CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

Now it is necessary to recapitulate the chief findings in this thesis before assessing the clusters of poems which may be indirectly associated with the three principal concepts of winter, old age and death, because of the complexity of contents in the images they present.

William Carlos Williams, the inquisitive, has depicted a stark background of winter season, its associated deep, dark and dreary imagery which corresponds to the disappointed, dis-spirited and disenchanted immediate environment and its inhabitants. The poems chosen serve as a vehicle for understanding the pulse and mind of the humanity facing the rigours of the cruel winter physically and psychologically. It has been viewed how the sufferings, pains, perversions, hunger and the impact of natural calamities bring forth the essential loneliness of a man. This stream of solitary living flows more intensely when he faces the hazards of severe winter, the experiences of old age and ultimately when he heads towards the unknown ultimate which is death. In one of his interviews, he honestly confesses that artists often feel lonely. He is seen in rebellion against the world. The Poems project this theme invariably as it seems to be deeply inherent in him. His poetry subserves his honest attempt to be a poet who has reconciled with his world. All three images of winter, old age and death, most regularly comprehend and strive in harmony and sometimes
in irony to form, the fierce, nervous and emotional tension of American life accompanied with coldness, cruelty and power of endurance. The impact of winter images, winter landscapes influencing the weak old age at the utmost, signifies the end of the mortal world with absolute reality-death. In this chapter of conclusion, it is important not to ignore certain variations within these three chief aspects which could not be included in the different chapters, due to the rare complexities they were associated with. There cannot be any definite dividing line in these concepts because they over-stretch their boundaries, they are linked and inter-related. They melt and mingle to produce an inner and essential symmetry, a wholesome view of life as lived and viewed by the poet.

In the previous discussions, the images of winter season are mainly recorded by Williams in the background of dark sensation. But positive aspects of winter imagery, too, have their influences on the nature, when nature itself fights against the onslaught of winter. Such pathetic fallacy associated with winter figures in the poem 'Portrait of the Author' (CEP, 228). The dry winter cover is unable to ruin the "green points" of the woods. The "delicate leaves" without surrendering to cold are unfolding and separating from one another. "It is the madness of the birch leaves opening/cold, one by one." It is a symbol of victory of plant life against an encounter with cruel winter. Williams is often surprised to watch such unexpected
phenomena of the magical nature. In his autobiography he is astonished to see winter-like conditions, at times, in early spring. Here the poet is mute to the undefinable reverse imagery when spring is going backward towards winter . . . On the square, I was startled to see everything covered with snow—there had been torrential rains all afternoon and early evening, snow in April!

At places visual colour imagery fills the heart of painter poet. The background of colours provides a rich canvas to the coming spring. The spring helps to discard the negative effect of winter on the modern tools of civilisation as in 'The Hermaphroditic Telephones,' when the "warm rains/wash away winter's/hermaphroditic telephones (CEP, 286)." A typical wintery sea-beach "Florida" is discussed in the poem 'This Florida: 1924,' (CEP, 329). Here sand is humanized as a victim of winter, who is enjoying "(as at the movies)" the "pleasure" of nudity when people are "tearing off to escape it/this winter" bite by a sunbath. Similarly a distinct bird-imagery against a fierce winter wind is seen in the poem 'The Manoeuvre' (CLP, 88). The shivering birds in mid air, with full strength and vigour try to overcome the demonic winter's "face into the winds teeth." This season of winter is taken as a prelude to spring by the "two starlings." The thought of spring gives a moral support to life and life-like creations. One winter morning, Williams woke up at dawn and was inspired by fox-sparrows, to write down a poem,
by the time, Floss, his wife, came into the room." Outside it was overcast, bitterly cold, and snow was expected, but already he could taste his seventy-second spring:

It is early. . .
the song of the fox sparrow
reawakening the world

... it is a cloudy morning.
He looks out the window
sees the birds still there—"2

Williams has often taken winter as a state of mind, a concept which affects the psyche of humanity. In his poems a typical image associated with the word crimson appears symbolically. In the poem 'Appeal,' a "mighty/ crimson Salamander," the fiend, symbolises the dragon like winter, representing death when the persona feels "the cold tips of fingers"—(CEP, 24). This mystical animal dilutes the coldness of snow with its crimson-colour, symbolic of fire. Mariani too, gives the detail of the beautiful crimson plant cyclamen, an indoor plant observed by Williams in the winter months of 1935/36. "... There is the world of thought and there is the world of passion, the passion of flowers— the flame-red crimson cyclamens."3

Sometimes unsavoury conditions of winter give birth to the hardships of a common man, as in the poem 'The Farmer.' "The farmer in deep thoughts"marchs down his "blank fields" "among the browned weeds" as a result of the "cold wind" (CEP, 243). This artistic figure of the farmer is juxtaposed
against the anarchist winter which "looms"-- the detailed description of the winter representing a dark and dreary blankness as against the looming depiction of a tenacious determination of the farmer. Human psychology is oriented to always wishing for the opposite in the earthly phenomenon around oneself. But the constrains of winter can never alter the eternal blessings of Love. In the style of Browning's monologue, paradox of love-hate relationship against the background of winter is visualized in 'Birds and Flowers':

... It is
winter, true enough, but
this day I love you.

