CHAPTER IV

DEATH

William Carbs Williams was a doctor who completed more than forty years in the medical profession. He had seen death very closely. There are innumerable direct and indirect references to death which recur in the entire body of his poetry. The images such as grave, funeral, pyre, coffin are directly and explicitly associated with death while sorrow, grief, bereavement, mourning, killing, burning, murder refer to death but distantly. Being a sensitive man, he was often shocked, to note several phenomena associated with barrenness, perversion, violence, and death in the realm of nature. Nature holds no solace to Williams; it is cold, dreary, and lifeless. In fact, poet's use of recurrent references to death in the world of animate and inanimate nature provide a meaningful scope of study. Many times he felt utterly helpless when he could not save his patients from the cruel clutches of death. Helplessly he has seen his father and mother, friends and relatives dying before his very eyes. As Paul Mariani says that Williams, the wounded physician had seen people dying one after another and knew very painfully his human limitations which could not transcend
the barriers of death, happened to live at the time when he was confronted with the ugly facts of world wars which inevitably resulted in scores of deaths. Along with the passage of time he seemed to be convinced with the idea that life betrays. Death was an ultimate refuge and a friend to Williams. His consciousness of death as an eventual conquerer is revealed in a number of poems. A keen and acute observer, the poet does not fail to see, hear and feel the images of death in the plant, animal and human worlds with a great sympathy.

Paul Mariani has rightly said, "Death awaited every man, and that seemed to be the end of the matter." Williams's poem "Death" presents his secularity:

So this is death that I refuse to rouse and write but prefer to lie here half asleep with a mind not aflame but merely flickering lacking breath to fan it-- from the comfortable dark womb (CLP, 253)

"Death" here seems to be just a state of sleep for the doctor-poet, William Carlos Williams. Persona imagines it as a state of "half-asleep with a mind" which refuses to "rouse and write." The persona's imagination is not yet aflame because of flickering "lacking breath" that
remains silent in "the comfortable dark womb," of death. If society is growth in whatever fashion, and only religion is true, death in his views is nothing except a cessation of these vital processes, nothing that enforces completely the terminal character of his awareness. But in his letter "To Robert McAlman," (February 23, 1944), he is at confused end to his philosophy:

If death is a wiping out and a finality then what the hell does anything matter at all? The man who gets what he wants is kind and we'd better all shut up fast. If there's anything to death apart from a simple cancelling out, then it had better be stated (in a modern acknowledgement, a modern language—which it was never been) at once so we can know just how to evaluate self seeking.

The theme of his poems, again and again, seems to be the inevitability of death. It is terminus, but a terminus to be shunted as fiercely and as long as possible. It is non-reality that has nothing to contribute to reality except negation. In our analysis it is necessary to deal with the death of human beings only after scrutinizing the poet's visualization of botanical, zoological, geophysical and astronomical elements of nature in this particular context.

Botanical elements of nature have a large representation in the poetry of Williams. 'The Bare Tree' (CLP,51) represents death of a tree. The botanical glory of the
tree, in a flashback, is witnessed by the poet in the first half of the poem. The poet admits that "the bare tree" produced "abundant fruit" and stood "higher than the roof" in the recent past. Now the tree stands as a "skeleton" with "no fruit on it." Death of the tree as juxtaposed against its glory, is expressed in the second half of the poem. Thematic unity which Williams has endeavoured to achieve in the poem is based on the images of life and death. The Poem "Spring" (CEP, 205) is also replete with the images of life and death drawn from the cyclic changes of season. The trees in this poem are not exactly dead, they have been described as "lifeless" and "leafless" entering "the new world naked," bereft of their previous pristine glory.

In the poem entitled 'The Birth of Venus' (CLP, 190) Williams presents poetic imagery of pain-pleasure complexity:

. . . . We do not have, to die in bitterness and the most excruciating torture, to feel! we Can lean on the wall and experience an ecstasy of pain, if pain it must be, but a pain of love, of dismemberment if you will, but a pain of almond blossoms, an agony of mimosa trees in bloom, a scented cloud! (CLP, 190).
"Pain" can never be avoided, as one finds it associated even with the "ecstasy" of "love," or "almond blossoms" and sometimes when it is related with small herbs- "an agony of mimosa tree in bloom." It spreads such pleasure after the painful weather twixt with "scented cloud." Death is no doubt associated with physical pain but life too cannot be isolated without the pangs of emotional pain.

'The Words Lying Idle' creates an atmosphere in which all creations on this earth are longing for the rain because of impending draught which may lead to dying away of many plants. All the components of nature are severely affected by this drought. The dire need of rain is emphatically projected into the poem. It is fully packed with the images of drought. There is no hope of rain:

The fields parched, the leaves drying on the maples, the birds’ beaks gaping! if it would rain, if it would only rain! Clouds come up, move from the west and from the south but they bring no rain. Heat and dry winds the grass is curled and brittle underfoot, the foot leaves it broken. The roads are dust.

But the mind is dust also and the eyes burn from it. They burn more from restless nights, from the full moon shining on a dry earth than from lack of rain. The rain, if it fell, would ease the mind more than the grass, the mind would be somewhat, at least, appeased against this dryness and the death implied. (CLP,106).
The drought imagery is present throughout the poem. The fields are "parched," the leaves are "drying" on the maples, the birds are opening their beaks wide, the dry grass is becoming brittle under the feet in a death like drought. "Clouds" in the poem bring only a hope of rain but not the rain itself. Williams' use of metaphoric language, "the mind is dust" and "the eyes burn from it" describes drought in the mind of man. The expression "they burn more" enhances his pain deteriorating his condition on "dry earth" in the "lack of rain." At last the poet fears the death of the entire creation. Escape from death, according to the poet, is only possible if it rains. Several birds and quadrupeds are too humanized recurrently in his poems because he seeks often a primordial resemblance between man and the fantastic zoological world around him. The drought imagery in 'A Note' is presented with reference to the death of animated geophysical world:

When the cataract dries up, my dear all minds attend it. There is nothing left. Neither sticks Nor stones can build it up again nor old women with their rites of green twigs

Bending over the remains, a body struck through the breast bone with a sharp spear—they have borne him to an ingle at the wood's edge from which all maidenhood is shent
--though he roared
once the cataract is dried up and done.
What rites can do to keep alive
the memory of that flood they will do
then bury it, old women that they are,
secretly where all male flesh is buried (CLP,154)

As the cataract dies the people who live around, pay
their attention to it and try every type of magic and
superstitious rituals with sticks, stones, green branches
and other material to revive it. Such customs are usually
used for resuscitating a man speared, and injured through
the chest; but the wound does not heal. Humanization
of the dead cataract is splendid in its figurative pic-
turization. Mostly womenfolk perform such rituals to
renew the dead male counterparts after such accidents.
Often the rituals are ended with the burial of the dead
body. It is also the custom of the Red-Indians to bury
all their males at a particular place. The death of the
cataract is imaged by Williams in such a magical atmosphere
in which the native women try their best to revive the
waterfall before giving up finally their efforts to cause
a resurrection of the great humanized geological object
of nature.

Dr. Williams who is endowed with reason, imagination,
and quickness of the eye, projects himself into the decea-
sed and wounded bodies of animals. The man-animal relation-
ship with inevitable facts of suffering and death is
expressed by Kenneth Burke in his essay 'William Carlos Williams: 'Two Judgements':

For Williams any natural or poetic concern with the body . . . was reinforced and notably modified by a professional concern with the body as a suffering or diseased object. (Think how many of his stories testify to his sympathetic yet picturesquely entertaining encounters with wide areas of both physical and social morbidity). The same relation to the human animal in terms of bodily disabilities led him to a kind of democracy...
The theme naturally lends itself to other kinds of imagery: 'The Old horse dies slow'; the portrait of an old goat listless in its assured sanctity:...

As revealed in his poems, a suffering and diseased body provokes awe and sympathy in Williams. The statement of Kenneth Burke comes true in the poem, 'Fish'. The poem exhibits Williams' unfathomable knowledge of the fish-world and their species. The theme of death in the poem is brought out with the underlying weapon of imagery. The poet is moved to deep sympathy for the dying fishes. He admits that "I have seen thousands of barrels packed with the fish on the shore" (CEP, 177). Fishes "packed" in "barrel," and placed on the "shore" remind us of their death without water and in suffocation.

