

POETRY – AN ELUSIVE TASK

BY

THOMAS C. BENET

PRESENTED TO THE CHIT CHAT CLUB

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

FEBRUARY 12, 2001

Speech to Chit Chat

Talking about poetry is a task for those fond of grappling with the elusive. The reasons a piece of verse winds up by being effective are often difficult to pin down. Why so? A poem constitutes mere words arranged on a page - the same as a lawyer's brief, a doctor's diagnosis, or an essayist's vehement screed. Nonetheless, it is a bit like trying to chase the will-o-the-wisp to try analyse the cause of the effect - the tug of emotion that can be produced by well-made verse. Robert Frost described poetry as metaphor: "saying one thing and meaning another, saying one thing in terms of another, the pleasure of ulteriority." This duality, this multiplicity of meanings this precision in imprecision, can either stump the reader, or send his spirits soaring. Don't worry, you're not going to get a treatise on rhyme schemes, verse forms, or squabbles amongst the litterati over the years about which poetic movements were most meaningful. The subject has weight, of course. As the New Jersey doctor-poet, William Carlos Williams, put it:

"It is difficult/ to get the news from poems/ yet men die miserably every day/ for lack/ of what is found there." (Asphodel, That Greeny Flower")

Williams's plain, precise words get to the heart of the matter. It is their simple, prosaic nature that provide emotional force. Their seeming weightlessness, indeed, is key to what gives his lines such compelling power.

No, I thought I'd take a look at a number of men who are now generally agreed to have been leading practitioners of the art in the twentieth century - an insurance company lawyer, that same New Jersey doctor and an Irish bard of mythic proportions who used communications from the unseen to fuel his art. We will probably get no nearer to the heart of what produces good poetry, but it may make for an interesting, if spotty, survey. And here I'm thinking along the lines of the delightful tour of Gilbert and Sullivan provided not too long ago by one of our members.

In his introduction to a collection of the work of eight American poets, the critic Joel Conarroe aptly observes that "poets are more likely to produce perfect poems than perfect lives. What alone constitutes life for a poet, according to T.S. Eliot, is the struggle 'to transmute his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal. Yes, poets can, and do, live chaotic lives: witness Robert

(2)

Lowell's struggle with mania; Dylan Thomas' s with alcoholism and an unhappy series of suicides that have infected the breed. But mania is hardly a requisite of art. Plenty of poets have quiet, even reclusive, lives: Emily Dickinson, the sheltered spinster of Amherst Mass., being a prime example.

Now, here a disclaimer, or, rather, confession, of sorts is necessary. I grew up in a family of writers. My father made his living that way - cranking out short stories for the Saturday Evening Post, the Delineator and other mags of the day; always wanting to get back to the poetry that was his true love. The magazines were where the money was then - the thirties and early forties; they had devoted readers and, in many ways, were the television of their time. My mother had been a reporter in Paris for the Chicago Tribune and a Town & Country columnist there during the twenties. When we moved back to America, she was occupied raising three children, but kept her hand in with book reviews and articles that appeared in a properly insouciant magazine just then a-borning: the New Yorker. My uncle was also a published poet with and kept in the literary swim by writing a monthly column called "The Phoenix Nest" for The Saturday Review of Literature. It all seemed perfectly natural to me to be connected to this group of frantic scribblers, and mine was not different from the lives of friends, whose parents were stockbrokers, lawyers, or what ever. The only odd element was that my parents worked at home, the tap-tap of a typewriter upstairs was usually a signal to cool it on rowdy behavior. Of course did have a magging, filial sense of obligation to parental example, but neatly ducked the challenge of creative writing, and took the easy way out by going into journalism.

I'm also aware that some of the members here may be better versed in the lives and work of the poets I am about to discuss than this avid amateur. And, that, in focusing primarily on just three, I will, of necessity, be slighting others just as - or more -worthy. So just consider this a personal tour through some of my favorites and a look at the curious factors that figured in the lives of these versifiers.