... tomorrow it may be snowing--

... If we make a desert of
ourselves-- we make
a desert ... (CEP, 356)

Winter is no barrier to love and related human emotions. The persona's internal urge for love hardly cares for the coming snow. Thus, no season can alter the human relationships except the Time. With time, the living beings cross the threshold of youth to enter the lonely, helpless winters of their life-- the old age physically, mentally, or both ways.

Old age in Williams' work is mostly concerned with the human beings with few images of plants and animals signalling old age too. His deliberations, rich in old
men and women, almost show an ever-surging crowd of humanity, out of the window of his ever-gushing poetry. He often tries to learn tolerance, wisdom, understanding and mutual dependence from these people. He is continually surprised with their unexpected qualities of endurance; an old world's charm, an extraordinary generosity, a softness and an acceptance in spite of ignorance at times, poverty, weakness, hate, disgrace, disease, helplessness and even suspicions. Sometimes one may come across few rare images of old age in juxtaposition with the botanical and zoological world of his poems. The short three-line poem 'The Soughing Wind,' vividly presents the picture of old branches in winter-like conditions, with few leaves hanging on them. "Some leaves hang late, some fall/before the first frost——so goes/the tale of winter branches and old bones." (CEP, 205). Thus the final outcome of the story of these old branches is the same as of the "old bones" of an old man, as both meet their milestone-death.

Williams' writings richly sympathize with the old age of human beings because of his profession of a physician. Old man and woman often take an additional dimension in his poem as has been already discussed in the chapter 'Old Age.' It is a period of isolation, discomfiture, and sufferings. But once, he was surprised to see a rare old patient, different to his old age, disease and death, though he was a tremendously wealthy sheep owner and a railroad executive named, a Senor Gonzales, from Spain. "He had
had pneumonia . . . was going to die. His circulatory system had broken down, he was dyspneic, edematous—his legs swollen to twice their natural size—but for all that, I found him alert and above all patient."\(^4\)

Most of the poems discussed previously are associated with personal elements of Williams. There are references again and again of his old mother, father and the phenomenal old English grandmother. Mrs. Wellcome—the grandmother is of immense importance as she had definitly acted as the 'Muse' responsive for his creative writings whom he took as a symbol for all old women coming across his personal, social and professional life. Mariani gives the details of this character for the poem "Morning." In the streets of Guinea Hill on a cold, blustery march month, he gets inspired by a digging, old, Italian woman resembling his goddess — the English grandmother, whom he'd called on to guide him in 'The Wanderer' (CEP, 4). In the poem, portrait of an old beggar woman is presented under the nostalgic influence of old grandmother. "She is attiring herself before me/.../ Forgiveless, unreconcilable;/.../ walking imperious in beggary!" The old "attiring" beggar woman is forgiveless and unreconcilable. The old crooked fingers with rings on them have lost the stones embedded in them. With a "diminished state" her lean wrists and bare ankles symbolizing her with the presence of river like life. But her old age, wisdom and experience would provide her peace, solace and quietness. Poet has never underestimated the wisdom of old age but still proletariate
images as of the beggars are marked meaningfully with reference to an astonishing poverty in the so-called rich country, America. One cannot ignore here Bram Dijkstra's contradicting views in relation to this viewpoint. It is rather contrary when, the critic, very much indifferently declares that Williams' work focussed entirely upon the narrow topics just like the government officials, even in the art." Williams' social concern simply did not go any further than that—concern for the condition of the poor, the exploited, the economically oppressed, is completely absent from his considerations. He added that for him freedom means his own interest for himself as he wished "preferably with a government subsidy." Not only the readers but even Williams was badly hurt when newspaper once described him a "Communist sympathizer" in the thirties. He never wanted to be politicised in his life time except working for poor people. It is true that he was often deeply moved with the miserable condition of his patients— the time when the sentimental poet in the unsentimental physician dominated his complex personality. Mariani collects those "despair" moments of his old age after the stroke in August.