The phenomenon of death in animal imagery is represented in 'St. Francis Einstein' of the daffodils:
A samos, samos
died and buried. Lesbia
a black cat in the freshturned
garden. All dead.
All flesh they sung
is rotten
sing of it no longer (CEP, 379)

Dead body of the cat "Lesbia" is juxtaposed against the
freshly dug garden. The poet feels disappointed to see
the deadly condition of cat. Using the flashback technique
of photography he imagines the alive and sprightful days
of the cat. Like the Greek Island Samos which fell into
the cruel clutches of Turks in the fifteenth century,
poor little cat has too fallen a prey to death. The expre­
ssion "rotten" signalizes the poet's disgust associated
with the termination of the feline domesticated animals.
The causative factor leading to the death of such cats
may be traced elsewhere in the same poem:

The peartree
With foetid blossoms
sways its high topbranches
with contrary motion
and there are both pink flowered
and coralflowered peachtrees
in the base chickenyard
of the old Negro
with white hair who hides
poisoned fish-heads
here and there
where stray cats find them—
find them (CEP, 380)
It seems strange to our poet that in man-animal relationship such cruelty on the part of man is considered often a normal occurrence. The image of potential extermination of cats is vividly polarized with the blooming peach trees, with pink and coral flowers. The expression "contrary motion" indicates the polarized images of life and death to follow. In spite of the beauty of the pear tree, its "foetid blossoms" bring in the same paradoxical juxtaposition of life and death. Further, quite meaningful is the presentation of the "negro" who is "old" and has "white hair." He naturally, seems to be not far away from death, but he is oblivious of the pain and suffering his animal victims would experience on eating the poisoned baits before death. The repetition of the expression "find them" reinforces the irony of fate of the stray cats. Also significant is the word "bare" associated with the "chickenyard" probably suggesting the killings of the chicken by marauding cats. Thus the negro, the cats and the chicken are viewed by the poet in a triangular relationship in which death of animals becomes central in importance. John Malcolm Brinnin in his analysis of this poem finds, among other things, the role of Williams' death imagery:

A place must be found for each of these things: Einstein, .... a black cat named Lesbia, a pear tree, peach trees, an old Negro who sets cat-traps, and a man who can't sleep. The challenges, a discerning a logical order in a sequence so disparate is modified only when the reader becomes aware that the poem has been conceived in terms of a kind of painting in which
all of these things must be apprehended at a glance... Samos, another reminder of the classical past, is "dead and buried"; Lesbia survives—only as a name sake—in the figure of the black cat that scavenges in the blossoming season and presumably meets her death in the course of her pursuit. "The Old Negro," involved in everything without knowing it, cause, the cat's death simply by pursuing, like her, a set way of existence. The little conflict of hunger and survival, dispassionately regarded in terms of history, is really a deadly backyard drama, enacted within the flowering orchards of a man who feels the season's change.

The death of an old horse in the poem 'When Structure Fails Rhyme Attempts to Come to the Rescue.' (CLP,79) does not remain unnoticed in Williams.

The old horse dies slow. By gradual degrees the fervor of his veins matches the leaves' stretch, day by day. But the pace that his mind keeps is the pace of his dreams. He does what he can, with unabated phlegm, ahem! but the pace that his flesh keeps--

leaning, leaning upon the bars-- beggars by far all pace and every refuge of his dreams. (CLP,79)
Here the "dreams" of the humanized horse are pronounced not as the dreams about his future but there are the nostalgic "dreams" of his past. The poet endeavours to capture the inner state of the mind of the horse. He arrives at the truth that the horse which is now old and about to die reminds him of the vitality of his youth in the past. Thus the progression from youth to old age is brilliantly manifested in the poem to denote the loss of vitality in the horse. The poet perhaps intends to show the movement of all living things towards their end through different stages with the flux of time. It is the "old" horse dying "by gradual degrees."

In several poems Williams portrays the image of dog, man's best friend. However, in the poem entitled 'death' a facet of man-animal relationship is probed by the poet objectively and almost dispassionately:

He's dead
the dog won't have to
sleep on his potatoes
any more to keep them
from freezing

he's dead
the old bastard--
He's a bastard because

there's nothing/
legitimate in him
any more

he's dead
He's sick-dead (CEP, 78).
This is apparently, a commentary upon the unceremonious death of a dog owned by a proletariiate potato-seller. As suggested here, the dog was often utilized by the man for keeping his sacks of potatoes warm in the "freezing" cold. The repeated abuses hurled on the dead dog are associated with the thoughts of the potato-seller to whom the animal is of no use at present, as if the legitimacy of its own animal life was dependent upon its keeping the master always comfortable in his trade during the winter months. The expression "sick-dead" is obviously a projection of the man's sick mind while he despairingly cogitates over his personal loss absolutely in the material sense. His aversion is expressed in the following lines:

he's
a godforsaken curio
without
any breath in it
He's nothing at all
he's dead
shrunken up to skin

Put his head on
one chair and his
feet on another and
he'll lie there
like an acrobat--

Love's beaten. He
beat it. That's' why
he's insufferable--

because
he's here needing a
shave and making love
an inside howl
of anguish and defeat--(CEP,78-79)
The animal even in his death is held responsible for the termination of the relationship between him and his master. For the animal it is a "defeat" that causes its own "anguish." In fact it is a projection on the part of the master as is obvious in the context of the poem. The man-animal relationship is given a special dimension:

He's come out of the man
and he's let
the man go--
the liar

Dead
his eyes
rolled up out of
the light-- a mockery

which
love cannot touch--

just bury it
and hide its face
for shame. (CEP, 79)

The man's selfish acquisitions are with reference to the bond they had between themselves-- their "love" is gone. The death of the dog signifying the so-called death of the relationship is expressed in the concluding lines.

In 'The Woodpecker' he notices the conflict in the mind of a bird which has taken an endless flight to some unknown destination in search of food. The bird is not sure whether it will reach the destination
or not and whether it will be fed or not. Suddenly, during the flight, the bird imagines its death. The woodpecker's state of mind is distinctly present in the poem; it appears as if the bird itself is narrating the things in process:

Innocence! Innocence is the condition of heaven. Only in that which we do not yet know shall we be feted, fed. That is to say with ceremony. The unknown is our refuge toward which we hurtle. For even tho', lacking parachute, we be flattened upon the earth it will not be the same earth we left to fly upward. To seek what? There is nothing there. It is not even the unknown for us now. But we never knew the earth so solidly as when we were crushed upon it. From a height we fall, innocent, to our deaths. (CLP, 122)

The expression, "The/hurtle/For /parachute" clearly refers to the struggle of the bird, the term "parachute" being associated with a meaningful smooth landing (which is certainly a life-giving image). The lack of the parachute refers to the death of the bird. Williams applies this term to denote the decreasing strength in the wings of the woodpecker as the bird floats down in space in sheer starvation. The impact of the empathic imagery is self-explanatory as the wings refuse to fly and the bird, in the visual of a pathetic climax, falls from "a height" to its death. The imagery of motion is associated with an inevitable sense of empathy in any observer concerned, similar to the neuromuscular experience of the poet as he projects himself into the
body of the woodpecker. One may assume that such images of pain and suffering in the animals, under contemplation, naturally evoke in our doctor-poet almost a humanitarian concern because humanization of animals becomes a natural corollary in such contexts.

In the poem 'The Rat' (CLP, 145) the poet gives a symbolic image of plague, a deadly disease, which refers to death of animals as well as human beings. The introductory part of the poem deals with anatomical and physiological details concerned with the body and the nature of the rodent before comparing the little animal with man:

The rat sits up and works his moustaches, the ontologic phenomenon of cheese rifting his blood to orgiastic rule.

The tail, epicene in its application, the round-file tail, that fearsome appendage which man for all his zest cannot match—other than conceptually of which his most thought latterly consists. How like this man (CLP, 145)

Later, the horror associated with the disease and the potential infections concerned communicate to the reader a suggestion of impending death:
the rat is in the ubiquity of his
deformity: plague
infected fleas come, through
the connivance of

the San Frigando Chamber of
Commerce, to infest the very
gophers of Nevada. His wise
eyes mewing in his

spindle head the rat thrives, well
suited to a world
conditioned to such human "tropism
for order" at all cost. (CLP,145)

The rat does not seem to be worried about its own fate; it, rather, apparently concentrates upon infecting the "gophers of Nevada" per kindness of the "plague/infected fleas." The concluding stanza ironically describes the rat that "thrives" at the cost of man's "tropism/for order."

