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Thomas, Jeffrey Crawford

THE CONTEXTUALIST METAPHYSIC OF AMERICAN MODERNIST POETRY: WILLIAM JAMES' INFLUENCE ON ROBERT FROST, WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS, WALLACE STEVENS & CO.

The Ohio State University

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THE CONTEXTUALIST METAPHYSIC OF AMERICAN MODERNIST POETRY: WILLIAM JAMES' INFLUENCE ON ROBERT FROST, WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS, WALLACE STEVENS & CO.

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1984

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Chapter One

Since World War 2 we have by and large done an about-face with respect to the relationship between modernism and romanticism. Whereas during the modernist period itself modernism's antiromanticism was often almost gleefully emphasized, later critics have emphasized a continuity of thematic and formal assumptions, generally seeing a fulfillment, development, or transformation of romanticism where an earlier generation had seen a revolutionary break. Many critics, Frank Kermode, Murray Krieger and C.K. Stead among them, have claimed that Eliot, Hulme and other modernists were being inconsistent, if not disingenuous, in identifying themselves with "classicism" because of the romanticism implicit in their theory and practice. The modernists perhaps have only themselves to blame for this reaction against their understanding of themselves; clearly they overstated their anti-romanticism. But whatever the case, I have no desire to rehearse the pros and cons of a perspective that need not necessarily diminish the distinctiveness of American modernism.

George Bornstein's Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot and Stevens, however, exemplifies our tendency to over-react--to de-modernize those poets in whose work
we have spotted an influence. Bornstein regards Stevens's and Yeats's poetry, Pound's "In a Station of the Metro," and Eliot's *East Coker*, to name just a few, as comparable to Coleridge's conversation poems, Shelley's "Mont Blanc," and Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey": in all "an act of the mind occurs, and the act itself is the true subject of the poem."¹ The modernists and their allies the New Critics were anti-romantic, according to Bornstein, because they didn't understand romanticism: "they could fathom neither the psychodramatic mode nor the lyrics whose 'speakers' were principles of mind."²

Bornstein begins his "Introduction" with an extended discussion of Stevens' two "theoretic poems," "Man and Bottle" and "Of Modern Poetry," as central definitions of modernism in poetry—definitions that place Stevens and his colleagues squarely within the romantic tradition. Bornstein does not ignore Stevens's insisting that "the mind, to find what will suffice, destroys/Romantic tenements of rose and ice" in "Man and Bottle," but he accounts for this insistence with curious ease:

Throughout his career Stevens uses *romantic* in two senses, both of which derive from his response to literary romanticism. Positively, the word denotes that imaginative perception on which poetry depends. But without recreation within the pulsations of an artery, perception hardens into the dead weight of outmoded convention. Hence, negatively, *romantic* can
also denote derivative structures and attitudes leading us into progressive unreality ('delusion'). Stevens, like so many of his contemporaries, could admire monuments of unaging intellect and yet shuffle off coiled conventions to renew romanticism in modern guise. Stevens did indeed occasionally use the word in a positive sense, but in "Man and Bottle" romantic would seem to have the same pejorative meaning (as the antithesis of imagination) as in "Imagination as Value," in which he explained,

The imagination is one of the great human powers. The romantic belittles it. The imagination is the liberty of the mind. The romantic is a failure to make use of that liberty. It is to the imagination what sentimentality is to feeling. It is a failure of the imagination precisely as sentimentality is a failure of feeling. . . . In any case and without continuing to contrast the two things, one wants to elicit a sense of the imagination as something vital. In that sense one must deal with it as metaphysics.

In "Of Modern Poetry" we get the same identification of imagination with metaphysics:

The actor is
A metaphysician in the dark, twanging
An instrument, twanging a wiry string that gives
Sounds passing through sudden rightnesses, wholly
Containing the mind, below which it cannot descend,
Beyond which it has no will to rise.

The old theater with its set scene and definite script Stevens clearly associates with romanticism; he could hardly more clearly state that for "the poem of the mind
in the act" there is no "script"; it must "Face the men of
the time," must "think about war," must "find what will
suffice." And the actor, the imagination, "containing the
mind," keeps it in a horizontal world. I cannot accept
Bornstein's partial conflation of romantic with modernist
poetry because he is basing it on a relatively unimportant
similarity ("an act of the mind") while overlooking a
crucial difference: whereas the romantics were concerned
with integration into an organic whole, Stevens, like
other key moderns, is concerned with an act, an event
within a new context. Romanticism cannot really be sepa­
rated from idealism (even Shelley, as Stevens pointed out,
posited absolutes). In Stevens's "Man and Bottle" and
"Of Modern Poetry" no integration occurs; the actor twangs
an instrument rather than listens to an aeolian harp over
which the wind plays; "the poem of the mind in the act"
becomes "the poem of the act of the mind" now without
there having been any "vertical moment" from which the
poet must inevitably fall back into the mundane. Indeed,
Stevens posits as the very condition for modern poetry
containment within a horizontal world of the imagination.
Any superficial resemblance between Stevens's and Coleridge's
thinking vanishes once we remind ourselves that Coleridge's
analysis of the imagination is rooted in a faculty psych-
ology according to which each faculty is a power of the soul, while Stevens has stipulated that he understands imagination as "the sum of our faculties" (and thus closer to what the romantics would have called the soul) and that "the imagination and society are inseparable." Implicit in Stevens's view of modern poetry, in other words, is a metaphysic radically different from that common to the romantics.

The distinctiveness of American modernism is rooted in its metaphysic; even so with romanticism, which derives from a different metaphysic. I grant the influence of romanticism on modernism, just as I grant the influence of the Symbolists, the Metaphysical poets, Whitman, Henry James, the Impressionists, and many others (not the least of whom is Shakespeare); but I must take issue with attempts to "pre-modernize" modernism, for it is by now a commonplace that the assumptions we bring to bear on a phenomenon will to a large degree determine our understanding of it. By the same token, modernism is in danger of being "post-modernized" by those whose aim is to separate it from romanticism only to make it continuous with current movements.

Consider, for example, the following passage from J. Hillis Miller's Poets of Reality:
So Santayana, in "To an Old Philosopher in Rome," lives "on the threshold of heaven," and sees things double, things and the presence of being in things, "The extreme of the known in the presence of the extreme/Of the unknown" (CP, 508). To see things transfigured in this way is still to see them just as they are, in all their barrenness and poverty. This world and the other are "two alike in the make of the mind" (CP, 508), and the old philosopher's ultimate insight, like Stevens' own, is not at all a mystic vision of things beyond this world:

It is a kind of total grandeur at the end,
With every visible thing enlarged and yet
No more than a bed, a chair and moving nuns,
The immensest theatre, the pillared porch,
The book and candle in your embered room...  
(CP, 510)

Merely to see being in things is not enough. It must be spoken. Through words man participates in being, for words of the world are the life of the world. Poetry does not name something which has already been perceived or put in words a pre-existent mental conception. The act of naming calls things together, gathers them into one, and makes present the things which are present. Speaking belongs to being, and in naming things in their presence poetry brings being into the open.

From De Quincey through Arnold and Browning to Hopkins, Yeats, and Stevens there is a movement from the absence of God to the death of God as starting point and basis. Various writers, Browning or Yeats for example, beginning in one or the other of these situations, are able to make a recovery of immanence. Perhaps it
is Stevens' way, the movement from the dissolution of the gods to the difficult apperception of being, which represents the next step forward in the spiritual history of man. 6

I would like to claim that this passage is representative not only of Miller's frequently excellent book, but of much, if not most, work on the American modernists—representative in that the metaphysic of the author in question has been translated into the critic's metaphysic, or the metaphysic of a different literary movement. And the consequence of what is basically a subsumption of one metaphysic's categories by another incompatible metaphysic's categories is distortion.

Miller makes what purports to be a descriptive statement about Stevens's metaphysic in introducing five lines from the poem: Stevens's "is not at all a mystic vision of things beyond this world." But then in discussing and interpreting the passage, Miller proceeds to imply just the opposite: i.e., despite having granted Stevens the horizontal cosmology he always insisted was his, Miller explicates a vertical cosmology. Miller's hypostatization of "being" becomes obvious if we simply insert "God" in its place: "Merely to see [God] in things is not enough. [God] must be spoken. Through words man participates in [God]..." We suddenly become aware that, despite the illusion of
textual analysis, the poem is really being used as an occasion for Miller to expound his own metaphysics. A more subtle form of hypostatization (pars pro toto) is implied in Miller's "The act of naming calls things together, gathers them into one, and makes present the things which are present." Once again Miller is implicitly asking us to imagine a universe in which a method, process, or action that requires an agent is suddenly a disembodied, idealized absolute bent on the mysteriously mystical revelation of a vertically-fraught Being. "Speaking belongs to Being . . . (my ital. & cap.)": the passage is so riddled with religious metaphors and imagery that one begins to suspect Miller of having a mystical experience, of sorts, at the expense of the text. And then Miller departs from Stevens's poem entirely (although there is the rhetorical implication that the lines quoted constitute the climactic, compelling illustration of Miller's conclusion) to place Stevens in the Evolution of the Spirit: " . . . the next step forward in the spiritual history of man." Miller's metaphysic with its reified, teleologically-oriented History ("History" emergent, an organic whole that already exists in some idealized time and space) becomes fully apparent, the translation of Stevens's metaphysic into Miller's complete. Would the typical Miller sentence in Poets of Reality
(metaphysical claim + quotation, neither element bearing any logical relationship to the other) be any less serviceable for Miller's unconscious rhetorical purpose if for lines and phrases from the work of five major poets we were to substitute lines and phrases from *Time* magazine?

Miller's is one of the best studies of Modernism despite its flaws, and I do not hold it up for ridicule; rather, I mean to suggest that we all today have difficulty keeping our own metaphysics distinct from that implicit in the text. Miller at least displays a sympathetic understanding of the text when he first begins the interpretive process; many import their own metaphysics at an earlier stage. The danger is that we will lose in the shuffle of our own assumptions our grasp on the distinctiveness of American modernism. The formal metaphysic with which American modernism shares a common ground in historical experience achieved popularity at the price of vulgarization, distortion, and misunderstanding. Its adherents were disappointingly apt at sloganeering, quarreled frequently amongst themselves, and tended to evade their metaphysic's implications for religious belief. The popular version of "Pragmatism," in short, seems to bear little overt relationship to American modernism, and it is hardly surprising that most literary historians have
dismissed it as having little direct relevance. At the same time, literary historians have tended unconsciously towards the dogmatisms of our time, implicitly committing themselves either to a 20th-century eclecticized version of romantic organicism (18th-century idealism + Nietzsche, Heidegger, et. al.) or, under the influence of the so-called "ordinary language" philosophers, to what claims status as an "anti-metaphysic" (but which makes metaphysical claims), an approach that involves treating metaphysical entities as if they were "brought into being by someone's wielding these notions in discourse . . ." The danger posed to our understanding of American modernism by the former: a description of modernist thinking and poetics in the categories and terms of an alien metaphysic involves translation—translation that will vary in faithfulness to the original according to its metaphysical load. It is by no means unusual for a critic's translation, made in good faith, to amount to a mirror image of its original. Witness all the readings in which Stevens, Williams, or Pound suddenly (and preposterously) emerge as nihilists imprisoned in a monism of consciousness, as Wordsworthian pantheists, or even as covert choir boys. The danger of the latter: metaphysics comes to seem quite irrelevant to the creation and appreciation of poetry, with the all but
inevitable result that the reader's own uncritically held metaphysic filters the text through a glass darkly.

Metaphysics has been variously defined, but most philosophers would agree that metaphysicians ask "questions about the kinds of things there are and their modes of being." Most would also agree with Frank Dilley that metaphysics is distinguishable from science "in being concerned with the whole of reality, not selected aspects, and therefore its theories are world theories, not limited to realities of special kinds as are the sciences and other specialized disciplines."

But metaphysics is not the concern of metaphysicians alone; it is unique among disciplines in that its subject matter is familiar to, and constitutes a problem for, everyone who thinks and wonders at all. Every person wonders about the basic metaphysical questions--what sort of being is man? What manner of world do we live in? What does it all mean? etc.--and every person feels, thinks, talks, and chooses as if he or she had, however tentatively, answered these questions. Our answers are constitutive of our worlds--indeed, William James once began a lecture by telling his audience that "our individual way of just seeing and feeling the total push and pressure of the cosmos" was "the most interesting and important thing" about each
one of us. We at least like to think ourselves independent in such matters. The metaphysician differs from the rest of us primarily in the way he goes about his metaphysical thinking, differs in his striving always for greater scope, consistency, rigor, and precision. An "unusually obstinate attempt to think clearly and consistently": so William James defined metaphysics. We can't avoid metaphysics; we can only choose between doing our own thinking and letting someone else do it for us.

Artists have increasingly chosen to do their own thinking. Whether or not Plato was right in claiming that a change from the Doric to the Lydian mode in music would lead to the corruption of the public or Pound that "when words cease to cling close to things, kingdoms fall, empires wane and diminish," artists have repeatedly associated certain fashions, styles, and forms with particular ideologies and theologies and have rarely approached their craft in a purely workmanlike or playful fashion. Not all artists have shared Blake's need to create a system for fear of being enslaved by another man's, but certainly many poets since Blake have regarded metaphysics as inextricably bound up with poetics.

To analyze the metaphysics implicit in the work of an artist or critic—or, for that matter, of any individual—we need do nothing mysterious, nor do we necessarily need
any explicitly metaphysical writings. Hypostatizations, enthymemes, analogies, juxtapositions, categories: all reveal metaphysical assumptions implicit in a work. For example, any abstract noun used repeatedly in a passage should be examined for hypostatization. Basic categories, to take another example, are not revealed to man by some inscrutable God of language; they are, rather, selected from a large number of possible sets of categories, either on the basis of an assumed metaphysic (by far the most common case nowadays) or because they are the tools of choice for accomplishing a particular purpose. Sets of categories usually hang together and are not distinct from metaphysical theories; on the contrary, they constitute the "abstract structure" of the theory, implying it, driving the naive user of those categories towards complete acceptance of the metaphysic. In other words, adopt the categories of a particular metaphysician and (unless he is eclectic) you have adopted his metaphysic or world theory. This is not to say, however, that analysis will or should reveal a single, internally-consistent metaphysic nor that one should proceed on the assumption that there is a causal relationship between the history of ideas and the history of the arts.

I would like to think that what I have so far said about metaphysics will be readily granted, if not regarded
as too obvious to need restatement. Were that the case, I might limit my task here to some mildly destructive criticism, attempting to pinpoint where our dogmatisms have led us to misunderstand the American modernists. I could proceed by analyzing how some of the major critical interpretations have begged their own questions, or distorted through categorial substitutions, or in a host of ways imported into readings of the texts assumptions that are alien to them. Dogmatism has become so respectable in recent years (often in the guise of liberation), however, and been embraced so firmly by those who would elevate criticism to the status of a creative art, that I'm not sure destructive criticism would serve any purpose. Those who choose to read the American modernists in terms of their pre- and post-modernist metaphysics would probably assert either that theirs is the true metaphysic and capable of subsuming all other metaphysics within its categories without distortion, or that theirs most adequately reveals the significance of American modernism, regardless of its faithfulness in detail to any of the particular works or authors. And those whose interest is more in the literary history of the period would be as dissatisfied as the dogmatists were unfazed; for the task of recapturing the level at which there is a common denominator among the American modernists would still be undone.
But to take the constructive route, a meta-metaphysic is necessary. In adopting as adequate to my purposes the one proposed by Stephen Pepper in *World Hypotheses: A Study in Evidence*, I make a large claim for the soundness of a theory and the rigor of a classification system that those I have above charged with dogmatism would reject out of hand as both reductionistic and hostage to Reason. "But what hope is there of squaring and settling opinions unless Absolutism will hold parley on this common ground; and will admit that all philosophies are hypotheses . . .": so pleaded William James in 1884. Robert Frost, at least, would probably applaud my choice, since he seems to have had something very like Pepper's theory in mind when he in 1936 wrote to Louis Untermeyer,

isn't it a poetical strangeness that while the world was going full blast on the Darwinian metaphors of evolution, survival values and the Devil take the hindmost, a polemical Jew in exile was working up the metaphor of the state's being like a family to displace them from mind and give us a new figure to live by. Marx had the strength not to be overawed by the metaphor in vogue. Life is like a battle. But so is it also like shelter. . . . We are all toadies to the fashionable metaphor of the hour. Great is he who imposes the metaphor. . . . There are no logical steps from one to the other. There is no logical connection.  

"Poetry is simply made of metaphor," Frost phrased it on a
different occasion. "So also is philosophy--and science, too . . ." \(^{15}\)

Pepper's thesis is that metaphysics or "world hypotheses" derive from root metaphors based in common sense experience. He holds that there are only seven or eight distinct ways in which men have seriously sought to build these world hypotheses, each "derived from certain masses of empirical evidence, originating in common sense, which become cognitively refined and may be codified into sets of categories that hang together." \(^{16}\) Each world hypothesis, he maintains, is useful and self-consistent only so long as, shunning eclecticism, it remains true to its root metaphor, "the concrete evidential source of the categories" (WH 328). In other words, some people have found certain common sense metaphors so powerful and satisfying that they have elaborated them into world theories. Pepper wishes to evaluate (from a philosopher's perspective) as well as describe world theories; in his terms, some root-metaphor-based world theories such as animism and mysticism (derived from the metaphorizations of man, person, or spirit and love respectively) are thoroughly inadequate because of their lack of scope, lack of precision, or both--despite their long histories and persistence in modern thinking. Mysticism explains everything (achieves scope) by reducing everything to one thing, love, which is known
with immediate certainty (mysticism's "cognitive value"). Mysticism thereby sacrifices all precision to scope, which also tends to make its root metaphor vacuous; for if something is everything, then it is really nothing. Animism similarly manages to explain everything by reducing everything to imprecise hypostatizations on the basis of infallible authority (its cognitive value). Pepper finds superior to the others and "about equal" in terms of adequacy four world hypotheses: mechanism, formism, organicism, and contextualism, the root metaphors of which are respectively the machine, similarity, the event with reference to its integration in an ideal organic whole, and the event with reference to its active character, its practical context.

We could think of these root metaphors as merely principles by which we organize experience; we would thereby lose, however, the evaluative criteria implicit in our terming them hypotheses. Why do people, metaphysicians, artists choose one root metaphor over another? What do they think they gain with one and lose with another? What common sense experiences are denied or ignored by one and accounted for by a rival? And so forth. More importantly, people use these root metaphors as if they were explanations or theories of the world; hypothesis therefore appropriately emphasizes the explanatory power commonly attributed
to these root metaphors. At the same time we gain the logical tools for separating (insofar as is possible) observation from interpretation, relations from intrinsic qualities, strong analogies from weak, etc. We can even, as Pepper proceeded to do in *The Basis of Criticism in the Arts*, distinguish an aesthetic clearly implied in each world hypothesis.  

Pepper's main purpose is to show that one cannot choose between the four best world hypotheses on rational grounds. Nor is eclecticism possible, for any attempt at synthesis presupposes the superior truth of one of the four views, organicism. "The four world theories formism, mechanism, contextualism, and organicism actually are our four basic concrete standards of judgment and evaluation." (WH 329). Each of the four, in other words, has a high degree of confirmation and has withstood serious efforts to refute it; but each is incapable of refuting its rivals because each is finally incommensurable with other world hypotheses. We cannot, except on the basis of Santayana's "animal faith," step outside all four hypotheses and decide which is "true" or "truest." At the same time (and here I part ways with Pepper), we need not take the position that normative evaluation of these hypotheses is rationally impossible, since normative evaluation can be
rational without being strictly logical (in law, for example, precedent constitutes a rational but not strictly logical basis for a decision).

Pepper argues that formism and mechanism are analytical world theories. That is, the "basic facts" of formism and mechanism "are mainly in the nature of elements and factors, so that synthesis becomes a derivative and not a basic fact" (WH 142). Formism, based on the intuition of similarity, is more familiarly called "realism" or "Platonic idealism" and is associated with Plato, Aristotle, the scholastics, neoscholastics, neorealists, and modern Cambridge realists. In aesthetics, the great formists are of course Plato and Aristotle, in whose approach to art there has in this century been a great resurgence of interest thanks to some of the New Critics and the so-called Chicago critics. Mechanism is more commonly called "naturalism" or "materialism" and is associated with Democritus, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Hume and many others. Santayana's The Sense of Beauty and Prall's Aesthetic Judgment exemplify mechanist aesthetics most clearly.¹⁹

Organicism, more commonly known as "absolute" or "objective" idealism (Hegel, Schelling, Bradley, Royce, et. al.), and contextualism, more commonly called "pragmatism" (Peirce, James, Bergson, Dewey, Mead, et. al.)
Pepper argues are **synthetic** world theories. That is, their "basic facts" are "complexes or contexts, so that analysis becomes derivative." (WH 142) The classics of contextualist aesthetics are Dewey's *Art as Experience* and Pepper's *Aesthetic Quality*. Coleridge and Bosanquet are probably the most read organicist aestheticians.

Lest the distinction between analytic and synthetic world hypotheses seem trivial, consider its implications for a much vexed term like *mimesis*. Those whose assumed metaphysic was either formist or mechanist might well view mimesis as a relatively straightforward affair—as "holding the mirror up to nature." Since the world's basic facts are elements or factors and synthesis derivative, the world and everything in it might be regarded as more or less passive in the hands of the skilled artist and mimesis as primarily a matter of style. No untruthfulness or unfaithfulness to "what is" need result from representing elements or factors in isolation; objectivity is possible; the proper mirror (perhaps informed by analogy or correspondence) tells much, if not all.

Organicists and contextualists, on the other hand, are confronted with a world the basic facts of which are complexes or contexts that resist "mirroring" if only because no mirror is big enough. Indeed, they cannot see the mirroring of elements and factors as true mimesis at
all, since parts are not isolable from wholes and contexts except under very special conditions that preserve and imply the whole or context in the part. Only the subjective can rescue the synthetic nature of the world and lead to "true mimesis": for organicists, the lamp rather than the mirror; for contextualists, the refusal to think in terms of subject and object at all. "The most striking feature of contextualism is the relative insignificance of the boundaries of the human body."²¹ Considering the work a growing process, a part of the world not different in kind from many other parts not normally considered works of art, a situation including agent, circumstances, and the interaction between the two—a situation full of potentialities and problems and each moment of which is a portentous and "funded" occasion which is always gathering in both memories and anticipations—considering the work, in short, as an experience, the contextualist has little use for such a notion as mimesis at all. Whether or not we should use the term mimesis to cover synthetic as well as analytic world views will no doubt continue to be a subject for debate. Karl Morrison (taking issue with Abrams's popular view of the romantics as having broken with the mimetic tradition) has recently insisted on the distinction between mimetic representation and mimetic thinking, the latter being "a conscious program, or
strategy, of mediation," and equally strongly rooted in the Greco-Christian tradition. Whatever the case, synthetic and analytic ontologies are likely to put different emphases on thinking as opposed to being mimetic.

Pepper also pairs formism and contextualism as "dispersive" theories in their treatment of analysis, and mechanism and organicism as "integrative" in their treatment of analysis.

That is to say, the categories of formism and contextualism are such that, on the whole, facts are taken one by one from whatever source they come and so are left. The universe has for these theories the general effect of multitudes of facts rather loosely scattered about and not necessarily determining one another to any considerable degree. The cosmos for these theories is not in the end highly systematic—the very word 'cosmos' is not exactly appropriate. They regard system as something imposed upon parts of the world by other parts, so that there is an inherent cosmic resistance to determinate order in the world as well as a cosmic trend to impose it. Pure cosmic chance, or unpredictability, is thus a concept consistent with these theories even if not resorted to or emphasized by this or that particular writer.

For the categories of mechanism and organicism, however, a concept of cosmic chance is inherently inconsistent and is veiled or explained away on every occasion that it threatens to emerge. If nothing better can be done with it, it is corralled in certain restricted areas of the world where the unpredictable is
declared predictable, possibly in accordance with a law of probability. For these two theories the world appears literally as a cosmos where facts occur in a determinate order, and where, if enough were known, they could be predicted, or at least described, as being necessarily just what they are to the minutest detail.

From this parallelism another follows: that the type of inadequacy with which the dispersive theories are chiefly threatened is indeterminateness or lack of precision, whereas the type of inadequacy with which the integrative theories are chiefly threatened is lack of scope. (WH 142-43)

Another way of expressing what Pepper is getting at here is this: for dispersive theories (formism and contextualism), system is a logical, not a real, category, whereas for integrative theories, system is real, an actual part of the world. Or again: just as these root metaphors imply that the most basic facts are either analytic or synthetic in nature, so they also imply attitudes towards those basic facts, leading us to treat them as determinate or somewhat determinate, predictable or somewhat predictable. If one considers either a machine or an organism a good analogue for the cosmos, then the features of the analogue itself do not admit the notions of "chance" and "indeterminacy."

(Heisenberg's much discussed Uncertainty Principle, of course, speaks only to uncertainty of measurement as far as mechanists are concerned, not to uncertainty
about the basic facts themselves, whereas to contextualists, including most physicists and Heisenberg himself, it represents a metaphysical truth, ruling out the mechanist's causal universe and "objective" reality.) If, on the other hand, one considers an historic event in its context the analogue of choice for what is, then the features of the analogue itself do not admit notions like determinacy, predictability, fate, and the like, but rather invite one's attention to change, novelty, and chance. In art, as Pepper points out, the contextualist is bound to be a "gourmand" for experience who refuses to associate beauty with pleasure alone (à la Santayana) or coherence alone (à la Bosanquet) or perfection of style and genre (à la Aristotle), asking rather for vividness, extensity and richness of content.

I wish to use Pepper's system as a heuristic device—something to be discarded once it has served its purpose. In essence Pepper has simply refined William James's observation about thinkers: "All follow one analogy or another; and all the analogies are with some one or other of the universe's subdivisions."23 The problem with such a system, needless to say, is that contextualism may be implied in it for all Pepper's having tried to give as good an account of each world hypothesis as would an adherent of each. I believe, however, that I can safely use his classification
scheme to distinguish contextualism from organicism, two metaphysics which are routinely confused today and which are implied in the aesthetic theories each generated. In the crudest sense, my argument is simply that John Dewey's *Art as Experience* or the essays of William James make better companion texts to the work of the American modernists than Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, or Emerson's essays, or Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*—or a host of other works that have been used in recent years.

Pragmatism, Pepper points out, has often been called "an absolute idealism without an absolute" (WH 145). The pragmatists themselves, however, claimed to have formulated a position that successfully mediated idealism and realism:

It [pragmatism] holds to reality, prior to cognitive operations and not constructed by these operations, to which knowing, in order to be successful, must adapt itself. In so far, it is realistic in tendency, and pragmatism is usually recognized to have been an influential factor in calling out the reaction against the Kantian and Neo-Kantian idealisms dominant upon its first appearance. But it does not hold that the adaptation of intelligence to existence is a matter of literal conformity or sheer reproduction by way of copying, but rather that it is an adaptation in the interest of a further evolution of life in complexity and richness of meaning. Hence it claims to recognize
and include the verifiable facts as to the role of thought in the world which have given rise to the idealistic exaggeration.  

Pragmatism, or contextualism, also differs from organicism (idealism) in other important ways. Because contextualism is a dispersive theory, for example, any sort of fact is easily real for a contextualist; organicists (like mechanists), on the other hand, "are constantly tempted to throw 'facts' out into the unreal." (WH 145). Those fragments of experience that organicists cannot integrate, those contradictions that cannot be resolved in a higher synthesis, those parts, events, features, and the like that refuse to cohere in an organic whole or nexus or matrix, the organicist relegates to a lower, less "real" status. Speaking of the shortcomings of organicism, Pepper remarks: "The more we study its categories the more convinced we become that the dichotomy of Appearance and Reality is intrinsic to them." Thus organicism (like mechanism) has "a certain affinity with mysticism. By wishing perhaps too hard to get everything into one determinate order, they have to deny the reality of a good many things." (WH 145).

To understand contextualism, we need to understand the contextualist root metaphor, which can best be approximated as "historic event": 
By historic event . . . the contextualist does not mean primarily a past event, one that is, so to speak, dead and has to be exhumed. He means the event alive in its present. What we ordinarily mean by history, he says, is an attempt to re-present events, to make them in some way alive again. The real historic event, the event in its actuality, is when it is going on now, the dynamic dramatic active event. We may call it an 'act,' if we like, and if we take care of our use of the term. But it is not an act conceived as alone or cut off that we mean; it is an act in and with its setting, an act in its context. (WH 232)

"Context" has become one of those glad words of which everyone regardless of their metaphysic now feels obliged to demonstrate a nominal awareness. The mechanist, however, generally means by it no more than "field of location" (a key mechanist category), the organicist "nexus" or "organic whole" (key organicist categories). Neither means to imply the change and novelty which is inherent in the contextualist's notion of context. The integrative theories, in other words, have attempted to subsume the key contextualist metaphor within their own categories, but they can only do so by stripping it of its meaning.

One of the key categorial features of contextualism is disorder, "and so radically so that it must not even exclude order. That is, the categories must be so framed as not to exclude from the world any degree of order it may be found to have, nor to deny that this order may have
come out of disorder and may return into disorder again—order being defined in any way you please, so long as it does not deny the possibility of disorder or another order in nature also." Robert Frost's poem "Unharvested" nicely captures the contextualist spirit here:

May something go always unharvested!
May much stay out of our stated plan,
Apples or something forgotten and left,
So smelling their sweetness would be no theft. 25

"This italicized restriction," Pepper continues, "is the forcible one in contextualism, and amounts to the assertion that change is categorial and not derivative in any degree at all." (WH 234). All other world theories deny change in this radical sense, accounting for it rather as derivative, as the result of fundamentals undergoing change, never change as itself fundamental. Thus the discovery of any permanent, unchangeable structure or entity in nature would prove contextualism false, whether it be an atom, a text, a Platonic form, or an Absolute. The given event as it actually goes on in history is what is most fundamentally real for the contextualist. Hence the contextualist also insists on the distinction between duration or qualitative time and schematic or chronological time, the former being categorial, the latter derivative. "He does not deny the utility of the latter, but he denies its adequacy to reveal the nature of an actual
event." (WH 242).

Finally, whereas organicism, like other world hypotheses, assumes a "vertical" cosmology, contextualism assumes a "horizontal" one. That is, other world hypotheses assert that the apparent universe is contingent, dependent, caused, integrated or ordered—something with underlying mechanistic structures (e.g., the space-time continuum) or overarching organic integrations, or transcendent formist realms (with various immanent variations that imply much the same thing). Contextualism, on the other hand, insists that the historic event (the universe as such an event) in its context is all there is, the underlying and overarching, transcendent and immanent, all non-categorial and in that sense "unreal," although all potentially "real" to the extent they are realized in the actual experience of a particular person.

Much more dramatic contrasts between contextualism and organicism could be sketched were this the place to develop the implications of each root metaphor—to "apply" the root metaphor, as it were—to psychology, aesthetics, epistemology, economics, physics, and the like. Conflations of the contextualist with the organicist position on any particular matter I tend to see as willful. Take the emphasis on the individual in the two metaphysics' implied psychologies. Contextualism is highly individualistic,
as is organicism (modernism vs. romanticism, pragmatism vs. transcendentalism), but because its theory of truth is its centerpiece and tests the meaning and worth of ideas by their consequences—i.e., understands ideas concretely, in action—its individualism is strictly limited by both man's capacity to imagine, will, and endure and an alien and not always hospitable world's plasticity in human hands. The unlimited aspirations that were to accompany the romantics' unlimited powers are admired but not imitated by the contextualist, who would choose not Prometheus but Ulysses (Tennyson's as much as Homer's) as his role model.

Through the first third of the 20th century--the so-called "golden age" of American philosophy--contextualism defined, if it never quite dominated, the American intellectual landscape, setting the agenda in most fields despite its being fiercely ignored or attacked by idealists and mechanists from the very first. By 1929 hostile reviewers of contextualist works like Joseph Wood Krutch routinely deplored the "universal acceptance of John Dewey's theory of knowledge and his theory of value" or like George Santayana in his review of Experience and Nature (1925) ironically belittled pragmatism as synonymous with American capitalism: "In profession they may be
Fundamentalists, Catholics, or idealists, because American opinion is largely pre-American; but in their hearts and lives they are all pragmatists, and they prove it even by the spirit in which they maintain those other traditional allegiances, not out of rapt speculative sympathy, but because such allegiance seems an insurance against moral dissolution, guaranteeing social cohesion and practical success. Their real philosophy is the philosophy of enterprise."^26 The contextualist metaphysic tended to get overlooked in the various controversies over the nature of truth, the possibility of religious belief, and the application of pragmatism to the social and behavioral sciences. The post-World-War 2 American intellectual scene, on the other hand, sported a wide variety of adherents to new and old versions of mechanism, formism and organicism, but only a small and rapidly diminishing band of contextualists. What had happened? Although Dewey and James were sometimes resurrected to play the role of straw men, it was not really that contextualism had been refuted or that any other world view had been shown to be more productive. Of course, in part the change in the mood of intellectuals as a result of the war accounts for contextualism's decline. But Richard Bernstein is probably closer to the truth in tracing the downfall of contextualism to the
1930s, when the largest migration of philosophers in history took place. All of them were continental philosophers who were fleeing fascism, and most of them were ultimately bound for American universities. Almost the entire Vienna Circle of logical positivists, for example, wound up teaching in the U.S. Most of the refugees could see nothing in American contextualism but a naive optimism and destructive relativism. Most of them had friends and family left behind in places where the worst was about to happen, and so their gloom was profound; and the accusing finger of history seemed to point nowhere so steadily as towards relativism, unless it were towards Democracy, that next best thing to a contextualist absolute. The pragmatists ceased to attract new adherents among the young, and by not long after the end of the war, the existentialists and the positivists were able to divide the world of the humanities between them. Ironically, pragmatism's decline as a philosophy paralleled its elevation to the role of keystone in the New Physics, a role it has retained to the present.

A word of caution is in order here. In choosing Pepper's term, contextualism, rather than the more familiar term, pragmatism, I hope to avoid a misunderstanding. The pragmatists tended to view themselves as anti-metaphysical, metaphysics being something they associated with idealism
(organicism). Each of the major pragmatists was primarily interested in non-metaphysical questions. Nor did they strive to make explicit a consensus on much besides their root metaphor and method, both of which they thought justifiable on aesthetic and moral grounds, a matter of taste, so to speak, which one either did or did not share. But the history of pragmatism as a philosophy need not detain us here, for I do not mean to insist on more than that the root metaphor of contextualism was "in the air" at the beginning of the 20th century. Little more was necessary for a change in sensibility.

For, if I may be permitted an artificial distinction between the affective and cognitive, there are at least two ways in which root metaphors may have far-reaching consequences. The "raw data" of experience do not exist in an uninterpreted form insofar as they impinge on human reality (originally a contextualist insight that we tend today to treat as scientific "fact"); we habitually interpret and analyze in terms of a root metaphor and its categories. That is, we project our metaphysic onto the world in which we live, and in that sense "create" our own worlds. We may also come to value a particular root metaphor because of its associations, and hence to value anything which clearly manifests "our" root metaphor and to disdain anything which does not. Just as some mechanists
not only approach the world with only the categories of mechanism but also value a certain phenomenon to the extent it reveals a machine-like character, so some organicists may approach the world in terms of the categories of organicism and value a phenomenon or not only insofar as it displays organicity or integration. In short, root metaphors tend to become both constitutive and evaluative. Pepper, in an inclusive spirit reminiscent of James, would have us regard all four of the best root metaphors as coequal resources in our cognitive repertoire but recognizes that nothing seems to be so characteristically human as dogmatic adherence to one root metaphor or another.
Notes

2. Bornstein, p. 17.
5. Stevens, pp. 61, 28.


17. In order to forestall confusion, I should point out that what Pepper means by "contextualism" bears no relation or kinship to what literary critics sometimes mean by the term--namely, the New Criticism, with its emphasis for a time on the induplicable context of the individual literary work. In Pepper's terms, some of the New Critics by and large assumed an organicist metaphysic and aesthetic, most of all in their insistence on the autonomy of the individual work; some (notably those associated with the Chicago school) assumed a formist one. Both
organicist and formist critics were likely to miss the forms with which many American modernists were experimenting, particularly those of Williams and Pound.

The situation can get quite complicated, however, especially since terminologies overlap whenever honorific terms are involved. Taken to task by Pepper for his use of organicist terms and categories in Art as Experience, Dewey insisted that he could treat what words like whole, integration, and complete refer to as facts of aesthetic experience without inconsistency. "I am not prepared to deny to writers of this [organicist] school genuine aesthetic insights; and in so far as these insights are genuine, it is the task of an empirical pragmatic esthetics to do justice to them without taking over the metaphysical accretions." "Experience, Knowledge and Value: A Rejoinder," pp. 515-608 of The Philosophy of John Dewey, Paul Schilpp, ed. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1939), p. 554.

18. Stephen Pepper, The Basis of Criticism in the Arts (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945). Reviewed by Henry David Aiken, Journal of Philosophy 43 (1 Aug. 1946), 441-46, who praises Pepper's "sympathy and objectivity" in expounding the four theories but argues "that the four 'theories' are theories of different facts, not four theories of the same facts." (445). Thus Aiken sees no reason why the four cannot be combined without eclecticism.
19. In *A History of Literary Aesthetics in America* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1973), Max Baym treats Santayana as an organicist. Certainly Santayana's work in aesthetics as a whole justifies such a classification, but Santayana had probably not thoroughly arrived as an organicist until the 1920s or even later. His early work on aesthetics, *The Sense of Beauty*, consisted of lectures delivered from 1892-95 at Harvard and published in 1896, throughout which period Santayana was entirely under the influence of William James, whose pragmatism, although already present in germ, yet appeared to most little more than an up-to-date mechanism. Santayana's mechanistic aesthetic is particularly evident in his attributing value and disvalue to pleasure and pain, which leads to an aesthetic that is both atomistic and individualistic. Beauty, he says, "is an emotion, an affection of our volitional and appreciative nature. An object cannot be beautiful if it can give pleasure to nobody . . ." (New York: Dover, 1955), p. 31.

20. Pepper wrote his *Aesthetic Quality: A Contextualistic Theory of Beauty* (New York: Scribner's, 1938) because he was disappointed with Dewey's *Art as Experience*, which he felt mixed organicism with contextualism in a manner detrimental to both theories. Pepper's criticisms of *Art as Experience* may be found in "Some Questions on Dewey's


29. Recently Pepper has noted a fifth "adequate" world hypothesis, one which has been in the air in the second half of the twentieth century and which he says he would now add to his original exposition: namely, "selectivism," the root metaphor of which is that of a "self-regulating feedback system." Terming himself "enamoured" of this world theory, Pepper describes its virtues thus: "Through its categories the insights of the other world theories seem to me to find their proper interpretation and proper places. And its own evaluative insight, that selective systems act as natural norms and set up adaptive priorities among themselves, seems to me of the first importance."

Chapter Two

Since Ezra Pound's rehabilitation as a major poet in the 1960s and 70s, a new orthodoxy has developed. No longer limited to a special breed of apologists, Pound's admirers have come to include the likes of Stephen Spender, who in T.S. Eliot (1976) ranks him with Eliot and Yeats as one of the century's three great poets. Once a source of controversy, Hugh Kenner's thesis in The Pound Era (1971) has more recently found its way into anthologies and introductory histories of the period--although already by 1972 Albert Gelpi, among others, was asserting that all but a rare breed "have come to acknowledge that Pound is a major, perhaps the major, genius of twentieth-century poetry and (from another perspective) of all American poetry." (AL 44, 3: 504). Now in the mid-80s in such ground-breaking studies as M.L. Rosenthal's and Sally Gall's The Modern Poetic Sequence (1983), Pound is treated as the central American poet. Indeed, many scholars today take for granted that they can date American modernism from Pound's arrival in London in 1908, whence the poets were led from bondage and Ezra as Imagiste came down from the mountain with a few don'ts. Given the applicability of those don'ts to the poetry of Stephen Crane, Whitman, Wordsworth--in fact, the poetry of many times and places--some heretics have been
troubled enough to attempt to trace slightly different genealogies and geneses but generally have retained Pound and Eliot as the Moses and Aaron of the story. Most maintain, as Pound later did himself, that Imagism was a formula for minor poetry because it stood in no necessary connection to a modernist sensibility (Stevens later distinguished between a modernism of content and a modernism of form, only the former in his opinion having any enduring value). But as if on the assumption that contact with Pound was the one thing that all the modernists had in common, most have continued to ransack Pound's poetics for the basic exposition of modernism. Pound's Vorticism, to be sure, has provided the mythmakers with a certain amount of leeway, it having been more a frame of mind than an actual movement with a definable program.

But I do not wish here to rehash events that have already been told so often as to diminish in historicity. Instead, I would like to claim that there are sufficient grounds for what we today think of as American modernism without any dramatic story of exodus, escape, and return to the promised Waste Land. To make my case in a reasonable compass I must select my facts, thereby exaggerating them to a size commensurable with the orthodox facts, leaving it to the reader to reconcile the two versions or not. While listing some of the ways in which a "oneness predicated of the universe might make a difference," William James illustrates a kind of monistic thinking he calls "aesthetic union":

Things tell a story. Their parts hang together so as to work out a climax. They play into each other's hands expressively. Retrospectively, we can see that although no definite purpose presided over a chain of events, yet the events fell into a dramatic form, with a start, a middle, and a finish.

