

# Jonathan Williams and Black Mountain by Ross Hair

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## “Hemi-demi-semi barbaric yawps”: Jonathan Williams and Black Mountain

The achievements of the former Black Mountain College student Jonathan Williams (1929-2008) are, Kenneth Irby notes, “diverse and remarkable,” encompassing his work as a poet, a photographer, a publisher, an essayist, and, as Guy Davenport suggests, a peripatetic disseminator of culture: “He publishes poets, introduces poets to poets, poets to readers, professors to poets, poets (perilous business) to professors, and he photographs poets” (307; 180). Williams is perhaps best known as the founder of the small press The Jargon Society, which he began in 1951 during a brief period in San Francisco shortly before enrolling at Black Mountain College.

Williams was born in Asheville, Buncombe County, North Carolina, to Thomas Benjamin and Georgette Williams who, Williams’s former partner and fellow Jargon poet Ronald Johnson explains, “were straight from the gracious strictures of Southern Semi-aristocracy (yet stubborn mountain folk to the bone)” (“Jonathan Williams” 406). Before enrolling at Black Mountain College Williams had “studied art history at Princeton, painting with Karl Knaths at the Phillips Memorial Gallery in Washington, etching and engraving with Stanley William Hayter at Atelier 17 in New York, and the whole range of arts at Chicago’s Institute of Design” (406). Williams subsequently went to Black Mountain College in 1951 to study photography with Harry Callahan. This decision was made while studying typography and graphic art at the Institute of Design where Callahan was teaching, and where M. C. Richards, in the spring of 1951, visited as part of a recruitment drive for Black Mountain College. Richards was Williams’s first exposure to BMC, which until then he “only knew [...] by its evil reputation in Highlands” as a place of “Free love, communism, and nigger-lovers” (Dana 201). Prompted by Callahan, Williams decided to enroll there, as he explains to Robert Dana:

It never occurred to me to want to go there particularly. But Harry Callahan the photographer whom I wanted to study with, said one afternoon, “I’m going to be down in North Carolina this summer. Why don’t you sign up at Black Mountain College.” “Well,” I said, “I just heard about Black Mountain yesterday.” “There’s a terrific guy named Aaron Siskind, friend of mine from New York, who’s going to come down too.” So it sounded perfect. And I didn’t know who Charles Olson was. He just happened to be on the place, as I say, when I got there. (201-2)

Williams’s first impression of Olson was of “a huge myopic man [...] shambling about the place” who subsequently “turned [Williams] in other directions” in addition to photography (*Maggie’s Bagpipe* 83). Although, according to Duberman, “it was more a case of antagonism than love at first sight between Williams and Olson,” the Black Mountain College rector still managed to influence not only Williams’s “poetic vision,” but also his “whole vision of life” (382):[\[i\]](#)

The most persuasive teacher I ever had was Olson ... I really didn't have knowledge of or interest in the Carlos Williams / Pound line of descent. Olson opened that up for me. I found him an extremely enkindling sort of man, marvellously quick and responsive. You got a lot from him at all times. His human condition was very attractive to me. And the conversations were endless, as I say. Night after night, day after day. He changed my whole poetic vision—and my whole vision of life too ... I'm not particularly interested in a lot of Olson's more ponderous material. But his process is something else. (383)

Equally important was Olson's influence on Williams's publishing activities. Although he had already published "Garbage Litters the Iron Face of the Sun's Child" in *Jargon*, it was Olson, Williams claims, who spurred him on to continue publishing. "The reason, really, why *Jargon* started," Williams tells Dana, "was to publish Olson":

Golden Goose published Robert Creeley's first book and were going to publish an Olson book, but then they went bust. And so [...] there was nobody, as far as we could determine, who was going to publish any Olson. Being new to the cause, as well as full of adolescent fervour, I decided I was going to do it. (192)

Under the auspices of *Jargon*, Williams went on to play a pivotal role in establishing the reputations of many of the poets closely associated with Black Mountain College and the poetic "school" with which it became synonymous. Most significantly, perhaps, was *Jargon's* role in publishing Olson. In 1953, *Jargon* published the first edition of Olson's *The Maximus Poems / 1-10* which was followed by *The Maximus Poems / 11-22* in 1956. Four years later, in 1960, these two volumes were published, in collaboration with Corinth Books, as a single edition. During this period, roughly from the mid-1950s to 1960, Williams published other Black Mountaineers, including Victor Kalos and Joel Oppenheimer. (Oppenheimer's *The Dancer* was published in 1951 accompanied by a drawing by another notable Black Mountain student, Robert Rauschenberg.) *Jargon* published four titles by Creeley between 1953 and 1959 and in 1958 published Robert Duncan's *Letters: Poems 1953-1956* and Denise Levertov's *Overland to the Islands*. Along with Larry Eigner, who *Jargon* published in 1960, Levertov was a poet closely associated with Black Mountain College despite never visiting the college. Together, this roster presents a comprehensive cross-section of what is generally perceived as the Black Mountain School of poetry. With the exception of Kalos, all the poets listed, as well as Williams himself, were included in Donald Allen's anthology *The New American Poetry* (1960) as representatives of what Allen categorises as BMC poetry:

The first group includes those poets who were originally closely identified with the two important magazines of the period. *Origin* and *Black Mountain Review*, which first published their mature work. Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and Robert Creeley were on the staff of Black Mountain College in the early fifties, and Edward Dorn, Joel Oppenheimer, and Jonathan Williams studied there. Paul Blackburn, Paul Carroll, Larry Eigner, and Denise Levertov published work in both magazines but had no connection with the college." (xii)

After this group of poets appeared in *The New American Poetry*, as Duberman notes, "the three measuring rods that categorizers have used to admit or deny a place in the school to given individuals" have been determined by the perception of "Black Mountain as a place, a review and a section in a history-making anthology" (388). "Diverse as those measurements are," Duberman stresses, "they seem downright uniform when set against the actual work of the individuals in question—for the differences in their styles are vast" (388).

This may be one of the reasons why Williams, despite his close and largely amicable links with several of the BMC poets, and his keen promotion of their work, remained ambivalent about being associated with the college and the school of poetry it sponsored. “I am as little interested in coterie as I can possibly be,” he claims: “Princeton was one club, and Black Mountain was another. I made distance from each as quickly as possible” (*Blackbird Dust* 119). Reiterating this claim in an interview with Jim Cory, Williams emphasises: “I don’t like labels. I don’t like being called a Black Mountain poet. I don’t feel comfortable with that. BMC is a place I studied at 40 years ago” (3).