Williams' profession as a physician makes it natural for him to depict his experiences pertaining to life and death in his writings to a large extent. His poetry is remarkable in recording the pain and anguish of his patients that is felt and experienced at the time of illness or death. In his autobiography, poet-physician gives the details of experiencing his first patient's death, "It was in the old French hospital I saw my first patient die— in the room between the words where they'd put the patients we knew were in
extremis. It is a hard thing for a young man to look at. But thereafter the man is gone, you are left, with a young nurse beside you, watching you, and suddenly you are alone with her.\(^5\) The reason that has been largely responsible for the theme of death in his poetry is because of the fact that "Doctor Williams... has seen more of life and death than the average person."\(^6\) William had been more considerate and sympathetic towards the child-patients.

In the poem entitled 'The Dead Baby' instructions are given to secure a clean place to lay the dead body of a baby. Death of the baby is declared in the introductory lines of the poem and then follows the description of sorrowful helpless parents of the dead baby:

Sweep the house
under the feet of the curious
holiday seekers--

Sweep under the table and the bed
the baby is dead--

The mother's eyes where she sits
by the window, unconsolled--
have purple bags under them
the father--
tall, wellspoken, pitiful
is the abler of these two-- (CEP,113)

The "eyes" of the mother express a deep dark sensation. We suppose, mourning on the death of baby, for several hours, has formed the prominent "purple bags," under her
sad "unconsoled" eyes. Father is also in a "pitiful" condition but "the abler of these two." Mariani gives, one incident in the life of doctor, when he had to face the death of babies like flies, "but in spite of the nurses and the food, Williams found himself in the midst of an outbreak of infant gastrocntritis that began to kill off his babies like so many flies. He worked long and hard both at the hospital and at a private mansion uptown that had been donated to the hospital for overflowing patients, keeping detailed records and trying to figure what in hell was happening to the poor kids. And still they died."  

The physician-poet is obsessed with this idea in the prenatal stage too. It is recurrently signalized when termination of pregnancy is accepted because of several reasons. Such instances of death even before birth are cited by Williams in quite a few of his poems. He had helped the woman in having abortions, whatever may be the cause, the result is the death of a human being in the making. Abortion of the foetus is a sort of murder resulting in the death before being born. 'A Cold Front' (CLP, 57) provides one such description. A mother of "seven foster children/and a baby of her own..." seeks the help of the physician to drop her pregnancy. Death before birth has been vividly suggested with the images such as "abortions," "pills." She
conveys to the doctor that she "won't have any more." she and the doctor both should not delay in such a case. Therefore, "quick action" of "abortion" is the main thing. A similar theme of death can be traced in Eliot's 'The Wasteland,' in which the woman loses her youth permanently under the strain of childbearing; she takes abortion pills in order to dissolve her last pregnancy. Thus, in such cases, death takes place in a very different way.

However, abortion can occur accidently also, irrespective of the wish of the parents concerned. In such a case the physician's point of view is articulated well in the poem entitled 'To All Gentleness':

She was
forewoman to a gang at the ship foundry,
cleared the finished parts to
the loading platform; had three misses,
all boys, by the man she lives with--
and may the fourth be a boy also for which he married her.

Tough, huh?
Never had a backache.

Not the girth of thigh, but
that gentleness that harbors all violence,
the valid juxtaposition, one
by the other, alternates, the cosine, the
cylinder and the rose. (CLP, 28-29)
Images of female thighs appear frequently in the whole corpus of Williams' poetry. Critics have failed to note that the source of such images is derived from his specialization in obstetrics and gynaecology. Practical images of parturition had made him accustomed to the sight of the limbs of the female body. The doctor who had delivered thousands of babies had every reason to picturize the anatomical peculiarities of female thighs under certain normal and abnormal psychological as well as physiological conditions within the peculiar scopes of his imagery. The image of the thighs harbouring the repeated "violence" concerned with three abortions. In each case a male foetus, is impregnated with the joys and sorrows of the biological urge and its consequences. However, the tragedy is often unavoidable in the case of such a working woman who has to perform daily, even during the most delicate period of advanced pregnancy, the physical labour suitable only for a man. The violence of repeated miscarriages is the eventual result. In another interpretation the image of sex may be oriented to "gentleness that harbors all violence." The "juxtaposition" being potentially related to the "cosine" angle between the "cylinder and the rose"—both being symbolically potent in the image pattern. This interpretation has its validity in the longing of the husband for a son even after the "three misses"
of the woman. Obviously, he married her for a son! Williams gives a detailed medical description of a diseased woman resulting in abortion in one of his letters written to William Eric Williams, "ran into a lousy case of ruptured appendix, badly neglected, in a twenty-six-year-old woman, seven months pregnant. Charlisle opened her up day before yesterday. General peritonitis, the appendix rotted off. Put in ten grams sulfanilamide, but couldn't pull the periton even together because of the pregnancy. He put in through and through silkworm sutures. She aborted the next morning." In such parturition imagery, it's not only the death of 'foetus' but sometimes, death of the mother-- the woman so vividly portrayed by the poet. As Williams gives the details of a patient in his letter to Norman Holmes Pearson, "lots of times doctors tell women they should not have any children and after that they have five or six and it never bothers them. So she went ahead with it and in the seventh month she began to swell up something awful. You wouldn't know she was a young woman. She swelled up to twice her size and all she could do was to sit up in a chair and gasp. The doctor wouldn't take her case but he felt sorry for her, so he got a specialist from the city to help him. When she couldn't go any longer they had to do a caesarean section, but she died on the sixth day."
Williams has been more considerate and sympathetic for the women than the men. In his poems, we can see women from proletariate class, fashionable young ladies, royal women, old women, sick and suffering women and the women from his own family. Death among women forms an important part of the chapter. Williams ponders over the mysteries of life and death in 'The Three Graces':

We have the picture of you in mind, when you were young posturing (for a photographer) in scarves (if you could have done it) but now, for none of you is immortal, ninety-three, the three, ninety and three, Mary, Ellen and Emily, what beauty is it clings still about you? Undying? Magical? For there is still no answer, why we live or why you will not live longer than I or that there should be an answer why any should live and whatever other should die. Yet you live. You live and all that can be said is that you live, time cannot alter it-- and as I write this Mary has died. (CLP,184)

The poem reveals the ever intriguing subject of death that how some lives are nipped right in infancy, some in youth, some linger on till old age. Some crave for life but death takes them away into its own realm whereas others/having crossed even the death stage, continue living despite their wish to die. Thus the poem depicts the uncertainty of time regarding the occurrence of death. The poet struggles hard to arrive at the truth
behind this mystery. In spite of his best efforts, he finds no answer for it. Whatever may have been the views of doctor Williams, he has biological reasons for the death of someone at any stage. But here in the poem, he does not seem to be fully satisfied with the biological reasons for death. He wants to seek some higher truth. The development of thought shows Williams deep interest in metaphysics. Even the devoutly religious men and philosophers are not free from grave doubts and scepticism. The Indian metaphysics extends "Karma philosophy" as an answer to this mystery. Psychologically speaking, it remains nothing more than a remedial document for reconciling the death of someone. The language of the poem is woven with the images of death which represents big traffic of thoughts in the poets' mind. The beginning of the poem is done with the artistry of flash-back technique in order to bring clarity to the contrast between youth and old age. The specific age of ninety three refers to the poets' English grandmother. The references to "Mary," "Ellen," and "Emily" is significant from the point of view of observations of the poet in the family circle discussed elsewhere in this thesis. It is suggested that the concept of "beauty" changes as human beings grow old, slowly approaching the doors of death. The fact that we continue to live sometimes even under dark and dreary circumstances is underscored in the expressions "undying
magical?" However the final fate is stumped decisively in "none of you is a mortal."