... he wrote Tom Cole that the sky itself had caved in for him with ... his stroke ... and ... with their story that he was "a communist sympathizer" blocked me. ... and completed the wreck. Now he was trying a brave comeback. ... and "under the greatest difficulties." That which we have suffered/was for us/to suffer, "he wrote, and now,

... He was an old man in desperate need, he realized, and he said so, crying of that need to Mary, Diana the Virgin, his wife, to "the female principle of the world."
The three women mostly influenced his long and poetically productive life of the poet. They were his mother, Raquel He'le'ne Rose, his grandmother, Mrs.Wellcome, and his wife, Mrs.Florence Williams. He often judged them as the most 'determined' women, in his writings. His grandmother who acted his muse, appears in several poems symbolically, his wife in three novels (beginning with 'White Mule'), but his mother figures in only few visionary poems specially the poem, 'Eve.' It is important to note down that the second most important influence on Williams' writings, after his grandmother, is of his visionary superstitious mother Elena. In her old age, Elena waited in front of her physician son like a frail bird for her mortality, when the doctor-son asks, "Pardon my injuries/now that you are old-/Forgive me my awkwardnesses/ my impatience/ and short replies--"(CEP,375). At moments in the same poem, he watches the old patient as an "infantile creature"--/without subtlety-- and "defenseless," Mrs.Williams lived to the incredible age of 102, with her son and daughter-in-law. For last twenty years of her life she remained confined to her bed due to a broken hip. This was her irresistible period of visions, often recalling her own care-free childhood and robust youth, like most aged persons do, perhaps to energise and invigorate her frail old age.

This mortal world has to undergo a constant flux in our life-time. All living beings undergo a steady change with the ever-ticking clock of life, to fulfil Darwin's
theory of survival—'Survival of the Fittest.' One who changes according to its surroundings along with the passage of time is only fit to survive in this strenuous struggleful life. Now it becomes necessary to assess the importance of certain poems which Williams wrote and which could not be covered up in any of the chapters as they depict the state of transition flux, death and the emotional concept of life after death. In 'Invocation and conclusion' (CEP,105), "January" the symbolic winter is portrayed as the mother of spring—"the beginning of all things!" The persona recalls the state of flux associated with the driving force of life invocating the memories of the age of thirteen when the marriage took place with a twenty-six year old person. Though there is no change in their living conditions even after a long period of time, the physical flux is clearly visible with the oncoming of old age, when persona with tinge of regret exclaims, "Now look at me!"

In spite of the physical change the poem 'For G.B.S, Old' shows mental flux, when the persona's thoughts move violently before death. "As the mind burns/... he feared/ his Tempest. Frozen/ into a pattern/of ice." (CEP,149). Before death life moves violently "to the plausibilities" which frighten him "to his own destruction"—as a prelude to death, which acts as a dispersing agent. Such idea of transition is often seen associated with images of war resulting into death. In war too, death is just a dispersing agent in spite of intelligences, bonds of togetherness,
new trials and opportunities associated with it. It only destroys energy, without any creation. This energy might be useful for better purposes during peace. In war it is just stalled by stupidity of humanity. In desperation, here too, life begins to move at a violent pace before death.

Death, the eloquent, just, and mighty phenomenon of life which is a part of a continually recurring rhythm of nature, makes a crisis in the history of mortal world. But still death is as necessary for a man's growth as life itself. One may live as a conqueror, a king, a painter, a poet, a politician, a poor beggar, or a magistrate; but he must die as a man. The bed of death brings every human being to his pure individuality, to the intense contemplation of that deepest and most solemn of all relations— the relation between the creature and his creator. Death, thus, is the ultimate refuge to all sufferings, sorrows, enjoyments and even solitude of living beings as has already been discussed at length in the previous chapter. Here one must re-consider Williams' views on death as taken by moderns, in one of his letters to Robert McAlmon:

It astonishes me to observe how irritated moderns become, not so much at the thought as at the mention of death. That's one thing they don't quite know how to take. I don't mean that we should be "brave." That stinks. But it is equally asinine to pretend to ignore it. I don't think there has been evolved a modern equivalent to the old religious certainty
that by death we will be justified
in our thoughts and deeds. In other
words that the good we do will triumph
and the bad we do be punished. That's
"out" as far as thinking people are concerned
and only effective as a whip used to keep the
various hierarchies of church corporations
in power. But there is nothing to take
its place. The end result of the modern
attitude being to taboo death as a topic
of thought or conversation.7