Wallace Stevens presents a figure that can - depending on your angle of vision - seem to embody either the epitome, or the anthesis, of "the poet." Born in 1879 of strongly Puritan, Dutch-Irish stock in Reading, Pennsylvania; he spent three years at Harvard (George Santayana and William James were teaching philosophy there at the time), and

(3)

then attended New York Law School. He married the beautiful (she was the model for the figure on the Liberty Head dime) Elsie Kachel, from what we can tell a difficult woman with no taste for social situations. Rare, indeed, was the visitor who passed the threshold of their house in Hartford, Connecticut, where he spent most of his professional life as an eminently successful official of the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company, being named a vice president in 1934. They had a devoted daughter, Holly, who did much in later years to edit his papers and help resurrect his reputation.

While Stevens enjoyed hearty good times with pals at the Canoe Club in Hartford, there is also a strong element of isolation here. A man fascinated with what he referred to as the "heaven of Europe" never traveled abroad. As Connaroe has noted, "the most remarkable thing about him apart from his size (well over six feet tall and weighing nearly 250 pounds) is that there was nothing remarkable about him. A highly disciplined businessman; he felt that poets who held university positions and read to women's groups were 'kept men.' "I detest company," he said, "and do not feel any protest of selfishness in saying so." His Europe, then a crucible of artistic change, was experienced through letters, postcards, wines and other tidbits of what he called "food for the starved imagination." Yet, there was another side. He relished trips on his own to Florida and Cuba, where the weather was benign, the drinks strong and the roast beef rare. Once he returned home from one of these forays with a black eye and a broken hand, the result of a fistic encounter with Ernest Hemingway. The details of that particular spasm of pugilism are mercifully fuzzy. But Stevens did admit later to being "pretty well lit" at the time.

And how did his associates at the insurance company react to this man? It is said that some did not even know he was a poet. Here is what one co-worker, Robert DeVore, observed:

"I first met Mr. Stevens in Philadelphia in 1928. We had a contractor we were bonding to the Board of Education, guaranteeing the performance of his contract. The fellow went broke and we had to contact the home office in Hartford to let them know we were in trouble with this man. Mr. Stevens got on the phone and told the manager it was important enough that he felt he ought to come down to Philadelphia..

He wanted me to meet him at the station, take him to the attorney's office. I stood at the

(4)

gate in the station and didn't have any trouble spotting him. Here was a fellow who matched the description the manager had given me: tall, austere, very dignified, an unusual-looking man. He said, "Let's get on our way. We want to go to the attorney's office and get into this thing right away. We don't want to waste any time." I said, "No, sir!"

Then he said, "The attorney's office is down on Chestnut street, so on the way down, what do you say we get some cinnamon buns." I said, "Cinnamon buns?" "Yes," he said, "I always, whenever I come to Philadelphia, buy these cinnamon buns at Lahr's" I thought, this is strange to do before going to an attorney's office. He ordered a dozen to send to Hartford. I thought, Oh that is it. Then he wanted a dozen more, they put them in a bag, and we started off. And I thought, My gosh, I wonder when he's going to eat these things. Well, we got to the attorney's office and we went through the introductions and into the conference room. There were about seven of us. He opened up his bag, put it in the middle of the table, and said, "Let's have a cinnamon bun." Everyone, trying to be polite, agreed with him, and we all reached in and got a handful of goo. And we started out conference.

Another glimpse, from another co-worker, John Rogers: "Stevens was a meticulous worker. He worked hard. He was the only man I'd ever seen do research the way he did it. He would get these books day after day: you'd see him with maybe twenty or thirty books, all place-marked, all around him on a certain subject. He was a terrific man for legal research. There were books on the desk, on the chair. You'd have to bring in extra chairs to hold the books. Now this guy would roll up his sleeves; he was a worker. Lots of others leave to play golf; not Stevens. Stevens was right there, grinding it. He was the grindingest guy they had there in executive row."

So much for the hard-nosed, albeit somewhat unusual, businessman. What of the poet? During his lifetime, Wallace Stevens was certainly appreciated, but his was a relatively small, albeit influential, base: the erudite readers of Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* magazine and the like. There were those who found his verse inaccessible, even precious. Indeed, when he died in August of 1955 at the age of 75, the New York Times quoted its own poetry critic, the late Percy Hutchinson, as having said: "Unpleasant as it is to record such a conclusion, the very remarkable work of Wallace Stevens cannot endure."