As a doctor, Williams helplessly views a tug-of-war between life and death, in connection with the personal elements in his poem, specially with mother and grand-mother. It was the spring of 1949, when Williams realized his mother was finally going to die, he composed a twenty-page poem in two parts entitled 'Two Pendants: for the Ears.' It is divided into two parts. The Part two, 'Elena' is the most moving one. The poem contains the detailed description of the death of the old mother (Elena) in front of her own son who is a physician as well as a poet.

You lean the head forward
and wave the hand,
with a smile,
twinkling the fingers
I say to myself
Now it is spring
Elena is dying

What snows what snow
enchained her--
she of the tropics
is melted
now she is dying

The mango, the guava
long forgot for
apple and cherry
wave good-bye

now it is spring
Elena is dying

Good-bye
You think she's going to die?
said the old boy.
She's not going to die--not now.
In two days she'll be
all right again. When she dies
she'll (CLP, 221)

Williams pays a visit to his dying mother, but poet
realizes as a doctor, that this "spring," "Elena is
dying." Now she seems to be, "of the tropics," is slowly
melting away the life as the enchanting "snow," Spring
fruit, "the mango," "the guava," the "apple" and "cherry"
must bid her "Good-bye" now, as she is "dying." The
caretakers, the Taylor's boy, don't believe her going
away. But doctor realizes that only death would make
her feel "all right again."

... When she dies she'll go out
like a light. she's done it now

... why just an hour ago
she sat up straight on that bed, as
straight as ever I saw her
in the last ten years, straight
as a ram-rod. You wouldn't believe
that would you? She's not
going to die. (CLP, 221)

The poet-doctor believes in the angelic disappearance
of his mother, going away "like a light." But as a
truly devoted son, as soon as, the mother sits straight
relaxing "as a ram-rod," he feels as if she would not
"die." Then follows a fashionable grocery list in the poem, "from the market." It is the love shown for the life against the dark death.

Elena is dying (I wonder)
Willows and pear trees
whose encrusted branches
blossom all a mass
attend her on her way--

... 

How can you weep for her? I cannot, I her son--though
I could weep for her without compromising the covenant

She will go alone.

... 

Elena is dying (but perhaps not yet)

... 

In her delirium she said
a terrible thing:

Who are you? Now!
I, I, I, I stammered. I am your son.

Don't go. I am unhappy.

... 

The woman (who was watching) added:

She thinks I'm her father.

... 

I told you she wasn't going to die, that was just a remission,
I think you call it, said the 3 day beard in a soiled undershirt
I am afraid I'm not much use
to you, Mother, said I feebly. (CLP, 224-25-26)

Thus the whole poem, is about the death of mother in front of the helpless doctor son. The Poem gives an insight into Williams' deep-seated love for his mother, the slow death process, and the issue of resurrection. William watched both his father and mother breathing their last breath and even being a doctor, he could not save them from the cruel clutches of death. It, consequently forced him to know a physician's limitations, the awareness of his being a helpless man at the time of their death makes Williams surrender himself to the fate and chance. He innocently describes his helplessness and the inevitability of death. "I'm afraid I'm not much use/to you, Mother, said I feebly." Though the fact cannot be denied that Williams' poetry is largely objective, but sometimes, he is noticed to be falling in the romantic sentimentality, it is certainly due to the influence of John Keats on him, that some of his later poetry is characterized by romantic features. His poetic development can be described as a journey from romanticism to realism, from subjectivism to objectivism. 'The last Words of My English Grandmother' gives a detailed description of the death of poet's grandmother.
There is little difference in tone, however, when Williams turns to a subject that elsewhere he celebrates as an epitome of life strength and fullness—his English grandmother who had personified the American experience, bearing her son, losing her husband, 'immigrating to the West Indies, rearing her son (to be sure into the very dutifulness that Williams so raged against), and moving on to the United States to help rear her son's family. Her end was no less a blank terminus, however, except for the important suggestion that she accepted it properly— as properly present in time—out of a feeling of sufficiency of or satiation with life. Even so, there is no grave or dignity in her dying beyond the acceptance it marks.10

The opening stanza gives us the impressions of a life lived in stress and abject poverty:

There were some dirty plates
and a glass of milk
beside her on a small table
near the rank, disheveled bed--

Wrinkled and nearly blind
she lay and snored
rousing with anger in her tones
to cry for food,

Gimme something to eat--
They're starving me--
I'm all right I won't go
to the hospital. No, no, no

Give me something to eat
Let me take you
to the hospital, I said
and after you are well (CEP,443)
The images of "dirty plates," "disheveled bed" are suggestive of paucity of which the old, "wrinkled and nearly blind" grandmother seems to have become victim. The images of "hospital" obviously refer to her sickness. Though she is being taken to the hospital for some definite medical purpose, yet she remains crying angrily for food, as she is suffering because she cannot eat anything. Her constant cries for food, "Gimme something to eat" make it clear that she eventually would die. Despite her refusal, she is being taken to the hospital.

oh, oh, oh! she cried
as the ambulance men lifted
her to the stretcher--
Is this what you call

making me comfortable?
By now her mind was clear--
oh you think you're smart
you young people,

she said, but I'll tell you
you don't know anything.
Then we started.
On the way

We passed a long row
of elms, she looked at them
a while out of
the ambulance window and said,

What are all those
fuzzy-looking things out there?
trees? Well, I'm tired
of them and rolled her head away. (CEP, 443-44)
The surrender, "you can do as you please," to the doctor represents the helplessness of the old dying grandmother. On the way to the hospital, she comes across "fuzzy-looking things," and turns her eyes away saying that "I'm tired/of them." It is only the inner happiness of man which on being identified with the outer, gets inflated. The beauty of the landscapes and the joy of the botanical components of nature cannot contribute to save her from death.

The poem stops in an abrupt manner indicating the death of the grandmother. Mariani too comments "At the end, nearly ninety and nearly blind, she had a disfiguring facial skin cancer which she refused to have treated. . . . Bill Wellcome wired Bill Williams at once to come up and do what he could to help their grandmother, and Williams raced to get up there. There was of course little he could do, and he had one hell of a time just convincing the woman to let the ambulance take her to the hospital—Grace Hospital in New Haven—where she died a few days later. In one of his strongest poetic under-statements, written several years later, Williams recalled the ambulance ride and the way his grandmother kept staring at the bare elm trees out there—"fuzzy things" she called them—before she turned her back on them for the last time in defeat.

In the end, the life she had tried to master and keep somehow intact, simply dissolved and slipped away."\textsuperscript{11}

The concluding part of the poem 'The Wanderer' semi-mythically symbolises the death of grandmother:
Then she, "Be mostly silent!"
And turning to the river, spoke again:
For him and for me, river, the wandering,
But by you I leave for happiness
Deep foliage, the thickest beeches—
Though elsewhere they are all dying—
Tallest oaks and yellow birches
That dip their leaves in you, mourning,
As now I dip my hair, immemorial
Of me, immemorial of him
Immemorial of these our promises!
Here shall be a bird's paradise,
They sing to you remembering my voice:
Here the most secluded spaces
For miles around, hallowed by a stench
To be our joint solitude and temple:
In memory of this clear marriage
And the child I have brought you in the late years.
Live, river, live in luxuriance
Rememning this our son,
In remembrance of me and my sorrow
And of the new wandering!"  (CEP,12)

Referring to the origin and content of the poem Williams says in an interview: 'This was the genesis of "Paterson" and started as the idealization of my grandmother, Mrs.Welcome .... The figure of my grandmother in 'The Wanderer' was semi-mythical. You must remember that I had been reading Keats' poem, a romance. . . . So the grandmother who was the spirit of the river, led to the Passaic.12 'Williams' grandmother identifies her old age with the river. Towards the end of the poem the disheartened old grandmother seems to be wandering on the shore of the river. It can be interpreted as a journey from youth to old-age, joy to sorrow. The river that takes its origin from the mountaneous landscapes surrounded by flowers, trees and other vegetative life also enters the barren lands. Thus the flux of the
river is the flux of time. The statement, "Live, river, live in luxuriance" is representative of the grandmother's death. The tone and voice of the grandmother forms immediate impressions of her sorrow at the time of her death.