### **Olson’s Boys**

I want to consider the broader reasons why Williams felt it necessary to distance himself from Black Mountain College and examine some of the ways his poetry and his publishing strategies helped him do this. I also want to acknowledge the ways in which Black Mountain College was a positive influence and experience for Williams and discuss the ways in which it opened his eyes and ears as a poet. Furthermore, I want to suggest that Black Mountain College’s positive influence on Williams can also be seen informing the aesthetic and intellectual ethos of The Jargon Society even despite this ethos, ultimately, necessitating a resistance to the kind of exclusivist club mentality that Williams found himself reacting against at Black Mountain College.

Whereas Williams, as he tells Jim Cory, saw Black Mountain College as simply being a place he studied at, Michael Davidson has suggested that Black Mountain College “was both a place and an ideology, a community and a set of legitimating practices and forms” (40). This certainly seems the case for the students that fell under Olson’s influence at Black Mountain College. According to Duberman, Olson “was impossible to ignore—not simply because of his mountainous size, but because of his largeness manner, the way he disposed himself”; although “The engagement ranged from intense dislike to blind adulation” (369). Nevertheless, Duberman suggests, “although the range of reaction does run the gamut from extreme distaste to almost swooning adoration, reactions cluster strongly on the side of admiration” (370). Tom Clark reiterates this largely positive reception of Olson from his students noting how “his evident personal involvement with his ideas, the experiential intensity with which his thoughts were being shaped even as he uttered them, the quality of challenge and adventure in the conjectural gamble he proposed, won from most of his listeners a trust that included considerable suspension of disbelief” (143). Such trust, in turn, meant that Olson could be “overprotective of his boys and overly reliant on their adoration” (Duberman 376).

Olson’s Black Mountain College was predominantly a male affair “organized around a masculine heteronormative model,” cemented via “fraternal bonds” that sidelined the college’s female minority (Davidson 18, 16). “Female students,” according to Davidson, “who attended Black Mountain were not exactly kept out of Olson’s classes, but they had a difficult time learning under his autocratic pedagogy” (36). No doubt, this was due to what Clark calls “the standard Black Mountain ‘straight’ male view of women as alluring but largely vacuous creatures” (210). And with “many more unmarried men than women in the community during its last years,” as Duberman suggests, “sexual tension and rivalry could be fierce,” (397) exacerbating “the decided *machismo* feel to the community” which, under Olson’s influence, “measured masculinity against the specific qualities found in the males at the head of the pecking order: Olson, Creeley and Dan Rice” (398). According to Duberman this established “a hierarchy based on talent, toughness, intelligence and honesty” which “could be as rigidly exclusive, as impassable to the uninitiated—and *more* male chauvinist—that anything found on a traditional university campus” (407).

Before he came to Black Mountain College, Williams had experienced a traditional university campus as an undergraduate at Princeton. Disillusioned with the “arrogant, boring” and “anti-intellectual” students there, Williams left after three semesters: “There were a tremendous number of people who were sleeping their way through four years, including the faculty” (Dana 199). However, the highly charged masculine climate of Black Mountain College fostered similar indiscretions. “There were sexual thugs by the dozen on campus,” he tells Ronald Johnson, describing his fellow students as “he-men flaunting their hemi-demi-semi barbaric yawps in the sylvan air of Black Mountain” (229).

In his allusion to Whitman’s “Song of Myself”—“I too am not a bit tamed – I too am untranslatable / I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world”—Williams raises significant questions regarding the deeper impulses and implications of such chauvinistic thuggery (87). As a poet who, as Robert K. Martin notes, “still continues to challenge our assessment of our sexuality and the ways we organise it” and who “refuses the tyranny of the family and compulsory heterosexuality,” Williams’s allusion to Whitman subtly queers the heteronormative model of Black Mountain College by identifying the homoerotic dynamics and tensions simmering under the surface of such intensely straight male bonds (xxi). Whitman’s “barbaric yawps” and the claims about “the manly love of comrades” he expresses throughout his poetry speaks eloquently for both hetero- and homosexual values (272). According to Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price, the imagery and the language that Whitman frequently uses in his poems “do not prohibit one from concluding that he engaged in genital sexuality with his male lover, but neither do they require that conclusion. The terms themselves retain an insistent mystery, a feature Whitman prized highly in love poetry” (65). The “insistent mystery” of Whitman’s ambiguous language is also effective for highlighting what Rachel Blau DuPlessis considers a distinct “compact of hetero- and homosexual men in the formation of 1950s poetic manhood, no matter the possible homophobia of the straight men, or the exclusionary campiness of the gay men” (DuPlessis para 82).

The language and imagery in Whitman’s poetry pertinently anticipates this ambiguous “compact” of sexualities DuPlessis describes with Whitman’s espousal of “manly” virtues and relationships. DuPlessis speaks plausibly about homoerotic and homosexual relationships while also anticipating the “accelerated exchange[s] of emotionally complex manhoods” that Williams recognized at Black Mountain (DuPlessis para 82). Indeed, the fact that a Whitman poem can “slip ambiguously between celebrations of same-sex and opposite-sex love” implies that the notion of manliness and “manly” relations does not so much reassert and reaffirm distinct notions of gender and sexuality but exposes their instability and ambiguity (Erkkila 144).

But in invoking Whitman’s “barbaric yawps,” Williams also acknowledges how “straight” manhood at Black Mountain College was expressed and performed through hyper-masculinised and feral expressions of self. Olson, Duberman notes, “was dealing with a group of mostly late teen-agers / early adults, and in a highly charged, isolated community setting. Which meant, inevitably, a lot of noise— ‘pure messy noise,’ as Francine du Plessix Gray has called it” (371). But, Duberman notes, being such an intensely small and isolated community, “There was a great deal more ‘self-expression’ at Black Mountain than selves to express” (372). One result of this was that Williams “periodically had to take people to his family’s summer home in nearby Highlands to protect them from, or nurse them through, a crack-up” brought on by the pressures of such an intense and unrelenting campus life (Duberman 395).