Further picking up on the critic's review of the poet's *Harmonium*, published in 1931, the

(5)

obituary cited Hutchinson's conclusion that the works were closest to "pure poetry," depending for their effectiveness on the rhythms and tonal values of the words used with only the remotest connection to ideational content. The critic said the poems were "stunts" in which rhythms, vowels and consonants were substituted for musical notes. But this achievement is not poetry, the critic said, adding "from one end of the book to the other, there is not an idea that can vitally affect the mind, there is not a word that can arouse emotion."

And yet. And yet. In the ensuing years, Stevens' reputation has grown exponentially, particularly amongst those who write about, and teach, poetry. A literary journal, devoted solely to the poet and his works, has appeared twice annually for more than 20 years and is not about to run out of meaty points of discussion. The distinguished scholar Harold Bloom now calls him a "central" American poet, "the best and most representative of our time." And I'll turn to Connaroe again for what I believe to be a fair picture of Stevens' present status.

"If Robert Frost is the poet most admired by the general public, and William Carlos Williams the favorite of the younger poets, Wallace Stevens is the undisputed champion of the academic establishment, the critic's poet. Preoccupied with 'ideas of order' and convinced that the imagination can discover 'the opposite of chaos in chaos' he is...a philosophical writer whose richly-textured lyrics, consistently reveals new meanings and tonalities, His poems, like Faulkner's novels, are fascinating puzzles that reward repeated visits, though they will frustrate anyone insisting on literal meanings. The late critic Anatole Broyard said he survived his army years by keeping a copy of the poet with him at all times, and one is reminded of Emily Dickinson's question about Shakespeare: 'Why is any other book needed?'. Unlike Frost, Stevens is not for everyone, but those who do respond to his music tend to find him without peer among American singers."

Another poet, Randall Jarrell, said of him: "At the bottom of his poetry, there is wonder and delight, the child's, the animal's, the savage's - man's - joy in his own existence and thankfulness for it."

Stevens's work is, indeed, dense. It is full of musical effects and occasional quixotic turns. The titles display a typical, often playful, panache: "The Pure Good of Theory," "The

(6)

Bird with the Coppery, Keen Claws," "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," "The Emperor of Ice Cream," "No Possum, No Sop, No Taters," "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle," "Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas. " You get the picture.

Stevens's work gains force and depth through re-reading. There are many of his poems, indeed, that I have read many times, probably still do not fully comprehend, but get increased pleasure each time I look re-experience them. Perhaps it is best to let the poet explain himself in his own way.

His, "The Man With the Blue Guitar", opens in this fashion: "The man bent over his guitar,
/ A shearsman of sorts. The day was green./ * They said, You have a blue guitar,/ You do
not play things as they are." *The man replied, 'Things as they are/
Are changed upon the blue guitar./ * And they said then, "But play you must,/ A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,/ * A tune upon the blue guitar/ Of things exactly as they are."

"I cannot bring a world quite round,/ Although I patch it as I can./ * I sing a hero's head,
large eye/ And bearded bronze, but not a man,/ * Although I patch him as I can. And reach
through him almost to man./ * If to serenade almost to man/ Is to miss by that, things as
they are,/ Say that it is a serenade/ Of a man that plays a blue guitar. "

By taking reality and running it through his "blue guitar", the poet produces a very special magic.

It is impossible to limn Stevens's range in a brief talk, so I'll just touch on one favorite theme: the order that is contained in disorder and vice-versa. A notable poem, "The Idea of Order at Key West," opens with the image of a woman singing on a beach.: "She sang beyond the genius of the sea....Made constant cry, caused constantly a cry./That was not ours, although we understood./ Inhuman, of the veritable ocean."

And it concludes: "Ramon Fernandez, tell me, if you know,/ Why, when the singing ended:/and we turned/ Toward the town, tell why the glassy lights,/ the lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,/ As the night descended, tilting in the air,/ Mastered the night and portioned out the sea./Fixing emblazoned and fiery poles,/ Arranging, deepening, enchanting night./ * Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,/ The maker's rage to order words of the sea./ Words of the fragrant portals, dimly starred,/ And of ourselves and of our origins./In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds."

(7)

I'll wind up on Stevens with what may have been his last poem from a posthumous collection edited by his daughter, Holly, and entitled "The Palm at the End of the Mind." It is called "Of Mere Being." "The palm at the end of the mind./ Beyond the last thought, rises/ In the bronze decor,/ * A gold-feathered bird/ Sings in the palm without human meaning,/ Without human feeling, a foreign song./ * You know then that it is not the reason/That makes us happy or unhappy./ The bird sings, its feathers shine./ * The palm stands on the edge of space./ The wind moves slowly in the branches./The bird's fire-fangled feathers dangle down."

