

1976

In the Intensity of Final Light

Charles Tomlinson

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30 SL, 216.

31 Abbott/Williams correspondence in the Poetry Room, Lockwood Library, Buffalo.

32 SL, 230.

33 SL, 232.

34 SL, 234-35.

35 SL, 236.

36 SL, 236-37.

37 Williams, who knew Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, was in full agreement with Freud that the content of the poem was indeed "a dream, a daydream of wish fulfillment." It was "always phantasy—what is wished for, realized in the 'dream' of the poem—but . . . the structure confronts something else." What the structure confronts, of course, is reality itself. ("The Poem as a Field of Action" in SE, 281.)

38 Cf. Williams' comment on the figure of the emergency squads of the omnipresent authorities—the critics, the universities—who, once they detect a trickle of new energy escaping from the dams they have built, "rush out . . . to plug the leak, the leak! in their fixed order, in their power over the water." And also, in the same essay-review, the image of the old poetic line as a "grill . . . before a prison window" and the new line as "the grill gone." ("A New Line is a New Measure," *The New Quarterly of Poetry*, II.2 (Winter 1947-48), 10.

39 "Letter to an Australian Editor," *Briarcliff Quarterly*, III.2 (October 1946), 207.

40 That Williams needed a line like the staggered or step-down three-ply line after his crippling strokes, needed their more meditative resources, can in part be demonstrated by listening to his reading on the *Caedmon LP, William Carlos Williams Reading His Own Poems*, of poems like "To Daphne and Virginia" and "The Host" in the new measure, where the pace seems correct, next by listening to his reading of "The Yachts" that same day—June 6, 1954—and then by listening to his reading of the latter poem recorded nine years earlier (in May, 1946) and issued in *An Album of Modern Poetry: An Anthology Read by the Poets*, edited by Oscar Williams. Listening consecutively to Williams' two recordings of "The Yachts," one realizes that at 62 he is reading the poem nearly twice as fast as he does at 71.

41 SL, 251-52.

TWO POEMS / CHARLES TOMLINSON

In the Intensity of Final Light,

In the intensity of final light

Deepening, dyeing, moss on the tree-trunks

Glares more green than the foliage they bear:

Hills, then, have a way of taking fire

To themselves as though they meant to hold

In a perpetuity of umber, amber, gold

Those forms that, by the unstable light of day,

Refuse all final outline, drift
From a dew-cold blue into green-shot grey:
In the intensity of final light
A time of loomings, then a chime of lapses
Failing from woodslopes, summits, sky,
Leaving, for the moonrise to untarnish,
Hazed airy fastnesses where the last rays vanish.

Underground

Tall—too tall
for a dancer—I'm
a dancer' was all
she'd say, shrieking
clacking a routine
in the one space
they'd cleared between
her and the wall: those
nearest, on the packed
platform were backing
away to avoid
her flailing legs:
animal activity,
decay of faculty
bespoke a woman
who moved with neither
pain nor thought,
insensibly subdued
to endless sound:
all the crowd
she disowned utterly
facing her wall,
lost in the space
they'd left her
and never once
did she turn
round to accost
or denounce them: well-
dressed, you could see