Thus, these self-expressive “barbaric yawps,” to use Davidson’s term, were “legitimated” by Olson’s pedagogic model. Olson “was dealing with a group of mostly late teen-agers / early adults, and in a highly charged, isolated community setting.” (Duberman 371). This, Duberman suggests, “meant,

inevitably, a lot of noise” and yawping, which Olson encouraged “in the hope that something that might count would come out of it” (371-2). Nevertheless, Olson’s teaching style did, on occasion, meet resistance from some of the college’s female students, as Williams explains:

Anybody had to pay attention to Charles Olson, and you were always intimidated by him [...] He was a monster. And even if it didn’t make any sense at all, that didn’t matter too much. He was a real dazzler, and most people were there prepared to be dazzled. Not everybody. I remember Francine du Plessix [Gray] thought he was a total crock. “I don’t feel I have to teach girls as ignorant as you. You shouldn’t be in my class.” [...] They were great antagonists. (Dana 207)

### **Olson and Sitwell**

Williams found his own ways to resist Olson’s autocracy and the “barbaric yawps” it encouraged by utilising the experiences and lessons he learnt at Black Mountain. As he was for many of the students at Black Mountain College, Olson was instrumental in Williams’s development as a poet. “No blarney and no mush” and “a useful guide for any of us, now,” is how Williams, in his essay “Am-O,” describes the “marginal comments made scrupulously and magnanimously by Olson on piles of fledgling JW poems” (*Magpie’s Bagpipe* 8). Such guidance, however, came with its own costs, as Williams has explained:

The only problem was, Olson is almost enough to wipe you out . . . It took me a long time to get out from under Leviathan J. Olson. Of course some poets said that I would be stuck there. They didn’t like him. Zukofsky thought I was being victimized. Rexroth thought so. Dahlberg still thinks so. He asks baleful questions like “Why do you imitate Olson? and Pound?” [Dahlberg has elsewhere referred to Olson as the Stuffed Cyclops of Gloucester.] I don’t think I do, but I would say it took me ten years to achieve whatever the thing is they call “my own voice. (Duberman 383-4)

After such a tough apprenticeship with Olson, Williams eventually found his own voice. He did this, in part, by assimilating Olson’s dominant voice with other valuable models and influences. “Well, one of the first poems that seemed to me really did the job was a poem about Stan Musial, from 1958,” Williams tells Cory, referring to his poem “O, For A Muse of Fire!” from his 1959 collection, *The Empire Finals at Verona* (1). This poem, despite the title’s allusion to Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, is concerned with one of the most popular sports at Black Mountain College: baseball. “Watching Charles serve as first baseman so vast that almost nobody could throw the softball past him into Lake Eden” (11), Williams recalls in “Am-O” and quotes a letter to him from Olson:

But we played a ball game against the town American Legion Juniors last night. And I, for one, missed yr style! The way you play baseball is the way . . .

It was wild

how

badly we played. The baubles! And these quiet kids made us look

like

dumbheads! . . . (10)

According to Duberman, baseball was part of the macho discourse at Black Mountain College:

There was, in fact, a decided *machismo* feel to the community in these years—like the costume parties where people came dressed as gangsters and acted as tough as they could; or the drunken binges (men only) where the palm went to those who could swig the home brew straight—and hold it down; or the “wild thrill” from defeating the championship local baseball team; or the fascination with—even the occasional appearance of—motorcycles (George Fick got fifteen stitches in the face after one crash). (398)

“For A Muse of Fire!” celebrates a legendary moment in baseball history, when one of its most celebrated hitters, Stan Musial, reached his 3000-hit milestone on May 13, 1958. “Only six major-league players in baseball history had hit safely 3000 times prior to this occasion,” Williams adds in a footnote to the poem: “The density of the information surrounding the event continues to surprise me, rather belies Tocqueville’s assertion than Americans cannot concentrate” (*Jubilant Thicket* 259).

Williams’s poem replicates the idiomatic terminology and colloquialisms, including Marsial’s nickname, “Stan the Man,” as well as the punditry associated with baseball:

The Muse muscles up; Stan the Man stands . . . and  
O, Hosanna, Hosanna, Ozanna’s boy, Moe Drabowsky comes

2 and 2  
“a curve ball, outside corner, higher  
than intended -  
I figured he’d hit it in the ground”

(“*it felt fine!*”)

a line shot to left, down the line,  
rolling deep for a double...

(“*it felt fine!*”)

Say, Stan, baby, how’s it feel to hit 3000?

“Ugh, it feels fine” (*Jubilant Thicket* 259-260)

“If you look at that poem,” Williams explains to Cory, “it’s kind of a peculiar marriage of Edith Sitwell and Charles Olson. Which is an unholy marriage! Neither of course could possibly, would possibly, countenance the other” (1). Sitwell, an aristocratic and eccentric English poet, according to Clark, was

one of the poets that Duncan introduced to the curriculum at Black Mountain College as one of his “casual heretical recommendations of ‘Indexed’ works and authors (*Finnegans Wake*, Eliot, Stein, Zukofsky, H.D., even Edith Sitwell)” which were anathema to Olson’s canon (255). Just how much of a rebuke Sitwell is of BMC machismo can be sensed in Duncan’s claim that, “It’s easier to announce that you are a homosexual than to say you read Edith Sitwell” (113). Williams’s comment to Ronald Johnson regarding the “hemi-demi-semi barbaric yawps” of Black Mountain College implies a similar consideration of Sitwell:

Let’s face it, Dame Edith Sitwell was too much, too much indeed, for all those he-men flaunting their hemi-demi-semi barbaric yawps in the sylvan air of Black Mountain. There were sexual thugs by the dozen on campus. A titled English woman like ES would be allowed to cut no ice. [...] Anyone stupid enough to say he or she hasn’t much to learn from Edith Sitwell deserves to be a life-time captive of the Soi-Disant Language Poets or the cult of Ally-Oopists on the West Coast. Her notebooks are wonderful. (229)

Much of Duncan and Williams’s esteem for Sitwell and her work rests on her notoriety as “a provocative and controversial figure” who, like Olson, provoked strong reactions from both her admirers and her critics: “It was apparently not easy,” John Ower claims, quoting Sitwell, “to be neutral towards the Sibylline yet impish figure who neither in her art nor in her life was afraid to be ‘an unpopular electric eel in a pool of catfish’” (253). The fact that Sitwell was “titled,” as Williams points out, and that she cultivated an air of eccentricity would, no doubt, have exacerbated these strong reactions. Indeed, in advocating this English eccentric is also not only a subtle reminder of Williams’s own semi-aristocratic southern background, but also a notable contrast to Olson’s working class origins.