James goes on to point out the danger of assuming that either the whole world or a single organism tells one story (which is to assume a monism of some sort):

In point of fact all stories end; and here again the point of view of a many is the more natural one to take. The world is full of partial stories that run parallel to one another, beginning and ending at odd times. They mutually interlace and interfere at points, but we cannot unify them completely in our minds.¹

I would prefer to take what James would call a pluralistic approach to American modernism rather than a monistic one. The former, with its interlacing, interfering, but finally disunified strands is what we today usually mean by "historical." The latter, which some value more, some less, is what we usually today mean by "mythical." Brevity demands the mythical.

What is at stake here is not Pound's reputation, which to my mind is secure, but rather our definition of, and therefore our approach to, American modernism. Do we really wish to use Pound as our frame of reference for the period? So long as we treat this story as myth, we won't ask ourselves how it happened that Frost and Robinson were, according to Pound himself, already writing poetry in a vital modernist language; how Whitman's Chicago followers could make poems which are arguably "modern," if no longer very
interesting; how not just Eliot, but Stevens, Marianne Moore, H.D. and others managed to "modernize" themselves enough on their own that Pound could "discover" them. Are we really to believe that Harmonium would not have happened without Pound and Eliot? Can we really consider a poem like Frost's "Design" (written in 1912) anything but modernist?

In proposing that we attempt to locate the American modernists metaphysically and aesthetically, I'm suggesting that we define the modern period in the same fashion that we have defined other periods in English literature from the Middle Ages through romanticism. Contextualism affected American modernist writers both through the dispersion of its root metaphor and through the writings of James, Dewey, and Bergson. Before turning to specific poems and attempting to show that our bracketing other metaphysics and recognizing the contextualist metaphysic of American modernism makes a critical difference in our reading of those poems, I would like first to develop the direct influence of the philosophers themselves, if only to allay a little the scepticism my thesis is likely to arouse. We have become so accustomed to approaching the American modernists through idealist/organicist assumptions--the best known critics of the period display little awareness that their categories may be partially or wholly inappropriate--that it may come
as something of a surprise that most American modernists freely acknowledged contextualist "influence" during that period which we usually regard as the "lying in" of modernism. (Influence, I should add, however, usually takes the form of a hunch had by a writer and the confirmation of that hunch by the philosopher or critic.)

An Anglo-Americanized version of German idealism held intellectual sway in American universities at the turn of the century, Royce and Bradley in particular being in the ascendent. Such idealism seemed the one possible counter to mechanism. Against this new idealism first James—and most of the American modernists were students at Harvard—and then Dewey (whose base was Chicago, that other center of the new poetry) carried on an unrelenting attack, ridiculing its absurdities, sharpening and wielding weapons Bergson had fashioned earlier, and, perhaps most importantly so far as the man-on-the-street or student-at-his-desk were concerned, making enough fuss and bother that the philosophically incompetent might feel there was an alternative to the either-or's of the period. (One word of caution: Dewey and James initially presented themselves as anti-metaphysicians, and so to proclaim oneself opposed to, or disinterested in, metaphysics was a favorite way of declaring one's defection to the pragmatist ranks, as was an announced preference for
psychology over epistemology.)

Too much has already been written about pragmatism to warrant any extended commentary here. Dewey succinctly described pragmatism in a 1912 encyclopedia article as having been "widened from a theory of the purposive character of knowledge and a theory of truth as the successful working out of knowledge, to the theory that reality is itself plastic and is in course of construction through the cognitive efforts of man." Thus Dewey implicitly recognizes that pragmatism is a metaphysic--a metaphysic at the core of which is a radically historicized truth-making process, as well as the root metaphor Pepper sums up as the historical event in its context. However, pragmatism has often been seen as either an alternative to metaphysics or as that narrower "theory of the purposive character of knowledge" of which Dewey speaks. Emphasizing those epistemological implications that were to be incorporated into the New Physics, Gary Zukav describes pragmatism this way:

The mind is such that it deals only with ideas. It is not possible for the mind to relate to anything other than ideas. Therefore, it is not correct to think that the mind actually can ponder reality. All that the mind can ponder is its ideas about reality. (Whether or not that is the way reality actually is, is a metaphysical issue). Therefore, whether or not something is true is not a matter of how closely it corresponds to the absolute truth, but of how consistent it is with our
experience. In the 1920s and 30s when theoretical physicists realized the inadequacy of mechanism as a metaphysical framework for the New Physics of quantum mechanics, pragmatism provided a ready-made alternative. And therefore, neglected today as a metaphysic, pragmatism is taught as physics, as science, as the "truth" about reality (or as such the naive take it). Zukav's description probably points as well as any to the appeal of pragmatism: it presents us with a reality or world that is fundamentally linguistic—whether that language be mathematics or the vernacular—and thus a reality about which something can always be done.

On the one hand, the pragmatists liked to think of themselves as hard-headed, "tough-minded" (as James used to say) empiricists in the sceptical tradition of Hume.

There may be little or much beyond the grave, But the strong are saying nothing until they see. (PRF, 300)

So Robert Frost expresses the Jamesian mood. James defined his "radical" brand of empiricism this way:

Empiricism . . . lays the explanatory stress upon the part, the element, the individual, and treats the whole as a collection and the universal as an abstraction. My description of things, accordingly, starts with the parts and makes of the whole a being of the second order. It is essentially a mosaic philosophy, a philosophy of plural facts, like that of Hume and his
descendants, who refer these facts neither to Sub-
stances in which they inhere nor to an Absolute Mind
that creates them as its objects. But it differs from
the Humian type of empiricism in one particular which
makes me add the epithet radical.

To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into
its constructions any element that is not directly ex-
perienced, nor exclude from them any element that is
directly experienced. For such a philosophy, the re-
lations that connect experiences must themselves be ex-
perienced relations, and any kind of relation experi-
enced must be accounted as 'real' as anything else in
the system.\(^4\)

In other words, as the italicized restriction makes clear,
James has taken what was really only an epistemological
position with Hume and his followers and blown it up into
a complete metaphysic, an innovation the boldness of which
should not be underestimated. According to his mood and
audience, James might stress the hard, sceptical side of
his philosophy. But a philosophy that starts with parts
and leaves it up to the individual what part to start with
can, on the other hand, have a soft, mystical side as well.

Note the sudden change in the following from the sceptical
to the mystical:

There is no complete generalization, no total point of
view, no all-pervasive unity, but everywhere some re-
sidual resistance to verbalization, formulation, and
discursification, some genius of reality that escapes
from the pressure of the logical finger, that says 'hands off,' and claims its privacy, and means to be left to its own life. In every moment of immediate experience is somewhat absolutely original and novel.\(^5\)

That "genius of reality" who slips into what began as a scientist's sentence and animates it had everything to do with pragmatism's appeal. Like all theories and metaphysics that gain a wide currency, pragmatism involved a distinctive attitude or posture as well.

Pragmatism achieved a rather sudden and sweeping triumph in the last years of James's life. In an aside in a 1912 review of James's posthumous *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, Dewey attributed James's influence as much to his style as substance:

> The unusual, the almost unique thing is that after having reached an age when most men simply repeat and expand their own past, Mr. James compelled the whole world to take note that a new way of thinking in philosophy had made its appearance. Of course, much of his influence is due to the remarkable vitality and picturesqueness of his style. But literary style alone does not explain the phenomenon. The times were ready; the general state of the imagination had moved so that it was ready and eager for the very ideas that in the earlier days of James's prophetic vision had meant nothing to it.\(^6\)

James writes wonderfully well; I remember how *Psychology: The Briefer Course* and a collection of his essays capti-
vated me as a college freshman—the ease of expression, the metaphors and analogies, all as surprising as they were apt, the variety of diction, the perfectly modulated tone. I can see now that James managed to create the illusion of someone presently, spontaneously thinking, just as Thoreau in Walden or Williams in his improvisations sought to do. Because of this intensely dramatic quality (which I, naturally, take to be the stylistic expression of James's contextualism), I cannot imagine a time when James will no longer be read, although the time is no doubt approaching when Psychology will be read primarily in philosophy and literature courses.

Both the first and second generations of American modernists found James's writings inspiring. Dos Passos was typical in advising a friend to "get hold of William James' 'Shorter Psychology' or his 'Varieties of Religious Experience' and I think you will have an awfully interesting time, as they are wonderfully fascinating books and not a bit dry. And they are the most interesting books on psychology I know." All the main elements of James's contextualist metaphysic are implicit in Psychology: The Briefer Course, the "Shorter Psychology" referred to by Dos Passos. Here were sermons based on science, eschatological hope based on evolution, a psychologist who was a
perfect gentleman and (but not too obtrusively) a puritan. Daniel Bjork rightly treats James as Emerson's successor:

Earlier in the nineteenth century Emerson made the ego disappear into nature; he had become as a "transparent eyeball." Now James, perhaps Emerson's most representative successor, presented another disappearance act. Thought was lost in consciousness, in the "stream of consciousness." Or rather, the mind became an eye, a free-flowing camera, forging natural pictures that reminded one of an impressionistic landscape, a Monet of the mind.8

From the outset James's readers seem to have looked to him, not for the principles of an experimental science, but rather for truth, wisdom, and inspiration. His was a humanized Darwinism and his mechanist colleagues were disturbed. About the Principles of Psychology (1890) Wilhelm Wundt, the greatest experimental psychologist of the period, remarked, "It is literature, it is beautiful, but it is not psychology."9 A rhetorical analysis of James's work would no doubt reveal his managing to make palatable statements made as poet, preacher or prophet by throwing over all the guise of scientific psychologist and philosopher. Much to Wundt's dismay, the Principles was the perfect example of a book in which style overwhelms content; but then Dos Passos and other young American writers would not have found a single paragraph of interest in any psychology textbook that embodied Wundt's idea of psychology. And for
Dos Passos as for others, one work by James led to another. The following year he wrote another friend, "I am very slowly reading William James' Essays in Radical Empiricism—I wish you'd read it as most of the ideas I find to be my very own." The scientist had replaced the preacher as the most idealized and respected figure in American society, but people still expected the same kind of authoritative pronouncements, comforts, reassurances from the new authority that they had received from the old—indeed, the same message on better authority sufficed for many.

Taking an apocalyptically dim view of James's and Bergson's influence in "The Intellectual Temper of the Age" (1913), George Santayana deplored the "malicious theory of knowledge" of this "scatter-brained school," which he blamed for Western civilization's "full career towards disintegration." Like another critic of James, Bertrand Russell, Santayana reserved his particular scorn for James's "characteristically American" belief in democracy, respect for the common man, love of the concrete, trust in will and action, and "habit of relying on the future, rather than the past, to justify one's methods and opinions." In one of the strangest and most back-handed tributes ever offered by a student to his former mentor, Santayana, having dismissed pragmatism as largely the product of James's peculiar temperament, tried to dismiss James himself as a
lover akin to two Santayana regarded as barbarians:

Love is very penetrating, but it penetrates to possibilities rather than to facts. The logic of opinions, as well as the exact opinions themselves, were not things James saw easily or traced with pleasure. He liked to take things one by one, rather than to put two and two together. He was a mystic, a mystic in love with life. He was comparable to Rousseau and to Walt Whitman; he expressed a generous and tender sensibility, rebelling against sophistication, and preferring daily sights and sounds, and a vague but indomitable faith in fortune, to any settled intellectual tradition calling itself science or philosophy.  

Santayana always had difficulty respecting the intelligence of anyone who disagreed with him. Temperamentally incapable of understanding James and therefore given to pitying him for his modesty, his spontaneity, tolerance, adventurousness and the like unaristocratic qualities, Santayana repeatedly tinged observations of the obvious about James with surprise and embarrassment: "I think it would have depressed him if he had had to confess that any important question was finally settled. He would still have hoped that something might turn up on the other side, and that just as the scientific hangman was about to despatch the poor convicted prisoner, an unexpected witness would ride up in hot haste, and prove him innocent." James would rather have liked the closing couplet of Frost's "A Minor
Bird": "And of course there must be something wrong/In wanting to silence any song." (PRF, 251). Such an attitude—the contextualist attitude when metaphysic and temperament reinforce one another—struck Santayana as incomprehensible and pitiful: "Experience seems to most of us to lead to conclusions, but empiricism has sworn never to draw them."

And in a remark that reveals in a flash the kind of contrast Santayana and James must have represented to young Harvard undergraduates, Santayana marveled: "He believed in improvisation, even in thought; his lectures were not minutely prepared." 14

A.N. Whitehead, himself an eclectic idealist, claimed in 1925 that the thought of William James inaugurated "a new stage in philosophy," James's "Does Consciousness Exist?" (1904) being comparable in importance to Descartes' Discourse on Method. Even today many would find James's reconceptualization of consciousness revolutionary if they were to consider its implications for their own deeply engrained habits of thought: "James denies that consciousness is an entity, but admits that it is a function."

Romantic poetics, aesthetics, and epistemology all take faculty psychology—i.e., consciousness as an entity, mind as an entity composed of distinct and fundamentally antagonistic entities—for granted; modernism takes for granted
consciousness as a function or relation. (In this respect, Freudian psychology represented a giant step backwards, for even when Freud managed to prevent his superego, ego and id from hypostatizing into mere codewords for the head, heart and will of the faculty psychologists, his followers could not.) Whitehead illustrates the "new mentality" that has "altered the metaphysical presuppositions and the imaginative contents of our minds" with a sentence from one of James's letters: "When he was finishing his great treatise on the Principles of Psychology, he wrote to his brother Henry James, 'I have to forge every sentence in the teeth of irreducible and stubborn facts.'"\textsuperscript{15} Thinking and experiencing "in the teeth of irreducible and stubborn facts" is for Whitehead the sign and essence of the new, modern sensibility. Indeed, one could say that for James consciousness itself exists only "in the teeth of irreducible and stubborn facts" (something which will have important implications for aesthetics). Like consciousness, reality is a function rather than a substance, consciousness and reality a network of mutual interrelations. Thus the Jamesian notion of selfhood is distinctive:

Attempting to mediate extremes, to formulate a position between the Cartesian sense of a subjectivity which is never related, or relatable to an outer environment, and the naturalistic sense of a subjectivity which is
nothing but a derivative form of the objective environment, James suggests that the inner citadel of selfhood, the unique subjective character of a personal consciousness, has a real status, but that it can be grasped and known only as it expresses itself, as it is impelled outward to interaction with objective conditions by the pragmatic energy at the very core of consciousness.¹⁶

The Mind/Body and Subject/Object problems that had troubled philosophers for centuries and led the romantics and symbolists to excesses and impasses were solved by James at a stroke. In T.S. Eliot's terms, the self is a "secondary construct." Or as John Dewey would put it, the self is merely a potential until it is both "formed and brought to consciousness through interaction with environment."¹⁷

To assure ourselves that Whitehead's view of James's importance is not idiosyncratic, we need go no further than Wyndham Lewis's Time and Western Man (1927), where even Whitehead himself and as close a friend of Lewis's as Ezra Pound are lumped in with all those other followers of the "Time-mind" who, thanks to the pernicious influence of James and Bergson, "see everything sub specie temporis."¹⁸

Lewis, a formist if ever there was one, deplores both the contextualism James tried to foster and the new organicisms his psychology made possible, failing or disdaining to distinguish between the two. His concern is with re-establishing the supremacy of the "Space-mind," and so he sees
no need to distinguish between Whitehead, Watson, Bergson, and James, except to designate James "the best of the company," and, criminally, "the hero of the final rout of the Subject." In Lewis's view, James heralded a new barbarism in asserting that "We humans are incurably rooted in the temporal point of view."¹⁹

In short, it ought by now to be a commonplace that Jamesian psychology represents "a turning point in American literary history," as Ellwood Johnson has called it: "it placed the self 'in time,' so to speak; it added a new dimension to the art of characterization in fiction." But to focus on just the impact of Jamesian psychology is to miss the greater part of James's influence. Yes, "the most concrete and direct influence on this period [1915-1945] was William James's speculations on human consciousness in his Principles of Psychology (1890), in which he postulates that man has no soul in the traditional sense of the term, no epicenter of identity, for the very reason that the self exists 'in time,' in the flux of experience, and that volition and time, rather than soul, spirit, or reason, are the essences of human identity."²⁰ But even more importantly, James did to the universe what he did to the person. Wundt dismissed James as a psychologist precisely because James had in effect deduced his psychology from a non-mechanist metaphysic; and the psychology carried the
metaphysic in germ within it. The American modernists made no attempt to separate the one from the other, and hence the impact of contextualism was perhaps all the greater on poets for their not feeling any professional responsibility to study psychology the way aspiring young novelists did.

Robert Frost's debt to Williams James is better known than that of other modernists thanks to his often having said, "My greatest inspiration, when I was a student, was a man whose classes I never attended." Indeed, Lawrance Thompson, Frost's biographer, believes that one of Frost's main reasons for wanting to attend Harvard in 1898 was to study with the author of The Will to Believe, who chanced to be on medical leave when Frost got there (although Hugo Munsterberg, who taught the course in James's absence, nevertheless used James's Psychology: The Briefer Course).

Frost shows his contextualism over and over again throughout his career. For example, in "Education by Poetry," a talk delivered at Amherst College and subsequently published in the Amherst Graduate's Quarterly (Feb. 1931), Frost asserts that "all thinking, except mathematical thinking, is metaphorical." He ticks off various metaphors that appealed to Greek metaphysicians—the All as the three elements, as substance, as change, as number. Heisenberg, he notes, has unveiled the last as a mixed metaphor.
And then, in explaining why the number metaphor cannot be carried into both space and time simultaneously, why "the more accurately you state where a thing is, the less accurately you will be able to tell how fast it is moving," Frost slips in: "And, of course, everything is moving. Everything is an event now. Another metaphor. A thing, they say, is an event. Do you believe it is? Not quite. I believe it is almost an event. But I like the comparison of a thing with an event."\(^{23}\) "Ever not quite!"--James thought this "fit to be pluralism's heraldic device."\(^{24}\) The qualification is not only typical of Frost but typical of contextualists in general, who believe, like Frost, that "All metaphor breaks down somewhere." Including their own. "That is the beauty of it," Frost says. "It is touch and go with metaphor, and until you have lived with it long enough you don't know when it is going. You don't know how much you can get out of it and when it will cease to yield." (SP, 41). Thus, having earlier qualified the adequacy of his contextualist root metaphor, Frost nevertheless proceeds to discuss metaphor itself as if it were an event, the outcome of which in any particular instance is bound to be a surprise. This emphasis upon metaphor as the root and mode of all thinking Frost almost certainly derived from James (who sometimes spoke of "analogy" rather than metaphor,
but without intending a meaningful distinction so far as I can see). James's reconceptualization of thinking, and hence of reason, as metaphor-bound may well have had consequences as great for American modernist poets as his reconceptualization of consciousness had for novelists.

Lawrence Thompson identifies an important similarity between James and Frost, whose authorship of poems like "The Trial by Existence" and espousal of contextualism must to some smell of either contradiction or opportunism: "Like James, Frost wanted to be 'pluralistic' in the sense that he could combine naturalism and idealism, physics and metaphysics, skepticism and mysticism."\(^{25}\) Frost inevitably reminds us of the auditor James addressed in the 1906 Lowell Lectures that were later published as *Pragmatism*: "You want a system that will combine both things, the scientific loyalty to facts and willingness to take account of them, the spirit of adaptation and accommodation, in short, but also the old confidence in human values and the resultant spontaneity, whether of the religious or of the romantic type."\(^{26}\) So, apparently, did Frost's generation, for the chink in the universe James provided for God constituted a major part of his appeal. Even Dewey, who initially scorned belief in an "inclusive first cause" of any sort, eventually chose to retain God as an imaginative projection of man's
best who is akin to the Supreme Fiction of Stevens.

It is worth pointing out, however, that when James
left this chink, it was not by means of paradox. James re-
mained true to his fundamental assumptions in ruling out
the God of the idealists and the formists—the Absolute,
omniscient, omnipotent God possessed of some infinite
being outside the cosmos. James did not feel, however, that
his assumptions and their implications constrained him to
deny the possibility of an historicized God—an "essential-
ly finite being in the cosmos," a God with "a very local
habitation" and "very one-sided local and personal attach-
ments," a God "like that of David, Isaiah, or Jesus."27 We
completely misunderstand the mood and thought of intellec-
tuals at the turn of the century when we tacitly assume
that a finite God is not a God at all; that the Absolute
and God must be one and the same; and, therefore, that God
and the Absolute are interchangeable terms. James and others
like Frost who shared his openness to a finite, limited God
were uncompromising in their rejection of an Absolute, In-
finite God, the very notion of which smacked of absurdity
or evil. Because of the current tendency to identify the
Absolute and God, most theists would reject the contextual-
ist notion of God as unworthy of the word (as they did
Frost's in "A Masque of Reason"). But that is their problem.
Nowhere does Frost's contextualism show more clearly than when he wishes his long-dead friend, Edward Thomas, were here to ponder gulfs in general with me as in the days when he and I tired the sun with talking on the footpaths and stiles of Leddington and Ryton. I should like to ask him if it isn't true that the world is in parts and the separation of the parts as important as the connection of the parts. (SP, 76)

Like James and other contextualists, Frost recognizes a difficult real world—a world that is not only beyond, separate from, even against our own subjectivity, but that is not an organic, unified whole. Nor—and this is where Frost turns his back upon romanticism and the 19th century entirely—nor would he sanction nostalgia for the universe of his transcendental ancestors:

The background in hugeness and confusion shading away from where we stand into black and utter chaos; and against the background any small man-made figure of order and concentration. What pleasanter than that this should be so? Unless we are novelists or economists we don't worry about this confusion; we look out on it with an instrument or tackle it to reduce it. . . . To me any little form I assert upon it is velvet, as the saying is, and to be considered for how much more it is than nothing. If I were a Platonist I should have to consider it, I suppose, for how much less than everything. (SP, 107)

Coleridge and Wordsworth, Tennyson and Arnold, indeed,
idealists of all ages and places would consider almost anything short of the mechanist's clock universe pleasanter. Frost, like James, considers the world as very nearly an aesthetic medium in and of which active consciousness shapes the order of its desire; in chaos he sees opportunity.

But the comfort is
In the covenant
We may get control,
If not of the whole,
Of at least some part
Where not too immense,
So by craft or art
We can give the part
Wholeness in a sense. (PRF 441)

The poem thus becomes for Frost "an epitome of the great predicament; a figure of the will braving alien entanglements." (SP 25). Frost's "alien entanglements," like his frequent recourse to metaphors of "pathless woods" and such, not only echo James's penchant for characterizing concrete experience as a "tangle" and reality as a "rich thicket" but also indicate that he has understood the implications of a contextualist metaphysic for aesthetics.

The central notion of contextualist aesthetics is that the quality of events is encompassed by a work of art:

Fine art conscripts elements to function in the mutual determination of one another, having no faith in the self-determination of an element. For there is nothing in art so variable as an isolated element such as a single visual line, a single color, a single word. But place any of these in a skillfully framed context and
its character becomes as specific as anything in the world. 28

Quality (or "pervasive quality") is what unifies an event and is felt or intuited rather than thought. A work of art is an event the experience of which is directed by emotion. Anger, love, hate, hope, lust may so frame a situation as to color all its elements, thereby unifying it. 29 Or as Frost puts it with respect to the poem--there being no gap or dividing line between aesthetic experience and experience, the aesthetic object and objects in general for a contextualist: "A poem is the emotion of having a thought . . . The only discipline to begin with is the inner mood . . ." (SP, 26). The work of art does not mirror or represent the world, or assume some form like that of the Greater Romantic Lyric, but rather achieves the same specificity and concreteness as other parts of, or events in, the world--the "world" being nothing but a collection of parts which do not add up, or as James expressed it, "partial stories that run parallel to one another, beginning and ending at odd times," mutually interlacing and interfering with one another.

But why predicament? Given Frost's jocular tone earlier in this passage and his knowledge of Latin, I take the poem as "epitome of the great predicament" to involve a pun on the archaic Latin meaning of "predicament" as predication,
the "great predicament" as the "world." As a "figure" or metaphor of "the will braving alien entanglements," the poem has the coherence of any other event; and as a process, both the will and the "alien entanglement" are changed. **Will**, according to the Jamesian textbook with which Frost was thoroughly familiar, "is a relation between the mind and its 'ideas.'" And ideas or thoughts "in the concrete are made of the same stuff as things." The will is therefore not a faculty or power but a relation between two parts of the world; those alien entanglements do not differ fundamentally from that other human 'part' of the world. In the poem, we know ourselves; different parts of the world know themselves. In identifying poetry with the will, Frost emphasizes poetry as act and commitment in a common world. James had shown that the will really boiled down to attention, and thus an act or relation: "Effort of attention is thus the essential phenomenon of will."  

Nothing less than a chasm separates Frost from Wordsworth & Co.: "For Frost the frequent failure to redeem alienation is never accompanied (as it sometimes is in Wordsworth) by the sense that human limitation has cruelly denied him the experience of what he believes to be most profoundly true of human beings and their relationship to the natural world." When tempted to romanticize modernism, we ought to remember how close to Frost's Platonist we
come. Frost has frequently been dismissed for his "optimism," but that optimism derives primarily from his having expected much less than the apocalyptic romantics, who tend to begin by first of all flunking reality for not having met their expectations. Whereas the romantics (including the many modern ones) want to merge two entities, the poet's mind or world and the world, Frost, like a good contextualist, never considers the possibility. The other parts of the world are of the same stuff, differing in the degree to which they have been formed and shaped: "In us nature reaches its height of form and through us exceeds itself. When in doubt there is always form to go on with." (SP, 106). Thus Frost can without bravado say: "Leave the evils that can be remedied or even palliated. You are of age now to face essential Hell. . . . Come with me into the place of tombs and outer darkness." 34 James has made available to Frost a metaphysic that enables him to treat as quite separate questions the nature of reality and the value of human existence. If confronted by the same reality Frost took for granted, a romantic could respond in only one fashion: nihilism. No direct answer to Job's question is possible within the organicist's world; the organicist must make use of some such strategy as distinguishing "mere" appearance from reality. James once described the
reaction of a friend whose metaphysic might be either
organicist or mechanist to his contextualist world:

It gives us a pluralistic, restless universe, in which
no single point of view can ever take in the whole
scene; and to a mind possessed of the love of unity at
any cost, it will, no doubt, remain forever inaccept-
able. A friend with such a mind once told me that the
thought of my universe made him sick, like the sight of
the horrible motion of a mass of maggots in their
carrion bed. 35

What James accounted the great gain of pluralism, however,
was that whereas in monistic metaphysics each "fact" unco-
vered about any aspect of reality resonates into the furth-
est recesses of the whole, in pluralism all "facts" are
local facts, relative in their truth, historical in their
nature, and purely secular in their implications. As a
local fact, an active consciousness might create its own
part of the world and thereby determine the value of its
existence. Needless to say, while some have applauded this
as the "major turning point" in the history of American
individualism and an anticipation of Sartrean existential-
ism, others have for this very reason seen it as an unmiti-
gated disaster.

Frost read avidly all of James's works from the publi-
cation of The Will to Believe (1896). Psychology: The Brief-
er Course and Talks to Teachers on Psychology (1899) he
repeatedly used as textbooks and so can be presumed to have known well. As Lawrance Thompson has pointed out, "Design" so clearly echoes Pragmatism (1907) that we can be quite certain Frost read it as well.36

Of the several scholars who have noted the Jamesian influence on Frost's poetry and poetics, Frank Lentricchia has explored the relationship most fully. Lentricchia attributes Frost's modernity to the Jamesian element:

In his ability to mediate the extremes of materialistic naturalism and romantic idealism James formulated a skeptic's version of the romantic doctrine of creativity. For the modern literary mind James made the romantic theory of creative imagination palatable by making it independent of its transcendentalist formulation. James's grounding of the romantic theory of creativity wholly in the finite human consciousness was thus the making of a modernized romanticism severed from its original base in German idealist metaphysics.37

In other words, James saves for the moderns an active, autonomous subject without all the hypostatizations of the romantics, without the medieval psychology (faculty psychology took its final shape from Kant but had changed little in most essentials since Thomas Aquinas38), without the positing of an Absolute, without the creation of an Appearance with which to rescue the reputation of Reality, etc. The one objection I would raise to Lentricchia's formulation is to his use of the word "romantic": what kind of
romanticism do we have left when its "transcendentalist formulation" and psychology are stripped away? What single element aside from a positive valuation of creativity do the two have in common? Of course, Lentricchia might see my objection as a quibble over an honorific term. I must continue to insist, however, that romanticism and the poetry associated with it cannot be separated from the metaphysic it implies. Needless to say, I hope, I mean no dishonor to the romantics; nor do I think it diminishes their contribution to maintain that their poetry is rooted in a permanently valid notion of the world and should therefore be of unceasing importance and interest to us, rather than that their poetry anticipated a kind of poetry that reached its culmination more than a century later, which is tantamount to casting "To a Nightingale" into the limbo of the literary historian, never again to merit equal standing with the contemporary.

For William Carlos Williams, the most important contextualist was John Dewey. In July 1945, having read yet another critical study that displayed no understanding of his poetry (this time by R.P. Blackmur), Williams complained bitterly to Norman Macleod about those who accused him of "formlessness" and demanded of him "some neo-classic
recognizable context": "That's why I despise the crew!" In the midst of his tirade Williams asked rhetorically: "Christ! Are there no intelligent men left in the world?" And then he added, "Dewey might do something for me, but I am not worth his notice."39

A similar anger at critical misunderstanding coupled with a belief that Dewey might somehow step in and straighten things out dated back at least to 1919. In an edition of Others he edited that year, Williams took "the field against the stupidity of the critics writing in this country about poetry today."40 The article was entitled "Belly Music" and attached as a supplement. Williams fully expected it to kill the magazine and hoped it would attract some attention to him personally.

Williams is uniformly scathing about literary critics and reviewers: "I bunch them all as one. They are all sophomoric, puling, nonsensical." The problem, according to Williams, is that no one writing criticism displays any awareness of "the inspiration that is in the poem"; no one offers "a new SIGHT of a SOURCE."41 Beyond this, Williams cannot yet express the function of the critic in positive terms. He can only point to negative examples and insist that it is not more intellectual knowledge that he would demand of critics, but rather some sign that they have
understood and responded to the new poetry they are discussing. Williams seems to assume Dewey's contextualist model of aesthetic experience: "Emotion is the directing force of aesthetic experience. It directs the artist in his expressive act and marks the particular consequences of the act--the art object." Williams in any event assumes that emotion is primary in poetry and that no critic should be chasing peripheral matters until he or she has first of all caught the poet's "belly music."

Having trashed one by one the various journals and their critics (including John Gould Fletcher, Richard Aldington, Conrad Aiken, Amy Lowell and Maxwell Bodenheim), Williams finally, climactically, turns to The Dial:

Of what significance is it to blazon a name of such dimensions as that of John Dewey on the editorial page of a paper: IN CHARGE OF THE RECONSTRUCTION PROGRAM: If you ignore the interdependence of thought and art, if you fail to adopt an enlightened, fully awake policy toward one of the major arts in a living phase instead of a sapless policy of makeshift? But what of John Dewey? Say that he doesn't give a damn about THE DIAL, that he is interested only in his section. My God is that not sufficient condemnation of the whole scheme he would advocate? If he, a hard thinker, do not stand on his feet and DEMAND excellences in anything that he is associated with it is an aspersion on the quality of his conception, that it has not the intelligence one would have expected from the semi-barbarous Irish of Emalne or a primitive
Confucius. It is a stigma upon the nature of modern inquiry, this sort of approach toward a reconstruction. I DEMAND that John Dewey do something, not to wake up but to emplace an intelligence in his associates on THE DIAL that will give modern American poets an adequate opportunity to place upon paper in a paying magazine what they have to say.

America's most famous philosopher and liberal during the inter-war years, Dewey seems to have been as much symbol as man to Williams. By 1919 Williams had already been reading Dewey's essays in The Dial for years and would continue to read them in various magazines ranging from New Republic (Dewey's favorite forum) to the Atlantic Monthly. Even as an old man, Paul Mariani has noted, Williams admired Dewey: "Williams's basic affinity with Dewey's liberal philosophy—his dissatisfaction with all forms of oppression, like procrustean educational practices, the recidivism of many of his colleagues in the medical profession who had steadfastly refused to allow women a choice in the use of contraceptives, his own refusal to turn the other way when he saw evidences of wife beating and child abuse—all this had come through untouched, despite his political differences with Dewey." Dewey was the one person in 1919 Williams didn't feel he needed to wake up.

Dewey was in China in 1919 and 1920 delivering a series of lectures that his oriental disciples hoped would lead to
pragmatic reforms in every aspect of Chinese life, and so he probably never read "Belly Music." The Dial nevertheless soon began printing the poetry and prose of the major American modernists. In fact, the next year Pound's 4th Canto immediately followed Dewey's "Americanism and Localism," an article so important to Williams that he would recall it years later when writing his Autobiography. 46

It's not at all surprising that "Americanism and Localism" made a deep impression on Williams. Dewey here in effect provides Williams with a confirmation of, and a rationale for, his not having followed Pound and Eliot to Europe. Dewey concludes by saying,

We are discovering that the locality is the only universal. Even the suns and stars have their own times as well as their own places. This truth is first discovered in abstract form, or as an idea. Then, as Mr. Oppenhein points out in the February Dial, its discovery creates a new poetry . . . When the discovery sinks a little deeper, the novelist and dramatist will discover the localities of America as they are, and no one will need to get away from home. Naturally that took us to Europe even though we fancied we were going around America. When we explore our neighborhood, its forces and not just its characters and colour, we shall find what we sought. The beginning of the exploring spirit is in the awakening of criticism and sympathy. Heaven knows there is enough to criticize. The desired art is not likely to linger long, for the sympathy will come as soon as we stay at home a while, And in spite of the
motor car, moving about is getting difficult. Things are getting filled up—and anyway we only move to another locality. 47

The resonances of Dewey's "Americanism and Localism" in Williams's work can hardly be exaggerated. As Charles Doyle has pointed out, Williams's first critical statements in Contact "asserting that the artist's work must begin in 'the sensual accidents of his immediate contacts', in the achieving of a locus," stem directly from Dewey. 48 And we can see clearly today, now that The Embodiment of Knowledge, Kora in Hell, Spring and All and the other early works are all readily available, that Williams did not draw a single, isolated idea from Dewey but either drew from Dewey's work, or found confirmed in his work, the whole contextualist metaphysic.

Williams began The Embodiment of Knowledge in the summer of 1928 and worked on it now and then for the next several years. In 1933 he mailed the unfinished manuscript to Kenneth Burke, who quite correctly, but apparently tactlessly, pointed out that Williams's attempt to create a new modernism was all Dewey. Always sensitive to charges of influence, Williams angrily replied: "If I could convince myself or have anyone convince me that I were merely following in the steps of Dewey, I'd vomit and quit—at any time. But for the moment I don't believe it—-the poetry
is offered not too confidently as proof.\textsuperscript{49} Williams was undoubtedly being sincere. He had no qualms later in life about admitting that at least his emphasis on the local derived from Dewey (and he therefore resented Eliot's sudden pretensions to discovery of the local in the 1940s): "In fact, there can be no general culture unless it is bedded, as he \textsuperscript{Eliot} says, in a locality—something I have been saying for a generation: that there is no universal except in the local. I myself took it from Dewey. So it is not new."\textsuperscript{50} Williams might have added that the idea was not original with Dewey either. Whitman had throughout his career insisted that poet and country were inextricably bound up together. In "A Backward Glance" Whitman said, "one needs only a little penetration to see, at more or less removes, the material facts of their country and radius . . . and its gloomy or hopeful prospects, behind all poets and each poet, and forming their birthmarks."\textsuperscript{51} Dewey's real contribution was the metaphysical and aesthetic context for Whitman's notion of the local. By 1928 Williams had so thoroughly absorbed Dewey's basic outlook that he thought he was being original in his contextualism.

In The Embodiment of Knowledge one can watch Williams pick up central contextualist insights and then make painful, often abortive attempts to worry out their implications for poetry. In one of the chapters entitled "The
Importance of Place," for example, Williams takes James's revolutionary reconceptualization of consciousness, about which his recent reading of Whitehead's *Science and the Modern World* had probably set him thinking, and, affecting commonsense naivete, traces it to the local:

Consciousness, which is of all things thinkable the most immaterial, is placed in the breast of man. To think of it as detached, separately operable is impossible. But where else shall one place it? Precisely that it is unknown but that it is objectified about, is always by place. So William James had said in "Does Consciousness Exist?" (the *Discourse on Method* of the age, according to Whitehead): "That entity [consciousness] is fictitious, while thoughts in the concrete are fully real. But thoughts in the concrete are made of the same stuff as things are." This is no doubt what Williams meant later when he proclaimed repeatedly, "No ideas but in things!" Given the contextualist model of consciousness, any thought or idea is experienced as a thing, concretely. And ours, according to James, is "a world where experience and reality come to the same thing." Thus the distinction between inner and outer dissolves.

It is in his concluding chapter that Williams attempts to lay out his "new" modernist metaphysic:
Everything rests, so far as I can see, on a condition, obvious to the eye, which may be called, if one care to, the pluralism of experience. And, obviously, no 'law' or abstract summary can include this since in itself it stands outside a generalization, it is plural concretely and in fact . . .

Quickly, it is this: that every individual, every place, every opportunity of thought is both favored and limited by its emplacement in time and place. Chinese 8th cent., Italian 12th, English 15th, French 18th, African, etc. All sorts of complicated conditions and circumstances of land, climate, blood, surround every deed that is done.

Due to certain conditions there flourishes a "school" of thought, Western, Eastern. It is one. It brings to a certain perfection that which it can do--and then can do no more--without destruction first. It has flowered.

Now, America is such a place. The old cultures cannot, can never without our history, our blood or climate, our time of flowering in history--can never be the same as we. They cannot.

. . . Thus we are to work in our own "locality" . . .

And the justice of this is that by such pluralism of effort in each several locality a "reality" is kept; in plural--and so verified.

By success in many places on different planes our efforts are confirmed, not driven to defeat and pessimism as in the case of mere central supremacy--which is in effect a denial of reality, not its consummation. . .

. . (EK, 149-50)

Williams has not only overcome the sense of belatedness with which some of the key American modernists seem to have
grown up, but he has also managed to make the connections between Dewey's notion of the local and those ideas known separately as radical empiricism, pluralism, and instrumentalism, together as contextualism. In the first paragraph above, his "pluralism of experience" recalls the famous passages in *The Will to Believe* wherein James contrasts pluralism with monisms and dualisms. According to James, "the world is a pluralism . . . The negative, the alogical, is never wholly banished. . . . Something is always mere fact and givenness."55 And then Williams suddenly sees (paragraph two) the necessary connection between pluralism and the relativization and historicization of experience, as had James and Dewey decades before. That brings him back to locality, the only reality that can be known, and a kind of instrumentalism of culture, instrumentalism being, according to Dewey, "the theory that standards and ideals are not fixed and *a priori*, but are in a constant process of hypothetical construction and of testing through application to the control of particular situations."56 American modernist poetry, in other words, cannot be written in London, any more than it could be written in the 19th or 21st centuries. Williams seems to have in mind, or be groping towards, Dewey's notion of experience as a series of interpenetrating situations, situations which are dynamically
interconnected but which are qualitatively unique in character. As in his attempt to think of consciousness as "objectified . . . place itself," he also seems to be invoking Dewey's notion of an organism and the objects of its environment held together by a unifying pervasive quality which, experienced in its immediacy and reflected upon, becomes a consummation. "Before this knowledge of reality begins it must be placed," Williams says (EK, 132).

Long before Williams began attempting to lay out his contextualism systematically, however, he was exploring its implications for his writing. Kora in Hell: Improvisations (1920) and Spring and All (1923), I will argue in Chapter Four, embody contextualist aesthetic assumptions in a thorough-going fashion and everywhere show signs of Williams's deliberate and daring artistry. Williams is perhaps the poet who has suffered most from our attempts to pre- and post-modernize the American modernists.

Not long after the publication of "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet" in 1944, a Bryn Mawr philosophy professor wrote Wallace Stevens, who described what ensued as follows:

Paul Weiss . . . wrote me about this, objecting to my founding my view of philosophy on James and Bergson. He said . . .
"Why not grapple with a philosopher full-sized?"
I asked him whom he had in mind; he fell back on Plato, Aristotle, Kant and Hegel, and then, as a relief from these divinities of the Styx, suggested Whitehead, Bradley and Peirce. I think that most modern philosophers are purely academic, and certainly there is very little in Whitehead contrary to that impression. I have always been curious about Peirce ... 57

I cite this passage not so much because Stevens here dismisses the great idealists with whom he is routinely associated as "divinities of the Styx" and expresses an interest only in the putative father of pragmatism, as because Stevens tacitly admits Weiss's charge. Stevens, as should be obvious to us today, had indeed founded his view of philosophy on James and Bergson. Weiss's charge also graphically illustrates the change in philosophical fashion: the contextualists are no longer by 1944 "full-sized" philosophers; a poet who speaks admiringly of them or who displays an affinity with them, dates himself.