Now, I'm going to turn to a poet who was not American, but Irish: the near-mythic William Butler Yeats. Yeats was every inch the bard: handsome, well-chiselled face, an abundant mane of snowy locks - an imposing figure often pictured clad in flowing tie and swirling cape. The son of an eccentric father, who gave up a career at law for the uncertain attractions of portrait painting, Yeats had established a formidable reputation in the field of verse by the time he reached his fifties, and was contemplating marriage, when the extraordinary event that is my focus here occurred.

Yeats had had romances in his day - most notably with Maud Gonne, the beautiful and tempestuous advocate of Irish independence. One of his loveliest poems: - "When you are old and grey, and full of sleep,/ And nodding by the fire, take down this book,/ And slowly read, and dream of the soft look/ Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep/ " - was addressed to her. But Maud had had a long, illicit relationship with a married French journalist, and was now involved with a difficult, combative personality, the fiery Sean MacBride. Indeed, Yeats had turned his attention to Maud's beautiful daughter, Iseult, then in her twenties.

Then he met the woman who would play a substantial, if largely unrecognized, role in both the domestic - and artistic - sides of his life. She was George Hyde-Lees: a much-younger, witty, down-to-earth Englishwoman. They shared a deep interest in occultism and psychic phenomena; were members of a secret society, The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, whose acolytes had underground names and were devoted to communication with "the other side."

So Yeats, having in mind that it was high time he should be thinking in dynastic terms,

(8)

and continuing the Yeats family name, settled on this practical, well-educated, well-spoken lady less than half his age.

Things did not begin auspiciously. Following the wedding, Yeats was stricken with a nervous stomach disorder, and, when they finally arrived at their gloomy honeymoon site, the brooding Ashdown Forest Hotel, both were beginning to feel it had all been a mistake. Then, something happened: while trying to cast a horoscope (they were fond of looking toward the planets to discover causes of earthly discomfort), George slipped into a trance, and, as if seized by an overpowering force, her hand began writing without her control. To George's utter amazement, as Ann Saddlemyer relates in a recent biography entitled "Becoming George", her hand acted as if "seized by a superior power," The loosely-held pencil scribbled out fragments of sentences on a subject of which she had no experience.

It was a transforming event. Yeats described this "miraculous intervention" in a letter to his friend, Lady Gregory: "I had begun to believe that just before my marriage I had acted...because my mind was unhinged by strain. The strange thing was that within a half an hour of the writing of this message my rheumatic pains, and my neuralgia and my fatigue had gone and I was very happy. From being more miserable than I ever remember being since Maud Gonne's marriage I became extremely happy. That sense of happiness has lasted ever since."

What happened here? There is reason to believe that George may have initially decided to "fake" some automatic writing - as adepts in the occult world, the process was familiar to both - and then was honestly "taken over" by the phenomenon. Here's Yeats himself on what happened::

"On the afternoon of October 24, 1917, four days after our marriage, my wife surprised me by attempting automatic writing. What came in disjointed sentences, in almost illegible writing, was so exciting, sometimes so profound, that I persuaded her to give an hour or two day after day to the unknown writer, and after a half-dozen such hours offered to spend what remained of life explaining and piecing together those scattered sentences. 'No.' was the answer, 'we have come to give you metaphors for poetry.'"

These writings, which were succeeded eventually by what the Yeatses called "sleeps", during which George would go into a trance and speak automatically, became a significant.

(9)

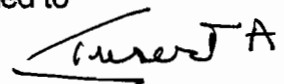
element of their marital life. The process involved dealing with a series of otherworldly personalities - some kindly, some obstreperous and destructive: there was Dionertes, who handled philosophical matters; Terhemly (an anagram of sorts for hermetically); Aymor who often proffered advice in love matters, and so forth, as well as one female control, Epilamium (a name derived from ephthilamium, or nuptial love song). And the voices - sometimes hectoring, sometimes soothing - provided the Yeatses with all sorts of advice - from when to conceive children (they eventually had two), when to travel and where to live. But most of all, they became important factors in a complex philosophy of life eventually expounded by Yeats in his fascinating opus, *A Vision*, whose subtitle presents the book as no less than "An Explanation of Life Founded upon the Writings of Giraldus and upon Certain Doctrines Attributed to Kusta Ben Luka." Here, I'll pass around an early edition of the work signed by Yeats himself.

