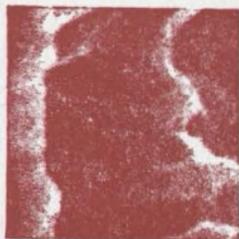


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DOCTOR WILLIAMS' HEIRESSES

Alice Notley



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# THE HISTORY OF THE

STATE OF

NEW YORK

FROM 1784 TO 1800

By

JOHN B. HENNING

Author of

"The

History of

the State of

New York

1800-1815

1815-1820

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DOCTOR WILLIAMS' HEIRESES

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Poe was the first one, he mated with a goddess. His children were Emily Dickinson & Walt Whitman--out of wedlock with a goddess. Then Dickinson & Whitman mated--since they were half divine they could do anything they wanted to--& they had 2 sons, William Carlos Williams & Ezra Pound, & a third son T. S. Eliot who went to a faraway country & never came back. From out of the West came Gertrude Stein, the daughter of the guy who wrote the 800-page novel & the girl who thought maybe rightly that she was Shakespeare. Gertrude Stein & William Carlos Williams got married: their 2 legitimate children, Frank O'Hara & Philip Whalen, often dressed & acted like their uncle Ezra Pound. However, earlier, before his marriage to Gertrude Stein, Williams had a child by the goddess Brooding. His affair with Brooding was long & passionate, & his child by her was oversized, Charles Olson. Before Charles Olson's birth the goddess had also been having an affair with Williams' brother Ezra Pound. No one was ever absolutely sure who the father of Olson was. Now O'Hara & Whalen were males that were male-female, as were many of the children of Williams by various goddesses & of Gertrude Stein & some gods. Olson was too big to be as male-female as he would have liked; his female was always curling up inside his shoulder or wrist to take a nice dark nap. Anyway it was striking how there were no females in this generation; & the first children of the male-females & of Olson & their other brothers were all males, and there were very many of them because of their fathers' incredible promiscuity. But the male-females also produced a second wave of children of which there were many females. These females could not understand how they came to be born--they saw no one among their parents & brothers who resembled them physically, for the goddesses their fathers mated with were evaporative non-parental types. As a matter of fact these females couldn't even believe that their fathers *were* their fathers. They came to indulge in a kind of ancestor worship--that is they each fell in love with a not too distant ancestor. One of them, Bernadette Mayer, fell in

love with Gertrude Stein. And the one named Alice Notley fell in love with her grandfather, William Carlos Williams.

#### YOUTH AND BEAUTY

I bought a dishmop--  
having no daughter--  
for they had twisted  
fine ribbons of shining copper  
about white twine  
and made a tousled head  
of it, fastened it  
upon a turned ash stick  
slender at the neck  
straight, tall--  
when tied upright  
on the brass wallbracket  
to be a light for me  
and naked  
as a girl should seem  
to her father.

\* \* \*

--I can't remember anything about what I was thinking about Williams & women writers 2 years ago. It was just a crack-brained theory so I could write some works then.

--Why are you working up to writing some incredibly baroque lecture? You should be worrying about whether or not your panties are gonna fall down while you're giving it.

--Which pair should I wear in case they do?

--Your Philip Whalen black & white calligraphy panties with lower case letters stitched along the seams... Why don't you do something easy like play some records of Williams reading?

--Ah, they've all heard those records.

--Are you kidding? Young poets haven't heard shit--they all turn up their noses at the Caedmon records because they got famous on the Dylan Thomas records. Which is why we liked them.

--Helena has the Williams record.

--She wouldn't have it if it weren't for me. I embarrassed her to death by making her read in class that poem about the girdle. English guys are great. They don't care what any poem looks like or where the lines break, they just start reading it like it was some more Tennyson & find themselves saying "I gotta/ buy me a new/ girdle." & "I GOTTA/ wig/gle/for this."

--I remember these funny conversations you & I'd have in England, where I'd get all indignant about the way I imagined that Williams treated Flossie. Then you'd get very intense & say something about how when he was old he had to come crawling to her on his hands & knees in "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower."

--That business still makes me uncomfortable.

--Our conversations?

--No, Williams & Flossie. Even when they got married she owed him a debt...

--She did?

--I mean she owed him one, & then she kept on waiting & holding back about getting back at him. Meanwhile he would go out & be a bad boy some more.