A classmate of Frost's at Harvard when William James seemed the very embodiment of a distinctively American modernist attitude that opposed both 19th-century idealism and the rising tide of scientific positivism, Stevens early imbibed contextualist attitudes and never wholly abandoned them so far as I can determine. And his letters suggest that he was fully aware of his contextualism. For example,
asked in 1945 for a good book on modern poetry, Stevens replied, "the truth is that I don't know of any good solid book on modern poetry." Stevens always made it a point of honor not to recommend books he had not read. In his later years, Stevens was often wryly apologetic about his not having read and been influenced by philosophers whose views were then fashionable. To Sister M. Bernetta Quinn he wrote: "I am sorry to say that I did not study under Whitehead. The truth is that there was an entirely different generation of philosophers when I was at college: William James, Josiah Royce, and so on." Stevens even intimated that the basic theory of the supreme fiction derived from James's notion of "the will to believe." Santayana at the time Stevens the undergraduate was having conversations with him had by no means thought his way beyond his teacher, William James. Indeed, according to Margaret Peterson, it was while Stevens knew Santayana that Santayana "found himself drawn increasingly into James's camp and eventually became another vehement critic of idealist doctrine."
In any event, "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet" reveals that the man Margaret Peterson has called the "philosophical father" of Harmonium was still a force in Stevens's thought when he was doing his mature work. The significant influence, of course, is evident not when Stevens is quoting James's letters about the "persistent euphony" in Bergson's Creative Evolution or on the invalidism of metaphysicists, but rather when Stevens thinks he is offering his own ideas but instead echoes famous passages in James's work. Consider, for example, Stevens's discussion of philosophic truth and poetic truth.

Stevens begins by asserting that there is a difference between the two, "the difference between logical and empirical knowledge." He then asserts on Bertrand Russell's authority that philosophers cannot agree about what constitutes philosophic truth, but he will nevertheless offer a definition of poetic truth: "an agreement with reality, brought about by the imagination of a man disposed to be strongly influenced by his imagination ...." The coincidence of phrasing with James's is striking. Truth, James says in the famous "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth," "is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their 'agreement,' as falsity means their disagreement, with 'reality.'" James repeatedly spoke of truth as "agreement with reality."
"... brought about by the imagination...": The rest of the essay Stevens devotes to explaining what he means by "imagination." His aim is to arrive at poetic truth, or agreement with reality. This involves, for one thing, "that we cease to be metaphysicians..."

and standing in the radiant and productive atmosphere, and examining first one detail of that world, one particular, and then another, as we find them by chance, and observing many things that seem to be poetry without intervention on our part, as for example, the blue sky, and noting, in any case, that the imagination never brings anything into the world but that, on the contrary, like the personality of the poet in the act of creating, it is no more than a process, and desiring with all the power of our desire not to write falsely, do we not begin to think of the possibility that poetry is only reality, after all, and that poetic truth is a factual truth, seen, it may be, by those whose range in the perception of fact—that is, whose sensibility—is greater than our own? (NA, 58-59)

In "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth," James, too, having defined an idea's truth as its agreement with reality, goes on to say that "Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process..." Stevens goes on to contrast false and true imagination:

It is important to believe that the visible is the equivalent of the invisible; and once we believe it, we
have destroyed the imagination; that is to say, we have
destroyed the false imagination as some incalculable
vates within us, unhappy Rodomontade. One may say that
the best definition of true imagination is that it is
the sum of our faculties. (NA, 61)

Nothing, of course, could be further from Coleridge's sin-
gle faculty that "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order
to recreate . . . struggles to idealize and to unify . . .
is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are
essentially fixed and dead." But then Stevens grew up on
Jamesian, not faculty, psychology. He learned that, as far
as sensation and imagination are concerned, "the same nerve-
tracts are concerned in the two processes." When Stevens
says that imagination "is no more than a process" and sug-
gests the "possibility that poetry is only reality" and the
poet, therefore, only the man of greater sensibility, he is
tacitly denying any real distinction between the life of
the senses and the life of the imagination. To be truly and
sensually in contact with reality and to imagine reality
amount to much the same thing. For the "sum of ourfacul-
ties," which Stevens equates with "true imagination," we
can read powers or ways of experiencing. Stevens
seems, indeed, to mean precisely what Dewey meant when he
defined imagination as

a quality that animates and pervades all processes of
making and observation. It is a way of seeing and
feeling things as they compose an integral whole. It is the large and generous blending of interests at the point where the mind comes in contact with the world. For the contextualist, remember, there is simply no difference between reality and experience—their are identical; and it is agreement with reality for which Stevens is striving.

But rather than attempting to examine Stevens's contextualism in any detail at this point, we should perhaps rather first establish conclusively that not only was he early exposed to the contextualist metaphysic but that Margaret Peterson is justified in referring to James as the "philosophical father" of Harmonium. Since one example (Peterson offers more than a few) treated at some length should be sufficient to establish the connection, consider Stevens's "The Bird with Coppery, Keen Claws" (1921) in juxtaposition with a passage from James's A Pluralistic Universe:

Above the forest of the parakeets,
A parakeet of parakeets prevails,
A pip of life amid a mort of tails.

(The rudiments of tropics are around,
Aloe of ivory, pear of rusty rind.)
His lids are white because his eyes are blind.

He is not paradise of parakeets,
Of his gold either, golden alguazil,
Except because he broods there and is still.
Panache upon panache, his tails deploy
Upward and outward, in green-vented forms,
His tip a drop of water full of storms.

But though the turbulent tinges undulate
As his pure intellect applies its laws,
He moves not on his coppery, keen claws.

He munches a dry shell while he exerts
His will, yet never ceases, perfect cock,
To flare, in the sun-pallor of his rock. (PBM, 57)

The poem's opacity clears considerably as soon as we recognize that Stevens's "parakeet of parakeets" or "perfect cock" is a bizarre figure for the idealists' God and a direct descendant of James's "absolute bird" in the following passage:

We see that no smallest raindrop can come into being without a whole shower, no single feather without a whole bird, neck and crop, beak and tail, coming into being simultaneously: so we unhesitatingly lay down the law that no part of anything can be except so far as the whole also is. And then, since everything whatever is part of the whole universe, and since (if we are idealists) nothing, whether part or whole, exists except for a witness, we proceed to the conclusion that the unmitigated absolute as witness of the whole is the one sole ground of being of every partial fact, the fact of our own existence included. We think of ourselves as being only a few of the feathers, so to speak, which help to constitute that absolute bird. Extending the analogy of certain wholes, of which we have familiar experience, to the whole of wholes, we easily become absolute idealists.
Peterson notes a whole series of correspondences. For example, "One particular of the natural world, a raindrop, implies for an idealist the 'whole shower.' In the poem a drop of water, by similar extension, becomes God's conceptual whole of creation, 'full of storms.' 70 (A second passage from A Pluralistic Universe, which I will not here quote, resolves the remaining obscurities.) Peterson, who deplores her need for the James text as a gloss on the poem, sums up Stevens's point thus:

Like the blind creator of "Negation," the parakeet is blind because he conceives his creation monistically, as idea. His setting is the idealist world from which the reality of particulars has been excluded; there are only the "rudiments" of the tropics, that is, sense phenomena. As the sole intelligence, the single "pip of life," he munched the dry husk of what was once a living creation. And finally, because he is an idealist who, according to James, "substitutes a pallid outline for the real world's richness," he is placed in "the sun-pallor of his rock." 71

The theme of "The Bird with Coppery, Keen Claws" is one James sounded again and again, and, as Peterson demonstrates, it is the main theme of Harmonium: "intellectual systems produce an idealism at odds with experience; the common metaphorical pattern represents various 'magnificos' of the intellect being in some way tripped up by reality." 72
Peterson finds Harmonium unsatisfactory on two counts. She resents having to gloss the poems with passages from James in order for them to make any sense to her, and she regards pragmatism as an inferior philosophy the positive side of which "rests simply upon the dubious assertion that the recovery of life's meaning is somehow the inevitable consequence of experience—unqualified experience except in that it is personal and its truths relative." To such a statement one can only respond that Peterson has either not read carefully or not understood James and Dewey, whose central reconstructive task, as they saw it, was the restoration of philosophy as a criticism of reality. In insisting on the "relative" nature of truth, the pragmatists never once implied that beliefs and their objects were equal; they meant, rather, that "When the question is raised as to the 'real' value of the object for belief, the appeal is to criticism, intelligence. And the court of appeal decides by the law of conditions and consequences." As Frost put it:

Why is his nature forever so hard to teach
That though there is no fixed line between wrong and right,
There are roughly zones whose laws must be obeyed?

Philosophers had previously, with disastrous consequences, treated value as somehow self-evidently inherent in certain
objects. How Peterson came by her condescending attitude towards the pragmatist notion of experience is even more puzzling, for it is their richest and most complex concept. Any experience for James and Dewey includes a self acting in a situation in which there are modes of experiencing (aesthetic, intellectual and practical modes, mixed in various degrees) and an object experienced. Normally the self takes experience as an unanalyzed whole with a pervasive quality. Art as Experience, according to some commentators, is Dewey's attempt to analyze what it means to experience or have an experience in the aesthetic mode (and thus a prolegomenon to an aesthetic rather than an aesthetic). For Peterson to make James and Dewey out to be the precursors of Leo Buscaglia is absurd.

Moreover, in showing us specific Jamesian sources for much that is curious in Harmonium--the drunken sailor who catches tigers in red weather, the emperor of ice-cream, the marriage of flesh and air--Peterson doesn't necessarily establish that the poems are unintelligible, or even unsuccessful, without some knowledge of their sources. The problem may rather lie with readers and critics who have long approached Stevens as an idealist and new romantic. Drop that assumption and the poems of Harmonium are accessible. More than that Stevens never wished; he frequently remarked
that he wanted his poems to resist readers—even tease them a bit: which is only to say that, as a part of reality, the poem should act like other parts of reality and be "malleable yet resisting." Stevens can hardly be faulted for the seduction of readers by the very absurdities of idealism he loved to expose.

But even granting the contextualism of Frost, Williams and Stevens, what about Eliot and Pound, whose central importance in 20th-century poetry has never with much success been challenged? Do the contextualists represent Perloff's Other Tradition (in which case I should go back and qualify all my general assertions about American modernism)? Or a Counter-Countercurrent? Or do they perhaps represent what Stevens meant by a "modernism of content," while Eliot and Pound, along with e.e. cummings, Hart Crane and some lesser figures, represent a "modernism of form"? Or do we need to return to some such dialectical distinction as Roy Harvey Pearce's between "Adamic" and "mythic" modes, the former corresponding roughly to that of Frost, Williams, and Stevens, the latter to that of Eliot and Pound? About Eliot's relation to American modernism I would like to make just a few observations at this point, for his, from a metaphysical perspective, is much the most complex
development of any 20th-century poet.

First of all, we still know precious little about Eliot's youth and that little highly suggestive and ambiguous (with no hope that key documents and letters will be published before the next century). I by no means wish to discount the importance of Royce and Bradley in Eliot's intellectual development; but to appreciate their importance properly I think we need to remind ourselves that Eliot did not begin to read Bradley until 1913. As Lyndall Gordon has pointed out, when Eliot returned to Harvard to do postgraduate work in philosophy, the department had just lost James, Santayana, and Palmer, leaving, of its leading figures, only Royce, and "in 1912 Ralph Barton Perry and five others inaugurated a doctrinal change with a book on the New Realism. Eliot admitted that the Realists might be refreshing, but he was put off by their subservience to mathematics and the exact sciences. He could not accept that Bertrand Russell's course on symbolic logic, given in 1914, had 'anything to do with reality.' It was in this context—in the severe throes of reaction against the kind of philosophizing epitomized by symbolic logic—that Eliot turned first to Indian philosophy, and then to Bradley's idealism. His poetry was already modernist before he ever responded to idealism deeply. His choosing Bradley's philosophy as the subject of his dissertation and Royce as his
committee chairman thus has everything to do with the direction his criticism took in the 1910s and 1920s, but it cannot have had much direct bearing on the modernist poetry he had been writing for some five years prior to the earliest possible inception of his idealist phase (by 1911 Eliot had written the "Preludes," "Portrait of a Lady," "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"). Of course, some students of Eliot might still today find La Fargue and the "French influence" in general sufficient to account for Eliot's modernism. I don't. On the contrary, Eliot's most La Fargueian poems strike me as his least modernist.

Secondly, we know that Eliot was an undergraduate at Harvard when James's influence was strongest; that he was interested in philosophy and so naturally took an interest in the fierce, if courteous, debates between the pragmatists and the idealists at Harvard; that he displays, as one would expect, a thorough understanding of, and critical attitude towards, pragmatism in his dissertation and elsewhere; and that throughout his work he displays an intimate acquaintance with Jamesian and Bergsonian psychology. According to Lyndall Gordon,

In the philosophy department Eliot remained impervious to William James's optimism, his faith in men's agency, his version of truth as relative rather than absolute.
William James's Pragmatism was one of the important books published while Eliot was at Harvard but Eliot remained unimpressed. In 1914 he said that the error of pragmatism was making man the measure of all things. Gordon may, however, be reading a later perception of James into a very different context. For in the context of Eliot's undergraduate days, James's major opponent was Royce, and it was Royce who found himself cast as the optimist, James as the tough-minded realist. Santayana later remembered:

As William James put it, in his picturesque manner, if at the last day all creation was shouting hallelujah and there remained one cockroach with an unrequited love, that would spoil the universal harmony; it would spoil it, he meant, in truth and for the tender philosopher, but probably not for those excited saints. James was thinking chiefly of the present and future, but the same scrupulous charity has its application to the past. To remove an evil is not to remove the fact that it has existed. The tears that have been shed were shed in bitterness, even if a remorseful hand afterwards wipes them away. To be patted on the back and given a sugar-plum does not reconcile even a child to a past injustice. And the case is much worse if we are expected to make our heaven out of the foolish and cruel pleasures of contrast, or out of the pathetic obfuscation produced by a great relief.

In the first years of the twentieth century, it was James and Dewey, the American gadflies, who would not let a comfortably situated and idealistically inclined establishment
forget even the sufferings of an unrequited cockroach. Nor should we take Eliot's 1914 dismissal of pragmatism as necessarily indicative of his response to it as an undergraduate (insofar as he was at such a young age cognizant of these issues). But even were we to grant that Eliot rejected the Jamesian mood and attitude, did he also fend off James's infectious metaphysic? Since Eliot in the 1920s utterly and vehemently rejected the idealism of his Bradleian phase, turning back to the formism of Aquinas and Aristotle, we can hardly maintain that he was somehow temperamentally inclined towards or attracted by idealism.

Indeed, and thirdly, we know from Eliot himself that he went through an intense Bergson phase. "My only conversion, by the deliberate influence of any individual, was a temporary conversion to Bergsonism." And on another occasion he explained: "I was very much under Bergson's influence during the year 1910-11, when I both attended his lectures and gave close study to the books he had then written." The French novelist Alain-Fournier, author of the seminal Le Grande Meaulnes, acted as Eliot's tutor in Bergson's contextualist philosophy. We need to learn a great deal more than is now possible about the Eliot who underwent this "conversion" if we are to reach any positive understanding of the young modernist poet. In the Journal of Philosophy in 1910 William James published a short article
entitled "Bradley or Bergson?", a response to an earlier article by Bradley. Bradley, according to James (and by his own admission), chooses the way of philosophy over that of life; "Bergson and the empiricists, on the other hand, tumble to life's call, and turn into the valley where the green pastures and the clear waters always were." By 1914, Eliot was choosing Bradley, but first he chose Bergson, who at the time was understood as a contextualist, although he had an organicist side that became increasingly apparent to people after the attacks of Julien Benda and George Santayana (in Le Bergsonisme, 1912, and Winds of Doctrine, 1913), his organicism varying as a function of one's emphasis upon the élan vital as a cosmology in germ. James was Bergson's earliest and strongest champion in the United States; as a matter of fact, Eliot's first acquaintance with Bradley as well as Bergson was quite probably through James's essays and lectures, where James attempted to give sympathetic accounts of all relevant European thinkers and to define their place in the traditional debates. Even had Eliot rejected James's metaphysic in its American setting, it would not have been uncharacteristic of him at that time (nor of most young men) to have found it thrilling in French.

James's generosity, or "proclivity to give away his own claim to originality," is perhaps in no case better
known than that of Bergson. Théodore Flournoy, an eminent Swiss psychologist and scholar, was not alone among James's contemporaries in thinking that Bergson had some acknowledging to do, and he said as much to James repeatedly. His letter of July 17, 1907 is worth quoting at some length both because he here levels criticisms of Bergson as a philosopher that would in just a few years become standard and because he also makes charges that, soon whispered by many intellectuals, damaged Bergson's reputation:

What simplicity and what clarity there is in your system and your style, compared with the over-refined and farfetched speculations of the French metaphysicians!—I am thinking of Bergson and his recent volume, L'Evolution créatrice, which is inspired by a lofty and beneficent spirit, but which in execution is singularly confused and undigested; when one tries to divest his thought of the metaphors and superb images in which it is wrapped up, one can understand nothing; it's clear enough that he wants to save liberty, individuality, moral spirituality,—but basically he hardly succeeds, for this élan vital which is the source of all, and which engenders the plurality of beings in coming up against the resistance of no one knows what, singularly resembles the unconscious Thrust of the German monists; for them too, the absolute Idea, or the unconscious Will or Force, etc., is the primordial urge, the original jet d'eau which breaks into small drops or divides up into finite beings; and, in Bergson's theory, it seems to me, you hardly escape any better from deter-
minism or from fundamental monism than you do with Fichte or Schopenhauer, Hartmann, etc. It is true that what interests one about a philosopher is not what he has succeeded in carrying through, but what he has aimed at and tried to do—not what he has proved, but what he believes. And seen in this way, Bergson is very attractive and stimulating. Only I have the impression that he is not so original as many people think he is; various indications make me think that he dipped pretty freely—even before his first work, "Les Données immédiates de la conscience,"—into the "Critique philosophique," and especially into the articles which that review published, between 1880 and 1889, by a certain Will. James.—I allow myself to tell you this, because this remark was made to me spontaneously by one of my friends, an amateur philosopher who knows your writings very well and who, on reading Bergson's L'Evolution créatrice, had the impression that you had been considerably plundered! (This amateur philosopher is Monsieur L. Cellérié, banker and son of Professor Cellérié, professor of mathematics at the Geneva Academy.) Cellérié finds that all the Bergsonian theory of Duration and of Consciousness is only a plagiarism of your Stream of Consciousness.85

"Plagiarism" might or might not be an overstatement at a time when laxer standards of scholarly integrity obtained. No written response from James to Flournoy's charges has survived, but in both public and private James proceeded to admire and praise Bergson's ideas. And he went out of his way to establish cordial personal relations with Bergson
himself on his next trip to Europe. In 1909 Flournoy wrote again:

Apropos Bergson, it always amuses me to see your admiration of his writings. It is not that I do not appreciate them and the magic of their style; but you make me think of a rich proprietor who does not even surmise all that he possesses and who falls into a swoon before jewels which a clever goldsmith has stolen from him and has simply disguised by means of a new and glittering setting. (This is between ourselves.)

Bergson's followers have had an increasingly difficult time ever since maintaining the originality of French contextualism. My point, however, has not so much to do with Bergson's habits as a scholar as with the similarity of many of Bergson's ideas to those of James—a similarity that was not only perceived at the time but which was all the more striking for its not yet having been complicated by Bergson's later increasingly organicist emphasis.

There are, of course, significant differences between James and Bergson, some of them relevant to a consideration of Eliot's early poetry. For example, Bergson conflated memory and the unconscious in a way that James, "the only first-generation American experimental psychologist to incorporate the unconscious mind into his psychology," was too good a psychologist to do. Piers Gray argues convincingly that Eliot assumes this conflation in "The Lovesong
of J. Alfred Prufrock." Overall, however, adherents to Bergson's as to James's thinking were marked by their commitment to the contextualist root metaphor, with which Eliot would wrestle, eventually finding it inadequate for defining a sense of culture and community (or so I understand his attraction to Royce's idealism, and then Bradley's).

The Waste Land, as is perhaps already obvious, could fruitfully be seen as an expose of the self-refuting nature of the contextualist root metaphor. Clearly, by 1913 or 1914 Eliot realized that he was trying to break with the thinking of James as well as that of Bergson, for in an address to the Philosophical Society he treated them as two sides of the same coin. Eliot's post-contextualist mood in this address (which points directly towards The Waste Land) has been summed up by Lyndall Gordon this way:

Instead of upholding absolute moral standards of goodness and evil, Eliot saw his contemporaries becoming subject to two fallacies, the idea of Progress (which he associated with Bergson) and the idea of Relativity (which he ascribed to William James's Pragmatism). Eliot saw what neither Bergson nor James acknowledged, that their absorption in a private psychological world of need and change was, in effect, a withdrawal from the great world and resulted from despair of a perfect political order. He was exasperated that neither philosopher followed his theory through to its pessimistic end.

Except to praise the prose of James for throbbing "with the
agony of spiritual life," Eliot ever after spoke in disparaging or adversarial terms of Bergson and James. But then he was hardly friendly in his remarks about American modernist poetry either. The force of Eliot's rebound from contextualism just might be taken as the measure of the force of its impact upon him.

In short, there is more to Eliot's relation to James than meets the eye, and one wonders why most discussions of Eliot's dissertation and early prose omit all mention of James. Consider, for example, Eliot's discussion of "Does Consciousness Exist?" in his dissertation, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley*. Eliot ostensibly rejects James's position with respect to experience, conflating it with Bergson's:

> . . . whether we say 'the world is my experience' or James, *Radical Empiricism*, p. 27 that experience 'is made of that, of just what appears, of space, of intensity, of flatness, brownness, heaviness, or what not', we have been in either case guilty of importing meanings which hold good only within experience. We have no right, except in the most provisional way, to speak of my experience, since the I is a construction out of experience, an abstraction from it; and the thats, the browns and hards and flats, are equally ideal constructions from experience, as ideal as atoms. An elan vital or 'flux' is equally abstracted from experience, for it is only in departing from immediate experience that we are aware of such a process.
Eliot is developing the implications of his having defined the self as a secondary construct, and he wishes to explain Bradley's doctrine of "immediate experience." What is at first sight so puzzling about the dissertation is Eliot's choosing as his point of departure for a discussion of the Bradleian notion of "immediate experience" James and Bergson. Both men, writing after the publication of Bradley's main work (Appearance and Reality came out in 1893), had attacked with devastating effect Bradley's notion of "immediate experience," and as far as the philosophical world was concerned had already settled Eliot's comparison in their own favor. James's response to Eliot's point, which follows hard upon the phrase Eliot quotes, is "Of course! Exactly!" That "provisional way" of speaking of experience is precisely what James insists we must content ourselves with given our linguistically-conditioned world. Bradley's reifications are what James time and again takes issue with; he otherwise manages to find much to agree with. Does Eliot misunderstand James, or is he using James (& Bergson) as a means of understanding Bradley? Towards the end of his first chapter, Eliot seems clearly to use James to get his bearings in Bradley's murky world:

At the beginning then consciousness and its object are one. So far we are in agreement with at least two schools of contemporary philosophy. We can say with
James (Radical Empiricism, p. 23) "the instant field of the present is . . . only virtually or potentially either subject or object". . . . What James calls the context is that of which Bradley speaks when he says that the finite content is 'determined from the outside'.

Given the fact that Eliot's chairman (Royce) is an idealist, one would think that Eliot would have in mind an audience who would not need to have identified the Jamesian equivalents of Bradleian notions. It is as if Eliot were approaching Bradley via the essays that were eventually published after James's death as Essays in Radical Empiricism and that Eliot were declaring his independence by taking the side of James's main opponent in those essays. If Eliot's purposes were indeed expository, then he might more logically have chosen some such figure as J.S. Mill (whose ideas represented a clear contrast to Bradley's—and one more to his advantage) rather than those who had made their philosophical reputations by worsting Bradley on these very points.

Unlike Eliot, who acknowledged having gone through a contextualist phase, Pound never acknowledged the influence of any important philosophy more modern than the Confucian, certainly not that associated with James, Dewey and Bergson. Indeed, Pound sometimes took pains to deny his pragmatism: "Ideas are true as they go into action. I am not resurrect-
ing a pragmatic sanction, but trying to light up pragmatic PROOF. The thread going through the holes in the coin... is a necessary part of a thought system. Or again:

Not only is the truth of a given idea measured by the degree wherewith it goes into action, but a very distinct component of truth remains ungrasped by the non-participant in the action.

And this statement is at diametric remove from a gross pragmatism that cheapens ideas or accepts the "pragmatic pig of a world." The pragmatists themselves, of course, were precisely those furthest from accepting passively that "pragmatic pig of a world." And James himself constantly tried to distance himself from "gross pragmatism"—"usually described as a characteristically American movement, a sort of bobtailed scheme of thought, excellently fitted for the man on the street, who naturally hates theory and wants cash returns immediately." Pound, however, remained all his life under the mistaken impression that pragmatism amounted to nothing more than its bob-tailed, money-making version that its critics had set up as a straw philosophy. He regarded philosophy as the occupation of old men who had experienced enough, who had laid in a sufficient stock of particulars, who had seen enough of the periplum to get the gist of it all. Unfortunately, by the time he was ready to tackle philosophy in the late 1930s, he was hardly in a position to do so and had
besides been living and acting upon the basis of a deeply-held point of view for many years. Abstracted from his writings, this point of view can only be described as "pragmatism," "radical empiricism," or "contextualism," if one desires a Western label. In fact, Pound's only rival among the American modernists as a contextualist is his oldest friend, Williams. David Ketchiff has recently shown that specifically between William James and Pound there exists not just an "equivalence of abstract propositions" but also remarkable "correspondences of tone, phrasing, and emphasis" of which Pound never demonstrated the least awareness, and to which, therefore, we can hardly apply the term "influence."  

Pound did betray his metaphysical preference time and again, however. Sometimes he betrayed it in little ways, as in his early flirtation with T.E. Hulme's Bergsonism, which he later in his life took pains to downplay. Or consider Pound's famous definition of an image as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." Pound goes on to explain, "I use the term 'complex' rather in the technical sense employed by the newer psychologists, such as Hart, though we might not agree absolutely in our application." Miriam Hansen and David Ketchiff have independently discovered that, contrary to a traditional assumption in Pound studies, Hart was not a
Freudian and did not mean a Freudian "complex"; Benjamin Hart, whose *The Psychology of Insanity* Pound was referring to, was on the contrary a thoroughgoing, self-confessed Jamesian psychologist and pragmatist whose use of "complex" derives from James's *Principles*, which also happens to contain some extended discussions of the image—discussions which shed a great deal of light on Pound's use of the term.

Pound also betrayed his metaphysical preference in his display of excitement over Ernest Fenollosa's work, especially *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, when he encountered it in 1912. "What Fenollosa did," according to Frank Kermode, "was to convince him [Pound] that one could have the Symbolist Image without having Schopenhauer or Bergson or indeed any other Western philosopher; that the Chinese had an analogous symbol without metaphysical trappings." That is, Pound recognized the idealism implicit in the poetics of Symbolism; T.E. Hulme, while he railed against romanticism constantly and called for a poetry of "small dry things," did not. Ian F.A. Bell succinctly contrasts the alternatives that confronted Pound, while using some terms I would like to question:

Fenollosa understood 'classification' in the scientific sense of comprehensiveness, while Bergson and Hulme understood the term in its logical sense of categorizations; Fenollosa recognized science as the best means
for coming to terms with natural process, whereas Bergson, committed to the view of scientific method as purely conceptual, saw it as distortive in accounting for the elements of flux and duration.

And about Hulme, he says further:

At the level of theory, Hulme's position appeared to advocate the art of the 'real', but at the level of practice the 'real' was always apprehended from the remove of a poorly assimilated philosophy; for all his talk about the false order imposed by conceptual thought, Hulme's vulgarization of Bergson postulates nothing more than the order implicit in a different sort of ideal, removed world. His pervasive denial of 'plain speech', his view of all language merely as a debased 'compromise' and the paranoid disgust that sees reality as uncontrollable 'cinders': all suggest an ideology of denial. Language is irredeemably divorced from its productive forces to become a mystification--self-sealing and apprehendable only to Hulme himself--of all that lies beyond the potential of available discourse. For Hulme, to touch the 'real' is, in practice, to be contaminated.98

Bell does not seem to be aware that what he is actually distinguishing here are the three main theories of truth—the realist, idealist and pragmatist, or Aristotelian, Platonic and Jamesian. If we are talking about the 20th-century "scientific" notion of truth, then we are also talking about the pragmatic notion of truth: the two are the same. As Dewey stated the matter, "Since, upon any theory, our way
of telling whether a given conception is true or not is to find out whether it is capable of experimental verification, pragmatism claims it is simpler to identify truth with the verified conception. Bergson was not clearly with the pragmatists on this point. In Fenollosa Pound found someone who was friendly to modern science, someone who had grasped that science and mechanism were not the same. James battled his "scientific" colleagues constantly over this. In 1906 he wrote Hugo Muensterberg:

"I am satisfied with a free wild Nature. You seem to me to cherish and pursue an Italian Garden, where all things are kept in separate compartments, and one must follow straight-rulled walks. Of course Nature gives material for those hard distinctions which you make, but they are only centers of emphasis in a flux for me; and as you treat them reality seems to me all stiffened."

So Pound understood Fenollosa to believe.

A philosopher turned Far-Eastern scholar and art educator; a Bostonian and museum curator whose divorce and remarriage forced his exile from Brahmin society; a graduate student at the Harvard Unitarian Divinity School with Hegelian leanings who later converted to Tendai Buddhism while becoming increasingly an empiricist in philosophy, Fenollosa was a man whose thought invites comparison with James's. Twelve years of teaching and study in Japan taught Fenollosa to reject idealism: "No Buddhist talks about
Universals, Absolutes, Macrocossms, Essence, Pure Being ..

Lawrence Chisholm describes Fenollosa as by temperament a contextualist, as someone who "embraced possibility and change. Like William James he relished the challenge of novelty and uncertainty." Indeed, Chisholm has in part anticipated my general argument:

Fenollosa's belief that change itself is welcome and can be made significant by human imagination links him with a pattern of American modernism that includes Walt Whitman and William James as well as Max Weber and Ezra Pound. This pattern of "existential modernism" includes in each instance a series of unique relationships discovered and ordered by a single trained sensibility. Whereas the existential primitive's re-entry into a closed circle of sacred time relieves him of personal responsibility by affording a compulsive "harmony" with the world, the existential modern accepts personal responsibility for achieving some kind of order, if only momentarily and tentatively, in an open world where time's duration is as necessary as change.

Stripped of the gladjectives of the fifties, Chisholm's point is that Fenollosa is a contextualist. His special message is that, contrary to Hegel, the East is not an exhausted civilization but one whose coming reunification with the West will produce the cosmopolis celebrated by Pound in the Cantos. Fenollosa's inclusive, pluralist vision of change and diversity differs from that of other contextualists (most of whom were intensely interested in the East and
Fenollosa's work) primarily in its focus on art history and art education. After Fenollosa's return from Japan, where his twelve years of teaching are today thought to have had a major impact on the resurgence of Japanese nationalism and cultural pride in the 1880s and 90s, Fenollosa spent most of his time crusading on the lecture circuit. The Fenollosa-Dow theory of art education, which eventually spread throughout the U.S., was first applied at Dewey's Laboratory School at the University of Chicago. "Thinking is thinging," Fenollosa declared in words reminiscent of James's "thoughts in the concrete are made of the same stuff as things are" and Williams's "No ideas but in things!" Just as the other pragmatists began in the tradition of German transcendental philosophy and were forced to move beyond that tradition by their desire to right wrongs, to reform and transform their immediate environments, so Fenollosa found that he could not separate the question of his ideas' truth from his own experience.

Fenollosa had been swept away by Hegel at first. In his early efforts to revive Japanese national art he gave a formal Hegelian interpretation to traditional Sino-Japanese artistic canons. In the 90s in Boston his philosophizing retained an idealistic emphasis and a rhetoric which was often florid. Not until he left Boston and thereby, symbolically, left mysticism, aestheticism, and aristocracy did his artistic theories become individualized and more empirical and his language more vernacular.
As his activities involved him increasingly in the pragmatic controversies of American education, "Idea," as a philosophical category, tended to disappear, perhaps because art teachers who talked idealism often practiced academic methods limited to 'moral' themes. Fenollosa kept the term 'synthesis' to describe aesthetic experience as a whole, but his attention gradually focused on the psychological processes of creation and appreciation, the flashing glimpse of possibilities uniquely ordered. 105

Such might be said to constitute the typical biography of a pragmatist (Dewey came to pragmatism via Hegel, James via Kant). Indeed, pragmatism itself began as a method for determining the meaning of a concept (Peirce) and only under the pressure of the needs of James and Dewey was blown into a theory of truth, and then, more largely, into a metaphysic. Once the 19th century realized that some things were historically conditioned, pragmatism was perhaps an inevitable development, a consequence of attempts to generalize a metaphor. That same root metaphor would then be seen--again more or less inevitably--to have cross-cultural implications: and work like Fenollosa's on a unified world theory emphasizing cultural diversity \(\textit{cf.} \) "The Coming Fusion of East and West," Harper's 98 (Dec. 1898), pp. 115-22 \(\textit{cf.} \) or that of the new anthropologists was bound to follow. James's The Varieties of Religious Experience, Principles of Psychology, and various essays on epistemology and metaphysics are all
chapters of a single work which has as its thesis the
contextualist root metaphor.

Given the fact that Pound spent three years poring over
Fenollosa's manuscripts, approaching Chinese poetry through
his poetics and translations, the fully developed context-
ism in Pound's mature work should not surprise us. Consider,
for example, the metaphysical assertions Fenollosa makes
in rebutting the two traditional definitions of the sentence
as a "complete thought" and as a "union of subject and
predicate":

But in nature there is no completeness ... The truth
is that acts are successive, even continuous; one causes
or passes into another. And though we may string never
so many clauses into a single compound sentence, motion
leaks everywhere, like electricity from an exposed wire.
All processes in nature are inter-related; and thus
there could be no complete sentence ... save one which
it would take all time to pronounce.

Fenollosa thus disposes of the sentence as "a complete
thought" on metaphysical grounds: its implications don't
accord with his contextualist view of the universe. The sen-
tence as "uniting a subject and a predicate" he disposes of
in much the same (metaphysical) way:

According to this logic, thought deals with abstractions,
concepts drawn out of things by a sifting process. These
logicians never inquired how the "qualities" which they
pulled out of things came to be there. The truth of all
their little checker-board juggling depended upon the natural order by which these powers or properties or qualities were folded in concrete things, yet they despised the "thing" as a mere "particular," or pawn. It was as if Botany should reason from the leaf-patterns woven into our table-cloths. Valid scientific thought consists in following as closely as may be the actual and entangled lines of forces as they pulse through things. Thought deals with no bloodless concepts but watches things move under its microscope.

Fenollosa then goes on to formulate his famous definition of truth as "the transference of power" and nature's sentence as "a flash of lightning"—basing both on his contextualist assumption that the "temporal order" is fundamental. Like many contextualists (James being the exception), Fenollosa tends to forget that for idealists and mechanists his "entangled lines of forces" don't really exist—are mere appearances: that his metaphysic is constitutive of his world. But then at stake in his contextualist battle against the vertical world of traditional metaphysics are all those "mere particulars," symbolized to him, appropriately, by the cherry tree:

... this process of abstraction may be carried on indefinitely and with all sorts of material. We may go on forever building pyramids of attenuated concept until we reach the apex "being."

But we have done enough to illustrate the characteristic process. At the base of the pyramid lie things, but
stunned, as it were. They can never know themselves for things until they pass up and down among the layers of the pyramids. The way of passing up and down may be exemplified as follows: We take a concept of lower attenuation, such as "cherry"; we see that it is contained under one higher, such as "redness." Then we are permitted to say in sentence form, "Cherryness is contained under redness," or for short, "(the) cherry is red." What Fenollosa is attacking, of course, is the logical sense of categorization. But what is his alternative? What does Bell mean when he asserts that "Fenollosa understood 'classification' in the scientific sense of comprehensiveness . . ."? Fenollosa says:

Science fought till she got at the things. All her work has been done from the base of the pyramids, not from the apex. She has discovered how functions cohere in things. She expresses her results in grouped sentences which embody no nouns or adjectives but verbs of special character. The true formula for thought is: The cherry tree is all that it does. Its correlated verbs compose it.

This is contextualism pure and simple.
Notes


3. Gary Zukav, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1979), p. 63. I am indebted to Professor John Muste for recommending this book and directing my attention to the connection between pragmatism and the New Physics. As Zukav points out, any inventory of the main ideas and concepts of pragmatism and physics reveals an astonishing fit in terms of analogues—a fit that would seem even more astonishing given pragmatism's having anticipated physics by several decades were it not for the prior availability of these ideas in the metaphysical and epistemological stockpiles of the Orient. Because of Zukav's self-confessed mathephobia and innumeracy, his account of Quantum Mechanics should be supplemented with some such article as R.I.G. Hughes's "Quantum


9. Quoted in Arthur L. Blumenthal, *Language and Psychology: Historical Aspects of Psycholinguistics* (New York: Wiley, 1970), p. 238. I should perhaps point out that Wundt, Titchener, Hugo Muensterberg and other contemporaries of James who expressed reservations about his philosophizing were all mechanists to whom mid-20th-century science, with its contextualist foundations, would have seemed stranger than Wonderland, its practitioners Mad Hatters all. Given their mechanist assumptions, they could not conceive of a science that did not presuppose objective observers, an independent physical reality that is single in nature, causality, and the like. As Daniel Bjork puts it, "Where Muensterberg, Titchener, and Cattell looked for science in James they found suggestion; they found figurative language that hinted but did not explain, insights that often led off the scientific path, rather than showed." (*The Compromised Scientist*, p. 172). Bjork, however, is looking back at James from the vantage point of an American psychology that is still struggling to makes its first leap beyond 19th-century mechanism.


20. Ellwood Johnson, "William James and the Art of Fiction," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 30 (Sp 72), p. 285. Johnson proceeds to develop fundamental differences between American and European fiction that are in large part attributable to James's influence, which is
coincident with the whole Puritan tradition of letters. The difference in a nutshell is this: "Leopold Bloom is the sum of the history of Western civilization, but the major characters in Hemingway, Steinbeck, and Wolfe are only the sums of their own experiences . . ." (p. 291).


22. Thompson, pp. 231, 239.


24. William James, Essays in Philosophy, p. 189.

25. Thompson, p. 246.

26. William James, Pragmatism, p. 17.

27. William James, A Pluralistic Universe, p. 111.


some of the American modernists were familiar with one version and some with the other version of James's *Psychology*, I will cite both, noting differences where appropriate.


38. The best book on the relationship between psychology and literature in the Middle Ages is E. Ruth Harvey's *The Inward Wits: Psychological Theory in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*.

39. William Carlos Williams, *Selected Letters*, John C. Thirlwall, ed. (New York: Obolensky, 1957), p. 239. The Blackmur comments most likely to have aroused Williams's ire are included in *William Carlos Williams: The Critical Heritage*, Charles Doyle, ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 170-72. Blackmur's organicist assumptions blind him to formal alternatives in Williams's poetry. He is so dogmatic that he finds it necessary to insult Williams repeatedly, implying that he is both unintelligent and dishonest for not sharing Blackmur's metaphysic and corollary aesthetic. To Blackmur, Williams is nothing but an "Imagist" who is "just as limited" as H.D.


42. P.G. Whitehouse, "The Meaning of 'Emotion' in Dewey's *Art as Experience,"* JAAC 37, p. 156.

43. Williams, "Belly Music," p. 32.

44. One of the most prolific and long-lived American writers ever, Dewey was a constant presence in the American
popular press from 1885 until 1950, arguing on behalf of all the classic liberal causes from a pragmatic standpoint. He also published constantly in philosophy journals from 1882, and rarely did two years pass without the appearance of a new book or collection of previously-published essays. In *The Dial* Williams's interest in education (much of *The Embodiment of Knowledge* is devoted to a Deweyish discussion of education) probably led him to read "Education and Social Direction" (11 April 1918) and "The Case of the Professor and the Public Interest" (8 Nov. 1917). In "Belly Music," Williams may be referring to any of five issues of *The Dial* between November 1918 and February 1919 in which articles by Dewey on The League of Nations appeared. I have not so far come across any evidence that Williams was regularly reading *New Republic* prior to Malcolm Cowley's assuming the editorship in the 1930s. In the *New Republic* from 1915 Dewey published articles on the whole range of his interests (averaging roughly a dozen articles per year).