Among other matters, human personality was divided into twenty-eight types, or, to use his term, twenty-eight phases of the moon. There are esoteric diagrams aplenty, cabalistic symbols; analyses of propitious times for historic events; a unicorn even rears its noble head in this splendid mishmash.

In his book, "Yeats, The Man and the Masks", the distinguished scholar, Richard Ellmann, raises average reader's basic question: Did Yeats believe in esoteric Yeatsism? It cannot be answered simply, says Ellmann. "As a man he sometimes believed his system and sometimes did not; at first he had more confidence in the 'communicators' of his automatic writing as being spirits beyond space than he afterwards maintained. ...In most of his verse he proceeded with his usual craft so that, while the metaphors for poetry which the communicators had brought him often appear, it is hard to find specific passages which are incomprehensible to someone who has not read *A Vision*."

In other words, whatever tangled and unconventional approach to a philosophy of life, this great Irish versifier needed to go through, the poems remained strong, accessible and moving. Was this automatic writing simply an odd *folie a deux* that the Yeatses found necessary to maintain their marriage? A fascinating question. But with poetry polished to such a brilliant sheen, why worry about the stimulus?

I'll conclude on William Butler Yeats in passing around a little volume from the



(14)

(Insert A)

George Yeats received very little recognition during her life for the role she had played in her husband's career. But Frank O'Connor, the managing director of the Abbey Theater, saw the relationship clearly in a speech he gave at Yeats's graveside on the 100th anniversary of the poet's birth:

"Another thing he (meaningYeats) would have wished me to do," said O'Connor, " and which I must do since none of the people who have written of him in his centenary year has done so - is to say how much he owed to the young Englishwoman he married, and who made possible the enormous development of his genius from 1916 onward. This should be said by someone who was much closer to them both than I was, but it was obvious even to a casual acquaintance. It is not too much to say that if Yeats had not married, or indeed, if he had married someone else, the story of his later work would have been very different. In many ways, he was a most fortunate man; fortunate in his parentage, because it is not every poet who has a genius for a father, and most fortunate in his marriage...For a long time before Yeats' marriage he withdrew gradually from Ireland and the Irish theatre to their great loss, but even that hurt he learned to ignore if not to forget. In this again, I think, we in Ireland owe a great debt to Mrs. Yeats."

(pu)

Cuala Press in Dublin, operated by his sisters, Lily and Lolly. There are so many great poems to choose from the overall work: "Sailing to Byzantium", "Among Schoolchildren," "The Wild Swans at Coole," but I'll settle for a brief one that reflects both his love of the Irish mythos and his incredible gift for language. It's called "The Song of the Wandering Aengus," and you doubtless know it:

"I went out to the hazel wood,/Because a fire was in my head./ And cut and peeled a hazel wand,/ And hooked a berry to a thread;/And when white moths were on the wing./ And moth-like stars were flickering out,/ I dropped a berry in a stream/ and caught a little silver trout./ * When I laid it on the floor/ I went to blow the fire aflame,/ but something rustled on the floor,/ And someone called me by my name:/ It had become a glimmering girl/ With apple blossom in her hair/ Who called me by my name and ran/ And faded through the brightening air./ * Though I am old with wandering/ Through hollow lands and hilly lands,/ I will find out where she has gone,/ and kiss her lips and take her hands;/And walk among long dappled grass,/ And pluck till time and times are done/ The silver apples of the moon/ The golden apples of the sun."

Now, as I wind up this presentation, I'd like to reemphasize that I've chosen to discuss only a couple of personal favorites: there are obviously some major poets of necessity omitted - Auden, Eliot, Frost to cite just a few - and particularly the women whose imprint on the field is increasingly being recognized as significant. Elizabeth Bishop's reputation has grown and grown over the years. And herewith another personal aside. I'm going to pass around a postcard of a photograph taken in 1948 of a gathering at that wonderful old bookstore in Manhattan, the Gotham Book Mart. My uncle is seated down in front. The Sitwells are there; so are Auden, Marianne Moore, Tennessee Williams and Bishop. There's even a very young Gore Vidal peeking out at the back.