However, for both poets it is also Sitwell’s prosody that is instructive, particularly the theories she outlines in her essay from her *Collected Poems*, “Some Notes on My Own Poetry,” as well as *A Poet’s Notebook*. In the latter, Sitwell considers the “texture” and the “varying uses of consonants, vowels, labials, and sibilants” for determining “rhythm and [...] variations in speed of the poem” (18). These ideas are developed further in “Some Notes on My Own Poetry” in which Sitwell proposes how “assonances and dissonances put at different places within the lines and intermingled with equally skilfully placed internal rhymes have an immense effect upon rhythm and speed” (*Collected Poems* xvi). “For me,” Ronald Johnson claims, “and poets like Jonathan Williams and Robert Duncan, her theories of words’ rhythm and texture in the treatise *Some Notes on My Own Poetry* [...] were a text to shove alongside Charles Olson’s *Projective Verse* and Louis Zukofsky’s anthology *A Test of Poetry*” (“Six, Alas!” 27). It is for similar reasons of prosody that Williams, as he explains to Cory, considered it appropriate to marry Sitwell and Olson:

I was able to do something with Olson and with Edith Sitwell that became something new. Sitwell ... because she’s so interested in so many aspects of *words*. What color they are. If they leave shadows. How much they weigh. And Olson ... what he really is is *symphonic*. There’s a big, big symphonic expanse there, particularly in *The Maximus Poems*. (1)

Looking at “For A Muse of Fire!” it is possible to see how, visually, the poem is scored on the page in a way that suggests Olson’s principles of “Projective Verse” and composition by field. But in richly alliterative phrases such as “The Muse muscles up; Stan the Man stands,” and the densely compacted and strong rhyming assonance, Williams also invokes the richness, excess, and flamboyance of Sitwell’s prosody in poems such as “Waltz” from *Façade*:

Our élégantes favouring bonnets of blond,  
The stars in their aviaries,  
Sylphs in their aviaries,  
Seeing them, spangle these, and the sylphs fond  
From their aviaries fanned  
With each long fluid hand  
The manteaux espagnols,  
Mimic the waterfalls  
Over the long and light summer land. (*Collected Poems* 145)

According to Sitwell, the poem's "movement" is achieved via "softening" and "trembling" assonances set against a "ground rhythm" based on the alliteration of "m," "p," and "b" sounds (*Collected Poems* xx). Williams's own tendency for alliterative tongue-twisters and obscure turns of phrase, particularly in his later work, finds a precedent in Sitwell's obscure, affected, and densely wrought lexis which, as Johnson notes, "is like pouring over a stiff tapestry of over-embroidered and ever-recurring images, with here and there an incandescence" ("Six, Alas!" 29).

In taking these aspects of Sitwell's poetry and marrying them with Olson's poetics in "For A Muse of Fire!," Williams subtly queers an otherwise straight-talking, straight-hitting "heroic" sporting moment into something more sexually suggestive. The phallic, erectile implications of the line, "The Muse muscles up; Stan the Man stands," along with the refrain "*it felt fine!*" and the allusion to Polish "Ozanna's boy, Moe Drabowsky" who "comes," identifies a homoerotic undertone in what is an otherwise straight, masculine, blue collar sport. Sexualizing such a "manly" discourse in this way, Williams's poem also tacitly undermines the pretensions and excesses of the hyper-masculine he-man culture at Black Mountain College, which was bolstered through such sports.

The poem can also be read as Williams's resistance to the over-dominating influence of Olson, who was ingrained within Black Mountain College's he-man culture. According to Andrew Mossin, "one cannot easily stand outside the masculine context of Olson's poetry. That is, a reader is either seduced by the language and enacted mythos of manliness or is likely to feel excluded by the exhortation of masculinity flowing out of the text" (19). Williams's own relation to Olson's language of manliness, however, is not quite so straightforward. As his warm accounts of Olson attest, Williams was not excluded by the masculinity that underscored Olson's stature as "a patriarch in poetry" (DuPlessis para 78). However, unlike many of Olson's "disciples," Williams was not "seduced" by Olson's patriarchy (DuPlessis para 78). And although Williams did not try and [to] emulate it, neither did he simply reject it. As "For A Muse of Fire!" shows, Williams frequently embraces the "language and [...] mythos of manliness" in order to illuminate its latent homoerotic resonances. Essentially, Williams writes from within the discourse that he ultimately critiques.

Williams does this with regard to Olson in his poem “Funerary Ode for Charles Olson,” included in *The Loco Logodaedelist In Situ: Selected Poems 1968-70* (1971). Notably, this poem occurs at the end of a suite of found-poems entitled “Excavations From the Case Histories of Havelock Ellis.” That Williams’s poem about Olson should immediately follow a series of candid poems acknowledging “Ellis’s pioneer work in acquiring sexual information in the form of case histories” (*Loco np*)—particularly homosexual experiences—tacitly reflects on Olson’s ambivalent attitude toward sexuality and the body.

The sexual “caprice” presented in “History XXI,” for example, with a description of “urine / over my body, / limbs // in my face!” adumbrates the carnality that Williams evokes in “Funerary Ode for Charles Olson” (*Loco np*). Recalling his correspondence with Olson, Williams asks: “so what about that word *amorvor*, Charles, / or the way you used to write *am O?* — / *I love*; or, *I am Olson?*” (*Loco np*). Williams later returns to Olson’s neologism—“so, Charles, let us (and you as well as us) / take you at your word” (*Loco np*)—charging it with a proprioceptive force that elaborates on Olson’s more reserved claims about the body being “the data of depth sensibility” and “an object which spontaneously or of its own order produces experience” (Olson 181):

let lust drag it off the word-list

down into the Bed Incarnate—

where heads have tongues up assholes,

and come’s all over chests and fingers,

when your eyes finally tell the poem is no place

for polite usage only

it is only when the beloved’s come, shit, and heated juices

receive the same sanctification as one’s own substance

that a state of love may be said to exist—

what poets call sacramental relationships, what Freudians

call excremental visions (*Loco np*)

Olson may have proclaimed that “the song is heat!” and proposed a proprioceptive, “corporeal poetics” very much centered on physiognomy, but in his own lifetime, Williams implies, Olson was “a cold man pretending to be hot” (Elder 341; *Loco np*). “Sex is one form of heat; poetry another,” according to Williams; therefore, to claim that Olson “lived cold” would suggest something about Olson’s own frigid sexuality (Browning 285). Unlike Williams who, Kevin Power suggests, “goes coursing with life’s juices, giving full rein to meat-thought, to intellectuality, to eroticism,” Olson shows more ambivalence toward “the omnipresent, unifying energy of eroticism,” especially

homoeroticism (np). Indeed, Williams's poem pertinently recalls Clark's speculations in *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life*, regarding Olson's "anxieties about his manhood" and "his sexual identity" (131 & 223). Olson was one of the many heterosexual male "counter-cultural" poets of the 1950s who remained ambivalent about, or resistant to, what DuPlessis describes as "the sexual frankness and body consciousness of gay male poets" (para 83).