49. Williams, Selected Letters, p. 138. Burke, it is worth noting, was going through his most radical phase, as were many young intellectuals. His remarks about Dewey, as a consequence, frequently smacked of condescension, Dewey in the eyes of the young being an old, well-intentioned but feeble liberal with opinions that couldn't be true because they were familiar. Burke reviewed many of Dewey's later books. His reviews strike this writer as on the whole superficial (especially for Burke), a strange mixture of knee-jerk sympathy and an inability to take Dewey seriously. Young radicals may also have been put off at this time by Dewey's cutting and just remarks about their farcical attempts to create a proletarian literature and to conflate polemics and criticism.

50. Williams, Selected Letters, p. 224.


52. William Carlos Williams, The Embodiment of Knowledge, Ron Loewinsohn, ed. (New York: New Directions, 1974), pp. 131-32. Further references will be included in the text with The Embodiment of Knowledge abbreviated as EK.
53. William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 37. The importance Whitehead attributes to this essay has previously been mentioned. For evidence that Williams read Whitehead's book shortly before beginning *The Embodiment of Knowledge*, see *Selected Letters*, pp. 79, 85. Just before the passage cited, Williams discusses some ideas that closely parallel Whitehead's.


55. James, *The Will to Believe*, pp. 5-6.


61. *Letters*, p. 443. To Gilbert Montague, Stevens writes:

\[\text{Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction was written during March and April of 1942: that is to say, just a year ago. It is a collection of just what I have called it: Notes. Underlying it is the idea that, in the various predicaments of belief, it might be possible to yield, or to try to yield, ourselves to a declared fiction. This is the same thing as saying that it might be possible for us to believe in something that we know to be untrue. Of course, we do that every day, but we don't make the most of the fact that we do it out of need to believe, what in your day, and mine, in Cambridge was called the will to believe.}\]

extended discussion of this point, see also Lisa Cole Ruddick, "Models of Consciousness in the Works of William James, Gertrude Stein and George Santayana," DAI 43, 5 (Nov. 1982).

63. Wallace Stevens, The Necessary Angel (New York: Vintage, 1951), p. 54. Further references will be included in the text with The Necessary Angel abbreviated NA.

64. William James, Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 96. James uses the phrase repeatedly elsewhere. See, for example, the "Preface" to The Meaning of Truth, p. 169. When Eliot in "The Hollow Men" wrote "Between the idea/And the reality . . . Falls the shadow," he no doubt expected his readers to recognize the implicit rejection of contextualist notions of truth.

65. James, Pragmatism, p. 97.


67. William James, Psychology: The Briefer Course, p. 177; Principles II, pp. 714-16.


70. Peterson, p. 665.

71. Peterson, p. 666.
72. Peterson, p. 676.
73. Peterson, p. 680.
80. Lyndall Gordon, pp. 21-22.
81. Santayana, Character and Opinion, pp. 63-64.

82. Quoted by Piers Gray, p. 2. Eliot referred to a "temporary conversion to Bergsonism" in his 1948 Magdalene College Chapel sermon, which I have not myself seen. E.J.H. Greene, in another book I have not seen, T.S. Eliot et la France, quotes Eliot as follows:

Je crois que c'était une bonne fortune exceptionnelle, pour un adolescent, de découvrir Paris en l'an 1910 . . . Je suppose qu'il y a encore des bergsoniens: mais pour avoir vraiment connu la ferveur bergsonienne, il faut être allé, régulièrement, chaque semaine, dans cette salle pleine à craquer où il faisait ses cours, au Collège de France. (Paris, 1951, p. 10)


86. Ibid., p. 215. Ralph Barton Perry, James's friend and biographer, stated without proof that James and Bergson arrived independently at their contextualism. James, however, seems always to have cared about ideas themselves and never about getting credit for them. Today there is a growing consensus that most of Bergson's clear, valuable ideas were James's; indeed, the list of ideas original with James from various writers and fields in the first half of the 20th century continues to grow. See John J. McDermott, "Introduction" to *Essays in Philosophy*, or Bjork's *The Compromised Scientist*.

87. Bjork, *The Compromised Scientist*, p. 145. In Chapter 7, "Accommodating the Boundaries of Consciousness," Bjork focuses on James's pioneering work on the unconscious, his interest in which dated from the 1860s. James's taking up the unconscious, which he often referred to as the "subliminal," in the *Principles* ("The Emotions," "The Consciousness of Self," and "Hypnotism" are the main chapters in which he deals with it), shocked his American colleagues, who unanimously rejected the notion as "unscientific." James was an early supporter of "non-scientific" psychologists: "In the wonderful explorations by Binet, Breuer, Freud, Mason, Prince, and others, we have revealed to us

I hope that Freud and his pupils will push their ideas to their utmost limits, so that we may learn what they are. They can't fail to throw light on human nature; but I confess that he made on me personally the impression of a man obsessed with fixed ideas. I can make nothing in my own case with his dream theories, and obviously 'symbolism' is a most dangerous method.


James preferred to talk in what we today consider Jungian terms: "There is a continuum of cosmic consciousness . . . into which our several minds plunge as into a mother-sea or reservoir." (The Confidences of a 'Psychical Researcher,' American Magazine 68 (1909), 580-89. James's position on the unconscious appears today the most reasonable of any of his contemporaries, albeit tinged at times with moralism.

88. Lyndall Gordon, p. 55.
89. T.S. Eliot, Vanity Fair (Feb. 1924), pp. 29, 98.
91. Eliot, Knowledge and Experience, p. 29.
103. Chisholm, p. 246.
105. Chisholm, p. 201.

107. Penollosa, p. 381.

108. Penollosa, p. 382.
Chapter Three

What is the case against Robert Frost? Not that he became lodged in the world of 1890, but that he was so content in doing so. That his years spanned the phenomena of militarism, mechanization, urbanization, yet these are the x-quantities of his universe. That in his lifetime wheels replaced feet and computers brains; that his rocky acres emptied while megalopolis bloomed; but nothing is allowed to discolor the pastoral dream readers might make of his verses. It is argued that today's headline makes tomorrow's footnote, and said--no doubt apocryphally--that the presence of his indispensable, infinitely comforting snow troubled him once he learned of readers deeply Southern not relating. But the story makes its point, that, attempting universality, Frost strands himself in the final evening of a dying era, premodern; that in point of time his work never advances beyond North of Boston; that to a world in future shock, he offers a luminous backward glance at never-neverland.¹

No major 20th-century poet, including Eliot and Pound, has been the target of such a sustained and emotionally-charged attack as Robert Frost has been. And yet when we consider a summation of the case against Frost such as that of Philip Gerber above, what do we find? Frost misread as a latter-day transcendentalist and then damned; Frost's poetry measured according to the crudest conceptions of

¹
mimesis and leftist dogma: the case against Frost is really an *ad hominem*. Unless Frost sticks to one particular political map of reality; unless he depicts strikes, trolleys, urban blight or somehow presents us with a whole picture (never mind how these same critics mock mimesis in other contexts), as if a poem or body of poetry were a museum that should exhaustively display themes properly tagged; unless, in other words, Frost either opts for orthodoxy or a private myth that constitutes no threat to that orthodoxy, his poetry is not only a lie but an irrelevant lie. Topicality and relevance, apparently, are somehow things, like cinnamon and sesame, that a poet adds to his poem, things that exist prior to the reader's interaction with the poem. I find a certain pathos in Granville Hicks's crying in 1930 that Frost has nothing to contribute to the "unification, in imaginative terms, of our culture. He cannot give us the sense of belonging in the industrial, scientific, Freudian world in which we find ourselves."² Such a statement tells me much about Hicks's generation and the intellectual climate in 1930, if little about Frost, who certainly was under no obligation to provide Hicks with the sacred scriptures on which to found an almost-secular church. But Gerber is representative of those writing half a century later in a partisan spirit
to which they are not as scholar-critics entitled; one can't help but compare their malignant spirit with that of a Dryden or a Johnson. Frost's detractors—Hicks, Blackmur, Tate, Winters, Cowley, Brooks, Schneider, Jarrell, Kunitz, Langbaum, and Nitchie, to name just some of the better known ones—bring a special passion to their destructive work. Unfortunately, the utter speciousness of their cavils, based as they are on mimetic models of poetry, Marxist conceptions of the artist's role, ill-founded charges of anti-intellectualism, and Wintersian moral imperatives, has made them no less damaging; for energy that might otherwise have been devoted to an understanding and appreciation of Frost's poetry and its relationship to that of other major American modernists is instead devoted to his defense. Negative critics then gleefully make much of the fact that, while the outpouring of books on Pound, Eliot, Stevens, and Williams continues unabated, "major considerations of Frost are in conspicuous absence."

Significantly, Frost's major recent defenders—Lionel Trilling, Reuben Brower, Lawrance Thompson, Richard Poirier and Frank Lentricchia—have all displayed some awareness of James's formative influence on Frost. Sometimes, as in Lawrance Thompson's biography, this awareness amounts to little more than the recognition that Frost
found comfort and some of his favorite ideas in *The Will to Believe*. Other times, as with Elizabeth Jennings, there is the recognition that what is mistaken for anti-intellectualism is really Frost's pragmatism and pluralism, his scorn for the dogmatic attitude; that, as Reuben Brower puts it, "the Jamesian temperament is congenial to him."\(^5\) Those who recognize the Jamesian element in Frost and grant him his premises can only stand dumb with astonishment at the detractors who, blind to Trilling's "terrifying poet," see either Cowley's "Calvin Coolidge of poetry" or Langbaum's Pied Piper who "leads us away from rather than to the center of the preoccupations of the time," or Mencken's "Whittier without whiskers," or Jarrell's "Olympian Will Rogers out of *Tanglewood Tales*."\(^6\) Given the fact that most of Frost's detractors championed mechanist or organicist metaphysics, one might take their characterizations of Frost as tributes to the constitutive power of metaphysical systems.

Frost regarded himself as a formidable theorist as well as poet, although he never followed through on his often mentioned intention to work his theories out in detail. "To be perfectly frank with you," he wrote John Bartlett on July 4, 1913, "I am one of the most notable craftsmen of my time. . . . I am possibly the only person
going who works on any but a worn out theory (principle I had better say) of versification."7 When even most of Frost's warmest admirers have made few claims for Frost as a theorist, my accepting Frost's estimate of himself may seem not only excessively generous but unnecessary. Elaine Barry, for example, feels that his dismissal of a critic like John Ciardi, his irritability with the symbol hunters, and his advice to Sidney Cox ('Let's not be too damned literary') all savor of the kind of aggressive defensiveness that one finds often in the amateur poet (who excuses basic ineptitude by a pose of taking his poetry neat, heart speaking to heart), but which one is surprised indeed to find in a poet of Frost's ability and sophistication."8 Yet Barry might do better to heed her surprise. Frost is indeed among the best educated and most sophisticated poets of this century, although he displays his attainments less ostentatiously than some. His protective attitude towards his poetry is similar to that of other contextualists such as Williams and Stevens. Contextualists understandably regard attempts by formist and organicist critics to encumber the reader with assistance as at best unhelpful.

Barry deplores what Frost says in the following letter to Lawrance Thompson about a proposed NBC broadcast:

Besides the danger of seeing figures and symbols where none are intended is the dangerous presumption on the
part of the critics that they can go the poet one better by telling him what he is up to. He may think he knows what he means but it takes a modern critic to catch him at what he is up to. Shelley for instance thought he meant the desire of the moth for the star when he was merely up to seduction. A little of the low-down on motivation goes a long way.\(^9\)

Barry apparently feels it incumbent upon her to defend the profession. "There is no recognition whatsoever here, or anywhere else in Frost's writing, that a good critic can constructively elucidate a poem, that there is such a thing as creative criticism, or that a responsible critic can be an arbiter and preserver of those twin virtues of taste and judgment that Frost regarded as the true ends of a literary education. More explicitly, there is here a flat rejection of the assumption that there can be 'more' in a poem than the author is conscious of, that he can write better, more universally, than he knows; and so, by implication, the unconscious is dismissed as an area of creativity."\(^10\)

Throughout Frost's life his attacks on the New Critics were in just this manner dismissed as a crotchety, egotistical old man's tendentiousness. Frost wants to talk about meaning; Barry wants to talk about "a poem"—which to Frost's way of thinking is the critic's reification of his or her own experience. Barry ignores the sentence that precedes the passage she attacks: "The right virtue of the natural
reader is the nice ability to tell always when a poem is being figurative and when it is not being figurative; just as it is the indispensible virtue of a member of society to know how to judge correctly whether his friends and relatives are hinting or not hinting." Frost, in other words, is concerned about preserving for the reader a context within which aesthetic experience is possible; the modern critic would destroy that context (or refuse to recognize that it exists), for, to Frost's way of thinking, intuition and analysis are antagonistic modes. Frost suggests that he and Thompson focus on saying "some bright things about the way poetry might be supposed to be taken by the writer of it, the teacher of it, and the natural reader of it." This is hardly an anti-intellectual suggestion; indeed, Frost hereby intimates that the "modern critic" misrepresents the complex as simple in not recognizing the profoundly different ways in which poetry is "taken" by those whose pragmatic relation to it is different. Frost is all for their talking about their experiences with a poem: "I don't want to make a show of conflicting with you and it is easy to avoid this by according you the position of the natural reader--and claiming it for myself."

But he cannot tolerate a critic's dictating to the reader what kind of experience he shall have--or, rather, that he
shall not have an experience but instead analyze, analyze, analyze. Barry fails to consider that there may be some serious philosophical grounds for Frost's assuming an antagonistic relationship between the critics and himself, equivocates with her defense of "creative criticism," and begs the question when, implicitly dismissing Frost's aesthetic, she scourges him with her own. If Barry, an admirer of Frost's, is contemptuous of him as a thinker, small wonder then that those who have not been attracted to his poetry have dismissed him. What is unfortunate about this is its injustice: from my perspective Frost was the first to work out a thoroughly contextualist poetics--the first wholly new poetics in English since the romantic revolution--and that he did so quite independently of other contextualist poets may give us cause to question our tendency to treat the history of poetry as somehow distinct from the history of ideas.

Frost's letter of July 4, 1913 to John Bartlett continues as follows:

You see the great successes in recent poetry have been made on the assumption that the music of words was a matter of harmonised vowels and consonants. Both Swinburne and Tennyson arrived largely at effects in association. But they were on the wrong track or at any rate on a short track. They went the length of it. Any one else who goes that way must go after them. And that's
where most are going. I alone of English writers have consciously set myself to make music out of what I may call the sound of sense. Now it is possible to have sense without the sound of sense (as in much prose that is supposed to pass muster but makes very dull reading) and the sound of sense without sense (as in Alice in Wonderland which makes anything but dull reading). The best place to get the abstract sound of sense is from voices behind a door that cuts off the words. Ask yourself how these sentences would sound without the words in which they are embodied:

You mean to tell me you can't read?
I said no such thing.
Well read then.
You're not my teacher.

He says it's too late.
Oh, say!
Damn an Ingersoll watch anyway.

One-two-three-go!
No good! Come back--come back.
Haslam go down there and make those kids get out of the track.

Those sounds are summoned by the audile imagination and they must be positive, strong, and definitely and unmistakably indicated by the context. The reader must be at no loss to give his voice the posture proper to the sentence. The simple declarative sentence used in making a plain statement is one sound. But Lord love ye it mustn't be worked to death. It is against the law of nature that whole poems should be written in it. If they are written they won't be read. The sound of sense, then. You get that. It is the abstract vitality of our speech. It is pure sound--pure form. One who concerns himself
with it more than the subject is an artist. But remember we are still talking merely of the raw material of poetry. An ear and an appetite for these sounds of sense is the first qualification of a writer, be it of prose or verse. But if one is to be a poet he must learn to get cadences by skillfully breaking the sounds of sense with all their irregularity of accent across the regular beat of the metre. Verse in which there is nothing but the beat of the metre furnished by the accents of the polly syllabic \[sic\] words we call doggerel. Verse is not that. Neither is it the sound of sense alone.\[11\] (My emphasis)

Frost in letters and interviews over the next couple years elaborated and refined upon his theory of the "sound of sense," perhaps never more clearly and contextualistically than when he defined poetry as "all the different intona­tions of 'oh' and the context written around them." "Think of what 'oh' is really capable: the 'oh' of scorn, the 'oh' of amusement, the 'oh' of doubt, and there are many more."\[12\]

Just as The Will to Believe, Pragmatism, Talks to Teachers and other works by James seem to have inspired specific poems in the Frost canon, so his theories seem to have taken Jamesian premises and concepts as their points of departure. "These sounds are summoned by the audile imagination and they must be positive, strong, and definitely and unmistakeably indicated by the context." Audile, which Lawrance Thompson and Elaine Barry among others seem to
have misconstrued as either a misspelling or a neologism, is the term which James (following Galton) uses for one who thinks "by preference in auditory images." One of James's most significant achievements so far as poets were concerned was his destruction of the traditional and romantic faculty of imagination, a faculty which even Dewey had retained in his own 1887 book on psychology. "There are imaginations, not 'the Imagination,'" James asserts, and then proceeds to describe for starters the "visile," "audile," "motile," and "tactile" imaginations, emphasizing what would become the physiological basis for the contextualist aesthetics of American modernism: "It seems almost certain . . . that the imagination-process differs from the sensation-process by its intensity rather than by its locality."¹⁴ (James also treats the various types of imagination in *Talks to Teachers*, another work Frost used as a text.) Given Jamesian psychology, Frost and other American modernists were no longer confronted with a tissue of metaphor and myth masquerading as a poetics but could begin to understand the perceptual and physiological processes which mediate all human feeling and cognition.

Frost has realized that a particular kind of imagination process or intensified sensation-process is engaged by language. In his chapter in the *Principles* on imagina-
tion and the following one on perception, James provides his readers with a variety of examples drawn from ordinary experience and of experiments which the reader is asked to do himself, as in the following passage, which Frost may have had in mind when he told Bartlett that "The best place to get the sound of sense is from the voices behind a door that cuts off the words":

Take the already-quoted catch, *Pas de lieu Rhone que nous*: one may read this over and over again without recognizing the sounds to be identical with those of the words *paddle your own canoe*. As the English associations arise, the sound itself appears to change. Verbal sounds are usually perceived with their meaning at the moment of being heard. Sometimes, however, the associative irradiations are inhibited for a few moments (the mind being preoccupied with other thoughts), whilst the words linger on the ear as mere echoes of acoustic sensations. Then, usually, their interpretation suddenly occurs. But at that moment one may often surprise a change in the very feel of the word. Our own language would sound very different to us if we heard it without understanding, as we hear a foreign tongue. Rises and falls of voice, odd sibilants and other consonants, would fall on our ear in a way of which we can now form no notion. Frenchmen say that English sounds to them like the *gazouillement des oiseaux*--an impression which it certainly makes on no native ear. Many of us English would describe the sound of Russian in similar terms. All of us are conscious of the strong inflections of voice and explo-
sives and gutterals of German speech in a way in which no German can be conscious of them.

This is probably the reason why, if we look at an isolated printed word and repeat it long enough, it ends by assuming an entirely unnatural aspect. Let the reader try this with any word on this page. He will soon begin to wonder if it can possibly be the word he has been using all his life with that meaning. It stares at him from the paper like a glass eye, with no speculation in it. Its body is indeed there, but its soul is fled. It is reduced, by this new way of attending to it, to its sensational nudity. We never before attended to it in this way, but habitually got it clad with its meaning the moment we caught sight of it, and rapidly passed from it to the other words of the phrase. We apprehended it, in short, with a cloud of associates, and thus perceiving it, we felt it quite otherwise than as we feel it now divested and alone.\(^5\)

(I quote James at such length as well to give some sense of the flavor of James's presentation of psychology as to point to a likely source.) One can readily imagine the young Frost attending to the word in a new way and realizing that, if he could not hear English as if it were a foreign language, there were nevertheless situations in which he could hear people speaking without being able to make out what they were saying. Moreover, he may have recognized that the difference the English "association" made in the perception of the words \textit{paddle your own canoe} was in part attributable to the "sound of sense." Hulme
led all those known as Imagists wrong in focusing attention too exclusively on the lexical aspects of language—on words as isolated things. "Plain speech is essentially inaccurate," Hulme maintained. "It is only by new metaphors, that is, by fancy, that it can be made more precise."\(^\text{16}\) Hulme thought modernism a matter of diction, of words charged with "aesthetic emotion," the word become metaphor, not speech: "Ordinary language communicates nothing of the individuality and freshness of things."\(^\text{17}\) Hulme's is really still a 19th-century world—a world of "absolute discontinuity," as he insists, between "vital and religious things," of opposed faculties of intuition and intellect, of Sin as an absolute state, of words mistaken for, or hypostatized into, things. His is not the world of American modernism. Frost's is. Frost recognizes that the decay of language has to do with the relationship between language and experience, not language and theology; that psychology, not epistemology, poses the relevant questions; that modernism is more a matter of syntax and semantics than words. Far-fetched as it might seem, I hear Hulme and Eliot, with their dogmatic assertion of Original Sin as the word and point of departure for poetry, being cunningly refuted in Frost’s late sonnet, "Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same," while at the same time echoes of James's gazouille-
"ment des oiseaux" and "sensational nudity" are newly embodied in an emerging myth of the sentence sound:

He would declare and could himself believe
That the birds there in all the garden round
From having heard the daylong voice of Eve
Had added to their own an oversound,
Her tone of meaning but without the words.
Admittedly an eloquence so soft
Could only have had an influence on birds
When call or laughter carried it aloft.
Be that as may be, she was in their song.
Moreover her voice upon their voices crossed
Had now persisted in the woods so long
That probably it never would be lost.
Never again would birds' song be the same.
And to do that to birds was why she came.  (PRF, 338-39)

I'll grant your Fall, Frost seems to say; I'll even grant your Adam giving names to things, your Logos, what you will. But then you've granted me my Eve, and she changes the whole context; we change as well as respond to the world around us. Her special quality, a new predicate, a new sentence sound: "an oversound, / Her tone of meaning but without the words."

In addition to reconnecting the processes of imagination and sensation in a way that has enabled Frost to reconceive the elements of poetry, James may have provided Frost with the means for reconceiving the relationship between poet and audience. For in saying that "The reader must be at no loss to give his voice the posture proper to the sentence," Frost seems by his choice of metaphor to be signalling his acceptance of the James-Lange theory of
emotion. Contrary to the traditional theory, according to which perception excites a mental affection called emotion and this state of mind leads to bodily expression, the James-Lange theory holds that perception leads directly to bodily expression, with the awareness of the bodily expression being the emotion: "the more rational statement is that we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble and not that we cry, strike or tremble because we are sorry, or fearful." The implications of the James-Lange theory for poetry, and for aesthetic experience in general, are enormous. Most importantly, the poem is restored as a physical object or constellation of stimuli in response to which the reader or listener experiences first of all physical sensations—and without our having to follow Hulme in reifying words as things. That is, the James-Lange theory provides a means of talking about and taking into account the reader, whose verbal-sensational recreation of the poem leads naturally to the appropriate feelings. Provided the reader recognizes the "posture proper to the sentence," as Frost puts it, he will have the experience the poet anticipated for him. Earlier poetics, especially the romantic, were tied to that older theory of emotion, which necessarily made of poetry a disembodied experience, usually a trans-
action between minds or souls. Within the older psychology, the aesthetic experience is not fundamentally temporal—indeed, is often conceived of as a moment of transcendence that partakes of the timeless or eternal; the James-Lange theory, on the other hand, with its physical aesthetic object being perceived by someone whose sensing, imagining, and feeling are all fundamentally physical and therefore temporally-conditioned, points towards the experimental poetry of American modernism, the increasingly linguistic emphasis of which we see first in Frost. Given Jamesian psychology, Frost need not, as must Hulme, posit an "aesthetic faculty" in order to experience "an aesthetic emotion"; he can instead focus his attention on language and experience.

Consider the following lines from "A Patch of Old Snow":

There's a patch of old snow in a corner,
That I should have guessed
Was a blow-away paper the rain
Had brought to rest.
It is speckled with grime as if
Small print overspread it,
The news of a day I've forgotten—
If I ever read it. (PRF, 110)

Now there are at least two ways we might consider this poem and the sentences of which it is comprised as events. We might on the one hand analyze it in relation to its grammar, its context, its place within the Tradition, and
the like—all of which emphasizes relations arrived at by analysis. Contextualists recognize the importance of relations, but by way of correcting for an historical bias in their favor stress rather the importance of a complementary and opposite aesthetic process. That is, we might on the other hand try to feel this event as a whole or totality, which is to put the emphasis on quality. Frost was insisting that poems began for him as a pervasive quality when he said: "It begins as a lump in the throat, a sense of wrong, a homesickness, a lovesickness. It is never a thought to begin with." 19 Sometime between July of 1913 and February of 1914 Frost reconceived his notion of the "sound of sense" as a "sentence sound"—a significant change in terminology because it indicates his preoccupation with quality. That is, having realized that a special kind of imagination-process or intensified sensation-process is engaged by language, he knew that there must be qualities as specific to the audile imagination as there were to the visible or tactile. As I've noted before, quality unifies an event and can be thought of as, in its simplest form, a feeling—that "lump in the throat"—which may so frame or pervade a situation as to color all its elements; moreover, the quality of an event "can be had only through the intuition of it." 20 With that in mind,
allow me to quote at some length Frost's letter to John Bartlett of 22 February 1914, a letter in which he uses "A Patch of Snow" to exemplify "sentence sounds":

I give you a new definition of a sentence:
A sentence is a sound in itself on which other sounds called words may be strung.
You may string words together without a sentence-sound to string them on just as you may tie clothes together by the sleeves and stretch them without a clothes line between two trees but—it is bad for the clothes.

The number of words you may string on one sentence-sound is not fixed but there is always danger of overloading.

The sentence-sounds are very definite entities. (This is no literary mysticism I am preaching.) They are as definite as words. It is not impossible that they could be collected in a book though I don't at present see on what system they would be catalogued.

They are apprehended by the ear. They are gathered by the ear from the vernacular and brought into books. Many of them are already familiar to us in books. I think no writer invents them. The most original writer only catches them fresh from talk, where they grow spontaneously.

A man is all a writer if all his words are strung on definite recognizable sentence sounds. The voice of the imagination, the speaking voice must know certainly how to behave how to posture in every sentence he offers.

A man is a marked writer if his words are largely strung on the more striking sentence sounds.
A word about recognition: In literature it is our business to give people the thing that will make them say, "Oh yes I know what you mean." It is never to tell them something they don't know, but something they know and hadn't thought of saying. It must be something they recognize.

Frost then quotes "A Patch of Snow" and continues as follows:

Now for the sentence sounds. We will look for the marked ones because they are easiest to discuss. The first sentence sound will do but it is merely ordinary and bookish: it is entirely subordinate in interest to the meaning of the words strung on it. But half the effectiveness of the second sentence is in the very special tone with which you must say--news of a day I have forgotten--if I ever read it. You must be able to say Oh yes one knows how that goes. (There is some adjective to describe the intonation or cadence, but I won't hunt for it.)

First of all, note that Frost has given the sentence a physical existence quite apart from the words of which it alone appears to be composed when visualized on a page. He means by "sentence sound" precisely what contextualists mean by "quality": the quality of the sentence as an event and its sentence sound are the same thing. Anyone with a well-developed linguistic and literary competence will be able to hear the sentence sounds of a poem, or be able to intuit the quality of each sentence. Expressing precisely
what this quality that we experience is never proves easy, though Frost indicates that if only he were diligent enough to search out the adjective to "describe the intonation or cadence," he could. As Tom Vander Ven phrases it without realizing that he is describing Frost's contextualism, "A poem is not a sound of sense itself but the context for one. Given a context of signals which indicate fear or doubt, the reader will experience the sound of fear or doubt in the poem only if he has actually heard those sounds carried on the human voice." This is really as much as to say that Frost has defined the poem along the same lines as the contextualist root metaphor--"the dynamic dramatic active event . . . an act in and with its setting, an act in its context." (WH, 232). I shall later argue that it is within this context that we should understand Frost's calling himself a "synecdochist" in contradiction to imagists and vorticists.

Frost continued to refine his notion of the sentence sound. In December of 1914 he wrote Sidney Cox, mentioning first that Edward Thomas was thinking of writing a book on what Frost's definition of the sentence sound "means for literary criticism" and going on as follows:

It may take some time to make people see—they are so accustomed to look at the sentence as a grammatical cluster of words. The question is where to begin the
assault on their prejudice. For my part I have about decided to begin by demonstrating by examples that the sentence as a sound in itself apart from the word sounds is no mere figure of speech. I shall show the sentence sound opposing the sense of the words as in irony. And so till I establish the distinction between the grammatical sentence and the vital sentence. The grammatical sentence is merely accessory to the other and chiefly valuable as furnishing a clue to the other. You recognize the sentence sound in this: You, you—! It is so strong that if you hear it as I do you have to pronounce the two you's differently. Just so many sentence sounds belong to man as just so many vocal runs belong to one kind of bird. We come into the world with them and create none of them. What we feel as creation is only selection and grouping. We summon them from Heaven knows where under excitement with the audile imagination. And unless we are in an imaginative mood it is no use trying to make them, they will not rise. . . .

. . . We will shake the old unity-emphasis-and-coherence Rhetoric to its foundations.23

Now Lawrance Thompson thinks Frost's theory of the sentence sound was adequately refuted by the actress who maintained that there were "many different ways to read--and to interpret the same poetic passage."24 But that the work of non-contextualist poets can be read in a variety of ways is by no means fatal to Frost's contention that a poetry of qualitatively distinct sentence events successively organized into a larger event is possible. Thompson also thinks
that Frost is engaged in hyperbole when he writes to Sydney Cox that "Words are only valuable in writing as they serve to indicate particular sentence sounds," even though as early as 1894 Frost was writing of sound as the element of poetry "but for which imagination would become reason."\textsuperscript{25} Certainly, non-contextualists must consider such an assertion hyperbole, since they are committed to various views of the poem as words on the page. Frost, however, commits himself to a view of the work as an aural experience or utterance, the sentence sounds or qualities of which must be recreated by the reader. To Frost as to other contextualists, the word and the sentence are events: "Words exist in the mouth not in books. You can't fix them and you don't want to fix them. You want them to change and be different."\textsuperscript{26} It's worth recalling that, to contextualists, "in the end, nothing is valuable but the quality of something."\textsuperscript{27} For Frost is really expressing the same sentiment time and again when he insists on the primacy of the sentence sound or asserts in the same letter: "The living part of a poem is the intonation entangled somehow in the syntax idiom and meaning of a sentence." Frost's thoughts about language are inextricably bound up with his pragmatic determination to shape his own reality. One can hear James's \textit{Will to Believe} still resonating more than
fifteen years after Frost's first encounter with it in the following to Louis Untermeyer (8 July 1915):

There's no greater mistake than to look on fighting as a form of argument. To fight is to leave words and act as if you believed—to act as if you believed. Sometimes I have my doubts of words altogether and I ask myself what is the place of them. They are worse than nothing unless they do something, unless they amount to deeds as in ultimatums and war cries. They must be flat and final like the showdown in poker from which there is no appeal. My definition of literature would be just this, words that have become deeds.28

Frost referred to those who intuited sentence sounds as "true readers," those who did not as "eye readers." He would later in his life rage against the eye-readers who were ransacking his poems for images to picture, cruxes and puzzles to explicate, themes to spatialize in relation to other themes. I think Joseph Garrison is right to indict Frost's critics for paying only lip service to Frost's theory of poetry as "the sound of sense": "Commentaries take frequent notice of the 'personality' of the voice in a given poem and certainly approach different poems as being spoken by different voices, but they do not seriously consider how these voices affect our assessment of the speaker and his relationship to the oral presence of the poem."29 Disdaining the poem as quality, as, in Frost's words, "the speaking tone of voice somehow entangled in
the words and fastened to the page for the ear of the imagination," we try to bring the same critical machinery to bear upon Frost as we do upon Eliot and Pound. Eliot and Pound do best what New Critics, Chicago critics, archetypal critics, structuralists, and deconstructionists all talk about and explicate best: the organization of ideas, concepts, images, textures and the like into spatial constructs. Frost offers a kind and order of complexity not to be found in the work of Pound and Eliot, whose "audile imaginations" are only intermittently brought into play in their poetry (and with less and less frequency in their later work). As mature poets, they appear incapable of aurally organizing whole poems or sections of poems except, as Pound sometimes does in the Cantos, with a chanting regularity, or, as Eliot does in the Four Quartets, with flights of romantic lyricism sandwiched between sections remarkable for their aural blandness. Anyone who has ever listened to recordings of Eliot and Pound reading their own poetry recognizes, I think, that for all their innovativeness in other respects, neither poet conceived of a poetry that was aurally modern. Needless to say, one could argue that they simply were not interested in the sound of their poetry; they associated an emphasis upon the aural with the Victorians and felt they had more important things—logopoeia and phanopoeia—to attend to.
But if one conceives of the poem as an experience, as Frost and Williams began to do quite early in their careers, an experience which one can have or not have and which is constituted by all those relevant details that produce bodily expression, then one would expect a new emphasis on sensational rather than conceptual processes. Frost's poetry is every bit as complex as that of Eliot and Pound (not that complexity is a virtue), but the reader need appreciate very little of that complexity in order to have his or her experience.

Consider, for example, one of Frost's most familiar poems, "Fire and Ice":

    Some say the world will end in fire,
    Some say in ice.
    From what I've tasted of desire
    I hold with those who favor fire.
    But if it had to perish twice,
    I think I know enough of hate
    To say that for destruction ice
    Is also great
    And would suffice.

Now commentators raised in the New Critical tradition have time and again noted the qualifications and understatement, the paradoxes, nascent epigrams, and symbols of Frostian poems like "Fire and Ice," although, as in this particular instance, one such as Reuben Brower might characterize the poem as "grimly ironic," a "poem of dry-eyed acceptance of both passions in their most destructive form," while another such as James Potter might instead
class it as "prosaic" and thus "antipoetic," an example of Frost working in the "low mimetic" rather than the ironic-modernist mode of Yeats and Eliot. We know, however, that if we ask ourselves what Frost wanted us to do with "Fire and Ice"—and what "deed" the poem embodies, since Frost insisted that words "are worse than nothing unless they do something"—then we cannot honestly maintain that he wanted us to analyze or explicate the poem. As Reuben Brower puts it in his general defense of Frost's poetry, "There is no poet of whose voice we are surer than Frost's, no poet whom we hear more distinctly as we read. He is also a poet of distinct and clear statement: we are relatively certain of what he is saying." If we should start searching for relations that will bear explication and discussion, we are likely to make the mistake of T.R.S. Sharma and begin inventing a dialectic of "opposites—fire or ice—and weighing equally dire and momentous alternatives."

But the New Critics would cry "foul!"—"Affective Fallacy!"—at our asking what "Fire and Ice" does. They would have us stick to what the text is, so fearful are they that other questions, particularly those related to aesthetic experience, will lead to relativism, subjectivism, and irreligion. To take the New Critical approach, however, is to turn the poem's speaking tone of voice into a problem rather than a fact—a fact that the reader actually
experiences. The contextualist as well as the New Critic recognizes irony in "Fire and Ice," but note the special meaning irony had for Frost in a passage I've already quoted: "the sentence sound opposing the sense of the words." Ironies are local and context-bound for Frost; indeed, Vander Ven is exactly right in defining Frost's notion of the poem as a context for a sound of sense, or, in explicitly contextualist terms, a context of enhanced or intensified quality. New Critical notions of irony, whether I.A. Richards's as "the bringing in of the opposite" or Warren's as the "reference to the complexities and contradictions of experience," are rooted in idealist metaphysics, whereas Frost's is not. The reader, as Frost always maintained, must recognize and supply the proper sentence sound. If we return to the sentence sounds of the poem, the balanced opposites prove to be an illusion: fire and ice, desire and hate, may be contrasting qualities, but they are by no means antithetical. Indeed, it is only when, as abstract thinkers tend to do, one reads allegorically, reads desire for fire, hate for ice, and recasts the poem as not an experience but a system of concepts that such a misreading is possible.

Now, if we recognize the speaking voice as ironic in Frost's sense here, how do the sentence sounds "oppose" the sense of the words? I would maintain that the sentence
sounds here are readily recognizable as quite the reverse of doom and destruction; it is rather the terseness, ordinaryness and inappropriateness of the sentence sounds that in part create the poem's unsettling effect. We know what inflection to give these syntactic structures, and the inflections we give accord with neither the words, the sound patterns, nor the meter. "Some say . . . " is a construction we use to talk about the weather, not apocalyptic. The judicious quality of the second sentence with its long introductory qualification is similarly out of place given the subject. The third and final sentence, with its spurious if-then structure and periodicity, again has a distinctive sound that we all recognize as that of sweet reason, although in this context, especially on the heels of the first two sentences, it is likely to smack rather of Swift's mad but modest proposer.

The notion that Frost himself regards this state of affairs aloofly, chilly, or with an ironic attitude could only arise among those who were dealing with the poem conceptually—as words on the page—rather than experientially. We have a speaker who regards his experience as of value primarily as it enables him to predict the ultimate fate of the universe. And yet we know that insofar as he has actually experienced desire and hate it has been in concrete and intimate relationships—man and woman, friend
and friend, parent and child. We know too that the antithesis suggested by the title is illusory: if we think that we are confronted with a choice between desire and hate based upon a faulty analogy to fire and ice, then we have missed the irony, which is not an irony of attitude, a romantic irony, nor an irony of reference, but an irony of "the sentence sound opposing the sense of the words," a contextual irony, an interactional experience of a pervasive quality. There are no transtemporal essences here, only the temptation to make of fire and ice, desire and hate, such transtemporal essences. The implicit common term with which we may choose to mediate desire and hate is of course love, which Frost, strenuously avoiding sentimentality, expects we may use to evaluate the analogy and, by our choosing to assert the existence of additional possibilities, to destroy the illusion of antithetical forces or entities. What we as analysts reflecting upon our experience of the poem need to recognize is that our interaction with the detailed context Frost provides is primarily aural. We must not forget that we encounter the poem sensationally. New Critics would treat "Fire and Ice" as a highly conceptual or perhaps symbolical poem—one lacking sensuous or concrete imagery and therefore great insofar as it seems to have "reference to the complexities and contradictions of experience," (i.e., insofar as it is
ironic) -- which makes of the poem a system of relations to be analyzed rather than an experience to be had or a deed to be done.