In the next group of poems Williams refers to the death of his relatives, friends and patients, along with the death of certain individuals. It is this deeply inherent consciousness that urges to imagine the death of others and one's own. It comes through the conscious experiences such as watching a dead body, taking part in funeral ceremonies etc. Mariani observes: "Williams was also testing the limits of imagination against the countercurrents of reality, including the fact of death. . . as Williams knew that his own father was slowly dying of an inoperable cancer. . . "\(^{13}\) William present in one of the early poems- 'Adam' where the theme suggests the external conflicts between liberation and duty, putting into relief the concept of Adamic freedom as life's redemption. William realizes that after losing "innocence," Adam:

\begin{verbatim}
Thence he was driven 
out of Paradise-- to taste 
the death that duty brings 
so daintily, so mincingly, 
with such a noble air-- 
that enslaved him all his life 
thereafter-- \textit{(CEP,371)}
\end{verbatim}
"Adam"— the man was thrown "out of Paradise," just "to taste the death," that comes to man very delicately and elegantly. Man, "all his life" become a "slave" to this death phenomenon. Adam here symbolises author's fatherly image. Adam here represents— the Father. In fact, Adam was to marry an exotic— a heavy burden, he was to tell his son as he lay dying. Williams writes in his autobiography, that his father died on Christmas Day, 1918. He never at any time complained of any pain or made the slightest difficulty for anyone during his illness. Mariani too comments, "He must have been half remembering, half suppressing the enema tube he'd forced up his poor father's emaciated rectum that Christmas Eve, knowing he'd hurt him badly at the last moment even as he sought to comfort him. And then his father had disappeared, cloudlike, over the horizon, gone." Thus all his life, the tall graceful figure of father which remained burdened with his duty of being a husband and a parent moved inevitably towards his final end silently:

Coldly
and with patience—
without a murmur, silently
a desperate, unvarying silence
to the unhurried last. (CEP, 374)

The destructive ideology concerned with war is often seen in Williams' poems. Williams admits in one of his essays that "war elevates the artist, the builder, they think
to the peaks of the stars, trebles his significance." 15

Perhaps the war elevates the artist and his creativity, but it puts civilization of the world in reverse gear. War, no doubt releases energy, but its negative roles cannot be ignored. Williams himself writes:

Make no mistake, war, releases energy, so far it is good but it has no art of its own no authentic character but mud, exhaustion and heroism which is never more heroic than when it throws its life away for nothing at all—war has no art to create anything, only to degrade and destroy. But the artist pauses, disciplines the fury and translates it to the eye. War creates nothing but stinking corpses and the perversion that makes leaders. Leaders! sucked out men, eating others because of their own poverty. There are no arts of war. Everything is stolen there—except the energy released which is not its own and badly used by it.16

War-time has been the darkest times in the history of mankind as in the poem entitled 'These':

are the desolate, dark weeks when nature in its barrenness equals the stupidity of man.

The year plunges into night and the heart plunges lower than night

to an empty, windswept place without sun, stars or moon but a peculiar light as of thought

that spins a dark fire—whirling upon itself until, in the cold, it kindles
to make a man aware of nothing
that he knows, not loneliness
itself— Not a ghost but
would be embraced— emptiness,
despair-- (CEP, 433)

The barrenness and desolation of winter suggest the sense
of deprivation and negation. The "desolate dark weeks"
are equalized to the "stupidity of man" symbolizing the
destructive winter season. The "loneliness" of the "dark
nights" give "peculiar" "thoughts" to the "empty" heart
filled with only, night-like-deep dark "despair." This
dark imagery is further juxtaposed against the death in
war imagery:

- - (They
whine and whistle) among

the flashes and booms of war;
houses of whose rooms
the cold is greater than can be thought

the people gone that we loved,
the beds lying empty, the couches
damp, the chairs unused-- (CEP, 433)

The sense of "loneliness" "emptiness" and "despair" is
further intensified by "the flashes and booms of war,"
which clearly suggest a grim and gruesome picture of
death. The "cold" is humanized as the death of "the
people" once our "loved" ones have gone away leaving
"empty" "couches" and the "unused chairs." Mariani comments,
unspoiled by insects" are "waiting/only for the cold."

Williams rightly comments in his Essay 'The American Background':

The decay of the small community was an actual decay of culture, it was a sack by invisible troops, leaving destruction for which the gains--and they were considerable did not compensate. It was a loss which degraded, which was compelled by circumstances but which posited a return to sources in some form later on. The inevitable destruction of the south during the Civil War was of this order. It was the overwhelming desire for an immediate realization of wealth, for escape from isolation which made wealth paramount and to be fought for, at any cost. Wealth meant, as it means today, the control of movements, mobility, the power to come and go at will. In small communities, being drained of wealth by the demand for it in the cities, men died like rats caught in a trap. And their correctly aimed but crude and narrow beginnings died with them.18

Williams' aversion to war often brings out a negative portrayal of the eyes that behold the massacre concerned. A very graphic negative picture is in 'Item':

This, with a face
like a mashed blood orange
that suddenly

Would get eyes
and look up and scream
War! War!

Clutching her
thick, ragged coat
A piece of hat
broken shoes
war! War!
stumbling for dread

at the young men
who with their gun-butts
shove her

sprawling--
a note
at the foot of the page (CEP, 95)

The face of the poor woman "like a mashed blood orange," reveals a shocking awakening to the horrors of war. The frightful audition of "War! War!" leaves an indelible impression. But "the young men" with their "gun-butts" are hardened even to leave the frightened poor weak woman who is stunningly "clutching her/thick ragged coat."

Similar image of death in war resulting into the "lust" and greed is shown in Poem'Lustspiel':

Death conquered Vienna but his men
had to be called off because
given the meanest break she'd lead
them hellbent to chunk the racket
for there's not a soul in Vienna
but likes to dance and sing!

-- drop their guns, dump the boss
grab a girl and join the rest
who like to dance and sing! (CLP,151)

War kills the "souls" of society. "Vienna," the city was "conquered" with the "death" of thousands of men.
The depressed nation had to fulfil the "lust" of the many
conquering soldiers, who "dumped" their boss, dropped
their "guns" and joined in merry-makings with the young
girls. Here war gives birth to bastards who forget their
morals and humanity. Williams himself confesses in 'Midas':

War is a bastard agent. It eats its young, it
creates only to mutilate and swallow its own offsprings.
It fertilizes the body of its continental flesh, the
female carcass that it cynically urges to new bursts
of labor, with glee, offering a prize (literally!)
to its woman that she may exceed herself: then
pig-like it crunches her shoats in its jaws while
pushing her into the trough, finally eating her also
thus becoming sterile! War feeds on lies of deception,
on the confusion of the woman, on pushing indignities
upon her and then robbing her piecemeal. She is
suppressed her aphrodisiacs taken away from her
piecemeal, and her reproductive wiles crushed to
the features of a sausage machine— the sacks of flesh
shooting into his gullet as fast as produced.
He swallows and belches— while she serves him in
his disgusting trade.19

The war has to be over one day. Then comes the true situ­
atation, raised into relief by patriotic fervor, flattens
the struggle between the raw new and the graciousness of
an imposed cultural design. The fashionable would still
be fashionable, and the unfashionable, unfashionable as
before. And then the civilization would carry on the unive­
rsal feature of glorification and paying homage to the
great war-warriors at huge war-memorials as seen in poem
'Middle':

Of this profusion
a robin flies carrying
food on its tongue
and a flag
red white and
blue hangs
motionless. Return
from the sick

wean the mind
again from among
the foliage also of
infection. There

is a brass band at
the monument
and the children
that paraded

the blistering streets
are giving lustily
to the memory
of our war dead. (CEP, 421)

The bird in motion is projected on the "motionless flag." The expression "lustily" indicates an image of healthy children. The doctor is coming back from the hospital after treating the patients of infectious disease in the hospital. The children happily withstand the "blisterring streets" giving relief to the doctor-poet. The components in the poem are the living, the non-living, patients symbolising despair, and children are exhibiting health and vigour defying a blistering heat. Further the bandmusic of celebration is paradoxically juxtaposed against "the memory of our war dead." However, the image avoids the negative approach and presents a universal feature of a national celebration as it glorifies the dead as national heroes. These celebrations are richly "to the memory/or our war dead." Such social thematic structure
is visible in the one of the most representative poems 'Tract' (CEP,129). The overall impression of the poem can be discussed in terms of Williams' disgust for man's blind adoption of meaningless conventions which are followed to pay homages to the dead. The poet wants to emphasize in this poem that the things should be treated as they are. The unnecessary exaggeration is not needed as most of the people do express their false love and affection towards the dead.