According to Douglas Chambers, Williams's poetry demonstrates a "refusal to keep the flesh and the spirit separate" (749). "Funerary Ode for Charles Olson" is no exception: by dragging the great platitude and abstraction, *love*, "down into the Bed Incarnate," Williams endeavours to make it flesh. Williams's "refusal" to abstract spirit from flesh also addresses the question of Olson's own ambivalent "body consciousness." Williams does this with an apparently innocuous comparison of Olson with Orpheus: "the severed head of Charles John Orpheus, Jr. / floats off Massachusetts" (*Loco* np). While this recalls Olson's claim in *The Maximus Poems VI* that "the mind go forth to the end of the world," cited by Ronald Johnson in Williams's poem, this is actually a loaded term, considering that Orpheus carries homosexual connotations in Williams's poetry (*Maximus* 290). For example, in "Always the Deathless Mu-Sick," the title of which derives from "Maximus to Gloucester: Letter 2," Williams claims that "Orf's awfully gay, / despite Eurydice . . ." and describes Orpheus's decapitation: "Acephalous, off key, Orpheus / floats out to sea" (*Maximus* 12; *An Ear* np). While "gay" suggests happiness, this gayness is evidently sexual too. In another poem, "The Electronic Lyre, Strung with Poets' Sinews," from *In England's Green &* (1962), Williams makes the same pun, but in a more overtly sexual context:

Be polymorphous perverse,

Orpheus!

All orifices,

Orpheus!

"It's all good." (*An Ear* np)

Williams attributes to Orpheus the bisexual urges that, according to Freud, are common during a child's sexual development. "The constitutional sexual predisposition of the child is more irregularly multifarious than one would expect, that it deserves to be called 'polymorphous-perverse,'" Freud writes in his *Selected Papers on Hysteria and other Psychoneuroses*, "and that from this predisposition the so-called normal behaviour of the sexual functions results through a repression of certain components" (191). In perverting Olson's proprioceptive ideas in his "Funerary Ode," Williams shows how Olson's poetics unwittingly, or potentially, promote an "openness [...] to multiple avenues of cathexis" that transgress so-called "normal," "straight" sexual behavior (Rothenberg 3).

Furthermore these "sacramental relationships" in Williams's poem transcend simple gender distinctions and sexual preferences, as the non-gender-specific "beloved's come, shit, and heated juices"—as well as the sexless "heads," "assholes," "chests and fingers"—indicate. This sexual ambiguity is very much in keeping with Williams's wider mistrust of, and resistance to, abstracting

labels and categories. “I don’t like these tiresome words *gay* and *straight*,” he remarks in his *Gay Sunshine* interview, “but I am so disinterested with politics outside the house that I put up with them, like most of us have to” (Browning 283). Likewise, Williams claims: “The words male and female must have been invented by the same crowd that talks about Truth and Beauty — abstractions that can be made to pay off commercially and politically when spoken out of the moola-side of the mouth” (282). Williams argues the phenomenon itself demands attention, not the reductive abstract concept. For Williams, this applies as much to being a Black Mountain College poet as it does being gay and male.

In this respect, the poem is a telling example of how the “outlawed sexualities” in Williams’s poetry not only “challenge the faked ignorance of the self-consciously respectable and up-tight,” but also propose “strategies for holding together the body’s loves and sensuousness in language” (Mottram para 15). Williams’s reading of Olson’s proprioceptive “heat,” therefore, is not simply a “queer” critique of Olson’s “straight” approach to the subject, but also a way of indicating how Olson stops short in his “polite”—perhaps even repressed—claims about the physicality and carnality of cognition. Indeed, when Williams writes that, “when your eyes finally tell the poem is no place / for polite usage only,” he draws attention to the possibility that Olson was blind to the wider sensual implications of his own poetry.

### **Black Mountain Roots**

“Funerary Ode for Charles Olson” also demonstrates Williams’s discerning capacity for realising the latent potential, repressed content, and felicitous contingencies of other people’s words. “Alert for eccentrics, roadside cafes with the accent over the *f*, stray-cat-scratched wisdoms of the urinal, foibles and follies, slips of the tongue, seers and doers, masters of schtick and spiel from sidewalk to bedroom and back,” Williams, Johnson writes, “seldom errs with eye or ear” (“Williams” 407). As Thomas Meyer explains, it is in Williams’s unerring attention for the linguistic and phonetic richness of vernacular dialect that he recognizes and realizes the rich sensuous possibilities of language most acutely:

A man is most eloquent — Dante proclaimed in *La Vita Nuova* — who uses the speech of ordinary men. The secret, Dante knew and Jonathan Williams knows, of the vernacular, of the way we talk, is its openness, its alert sensual tones (its vowels actually). (para 29)

The “poetic marriage of Edith Sitwell and Charles Olson” that Williams promotes also informs this concern for an open, “sensual” language. In an early poem entitled “Found Poem Number One,” Williams proposes “the world’s first marriage of the poetics of Charles Olson and Dame Edith Sitwell” by way of a found vernacular that, like his Ellis excavations, derives from psychiatric experiences (*Jubilant Thicket* 207). “Found Poem Number One” dates back to 1952/1953 when Williams’s studies at Black Mountain College were interrupted by the draft. “As a conscientious objector,” Tom Patterson writes, Williams “was exempted from combat training and service, and assigned to non-combatant work for the U.S. Army Medical Corps in Stuttgart, Germany” (9). Williams was placed in the locked ward of the Fifth General Hospital in Stuttgart, “working as a ‘neuro-psychiatric technician,’ subduing and pacifying malingerers and psychopaths and really mean folks” (Dana 209). It is one of these “folks” that provides the subject and language of “Found Poem Number One”:

FOUND POEM NUMBER ONE:

(Fifth General Hospital, Bad Canstatt/ Stuttgart, 1953: the speaker, a bop spade from Cleveland in a fugue state, making the world's first marriage of the poetics of Charles Olson and Dame Edith Sitwell —and you are there!)

man,

i come from

the 544

motherfuckin'

double-clutchin'

cocksuckin'

truckin' company!

U CALL—

WE HAUL

U ALL . . .

we got

2 plys

4 plys

6 plys

8 plys, semi's—

and them BIG motherfukers

go

CHEW!

CHEW! (*Jubilant Thicket* 207)

Like “A Muse For Fire!,” “Found Poem Number One” is concerned with a specific demotic, vernacular speech. In this instance, however, Williams’s poem presents the semi-conscious, ramblings of a soldier suffering a fugue state of mind. And as the concluding phrase—“CHEW! CHEW!”—suggests this found poem is about verbal trains of thought that create their own kind of musical fugue. An initial reference to the soldier’s military “company”—expressed in a “bop” hipster idiom—morphs into commercial jargon advertising a logistics truck company (“U CALL— / WE HAUL / U ALL . . .”) and a timber supplier (“ply”). The trucks these companies use (“them BIG motherfuckers”) blur into trains which go “CHEW! CHEW!” Indeed, when the meaning of the word “fugue” is recalled, this poem is very much about *loco* (mad, insane) *motion*. In psychiatric terms a “fugue” denotes the flight from one’s own identity, and often involves mental travel to some unconsciously desired locality, a point that Williams implies when, in the poem’s subtitle, he writes, “and you are there!”