--Do you remember anything about my theory about Williams offhand?

--What Williams did for you--he consolidated a lot of what

you knew already, but he allowed you to be fast, perky, sassy, talky, all these different ways that had to do with talking, in one poem. He helped you to be as fast as you are. And to consolidate these voices you were hearing in your head & in the house & on the street & put them in the same poem. Getting it off Williams was like getting it authentic & not a little thirties-movies-modern like in Frank O'Hara... What I got off of him was a sharp clear use of direct address. He had this way of using the imperative tone.

---My theory had something to do with being for awhile the female to his male. You could use him without sounding like another imitation Williams poem. And how could you not use him since he was the greatest one? But you could use him to sound entirely new if you were a woman. It was all about this woman business. I thought we didn't need to read women--- I mean find the hidden in the woodwork ones---so much as find the poems among whatever sex that made you feel free to say whatever you liked. Williams makes you feel that you can say anything, including your own anything.

---Well he made you feel like you could talk about your tam-pax without feeling tragic about it or even daring, just getting the exact register of annoyance or non-annoyance or whatever.

---He also made it so I could write about the kids, or not always about, but just include the kids. It's because of Williams that you can include everything that's things--- & maybe everything that's words, is that going too far?---if you are only up to noticing everything that your life does include. Which is hard. Too many people have always already been telling you for years what your life includes... Ha ha! I just remembered last week you said he was the rich man's Gertrude Stein. You're terrible!

---At least I don't have the hubris to address Williams directly in a poem. Like you. Holy Jesus!

---Well I was pregnant at the time, & he delivered babies. I had a crush on my obstetrician then too, remember him?

---That sonofabitch? He was the great guy who wrote me all those prescriptions for sleeping pills.

#### THE DISPUTANTS

Upon the table in their bowl!  
in violent disarray  
of yellow sprays, green spikes  
of leaves, red pointed petals  
and curled heads of blue  
and white among the litter  
of the forks and crumbs and plates  
the flowers remain composed.  
Coolly their colloquy continues  
above the coffee and loud talk  
grown frail as vaudeville.

\* \* \*

"It seems really the body itself speaking, a very old, very certain...and absolutely unflustered body .... It is the body speaking." "Begin then sisters of the sacred well." "A 'fine' man or woman, let us say, goes down. If this be not a necessary terminal act is it not then in itself a work of art; an evocation of the true procreative process which is at the back of all genius & all worth?" And you like my poetry for my body, & I admire it in the mirror to write my poetry, though it is aging, though it is aging & that is admirable. As a poet I study my physiology, I don't discourse on the evils of alcohol & drugs. I would give you in my poetry all the delight that my body might give your eyes & hands or that any lively body might there are so many---as a poet I study my physiology. This is Alice speaking now, it's not my consciousness I study but my physiology. My blood & my breathing, my vision, my walk, the chapping of my lips, the greying of my hair, my flowers

becoming less sticky more silky, the birds in my nests, etc. dirty jokes, a tiny car drives down my neck and over my shoulder.

Williams would have the man classify bodies: "some a sort of hanging rind for the brain, some fit only to bear offspring, some absolutely not, some flowers, some this & some that, etc. And all requiring refertilization, both male & female, one way or another at frequent intervals." But he would be at least in a poem any body he so classified—the bug under a waterfall of piss.

One time I had a dream that I was a flea & then in the dream I grew up to become the ballerina Maria Tallchief. Is that Williams—the first Native American ballerina? Someone, Edwin, didn't like her as much as Frank did. This is the body speaking—the physiology of my vision is also clouds & sky & grass & paintings. My skin makes words—fingertip & tongue. Let's touch tongues.

Sometimes I'm just looking at the shows but sometimes I get so angry, & what I think I'm angry about is phantasmic & this anger will drag me down—a "fine" woman, another flea, a secret prima ballerina—how similar are anger & lust? I can't stand it, I can't stand it. I exult in it, I triumph.

#### SAPPHO, BE COMFORTED

There is only one love  
let it be a sparrow  
to hold between the breasts  
          greet us daily with its small cries

what does it matter?  
I, we'll say, love a woman  
but truth to tell

          I love myself more. Sappho loves

the music of her own  
songs which men seldom  
mean to her, a lovely girl  
          of whom she is desperately fond:

This is myself though  
my hateful mirror  
shows every day my big nose.  
          Men are indifferent to me, my sweet

but I would not trade  
my skill in composition for  
all, a second choice, you  
          present for my passionate caresses.