From Frost's perspective we have first of all here a pattern of axial symmetry, line five serving as a fulcrum or axis upon which the poem is balanced or around which it turns, and with lines one through four and six through nine also displaying symmetrical elements. In conjunction with the axial symmetry we have a texture of sentence sounds counterpointed with other sound patterns. If we treat assonance and rhyme as a single aural texture, for example, consider what Frost has done. Rather than assonance as an intralinear effect and rhyme as a matter of repetition at equal intervals, Frost here gives us in addition that kind of symmetry (already incorporated in the axial symmetry of the poem as a whole) known from ancient times as "golden" and characterized by the so-called "divine proportion": 1.61803+ to 1 or roughly 8 to 5. The chambered nautilus and other shells, phyllotaxy (the arrangement of leaves on a stem), the patterns of petals on various flowers, the genealogy of the drone bee, the number of emergent rays of light reflected by two sheets of glass in contact, the history of an ideal gas, the chromatic scale -- all these phenomena and a host of others manifest the importance of golden section symmetry in the
natural world. The Fibonacci series, which used to be most famous as the structural principle of the equiangular spiral (which the chambered nautilus embodies) but which may soon be known even more widely as the basis of non-algorithmic computer-programming modes, begins additively with the two simplest integers and proceeds thus: 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, 233 . . . In "Fire and Ice" the most striking and highly elaborated pattern of assonances involves the [ai] diphthong, for it begins with a perfect Fibonacci series, occurrences of [ai] corresponding with, and only with, the Fibonacci numbers 1, 5, 8, 13, 21. The [e] series also incorporates the divine proportion but on a slightly different scale (a so-called "Lucas sequence" results) which it would here add little to explain. What is important and remarkable here is that Frost has placed "hate" and "desire," "fire" and "ice" quite literally, if aurally, in the Parthenon. A whole artistic and aesthetic tradition is invoked—the art of ancient Greece, Egypt, and China, the music of Purcell and Bach, Renaissance art and architecture; invoked too, perhaps, is the ethic of the Golden Mean, which throughout Western history has been closely associated with its aesthetic counterpart. The sense of the words in "Fire and Ice" is, as Reuben Brower would have it, "dry-eyed acceptance of both passions in their most destructive
form." In a New Critical sense, this is what the poem is. But the poem as quality (and the essence of quality is emotion) is something quite different. The ironic relationship between the sentence sounds and the sense of the words, intensified by the conflict between the regularity of the footed line and the symmetry of the golden section, leads us to entangle our wills with the poem as the poem is entangled with reality. As Frost summed up his contextualist poetics:

There are only three things, after all, that a poem must reach: the eye, the ear, and what we may call the heart or the mind. It is the most important of all to reach the heart of the reader. And the surest way to reach the heart is through the ear. The visual images thrown up by a poem are important, but it is more important still to choose and arrange words in a sequence so as virtually to control the intonations and pauses of the reader's voice. By the arrangement and choice of words on the part of the poet, the effects of humor, pathos, hysteria, anger, and in fact, all effects, can be indicated or obtained.35

Clearly, the poetics of contextualism is rooted first and last in physical perception. (And this, finally, must be its answer to those deconstructionists who would ask the blessing of contextualism: quality is too central a category for the deconstructionists to jettison it and still claim contextualist antecedents.)
Frost recognizes that "The visual images thrown up by a poem are important, but it is more important still to choose and arrange words in a sequence so as virtually to control the intonations and pauses of the reader's voice." James's treatment of language in the *Principles* provides the theoretical framework within which we can precisely understand what Frost means here and how his sentence sounds were related to his "synecdochism." James defines language as "a system of signs different from the things signified, but able to suggest them." He then hypothesizes that the origins of language lie in instances of "interjectional expression of strong emotion" that are precisely analogous to Frost's sentence sounds. James's central concern, however, is to explain novelty in reasoning and language, which he does in terms of analogy and similarity. In modern terms, he is preoccupied with the problem of metaphor, a problem to which he returned in a famous address several years after the *Principles*, "The Knowing of Things Together." (1894). The problem of metaphor (one of the great scandals of modern philosophy) is for James the problem of the "synthetic unity of consciousness." He posits two ways of knowing things: "knowing them immediately or intuitively, and knowing them conceptually or representatively." We know intuitively, linguistically "signs," or, as Frost calls them, sentence
sounds. We know conceptually or representatively things together in their relations. Intuition has primacy, since "empirically, we have learned that things must be known in succession and singly before they can be known together." 37

As Rexford Stamper has pointed out, "Frost's chief aesthetic problem was how to order the expression of subjective experience without forcing a pattern on a world which would not conform to a pattern." 38 As empiricists, contextualists respect the world's recalcitrance to pattern; as pluralists, they insist upon it. For "there must be something wrong," Frost says in "A Minor Bird," "In wanting to silence any song." (PRF 251). Frost's theory of the sentence sound represents the first step in his solution to the modern artist's problem. James's notion of metaphor or analogy as a synthetic unity of consciousness provided the other. To the extent that Frost is faithful to the sentence sounds of ordinary speech, themselves imbued or invested with quality, Frost can be sure that he is capturing the form that inheres in any event. The immediate results were the fine monologues and dialogues of North of Boston (1914), some of the finest poems of which-- "Home Burial," "The Black Cottage," "A Servant to Servants," and "After Apple-Picking"--are not among his best known. But as Frost well knew, the form he was claiming for his
poems was by no means innocent of metaphysics:

In my Mending Wall was my intention fulfilled with the characters portrayed and the atmosphere of the place? You might be amused by my answer. I should be sorry if a single one of my poems stopped with either of those things—stopped anywhere in fact. My poems—I should suppose everybody's poems—are all set to trip the reader head foremost into the boundless. Ever since infancy I have had the habit of leaving my blocks carts chairs and such like ordinaries where people would be pretty sure to fall forward over them in the dark. Forward, you understand, and in the dark. 39

Frost realized that, whether he called the poem a "figure of the will braving alien entanglements" or a "momentary stay against confusion," he was redefining the poem as an act or event and that his view of form was rooted in his Jamesian view of the world. "Each poem clarifies something," he told John Ciardi in a late interview. "But then you've got to do it again. You can't get clarified to stay so ... In a way, it's like nothing more than blowing smoke rings. Making little poems encourages a man to see that there is shapeliness in the world. A poem is an arrest of disorder." 40

In his oft-quoted definition in "The Figure a Poem Makes," Frost says that "it runs a course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of life—not necessarily a great clarification, such as sects and cults are founded on, but in a momentary stay against confusion." (SP, 18).
A poem, then, has successive or temporal form as it happens (sentence sounds, the sound of sense)—a form that can and must be intuited before any other kind of form can become possible; and a poem can have a kind of form based upon the capacity of consciousness to deal in synthetic unities—form that is rooted in our capacity to know conceptually or representatively and that is best typified by the perception of metaphor, analogy, or similarity. As soon as he met with them in 1913 and 1914, Frost recognized in imagism and vorticism attempts to formulate a modernism inimical to his in that it was formulaic and superficial. His wry response was "synecdochism": "for I prefer the synecdoche in poetry—that figure of speech in which we use a part for the whole." One can have an "emotional complex in an instant of time" only by way of James's "synthetic unity of consciousness"—and therefore only after successive and single intuition of the parts (sentence sounds within a dramatic, lyric, discursive or satiric context). But if the poem's diachronic dimension is prior and is conditioned metaphysically, then the notion of an image as autonomous, pure, spontaneous, or creative is untenable. As Dewey put it, language "joins the gap between existence and essence"; and that gap is already joined before conceptual or representative knowing (anal-
ysis) is possible. Frost would agree with Monroe Beardsley that "any universal ontological statement must involve a synecdoche, for any interesting word that is applied to everything must be one that has already acquired a usage in which the word is applied to less than everything." Frost is insisting upon the temporal dimension in poetry, for it was the connection between the contextualist root metaphor and pluralism that James had proposed as the answer to determinism and despair. In a famous footnote in The Will to Believe James had argued, "To say that time is an illusory appearance is only a roundabout manner of saying there is no real plurality, and that the frame of things is an absolute unit. Admit plurality, and time may be its form." Frost's synecdochism is not a spatialization of poetic form but a conceptualization of the relationship between poetic form and the form of everything.

Rather than examining one of those poems which have been discussed to the point of tedium, let's consider Frost's "synecdochism" in an early poem that has attracted little comment and that little negative:

An Encounter

Once on the kind of day called "weather breeder,"
when the heat slowly hazes and the sun
By its own power seems to be undone,
I was half boring through, half climbing through
A swamp of cedar. Choked with oil of cedar
And scurf of plants, and weary and overheated,
And sorry I ever left the road I knew,
I paused and rested on a sort of hook
That had me by the coat as good as seated,
And since there was no other way to look,
Looked up toward heaven, and there against the blue,
Stood over me a resurrected tree,
A tree that had been down and raised again—
A barkless specter. He had halted too,
As if for fear of treading upon me.
I saw the strange position of his hands—
Up at his shoulders, dragging yellow strands
Of wire with something in it from men to men.
"You here?" I said. "Where aren't you nowadays?
And what's the news you carry—if you know?
And tell me where you're off for—Montreal?
Me? I'm not off for anywhere at all.
Sometimes I wander out of beaten ways
Half looking for the orchid Calypso."

and included in Mountain Interval (1916), "An Encounter"
is one of the first of the "danger signals" (previewing
the "Sam Slick of Slickville" of later years), according
to George Kittie, because it "demonstrates arch jocularity
at the expense of civilization." 45 I think it stretching
the connotations of "arch jocularity" to call even the
last several lines such, but we'll let that stand for the
moment. By reversing the process Frost would have us follow and analyzing first, I think, we can readily ascertain
that the speaker's tone is more sorrowfully ironic than
archly or jocularly so.

Some of Frost's earliest poems had to do with bog-trotting for orchids. Indeed, "The Quest of the Purple-fringed," first published in 1901, dates from roughly the
same period as Frost's 1897 encounter with The Will to
Believe. According to Lawrance Thompson, "Frost's own intensity of response, the almost religious quality of awe and worship which he then (and always thereafter) associated with bog-trotting for orchids, was later given a self-deprecatingly humorous statement in the poem eventually called 'The Encounter.'" An Encounter" is interesting, however, because it is clearly an encounter with doubt, an older man's sceptical, pluralist creed, the whole poem synecdochic in Frost's sense of clarification. Of course, once we focus our attention upon the synthetic unity of the poem, we see Frost's puns and ambiguities—see that the day is a "whether" breeder, that the sun's own power is stifling and obscurantist, the speaker's risking a new and personal path unproductive in terms of any new and romantic relationship with nature. This is a world that is full of resistances and snags. To be sure, one might choose to see as comic the "hook" that seats the speaker, the telephone pole that is quite literally a "resurrected tree," a crucifix framed against the blue. But it is a "barkless specter": no hot pursuit by the hounds of heaven. The telephone lineman brings no genuine means of communication, no good "news" for the wanderer. Then we finally learn what's brought Ulysses to the swamp: "Sometimes I wander out of beaten ways/Half looking for the orchid Calypso." Orchid, as the classically-educated
Frost well knew, was Greek for testicle, which many species of orchids resemble; while Calypso was the sea nymph who loved and held Ulysses for seven years, at the end of which time Jupiter commanded his release. The Calypso orchid grows in bogs and swamps in New England. The whole point here is that the religious associations are arbitrarily asserted and ironic. The speaker is imposing meaning on the swamp and knows his meanings to be imposed. He has not found the seminal orchid; besides, Calypso's isle is a bog, and were he to find what he sought, he might not be let go. He has achieved clarity, not epiphany, and this with another person in a specifically human context. For all his remaining sceptical of the value of a telephone line, he does not venture so far as to condemn connection with that distant place that is not Calvary but simply Mount Real. Of such is "An Encounter" a synthetic unity. The sentence sounds of "An Encounter" work against the puns and ironies; indeed, Frost uses the full sweep of the iambic line in a fashion that approaches the elegiac.

Since a number of people have already previously done so, I see little point in detailing specific parallels between James's essays and Frost poems like "Sitting by a Bush," "For Once, Then, Something," "Neither Out Far Nor In Deep," "All Revelation," "West-Running Brook," or
"Riders." The affinities between Frost and James are obvious. Many have also pointed out that Frost stands squarely in the American colloquial tradition that runs from Emerson through Whitman and Dickinson to Robinson and Frost. More important and less obvious is the connection between Frost's two primary affinities: i.e., Frost used the Jamesian metaphysic to remake or modernize the American colloquial tradition. It was James and the other pragmatists who first recognized the primacy of language in psychology, epistemology, and metaphysics. Frost's theory of the sentence sound in conjunction with his synecdochism represent a first approximation of contextualist poetics.
Notes


11. Selected Letters, pp. 79-81. The main discussions of Frost's theory of sentence sounds are the following:


17. Hulme, p. 163.


22. Vander Ven, "RF's Dramatic Principle of 'Over-

sound,'" p. 250.


34. The literature on the golden section is vast, the best introductions H.E. Huntley, The Divine Proportion: A Study in Mathematical Beauty (New York: Dover, 1970) and Marius Cleyet-Michaud, Le Nombre D'Or, 2nd ed. (Presses
Universitaires de France, 1975). Fechner in the 19th century demonstrated that people have a strong preference for golden section symmetry, although whether that preference is innate or acquired remains a subject of debate. It has recently been found that nerve cells in the human body increasingly approximate in their firing to "golden" correlations as we move from the finger tips to the central nervous system and the brain. We are likely to find that the golden section is the key to our auditory system since it alone (by virtue of the Fibonacci series) makes easy spatio-temporal translations: and from the moment when a sound first triggers a response in the cochlea until the stimulation of the auditory cortex rhythmic impulses must five times or more be projected onto a flat surface and then be re-encoded as rhythmic impulses.

Frost's interest in the golden section has previously been noted by R.F. Fleissner, "Like 'Pythagoras' Comparison of the Universe with Number': A Frost-Tennyson Correlation" in *Frost Centennial Essays*, pp. 207-220.


37. James, *Essays in Philosophy*, pp. 73, 81.


41. Thompson, The Years of Triumph, p. 485.

42. Dewey, Experience and Nature, p. 139.


44. James, The Will to Believe, p. 139.


46. Thompson, The Early Years, p. 223.
Chapter Four

Part of the change in Williams's poetry between the time he published *The Tempers* (1912) and the fully modernist *Al Que Quiere* (1917) and *Kora in Hell: Improvisations* (1917, 1920) can reasonably be attributed to his having read T.S. Eliot's poetry. Another influence, suggested by Williams himself, might have been the cubist paintings in the 1913 Armory Show (which, however, the usually reliable Flossie insisted he never saw, although he certainly read and heard about them). But Bram Dijkstra seems to me to exaggerate the influence of the visual arts on a word-centered man when he argues that Williams "took his cue from the manner in which objects were juxtaposed at will in certain paintings by Delauney and others, and proceeded to do with language what they were doing with paint." Williams's mistrust of sight as the most "abstract" of the senses and the source of the subject/object dichotomy is well known. Besides, Williams loved dance as much as he loved painting, and his response to seeing Isadora Duncan dance for the first time just a few years prior to the Armory Show, while ecstatic, was thoroughly Keatsian. The adept may have a difficult time abstracting the categories necessary to understand the new in art but usually at least knows what to look for (or
such is the critic's main reason for being). While I can readily imagine artists in arts as different as painting and poetry influencing one another, I can only imagine that happening when the influenced party has achieved a level of training and sophistication in the other art beyond anything Williams had achieved by 1913—unless the influenced party already possesses the requisite categories. In other words, I think it more likely that the Armory Show confirmed Williams in his modernism than caused that modernism. It makes more sense to me to regard the young Williams as responsive to new trends in the various arts because he had come to share in the "intellectual temper" of the age, come to take for granted that "reality is change, growth, action, creation. . . . that consciousness does not exist . . . In the immediate what appears is the thing, not the mind to which the thing appears. Even in the passions, when closely scanned introspectively, you will find a new sensitiveness or ebullition of the body, or a rush of images and words . . . ." According to George Santayana, writing in 1913, these Jamesian and Bergsonian notions are what has the intellectual world in "full career towards disintegration."

"What!" Santayana exclaims sarcastically, "The world a gradual improvisation? Creation unpremeditated?"

We need not regard the technique of juxtaposition that Pound and Williams developed as something the origins
of which are shrouded in mystery or as something for which we need to pinpoint a specific precedent. In each previous aesthetic particular ideal forms were implied. But at any time artists also have available to them a range of variant, recombinant, and idiosyncratic formal possibilities that constitute in effect potential precedents to which appeal may be made. When the modernists rejected earlier aesthetics, they each of them no doubt thought of many a precedent to which their experience had exposed them. I could as plausibly, I think, point to a book most of the American modernists had read as Dijkstra could point to the Armory Show.

In a letter to James in 1903, Bergson, while enthusiastically praising *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, reserved special praise for James's "quite novel procedure, which consists in giving the reader in sequence a series of *impressions d'ensemble* which intersect and at the same time fuse with one another in his mind. There you have opened a way in which you will certainly be followed by many others . . ." In developing his new metaphysic, James naturally began to put into practice changes in style and presentation that reflected a new author-reader relationship implied in his metaphysic's aesthetic. By the same token, any contextualist could independently have developed the technique of juxtaposition or *impressions*
d'ensemble." Williams, for example, realized that "Understood in a practical way, without calling upon mystic agencies, of this or that order, it is that life becomes actual only when it is identified with ourselves." (115). For Williams this does not lead to romantic solipsism because his is a pragmatist's nature that "possesses the quality of independent existence, of reality which we feel in ourselves. It is opposed to art but apposed to it." (121). Thus in that moment when he pragmatically identifies the self and the actual, the essential step—a metaphysical step—is taken: "it is a wordless/world." Theology can no longer dictate the logos. Poets regain the right to create their own worlds:

They enter the new world naked,  
cold, uncertain of all  
save that they enter. All about them  
the cold, familiar wind—

Now the grass, tomorrow  
the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf  
One by one objects are defined—
It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf  

"They" probably refers to the bushes and small trees along the road to the contagious hospital; but the uncertainty of the reference is certainly intended to show a closing of the gap between things and people without any loss of definition. Indeed, the juxtaposition here is temporally based: "the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf" will be juxtaposed to the grass "tomorrow," and yet it is realized in the experience of the poem now.
In short, my thesis here shall be that Williams's contextualism—the categories within which he understood and responded to events in the art world—however it originated and developed—constituted the necessary and sufficient condition for Williams's modernism. If the Armory Show meant anything to him, it was because he had already emerged from that vast transcendentalist nature of metaphor and symbol, with all its bifurcations, and was thinking in terms of a universe in which system is imposed, relations real.

Consider, for example, the "improvisations" Williams claimed to have written daily in 1917 and from which he chose some 81 (which he then divided into 27 groups of 3), adding commentaries and a "Prologue" in 1918 before publishing the whole in 1920 as Kora in Hell: Improvisations. One of the most engaging and underrated works of the American modernists (Philip Gerber, in his study of Williams's critical reception through 1920—"So Much Depends: The Williams Foreground"—does not even mention it), Kora is typical of those works that have suffered at the hands of the formist and organicist critics who have dominated literary discussion since WW2 and who are singularly ill-equipped to deal with contextualist works. In Kora neither the kind of coherence, integration and self-consistency pleasing to organicists nor the kind of unity and adherence to received generic norms pleasing to formists is readily apparent. In fact, rather than coherence and formal unity, Williams announces that his aim is "brokenness" or "fragmentation."
His attitude towards unity clearly is already that which he would describe this way in "An Essay in Virginia" (1925):

Unity is the shallowest, the cheapest deception of all composition. In nothing is the banality of the intelligence more clearly manifested. There is no less significant matter for the attention. Every piece of writing, it matters not what it is, has unity. Inexpert or bad writing most terribly so. But ability in an essay is multiplicity, infinite fracture, the intercrossing of opposed forces establishing any number of opposed centres of stillness. *(Imaginations, p. 323)*

Hardly a writer who considered genres sacred, Williams would not have objected to this remark's being given a reference more general than to just the essay. Within the worlds of discourse created by other aesthetics and their implied metaphysics, unity is both an aesthetic problem and a goal. But in contextualist aesthetics unity is already in one sense guaranteed by the nature of the aesthetic occasion itself, which will have as much, and the same kind of unity as any other experience. Whereas New Critics conceive of a work of art as an organic, autonomous whole, contextualists consider the work a total situation that, in the case of literature, includes a reader or listener, circumstances (which in theory would potentially include much more than the literary text itself as other aesthetics conceive of it, though just how much more could perhaps never be precisely defined), and the interaction between
the two. In his early poetry, Williams's attempts to compose a situation are often awkward, if touching in their earnestness, as in "January Morning":

All this--
was for you, old woman.
I wanted to write a poem
that you would understand.
For what good is it to me
if you can't understand it?
But you got to try hard--7

Contextualists focus rather on what makes this situation a single, whole event: the intuition of quality, which, had intensely, is what Dewey meant by seizure, and what poets often mean by ecstasy. The simplest linguistic expressions of quality are ejaculations--God! Yes! No! Good!--and exclamations, of which Al Que Quiere is full. In "Sub Terra" Williams is fairly successful in conveying a Whitmanesque urgency to his reader:

You!
to go with me a-tip-toe,
head down under heaven,
nostrils lipping the wind! (CEP, 118)

But to achieve a wider range of effects he had to try to learn more about the aesthetic situation.

Whereas the New Critics in their emphasis upon the work as an objective structure or texture of elements--a "simulacrum" of reality--provided us with methods of textual interpretation and explication that in a sense were
intended to obviate the need for any reconceptualization of aesthetic experience, the contextualists provided us with a notion of aesthetic experience as simple as it was new. As Pepper defines it, "The aesthetic experience is simply that of being vividly aware of what is actually going on." According to earlier aesthetics, Williams could only ironically have claimed "the supreme importance/of this nameless spectacle":

an elderly man who
smiled and looked away
to the north past a house--
a woman in blue
who was laughing and
leaning forward to look up
into the man's half
averted face
and a boy of eight who was
looking at the middle of
the man's belly
at a watchchain--

Williams's originally sensory experience ceases to be "nameless" and achieves high aesthetic value to the degree Williams succeeds in making it into a vivid verbal situation suffused with its unique quality. For organicists, aesthetic experience is predicated on the notion of getting out of or transcending the world of mere appearance. As James Breslin in his excellent book on Williams puts it,
what the American modernists "were attacking was not just a style that had gone stale, but the notions of ideality that were ultimately behind the style. Modern art starts with the recognition that all transcendent sources of order and value have broken down; the modern artist lives in a world that is broken, neutral, indifferent to human feeling or purpose."\(^9\) Eliot, Ransom, and the New Critics made it their mission to save and reform that style (The Tradition) once they recognized that the metaphysics and theology to which they were committed could not be reconciled with the new style. Where I disagree with Breslin a bit is with his covertly carrying the idealism of the Tradition into the modern artist's world, hypostatizing that world, terming it "broken" rather than plural, "neutral" and "indifferent" when these words are likely to be construed as implying an attitude and therefore some being that can have an attitude. The contextualist conceptualization of aesthetic experience leads to a major simplification of human experience: aesthetic experience becomes continuous with normal daily experience. We need only look and there are

\[ \text{little frogs} \]
\[ \text{with puffed-out throats,} \]
\[ \text{singing in the slime.} \quad (\text{CEP, 161}) \]

Moreover, given James's recasting of the question of free
will as essentially a question of attention, aesthetic experience is normal, central, potentially ordinary, fully human experience and the type of what freedom man knows. Rather than treating aesthetic experience as quasi-religious, or removed from ordinary experience, or as the pale shadow of organized religion,

as if the earth under our feet were
an excrement of some sky
and we degraded prisoners
destined
to hunger until we eat filth. (Imag., 132)

Williams offers as "Spring and All" what is "by the road to the contagious hospital."

Williams's choice of subject in Kora, therefore, while outlandish from the point of view of other aesthetics, comes naturally to a contextualist, who denies that his subject must somehow be locateable within some sort of increasingly abstract pyramid of significance. Williams is trying to get to know his own immediate world, to make "contact" as he would later express it:

And in proportion as a man has bestirred himself to become awake to his own locality he will perceive more and more of what is disclosed and find himself in a position to make the necessary translation. The disclosures will then and only then come to him as reality, as joy, as release.
Thus *Kora* has unity of purpose sustained over a year's time but otherwise possesses only certain other features from which the reader may, should he so choose, construct a unity—when he might better be having an experience. Contextualists do not regard unity as an evil but like everyone else as a good; unlike the adherents of other aesthetics, however, contextualists believe that unity, organicity, integration and the like must much of the time be sacrificed to what is really important— to what distinguishes aesthetic experience from those other kinds of experience with which it is continuous: namely, vividness or intensity. Williams is uncompromising in his contextualist values: "poetry should strive for nothing else, this vividness alone, *per se*, for itself." It is according to this criterion—vividness—that Williams judges the poet's tools. He continues: "The realization of this has its own internal fire that is 'like' nothing. Therefore the bastardy of simile. That thing, the vividness which is poetry by itself, makes the poem. There is no need to explain or compare. Make it and it is a poem."¹¹ We can see particularly clearly in a work like *Kora* what it means for an artist to aim at vividness or intensity as his primary aesthetic value.

Williams's rejection of the generic notions of the formists is too well known to merit further discussion,
especially since scholars are now agreed that Kora was really without precedent, Pound and others wrong in suggesting that it was a rehash of the French prose poetry of the previous century. Williams himself raises the question of precedent or genre right from the outset, opening his Prologue with the words, "The sole precedent I can find for the broken style of my prologue is Longinus on the Sublime and that one farfetched." For the body of the work he claims novelty, although for the idea of arranging his improvisations with notes or interpretations following them he takes a bow in the direction of Metastasio, whose Varie Poesie Dell' Abate Pietro Metastasio (1795) Pound had left behind after a visit.

Williams had been deeply disappointed by the response of both reviewers and friends to Al Que Quiere—rightly so, I think we can see in retrospect, for it contains some of his best work and compares favorably with any other collection of that decade. But the public response of the reviewers was minimal, Conrad Aiken content to ask "Is it poetry?" and the reviewer in Poetry sure she saw in Williams a poet of "pure sensation" whose volume is "a small garden induced to grow in unlikely surroundings." Nor did he receive the recognition he craved from his peers. Each original writer, perhaps, must teach his audience how to read his work.
When a writer feels he is quite literally, if metaphysically, living in a new and unprecedented world, the problem is compounded, for metaphysics and aesthetics are bound up together, and the writer is forced to peddle both to his audience at once. *Kora* reflects Williams's contextualist response to a problem faced to a greater or lesser degree by all original artists.

In effect Williams models the kind of aesthetics his work assumes. The Prologue, I would argue, is an integral (in the contextualist sense of the word) part of the total delight that is *Kora*, despite Williams's later agreeing to its independent appearance in Selected Essays, which has led to its frequent treatment as embarrassing proof of Williams's intemperate jealousy of Eliot. The commentaries or interpretations on the improvisations are similarly an integral part of the work in my view. In the commentaries Williams models the kind of engagement within the aesthetic situation that he desires for the reader, in each case his own "more or less opaque commentary" teaching by example. *Kora* as a whole consists of a variety of juxtaposed moments, two sets of which are parallel series. All moments have been rendered in such a way as to emphasize the immediacy of experience, immediacy being according to Williams both the hallmark of modernism and to the uninitiated the source of distress "due to the necessary
appearance of disorder in all immediacy . . . "15

In the Prologue Williams tries to create a context for the reader and also provides a series of negative examples. He opens the Prologue by talking about his mother at some length, she being his positive model. She is a woman who, when in Rome, never went out without fear of getting lost, a woman given to "rollicking" camaraderie with "disreputable" men of "picturesque" personalities, a woman "incapable of learning from benefit or disaster," a woman "given over to frequent periods of great depression" but "by nature the most light-hearted thing in the world." Indeed, his mother is a Kora (or Persephone), of sorts, and the very type of "a creature of great imagination. I might say this is her sole remaining quality." (6-8). His mother sees "the thing itself without forethought or afterthought but with great intensity of perception . . . ." (8). Significantly, in presenting his mother as a "creature of great imagination" Williams includes descriptive details that keep her nailed down, so to speak, prevent her turning into a symbol; her having imagination is made to seem almost incidental to her being the woman who never went out without fear of getting lost.

Williams wishes to become more like his mother, hence, improvisation: "It is to loosen the attention, my attention
since I occupy part of the field, that I write these improvisations." (14). At least two things are noteworthy here. First of all, Williams seems to indicate by his choice of words an awareness that, in Jamesian terms, he is defining his aim in terms of freedom, James having re-formulated the problem of freedom as a matter of attention, and in effect turned the whole of human reality into an aesthetic medium. Given the excellence of Williams's medical education, it is inconceivable that the Principles was unfamiliar to him.

Secondly, in opening the Prologue to Kora with an extended portrait of his mother, Williams clearly is daring Freudian psychology to prove itself relevant. Williams at this time regarded the destruction of Freud's influence as one of the greatest services anyone might do mankind (the other being the destruction of the "French influence"). In 1921 he wrote Kenneth Burke, "the world has fucked itself with Freud too long." Williams all his life rejected the notion that art was fundamentally neurotic, a sublimation of libidinal energy. On the one hand, his treatment of his mother here is both respectful and tender. He hides her behind no attenuated symbolism but rather focuses on what she is actually like in her most ordinary moments. Williams's invocation of a Freudian "non-context," however, is a sardonic joke—a joke that exemplifies his basic method for
intensifying the vividness of his improvisations: conflict. Two views of man, art, and the world are in conflict here, at stake the identity of Williams's true love whose return to the surface would make the world fruitful again. In this case, Williams himself, if not necessarily all readers, can easily resolve the conflict by dismissing Freud's pretensions as absurd; Williams's mother is no rival of Flossie's, no sought-after object of desire to Williams. (Nor, since Williams once identified Kora with himself, is she his muse's rival.)

Charles Doyle terms the Prologue a "collage of anecdotes, letters received, fragments of a poem"—meaning to imply no particular structure thereby. We might better term the structure montage in Dos Passos's sense of the word: "The whole method is based on contrast. That is what I was saying about what they call montage in the movies. It is a method of getting an effect by using contrasting scenes, contrasting styles. The whole effort was to sort of give another dimension by bringing in things that were going on at the same time as the actual narrative." This is the technique Dos Passos used in the newsreel sequences in U.S.A. and an especially apt technique for writers who hold to a contextualist aesthetic, for no technique (except the closely related ideogram, which it could be argued is the same technique) gives greater scope and emphasis to con-
flict and novelty.

Williams next recalls Walter Arensburg's having told him "that the only way man differed from every other creature was in his ability to improvise novelty," mentions an anecdote involving Duchamp and what is now called "found" art, and then proceeds to set Arensburg and Duchamp at odds with one another. One might naturally (but non-contextualistically) expect that novelty cannot on the one hand be man's distinguishing feature and yet, on the other hand, a stained glass window that has fallen out and lain broken on the ground could qualify as a novel piece of art: that Williams himself would have to opt for either Arensburg's or Duchamp's view. But Williams presents the conflict and passes on, content to leave it unresolved. So he will do throughout Kora, which resembles nothing so much as a montage of conflicts—and not because, as in the very first example of conflict, Freud at odds with James, the resolution is obvious. It is rather that the conflict is what counts for Williams; conflict is what heightens aesthetic experience and intensifies the qualitative aspect of events. Organicists and romantics are also fond of conflict, antitheses, opposites, polarities and the like; but the organicist's or romantic's whole notion of form centers around the resolution, integration, synthesis, or transcending of these conflicts, antitheses, opposites, polarities, etc.
Contextualists must on the contrary maintain that resolvable conflicts are not very useful to an artist, even when by some fancy Hegelian footwork the new synthesis is held to generate further conflict or to carry within itself its own contradiction. Contextualist aesthetics focuses on enhancing vividness, and nothing, paradoxically (this is an empirical fact) enhances vividness like conflict and tension. Therefore, Pepper says, "the organization that is wanted in art is one that produces harmony without dissolving conflict." Needless to say, contextualists also find appealing the parallel metaphysical assertion: in a pluralistic universe, any unity that is not an extremely local unity is suspect. If what Pound calls the "letch for unity" is the subverter of sound metaphysics, it is also the enemy of aesthetic experience. As Williams might express it, things in conflict are in contact. J. Hillis Miller seems on the one hand to appreciate Williams's distance from romanticism, but at the same time to be unable to overcome his New Critical training. According to Miller, "Kora in Hell is a sequence of free variations on this theme of polarity." But there is a critical difference between conceiving of conflict as a theme (or "motif," as Miller also refers to it) that unifies Kora, as if it were a verbal icon, and of conflict as a necessary part of
Williams's basic method. Williams loves conflict, we might say, but he disdains "polarities," a word which implies things diametrically opposed within a special frame of reference.

But schism which seems adamant is diverted from the perpendicular by simply rotating the object cleaving away the root of disaster which it seemed to foster.  (CEP, 266)

Williams loves to turn the pair into the series, to push his compositions towards anarchy: "It's the anarchy of poverty delights me ..." (CEP, 415). Miller's "polarities" are the creation of his own dialectical spectacles.

Williams crowds the rest of his Prologue with people, incidents, letters, peeves, snatches of poetry—developing his aesthetics and metaphysics by fits and starts as he goes. In a paragraph like the following his purpose seems to be to list the contextualist aesthetic values, but even here he presents a pair and suggests some mysterious conflict between them: "Of all those writing poetry in America at the time she was here Marianne Moore was the only one Mina Loy feared. By divergent virtues these two women have achieved freshness of presentation, novelty, freedom, break with banality." (10). Ezra Pound is then introduced
to the reader, Williams relating the famous incident in which his father taught Pound the virtue of plain speech and then presenting without immediate comment a letter of Pound's written shortly after the first improvisations appeared in the *Little Review* "in which he urged me to give some hint by which the reader of good will might come at my intention." (10). Pound terms Williams "a blooming foreigner" and effete easterner" whose improvisations ("very glad to see") are "wholly incoherent unamerican poems"(11). Pound does have some insight, however, into the improvisations, although non-contextualists might need his praise translated: "The thing that saves your work is opacity, and don't forget it. Opacity is NOT an American quality. Fizz, swish, gabble, and verbiage, these are *echt amerikanisch*." (11). J. Hillis Miller, among others, has read a great deal into Pound's "opacity": *Kora in Hell* is a thick murk of words which tries to go back toward the flux of inarticulate sound at the origin of all language."21 In context, however, it is clear that Pound is referring to "opacity" as a quality opposed to "fizz, swish, gabble and verbiage." Dark and substantial, Pound means (here as he frequently does Pound lets the Latin root take precedence over current usage), not murky or unintelligible. In other words, Pound means that the improvisations resist the reader and are thereby enhanced in quality.
Next Williams introduces a letter from Hilda Doolittle, also an old friend with whom he was at odds even "before she began to write poetry . . . When I was with her my feet always seemed to be sticking to the ground while she would be walking on the tips of the grass stems." (12). Hilda he presents within the context of a conflict between the values of the Athenian Greeks and the more adventurous colonizing Greeks. Hilda, he implies, is one of those modern Hellenists "too little fecundative to impregnate [his] world." (12). Writing about Williams's "March," Hilda praises his "beautiful" lines but scolds him for a "derivative tendency": "It is as if you were ashamed of your Spirit, ashamed of your inspiration!—as if you mocked at your own song. It's very well to mock at yourself— it is a spiritual sin to mock at your inspiration—" (13). Williams recognizes that between Hilda and him yawns a metaphysical gap; she "misses the entire intent of what I am doing no matter how just her remarks concerning that particular poem happen to have been." (13). He uses the letter as an occasion to state his contextualist faith:

"sacred" has lately been discovered to apply to a point of arrest where stabilization has gone on past the time. There is nothing sacred about literature, it is damned from one end to the other. There is nothing in literature but change and change is mockery. I'll write whatever I damn please, whenever I damn please and as I
damn please and it'll be good if the authentic spirit of change is on it. (13).

Hilda Doolittle believes in an eternal, unchanging realm to which she would have her Spirit and her Art aspire; within the context of Williams's "March," she is for the Fra Angelico, the second spring

passed in a monastery
with plaster walls--in Fiesole
on the hill above Florence.
My second spring--painted
a virgin--in a blue aureole
sitting on a three-legged stool,
arms crossed--
she is intently serious,
and still (CEP, 45)

But the static, the serene, the unchanging are not what Williams is after--are not, in fact, beautiful to him, nor literature, unless, as in "March," they are held in tension by the contrasting, dynamic image of an archeological dig where

Natives cursing and digging
for pay unearth dragons with
upright tails and sacred bulls
alternately--
in four tiers--
lining the way to an old altar!

Williams ends "March" with the tension tightly drawn, the reader's aesthetic experience a realization of that tension:

But though you are lean and frozen--
think of the blue bulls of Babylon.
Fling yourselves upon
their empty roses—
cut savagely!

But—
think of the painted monastery
at Fiesole.

Williams, in other words, has seized upon Hilda's perhaps unthinking use of the word "mockery" and taken it to mean an act of imitation or mimicry. If literature is mimetic (mockery), then to the extent that it is faithful to the real nature of things it mimes change; thus the work of literature should be dynamic rather than static, as Hilda would like a good imagist have it. But in a stricter sense, Williams clearly would agree with Pepper that "In view of the transitory passage of events in the continuity of actual experience, a description of a past event as a mirror image of what then occurred is an absurdity." If Hilda's notion of the sacred is just, Williams further responds, then may he, with his art that is part of a changeful world, be damned. Hilda's aesthetic ideal is to him "the desolation of a flat Hellenic perfection of style." (13). For a different notion of the sacred, and thus a different perfection of style, we need venture no further east than Babylon. "The true value," Williams declares, "is that peculiarity which gives an object a character by itself." (14). In giving primacy to the character or quality of an object or
event (for it is everywhere clear that Williams does consider objects to be events), Williams gives primacy to intuition rather than analysis. Relations between things we may know by analysis, but the thing itself in its qualitative aspect we can only know through intuition. If contextualists here seem to echo Emerson and Whitman, they do so willingly. The intuition of quality, which is really its realization or feeling, contextualists regard as every bit as cognitive as analysis.

It is at this point in the Prologue that Williams states that his aim in Kora is "to loosen the attention." Throughout he has attempted to define and to develop through conflict and contrast, and he defines and develops his purpose in much the same way: "Here I clash with Wallace Stevens." (14). Writing about the poems in Al Que Quiere, Stevens notes "their casual character" and admits his "distaste for miscellany." Stevens speaks the same contextualist language as Williams: "I am only objecting that a book that contains your particular quality should contain anything else and suggesting that if the quality were carried to a communicable extreme, in intensity and volume, etc." (15). Stevens sums up his criticism by saying, "I think your tantrums not half mad enough." The central part of Stevens's criticism is the following:
... My idea is that in order to carry a thing to the extreme necessity \(\text{sic}\) to convey it one has to stick to it; ... Given a fixed point of view, realistic, imagistic or what you will, everything adjusts itself to that point of view; and the process of adjustment is a world in flux, as it should be for a poet. But to fidget with new points of view leads always to new beginnings and incessant new beginnings lead to sterility. ... A single manner or mood thoroughly matured and exploited is that fresh thing ... (15)

Williams, in quoting this letter, is letting the reader know that he or she will not get a "fixed point of view" nor anything like Stevens's idea of discipline. Williams is out to free his imagination by "lifting to the imagination those things which lie under the direct scrutiny of the senses" (14). Stevens, on the other hand, is preoccupied with what a contextualist rhetoric would amount to—with how to convey aesthetic experience successfully.

The time when Williams might have set down his "'Vortex' after the fashion of London, 1913," being past—although if it weren't it would consist of his and Dewey's theory of the local ("how little it means to me whether I live here, there or elsewhere or succeed in this that or the other")—Williams proceeds to present the reader with a series of commentaries on improvisations which the reader has not yet read. Is the reader to continue to read in a linear fashion, simply turning pages consecutively, or to
dip into the improvisations themselves? Williams says that he intends to "relieve the later text and also add their weight to his present fragmentary argument." (16). But he also declares that he is placing them in the Prologue "without losing their original intention . . ." The commentaries in the Prologue are not sequential; they do not present a linear argument or flow. The first commentary in the Prologue (V, 2) begins with the clue the reader needs, however: "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." Williams knows that he is breaking up his text, destroying its linearity. The "weapon" that brokenness makes him master of is apparently being wielded against the earlier referred to "finality which they clinging to in despair . . . Thus the so-called natural or scientific array becomes fixed, the walking devil of modern life." For the second sentence of the commentary runs: "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." (16).

In the second commentary of the Prologue, Williams announces another major clue to Kora: "The instability of these improvisations would seem such that they must inevit-
ably crumble under the attention and become particles of a wind that falters." Can a slender moment bear such attention, bear the implicit claim to significance, or will the very freedom being sought be the first loss? "It would appear to the unready that the fiber of the thing is a thin jelly." Williams, however, is not a traditional empiricist, but a Jamesian, radical empiricist. As Perry points out, the essential distinction between James and his predecessors has to do with the "temporal reference of ideas and beliefs":

The classic empiricists had emphasized the reference to the past, whereas James, in keeping with the spirit of experimentalism, emphasized the reference to the future. Locke, Berkeley, Hume and Mill had said, in effect, that the most important thing about an idea is that it should have sprung from experience, and their inquiries were therefore genetic. An idea was cognitively justified by its ancestry and past history. For James, on the other hand, ideas are cognitively justified by their achievements and prospects.24

In capturing, or perhaps I should say "liberating," a moment in an improvisation and then later attending to (in commenting upon) that moment, Williams's focus is always upon the new present, on a making a start out of particulars. Therefore he continues:

It would be these same fools who would deny tough cords to the wind because they cannot split a storm endwise
and wrap it upon spools. The virtue of strength lies not in the grossness of the fiber but in the fiber itself. Thus a poem is tough by no quality it borrows from a logical recital of events nor from the events themselves but solely from that attenuated power which draws perhaps many broken things into a dance giving them thus a full being. (16-17).

In other words, those who look for an organization based upon some logical thread will look in vain; Williams's organization is based on quality, which can be intuited or felt, like a wind blowing, or a whirlwind drawing many "broken things" into a dance (Williams's vortex). The improvisation on which a commentary is based (itself a new improvisation, introducing much that is novel) is not explained but rather made particular in its new context. Williams is interested in the future history, not the past history, of each improvisation. The attitude towards the past embodied in Williams's method is identical with Dewey's:

Intelligent understanding of past history is to some extent a lever for moving the present into a certain kind of future . . . In using what has come to them as inheritance from the past \[ \text{men} \] are compelled to modify it to meet their own needs, and this process creates a new present in which the process continues. History cannot escape its own process. It will, therefore, always be rewritten.\(^{25}\)

Rather than a closed or determinate text, \textit{Kora} thus has a
future with each of its readers, who will add their own commentaries, forming a relationship or interacting with the text in a manner analogous to Williams's dancing "within" the text. Are the commentaries of future readers "part of" The Text? That depends on your aesthetic, and thus on your metaphysic. Contextualists like Williams, who regard the boundaries between the human body and the world (and particulars like a literary text within the world) as relatively insignificant, would probably respond in the affirmative. At the very least contextualists would demand some justification for hermetically sealing off a particular text from the future. Is the text from the Middle Kingdom? Perhaps the reader will have some much difficulty grasping the meaning that the boundary becomes significant, although Pound's "Papyrus" on a Sapphic fragment demonstrates that even in the most extreme cases some individuals may defy seemingly insuperable obstacles. The text, in other words, is to contextualists not marks or symbols on a page but rather, as I think Pound phrased it, "a ball of light in one's hand," an experience, an event, or something equally hard to delimit. Certainly Williams's attitude towards Kora is at an extreme remove from the verbal-icon syndrome.

With inevitably diminishing returns I might continue to present my own commentaries on the commentaries that
Williams has included in the Prologue, in the opinion of some "explicating," but I think at this point that I have made sufficiently clear what he is doing and that I may be forgiven some hit-and-run quotations intended rather to demonstrate and to elaborate upon his contextualism. In *Kora* Williams has arrived as an artist; he knows what he is doing and why, and he wants his readers to know he knows.