“Found Poem Number One” can also be read as a product of Black Mountain. As well as drawing upon two very different poetic models he encountered at the college—either in person (Olson) or on Duncan’s curriculum (Sitwell), the poem also demonstrates Williams’s attentive ear for dialect. This aspect of his poetry emerges from his time at Black Mountain College and his renewed interest in his birthplace in nearby Asheville, Buncombe County. In his conversation with Dana, Williams explains that, “Most of my connection with Buncombe County, after getting born there, was coming back to go to Black Mountain College” (188). In studying at Black Mountain College Williams was not only exposed to the progressive, liberal, and avant-garde ideas of the college, but he also reconnected with, and reassessed, the wider cultural environs of his birthplace, particularly the tradition of Southern dialect literature that he grew up with. “It must have had its effect,” he tells Dana, “because, in my own way, I finally turned back and became very acutely interested in what southern mountain speech was all about” (189).

Dialect literature remains a contentious subject. As Joan Wylie Hall stresses, the Southern dialect literature, which became widely popular after the American Civil War, has been accused of reaffirming “the comforting mythology of the plantation South as a lost Eden whose kind and well-spoken masters and illiterate but loyal slaves nurtured each other in a pastoral landscape” (206). Indeed, both of the white Southern writers that Williams enjoyed as a child—John Charles McNeill, who wrote *Lyrics From Cotton Land* (1906) and Joel Chandler Harris, author of the popular *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings* (1880)—appropriated African-American dialect in idealized rural, plantation settings. It is reasonable to see both writers’ work as pertinent examples of “a highbrow convention which employed exaggerated, humorous speech to camouflage a patronizing sentimentality and satire” (Jones 8). While the avuncular sentiments of Harris’s *Uncle Remus* certainly supports these assessments, Gavin Roger Jones suggests that “Ethnic dialect could provide writers with a voice for social commentary and political satire” and articulate a “cultural and aesthetic politics of difference” that “over turn[s] linguistic hegemony” (5; 2). It is in a similar spirit of “linguistic difference and diversity,” and with an awareness of “the cultural and political issues surrounding questions of linguistic variety,” that Williams approaches the Appalachian “mountain speech” of his neighbours in Highlands, North Carolina (2).

Southern mountain speech underscores a considerable part of Williams’s book, *Blues & Roots/Rue & Bluets: A Garland for the Appalachians* (1971). According to Johnson, this book “should sit on our shelves alongside *Uncle Remus* (1880),” no doubt because of Williams’s skill in capturing the rich linguistic and phonetic nuances of his Appalachian neighbours (409). In his introduction to the second edition of *Blues & Roots*, Herbert Leibowitz claims that Williams’s poems “make up an unofficial oral history in verse of the Southern Appalachian folk often vilified and dismissed as hillbillies” (np). These poems, overheard or found, implicate the poet as “an autochthonous mindless recording mechanism established ecologically within a mountain region” keen to note the singular qualities of Appalachia’s

topography and nature as well as its people and the nuggets of poetry they, often unintentionally, produce (*Magpie's Bagpipe* 164). "I like to get my ear right to the ground and listen to this Nation talk its trash," Williams proposes: "In certain styles the South is impossible to beat: the billboard, graffiti; e.g., like from nature" (*Magpie's Bagpipe* 166). Therefore, *Blues & Roots*, according to Williams, "is a hoard: the best of what mountains and I have found out about each other, so far. And a little of the worst as well" (*Blackbird Dust* 122).

However, *Blues & Roots* also consolidates Williams's experiences at Black Mountain College. Williams's return to Buncombe County to study at BMC, and the interest in dialect and "mountain speech" that resulted from it, is a telling reminder that "radical" means to be progressive and innovative, as well as *rooted*. The title, *Blues & Roots*, draws on both senses of the word by deriving from Charles Mingus's 1959 album of the same name, in which the jazz musician and composer revisits his musical roots by reworking blues, gospel, and Dixieland into modern jazz forms. Traditional roots and progressive branches also reiterate Olson's proposal in the 1952 Black Mountain College Catalogue that the school's pedagogic mission is "to penetrate and past and *feel* as well as mentally see our way into the future" (25-26).

### **Whose Black Mountain?**

But if the poems in *Blues & Roots* tacitly draw upon Williams's Black Mountain College experiences, some of them also respond critically to his time there. "The Nostrums of the Black Mountain Publican," for example, reads like an Appalachian equivalent of Gary Snyder's "In Praise of Sick Women." Just as Snyder's poem presents a series of superstitions and myths about menstruation from an exclusive male perspective, Williams's poem concludes with a warning against cunnilingus:

best thing  
for roomatiz,  
Homer, is

a great big ol messa  
Wooly-Booger

if God  
made anything better  
he kept it  
for Hissef

but, boys, lemme  
tell you;

DON'T EAT NO  
HAIRPIE  
ON FRIDAY! (*Blues & Roots* np)

One assumes that this is overheard talk in a local Black Mountain bar; perhaps Ma Peak's Tavern, a "local" for Black Mountain teachers and students during Williams's time there. According to Williams, for "those fortunate of us to be in nether Buncombe County, North Carolina, then (Charles Olson, Dan

Rice, Lou Harrison, Joel Oppenheimer, Fielding Dawson, Ben Shahn, Katherine Litz, Francine du Plessix Gray, to name a few) spent many a long evening down at Ma Peak's Tavern, three miles from the college, drinking beer and listening to the lore that [Aaraon] Siskin and Callahan commanded between them" (*Magpie's Bagpipe* 92). These excursions would have also been one of the few opportunities where students came into contact with locals and where Williams could sharpen his ears on local speech: "The beer joint in Hicksville, USA should never be underestimated" (*Magpie's Bagpipe* 92).