However, the image of death associated with graves and tombs may be noted in the poem entitled 'History' (CEP,50-51). After death the spirit of the persona is moulded into geophysical nature. The supreme position of hard stone "over the flesh" has an advantage as suggested in the extract below. The hydrospheric elements of "water" when "spilled" upon the geophysical "ground" will nourish the botanical "rose-leaves." Contrasted against this natural phenomenon is the function of the tomb, that has taken up the spirit of the dead man, is to "hold life" in a static form, may be in terms of "memory" even after life is over.

The priest has passed into his tomb,
The stone has taken up his spirit!
Granite over the flesh: who will deny its advantages?
Your death?— water
spilled upon the ground—
though water will mount again into
rose-leaves—
but you?— Would hold life still,
even as a memory, when it is over,
Benevolence is rare. (CEP, 51)

Elsewhere in the same poem Williams presents in the words of Uresh-Nai, an historically important priest to the goddess of the sky, his directions for making the stone container for holding his own body:

Run your finger against this edge!
—here went the chisel!— and think
of an arrogance endured six thousand years
Without a flaw!

... 

"The chisel is in your hand, the block is before you cut as I shall dictate:
This is the coffin of Uresh-Nai, priest to the sky Goddess,— built to endure forever!

Carve the inside
With the image of my death in little lines of figures three fingers high.
Put a lid on it cut with Mut bending over the earth, for my headpiece, and in the year
to be chosen I shall rouse, the lid shall be lifted and I will walk about the temple where they have rested me and eat the air of the place:
Ah--these walls are high! This is in keeping." (CEP, 50-51)
In the first five lines of the extract above, a guide is speaking to a visitor to the historical monument. After that, the rest of the extract within quotes is the articulation of Uresh-Nai. The coffin is "built/to endure for ever!" The sign of exclamation being self-explanatory as the priest wishes his body to be held in the coffin to infinity. The expectations of the priest are not for a resurrection in the normally accepted sense because he would rise again and habitat the place only within the boundary walls of the monument. The "image" of his "death" is to be sculptured meticulously within the interior of the coffin and the "headpiece" must be carved exquisitely. The human arrogance associated with such ambitious projects is spelled out elsewhere in the same poem:

I arrogant against death! I who have endured! I worn against the years! (CEP, 52)

However, several samples of imagery related to graves, coffins and of cemetry may be found to contain a down-to-earth normal presentation as in 'An Address':

Walk softly on my grave for I desired you,

a matter for sorrow for decay;
flowers without odor

garlanded

about the sad legend:
Live in this

whom green Youth denied. (CLP,59)

The personae has died in his early youth. Love and desire never reached their fusion in such a case. Expressions such as "sorrow," "decay," "flowers without odor," and "sad legend" are contrasted against the paradoxical advice, "Live in this."

Most of Williams' poems present the rejection of the belief regarding life after death. It is the conscious mind of the physician that rejects the universally accepted concept of life after death; he does so because of his training in, and practice of the medical profession. As the physician deals with the phenomenal world, he rejects anything that is beyond the seeing eye. However, on the contrary, at times, the mighty force of his unconscious perception makes him accept even the existence of those things that are beyond the sensory experience. Notwithstanding his conscious view of physical death as an end, Williams utilizes such statements which underline the existence and immortality of the soul. He considers the human soul as the most important facet of human life. It leads the dead one to rebirth. The development
of such theme can be traced in his poem entitled 'An Eternity':

The soul, my dear, is paramount,  
the soul of things  
that makes the dead moon shine  \( (CLP,183) \)

The image of soul itself is suggestive of life's continuity after death. Life after death can be described as life on the earth. We doubt the existence of soul because it cannot be perceived with the seeing eye. After death of his mother in this poem, he expresses his deep affection for her. It too elucidates 'Williams' helplessness as he cannot join his dead mother. He can join her only after his own death. As the poem reveals, the mother died in an extreme old age which is a stage in human life when one is not able to see clearly, hear properly, and stand erect. And his autobiography confirms the various disabilities of his mother while she lived. Out of his unshakeable belief in the immortality of the soul, he exhorts his dead mother to wait for a little while. After his own death he would join and look after her. Thus the poem depicts a strong sense of concern and responsibility of the son towards his dead mother. He promises to take it up even in the world after death. He asks his dead mother to come back to the world of living ones:

Come back, mother, comeback from  
the dead-- not to "Syria," not there  
but hither-- to this place.
At ninety the strangeness of death is upon you. I have been to all corners of the mind. What gift can I bring you but luxury and that you have taught me to despise. I turn my face to the wall, revert to my beginnings and turn my face also to the wall. (CLP, 182)

It becomes clear from the lines quoted above that the poet considers that the earth is not the only place for living in; there are other places also to live in. Further unfolding the meaning of the poem, we have the images such as "black," "defeated," "night," which refer to the grief and utter helplessness of the son over the death of his mother. The grief is expressed as compared to the joy of a moonlit night. The poet, here, gives a flashback to his past. When his mother was alive, moonlit night often rendered him a soothing touch with a lot of joy. But at present, the moonlit night only adds to his grief. Sorrow and defeat put the poet in a state in which he views life bringing only miseries into the world. "We... were/defeated and yet lived," (CLP, 182) makes it obvious that the son does not want to live any more. He curses the life:

And yet, Mother, that isn't true.
--the night, the night we face
is black but of no more weight than the day-- the day we faced and were defeated and yet lived
to face the night in which the fair moon shines— (CLP, 182)
'The Horse Show,' written in late 1948, records Williams' talks with his mother. The central part of their conversation has perhaps been the continuation of life after death. His mother affirms a strong faith in the continuity of life while Williams does not merely oppose it, but he rejects the very idea of life after death.

... Unless there is some spark, some spirit we keep within ourselves, life, a continuing life's impossible-- and it is all we have. There is no other life, only the one. (CLP, 185)

Unlike 'An Eternity,' the present poem illustrated a different attitude of the poet towards death. The son has come across a news about such a man who was buried in his grave under a mountain, had dug himself out to come back from the dead to the world of living ones.

... I don't know. I don't know why they should want to comeback. I was reading about some men who had been buried under a mountain, I said to her, and one of them came back after two months, digging himself out. It was in Switzerland, you remember? Of course I remember. The villagers tho' it was a ghost coming down to complain. They were frightened. They do come, she said, what you call my "Visions." I talk to them just as I am talking to you. I see them plainly. (CLP, 185)

When the poet narrates this news to his mother, she insists that the world of spirits does exist as our own, and they do visit the living ones. But Williams remains unconvinced by this statement. In connection with Williams'
views about the world of spirits, Alan Ostrom states: "For Williams the world of the pure spirit is an absurdity; the human world is the whole world of actuality, of physical things, of the emotions and ideas engendered by them, and above all, of action. In contradiction, the world of the spirit is one in which the mind's opposition to the body is ended: the body does not have to exist because a man is not expected to do anything." Williams has a psychological reason for his mother's belief in the existence of the world of spirits. The vissitations of spirits are deceptive. As a matter of fact, she does not talk to the spirits in reality. It is only her imagination that she would continue her life after death in the realm of the spirits. In "Visions," when she is about to die, there is a marked reference of her wish to live again. While being asked about life in an interview, he replies: "... We won't be alive very much longer.... I mean, what is life anyhow? Pessimistic Optimism...." He describes life as Pessimistic because everyone knows that he will die. It is optimistic because every one dies with a desire to be reborn.

In the next group of poems several living characters seem to vibrate between life and death because they pine to be like those who escape the tragedies of life though they cannot escape at all. As a consequence they are neither living nor dead. Their condition can be paradoxically considered of life-in-death and death-in-life.
In the light of this theme, death represents the negative emotions which suck out the vibrancy, vitality and zeal of man and leaves him almost lifeless. 'Death the Barber' is noteworthy for its presentation of talks between the barber and the poet.