\* \* \*

...theory which I still have but temporarily can't locate, & we've had no heat or hot water now for 5 days plus is anyone interested? "It's like, there's still no decent book by a critic on him—no essay that isn't patronizing or evasive & the way poets know about him they don't say much, it's too personal knowing about Williams. Meanwhile the critics (this is Ted speaking) have given us first the Eliot Era then the Pound Era, while Williams is over there being the real whole thing." "Where is Hugh Kenner from?" I said. "That's a good question," he said, "...from Harvard." "He's picked out this one thing Williams does," I said, "of delaying or omitting verbs & talks about it as this great discovery-trick of Williams', without noticing that's also how we talk around here in America. That poem "Young Sycamore" is in the syntax of conversation." "Hugh Kenner thinks poets are as smart as he is," he said. "I don't feel like paideumaing again," I said. "I like Hugh Kenner," he said, "I like critics who are brilliant but long & dull." "I like anybody else but critics to be like that," I said. "I consider that to be a perfect exchange between us," he said. "There's nothing I like critics to be like yet," I said.

Let's get bitchy about a few things, he in effect said. What

about this "the local," isn't that a little overrated? what about all those things he's supposed to be that he isn't? Oh, I said, local was a word he used to explain why Poe wrote horror stories that took place in horror-story land. Long stupid exchange about the local. Like, The most local thing about a person is their body I said, for some it's their brain he said, etc. What about Lowell? he said, does everyone think Williams was just being stupid about Robert Lowell? Ask your audience in multiple choice form: a) although Williams was a great poet he was stupid b) he made a mistake that day c)...I blanked out for a while & came back when he was saying, If women get mad at Williams they can't dismiss him, they're engaged with him & call him You man, you! Now you (meaning me) you got to read Williams from the very first face to face, that way where you're not involved with technique. That's unusual for a poet, but he really reached you. You read him for yourself. Yes, I said, I don't want to deal with the poems right now because I don't want to ruin them for me, even for a little while, by holding them up & taking them apart in public.

The rest of our conversation was about the variable foot, & that conversation mostly evaporated, so I'll invent something, this:

We still haven't caught up with what Williams meant by the variable foot, which has to do with scoring for tone of voice, which is part of your music & your breath, but maybe even more. Variable foot is maybe about the dominance of tone of voice over other considerations--- I do my poems this way 'cause I talk from here---haven't you ever talked to anyone? I'm not an oracle or a musical instrument or a tradition or a stethoscope or a bellows or even a typewriter: I am a tone of voice, warming, shifting, pausing, changing, including, asserting, exulting, including, including, turning & including. I break my lines where I do, as I'm being as various as

my voice should be in our intimacy. I'd like there to be something as firm as you to push my voice into its best most natural place, that would really be measure. But I like to lay them out in dropped-line triplets, 3's are good for me, because I can go on at length say addressing you in that way where you'll hear me out--- Flossie it's me with our 50 years together included in how I intone each word so you must hear me out. If you do the world does, though I'll never hear about it.

I do not come to you  
save that I confess  
to being  
half man and half  
woman. I have seen the ivy  
cling  
to a piece of crumbled  
wall so that  
you cannot tell  
by which either  
stands: this is to say  
if she to whom I cling  
is loosened both  
of us go down.

\* \* \*

in lifting your skirts to show your silken  
crotches, it is this that is intended.  
You are it.

I was your nightgown,  
I watched!

FROM AN INTERVIEW:

"I think about him more than anybody. I mean he's the greatest poet of the century, there's no way around that & I think

you have to go back to Williams when you start."

"The thing about William Carlos Williams is, aside from the fact that he talked & wrote in this very particular way, he sets himself up to be this character of the American male in this way. And besides being the most important American poet. So if you're a woman you can relate to him in this way, where you'll be the woman, the typical American woman character. He made himself be this character, so you can make yourself be this other character, the polar opposite of him, & it enables you to have access to his secrets & to his diction & to his ways of thinking.... I don't know there's this way to be yourself, a woman, & person that has a lot to do with William Carlos Williams.... There's Williams. In this century, there's Williams. It's actually a secret you know, in spite of everything---it's still a secret.... it's still our secret."