Williams considered it to be a privilege to die in spring
when the persona would lie hand in hand with dirt realizing
death as an advantage as in the poem 'Spring Song.'
"Having died/one is at great advantage/... when/ I would
merely lie/hand in hand in the dirt with you" (CEP,119).
Williams acknowledges death to be of great advantage than
to have the struggling miserable life, when man can never
be at complete rest. The persona feels relaxed to imagine
the death in spring so that he could lie hand in hand
with the dirt of the earth. Death in the realm of nature
is equally predominant in his poetry as the death of animals
and human beings, because of the fact that nature is
not a separate entity for Williams. The struggling birds
against the background of nature have not remained unnoticed
by the keen observer- Williams. In the poem 'The Birds,'
(CEP, 218) the beginning of the world is pictured in
the light of the dawn. "The blackbirds in the rain"
trying their best to escape death against the dead branches
of tree hanging low over the roses and the grass, almost
give a vivid word-painting. Similarly "The black, long-
tailed," birds are trying their best to enjoy this transitory
life before death stings them as in the poem 'The Yellow Season' (CEP,454). The poem is a word-portrait of the chirping birds standing among the branches is presented amidst the yellow leaves symbolising the decline and decay of the leaves. But still the living lively birds are all alert of the certainty of their doom in the clutches of death.

Williams being a doctor always remained preoccupied with an ever-lasting tug-of-war between life and death. His medical practice gave him an entrance to the secret garden of innermost self and the self of the others. He was permitted by his medical badge to follow the guls and grotos of the poor and defeated body. He was invariably present at deaths and births during his visits to the hospital. So far, death has been depicted under different circumstances such as accidents, exploitations, injustice, sufferings, murders, suicides, starvation, natural catastrophes and so on. Williams was often disturbed with the untimely deaths due to accidents, as was he in Eliot's and his troops drowning accident leading to death. Once he was shocked to read the newspaper report on the death of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, the two Italian anarchists who were given the unjust death-sentence as they were convicted of murder. It was the death because of legal injustice, where all mercy pleas were turned down.

It is an established fact that death has an easy access wherever there is poverty. In 'The Descent of
Winter,' physician poet is deeply moved by the helplessness of cancer patient who dies without cure due to financial strains. "We have little now but/... we need a /transfusion. No one will give it to us,/... The eyes and the ears/down on it. Close," (CEP,308). The picture of poverty looming largely refers to the lack of facilities because of dearth of money.

The 'Great Depression' of 1930s, deteriorating socio-economic and socio-political conditions paved way to a number of evils such as killings, thefts, loots, and exploitation. Williams is a realist who never turned his eyes away from those harsh realities of life. He transmuted his consciousness into characters who become the personification of different social realities prevalent during depression period. That was the period when aesthetics were rapidly giving way to social and political concerns, giving chance to Williams to celebrate the poor, proletarian, helpless old men and women in poem after poem. 'A Vision of Labor : 1931' (CLP,43) is the best example of death in sheer starvation and poverty. "... damned near starving ... You can't help it. That's'/Poverty/... the pump/Stopped and the bishop died." The image of poverty serves to think about the death of the poor people all over the world, thus, giving it a universal appeal. Similarly poor workers with the heavy burden of work and ruthless exploitation cannot help declaring. "And we too shall die/ among the rest" (CLP,259) in the poem 'East Coocoo .'
The poem represents death in the proletariats where workers are identified with the "innocent locomotives."

Williams shows in a magnificent way his aversion to pathatic fallacy--one of the closest phenomenon associated with death, which leads the near and dear ones of the doomed to an extreme deep sea of darkness filled with sorrows and sufferings. Such extreme sorrow is pictorially portrayed in the poem 'The Widow's Lament in Spring Time':

Masses of flowers
load the cherry branches

... but the grief in my heart
is stronger than they
for though they were my joy

... Today...

... I feel that I would like
to go there
and fall into those flowers
and sink into the marsh near them. (CEP, 223)

The widow's pathetic fallacy associated with death is not allowed to pullute the radiance and beauty of springtime in nature. As revealed in Williams' autobiography, his father died about two decades before his mother's death. She is forced to feel the absence of her husband who used to be with her in spring time. Resultantly, her husband's absence transports her from the plane of joy to the plane of sorrow. The first part of the poem, "The Widow's Lament," refers to the sorrow in the human world while the second
Synthesis of both parts and juxtapositions of sorrow and joy in the whole text of the poem bring out Williams' masterly technique of handling two opposite things in one single whole. The underlying imagery of "plum trees" with "masses of flowers" and "some bushes/yellow and red" is associated with the arrival of the spring. The joy of the spring is marred by the sorrow caused by her husband's death. Many a time, Williams juxtaposes sorrow and death of nature against the joy of the human world. In the poem, the widow's soliloquy reflects clearly the state of mind through simple but appealing diction and somewhat irrational transitions. Pathetic fallacy often tempts the poet and the personae portrayed by him to spread the concept of the human grief around him so as to make the dark sensation more prominent in the images concerned. To avoid the pathetic fallacy, she cuts through the joys of her child "falls into those flowers," however, she "sidles" along the flowers quietly to "sink into the marsh near them," so that her distress finds its place, which is in consonance with its tragic dark sensation. Similarly the poet is reminded of his father in the Poem 'Eve,' where symbolically Biblical "Adam" is taken as a demon "fighting for the fire/it needed to breathe/to live again" (CEP,376).