Take, for example, his contextualist emphasis upon the unique and novel:

*Nothing is good save the new.* If a thing have novelty it stands intrinsically beside every other work of artistic excellence. If it have not that, no loveliness or heroic proportion or grand manner will save it. It will not be saved above all by an attenuated intellectuality. (23-23).

Williams is interested in novelty because it enhances quality. He has understood that, if he is going to regard perception as an event, then that quality which pervades and fuses an event, making it an experience, must be the focus of the artist's efforts. In art as in life, according to contextualists, intensification of quality, and therefore experience, results from conflict and resistance, both of which can be generated in the person having the experience by novelty. 26 This kind of emphasis upon novelty, I should add, is not evidence of a highly romantic side, because it does not serve the desire to see the universe in a grain
of sand, but rather to see the grain of sand in the multiverse. Thus for Williams "the coining of similes is a pastime of very low order, depending as it does upon a nearly vegetable coincidence. Much more keen is that power which discovers in things those inimitable particles of dissimilarity to all other things which are the peculiar perfections of the thing in question." (18). Williams is interested in what gives something its felt quality, what makes it unique, new; he wants each thing to be an event. As he puts it in one of his finest studies of quality, "The Rose," although as symbol "The rose is obsolete," he is now looking at a rose:

From the petal's edge a line starts
that being of steel
infinitely fine, infinitely
rigid penetrates
the Milky Way
without contact--lifting
from it--neither hanging
nor pushing--

The fragility of the flower
unbruised
penetrates spaces (108-09; CEP, 250)

Williams is interested in conveying the geometry of this particular rose, a geometry he creates himself, for it is essential to the "fragility" wherein the quality of the experience consists. What novelty this experience has, moreover, is temporally conditioned: "a line starts . . . penetrates . . . lifting . . . neither hanging nor pushing
"... penetrates ..." Of course, through various strategies of which symbol-hunting is perhaps today the most common, readers have the power to turn the novel into the familiar; hence Williams is determined to change reading habits in Kora.

Williams's metaphor for the sort of relation between particulars he seeks is musical, but he does not seek the harmony of past aesthetics. Instead:

All is confusion, yet it comes from a hidden desire for the dance, a lust of the imagination, a will to accord two instruments in a duet.

But one does not attempt by the ingenuity of the joiner to blend the tones of the oboe with the violin. On the contrary the perfections of the two instruments are emphasized by the joiner; no means is neglected to give to each the full color of its perfections. It is only the music of the instruments which is joined and that not by the woodworker but by the composer, by virtue of the imagination.

On this level of the imagination all things and ages meet in fellowship. Thus only can they, peculiar and perfect, find their release. This is the beneficent power of the imagination. (19).

Whereas Coleridgean imagination has as its primary function fusion, unification, synthesis, the resolution of conflicts, Williams wants to image in the duet a harmony that rather than dissolving conflict enhances it. Without either instrument accepting a subordinate role or necessarily
even making concessions, confusion is turned into harmony. Williams wants the integrity of particulars respected, what is "peculiar and perfect" in them left undisturbed, one new thing made to issue from two others (which makes three). Kingsley Weatherhead has pointed out that all of this sounds a great deal like a poetry of "fancy" as Coleridge conceived of it. Perhaps—although I fail to see what is gained by viewing Williams's poetry through the spectacles of 18th-century psychology and metaphysics. Better we focus on his image of "two instruments in a duet" or the parallel image of conflictual harmony in his marriage with Flossie. Besides, Williams has inserted a telling phrase before his "two instruments": "a will to accord . . ." Jamesian psychology, with its emphasis upon the role of human will in the creation and shaping of reality, provides us with the clearest and most appropriate framework for understanding what Williams means here.

I would if I could pass over the closing section of the Prologue without comment, it having received an inordinate amount of attention in the past because of Williams's supposedly ill-natured and jealous remarks about Eliot, Pound, and others. But when even James Breslin, Williams's most sensitive reader, mistakes the Prologue for a critical essay, some words in Williams's defense are necessary.
Here's Breslin:

The famous "Prologue" to *Kora in Hell*, one of his first critical manifestoes, was certainly one of his most spiteful and implacable. There, Williams starts by splitting modern poetry into two warring camps—the stay-at-homes and the expatriates—and his infuriated need to destroy his exiled foes forces him to rank Marianne Moore, Alfred Kreymborg, and Maxwell Bodenheim over H.D., Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot. Few have followed him here. Moreover, Williams often lowers the attack to a personal level. In the "Prologue" Williams quotes from unpublished letters by H.D., Pound, and Wallace Stevens in order to answer, deridingly, their criticisms of him.27

Breslin has failed to recognize that the Prologue was written to fulfill specific functions in relation to *Kora* and has mistaken as psychological facts what are rather the reflections of an aesthetic. I count at least twenty-two different interpersonal conflicts in varying degrees of development in just the Prologue. But the better part of Williams's pugnaciousness in print he regards as aesthetically imperative and not the least bit personal. In calling Pound "the best enemy United States verse has" (26), Williams thinks he's keeping up his end of the duet. These are for the most part his friends with whom he's tussling. Far from having lost his temper, Williams has adopted a tone that, although sometimes sardonic, is thoroughly formal in its fury. This tone is intended as a contrast to
the comic tone that pervades the improvisations and commentaries themselves—which comic tone Breslin, almost alone among readers of Kora, fully appreciates. It is not, I must hasten to add, that Williams does not mean what he in the Prologue asserts; it is rather that the propositional content is here, as in any work of literature, conditioned by its literary context. Williams is speaking on a particular occasion to a particular audience with a particular purpose.

Kora opens teasingly, with an obscure verbal triptych, of sorts:

1
Fools have big wombs. For the rest?--here is pennyroyal if one knows how to use it. But time is only another liar, so go along the wall a little further: if blackberries prove bitter there'll be mushrooms, fairy-ring mushrooms, in the grass, sweetest of all fungi.

2
For what it's worth: Jacob Louslinger, white haired, stinking, dirty bearded, cross eyed, stammer tongued, broken voiced, bent backed, ball knee'd, cave bellied, mucous faced--deathling,--found lying in the weeds "up there by the cemetery." "Looks to me as if he'd been bumming around the meadows for a couple of weeks."
Shoes twisted into incredible lilies: out at the toes, heels, top, sides, soles. Meadow flower! ha, mallow! at last I have you. (Rot dead marigolds--an acre at a time! Gold, are you?) Ha, clouds will touch world's edge and the great pink mallow stand singly in the wet, topping reeds and--a closet full of clothes and good shoes and
my-thirty-year's-master's-daughter's two cows for me to care for and a winter room with a fire in it—. I would rather feed pigs in Moonachie and chew calamus root and break crab's claws at an open fire: age's lust loose!

3

Talk as you will, say: "No woman wants to bother with children in this country";—speak of your Amsterdam and the whitest aprons and brightest doorknobs in Christendom. And I'll answer you: Gleaming doorknobs and scrubbed entries have heard the songs of housmaids at sun-up and—housemaids are wishes. Whose? Ha! the dark canals are whistling, whistling for whom will cross to the other side. If I remain with hands in pocket leaning upon my lamppost—why— I bring curses to a hag's lips and her daughter on her arm knows better than I can tell you—best to blush and out with it than back beaten after.

In Holland at daybreak, of a fine spring morning, one sees the housemaids beating rugs before the small houses of such a city as Amsterdam, sweeping, scrubbing the low entry steps and polishing doorbells and doorknobs. By night perhaps there will be an old woman with a girl on her arm, hissing and whistling across a deserted canal to some late loiterer trudging aimlessly on beneath the gas lamps. (31-32).

Williams himself referred to Kora as more or less "incomprehensible." 28 A great deal depends on what we take him to mean by that. One explicator has noted that the "penny royal" referred to in the first improvisation is used for abortions, which suggests that we have here in the first paragraph a dramatic monologue with an apothecary handing
out a folk remedy. In the second we have no difficulty inferring that Jacob Louslinger, the village bum, has been found dead in the cemetery, although whose point of view we are getting remains problematic. In the third, a man is out whoring in Holland. The commentary, which purports to interpret the three improvisations, actually stands in an uncertain relationship to them. It consists of two contrasting sentences, one with reference to "daybreak," the other to "night"; one depicting a neat, bourgeois world in which housemaids polish doorknobs and beat rugs, thereby establishing a link to the scene in the third improvisation in which the man at night mocks such gleam and cleanliness and whistles for a housemaid "who will cross to the other side," and the other depicting a madam roaming the streets with a young prostitute in search of a man who has failed to seduce a housemaid. The commentary seems to relate directly to only the last improvisation, and then its two statements apply tentatively ("perhaps there will be . . ."), generally ("of a fine spring morning, one sees . . .") and suggestively.

I'm reminded of Fenollosa's definition of the cherry tree as the sum of what it does. From some perspectives, the opening of Kora—indeed, of many of the improvisations, many of the commentaries—is nonsense: meaningless, unintelligible nonsense. Or badly botched impressionism. Not
so from a contextualist standpoint, although its meaning is not fully intelligible or determinate. It probably makes one laugh, even after that bit of medical lore is explained. It certainly violates one's expectations, even today, decades after we have become more or less familiar with the "experimental" art of the contextualists and their avant-garde cousins.

In the first of the second set of improvisations, the reader gets a more recognizable and literary subject, which enables him to orient himself—to infer point of view, situation, tone, and the like:

Why go further? One might conceivably rectify the rhythm, study all out and arrive at the perfection of a tiger lily or a china doorknob. One might lift all out of the ruck, be a worthy successor to--the man in the moon. Instead of breaking the back of a willing phrase why not try to follow the wheel through--approach death at a walk, take in all the scenery. There's as much reason one way as the other and then--one never knows--perhaps we'll bring back Eurydice--this time!

Presumably our point of view is that of an Orpheus, of sorts, on who has previously made his first journey to the underworld and lost Eurydice yet again. Orpheus is debating means--whether, as I read it, to take the route of lyric poetry (to do which he would have to "rectify the rhythm" and break "the back of a willing phrase," all
to "arrive at the perfection of a tiger lily or a china doorknob") or to take the way of improvisation ("to follow the wheel through--approach death at a walk"). Williams's commentary:

Between two contending forces there may at all times arrive that moment when the stress is equal on both sides so that with a great pushing a great stability results giving a picture of perfect rest. And it may be that once upon the way the end drives back upon the beginning and a stoppage will occur. At such a time the poet shrinks from the doom that is calling him forgetting the delicate rhythms of perfect beauty, preferring in his mind the gross buffetings of good and evil fortune. (32-33)

According to Leon Richey, this commentary is as "darkly written and obscure" as what it purports to explain. Obscurity is not what Williams is here striving for, however; contrast is. As in the Prologue, Williams wants conflict--conflict that will, presumably, intensify the reader's experience. Therefore, whereas in the improvisation the poet in the guise of a modern Orpheus debates a dramatic choice in concrete poetic language, in the commentary the aesthetcian/metaphysician describes a different kind of moment, a moment of equilibrium and rest when "the stress is equal on both sides" in highly abstract language. Thus we have the kind of harmony Williams likes: harmony without any relaxation in tension. Meaning here is not
additive, consecutive, or logical; the lines do not explicate, do not submit to the reader. Meaning here is a question of what these two juxtaposed passages, improvisation and commentary, put in a relationship of conflict (for they neither explain each other nor relate logically to one another), or what they do to the reader. That is, their meaning is latent, a potential outcome of experience. But the reader must himself improvise. Their meaning to me is not likely to be their meaning to you, although we could probably agree on all that I have so far laid out. I should add, however, that aesthetic experience within a carefully contrived context points not so much, or only incidentally, towards silence as towards feeling.

In Kora Williams seems to have discovered that he could indeed focus on the central contextualist criterion of value in aesthetic experience: vividness. As he later (1927) expressed it, "poetry should strive for nothing else, this vividness alone, per se, for itself ... That thing, the vividness which is poetry itself, makes the poem. There is no need to explain or compare. Make it and it is a poem." Paul Mariani has pointed out that "The derangement of the senses here is finally only partial, a way of making the reader slow down and engage the writer in the act of seeing what we call the 'common' freshly,
as if it were to discover it for the first time." Note the emphasis here upon the reader. *Kora* is not an outpouring of raw emotion, despite its improvisatory origins. Williams, while he claimed he had done no rewriting of sentences, described his final task as one of careful selection—he chose only a fraction of the year's improvisations—editing, and arrangement. James Breslin describes the reader's experience this way:

A prose of pure process, lacking explicit connectives, the writing here leaves many gaps for us to fill in. To do this, we are required to yield whatever fixed point of view we bring to the work; we must surrender our conscious personality and let ourselves be drawn in. To put it another way, the reader is forced to experience the work from the inside; aesthetic distance is disintegrated. With this kind of patient absorption, a basic coherence emerges, which can be defined through the myth which has given the book its title... Gradually, the reader discovers a series of recurrent metaphors—descent, darkness, winter, ascent, light, flower, meadow—which combine to create the cyclical movement of *Kora*.33

Breslin's new-critical terminology is in the way here. Good readers by definition do not bring a "fixed point of view" to a work. Williams probably would not like to have the kind of openness to experience he's demanding of the reader called a "surrender" of "conscious personality". Breslin must be thinking of *Kora* as a verbal icon with
gaps or a simulacrum with an interior. We should question as well his conceiving of the structure of Kora in terms of "coherence" and "recurrent metaphors." But Breslin has despite his critical handicaps gotten the gist of Kora. Williams does succeed in teaching us how to read his improvisations, and what soon proves most remarkable about the work is his having shown why contextualists do not usually need to distinguish between the objective and subjective.

I speak of "objectivity" in the contextualist sense: the greater the extent to which details, images, motifs, strands, whatever-you-want-to-call-the-units-of-discourse; the greater the extent to which they mutually determine one another or demand one another, the more objective the work. To the extent that the subjective must be invoked to explain the inclusion of particular details, a work is more or less subjective. One finds when one examines closely almost any particular improvisation that to an extraordinary degree details mutually demand one another; the more familiar one becomes with the whole, the more the interconnections between the parts proliferate, as if marching to the tune of Coleridge's imagination (which contextualists would like either to call "relevant construction" or to restrict to what Coleridge called its "esemplastic" dimension, in
neither case implying a faculty psychology). And yet one hesitates to speak of "coherence," for coherence is usually taken to be a matter of the "internal differentiation" and "organic unity" of an object called a "text," all of which contextualists would reject as a false conceptualization of the work. Imagination, as contextualists conceive it, "is the personal contribution to the aesthetic work of art. Without the imagination, all that is left is the physical work of art, which is describable only in the analytical relational terms of physics." Reading a biography of Williams, reading a good history of the modernist period, reading other poems, novels, and essays by Williams--even reading criticism: all may help the reader realize whatever objectivity is latent in the particular work or may help the reader see how details demand one another. Analysis may cooperate with intuition in creating the aesthetic experience that is the work.

Williams set out to "loosen his attention" and to create a large single work. The work was created through that later process of selection, arrangement and commentary, which Williams apparently regarded as analogous to Duchamp's finding the pieces of the stained glass window lying on the ground. Williams has thereby focused in an unprecedentedly self-conscious manner on a truthful
rendering of his own world—at least in Jamesian terms.

"Truth," as James first insisted, "is a relation, not of our ideas to non-human realities, but of conceptual parts of our experience to sensational parts." Our sensational experience is as close as we can come to the world, and thus to Kora's liberation. This is what Williams resists in his long winter and the learning of which provides Kora, if not a "plot," a liberating cyclicity, so to speak. For the main movements of Kora are indeed cyclical, circular, "revolutionary" (a word on which Williams plays).

The initial plunge past, Kora is not difficult reading, although, given the conventions of criticism, it is difficult to talk about. Having noted Williams's attempt to set whirling an atomistic set of improvisations, what more is there to say when the need for critical translation ceases? Once acclimated to Williams's world of doctoring, family, affairs, artiness, and metaphysics, the reader does not need help. A few observations may be in order, however.

Kora's shape is roughly circular, a year's round. But if its tone at the outset is mocking, at the end it is earnest; if it begins with Williams at home with his imagination and having occasional epiphanic moments, it crescendoes and has the major moment of ecstasy roughly where one would normally expect a climax. The major contrast is that of the spring and summer months, with which Kora opens and
closes, with the fall and winter. Thus the middle of Kora, beginning about the time of his September 17th birthday, shows us Williams increasingly resisting his imagination, as when he reacts to the implications of relativism with revulsion, the passage of time and the derivative nature of the self leaving him with nothing to rely upon but change:

The browned trees are singing for my thirty-fourth birthday. Leaves are beginning to fall upon the long grass. Their cold perfume raises the anticipation of sensational revolutions in my unsettled life. . . .

To each age as to each person its perfections. But in these things there is a kind of revolutionary sequence. So that a man having lain at ease here and advanced there as time progresses the order of these things becomes inverted. Thinking to have brought all to one level the man finds his foot striking through where he had thought rock to be and stands firm where he had experienced only a bog hitherto. At a loss to free himself from bewilderment at this discovery he puts off the caress of the imagination. (52)

How does one "put off the caress of the imagination"? Williams begins the next improvisation thus: "The trick is never to touch the world anywhere." And he then creates for himself another self who will take care of sensational experience for him, thereby splitting his world in two and divorcing the world of the imagination from that of experience. He embraces the descent, or what will in his later
work be imaged in the plunge into the filthy Passaic:

This tore the dress in ribbons from her maid's back and not spared the nails either; wild anger spit from her pinched eyes! This is the better part. Or a child under a table to be dragged out coughing and biting, eyes glittering evilly. I'll have it my way! Nothing is any pleasure but misery and brokenness. THIS is the only up-cadence. (57)

Better embrace the worst than risk in rejecting anything the loss of your own self's actuality. When everything is misery and brokenness, the only pleasure lies therein; the attempt to strain an affirmation out of it all results in the betrayal of all experience. In other words, Williams already believes that the way up and the way down may be the same:

Often when the descent seems well marked there will be a subtle ascent over-ruling it so that in the end when the degradation is fully anticipated the person will be found to have emerged upon a hilltop.

For, as he will say in the final set of improvisations, Kora's rescue and the rescue of particular things are one and the same:

The particular thing, whether it be four pinches of four divers white powders cleverly compounded to cure surely, safely, pleasantly a painful twitching of the eyelids or say a pencil sharpened at one end, dwarfs the imagination, makes logic a butterfly, offers a finality that sends us spinning through space,
a fixity the mind could climb forever, a revolving mountain, a complexity with a surface of glass; the gist of poetry. (81)

The descent is from the general to the particular, from the transcendental to the actual; Williams does not mean to imply vertical movement within the world of traditional metaphysics. This, I should perhaps point out, is not just empiricism that Williams is insisting on, but radical empiricism, for Williams emphasizes the relations between mental and sensational experience as real relations: "a dance is a thing in itself." (47). What this means for poetry Williams is only beginning to understand. It means that "A poem can be made of anything." (70). This is because our experience never comes closer to the actual world than our own sensations. It means that "it is the little things that count! Neglect them and bitterness drowns the imagination." The moment the imagination breaks away from sensational experience, it is threatened with abstraction. Such in Williams's new mythology (which closely parallels Pound's) was the fate of the Greek gods, whom we may recover by recovering our "eye" for them, by recovering our reverence for particulars:

Giants in the dirt. The gods, the Greek gods, smothered in filth and ignorance. The race is scattered over the world. Where is its home? Find it if you've the genius. Here Hebe with a sick jaw and a cruel
husband,—her mother left no place for a brain to grow. Herakles rowing boats on Berry's Creek! Zeus is a country doctor without a taste for coin jingling. Supper is of a bastard nectar on rare nights for they will come—the rare nights! The ground lifts and out sally the heroes of Sophokles, of Aeschylus... It's all of the gods, there's nothing else worth writing of. They are the same men they always were—but fallen. Do they dance now, they that danced beside Helicon? They dance much as they did then, only, few have an eye for it, through the dirt and fumes. (60-61)

Radical empiricism is really the discovery, or recovery, of Kora:

This that I have struggled against is the very thing I should have chosen—but all's right now. They said I could not put the flower back into the stem nor win roses upon dead briars and I like a fool believed them. Weave away, dead fingers, the darkies are dancing in Mayaguez—all but one with the sore heel and sugar cane will soon be high enough to romp through. (62)

Here we have Williams imagining his mother's thoughts, she who is a "creature of great imagination," who sees the "thing itself without forethought or afterthought but with great intensity of perception" (8). Williams discovers in her the same divinity he found "smothered in filth and ignorance":

A woman on the verge of growing old kindles in the mind of her son a certain curiosity which spinning upon itself catches the woman herself in its wheel, stripping from the accumulations of many harsh years and shows her
at last full of an old time suppleness hardly to have
been guessed by the stiffened exterior which had held
her fast till that time. (63)

Most of all Williams realizes that his new empirical vision
of the world entails for his poetry a new notion of mimesis—
that which he punningly played with in the Prologue as
"mockery."

After thirty years staring at one true phrase he
discovered that its opposite was true also. For weeks
he laughed in the grip of a fierce self derision. Having
lost the falsehood to which he'd fixed his hawser he
rolled drunkenly about the field of his environment be­
fore the new direction began to dawn upon his cracked
mind. What a fool ever to be tricked into seriousness.
Soft hearted, hard hearted. Thick crystals began to
shoot through the liquid of his spirit. Black they were:
branches that have lain in a fog which now a wind is
blowing away. Things more. Fatigued as you are watch
how the mirror sieves out the extraneous: in sleep as
in waking. (65)

Williams discovers that he has been mistaking concepts for
reality; that at the conceptual (or mental) level of reality,
opposites may be true—that, indeed, "opposites" is a concept.
Mistaking the conceptual for reality (and usually leaving out
the sensational level entirely), we tend to put a value on
things, and to value our values, treating as "extraneous"
what our mirror (our concepts) has left out. But, as Williams
proceeds to illustrate vividly in the rest of the improvisation
in his description of his being called to assist a woman in labor late at night, our conceptual or mental reality with the sensational left out is utterly incommensurable with the actual. "One cannot have more than the appetite sanctions," he observes wryly.

Though the eye
turns inward, the mind
has spread its embrace—in
a wind that
roughs the stiff petals—
More! the particular flower is
blossoming . . .

(CEP 357)

This is not, as Miller asserts, a Berkeleyan transformation of the world into soul but rather the predication of some necessary multi-faceted mutuality between person and world. Like Frost and Stevens, Williams embraces the Jamesian assumption that, epistemologically speaking, the mind and the world are not separable.

In turning to Spring and All (1923), we do not really leave Kora behind. Spring and All was implied in Kora. Here Williams states that he is finding that the values there in Kora discovered can be extended. I find myself extending the understanding to the work of others and other things--

I find that there is work to be done in the creation of new forms, new names for experience

and that "beauty" is related not to "loveliness" but to a state in which reality plays a part (117)
Especially considering the fact that Williams here stresses his once again being about "the creation of new forms," I find it incredible that few think it important we read *Spring and All* as it first appeared, a series of poems set upon a grid of prose. Few, apparently, have been convinced by J. Hillis Miller's pioneering argument that "The prose parts of the original edition of *Spring and All* ... are his fullest expressions of a subtle theory of poetry which rejects both the mirror and the lamp, both the classical theory of art as imitation and the romantic theory of art as transformation." Linda Wagner, offering as her reason a "unity of design" she does not demonstrate, states that "the poems cannot be separated from the prose without reducing the whole to fragments." Webster Schott, while he thinks that the "prose portions of the book seem as random as the paragraphs of *Kora,*" recognizes that the separation of the prose from the poetry in the years since the book's first publication is a "mistake": "He enunciates his literary principles in the prose. He demonstrates them in the poetry." Most other critics, however, have either ignored *Spring and All* as a whole, discussing particular poems as they appeared in *The Collected Earlier Poems,* or agreed with Alan Ostrom, who thinks the poems gain when the prose is stripped away: "completely free from interpretation or comment--the images stand alone, the things in themselves,
with only the method of their arrangement to give (implicitly) any understanding of their 'meaning' (reality)."\(^{39}\) Although the latter strategy is billed as independent of the New Criticism, it in effect, like the former strategy, concedes all those so minded their verbal icon.

James Breslin, brilliant as are his discussions of individual poems in *Spring and All*, treats those poems as if he has forgotten his own description of the book as "a serial poem consisting of twenty-seven untitled but numbered poems, introduced and accompanied throughout by a sometimes fierce, sometimes flamboyant polemic."\(^{40}\) Breslin's description of the typical poem in *Spring and All* could not be more right so far as it goes:

The *Spring and All* poems, striking for their toughness and spontaneity, their abrupt and radical shifts of tone and direction, generate all the intensity and persistence of a pitched battle; and they get their extraordinary power from their proximity to chaos—from their capacity to bring together violently antagonistic forces and to leave them, suspended and unresolved, in a moment of agonizing tension. Individual poems, as we move through them, seem to fly off in several directions simultaneously and, by doing so, become the first in Williams's career to illustrate what he later called "the poem as a field of action."

No argument, no narrative—no linear mode of organization—imposes a single direction on the full, rounded moment of experience. Instead of relations that are
stated and therefore fixed, we get relations that are left open and therefore fluid and multiple. Instead of a designated path we can follow through the poem, we get the poem as a field—as a field of action.41

Breslin thinks he is dealing with a new lyric form, when his description is rather of lyric form reconceived from a contextualist perspective—which is the difference between Williams's having added some poem to our literature and his having changed, modified, in Dewey's sense "rewritten" that literature. Nor do we find the first of this type in Spring and All, but rather in Al Que Quiere and Sour Grapes. In Spring and All, Williams has used his prose improvisations so to enhance the tension and novelty of the poetry that readers not previously attuned to the effect for which he is striving may finally be seized by it. Williams had already begun to think in terms of a "field" while working on Kora. For in the Prologue he took care to state his purpose in those terms: "It is to loosen the attention, my attention since I occupy part of the field, that I write these improvisations." (My emphasis.) Williams is not using "field" in the mechanist's sense of simple location, but rather as his whole world of mental and sensational experience, as when in Kora "he rolled drunkenly about the field of his environment before the new direction began to dawn upon his cracked mind." (My emphasis.)
The question of Williams's use of prose in *Spring and All* bears directly upon one of the principle sources of confusion with respect to his work as a whole: his use of the word "imagination," which seems to act as a touchstone, of sorts, testing the true character of each critic's metaphysical commitments. We should heed Williams's final word on the imagination in *Spring and All*, for it might both forestall much confusion and clue us in to the work's form:

Sometimes I speak of imagination as a force, an electricity or a medium, a place. It is immaterial which: for whether it is the condition of a place or a dynamization its effect is the same: to free the world of fact from the impositions of "art" . . . and to liberate the man to act in whatever direction his disposition leads. (150)

Williams is acutely aware that he keeps changing horses when talking about the imagination, shifting from one metaphor to another. He does this, he is letting us know, not because he is lazy or confused, but because, like other contextualists, he does not want to treat the imagination reductively, as a single element that explains or accounts for aesthetic experience (as the faculty of Imagination did for the romantics). When he does finally define imagination, he does so pragmatically, in terms of its effects, in terms of the differences that would be made if imagination had the meaning in question. Here as elsewhere Williams shares something with
the romantics that the pragmatists also share, but differs
from the romantics in the same way and sense that the prag-
matists differ. Williams and the pragmatists place the same
high valuation upon the imagination that Coleridge does but
reject all that to which the vocabulary and assumptions of
that generation led, particularly the distinction between
imagination and fancy. Imagination for contextualists--and
since Williams focuses on the effect as definitive it is
clear he agrees--"is the personal contribution to the aes-
thetic work of art." Kora had taught Williams that was sim-
ply no difference between being imaginative and being him-
self.42

Note in addition the analogy implicit here. Williams
would have us realize that he has used prose in relation to
poetry in Spring and All as the imagination stands in rela-
tion to its effects. The prose in Spring and All acts as "a
force, an electricity or a medium, a place" and frees the
"world of fact." It conditions our experience of the poetry.
Williams conceives of aesthetic experience contextualistic-
ally, as, to quote Pepper again, "immersed in a context of
continuous happenings." Rather than leave the reader his own
experience unconstrained by the work between poems, Williams
provides his own context of continuous happenings. And thus,
from a contextualistic point of view, the poems of Spring
and All cannot be separated from the prose without destroying the work's form and committing an unconscionable bowdlerization. As Dewey expresses it, "form is the moving integration of an experience." That "moving integration" Williams originally designed consisted in large measure of a rhythmic alteration or dynamic contrast between the poems and the prose. It is as if Picasso also provided the room for which he intended a particular painting.

The central contrast upon which Spring and All is based is that between uses of language. Those who doubt the centrality of pragmatism in Williams's thought and writing should note the pragmatic notion of language expressed in the following:

Prose—When values are important, such—For example there is no use denying that prose and poetry are not by any means the same IN INTENTION. But then what is prose? There is no need for it to approach poetry except to be weakened.

With decent knowledge to hand we can tell what things are for

I expect to see values blossom. I expect to see prose be prose. Prose, relieved of extraneous, unrelated values must return to its only purpose; to clarify to enlighten the understanding. There is no form to prose but that which depends on clarity. If prose is not accurately adjusted to the exposition of facts it does not exist--Its form is that alone. To penetrate everywhere with enlightenment--
Poetry is something quite different. Poetry has to do with the crystallization of the imagination—the perfection of new forms as additions to nature . . . (140)

Williams pragmatically stresses "what things are for." The purpose of prose is expository; the purpose of poetry is creation. Prose conveys conclusions, and its conclusions are valid only to the extent that it confines itself to those few logical forms that ensure validity. But poetry can imitate nature's creativity. Given this difference in intention, Williams concludes, "It is ridiculous to say that verse grades off into prose as the rhythm becomes less and less pronounced . . ." (144). Because intention is what counts, "when poetry fails it does not become prose but bad poetry." (145).

Williams follows his discussion of the distinction between poetry and prose with a poem that exemplifies what poetry does:

**XXIII**

The veritable night of wires and stars
the moon is in the oak tree's crotch
and sleepers in the windows cough
athwart the round and pointed leaves
and insects sting while on the grass
the whitish moonlight
 tearfully
 assumes the attitudes
 of afternoon--

But it is real
 where peaches hang
 recalling death's
 long promised symphony
 whose tuneful wood
 and stringish undergrowth
 are ghosts existing
 without being
 save to come with juice
 and pulp to assuage
 the hungers which
 the night reveals
 so that now at last
 the truth's aglow
 with devilish peace
 forestalling day
 which dawns tomorrow
 with dreadful reds
 the heart to predicate
 with mists that loved
 the ocean and the fields--
 Thus moonlight
 is the perfect
 human touch (141-42)

As James Breslin has pointed out, most of Williams's critics have recognized that the chief theme of Williams's critical prose is that "the poem is not a vehicle for thought, or
for the recitation of events, but a physical object, an organization of sounds and rhythms," but have seldom taken the next step and shown how his poetic "informs the workings of particular poems." Like most of the poems in Spring and All, "The Veritable Night" has in one sense so traditional a subject as to be banal: a nocturnal landscape. New Critics, not wanting to be guilty of the affective fallacy and committed to a method that yields what the text is without any necessary resort to what it does, find the typical Williams poem embarrassingly scanty. At the opposite extreme, reader-response critics like Stanley Fish who have proceeded on beyond what the poem does, embracing the affective fallacy (if fallacy it be), to the notion of the reader's writing the text, find so much in any poem that, barring the interference of a community of readers, the poem is hard to find. What difference does our recognizing Williams's contextualism make?

The poem's real subject, of course, the relationship between metaphysics and poetry, is signalled by the opening line: "The veritable night ..." Wherein true, actual, or authentic night consists is a metaphysical question. Read carelessly, the lines that follow might constitute a romantic description of a night scene complete with moon, sleepers, leaves, insects and the like. If no clear and beautiful picture emerges, our careless reader supposes,
that's because Williams isn't much of a poet. But somewhere ten or twelve lines into the poem, the reader must pull up and recognize that he simply cannot read this as he might read Keats or Eliot. Either lines 13 and 14 constitute the predicate of lines 11 and 12 and "the whitish moonlight tearfully assumes the attitudes of afternoon," which makes no sense, afternoon and moonlight being two things that do not normally occur together, or lines 11 and 12 lack a predicate and lines 13 and 14 lack a subject; or the categories of commonsense experience do not here apply. Casting back over the first ten lines, the reader must then recognize the problematic meaning of "veritable" as an adjective describing "night"; the disturbing choices facing him in lines 5 and 6, in which either "sleepers" are coughing in the window or "windows" are coughing, and lines 7 and 8, in which either the sleepers or the windows are "athwart the round and pointed leaves"; and the absence of a direct object in lines 9 and 10, where insects are stinging something while on the grass, or, worse, the presence of a direct object in "whitish moonlight"; and so forth. The reader's situation, if he persists in his pre-modernist predilections, can only deteriorate in lines 15-34. What is "it" where peaches "hang" unless it is this "night" that purports to be "veritable" but turns vertiginous? The reader cannot get anywhere unless he entertains Williams's contextualism and takes the poem as
literally a new creation, the "veritable night" as not some ideal essence hidden beneath mere appearances but as rather a premise of this new creation. (As such, ironically, it could be taken as a symbol of aesthetic experience. Williams's symbols, however, always point towards the world of experience. As such they are identical with what James termed *conceptions* and we today take *concept* to mean.) Precisely how a particular reader will be able, in a context of continuous happenings, to intuit the poem's unifying quality we can't tell. It's too complex. Writers can predict with varying degrees of acuteness how their audiences will respond, suggesting that Wolfgang Iser may at least in part be right to deny significant variability among readers. But we still have no way of relating neurophysiological events to behavior, only ways of pretending we don't need to.

Once the reader makes the necessary metaphysical adjustment, the poem ceases to present difficulties and instead presents possibilities between which the reader may or may not choose. The poem's final line, inexplicable otherwise, is clarified. "Thus moonlight is the perfect human touch": the poem's moonlight is Williams's own creation, not God's or the Big Bang's. But most aspects of this creation require the reader's collaboration. The reader must make choices, most of which are necessitated by line breaks and syntactic breaks being almost perfectly out of phase
with each other and Williams's systematic exploitation of ambiguity in diction, phrasing and syntax. I count at least forty-two instances of syntactic ambiguity alone, which means that, were readers forced to choose one reading over another, as many as 1680 distinct readings of the basic syntax alone might result; and needless to say perhaps, readers need not treat ambiguity as forking paths of which only one can be followed but may if they so choose have it both ways--have both the sleepers and the window coughing. Rather than being treated as a means of propaganda, a means of conveying truth, of mirroring nature, or of transforming nature, Williams is insisting on the poem as an end in itself, as nature is to him an end in itself.

Williams stated his position explicitly in his *Autobiography*:

It is NOT to hold the mirror up to nature that the artist performs his work. It is to make, out of the imagination, something not at all a copy of nature, but something quite different, a new thing, unlike anything else in nature, a thing advanced and apart from it.

To imitate nature involves the verb to do. To copy is merely to reflect something already there, inertly: Shakespeare's mirror is all that is needed for it. But by imitation we enlarge nature itself, we become nature or we discover in ourselves nature's active part. This is enticing to our minds, it enlarges the concept of art, dignifies it to a place not yet fully realized.45
This position, according to Williams--a thoroughly contextual position, I should add--is necessary to "a full conception of the modern in art." To say that the artist creates a "new thing" is to say that the artist provides a means or context for experience that is also an end in itself. The poet is not out to achieve some kind of "fit" between his subjective experience and the objective world: "This is not 'fit' but a unification of experience" (120). The New Critics, unable finally to do without dualism though it be a "dualism with a difference," the mode of which is irony, had no choice but to leave form inhering in the object. Williams, grounded in a tradition that thinks it absurd to erect walls between subject and object, poetry and science, good and evil, appearance and reality, has available to him a different notion of form: "Form is a character of every experience that is an experience." Williams, therefore, following Dewey, can conceive of his task in *Spring and All* as the downing of "a constant barrier between the reader and his consciousness of immediate contact with the world" (88), or, in other words, between the conceptual and sensational parts of experience.

In the composition, the artist does exactly what every eye must do with life, fix the particular with the universality of his own personality--Taught by the largeness of his imagination to feel every form which he sees moving within himself; he must prove the truth
of this by expression.

The contraction which is felt.

All this being anterior to technique, that can have only a sequent value; but since all that appears to the sense on a work of art does so through fixation by the imagination of the external as well internal means of expression the essential nature of technique or transcription. (105)

A work of art, Williams goes on to insist, "gives the feeling of completion by revealing the oneness of experience; it rouses rather than stupefies the intelligence by demonstrating the importance of personality..." (107). Given the contextualist view of the world as an event, the remedy for a "dissociation of sensibility" is only a consummatory experience away; as Williams remarks after presenting his readers with the "oneness of experience" that is the red wheel barrow, "It is the imagination on which reality rides..." (139). The New Critical version of the modernist sensibility (Ransom's, in any event) seeks just the opposite—in art as in life—for it is the barrier that generates the saving irony: "A poem records," Ransom wrote in 1925, "for all its shining look of innocence, an intricate historical experience; but it can only hope to be intelligible to those minds whose history is tangled in just the same way as the poet's. Its communicability varies inversely with its intricacy or completeness."48
Here the great gain of the Jamesian conceptual revolution is particularly apparent. For Williams can limit the cleavage to that between sensational and conceptual experience, and, the latter being virtually the creation of language, conceive of it as an opportunity: although it is a "wordless world," experience when unified need not be wordless. The trick is to prevent any detachment of concept from sensation: "The reader knows himself as he was twenty years ago and he has also in mind a vision of what he would be, some day. Oh, some day! But the thing he never knows and never dares to know is what he is at the exact moment that he is. And this moment is the only thing in which I am at all interested." (89). This moment of contact was not conceivable prior to James's reconceptualization of experience in any but mystical or romantic terms, which in turn carried with them all the traditional problems of Western philosophy. It was by ignoring or dismissing the Jamesian alternative that Ransom, Eliot and other traditionalists were able to argue that the only alternative to romanticism was what Ransom called "dualism with a difference" and what usually amounted to a dualistic Christianity plus the ironic mode.

Distinguishing himself as an artist from those in the past who have sought "the beautiful illusion" ("In fact it is this which has kept back the knowledge I seek" 120) and who have sought to "keep up the barrier between sense
and the vaporous fringe which distracts the attention from its agonized approaches to the moment," Williams addresses Spring and All to the imagination: "To refine, to clarify, to intensify that eternal moment in which we alone live there is but a single force—the imagination. This is its book." The "eternal moment" to which he refers is not outside time, but inside, our own, our personal present. And note how truly radical (in the Jamesian sense of the word) Williams's notion of Spring and All is. "To refine, to clarify": as we've previously noted, this is the work of prose, as Williams defines it; and "to intensify": this is what poetry does. The imagination, as Williams pragmatically conceives of it, has to do with both: prose and poetry, contrary to the various poetics that have dominated literature since the Elizabethans, are natural allies—all the more so if antagonistic, since the contrast afforded by mixing prose with poetry will only serve to enhance the intensity of the poetry. Williams then adds in Whitmanesque fashion: "In the imagination, we are from henceforth (so long as you read) locked in a fraternal embrace, the classic car- sess of author and reader. We are one. Whenever I say, 'I' I mean also, 'you.' And so, together, as one, we shall be- gin." (89). If we take into account Williams's later caveat that he conceives of the imagination pragmatically, then we have Williams offering us as readers a poetry that, when
successful, does away with the conceptual barriers that normally interpose themselves between our sensational experience and things. As Williams later put it,

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

(CLP 7)

Williams, I submit, understands the relationship between author and reader in the same fashion as Dewey:

For to perceive, a beholder must create his own experience. And his creation must include relations comparable to those which the original producer underwent. They are not the same in any literal sense. But with the perceiver, as with the artist, there must be an ordering of the elements of the whole that is in form, although not in details, the same as the process of organization the creator of the work consciously experienced. Without an act of recreation the object is not perceived as a work of art. 49

The "Jersey Paideuma," in other words (Paideuma: "a people's whole congeries of patterned energies, from their 'ideas' down to the things they know in their bones, not a Zeitgeist before which minds are passive . . ."50), assumed in Williams' hands not just a local flavoring from the Passaic and his patients and his arty New York friends, but also a national one. Pragmatism, aptly known as the philosophy of democracy, was something Americans "knew in their bones" long before
James and Dewey came along and systematized it. "A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking" James subitled Pragmatism. Franklin, Whitman and Emerson each had a contextualist side, although it would be unfair and misleading to see it as their characteristic one. Although James found that he could read Whitman pluralistically, he acknowledged the "monistic" reading to be irrefutable.51

Whether Williams chose New Jersey and family because of his metaphysic or found justification for that choice in contextualism is a question for future psychologically-oriented biographers. What is incumbent upon us is the simple recognition for what he is of the poet who could see the "crowd at the ball game" in "detail":

It is the Inquisition, the Revolution
It is beauty itself that lives
day by day in them idly--

And the contextualist for whom

the white daisy
is not enough

--who must also have the

rich
in savagery--
Arab
Indian
dark woman
Notes


5. William Carlos Williams, Imaginations, ed. Webster Schott (New York: New Directions, 1970), pp. 95-96. Further references to this collection, which includes not only Spring and All and Kora in Hell but also all the other early, hard-to-find Williams works, will be included in the text.

