

## Marjorie Perloff: On "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower, Book I"

In one of the last poetry readings he was able to give, at Wellesley in 1956, Williams read "Asphodel, that Greeny Flower." Lowell movingly recalls the hush that fell over the enormous audience when the now-famous poet, "one whole side partly paralysed, his voice just audible," read this "triumph of simple confession". . . .

Like "Paterson, Five," "Asphodel" marks a return to tradition, in this case the pastoral love poem in which the penitent husband makes amends to his long-suffering wife. No more snatches of documentary prose, no Cubist or Surrealist superpositions or dislocations. The poem is stately and consistent, an autobiographical lyric in the Romantic tradition.

"Asphodel, that Greeny Flower" can be regarded as a garland for the fifties. But the Williams who speaks to the poets of our own generation is, I think, less the loving, apologetic husband of "Asphodel" or the aspiring American bard of Paterson than he is a Voyager to Pagany, to the Paris of the twenties; he is the poet as passionate defender of the faith that "to engage roses / becomes a geometry."

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William Carlos Williams [2]

### **Author:**

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