Williams never remained untouched with the deaths and sufferings in wars going on during forty's. The physician confesses that winter of nineteen hundred and forty was his busy time; attending especially to influenza
cases in war. Williams—the poet could never imagine a peaceful society when he viewed the aftermaths of war. He once rightly comments that the offsprings of this destructive energy released during war will all be bastards. Overall war represents death on a large scale resulting in cruelty, wickedness and all other evils among the survivors, as we have seen in the chapter on death.

Surprisingly in few of his poems, Dr. Williams—the son, is seen a totally broken-man talking about a kind of life after death. Such poems mostly deal with the death of his close relatives, friends and parents. The mighty force of his unconscious constrains him to accept even the existence of those things which are beyond the sensory experiences. The conscious mind of doctor Williams has always rejected the universally accepted concept of life after death, because of his medical profession. For him death is just a lie contrasted with life. Notwithstanding his conscious view of physical death as an end, Williams utilizes such statements which underline the existence and immortality of the soul, as can be traced in the poem '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. Williams laments over the death of his mother as he feels helpless to join his dead mother. Out of his unshakable belief in the immortality of the soul, he exhorts his dead mother to wait for a little
while in the same poem, "... come back from the dead—where I cannot yet join you." Sorrow and defeat often put the poet in a state in which he views life bringing only miseries into the world. The poet considers not only the earth as a worth living place, but there are other places also to live. About Williams' views on the world of spirits, Alan Ostrom has commented that it was just an absurdity for him. Human world is the complete world of actuality, of physical things, a place where action is associated with emotions and ideas. Williams has a psychological reason for his mother's belief in the existence of the world of spirits. Williams defines life as pessimistic optimism. It is pessimistic because everyone knows that he will die one day. It is optimistic because everyone dies with a desire to be reborn. Physician-poet feels that things are only transformed after death but are never lost. Williams from his very childhood was hardly bothered about the superstitions associated with spirits, as his mother used to believe.

A reflection on Williams' life, to conclude, is a life lived every minute, full of rich poetic treasures, inspiring companionship of his relatives and friends, ups and downs. It was a life which resulted in peaceful existence, in and around the provinces of New Jersey like Rutherford, Hackensack, Passaic, Carlstadt, Lyndhurst, Garfield and Paterson. He was a representative poet like Whitman, a figure who in his writings had raised
the particular world to the level of art with a single-mindedness and persistence approaching the heroic. What made it difficult for many Americans, let alone others less centrally concerned, to accept the estimation of Williams was that they could not believe that such a major poet could happen here, here in the postlapsarian, gritty yet burgeoning world of America. It was Williams' genius to have seen—seventy years ago—that it could happen here...and that it did.

Like Whitman Williams was in constant contact with intellectuals of his age and could feel the vibrating pulse of people around him, and absorb the cultural currents of New York and incorporate them in his poetic outburst. It was only after his death that his wife Floss and others realized that Williams had left an indelible print on their lives through his writings.

Williams remained a realist throughout his life and through his anti-poetic naturalism, localism and objectivism he offered astringents and tonics to the ailments of contemporary life. The three unique concepts of winter, old-age and death which are of permanent and universal value, blend and coalesce in his poetry bringing forth a generously whole-some view of human life as lived and viewed heroically by this great physician poet—William Carlos Williams.
NOTES


2. Paul Mariani, William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked, (New York: McGraw Hill Book, 1981) p. 693 (P5, p. 207). Six weeks later WCW wrote to William Wilson that his guess had been right: that no sooner had WCW begun P5 in 1952 than he realized that he was writing a different poem, "Asphodel." At that point he had no idea that he would do Books 2 and 3 or the coda of that poem. Now, however, "since the first of the year I have begun to write the final Paterson 5— it has not progressed far but has already taken more the form of the previous books [of Paterson] [WCW to Wilson, 27 April 1956] (Lilly).

3. Ibid., p. 385.


6. Mariani, pp. 655-56.