Of death
the barber
talked to me
cutting my
life with
sleep to trim
my hair—

It's just
a moment
he said, we die
every night—

And of
the newest
ways to grow
hair on

bold death—
I told him
of the quartz
lamp

and of old men
with third
sets of teeth
to the cue

of an old man
who said
at the door—
Sunshine today!

for which
death shaves
him twice
a week (CEP, 264-65)
"We die/every night," conveys the meaning of the present aspect of our theme. Williams makes use of a number of such statements and images which refer to a death-like state. He has a very acute sense of observation that differentiates the beautiful from the ugly, the pleasant from the unpleasant.

"In Sisterly Fashion" represents an ugly woman depicting her mental sickness:

The ugly woman clutched
her lover round the neck
her skin was white as snow
as she wept softly to herself
knowing her lack of beauty
like the sting of death—
by which she praised in
sisterly fashion your fitted
limbs your honied breath (CLP,19)

The sense of lack of beauty poisons her life. She is frustrated, depressed and almost bloodless. She is a woman who seems to sway between life and death. She wants to have an escape from this harsh reality through death, but she cannot do so through natural death. As a result, she develops a suicidal tendency. Williams not only depicts an ugly woman, but a woman, who is hypersensitive to her ugliness. This consciousness of her being an ugly woman renders her "white as snow." Her "lack of beauty" is compared to "the sting of death." It is a sort of wish to die as this woman does not want to live a life of humiliation.
In 'The Cure,' the protagonist seems to be burning with the fire of jealousy when he does not become capable of writing a good piece of poem in comparison to other poets. In order to elucidate the meaning of the poem, it is worth mentioning that the instincts such as jealousy, greed, and anger exist simultaneously with the virtues in human nature. The man is often misguided by those vices and sometimes they lead to his death. The poem indicates the disturbed condition of Williams' psyche that is caused by his inability to write well. He says:

Sometimes I envy others, fear them a little too, if they write well. For when I cannot write I'm a sick man and want to die. . . . (CLP, 23)

Williams' deep seated desire to establish himself in the realm of poetry is expressed through the images such as "sick man," "envy," when he fails to produce a good poem, he wants "to die." Death wish is certainly stronger during hard and excruciating circumstances, because it offers a fine escape from the harsh realities of life. 'Rumba! Rumba!' is one such poem that represents the wish to die.

to hide the defect-- the difficulty held burden, to perfect! melted in a wish to die. (CLP,34)

'A Plea For Mercy' is another example of death-like state. It high-lights the death of emotions. The emotional participation in death imagery exhibits the frustration
of lover. The poet expresses his deep sympathy towards a frustrated lover who has been jilted by his girl friend. The poet says:

Who hasn't been frustrated with the eternal virgin shining before him and he cold as a stone? (CLP,34)

Here the frustration is enhanced to its climax by the poet, by bringing into comparison the joy of the beloved and the sorrow of the lover. Psychologically speaking, the reason behind his frustration is the problem of identification. His sorrow is identified with the joy of the beloved. Their separation is caused not by any other party, it is his beloved who has jilted him. Since she has been presented by the poet as a happy woman, the lover fails to derive some consolation from her. On the contrary, her happiness adds to his sorrow. The images such as "cold" "stone" refers to lifelessness. The words "eternal," "shining" are associated with the joy and fuller life of the beloved. Mariani rightly comments in 'The New World Naked': "death was no resolution for William, some final moving into an eternal silence where, hopefully, one took one's deepest secrets with one. Death was nothing so grand but merely a bastard biological fact, a final negation. What Williams was after, instead, was a celebration of the forces of love and the imagination- to conquer whatever the poet should have to confess. Nor was the silence of the dead an
answer, and the forgiveness we might more easily grant them than was worse than useless. It was the mind, he insisted, "that must be cured/short of death's/intervention" so that the imagination itself, which might grant that forgiveness, could blossom again into a garden."\(^{22}\)

'The Yachts' presents a description of the magnificent America's cup Yacht races. The Yachtsman are found to be obsessed with fear of death throughout their expedition. A number of images associated with death, take place before their eyes and they can almost visualize their death by sinking into the sea. The fear of being dead is more involved in risk taking activities. It is due to their participation in this adventurous race that they cannot free themselves from this fear. During their race, they come across the dead bodies which are "cut aside." The audio-visual images have played a vital role to suggest their death in imagination. The scene is presented with a number of horrified images:

"... the signal is set and they are off. Now the waves strike at them but they are too well made, they slip through, though they take in canvas. Arms with hands grasping seek to clutch at the prows. Bodies thrown recklessly in the way are cut aside. It is a sea of faces about them in agony, in despair

until the horror of the race dawns staggering the mind, the whole sea become an entanglement of watery bodies lost to the world bearing what they cannot hold. Broken, beaten, desolate, reaching from the dead to be taken up they cry out, failing, failing! their cries rising in waves still as the skillful yachts pass over."\(^{(CEP,106-07)}\)
The whole scene evolves our repulsion as we can visualise the "bodies thrown recklessly in way" which are "cut aside" by "well made" yachts. "The horror of the race" evokes images of their death. As a result, they are broken/beaten, desolate reaching from the dead. Psychologically speaking, the descriptions are not realistic. They are the different states of their frightened psyche. They become so much death obsessed that "they cry out" for the help. Often cited and anthologized, this poem may be interpreted in terms of a class struggle. Mariani reveals: "Williams had called it a race: a political race between Democrats and Republicans like those Yachts racing for the America's cup in the summer of '35. One or the other side would win—probably the special interests once again—and the Sansou, the poor, the disenfranchised, would be cut aside relentlessly as they clawed against the boats struggling simply to stay afloat." "Romance Moderne" develops a similar theme in which a car-driving and joy-making couple, all of a sudden, meets with the accident. In certain risk-involved activities such as climbing on the mountains, driving on the roads, sailing on the sea, and flying in the air; imagination of the death by accidents proves to be favourable. Though it is torturous, yet it prevents the men from death in real situation. Here, in the poem, the seeing eye of either the living or the dead narrates one such situation of accident.

... Twirl the wheel!
Over the edge! screams! crash!
The end. I sit above my head—
a little removed— or
a thin wash of rain on the roadway
-- I am never afraid when he is driving,--
interposes new direction,
rides us sidewise, unforeseen
into the ditch! All threads cut!
Death! Black. The end. The very end-- (CEP, 182)

The whole scene is charged with dark images of gloom and death. "Screams," "crash," "ditch" refer to a terrible accident due to which "all threads" of life are cut. The figures of speech are like that of a dying man, unlike Wallace Stevens who describes death as the "mother of beauty," Williams calls it ugly, unpleasant, and "black." Williams, again, depicts physical death as an end, "the very end" of human life.

'The Death of See' is a state of mind of the poet with reference to newspaper report on the death of Crosby. 'See' here must be symbolizing 'C' of Crosby (C=see).

One morning
the wind scouring
the streets

I read: Poet
and woman
found shot dead

Pact seen in
murder--
Suicide in

artist's suite-- (CEP, 381)

This newspaper report of "murder" or "suicide" of an "artist" with the "woman" shocked Williams and he was really infuriated by the news. "For years he had hated the papers anyway for serving death up daily along with one's orange juice
and toast.... Harry Crosby was a potential publisher for his own 'January'. The police found Crosby and Josephine Biglow lying mannequin-like, fully clothed, in bed at a friend's studio at the Hotel Artistes on West, 67th street. That, of course, was the kind of news that sold papers, and the tryst suicide was smeared over the tabloids for weeks." 24 So Williams wrote 'The Death of See,' reducing Crosby to the cipher C, like Wallace Stevens had reduced his own Crispin poet to the same cipher.

