagements here and there to break the monotony of straight revision, which is fine.

I, too, enjoyed the very fine poems of Bill's and also the article of Lowell's, and was going to write you about them, but KB's letter went out meanwhile and he is speaking for both of us. We are so anxious to know how things are going for you, and hope Floss will find time to drop us a card.

Best love, and all the good wishes in the world for the New Year,

Lib

I don't know whether other people's calamities make you feel any better or not--but KB is on a strict diet, no liquor, etc. to bring down his blood pressure, and I am having my front teeth pulled this weekend! However, the b/p

is now down to 155 or thereabouts, and I am looking forward to sporting my store teeth next week!

Greetings to the Jrs. Are any of them living with you now? How are the grandchildren? Also say hello to Madelein when you see her.

Notes for 1961

¹ Yes, the world is stupid. But no, you have not sent me a book.

² Burke taught at the University of Chicago in the late thirties, late sixties, and late seventies (Jay 411).

³ Language as Symbolic Action, 1966.

1962

[B] [Kingston, NJ]

January 14, 1962

Dear Bill,

Have just read the article by Robert Lowell on you in
the current Hudson Rev..¹

It gives me a chance to say why I haven't written the
article on you that I have long wanted to write.

I have not written it because I'd love to have done a
long piece having exactly the quality of those warm and
brilliant and thoroughly just pages by Lowell.

Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa. Forgive, Bill--but at
least let me hereby formally subscribe to the quality of the
perceptions and sentiments so persuasively set down by
Lowell.

Meanwhile, I'm in the midst of revising a chapter on
hermeneutic burdens having to do with the subtle
interrelationships btw. Sphinx and sphincter. (I'm already
two weeks past the self-imposed deadline for the book as a
whole, and I'm not halfway through the revision.)

Best greetings, and to Floss. And if you have but a
fraction of your poems' felicity, then surely you're all
afloat with joy. (Why did my Ucs make me first write "job"?)

We're here, quite comfortably fixed, until the end of March. No problems except my worst enemy, meself. Wish we could see you.

Sincerely,

K.B.

I append a few lines from a recent poem, perhaps not intrinsically worth considering, but of diaristic relevance:

Meanwhile me,
A vile old man,
Inclined to an old man's greed,
Seeing the seamy side,
Powerlessly exclaiming

Bring on your bombs, your bugs, and the trick chemicals
Get this damned business done

But in the interim
Curse me for a not-yet-housebroken cur
And rub my nose in filthy lucre.²

[B]

[Andover]

July 12, 1962

Dear Bill,

After working my damfool head off, and then falling into a sloth that which none could be slothier, I am gradually pulling the self together. And I now seize my trusty Qwert Uiop (or, if you will, my Asdf Gh Jkl, or do I mean my Zxcv Bnm?--though I resolutely refuse to call it a "#\$_&'()*"). And I wanna thank you greatly for the hand-attested copy of your Pictures From Brueghel.³

Jeez, many things there are nice and fresh! He writes the poem "Because it's there to be written." That's quick and jaunty. Levitaysh is all. I always had some erudite ideas about that famous red wheelbarrow--and I find them confirmed on p. 57.

As for the Brueghel ones: Though I admit that I prefer fingerpainting to word-painting, I must say you do wonders with that form. And I got much interested in trying to make exactly how the ending of your lines, as printed on the page, differs from the sheerly logical breaks, with some transitions fitting indeterminately on one or the other side of a slope between two sentences. The shifts are very subtle. In one of my early stories (which you never loved!) I tried one thus: "Ampersand placing the germs into the blood through the sucking of lice not affable skulls whom the madam lay with the man so aloof from us as he stood on stilts that passing dogs stopped to befoul them." But after that effort, I collapsed. In your case I have in mind, for instance, the closing lines on p. 9:

under a tree

whose shade

carelessly

he does not share the

resting
center of
their workaday world

"He does not share" goes first of all with "shade," then shades off indeterminately into "the resting center." The more closely you watch such, the more it maketh to be dizzy.

I have pedantically marked out quite a number of the poems, in the attempt to see whether, by inspecting the lot, I could spot some corresponding formula (which is my kind of un--and to heck with you!). But I'm still left trailing, and not likely to catch up.

What you were able to do, while picking your way through all the butchery and botchery that the freedom-loving (or do I mean money-loving?) inhuman race visited upon the areas this side The Meadows, what you found a way of doing was to keep on saying that there were all sorts of things to write zippy zappy lines about--and without lying, Bejeez, lines without lying! Lines under the sign of Levitaysh--and the sharpness of the lines themselves proves that the levitaysh is really there, if one is but a Billiam Charlie Billiams while one is looking.

All your lines go well. Then all of a sudden there's a line that is so essentially you, I hear you and see you

right hic et nunc. You materialize in your sparkling bad-boy best. The shrewd scholastics tell us that, if we do have to go to Heaven, which looks like one hell of a bore to me, we'll be there at the height of all our powers. Just like so many of those lines of yours. And if you now and then feel bum, just bear in mind the fact that the human body can't go on living up to the requirements imposed upon it by brisk verse such as yours.

You baystard, you stinkeroo, you're good! You just are. And don't ever try to deny it. For you have committed yourself, again and again. Us critics and the John Birch Societies have got the dope on you. You could go down a filthy city street, and find there a poem as lovely as a babbling brook in June. And again and again you proved your point: The poem "was there to be written." And that's subversive.

But, though it was undeniably there as has been scientifically and/or poetically proved by the writing of it, it couldn't have existed except through the agency of Billiam Charlie Billiams.

Eauque, dear Dopo. And thank you very much indeed for sending us that book, with that precious wobbly signature. You baystard, you stinkeroo. We prize that, because we

know what to prize.

And with all our love to Floss,

Sincerely,

K.B.

Dear Fellow North-Jerseyite: Is it poss. that you and Floss may be out this way this summer sometime, in that local cranberry bog writ large? If so, that would be wonderf. And d'yuh know? Come next wint, we're planning to go south again to Floridoah. You should give the area another chawnst. Think it o'er!

K.B.

Notes for 1962

¹ Robert Lowell, "William Carlos Williams," Hudson Review (Winter 1961-62): 530-37. (The volume also contains four poems by Williams, 527-29.)

² Kenneth Burke, "On a Photo of Myself," Collected Poems, 1915-67 (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1968): 206.

³ William Carlos Williams, Pictures From Brueghel (New York: New Directions, 1962).

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