

William Carlos Williams (1883-1963) famously combined the two careers of doctor and writer, along the way founding a specifically American version of Modernism. He was born in Rutherford, New Jersey, the son of a New York businessman of British extraction and a Puerto Rican mother with artistic talent. He grew up speaking Spanish and French as well as English. From the start he was in tune with America's multiracial and immigrant traditions. He studied medicine at the University of Pennsylvania where he made important friendships with Ezra Pound and Hilda Doolittle (H.D.). He graduated in 1906 and, after further medical study in pediatrics, set up his own practice in Rutherford in 1910 treating his patients for the next forty one years. Though he made several important trips to Europe, Williams' life was essentially rooted in what he termed "the local". In 1912 he married Florence Herman and they moved into a house in Rutherford which was home to them and their two sons for many years.

Williams' early poems, begun in college, are Keatsian and derivative but he swiftly abandoned this style and, under the influence of Pound, embraced Imagism and its emphasis on clear visual detail and the exact word. Local he might have been, but Williams was never provincial: his friendship with Pound kept him in touch with movements in the international avant garde and he also became part of a radical group of artists and writers in New York known as 'The Others' that included Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Wallace Stevens and Marianne Moore. What set Williams apart from other members of the modernist movement was his determination to create poetry out of a specifically American idiom, informed by the rhythms of everyday speech. This urge to forge a democratic aesthetic was at odds with the reliance of poets like Pound and T. S. Eliot on classical and European traditions. Whilst Williams' output was huge - including short stories, novels, plays and essays - this ambition remained a driving force. It was informed too by a political engagement - he described himself as a socialist - shaped by his daily contact with the largely working class patients he saw in his surgery.

Starting in the late 1930s he became increasingly influential as a writer and a poet: writers as diverse as Robert Lowell and Allen Ginsberg turned to him for poetic inspiration and he paved the way for many of the movements of the 1950s including the Black Mountain Poets, the New York School, the Beats and the San Francisco Renaissance. In the 1940s he embarked on his five-volume epic of small-town life, *Paterson*, the culmination of his belief in the essentially poetic nature of dailiness. Critical appreciation began to catch up with his achievements when the third volume of *Paterson* (1949) won the National Book Award. It is Book I however that contains within it his oft quoted maxim "no ideas but in things". However, the decade also brought difficulties: he suffered the first of many strokes in 1951 his physical decline forced him to give up medicine. Then his position as consultant to the Library of Congress was revoked during the McCarthy anti-communist hysteria, an event that triggered a spell in hospital for depression. He continued to suffer a series of debilitating strokes and he died in 1963. His last published collection, *Pictures from Breughel and Other Poems*, was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize.

"Paterson's" central image is that of the city as a man, a man lying on his side peopling the place with his thoughts. Further, in William's prefatory notes to the original four book "Paterson", it is that a man himself is a city beginning, seeking, achieving and concluding his life in ways which the various aspects of a city may embody - if imaginatively conceived - any city all the details of which may be made to voice **his** most intimate convictions.

It is Book 1 from the 5 books of "Paterson" that I've used as the basis for my composition. This work is published by KEM Enterprises, Inc. —J. Kaufman