"The Nostrums of the Black Mountain Publican" also reads as a perceptive critique of the college itself. The recipients of the publican's quack medical advice are exclusively men, as the colloquial "boys" suggests, implying a homosocial bar culture that mirrors Black Mountain College's fraternity. Indeed, "The Nostrums of the Black Mountain Publican" is good indication of why Williams should have felt uncomfortable with being lumped into an exclusive Black Mountain College club, as exclusively male culture, whether in a local tavern or a liberal college, compounds small-mindedness. The word "Nostrums" (from the Latin *noster*, meaning "our") emphasises this by highlighting the polarization that can occur in narrow-minded communities as well as the "us" versus "them" mentality they encourage. In this respect, the college promotes an exclusionist mentality equivalent of the Buncombe County locals who viewed Black Mountain College with suspicion:

Several Black Mountain founders had had summer houses here, oddly enough. They had a very unsavoury reputation with Southern aristocrats and conservatives in places like Highlands. (Dana 201)

It is therefore understandable that Williams, on a number of occasions—often with his tongue in his cheek—should voice misgivings about poetic labels, clubs, and coteries:

I live in hiding from the Cornbelt Metaphysicals, the Alley-Oopists, the Language Poets, the Great Unwashed, the Jewish Princes, the Ivy-League Heavies, the International Homosexual Conspiracy, the Heap-Big-He-Men, the Hem & Haw Femmes, the Primal-Scream Minorities, and the Tireless Untalented—there are thousands and thousands of these people ready to push you into a tar pit. (*Blackbird Dust* 121)

Williams's publishing interests have also proved to be an effective way of resisting the kind of "tar pits" and *noster* mentalities of "clubs." For over five decades, Williams published an eclectic range of writers and titles through The Jargon Society. In addition to the Black Mountain College poets, Jargon also published a broad range of British and American poets including Ian Hamilton Finlay and Thomas A. Clark; neglected modernists such as Bob Brown, Mina Loy, and Lorine Niedecker; the photography of former Black Mountain College student, Lyle Bongé and North Carolinian Elisabeth Matheson; books on outsider artists; and, Jargon's best selling title, Ernest Matthew Mickler's *White Trash Cooking*. Indeed, as Richard Owens and Jeffrey Beam propose, Jargon comprises "a constellation of cultural figures and objects that brings together in a single orbit the utterly unpolished and the cosmopolitan, the eccentric and the carefully measured, the odd and the familiar" (para 6). But Jargon's orbit is also *eccentric* in the sense of being remote from the centre and not centrally placed. Thus Jargon deliberately assumes a marginal or peripheral position that makes it possible to evade the homogenising labels and ideologies of clubs and coteries.

Jargon's "eccentricity" is particularly evident in the way it has promoted Black Mountain College's broader legacy by not only publishing the work of the now familiar and established Black Mountain poets, but also more peripheral Black Mountaineers, including the composer Lou Harrison, the photographer Lyle Bongé (Williams's former roommate at Black Mountain) and R. Buckminster Fuller. Williams and Olson "came to grief after the publishing of the first three books of *The Maximus Poems*" and the two poets subsequently "started playing Lazy Southerner and Imperious Yankee" (*Magpie's Bagpipe* 6-7). Behind Williams's publishing decision, as Duberman implies, were wider issues concerning what Olson perceived as Williams's lack of commitment to Olson's perception of Black Mountain:

Williams's relations with Olson deteriorated, in part because of complications that developed between them over further publication of the Maximus poems; in part because Olson didn't approve of some of the other people Williams published—like Patchen, Bob Brown, Mina Loy or Buckminster Fuller (the latter according to Williams, was "anathema" to Olson); and in part because Black Mountain was, as Williams said to me, "literally a *place*. The associations were very close and very constant. But if you suddenly are not all in one place, and there is no community in fact, then all the separations and distances and divergences seem to enter." Among the divergences was Olson's occasional tendency to treat Williams like a servant, to patronize his talents as a poet (Olson was more interested in Dorn, John Wieners, and later LeRoi Jones and Ed Sanders than in Williams), and to regard his publisher's "sins" in printing the likes of Mina Loy et al., as akin to a betrayal of the "movement." (383)

"The voluble dome guru," R. Buckminster Fuller, Clark claims, "provided [Olson's] main competition for students' attention" at Black Mountain College and, according to Ralph Maud, a number of antagonisms and conflicts arose between Olson and Fuller concerning the leadership of Black Mountain College (155; 115-117). Bearing such tensions in mind it is therefore possible that Williams's decision to publish Fuller's *Untitled Epic Poem on the History of Industrialization* in 1962 undermines Olson's imperiousness. To publish Fuller would have undoubtedly be seen as a wilful insubordination on Williams's part, but such a decision shows how Williams's perception of Black Mountain College recognized the importance of the achievements that occurred outside Olson's classroom.

### **Black Mountain Seeds**

In his poem "The Big House," Williams proposes to "cast celebration / like a seed!" (*An Ear* np). Despite his criticism about aspects of Black Mountain College, Williams has [ii] celebrated the college largely through the auspices of Jargon. The inclusive, eclectic range of Jargon's authors and titles re-inscribe pertinent aspects of the college's enduring legacy and the broader ethos in which Olson's presence is but a part. In particular, Williams's eclecticism is very much in the spirit of another Black Mountaineer that he admired: the potter and teacher, M. C. Richards. In her book *Centering*, Richards writes passionately about the college's ideals. Although the book's title may appear the antithesis of Jargon's *eccentricity*, Richards lauds Black Mountain College's endeavors "to bring elements into a whole which could move in a variety of ways without falling apart" and "integrate individual spirit and community spirit" (119). "When its spirit withdrew," Richards writes, "the college closed," but she is also keen to stress that, "It lives in all of us who were there initiated into a life that has an open end" (123).

As a "society," rather than a "club," Jargon shows a similar concern for integrating singular individual endeavours into a non-homogenising community or milieu. An openness to, and celebration of,

difference, diversity, and individuality affirms a level of autonomy from any singular aesthetic or school. As James Jaffe stresses, the books that Williams published through Jargon “were allowed to be as individual and independent as he was himself”:

It wasn’t about putting his stamp, his signature, on everything. And as such the Jargon Society differed from other literary private presses in being radical and democratic, in giving each book its own identity, its own idiosyncratic form. (para 7)

Williams’s press cultivates an eccentricity or idiosyncrasy that resists a uniform aesthetic or criteria and is comfortable with publishing the poetry of Zukofsky and Alfred Starr Hamilton. Indeed, Davenport stresses this well in his suggestion that Williams “is an ambassador for an enterprise that has neither center nor hierarchy” (181). Beam and Owens have described this ethos of Jargon as “a poetics of gathering” which links together Williams’s “unswerving desire to collect and preserve, harvest and distribute” a rich miscellany of writers, artists, and photographers (para 4).

Beam and Owens’s use of “harvesting” and “distributing” to describe Williams’s activities is especially apt in the context of Black Mountain College, whose history has been expressed in similar terms of dissemination and propagation. Mervin Lane, in *Black Mountain: Sprouted Seeds*, his anthology of personal accounts by former BMC students and teachers, is interested “in how John Andrew Rice’s seeds—planted back in 1933—sprouted, how they blossomed and what was remembered of the nurturing process” (4). Likewise, Duberman couches his account of Black Mountain College’s closure in similar terms of dissemination and dispersal. For Olson, Duberman writes, “Black Mountain had merely dispersed, not ceased; it hadn’t failed, it had stopped. [...] Or as Eric Weinberger has put it, ‘the seeds live inside you’” (412). These seeds drifted—or, “were scattered,” Duberman suggests—to a number of locations, including the Beat milieu of the West Coast Bay Area and the Cedar Bar crowd of New York’s Greenwich Village (412-13).