6. The major discussions of Kora are the following: Joseph Evans Slate, "Kora in Opacity: Williams' Improvisations," Journal of Modern Literature (May 1971), pp. 463-76;


12. Williams, *Kora in Hell: Improvisations*—included in *Imaginations*—p. 6. Further references will be included in the text.


Williams's statements about change with James's, as in the following: "The fundamental fact about our experience is that it is a process of change." (The Meaning of Truth, p. 54.)


26. I am indebted to D.C. Mathur, "A Note on the Concept of 'Consummatory Experience' in Dewey's Aesthetics," Journal of Philosophy 63 (1966), pp. 225-231, for having clarified the essential criterion of contextualist aesthetics for me. Mathur neatly lays out the "basic rhythm of experience" this way: "(1) immediate qualitative experience, of 'doing and undergoing' in specific situations, giving rise to (2) reflective experience in which the organism not only 'has' the experience but understands its meaning or perceives the relation between its 'doing' and 'undergoing,' and, as a result, (3) the final phase of experience, which incorporates the significance and meaning of the reflective phase and is thereby rendered more rich and deepened in its immediacy. This is an experience, or a consummatory experience." (226).

27. Breslin, p. 59.

30. Richey, p. 66.
31. Williams, Selected Essays, p. 68.
32. Mariani, p. 149.
33. Breslin, p. 58.
34. Pepper opts for the former in Aesthetic Quality, pp. 228-42; Dewey opts for the latter in Art as Experience, pp. 266-69.
35. Pepper, Aesthetic Quality, p. 229.

46.
40. Breslin, p. 50.
41. Breslin, p. 50.
42. Pepper, Aesthetic Quality, p. 229.
44. Breslin, p. 79.

46. John Crowe Ransom, "Thoughts on the Poetic Discontent," Fugitive 4 (June 1925), p. 64. Ransom, perhaps universalizing his own experience as a young man, thinks poets
go through three steps, the first of which is dualism, the second romanticism: "Then he consents to surrender the idea of his own dominating personality in exchange for the more tenable idea that he is in some manner related by ties of creation to the world, and entitled to some share in the general patrimony. The second step in his intellectual career is to discover somehow this community. It is a mystical community . . ." (63). Ransom thinks great poets take the third step to "dualism with a difference"—the difference being the ironic "state" or "mode" of mind: "Irony may be regarded as the ultimate mode of the great minds . . ." (64). To be sure, Ransom is really preparing the ground here for the defense of Christianity that he presented a few years later in God Without Thunder: An Unorthodox Defense of Orthodoxy (1930). Ransom seems to have turned from philosophy to literary criticism (following in Eliot's footsteps?) at least in part because he thought arguments in defense of literature transferable to the theological arena—i.e., if literature could be defended against the positivist onslaught, then Christianity could be on the same grounds (treated as a form of myth, which for strategic reasons had already been accorded an honorific status without anyone's having told the positivists). Much that seems vague, peculiar or willful and dogmatic in The World's Body (1938) and The
New Criticism (1941) can be attributed to Ransom's hidden theological agenda. The same, of course, can be said of Eliot, Tate, Brooks and others who helped to shape the New Criticism.


49. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 54. I should perhaps point out that an act of "recreation" by the reader—art as experience—entails relativism, or, as it is sometimes called, perspectivism, unless one is willing to follow Ransom in accounting as possible readers only "those whose history is tangled in just the same way as the poet's." Because the latter is clearly a desperate and absurd alternative to relativism and other alternatives were not forthcoming, the New Critics were willing by the 1930s to pay the price for cutting the work adrift from author and reader.


51. James begins his 8th lecture in *Pragmatism*, "Pragmatism and Religion," by reading and interpreting Whitman's
"To You," showing that metaphysics and criticism are inex-tricably bound up together. "Noble enough is either way of reading the poem; but plainly the pluralistic way agrees with the pragmatic temper best, for it immediately suggests an infinitely larger number of the details of future experience to our mind. It sets definite activities in us at work." (133).
Chapter Five

A substitute for all the gods:
This self, not that gold self aloft,

Alone, one's shadow magnified,
Lord of the body, looking down,

As now and called most high,
The shadow of Chocorua

In an immenser heaven, aloft,
Alone, lord of the land and lord

Of the men that live in the land, high lord,
One's self and the mountains of one's land,

Without shadows, without magnificence,
The flesh, the bone, the dirt, the stone.

_The Man With the Blue Guitar_¹

In the above lyric from _The Man With the Blue Guitar_ (1937), Stevens reiterates one of the commonplaces of 19th-century humanism. As Ludwig Feuerbach first expressed the idea in _The Essence of Christianity_ (1841) and George Eliot translated it: "Religion is the relation of man to his own nature . . . but to his nature not recognised as his own, but regarded as another nature, separate, nay, contradistinguished from his own . . . ."² A fierce enemy of the 18th-century idealist tradition, which he saw as inimical to all material improvement of the human condition, Feuerbach sought to anthropologize theology:

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The personality of God is thus the means by which man converts the qualities of his own nature into the qualities of another being,—of a being external to himself. The personality of God is nothing else than the project-ed personality of man.3

In Stevens's terms, "that gold self aloft" is our "shadow magnified," and, conflated with Mt. Chocorua's "shadow," worshipped as part of "an immenser heaven" that is by implication not our own and which indeed achieves hegemony over us much to our own and our world's impoverishment ("One's self and the mountains of one's land, without shadows, without magnificence"). For, as Stevens put it in Esthétique du Mal, "The greatest poverty is not to live/In a physical world" (CP 325). Hence our world is left heir to the most grossly material—"The flesh, the bone, the dirt, the stone"—and that all disconnected, apparently unrelated and devalued. Especially the collective facts—armies, cities, "one's land"—are lost to the realm aloft, dehuman-ized and derealized; and concepts and conceptual systems are walled off from experiential reality. "An anthropomorphic god is simply a projection of itself by a race of ego-ists, which it is natural for them to treat as sacred." (L 349). To Stevens the contextualist such anthropomorphism was anything but academic: "In A Fading of the Sun the point is that, instead of crying for help to God or to one
of the gods, we should look to ourselves for help. The ex-al-tation of human nature should take the place of its abase-
ment." (L 295). The resubstantialization of Chocorua so that
it could cast its shadow in a world in which we could re-
claim our whole selves would become the subject of a pivo-
tal, neglected, and misunderstood poem, Chocorua to Its
Neighbor (1942), a poem to which a lengthy, if not leisure-
ly, introduction is necessary.

The two central issues in Stevens criticism have
long been Stevens's relationship to romanticism (or, alter-
natively formulated, his relationship to modernism) and the
continuity (or lack thereof) of his development as a poet.
Chocorua bears on both issues. The major flaw of the fine
Pearce and Miller studies, in my view, is their authors'
having without warrant imposed a dialectical framework on
Stevens's poetry, the effect of which is to pose issues in
the distortional bipolar terms of subject-object, mind-mat-
ter, imagination-reality and similar dichotomies which
Stevens was at pains to reject as early as his Harmonium
period—and which back-flip him into the solipsistic world
of extreme romanticism. In March of 1943 Stevens recommend-
ed to Henry Church a Partisan Review polemic of John Dewey's,
"Anti-Naturalism in Extremis," which struck Stevens as being
"valuable." (L 441). Dewey's main point is that "the most
pressing problem and the most urgent task of naturalism at the present time is to work out, on the basis of available evidence, a naturalistic interpretation of the things and events designated by the words that now exert almost complete control of psychological and societal inquiry and report.\(^4\) We should recognize that Stevens was acutely aware of, and wary of, the historical and metaphysical accretions of the terms routinely bandied about in discussions of his poetry.

In any event, the "vanishing of God" is an entirely different problem for one who adheres to a dialectical vision of the world than it is for one who has access to the contextualist world of "pure experience" (a neutral reality) that in effect absorbs all such dichotomies and cuts at a stroke the epistemological knot with which the idealists had felt it their tragic duty to bind themselves. Miller's gloom contrasts with Stevens's gaiety because of Miller's dialectic. In the polemic of which Stevens approved, Dewey insists that all the anti-naturalistic philosophies not only hold base and degrading views of nature in general and of human nature in particular but that they are pessimistic: "the diluted philosophic version of historic supernaturalism which goes by the name of rationalistic metaphysical spiritualism or idealism has no basis upon which to erect its
'higher' non-natural organs and faculties, and the supernatural truths they are said to reveal, without a corresponding thoroughly pessimistic view of human nature. ⁵

By the same token, Pearce's presentation of Stevens as an Adamic poet is marred by several famous misreadings of individual poems in part because Pearce's categories and method betray his general insight into and understanding of Stevens. Stevens's poetry is one of relations—one which takes relations to be real; he is concerned, as he phrased it, with "the incessant conjunctioning between things as they are and things imagined." ⁶ If Stevens were an idealist it would be appropriate to speak of the dialectic of "imagination and reality"; but if Stevens is a contextualist, then the and is just as real and bursts the seams of dialect of the thesis-antithesis variety. Hegelian dialectic—indeed, traditional logic in general—relegates relations to a lesser status and thereby, at least from a contextualist point of view, falsifies. "Life's nonsense pierces us with strange relation." (GP 383). Stevens's sense of the human predicament is both more complex and more vague than those who press him with the iron of dualistic dialectic would have us believe. If "we live in a place/That is not our own and, much more, not ourselves," then we may little understand that to which we as mimics add our "sweeping
meanings" (CP 383-84).

Granted: idealism and romanticism fascinated Stevens all his life; the Ideal and the Romantic are among his favorite subjects, magnificos of the Ideal and mountain-minded Hoons among his favorite speakers. But, like William James, Stevens considers the Romantic and the Ideal anthropologically and psychologically—as varieties of religious experience or forms of human desire or expressions of a certain kind of personality. His metaphysic, on the other hand, is intensely, even one-sidedly and repetitively, anti-idealist:

The imperfect is our paradise.
Note that, this bitterness, delight,
Since the imperfect is so hot in us,
Lies in flawed words and stubborn sounds. (CP 194)

So he put it in "The Poems of Our Climate," a poem which rather ludicrously lends its title to Harold Bloom's idealist misprision of Stevens. Time and again Stevens's speakers dispute with idealists, insisting, for example, in "Study of Two Pears" that "The pears are not seen/As the observer wills." (CP 197). The speakers which most clearly have their creator's endorsement insist that the world is not created by the self, as idealists would have it, but rather exists before any cognitive operations are performed. To it we must adapt, although not surrender. Stevens has great fun showing over and over again that when idealists think a world is being created, it is rather a self that is
in creation; and there are many potential selves, each a potential system of relations. As Richard Ellman has noted of the young (1907) Stevens: "What in his journal in 1899 he had considered artificiality now began to seem altogether natural. For he had come to William James's conclusion, which he had perhaps heard or read at Harvard, that every self is many selves." Stevens's Jamesian notion of the self as a relation or context (a natural corollary of a synthetic world theory like contextualism) in effect resolved for him all those dilemmas of romanticism that arose from a dichotomization of subject and object, self and world. In "Prelude to Objects" Stevens posits an adequacy of experience unthinkable before James:

If he will be heaven after death,
If, while he lives, he hears himself
Sounded in music, if the sun,
Stormer, is the color of a self
As certainly as night is the color
Of a self, if, without sentiment,
He is what he hears and sees and if,
Without pathos, he feels what he hears
And sees, being nothing otherwise,
Having nothing otherwise, he has not
To go to the Louvre to behold himself. (CP 194)

Note that this is not at all the sort of synthesis posited by organicism, being neither an absorption of an ego into a world that is an "externalization of soul" nor a moment of transcendence.
But if Stevens most often finds idealism comic, sometimes it seems to fill him with anger and disgust, as in "The Pediment of Appearance":

Young men go walking in the woods,  
Hunting for the great ornament,  
The pediment of appearance.

They hunt for a form which by its form alone,  
Without diamond--blazons or flashing or  
Chains of circumstance,

By its form alone, by being right,  
By being high, is the stone  
For which they are looking:

The savage transparence. They go crying  
The world is myself, life is myself,  
Breathing as if they breathed themselves,

Full of their ugly lord,  
Speaking the phrases that follow the sight  
Of this essential ornament

In the woods, in this full-blown May,  
The months of understanding. The pediment  
Lifts up its heavy scowl before them. (CP 361-62)

Stevens no more than James can bear to see the "rich thick-
et" of reality straightened according to the architectural 
notions of the idealists, the Whole, having been drained, razed and impoverished, crowned with a classical pediment, the triangular space or gable of which may satisfy the trinitarians but which must soon seem too much like stuff-
ing heaven in an attic. The young men's bifurcation of the world into "appearance" and "reality" leads to the miscon-
struction of what appears as an impediment, when the true
impediment is their demand for a pediment, a roof for the stars; and as a consequence the world is transformed into an ugly solipsism. Idealist habits are clearly to blame: "They go crying/The world is myself, life is myself . . . ."

In "Connoisseur of Chaos," Stevens answers Berkeley (and by implication romantics, idealists, organicists) with James:

After all the pretty contrast of life and death
Proves that these opposite things partake of one,
At least that was the theory, when bishops' books
Resolved the world. We cannot go back to that.
The squirming facts exceed the squamous mind,
If one may say so. And yet relation appears,
A small relation expanding like the shadow
Of a cloud on sand, a shape on the side of a hill. (CP 215)

It was James, as I've already noted, who first asserted the reality of relations, and in a way which had important effects on the modern attitude towards language:

If there be such things as feelings at all, then so surely as relations between objects exist in rerum natura, so surely, and more surely, do feelings exist to which these relations are known. There is not a conjunction or a preposition, and hardly an adverbial phrase, syntactic form, or inflection of voice, in human speech that does not express some shading or other of relation which we at some moment actually feel to exist between the larger objects of our thought.8

Remember James's having insisted on a unity of imagination and sensation and on a theory of emotion that is a writer's dream. Add his key notion of experience as a continuous flux
(i.e., a given of perception), and the adequacy of language ceases to be in question. "By metaphor you paint/A thing."
"The senses paint/By metaphor." (CP 219). The speaker of "Poem Written at Morning" continues:

The truth must be
That you do not see, you experience, you feel,
That the buxom eye brings merely its element
To the total thing, a shapeless giant forced
Upward.

(CP 219)

Indeed, not only is language by implication potentially adequate to expression, but it is also a treasure house or store house of experience and feeling, particularly in its lexicon and colloquial forms. Hence this new adequacy of language entails an adequacy of feeling, there being no essential difference, according to James, between the relation of two objects in the world of particulars and the relation between two objects, ideas, or concepts in the stream of consciousness. We experience relations. Now where Berkeley saw soul relating things to one another and in effect provided English romanticism with its enabling idea, Stevens can see language, sensation, and feeling cooperating:

Words add to the sense. The words for the dazzle
Of mica, the dithering of grass,
The Arachne integument of dead trees,
Are the eye grown larger, more intense. (CP 234)

Words and their forms and relations all enhance sensational
processes. Just as "Music falls on the silence like a sense,/A passion that we feel, not understand" (CP 392), so the poem may act as a new means of sense impressions, or of expanding the resources of language. By the same token, our loss of the subjunctive mood in modern speech may also entail the loss of a range or mode of feeling. The romantic simplification and democratization of the poet's repertoire has its impoverishing side. But if diminution has been a fact, enlargement is a possibility. Thus it is for Stevens as for James that "What/One believes is what matters." (CP 258). Or to pose the issue as James did in his late work, conceptual systems are part of perceptual reality and create real effects. Nothing could be further from the sense of belatedness felt by the romantics and their true descendants.

The recently-emerged consensus view of Stevens as a poet firmly and directly rooted in the British and American romantic traditions (between which Harold Bloom, the major spokesman for this consensus, has rarely seen fit to distinguish)—although one who had to grow through a series of variously defined stages in order to realize his romanticism—is a view that makes of Stevens an emperor only to the extent that it strips him of clothes. I think Stevens rightly assessed the extent of poetic influence in his case when he maintained: "While, of course, I come
down from the past, the past is my own and not something marked Coleridge, Wordsworth, etc. I know of no one who has been particularly important to me. My reality-imagination complex is entirely my own even though I see it in others." (L 792). Even critics like Margaret Peterson who have demonstrated Stevens's contextualism at book length, tracing the direct influence of James and Bergson in literally dozens of poems, have freely granted "that Stevens's position is essentially a romantic one cannot be seriously questioned"—without, however, either satisfactorily defining romanticism or explaining how Stevens's purported romanticism relates to his modernism. Stevens's is the most negative, and to my mind unfair, critique of romanticism of all the major modernists. Time and again he parodies the major romantics, as in "Sailing After Lunch," where he burlesques one of Shelley's finest lyrics ("My Soul Is an Enchanted Boat," from Prometheus Unbound):

This heavy historical sail
Through the mustiest blue of the lake
In a really vertiginous boat
Is wholly the vapidest fake. . . . (Stevens's ellipses)

Turning from parody, the speaker explains, "It is least what one ever sees./It is only the way one feels . . . ." (CP 120). Basically Stevens seems to think romantics try too hard (note his pun on "mustiest" above). In one of his most explicitly contextualist statements, "On Poetic Truth"
(1954), Stevens explained:

poetry has to do with reality in that concrete and individual aspect of it which the mind can never tackle altogether on its own terms, with matter that is foreign and alien in a way in which abstract systems, ideas in which we detect an inherent pattern, a structure that belongs to the ideas themselves, can never be. It is never familiar to us in the way in which Plato wished the conquests of the mind to be familiar. On the contrary its function, the need which it meets and which has to be met in some way in every age that is not to become decadent or barbarous is precisely this contact with reality as it impinges on us from the outside, the sense that we can touch and feel a solid reality which does not wholly dissolve itself into the conceptions of our own minds. It is the individual and particular that does this. (OP 236-37)

In other words, Stevens regards system as a logical category imposed upon rather than inherent within reality. The World is an entity we create; the real world we do not create. That is, Stevens accepts the Jamesian mediation of idealism and realism. Stevens goes on to define "the very soul of art": "a quickening of our awareness" of the particulars of reality. Do those who apply the word romantic to his poetry have any but an emotive meaning in mind?

Like Henry James, Stevens seems all his life to have "unconsciously pragmatized." We would flounder less in the complexity of his poetry, find less bewildering the
multiplicity of voices, the substantialization of rhetorical devices, and the rapid shifts from satire and even burlesque to meditation and rapture if we started by appreciating and understanding his contextualism, all the distinctive features of which are readily identifiable in and central to his poetry. Take, for example, "On the Road Home," in which, as Thomas J. Hines says, the "voyage 'home' is a metaphor for the movement of the mind toward a more appropriate relation to its own world"10 than any form of idealism or absolutism could provide:

It was when I said,  
"There is no such thing as the truth,"  
That the grapes seemed fatter.  
The fox ran out of his hole.

You . . . You said,  
"There are many truths,  
But they are not parts of a truth."  
Then the tree, at night, began to change,

Smoking through green and smoking blue.  
We were two figures in a wood.  
We said we stood alone.

It was when I said,  
"Words are not forms of a single word.  
In the sum of the parts, there are only the parts.  
The world must be measured by eye";

It was when you said,  
"The idols have seen lots of poverty,  
Snakes and gold and lice,  
But not the truth";

It was at that time, that the silence was largest  
And longest, the night was roundest,  
The fragrance of the autumn warmest,  
Closest and strongest. (CP 203-04)
The speaker's denial of "the truth," which is implicitly the denial of a static block universe, immediately vivifies his world, makes him aware of his being in a world in which things happen: "The fox ran out of his hole."--an event of life and death significance for the fox, and an act analogous to the speaker's act of denial. In the cartoon version of the romantic's idealist universe, one is always the hunter and seeker after Truth (hence Thoreau's injunction: "make them hunters"!), a hunter in an egoistic, at moments even solipsistic universe in which it is hardly ever necessary to conceive a thou, so omnipresent is the Thou. One thinks of Coleridge's "The Aeolian Harp" as typical, the speaker after his visionary moment left "wildered and dark" and subject to the scoldings of a Sara whose both feet will forever remain firmly planted to the ground. Imagine, rather, a world in which one is the hunted, the sought for, perhaps even (as Stevens finally went so far as to assert) the truth oneself. Suddenly there is that significant other who is the hunter and one's fellow foxes. Genuine recognition of a "you" leads (as in the second stanza) to the affirmation of pluralism, and a keener awareness that it is not so much boundaries like inner and outer that matter in a world of conscious experience as the differences made by before and after. In stanza four the "I" denies the symbolist version of romanticism, and in stanza five the "you"
denies the "realist," each denial, however, ironically affirming the relation developing between these two foxes, either one of whom might also be a hunter; and it is in this world of ever-ramifying, demystified relations that particulars achieve the superlative.

While an appreciation of Stevens's contextualism may not explicate the poems for us, it may save us from grossly misreading. What most chagrins this writer is the number of fine critics who have acutely delineated the contextualist outlines of Stevens's poetry--acknowledged his utter rejection of the soul and any absolute, his celebration of pluralism, empiricism, change, and chance, his expose of system as imposed, logical rather than real (and thus his endorsement of radical empiricism), his treatment of consciousness as a function or relation rather than an entity--and called them romantic, organicist, idealist, or transcendentalist. Or who have offered strikingly contextualist readings of poems such as "The Idea of Order at Key West" and "The Man on the Dump" only to conclude in a welter of idealist slogans. Or who, like Roy Harvey Pearce, have on the one hand recognized rightly that "Stevens sought not to transcend his sense of human limitations but to find and contain the center from which the limiting force radiated" but who have then seen in this little more than a renewal of romanticism.11 Jacques Barzun must be right in
charging that "the American mind and much of the European still linger in the Idealist tradition that James combatted all his life." I have sometimes wondered whether Stevens's critics are aware of contextualism as a metaphysic distinct from organicism or doubted their willingness to analyze Stevens along any but a single axis. Certainly Stevens's entire work is predicated on an urgent sense of the importance of ideas—especially metaphysical ideas. By the early 1940s, if not much earlier, Stevens had developed a keen awareness of the metaphorical foundations of all metaphysical belief and repeatedly expressed the same sort of creative scepticism as that for which Pepper called:

Yet to speak of the whole world as metaphor
Is still to stick to the contents of the mind
And the desire to believe in a metaphor.
It is to stick to the nicer knowledge of
Belief, that what it believes in is not true. (CP 332)

Stevens knows that "It is never the thing but the version of the thing" (CP 332), a theory not the truth that we know; but such for him is "The Pure Good of Theory." To be sure, Stevens was aware of Pepper's elaboration of James by this time and had recommended Aesthetic Quality to others.

Stevens's contextualism became more marked with the years as he pushed his applications of his root metaphor ever further. Whereas to Shelley and all true
romantics (as Shelley wrote in *Adonais*, LII)

The One remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many-colored glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity.

for Stevens life is an event, and, as he asserted in "A Discovery of Thought" (OP 96) in 1950,

The accent of deviation in the living thing
That is its life preserved, the effort to be born
Surviving being born, the event of life.

Stevens always insisted that change was what defined the event: "Nothing had happened because nothing had changed." (CP 392). Change to Stevens (as to all contextualists) is fundamental: "What is necessary is to recognize change as constant. Life is chaos, notwithstanding its times of serenity" (L 367), Stevens wrote Hi Simons in 1940. And though "change is incessant" and this makes for much waste, "This is not pessimism. The world is completely waste, but it is a waste always full of portentous lustres." And in "Mr. Burnshaw and the Statue" (1935), the work Stevens was referring to when explaining his view of change to Simons, he said: "It is only enough/To live incessantly in change." (OP 50). Only contextualists take change in this radical, categorial sense, denying the existence of any permanent unchangeable structure or entity in nature. All such are fictions, doomed like the statue of General Du Puy. When
Stevens plays with the notion of contraries as implicated in the origin of change, he is careful to avoid the language of dialectic:

Two things of opposite natures seem to depend
On one another, as a man depends
On a woman, day on night, the imagined
On the real. This is the origin of change.
Winter and spring, cold copulars, embrace
And forth the particulars of rapture come.

Music falls on the silence like a sense,
A passion that we feel, not understand.
Morning and afternoon are clasped together

And North and South are an intrinsic couple
And sun and rain a plural, like two lovers
That walk away as one in the greenest body. (CP 392)

Significantly, the contraries here are not concepts or abstractions but things or relations that can be perceived; and depending upon one's point of view, these contraries all may seem of opposite natures or one in plural form.

No doubt the marriage metaphor acquires centrality in Stevens's mature work in large measure because it enables us to perceive interdependency of parts and plurals without abstracting away from experience.

Stevens was equally consistent to the end of his life in his pluralism. Take the late "July Mountain" (1955), for example:

We live in a constellation
Of patches and of pitches,
Not in a single world,
In things said well in music,
On the piano, and in speech,
As in a page of poetry--
Thinkers without final thoughts
In an always incipient cosmos,
The way, when we climb a mountain,
Vermont throws itself together. (OP 114-15)

I know of no finer expression of the Jamesian man (for
whom, as Ralph Barton Perry has pointed out, "knowing means sensile acquaintance with concrete particulars. Hence,
for James, while knowing is a form of practice and is prac-
tically motivated, it culminates in a revelation or disclo-
 sure of existence."13)—unless it be this earlier, trans-
parently ironic section of "Landscape With Boat" (1940):

He never supposed
That he might be truth himself, or part of it,
That the things that he rejected might be part
And the irregular turquoise, part, the perceptible blue
Grown denser, part, the eye so touched, so played
Upon by clouds, that ear so magnified
By thunder, parts, and all these things together,
Parts, and more things, parts. He never supposed divine
Things might not look divine, nor that if nothing
Was divine then all things were, the world itself,
And that if nothing was the truth, then all
Things were the truth, the world itself was the truth. (OP 242)

One could multiply such quotations from the poetry at will
if all one were looking for were an expression of context-
ualist sentiments. Only contextualists are on the one hand
synthetic in their treatment of analysis, regarding the
basic facts (like organicists) as complexes or contexts,
but, on the other hand, are also dispersive in their
treatment of analysis (unlike all organicists, idealists, and romantics), insisting upon a universe that is a multitude of scattered facts not necessarily determining one another to any degree and upon any part of which system or form represents an imposition by another part. System or form, in other words, is also an event. Stevens contextualizes the romantic revelation in a manner of which Dewey would thoroughly have approved: "There is inherent in the words the revelation of reality a suggestion that there is a reality of or within or beneath the surface of reality. There are many such realities through which poets constantly pass to and fro, without noticing the imaginary lines that divide one from the other." (OP 213). The much-remarked upon "indeterminateness" or "lack of precision" of Stevens's later poetry (like that of Williams's) is probably a reflection of his pluralism and derives from the historical, imposed nature of system or form. The contextualist poem, if it is to have even just the barest qualities of the root metaphor, must leave to the reader a maximum of making, shaping, or forming, so that it will not become a past event but rather retain its potential to happen in the present—even though this may mean considerable sacrifice of the author's means of controlling reader response. "The poem must resist the intelligence/Almost successfully." (GP 350). Vagueness, confusion, ambiguity, and indeterminacy
all may serve positive creative ends in contextualist works.

The temptation to multiply instances of contextualist remarks on Stevens's part in the Letters and prose writings I shall resist. Suffice it to say that I could cite many remarks of the sort Stevens made to Ronald Lane Latimer (5 Nov. 1935): "The only possible order of life is one in which all order is incessantly changing." (L 291-92). Or I could turn to the Adagia and find aphorisms like "To read a poem should be an experience, like experiencing an act." (OP 164). Early and late, in prose as well as poetry, Stevens was a proselyte for chaos, change, and chance; for a metaphysic based on the event in its context; and for a poetics equal to this changed conception of the world.

In Stevens's poetry, the focus is on neither the subjective images of the idealists and romantics nor the objective particulars of the empiricists and naturalists, but rather the relations between the two, which radical empiricism really for the first time enabled people to see, James having made knower and known inhabitants of the same universe of change and thereby made virtual the restoration of experiential fullness: out of the "embrace . . . the particulars of rapture come." (CP 392). Stevens rings endless changes on the interrelationship between language
and perception, apparently traveling along the same road as had James when he arrived at his revolutionary declaration that "concepts and percepts are consubstantial." As James explained in his last and unfinished contextualist primer, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (1911), "The world we live in is one in which it is impossible (except by theoretic retrospection) to disentangle the contributions of intellect from those of sense." And in imagery which recalls numerous Stevens poems of the 1940s James notes "how practically momentous is this enlargement of the span of our knowledge through the wrapping of our percepts in ideas. It is the whole coil and compound of both by which effects are determined, and they may then be different effects from those to which the perceptual nucleus would by itself give rise."14 Roy Harvey Pearce is exactly right in arguing that in the *Harmonium* poems "description and declaration are equated with perception, and perception with conception. The poet differentiates one segment of his reality from another and learns that in the process he has made every segment part of himself."15 But this is to stress the Jamesian side of *Harmonium*, the mind as an eye, consciousness as a function or relation rather than an entity, concepts and percepts as consubstantial. Right from the outset, contextualism was not merely a subject or sentiment for Stevens but rather his way of thinking and
feeling. "When I was a boy," Stevens explained to Hi Simons in 1940, "I used to think that things progressed by contrasts, that there was a law of contrasts. But this was building the world out of blocks. Afterwards I came to think of the energizing that comes from mere interplay, interaction." (L 368). In other words, Stevens was quite aware of his having eschewed the block universe of the idealists for the dynamic world of relations asserted by the contextualists.

J. Hillis Miller's remains not only the pioneering but the best attempt to save Stevens from his romantic-revisionist critics. Miller's central point, that Stevens's is a poetry of struggle, a poetry devoted to the impossible task of reconciling imagination and reality, is essentially sound. I would like to contextualize Miller's analysis, however: to caution that Stevens's use of idea as a direct sense image derives directly from James's Principles; that Stevens's use of abstraction as man's power to separate himself from the resisting and impinging real is likewise derived from the Principles ("The act of singling out is then called abstraction . . ." 16); that the Stevensian imagination is irreconcilable with reality because it is Jamesian—sensationally conditioned (thus incommensurable with reality)—and the very nature of the neutral reality
of pure experience which James proposed is to resist more than momentary reconciliation; and so forth. One example must serve to illustrate the danger here: "Crude Foyer," in which, starting from the assertion that "Thought is false happiness," the speaker proceeds to enumerate the false happinesses of idealism, the most important of which is "the idea that . . .

there lies at the end of thought
A foyer of the spirit in a landscape
Of the mind, in which we sit
And wear humanity's bleak crown . . . (OP 305)

Joseph Riddle reads this as an expression of a noble existentialism rather than the willful turning from paradise I take it to be: "Rejecting foyers of the spirit which reach outward into empty paradise, he dons 'humanity's bleak crown' . . ." But because of his contextualist beliefs, the speaker has no patience with our sitting in our crude foyer, neither in our ideal realm nor the earthy reality that is all we have; sitting and breathing

An innocence of an absolute,
False happiness, since we know that we use
Only the eye as faculty, that the mind
Is the eye, and that this landscape of the mind

Is a landscape only of the eye; and that
We are ignorant men incapable
Of the least, minor, vital metaphor, content,
At last, there, when it turns out to be here. (OP 305)

The tone, surely, is one of anger and disgust at such
content, even in death; there is none of the pity here that is expressed in "Large Red Man Reading" for those ghosts "who had expected more." Stevens here takes quite literally the Jamesian reconceptualization of the mind as an eye, an idea a sense image, and he proceeds to the same conclusion as James: if the mind is an eye, of sorts, and consciousness a function or relation, then to turn the eye away from reality is catastrophic. Misused to present us "the critique of paradise," the same language that might as "vital metaphor" (and therefore sense impressions) turn us towards the world again can only confirm us in our ignorance. A foyer is no place to live.

Except for Harold Bloom, no one has paid much attention to one of Stevens's most assertively contextualist poems, Chocorua to Its Neighbor (1943). J. Hillis Miller briefly discusses Chocorua as "an extraordinarily disembodied poem, the subject of which is a strange shadow, 'an eminence,/But of nothing' (CP 300)." Bernard Heringman has commented that Chocorua is about a kind of ideal transcendentalist poet: "The entire poem describes this man as a fusion of the two realms of imagination and reality, making him the microcosm and the voice of the synthesized world." Bloom, in short, deserves the honor due a pioneer who has ventured where others have seen no trail.
Chocorua is "a vision, which takes place at the end of night but before the morning comes," Bloom says, adding that he considers it a "greatly underrated, almost hushed poem of rapture." Unfortunately, Bloom fails to account for most of the poem's details, construes it according to inappropriate generic criteria, and finally disdains to demonstrate the plausibility or coherence of his reading. When Bloom generalizes he is vague, when specific, wrong:

Of all Stevens' longer poems, Chocorua is the most unreservedly affirmative, though what it affirms is neither simple enough nor sufficiently palpable to bear reduction. This is hardly surprising in a poem which purports to be the discourse of one mountain to another. Bloom is right to nod in Emerson's direction: the ultimate "precursor poem" is undoubtedly Monadnock. It is by no means obvious, however, that Chocorua "purports to be the discourse of one mountain to another," nor does Bloom adduce evidence to support his assertion; and it certainly seems self-contradictory to insist that what one cannot in any way define is unreservedly "affirmative." Bloom flirts with absurdity when he announces that the opening stanza of Chocorua is "a hushed stanza of definition and division that declares its own synecdochal rhetoricity and that says what it is to be an Emersonian mountain in New Hampshire." In one of his earlier books, The Ringers in the
Tower, Bloom's attempt to define the relationship between Chocorua and Monadnoc borders on the unintelligible: "Monadnoc expects to disappear in the mightier chant of the Major Man it awaits, a god no longer in ruins. Chocorua celebrates only the shadow of the Major Man, but already begins to disappear in that celebration."23

According to Blake, "Great things are done when men and mountains meet." Mountains have always been regarded as places of vision, revelation, and divinity, but different mountains have generally been associated with different visions and revelations of the divine. Chocorua is not a place where we would expect a new Sermon on the Mount, nor a Mt. Sinai from which we might expect to get a glimpse of a new Adam or a new law; nor, Bloom notwithstanding, is it a Mt. Monadnoc from which a new Emersonian ideal poet might catch a glimpse of a refurbished transcendentalism. We can't imagine Stevens saying, as Emerson does in "The Poet," "I shall mount above these clouds and opaque airs in which I live—opaque though they seem transparent—and from the heaven of truth I shall see and comprehend my relations."24 Olympus, Chimborazo, Fuji, Mt. Abora, Pound's Mt. Taishan, Shelley's or Byron's Mt. Blanc: the mountains Stevens might have invoked are many, and each would have borne a particular freight of meaning and association.
Mountains appear only incidentally in Stevens's early poetry, as, for example, those on which the deer walk in "Sunday Morning," those snowy mountains among which the eye of the blackbird moves, or those western mountains where there might be mandolines. Mountains begin to become a frequent and meaningful part of the Stevens landscape in the mid-30s with "that mountain-minded Hoon" (usually identified as Emerson, though by Bloom termed "Paterian-Whitmanian") of "Sad Strains of a Gay Waltz" (1935), the "idea of the Alps" in "A Thought Revolved" (1936) and the "mountainous music" of Chocorua in The Man With the Blue Guitar (1937). Stevens is careful to deny his mountains—which are increasingly associated with peace, fulfillment, and a good death, as in "the final mountain" of Credences of Summer (1946)—any insulation from his contextualism—any participation in a timeless, transcendental realm. Consider the following from "The Owl in the Sarcophagus" (1947), where the mountain is denied any symbolic aspect by its having been bound with a simile, although it nevertheless lends its shape to the whole passage:

There he saw well the foldings in the height
Of sleep, the whiteness folded into less,
Like many robings, as moving masses are,

As a moving mountain is, moving through day
And night, colored from distances, central
Where luminous agitations come to rest,
In an ever-changing, calmest unity,
The unique composure, harshest streakings joined
In a vanishing-vanished violet that wraps around

The giant body the meanings of its folds,
The weaving and the crinkling and the vex . . . (CP 433)

Chocorua is not just any mountain. In 1886 William James bought a farm on the shore of Chocorua Lake, over which the mountain Chocorua looms, "a sharp blue peak thirty-five hundred feet high," as Gay Wilson Allen describes it. James's letters, many of them dated from "Chocorua, N.H.," are full of ecstatic descriptions of Chocorua and its effect. Over the twenty-five years that they summered there in the house with fourteen doors, all opening outwards, Chocorua became the emotional home of the James family. Henry and William had their happiest time together there. William had long looked forward to retiring to Chocorua, there to do his philosophizing and finally to create his system; it was to Chocorua that he was hurrying in his final illness. At his behest, his ashes were scattered on one of Chocorua's streams where he had frequently bathed on warm summer days. I do not know whether Stevens ever saw any of E.E. Cummings's oil paintings of Mt. Chocorua, the best known of which dates from 1941. (Cummings's parents not only were first introduced to each other by William James but also in Cambridge lived next door and near Mt. Chocorua had a summer home.)
William believed that Henry's description of Chocorua in *The American Scene* (1907) did it most justice. Not known for lyrical descriptions of natural beauty, Henry's work offers nothing else quite like it, especially in the impressionistic late style. Having opened with a brief negative glimpse of the New York scene with all its vulgarity, Henry turns to "the New England Arcadia," especially Chocorua, which he describes as an "admirable silvered summit (for Chocorua Mountain carries its grey head quite with the grandest air)." He continues:

the parts of the impression fell together and took a particular light. This light, from whatever source proceeding, cast an irresistible spell, bathed the picture in the confessed resignation of early autumn, the charming sadness that resigned itself with a silent smile. I say "silent" because the voice of the air had dropped as forever, dropped to a stillness exquisite, day by day, for a pilgrim from a land of stertorous breathing, one of the windiest corners of the world; the leaves of the forest turned, one by one, to crimson and to gold, but never broke off: all to the enhancement of this strange conscious hush of the landscape, which kept one in presence as of a world created, a stage set, a sort of ample capacity constituted, for—we'll, for things that wouldn't, after all, happen: more the pity for them, and for me and for you. This view of so many of the high places of the hills and deep places of the woods, the lost trails and wasted bowers, the vague, empty, rock-roughened pastures, the lonely intervals where the
afternoon lingered and the hidden ponds over which the season itself seemed to bend as a young bedizened, a slightly melodramatic mother, before taking some guilty flight, hangs over the crib of her sleeping child—these things put you, so far as you were preoccupied with the human history of places, into a mood in which appreciation became a positive wantonness and the sense of quality, plucking up unexpectedly a spirit, fairly threatened to take the game into its hands. You discovered, when once it was stirred, an elegance in the commonest objects, and a mystery even in accidents that really represented, perhaps, mere plainness unashamed. 27

James seems to wish to conjure up the stock elements of a romantic landscape only to highlight his own identity as a modern in their midst. After a great deal more of the same sort of description, Henry James turns the Chocorua landscape into a personified synecdoche for the American scene: a voice in the air, from week to week, a spiritual voice: "Oh, the land's all right!"—it took on fairly a fondness of emphasis, it rebounded from other aspects, at times, with such a tenderness. Thus it sounded, the blessed note, under many promptings, but always in the same form and to the effect that the poor dear land itself—if that was all that was the matter—would beautifully "do." It seemed to plead, the pathetic presence, to be liked, to be loved, to be stayed with, lived with, handled with some kindness, shown even some courtesy of admiration. 28

Particularly significant about Henry's "voice in the air"
is the non-transcendental nature of its appeal. This is not Emerson's Monadnoc that "imagest the stable Good/For which we all our lifetime grope,/In shifting form the formless mind" but rather the potentially companionable otherness of the modern landscape. In yet another passage that may be relevant to Stevens's Chocorua, Henry James notes:

Written over the great New Hampshire region at least, and stamped, in particular, in the shadow of the admirable high-perched cone of Chocorua, which rears itself, all granite, over a huge interposing shoulder, quite with the allure of a minor matterhorn—everywhere legible was the hard little historic record of agricultural failure and defeat. It had to pass for the historic background, that traceable truth that a stout human experience had been tried, and broken down. One was in presence, everywhere, of the refusal to consent to history, and of the consciousness, on the part of every site, that this precious compound is in no small degree being insolently made, on the other side of the continent, at the expense of such sites. The touching appeal of nature, as I have called it therefore, the "Do something kind for me," is not so much a "Live upon me and thrive by me" as a "Live with me, somehow, and let us make out together what we may do for each other—something that is not merely estimable in more or less greasy greenbacks. See how 'sympathetic' I am," the still voice seemed everywhere to proceed, "and how I am therefore better than my fate; see how I lend myself to poetry and sociability—positively to aesthetic use; give me that consolation."
Various elements, none of them conclusive proof of Stevens's ever having read *The American Scene*, are common to both James's descriptions and Stevens's *Chocorua*: the voice in the air, the shadow, the sympathy of the natural for the human; James's "strange conscious hush of the landscape, which kept one in the presence as of a world created, a stage set"—although something happens in *Chocorua*, whereas Henry James seems to recognize a dismal past and a rich potential for future "aesthetic use." Certainly it is *The American Scene* that first presents the Chocorua to Florida interpretation of America, which Stevens, perhaps coincidentally, was to broaden to stand for all of human reality. We can at least be quite sure that Stevens knew of the association between the James family and Chocorua; for in his lecture "The Figure of the Youth as a Virile Poet," which, like *Chocorua*, dates from 1943, Stevens quotes from a letter James wrote to Bergson that was dated from "Chocorua, N.H.": "You may be amused at the comparison," James wrote Bergson about the latter's newly-published *L'Evolution Creatrice*, "but in finishing it I found the same after-taste remaining as after finishing *Madame Bovary*, such a flavor of persistent euphony." 31

In short, I think it clear that Stevens expected his readers to come to the poem with the Jamesian association ringing in their minds—-not at all an unreasonable
expectation given the fact that James's *Letters* (1920) and Perry's *The Thought and Character of William James* (1935), which includes hundreds of letters, were best sellers of their kind. The title of the poem might in addition lead the more literary among us to expect not only the association with James to be developed but also a comparison with Emerson. We have in *Chocorua* the contextualist vision of the new Adam-Christ-poet, or in the Stevens pun with which the poem leads into its final ellipsis, the "rugged roy." "What is this world going to be? What is life to make of itself? The centre of gravity of philosophy must therefore alter its place. The earth of things, long thrown into shadow by the glories of the upper ether, must resume its rights." 32 So James posed what he considered the central "vital" question.