'To a Dead Journalist' is again, based on some newspaper report. Death is viewed, here, as a restful sleep, presenting an image of peace:

Behind that white brow
now the mind simply sleeps--
the eyes, closed, the
lips the mouth,

the chin, no longer useful,
the prow of the nose.
But rumors of the news,
unrealizable, (CEP, 416)

The photographic image of the dead journalist, is a demonstrated with the news of his death. The peacefully closed eyes negate "rumours of the news/unrealizable." Another media than newspapers, for focussing on the mourners is considered in 'Death by Radio.' Williams pays the tribute to a political leader Roosevelt after his death as Walt Whitman in 'O Captain! My Captain' or Robert Browning in 'The Lost Leader.' The poem opens:
Suddenly his virtues became universal
We felt the force of his mind
on all fronts, penetrant
to the core of our beings
Our ears struck us speechless
While shameless tears sprang to our eyes
through which we saw
all mankind weeping. (CLP, 258)

The fact that a man is recognized more by the people after his death than during his lifetime is realistically sketched in the poem with the images of "tears" "to our eyes." All "fronts" are now covered up with the dead man's genius. The radio announcement shocks them to a sudden speechlessness. The mourners, several of whom might have been the severe critics of the dead man during his lifetime, now weep with "all mankind." Although death negates and terminates life, the final recognition is a positive signal. The expression, "shameless tears sprang to our eyes," gives out the light of recognition in the midst of the dark sensation of death. Mariani provides the details: "In April, too, Williams—like millions of other Americans—was shocked and saddened by the news he heard over the radio even as the war in Europe drew to a victorious close. The man who had taken them through the depression and seen them through the war, the man who had raised the hopes of some and struck dismay in others with his policies was now gone. On April 12, the world learned that Franklin Delano Roosevelt, just beginning his fourth term as President of the U.S., the man Pound would curse as "that ambulating dunghill," had died of a cerebral hemorrhage in Warm Springs, Georgia. Williams, hearing the news, found himself weeping for his lost leader."25
Similar tributes are paid during the death of D.H. Lawrence in the poem 'An Elegy for D.H. Lawrence'.

Green Points on the shrub
and poor Lawrence dead.
The night damp and misty
and Lawrence no more in the world
to answer April's promise
with a fury of labor
against waste, waste and life's coldness. (CEP, 361)

The very opening lines of the poem give us the sample of Williams' sentimentality. They present a fine contrast between the joys of nature and sorrows of human life. His depiction of death of Lawrence is conveyed chiefly through images which contrast man and nature. Images of the joy of nature and the images of sorrows of man has been skillfully fused together to mourn the death of D.H. Lawrence.

Images of death, as superimposed on that of life in reality and sometimes in imagination, in this world, and in the world of spirits, crowd some of the later poems of Williams. Williams is confused at the questions associated with what actually happens after death, "And where do our loved ones go? Into the ground or up into the heavens, to ride the clouds there?" 'The Clouds' (CLP, 124) is certainly one of the most sustained poems of Williams which tells of not only the expression of the poet's personal grief at the death of his father, but it also
represents the ultimate issue of human predicament. The poem appeared in the last year of the second world war and the poet felt deeply involved by the death of thousands of men and women all over the world. Their death reminds him of his father who had died twenty-five years ago. The poet transmutes the personal grief into impersonal sorrow in order to achieve universal appeal in the poem. Mariani comments in relation to this poem:

"what, then, remained?" With each, dies a piece of the old life, which he carries, a precious burden Beyond, "the last movement of "The Clouds" begins. So it is the old life that we the living treasure and nothing more. And yet, and yet: What if the dead do somehow live on contrary to all our expectations? Williams simply didn't know, and so the poem could do nothing but circle at its close back to its beginnings: with the clouds, "the disordered heavens, ragged, ripped by the winds/or dormant," made up of a calligraphy of sorts, a writing on the sky in a world constantly changing, "in which the poet foretells his own death," forms forming and dissolving, "convoluted, lunging upon/a pismire, a conflagration, a . . . ." Thus Williams dissolved his own meditation, in mid sentence, open-ended, halting on the indefinite article, the extended dots forming a signature for the "no-knowledge" of his "nameless destiny." Till the very end of his own life Williams would never come any closer than this to a certitude of what followed that final breath.... 27

Besides being a physician and a poet, Williams seems to be a great prophecy maker. Paul Mariani writes in this connection, "Whitman, Pound, death, and the sea. It was Williams' complex enactment of his own death and the nature of a subsequent resurrection in the last book of 'Paterson' as he'd contemplated it until then." 28 Williams predicted his own death in 'The Shadow' a poem which had appeared
full forty six years before his death in the spring of 1963. In this poem Williams imagines his death and burial. Here the poet-prophet says:

Soft as the bed in the earth
where a stone has lain--
So soft, so smooth and so cool
spring closes me in
with her arms and her hands.

Rich as the smell
of a new earth on a stone
that has lain breathing
the damp through its pores--
Spring closes me in
with her blossomy hair
brings dark to my eyes. (CEP,120)

The expression "spring closes me in/with her arms and her hands" refers to Williams' wish to die in spring which is so soft, so smooth and so cool." His prediction turned out to be true when he passed away in spring time on March 4,1963 in Rutherford, New Jersey. Floss writes the details as noted by Mariani:

Christmas came and went, Floss adding in her Christmas cards to Bill's old friends that he was not in the best of health... March I had always signaled the real beginning of the year for Williams, but that too came and went without incident. And then, on the morning of the fourth, when she did not hear Bill moving around by half past eight, Floss went to wake him up. As usual, Stormy followed her to the closed door. Floss opened the door, but this morning stormy refused to follow her into the room. Instead he lay down and began to whine. Floss walked over to the bed, and looked at the small figure facing the wall. She knew at once that, finally, the end had come. She called Bill to examine his father for the last time and pronounce him dead, just as Williams had done for his father forty-five years before.
The mourners buried him at the cemetery where his father, mother, and other family members lay buried. Paul Mariani witnesses his burial too: "... as spring began to steal in, Williams had gone. The family waked him in a closed coffin, covered with some of those spring flower he'd celebrated again and again in his poems. Once, when Floss had asked him what kind of service he would want, he had told her a simple one without "a lot of religious stuff." ... At the cemetery, where Elena and William George Williams and three Hermans already lay buried, the mourners— including Floss and Bill Jr. and his family and Paul and his second wife, Betty, and his children, waited in the cold rain under a tent for the services to conclude."30

The death of William Carlos Williams on March 4 was expected and even longed for, in the pitiable way that human beings must adopt when they are touched and concerned, by those who knew him. He had been ill for a long, long time. We can be grateful, on his account and our own, that even during the last tortured years he was able to write some of the poems, some times. The work of the final decade contains perhaps his most beautiful writing, full of life, and all it implied—was the key to everything he saw, everything he felt and everything he did. It gave him, one fervently hopes, the satisfaction he deserved. Certainly it will continue to satisfy us and those who come after us, if there are any, as we turn to his poems again and again.
NOTES


7. Paul Mariani, p.66.

8. Ibid., p.198.


12. Linda Welshimer Wagner, p.76.

13. Paul Mariani, pp.359-60.


16. Ibid., p.164.

17. Mariani, p.399 (Wallace Stevens, The Collected Poems p.128, the full title of the poem being, 'The Idea of Order at Key West')


22. Paul Mariani, p.673.

23. Paul Mariani, pp.370-71 (WCW to EP from woods Hole, Massachusetts, Sunday 25 Aug.1935 (Y). "I think you greatly exaggerate the intelligence of the general populace." WCW warned EP. "If you expect any understanding in relation of action (Sic). I do not exclude myself. The chief bar to action is (the) vastness of (America's) terrain, subtlety of camouflage as to which heads to bash and comparative lack of difficulty now a days in finding bread and circuses. The movies and the tabloids are cheap and one is fed, by God, and well fed out of the public Kitchen—everyone can eat and eat well in America at least.")

24. Ibid., p.295.

25. Ibid., pp.504-05.

26. Ibid., p.568.

27. Ibid., pp.568-69. (CLP, pp.124-28. In an exchange with KB in "The Clouds," William carlos Williams wrote that he was not talking about heaven in the poem. Heaven was a "bad world," he argued, because it was too inaccurate as a concept, certainly clouds could never mean heaven for a Christian, even such a non-Christian as himself. For himself he chose to put his own faith in meeting death in "doctors and chicken broth," since as for as he was concerned there was no chance of ever being "cured," whether by philosophy or by Christ. Except he added, in the case of T.S. Eliot (WCW to KB, no date, but ca. mid-August 1948).
28. Paul Mariani, p.600.

29. Ibid. p.767 (N.159. Lightening stroke and Thunder clap) so far example, to LZ, 13 Dec.1962. "The last time I saw him was about a month before his death," Denise Levertov remembered, and it was the only time I left 9-Ridge Road despondent instead of exhilarated." Letter to author, N.160-Y collection).

30. Paul Mariani, p.684.