Speaking of women poets, one of my aunts, Elinor Wylie, a controversial and independent lady if there ever was one, was known in the '20s and '30s for her well-wrought verse and sculptured novels. She crossed paths with Virginia Woolf in England at one point, and here's Virginia's acid opinion as delivered in a letter to a friend, Vita Sackville-West:

"Oh, what an evening! I had expected a ravishing and diaphanous dragonfly, a woman who had spirited away four husbands, and wooed from buggery the most obstinate of his adherents; a siren; a green and sweetvoiced nymph - that was what I expected and came a tiptoe in the room to find - a solid hunk, a hatchet minded, cadaverous, acid-voiced, bareboned, spavined, patriotic, nasal, thick legged American. All the evening, she proclaimed unimpeachable truths; and discussed our sales, hers are three times mine, naturally;...She...made a move as if to go. Figure my woe on the stairs when she murmured: "It's the other thing I want. Comes of trying to have children."

Virginia sure knew how to hurt a girl.

William Carlos Williams was, even though he lived in suburbia, a kind of classic country doctor. Born in Rutherford, New Jersey in 1883, he grew up there, married a local girl, practiced medicine there - a pediatrician and obstetrician, he delivered over 2000 babies - and died there in 1963. He also wrote there, in the attic of a plain, albeit comfortable, frame house, plays, novels, and particularly poems deeply rooted in the mundane dailiness of his unremarkable New Jersey environment.

In *Paterson*, as Connaroe notes," his ambitious poetic sequence, he attempted to provide a microcosm of this country's history; and it is not far-fetched to say that with an international mix of blood in his veins this child of immigrant parents was himself an American microcosm - his father was born in England, and his mother (Raquel Helene Rose Hobeb Williams) of Dutch, Spanish and Jewish descent) in Puerto Rico.

Citing this mixed background; Williams wrote: "I felt from the earliest childhood that America was the only home I could ever call my own. I felt it was expressly founded for me, personally, and that it must be my first business in life to possess it.; that only by making it my own from the beginning to my own day, in detail, should I ever have a basis for knowing where I stood."

His aim was to dig into what Ezra Pound referred to as "the bloody loam," Connaroe continues with acute perception, and to celebrate a culture as "locally related" as a tree in earth. He referred to his friend, Wallace Stevens as "Dear fat Stevens"..."a veritable monk...drawing back from the world." Dr. Williams found his inspiration - and reward - in the earthiness right at hand in one's own backyard.

(12)

Herewith an example:

"Meanwhile, / the old man who goes about/ gathering dog lime/walks in the gutter/
without looking up/and his tread/ is more majestic /than that of the Episcopal minister/
approaching the pulpit/ of a Sunday./ These things/ astonish me beyond words."

This poet, who wrote verse on prescription blanks during free moments, did not receive adequate recognition during his lifetime - although he was eventually awarded a Pulitzer prize for his volume "Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems." [Connaroe, and once again I like to use the words of a recognized critic rather than my own personal feelings, says that] Williams, once considered "a man on the margin", has come to be regarded as one of the most significant American poets since Whitman, with great influence over some of our newer poets. He offers us a bleak picture of Williams later life:

"In his late sixties, the poet suffered a series of strokes that forced him to give up his medical practice (one of his sons took it over) and made writing difficult. Having lost the use of his right arm, he stubbornly learned to type with his left hand. At one point, when he was seventy, he was hospitalized with severe depression brought on by the nightmare experience of having a promised post as Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress sabotaged by an obscure McCarthyite, who, referring to the poet "as the very voice of Communism," leveled a series of preposterous charges against him.

But the old man persevered.

Perseverance is a quality that marks all the men I have discussed. And does it really matter what sort of curious elements go into a poet's weaving of his complex craft? It is the words, their music and their ability to evoke emotion, that matter. With this, I'll give Dr.

Williams the last word:

so much depends

upon

a red wheel

barrow

(13)

glazed with rain

water

beside

the white chickens

##

(I am obviously indebted to Joel Connaroe's collection, Six American Poets, for some of the quotations here. Other source : i.e. Ann Saddlemyer's fascinating book on George Yeats, vary. tb)