At issue is the nature of the relation Stevens develops between transcendentalism and contextualism, Monadnoc and Chocorua. According to Harold Bloom an "absurdly undervalued" poem in the Emerson canon, *Monadnoc* (1845) is simple in its structure, its message unmistakably clear (nor would Emerson, needless to say, have been ashamed of writing a poem with a message). After a short introductory section in which he responds to a "summoning voice," the speaker sets out in the direction of Monadnoc (ll. 1-36). He is soon profoundly disappointed to find the people
incommensurate with the region's beauty and promise (ll. 37-94):

Intent I searched the region round,
And in low hut my monarch found.
He was no eagle and no earl,
Alas! my foundling was a churl,
With heart of cat, and eyes of bug,
Dull victim of his pipe and mug;
Woe is me for my hopes' downfall!
Lord! is yon squalid peasant all
That this proud nursery could breed
For God's viceregency and stead? (ll. 71-80)

The speaker had expected more of the Oversoul to be apparent in people as he climbed to higher elevations. Disillusioned, he proceeds to lament the mental and spiritual poverty of the people, whose lives are as anti-poetic as the landscape is poetic, and continues to search, his faith in the "world-soul" itself unbroken (ll. 95-212):

The world-soul knows his own affair,
Fore-looking when his hands prepare
For the next ages men of mould,
Well embodied, well ensouled,
He cools the present's fiery glow,
Sets the life pulse strong, but slow. (ll. 162-67)

We are in the unitarily purposive, only apparently various world of transcendentalism, than which nothing could be further from the "rich thicket," the "great blooming, buzzing confusion" of the contextualist's world, except when he entertains "thought-like Monadnocks." (CP 424). The speaker is at this point answered at considerable length
by Monadnoc, which at moments sounds remarkably like God answering Job out of a more genial whirlwind, asking him where he was when He made Leviathan:

Ah! welcome, if thou bring
My secret in thy brain;
To mountain-top may muse's wing
With good allowance strain.
Gentle pilgrim, if thou know
The gamut old of Pan,
And how the hills began . . . (ll. 232-38)

Indeed, one can hardly avoid concluding that the structural and topical allusions to Job in Monadnoc are as deliberate as they are disastrous—disastrous because they call attention to the inadequacy of Emerson's conceptualization of evil here, his speaker's complaint being intellectual and aesthetic rather than the piercing human cry of Job. It is no doubt at least in part Monadnoc's having risen above the plain of human misery that has led Stevens in a time of war to counter with the view from Chocorua—from which the armies and cities are plainly visible and not the "simplest soldier's cry"to be shut out.

Monadnoc claims to have been fixed where it is by enchantment—"To stand the hurts of time, until/In mightier chant I disappear"—and prophesies the coming of the perfect man, the complete poet:

Monadnoc is a mountain strong,
Tall and good my kind among,
But well I know, no mountain can
Measure with a perfect man;
For it is on Zodiack's writ,
Adamant is soft to wit;
And when the greater comes again,
With my music in his brain,
I shall pass as glides my shadow
Daily over hill and meadow. (ll. 275–84)

Although he sounds suspiciously Christ-like in his eschatological trappings, this "perfect man" is actually the transcendentalist poet deprived of Christ's humanity:

Anchored fast for many an age,
I await the bard and sage,
Who in large thoughts, like fair pearl-seed,
Shall string Monadnoc like a bead. (ll. 302–05)

One cannot but hear in response the bitter sarcasm of Stevens's "The Good Man Has No Shape." Stevens clearly regards Emerson's "bard and sage" in much the same light as he regards the Jesus who was betrayed and dehumanized by deification. Ordinary men are no more Monadnoc's concern than quotidian reality. The future poet will descend from Jove, not men. Ordinary men, ordinary sailors--"Cooped in a ship he cannot steer,/Who is the captain he knows not" (ll. 355–56)–Monadnoc delights in terrorizing:

I scowl on him with my cloud,
With my north wind chill his blood,
I lame him clattering down the rocks,
And to live he is in fear.
Then, at last, I let him down
Once more into his dapper town,
To chatter frightened to his clan,
And forget me, if he can. (ll. 359–66)
To be sure, Emerson means by such imagery to place his Monadnoc in the tradition of the American sublime, but the contrast between Emerson's Monadnoc and the Chocorua of Henry James and Wallace Stevens is nonetheless striking for all its generic appropriateness.

In Monadnoc's concluding section, the speaker, like Job, accepts his chastening in all humility and explains in the most explicit terms the meaning of his symbolism:

Thou seest, O watchman tall!
Our towns and races grow and fall,
And imagest the stable Good
For which we all our lifetime grope,
In shifting form the formless mind;
And though the substance us elude,
We in thee the shadow find.

Emerson's shadow, of course, is a Platonic shadow cast by the real from its transcendental realm; we are the captives in the cave watching such shadows. What jars here in part is that Emerson is proposing Monadnoc as an image of the "stable Good," when the reader has no doubt been thinking of Monadnoc as almost utterly removed from human concerns. One is reminded of a passage in Emerson's essay, "Love," which James quoted by way of explaining one way that concepts may be used:

Each man sees over his own experience a certain stain of error, whilst that of other men looks fair and ideal. Let any man go back to those delicious relations
which make the beauty of his life, which have given him sincerest instruction and nourishment, he will shrink and moan. Alas! I know not why, but infinite compunctions embitter in mature life the remembrances of budding joy, and cover every beloved name. Every thing is beautiful seen from the point of the intellect, or as truth. But all is sour, if seen as experience. Details are melancholy; the plan is seemly and noble. In the actual world—the painful kingdom of time and place—dwell care, and canker, and fear. With thought, with the ideal, is immortal hilarity, the rose of joy. Round it all the Muses sing. But grief cleaves to names, and persons, and the partial interests of to-day and yesterday.  

James acknowledges the real practical part such concepts may play in human life, not only inspiring or awakening us to the sublime, but also steering us practically every day, bringing "new values into our perceptual life," and, most importantly perhaps, providing "an immense map of relations among the elements of things," which map may to the considerable impoverishment of our lives assume an "independent existence."  

Emerson has chosen the map over "the painful kingdom of time and place," the lofty Monadnoc view of things. Such is the difference between the idealist and the empiricist in a nutshell. (James, to reiterate a crucial point, adds that "Anything is real of which we find ourselves obliged to take account in any way," thereby, without necessarily having to crack either nut, walking away with all the sweetmeats.) Kenneth Burke, in a manner that
owes much to both the late James essay in which this Emerson passage appears, "Percept and Concept," and James's critique of transcendence and transcendentalism in *The Meaning of Truth*, has proposed that we understand transcendence as a purely symbolic operation which involves "the building of terministic /symbolic/ bridge whereby one realm is transcended by being viewed in terms of a realm 'beyond it.'" Or, to put it a little differently, "transcendence involves dialectical processes whereby something HERE is interpreted in terms of something beyond itself." It is this contextualist strategy of rejecting transcendentalism as a metaphysic ("demystifying" it) and yet retaining it as a useful "bridge," "system," or "map" that sometimes appears to confuse thoroughgoing idealists into thinking they have made converts of those who, like James and Stevens, did indeed believe that the transcendental constituted a linguistically-ordered imaginative realm, a realm which was entirely "real" in that it produced real effects, had to be taken account of. Such a realm, however, is an instance of a system of relations imposed on one part of the universe by another part (the transcendentalist or anyone who chooses to interpret something here transcendentally), each particular notion of which is to be interpreted by pragmatically tracing its full florescence of consequences.
I have quoted so generously from *Monadnoc* while summarizing it for two reasons. To read Harold Bloom's version of it in *The Ringers in the Tower*, first of all, one would think *Monadnoc* remarkably Stevensian; indeed, as so often with Bloom's more recent criticism, one is never sure whether he is discussing two separate poems or what he believes to be one poem by numerous authors on the Emersonian assumption that "poetry was all written before time was." Secondly, these particular passages should help to clarify Stevens's comic treatment of, and allusions to, transcendentalism in *Chocorua*.

*Chocorua* is in effect an answer to lines 92-95 of *Monadnoc*:

Is this colossal talisman
Kindly to creature, blood, and kind,
And speechless to the master's mind?

But that of which Chocorua speaks differs in ways that contextualist reality differs from transcendental reality. Chocorua is not

that mountain-minded Hoon,
For whom desire was never that of the waltz,

Who found all form and order in solitude,
For whom the shapes were never the figures of men. (CP 127)

But is rather that "harmonious skeptic" who in "a skeptical music"
Will unite these figures of men and their shapes
Will glisten again with motion, the music
Will be motion and full of shadows. (*CP* 122)

On Chocorua, the shadows are reendowed, reunited with their essences, and we are given "the essential shadow,/Moving and being, the image at its source" (*CP* 223) of which Stevens so often speaks. Whereas in *Monadnoc* we have a speaker whose more mundane poetizing serves as a frame for the vatic mountain's prophecies, in *Chocorua* we hear only from our mountain, except for a brief eleven-line section in which Chocorua overhears some human speech. Stevens has reversed everything. Emerson's speaker had sought to rise above human perspectives to the perspective of absolute Truth or Good, imaged in his mind by *Monadnoc*. Stevens, on the other hand, always a perspectivist in the Jamesian tradition, gives us Chocorua's point of view, naturally a transcendentalist one in the sense of being lofty, but the transcendental made sensible, the "mountainous music" become a sense. The comedy that results is profound, but perhaps available only to those who can resolve the poem's surface obscurities by correcting for the angle of Chocorua's plato- tonic vision. Emerson wanted to climb Monadnoc so as to survey the scene from above the "painful kingdom of time and place"? All right, Stevens seems to say; we'll not only climb the mountain but try to see (and therefore sense and
think) as the transcendental mountain sees. Transcendentalism, like other benevolent fictions that often turn vicious with time, is a projection of human needs, desires, and values. A genuine transcendentalism, which ironically could only derive from a contextualist use of transcendentalism as a strategy—"It must be that in time/The real will from its crude compoundings come" (CP 404)—would show us something quite different from Emerson's disdain for the human; the transcendentalists appear never to have really followed through on their own assumptions before Whitman. Bloom, always blind to Stevens's humor, makes a catastrophic mistake when he identifies Chocorua's point of view and sentiments with those of Stevens himself, that of the earlier stanzas a matter of indifference: "It is clear after this that the titan to whom we listen in this rapt poem is Stevens himself, hardly the poet as presented to us by most of his critics but a great affirmer, lineal heir of Emerson and even more of 'an American bard at last,' Whitman." 38 Thus, according to Bloom, "In the final stanza, the mountains perceive the Over-man or 'prodigious shadow' as being large in reference to his form, which leads Chocorua to the Emersonian realization of a beyond, of a transcendental realm of presences greater than the mountain's sense of reality." 39 Nonsense!
Chocorua seems to create itself in the opening stanza through language, speaking and thereby emerging out of the transcendental realm of immutable ideas, idealism's "potential space" giving way to "actual space":

To speak quietly at such a distance, to speak
And to be heard is to be large in space,
That, like your own, is large, hence, to be part
Of sky, of sea, large earth, large air. It is
To perceive men without reference to their form.

The armies are forms in number, as cities are.
The armies are cities in movement. But a war
Between cities is a gesticulation of forms,
A swarming of number over number, not
One foot approaching, one uplifted arm.

Who is the "neighbor"? The reader cannot yet be sure whether it is simply Monadnoc or, as so often in Stevens, a rhetorical situation more complex and multi-leveled or purposely left vague and indeterminate. In becoming real without, apparently, becoming substantial, without becoming infected with "the flesh, the bone, the dirt, the stone" of our land, Chocorua becomes capable of only a vague and distorted, if darkly comic, kind of perception (extensity, like intensity, as James first showed, is the basis of all perception and not the work of a special faculty): "It is/
To perceive men without reference to their form." Chocorua, as one acclimated only to transcendental realms, perceives quantity, not quality. Human form is time-bound; hence Chocorua is perceiving men "without reference to their form."
The armies from "such a distance" appear mere quantity, "a swarming of number over number..." To Chocorua this had seemed as it should be: Platonists typically think of concepts as perfect, and the more perfect and worthy of love as they approach pure mathematical (quantitative) expression. But there is amazement now in the initially puzzling "not/
One foot approaching, one uplifted arm." At a specific time, "the end of night last night," the general gave way to the particular and Chocorua had to deal with novelty and time. That armies, cities, men as collective and therefore time-bound facts were beyond his transcendental ken had not before disturbed Chocorua. For, like Emerson's Monadnoc, Chocorua's transcendental "existence" prepared it to expect only processes in space, not a process in time like experience. As James pointed out, "The great transcendentalist metaphor has always been... a grammatical sentence." Chocorua can speak its part of the Absolute's sentence, the whole of which has existed from all eternity, without any compounding of consciousness being necessary—or so a transcendentalist would assume. This was the Achilles heel of Idealism at which James concentrated his attack in A Pluralistic Universe, "The Bird With the Coppery Keen Claws" being Stevens's clearest version. Actually it is not possible for Chocorua, as it has learned now from experience,
"to speak/And to be heard" without enlargement, without compounding of consciousness, the very nature of perception and sensation being to render insignificant boundaries, significant relations.

"Nothing happens in the realm of concepts; relations there are 'eternal' only," James notes. But Chocorua could not speak, be heard, and become larger in space without something happening; Monadnoc could not have interacted with the ideal poet in the manner Emerson maintained. That interaction, like Chocorua's now, should have revealed the inadequacies of transcendentalism:

At the end of night last night a crystal star,
The crystal-pointed star of morning, rose
And lit the snow to a light congenial
To this prodigious shadow, who then came
In an elemental freedom, sharp and cold.

The feeling of him was the feel of day,
And of a day as yet unseen, in which
To see was to be. He was the figure in
A poem for Liadoff, the self of selves:
To think of him destroyed the body's form.

The "star of morning" naturally recalls Jesus's claim in Revelation 22:16—"I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star." However, since in context it is the "light congenial/To this prodigious shadow" that is the morning star, only contrast is intended; the shadow owes only its opportunity for definition or negation to this light source. Stevens may also be alluding
to Shelley's romanticization of this revelation so central to our culture:

A brighter Hellas rears its mountains  
From waves serener far;  
A new Peneus rolls his fountains  
Against the morning star. (Hellas, ll. 1049-52)

As Parnassus was to the Greeks and Monadnoc to Emerson, so Chocorua may be to Stevens. The light congenial to "this prodigious shadow" is less glaring than that of the sun (which Stevens usually associates with reality) but it is not that blue light of the moon (which Stevens usually associates with human imagination) either. At night any part of darkness that is defined by contrast can be shadow; "Against the morning star" of Shelley: for Stevens "In an elemental freedom, sharp and cold." But we mistake Stevens's meaning, I think, if we take this "prodigious shadow" to be Nietzschean. To Henry Church he wrote (12 June 1942): "About Nietzsche: I haven't read him since I was a young man. My interest in the hero, major man, the giant, has nothing to do with the Biermensch; in fact, I throw knives at the hero, etc." (L 409). "The hero is a feeling, a man seen/As if the eye was an emotion" (OP 278), Stevens explained in terms similar to those of Chocorua. Significantly, Chocorua describes the "feeling of him" as that of the Berkeleyan equivalence of being and seeing (esse in percipi),
which is "a day as yet unseen." That is, contextualized, because concepts are real, Berkeleyan, romantic reality can be experienced, although not in the way or on the terms in which Berkeley and the romantic poets thought. We must take doubly this "prodigious shadow" of which Chocorua speaks, seeing too the real, the particular, of the empiricist: a shadow that has recaptured its essence. For Chocorua to ascribe to this "shadow" an "elemental freedom" is likewise to ascribe to it something which is strictly impossible from a transcendentalist perspective for a true and perfect concept. The complexities engendered by a recognition of perspectivism begin to brew. As James warned an audience of Oxford idealists, "If there be no outside witness, a thing can appear only to itself, the eaches or parts to their several selves temporally, the all or whole to itself eternally. Different 'selves' thus break out inside of what the absolutist insists to be intrinsically one fact."42

His form being temporally conditioned, Chocorua literally cannot conceive or conceptualize him:

He was a shell of dark blue glass, or ice,
Or air collected in a deep essay,
Or light embodied, or almost, a flash
On more than muscular shoulders, arms and chest,
Blue's last transparence as it turned to black,

The glitter of a being, which the eye
Accepted yet which nothing understood,
A fusion of night, its blue of the pole of blue
And of the brooding mind, fixed but for a slight
Illumination of movement as he breathed.

Emerson had said that "the poet turns the world to glass"; Stevens implies that the opposite is the case. As attempts to grasp the essence of him, each of Chocorua's images must give way to another, having largely failed; each attempt to describe his essence in metaphor is infected with time—"glass, or ice" both the products of transformation and promising change; "flash," "turned," "glitter," "accepted," "fusion," "fixed but for . . ." Approached contextually, metaphor, like language in all its uses (virtually all of which are tinged with metaphor) constitutes another sense, and like our other senses works in time. Chocorua is discovering the contextualist insight into being: "What really exists is not things made but things in the making." Hence Chocorua finds itself caught in all the contradictions that beset idealists in a world of experience:

The substance of his body seemed
Both substance and non-substance, luminous flesh
Or shapely fire: fire from an underworld,
Of less degree than flame and lesser shine.

Upon my top he breathed the pointed dark.
He was not man yet he was nothing else.
If in the mind, he vanished, taking there
The mind's own limits, like a tragic thing
Without existence, existing everywhere.
He is not the transcendental idea of man, which must, given transcendentalist assumptions, be perfect and immutable, whereas he is all temporal and human. By the same token, if he is no more than a thought in the idealist's absolute mind, then he is once again stripped of the temporal and human and hence vanishes. Ghocorua must pity him as a tragic thing. The reader, however, sees the intended irony of "without existence, existing everywhere." "A circle of which the center is everywhere and the circumference nowhere": so runs Augustine's famous definition of the nature of God. Indeed the whole passage smacks of the curious mixture of myth, paradox, and hyperbole of traditional theology. Ghocorua continues his story:

He breathed in crystal-pointed change the whole
Experience of night, as if he breathed
A consciousness from solitude, inhaled
A freedom out of silver-shaping size,
Against the whole experience of day.

The silver-shapeless, gold-encrusted size
Of daylight came while he sat thinking.

Ghocorua registers the fact without understanding its significance. Newly conscious itself, the mountain, prone to magical thinking, thinks this man-not-man brought day by inhaling the "crystal-pointed star" and the "whole/Experience of night." Change, experience, consciousness, freedom—all are entities still to this brilliant infant. In case the reader may have missed that the whole Western
religious tradition is the object of satiric attack here, Stevens again conjures up the context of Revelation 21 and 22 (the concluding chapters of the Bible, of course): the gold-encrusted size, if size be taken in the sense of "measure," is Chocorua's version of the gold measuring rod in Revelation (21:15) with which the new Jerusalem is laid out. Stevens is inviting us to demystify, to regard the gorgeously symbolic language of revelation in a naturalistic fashion.

The key to the whole poem is in the commentary Chocorua overhears on its transcendental ways:

He said,
"The moments of enlargement overlook
The enlarging of the simplest soldier's cry
In what I am, as he falls. Of what I am,
The cry is part. My solitaria
Are the meditations of a central mind.
I hear the motions of the spirit and the sound
Of what is secret becomes, for me, a voice
That is my own voice speaking in my ear.

There lies the misery, the coldest coil
That grips the centre, the actual bite, that life
Itself is like a poverty in the space of life,
So that the flapping of wind around me here
Is something in tatters that I cannot hold."

From the transcendentalist heights, the man-not-man realizes, the pain of the single struggling individual dwindles to insignificance. In "The Sovereignty of Ethics," Emerson made a famous remark that James paraphrased as follows in The Will to Believe: "Emerson quotes some Eastern sage as
saying that if evil were really done under the sun, the sky would incontinently shrivel to a snake-skin and cast it out in spasms. But, says Emerson, the spasms of Nature are years and centuries . . . "44 The shadow man is too human to see pain and evil in this way--to "overlook" them. Nor can he separate himself. In A Pluralistic Universe James explains the kind of "central mind" he has claimed for himself:

My present field of consciousness is a centre surrounded by a fringe that shades insensibly into a subconscious more. I use three separate terms here to describe this fact; but I might as well use three hundred, for the fact is all shades and no boundaries. Which part of it properly is in my consciousness, which out? If I name what is out, it already has come in. The centre works in one way while the margins work in another, and presently overpower the centre and are central themselves. What we conceptually identify ourselves with and say we are thinking of at any time is the centre; but our full self is the whole field, with all those indefinitely radiating subconscious possibilities of increase that we can only feel without conceiving, and can hardly begin to analyze. The collective part functions distinctly . . . Every bit of us at every moment is part and parcel of a wider self, it quivers along various radii like the wind-rose on a compass, and the actual in it is continuously one with possibles not yet in our present sight.45

What Chocorua sees is a concept: the major man, or whatever one wishes to call this shadow "not man . . . yet
nothing else." The contextualist sees the percept wrapped in the concept "as a gunshot in the mountains is wrapt and rolled in fold on fold of echo and reverberative clamor," stresses "how practically momentous is this enlargement of the span of our knowledge through the wrapping of our percepts in ideas. It is the whole coil and compound of both by which effects are determined, and they may then be different effects from those to which the perceptual nucleus would by itself give rise."46 In other words, the percept here is the soldier's cry, the concept the brotherhood of man; he must hold fast to both, make both count.

Seeing only the concept, incapable of understanding the misery "that grips the centre" of the major man, Chocorua almost immediately begins to misconceive him, to turn him into a God in Chocorua's own image. Beginning with stanza 13, and continuing through the end of the poem Stevens's laughter over his little satire on the genesis of religious belief breaks through time and again. Like so many of Stevens's human speakers, Chocorua projects his own qualities and characteristics onto this other, which thereby becomes ever more dear to him. At first his "gigantic bulk . . . /Grew strong, as if doubt never touched his heart." Then suddenly he has "external majesty" and is a "spokesman for the night" bearing a message near and dear to any transcendentalist's heart: "time stands still." And then
Chocorua utterly mythologizes (and contradicts) what happened, turning the shadow on his slopes into the star he was against:

Last night at the end of night his starry head,
Like the head of fate, looked out in darkness . . .

But Chocorua is not yet monotheistic:

True transfigurers fetched out of the human mountain,
True genii for the diminished, spheres,
Gigantic embryos of populations,
Blue friends in shadows, rich conspirators,
Confiders and comforters and lofty kin.

Chocorua's articulate consciousness derives not from its being an entity but from its having stood in relation to the man-not-man--i.e., from an event. But now, the event past, Chocorua "mountmorphosizes" him, if I may coin the term: he is "bare brother, megalfrere," looks no doubt a great deal like Monadnoc, man and mountain, "resting on me, thinking in my snow." He is an inclusive figure--like Emerson's poet, the "interior fons" or source; like the major man of Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction (I, 9&10), a "political tramp with an heraldic air"; a "metaphysical metaphor"; "a largeness lived and not conceived"; and so forth. Chocorua adores and looks up to him, "the companion of presences/Greater than mine, of his demanding," as would any mountain, Stevens implies, who first encountered man in the singular (abstracted). Of the poet,
Emerson said, "He is a sovereign, and stands on the centre." Chocorua trails off with the mountain meditating about the "rugged roy," whose qualifications for sovereignty are all naturalized. Neither by descent nor election is he chosen. Stevens always insisted, as he said in Notes, that "apoth-eosis is not/The origin of major man." (CP 387). But this is not the time to try to define who this shadow was, since to call him "major man" is to raise a whole new set of issues.

Give him

No names. Dismiss him from your images.
The hot of him is purest in the heart. (CP 388)

No doubt part of the reason Stevens chose to give us Chocorua's perspective on the possibility of man was that the strangeness of the mountain's projections might make it a little easier for us to engage in perspectivism and to sort out a few of our own projections from "the hot of him."

For Chocorua, like most of Stevens's satires, is meant to help us cure ourselves even as it scourges us. Contextualists like Stevens have designs upon us; they regard romanticism, transcendentalism, idealism and the like as moral issues. Those who accept Jamesian psychology necessarily regard (language being our 6th sense) any mis-application, reification, or corruption of conceptual systems as tantamount to gouging out one's eyes.
Notes


8. James, PBC 29; Principles I, 238.

9. Margaret Peterson, Wallace Stevens and the Idealist Tradition (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), p. 4. Although newly published, this book is a real disappointment because it is outdated. It contains no reference either in the text or the bibliography to any of the Stevens scholarship of the 1970s. Moreover, Peterson backs away from the most valuable insights in her 1971 article, "Harmonium and William James," referred to in chap. 2.


16. James, PBC 118; Principles I, 477.


18. J. Hillis Miller, Poets of Reality, p. 278.


32. William James, Pragmatism, p. 62.
35. James, Some Problems of Philosophy, p. 43.
40. James, A Pluralistic Universe, p. 190.
43. James, A Pluralistic Universe, p. 263.
44. James, The Will to Believe, p. 139 n.
46. James, Some Problems of Philosophy, p. 59.
Conclusion

In the critical literature on American modernism, two problems have long struck me as paramount. First of all, no satisfactory explanation has been forthcoming for the obvious common features and assumptions of poetry written by Americans in the early 20th century. In fact, many critics have all but despaired of defining modernism, so various and conflicting are the descriptive definitions now current. Graham Hough's rather negative characterization of the modernist revolution as "one of technique and sensibility, not a movement of the spirit in any profound sense" is typical. But then such is bound to seem the case when Frost, Williams, Stevens, Pound, Faulkner, Hemingway, et al. are lumped in with Yeats, Joyce, Woolf, Kafka, Mann, Rilke, Gide and other Europeans who are not contextualists and would agree with Eliot that "finally it is of no use to anyone." Yeats's wonder at Pound's pragmatic way of thinking is expressive of the difference between European and American modernism: "Ezra Pound bases his scepticism upon the statement, that we know nothing but sequences. 'If I touch the button the electric lamp will light up--all our knowledge is like that.' But this statement, which is true of science, which implies an object beyond the mind and therefore unknown, is not true
of any kind of philosophy."\(^1\) If our concern were with identifying an underlying unity to international modernism, we might have to rest content with talk of a revolution in technique, an experimental attitude, a creative individualism or the like. When, however, we focus our attention specifically on American modernism, taking care not to let Eliot dictate our mise en scène, we see, I think, a movement of the spirit as profound as romanticism.

The second problem that impressed me was this: American modernism seemed as hostile to traditional religion as to romanticism and transcendentalism, and yet at the same time was unprecedentedly self-conscious in its metaphysical demands and preoccupations. Contextualism, I now know, bears directly on this, as on the former, problem. The intellectual framework which the American modernists derived from James made possible a reconstruction of humanism (if the troubled history of that term in a variety of disparate contexts since the Renaissance does not disqualify it for use in our present exigency). Having created a non-reductionistic, non-mechanistic psychology, James proceeded on to adumbrate, if not fully articulate, the social, religious and philosophical ramifications of what he very nearly called humanism rather than pragmatism. A metaphysic based on the event in its context could not but prove hostile to traditional religion and philosophy. My aim has been to show that we must be alive
to our own metaphysical assumptions lest they preclude any
genuine aesthetic experience—i.e., recognizing the contextual-
ualism of those working in the American modernist vein makes
a critical difference. Object-oriented poetics, whether New
Critical, Structuralist, or whatever, are particularly inap-
propriate. As Stevens asks rhetorically in "The Irrational
Element in Poetry," "When we find in poetry that which gives
us a momentary existence on an exquisite plane, is it neces-
sary to ask the meaning of the poem?" (OP 223). Frost and
Williams repeatedly issued the same protest.

J. Hillis Miller's Poets of Reality, which I might
single out as a model in terms of its broad historical scope
and clear purpose and devotion to poetry, suffers from three
related and mistaken assumptions, none of which Miller would
have made had he been more familiar with James. First, he
saddles modernists with an antipathy to science and leaves
intact the New Critical-Eliotic wall between science and
poetry, science having been conflated or conjoined with
technology: "Science and technology, like romanticism, take
all things as objects for man's representation." Miller
might have realized that nothing could be less true of
Williams and Stevens had he been reading them in company
with Frost and Pound rather than with Yeats and Eliot, who
with respect to science, as to most everything else, differed
radically from the American modernists. Frost, like his
fellow contextualists, knew that his metaphysical beliefs were enhanced rather than threatened by science, which like anything else could be approached humanistically, and he knew that mechanism, not science, was the true antagonist of poetry in the early 20th century: "Well well just when it reaches the back country that the universe is a mechanism and what reason have we to suppose we are anything but mechanisms ourselves the latest science says it is all off about the universe; it isn't a mechanism at all, whatever we fools may be. It will take fifty years for that to penetrate to the Clarence Darrowsians and Daytonians." (SL 324-25).

Secondly, Miller errs in focusing on theology rather than metaphysics. And his posing his questions within the wonderland of mid-century theology leads to his third and disastrous mistake: dialectical bifurcations, which among other things lead him to conclude, for example, that nihilism is the only alternative in a post-romantic milieu to theological orthodoxy when it is not even a common one. Like those who misunderstood the relativism of the pragmatists, Miller assumes that if man creates his values, then those values are arbitrary (not the case, of course, given the pragmatic theory of knowledge). With the dialectic generated by his fallacious bifurcations, Miller can then posit a neat series of reversals, which gradually assume the character of a winding stairway bound for glory.
The reality of American modernism, I need hardly say, is much more complicated and various. In fact, once one has recognized the common metaphysical background, one has probably only managed to avoid certain pitfalls; the poems (or stories or novels, as the case may be) themselves remain to be experienced. Contextualist assumptions, because they emphasize the aesthetic potential of any and all experience and the act of personal (i.e., imaginative) commitment that the artist makes in entangling himself with the unformed and charging it with the form of an experience, give at least as great scope to individual differences among poets as any previous set of assumptions.

If I have not detailed a consistent, formal poetic, it is because from a contextualistic perspective such is neither desirable nor, strictly speaking, possible. A poet will presumably learn his or her craft in the same instrumental fashion that one learns anything; a poetic, like a rhetoric, might serve a beginner well enough, but a mature poet, unless he or she wishes to keep up with science and psychology, will attend only to experience, regarding poetry as more a sense than an art. For rather than inhering in the object itself, as the New Critics (following Coleridge) maintained, form happens, is an event, arises out of a transaction between the physical aspect of the work and the reader or listener. Hence, as Stevens insisted, "The greatest poverty
is not to live/In a physical world" (CP 325). A poet, as all the American modernists would agree, provides concrete particulars someone else's experience of which will invest with form. And that form is not separable from the work's utility, however separable the work's formal potential may have been. Dewey really sounded the keynote of the contextualist psychology of art when he said, "Form is a character of every experience that is an experience." (AE 137). Frost had already realized and long assumed the conjunct nature of form and experience and rightly regarded it as the fact from which a new humanism could be derived: "In us nature reaches its height of form and through us exceeds itself." (SL 418). He did not, however, seem to realize, as did Williams and Stevens, that the contextualist co-implication of form and experience reunifies the world and endows poetry (not the romantic poet) with special powers as a new sense. This is the "unification of experience" Williams theorizes about and strives to achieve in Spring and All. It is what Stevens means when he asserts:

The world imagines for the beholder.
He is born the blank mechanic of the mountains,

The blank frere of fields, their matin laborer.
He is the possessed of sense not the possessor.

In Pound's hands, it led to the ideogrammic method.
Contextualists try always to leave room for improvisation, because in the Jamesian universe in which novelty is a reality, a central fact, the unexpected can only with time become more likely. Aesthetic value changes; each generation must create its own art and criticism; each art work must be granted a potentiality relative to a particular moment in history: such is the contextualist creed, which assumes a distinction between the physical and the aesthetic work of art. It is in this context that Stevens was willing to speak of the "essentially romantic nature" of poetry: "only the romantic of poetry must be something constantly new and, therefore, just the opposite of what is spoken of as the romantic." (Letters, p. 277). In other words, for Stevens the temporal, not the organic, is fundamental.

Once the ramifications of the root metaphor made their way into the art world, it was inevitable that, rather than the single absolute entity of the romantics, the modernists would think in terms of multiple relative (but not arbitrary) entities. Or as Pepper contrasted the art generated by the two synthetic metaphysics: "Organicism is a theory of harmony culminating in the great cosmic harmony of the absolute. Pragmatism is a theory of conflict, celebrating struggle and vigorous life in which every solution is the beginning of a new problem, in which every social ideal is an hypothesis of action, in which values thrive on conflicts. The inference
almost comes of itself that vital quality will thrive on tragedy, so that artists will seek out great conflicts for the esthetic values that directly sprout from them."

Like romanticism, American modernism is an attempt to reconstruct humanism—an attempt, I should add, that was independent of and largely prior to the humanism of Babbitt and More, which offered nothing newer on the metaphysical plane than a warmed over formism. The romantics lacked the friendly metaphysical base with which James provided the American modernists—indeed, were never in my view able to reconcile the Berkleyanism that originally inspired them with the German transcendentalism that sustained them. Modernists had all the advantage of being able to learn from the triumphs and failures of romanticism. Although the organicist metaphysic on which romanticism was based was, like contextualism, a synthetic world theory and therefore capable of generating poetic structures or forms critical of the historical moment—romantic poetry is after all in its main phase a revolutionary poetry—the kinds of transformations generated by romanticism were either (1) easily assimilable by adherents of formist and mechanist (analytic) metaphysics, who found the critical synthetic aspect defusable when the analytic activity was insisted upon strenuously enough; or (2) so infected with the dualisms and bifurcations
of German transcendentalist metaphysics as to be of questionable value. J. Hillis Miller rightly sees as decisively distinctive of romanticism the presupposition of a double bifurcation: the subject-object dichotomy projected onto a vertically-organized world. The romantic is then forced into an ever-concatenating chain of further bifurcations and soon cannot sit down without use of a dialectical method. This double bifurcation precluded the humanism for which most of the romantics yearned. For it inevitably made the human element or contribution appear a distortion of the real. Modernists had the advantage of having been shown by James that such distortions were actually a product of the artificial separation of the self from the world. As James wrote in a 1904 review of F.C.S. Schiller's Humanism, "it is impossible to strip the human element out from even our most abstract theorizing," and therefore "to an unascertainable extent our truths are man-made products."  

I do not, I hasten to add, mean to imply that any absolute value attaches to any metaphysical position. In certain contexts mechanism conduced to positive change and great art, especially during the Renaissance. Earlier literatures and criticisms, however, were almost always associated with analytic metaphysics, which naturally lend themselves to an emphasis upon the rhetorical and generic aspects of a work, make of diction an issue, of a platonized Beauty
a goal, and of mimesis a touchstone. Because his access to the world's basic facts is unmediated, the analytically-minded artist for whom synthesis is derivative need not bother about metaphysics. Art tends to become a craft for holders of an analytic metaphysic. But the romantic, like the American modernist, must either become a skilled metaphysician or turn mystic or sentimentalist. In turning to metaphysics ever more frequently as they grew older and realized the true enormity of their tasks as poets, the American modernists were impelled by the same necessities as Blake, Coleridge, Shelley, Browning and other romantics had experienced, each according to his ability and lifespan. For the perceived organicist complex, like the pragmatist's context, is a matter of interpretation or vision, the ultimate relation between self and world a problem insofar as it is treated apart from experience.

The American modernists had in contextualism a root metaphor better suited to the modern world. So long as people lived close to the land and felt fully the power of nature as a substitute deity, of sorts, the organicist metaphor might seem to have sufficient explanatory scope or organizing power meaningfully to transform experience. A city man who had been raised in the country might conceive of his alienation in terms of subject-object dichotomies and find relief (transcendence) in the synthesizing power of the
romantic image. In a time when print played a very different role in our culture and when readers apparently identified more strongly or suspended disbelief more willingly, the romantic's report of experience was undoubtedly more vividly experienced than we can today imagine. Certainly, when the romantics wished to express living intensity and vividness, they resorted to language for metaphors. The universe that to Emerson was an "externalization of soul" was a sentence. To Carlyle: "It is in and through Symbols that man, consciously or unconsciously, lives, works, and has his being." Language and God were naturally and inextricably bound up together to the romantics, as in Carlyle's famous definition of the symbol: "In a Symbol, there is concealment and yet revelation: hence, therefore, by Silence and by Speech acting together, come a double significance. . . . In the Symbol proper, what we can call a Symbol, there is ever, more or less distinctly and directly, some embodiment and revelation of the Infinite." That vast transcendentalist nature of metaphor and symbol, the physical world severed from the spiritual, naturally required special vision on the poet's part, the Imagination as vates, which might in practice swing from spiritualizing to humanizing the real, in either case so confusing the two as thoroughly to mystify the world once romanticism's original vigor waned.
The American moderns steadfastly refuse to spiritualize nature, of course; they also refuse to humanize it insofar as we are talking about a world distinct from that of human experience. But at the same time they display a willingness to attribute a human value to nature—a value traditionally reserved for the spiritualized or humanized aspects they reject as falsehoods. With the modern world ever further removed from the 18th-century's Nature, the organicist metaphor has come to seem not so much false as incommensurable with the central modern experiences of city, technology, and man-made system. Once change became the most dramatically-assertive fact of everyday experience, it was inevitable that romantic interpretations of, and strategies for coping with, experience that de-emphasized change should come to seem escapist insofar as they are advocated for present use. All the American modernists acutely felt the inadequacy of romanticism to their own historical moment—felt the inadequacy of romanticism because that seemed the last great age of poetry. Fair or not, they soon came to see the romantics and their Victorian heirs as part of the problem, just as James and the other contextualists soon reacted against their early adherence to organicist and mechanistic metaphysics. A romantic poet could in good faith present his reader with what is essentially a report of experience (an experience the reader might re-enact) on the grounds that
things need to be interpreted, and the poet is a gifted, if not divinely-anointed, interpreter; the American modernist, however, believes (on metaphysical grounds) that things speak for themselves, and he may therefore not only regard it as his job to provide no more than a means or context for experience, but can only see going beyond this as propagandizing. Stevens has adopted a contextualist attitude towards ideas—and utterly left behind rhetorical and romantic attitudes—when he routinely winds up a discussion of one of his poems with a remark such as: "These are tentative ideas for the purposes of poetry." (Letters, p. 293). Pound similarly emphasizes ideas "in action"; Williams ideas "in things." Frost's and Stevens's failures most often result from their having forgotten how much the reader must do if he or she is to have an experience and their having indulged in contextualist propaganda rather than provided a context for experience.

In the final analysis, to propose a contextualist framework for American modernism is equivalent to arguing that Frost, Williams, Stevens, Pound, et. al. found humanism possible in their time, found in James a recovery of the tragic vision. For in James's melioristic pluriverse, risk, error, loss, and tragedy are every bit as real and as likely to accrue from even our most triumphant exercises of our freedom. In James's pragmatic method lay the solution to
romantic solipsism: for without our ever being able to get outside the world of experience, we can pragmatically learn about our effects upon the world. In one of his last essays, "On Poetic Truth" (1954), conflating the contextualist attitude with the poet's as was his habit in his later years, Stevens noted (hoped?) that theology was perhaps beginning to find itself at home in a new metaphysic:

There is one most welcome and authentic note; it is the insistence on a reality that forces itself upon our consciousness and refuses to be managed and mastered. It is here that the affinity of art and religion is most evident today. Both have to mediate for us a reality not ourselves. This is what the poet does. The supreme virtue here is humility, for the humble are they that move about the world with the love of the real in their hearts.
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