Echoes of this scattering and dissemination is also evident in one of Williams’s “found” poems that initially appeared in *Roots & Blues*—later reprinted in *Jubilant Thicket* (191)—entitled, “John Chapman Pulls Off the Highway Towards Kentucky and Casts a Cold Eye on the Most Astonishing Sign in Recent American Letters”:

O’NAN’S

AUTO

SERVICE

A sign advertising an Irish car mechanic takes on biblical proportions via an allusion to Onan, second son of Judah, who spilled his seed while having sex with his sister-in-law, Tamar, so as not to impregnate her. God may have killed Onan for his disobedience, but his name endures in the word “onanism,” a term for *coitus interruptus* and that primary act of “auto / service”: masturbation.

Williams's poem also alludes to the American folklore hero John Chapman, better known as "Johnny Appleseed." Chapman earned the name "Appleseed" because of his charitable activity of sewing apple-seeds in parts of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois in order to establish apple nurseries. William puns on the Appleseed legend by conflating onanistic suggestions with Chapman's arboreal disseminations. In doing so Williams—who claims that "Jacking off remains (solitary or in company) one of the great releases"—also reflects something about himself and his cultural activities (Browning 281).

Indeed, Williams earned himself the title of Johnny Appleseed for his own peripatetic "do-it-yourself" ethos. As Davenport points out, "It was R. Buckminster Fuller, on his way from Carbondale to Ghana (and deep in Kentucky at the time) who remarked of Jonathan Williams that 'he is our Johnny Appleseed — we need him more than we know'" (180). Williams got this title due to how, after Black Mountain College's closure, he pursued a cultural dissemination similar to Chapman's arboreal one:

In North Carolina, Jonathan Williams loaded up his father's station wagon with Jargon, Golden Goose, City Lights, Grove Press and New Directions books and started his travels around the country, travels not yet ceased, peddling the books, reading the work of "The Black Mountain Poets," spreading their reputation and influence. (Duberman 413)

Just as Chapman's travels changed the landscape of the places he visited because of the seeds he sowed, Williams's peripatetic evangelism also helped change and influence America's cultural topographies. "If his poetry defines and extricates a tradition from his past," Davenport writes of Williams, "his wandering (as Buckminster Fuller points out) defines the curious transformation of the shape of American culture" (188). When the word's root sense of "careful" is recalled, it is evident how Black Mountain College remains a vital seed in these continuing "curious" transformations of American culture, as Beam suggests:

The events that brought Black Mountain College to North Carolina, and Jonathan to Black Mountain, continue to bless our state and her arts, allowing each of us to confront the greater questions of attention, aesthetics, and exclusion. Black Mountain taught us that "the pure products of America" are often found beneath the stone walls, outside the city gates. (*A Snow Flake*)

"There is no American capital," according to Davenport; "there never has been. We have a network instead" (188). Williams's peripatetic disseminations, therefore, have been pivotal in spreading Black Mountain's legacy and ensuring it travels beyond "the city gates" of metropolises such as New York or California. "[W]e flower in talk," and "the way we ripen ourselves" is with "*literature*," Williams writes in his poem "Enthusiast" (*Jubilant Thicket* 250). Black Mountain College's legacy has flowered—and continues to flower—in a large part because of the attention Williams gave it in the talks, lectures, and poetry readings he gave across the United States, as well as the literature he published associated with the college. True to his word, Williams cast celebration like seed and helped the legacy of Black Mountain College, as he saw and experienced it, take root in new receptive soils.

### **Attention and Exclusion**

Beam's perceptive assessment of Williams's poetry as providing valuable opportunities to "confront the greater questions of attention, aesthetics, and exclusion" accurately sums up Williams's own complex relationship with Black Mountain College. Attention, aesthetics, and an indiscriminating acceptance (rather than discriminating exclusion) of things are, perhaps, the defining terms for Williams's poetry. According to Meyer, Williams, like "the true Epicurean, [...] embraces it *all* precisely because for him or her there is nothing else, absolutely, resolutely **nothing else**" (para 33). There is nothing else except for the immediate "panoply of detail and experience" which elicits "close attention" and a *curious* regard (para 39; para 42):

His attention when it focuses centers. There is no background, foreground, or middleground. There is only what is there — a kind of "in-your-face" phenomenology. (para 41)

The exclusions at Black Mountain College under Olson's influence and the prescriptive, oppressive attitudes they encouraged—particularly towards notions of gender and sexuality—are antithetical to this "kind of 'in-your-face' phenomenology." But by queering the pitch of the college's hyper-masculine culture and subverting by appropriating its discourses, Williams's poetry is a poignant reminder of a broader, more inclusive, "tradition" that Black Mountain College should be remembered and celebrated for.

Williams has suggested that, "*Tradition* could be defined as (1) what you care to remember; or (2) what you simply cannot forget" (*Magpie's Bagpipe* 68). He also believes that "*tradition* is what the making of poems is celebrating" (68). In all these respects Black Mountain College remains an integral and *indelible* part of the tradition that Williams celebrates in his poetry. But, as Jargon's substantial bibliography—and Williams's own reminiscences, reviews, and essays—indicate, that tradition is not, despite Williams's debts to it, simply the BMC of Olson and the poets he fostered there. Rather, the Black Mountain College that Williams celebrates is the one that eludes such homogenising group mentalities and labels and but a more diverse and eclectic "gathering" of names—Harry Callahan, Lyle Bongé, M. C. Richards, Hilda Morley, Lou Harrison, to name but a few—who, *together*, show just how fluid, dynamic, and inclusive the college was during its twenty-four year existence. Williams's own ideas about "caring" seem especially poignant considered against this more comprehensive Black Mountain College tradition: "The point about 'caring' is that it is inclusive," he explains: "As a poet one does not divide the world up into its innumerable factions: white, black, male, female, old, young, good, bad" (68). The point is, Williams stresses: "*We are all here together*" (71).

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[1] Williams's initial response to Olson, as Duberman's comments indicate, was not unusual: "Along with the fact that most of those who came into prolonged contact with Olson ended up loving the man, I've been struck by a second fact: that even the most furious of his detractors single out important gains for themselves for having known him" (371)

The event was arranged to celebrate the end of the autumn harvest in Rongshui County, in the province of Guangxi, and saw the locals gather to watch what animal rights campaigners have called "cruel" and "barbaric". Horse fights are popular in rural China, as well as in many other parts of Asia, where the "sport" goes back over 500 years.