"Well, if you're a woman you put yourself somewhere near the beginning & then there's this other place where you put yourself in terms of everybody."

"These are childish activities. To go look at the flowers, I mean in a way, to go to a place that is a house for flowers & look at the flowers... To go & see this movie for a child & then to go to, into the part of the aquarium where all the children hang around & stare over the railing at all the crocodiles & alligators, which never move... They just sit there. Do you think I have a childish voice? I probably do."

"In that poem."

"I don't mind having one. I don't mind being accused of having one. I don't feel a necessity for being a mature person in this world, I don't think too many poets really are, but men are very good at acting out the part. They've been brought up to have a good cover story, but they're all kids too---the male poets."

"I mean all the grownups in this world, they're just playing house. All the poets know they're playing house."

"Yeah, but I'm a character too. I'm the character of the new wife, & the new mother. It's a speech actually, a sort of a dramatic speech... And this character is making a speech on a stage like a character in Shakespeare, & the stage is sort of dark except for the light around the person talking... this poem I became the voice of the woman who's a wife & a mother. It was also me the poet."

"I think it's very interesting that things close down & open up at the same time... Life is always closing down on you as you get older & older, all you can hope to do is open it up."

"I would hope that the poems would be like that actually. A woman just came in & was there & said a few things & then left & you had this sense that she was actually there. And maybe she was me, & maybe she wasn't. Just some woman."

"Awkward, spasmodic---my sense of rhythm. I don't know, I've gone through periods where I didn't want to think about rhythm at all, it seemed so incredibly arbitrary. And so I would use the most arbitrary rhythms there were... So since I've been writing a lot by hand in the last few years, I would just break---if I had a notebook the size of this book, & I was writing in script & broke the line at the end of the page, when I typed it up it would turn out to look like a regular kind of line length for a poem, & I would break my lines that way, it gave me a kind of fierce pleasure to do that.... And then this new music has come on... But I don't know what the system is exactly. It varies from line to line & from poem to poem."

"I used to think that all my poems had the rhythms of 1950s popular songs, you know, pre-rock & roll songs, it always seemed to me that my poems should be sung by Georgia Carr, or somebody like that..."

"I'm not very familiar with *How To Write*."

"...I love flowers, I identify with them. I think that they

are these beings. I'm always conscious of flowers being these beings...they're these other people from this other world.... Well it's all this sense that this flower is this very fragile thing, but it's also very strong, & you know that poem "The rose unbruised penetrates space" & if you look at a flower very closely that's what the petals do. Flowers are a very fragile thing, but it's a totally penetrating thing. And it has this edge & the edge is very cutting & the edge is very fragile at the same time & it has this total strength out of being so strongly colored & out of being so perfect too."

"Being a woman the poet? Well it's a tone of voice that people aren't used to. You have to hit these tones of voice that people are going to say are this or that, strident or shrill..."

"I don't really want to be a character that way, it's just something you do when you make a poem....I'm not all that interested in being a woman, it's just a practical problem that you deal with when you write poems. You do have to deal with the problem of who you are so that you can be a person talking."

#### THE LOVE CHARM

Take this, the nexus  
of unreality,  
my head, I detach  
it for you. Take it  
  
in your hands, metal  
to eat out  
the heart, if held  
to the heart. Hold it  
  
to your heart  
and wait, only wait  
the while  
its fissions curdle.

\* \* \*

Jan 27, 1980

Dear Alice,

If Dr. Williams married Gertrude Stein, is that why my typewriter will occasionally refuse to make spaces between the words as if I were a Greek or Latin poet? It would be nice if Gertrude Stein had actually given birth to children, so she could have written all about it and then if they were delivered by her husband Dr. Williams, preferably at home, he could have written all about it too, just like Sigmund Freud's midwife, his mother's midwife, who predicted he'd be famous because he'd howled peculiarly or maybe it was something about the moon, you'd better look that up. And if of course Gertrude Stein had given birth to one of our mothers who then gave birth to us, or one of our fathers, Mr. or Mrs. Stein-Carlos-Williams or Mrs. Stein-Carlos-Williams-what?, who would my mother have married if she were Gertrude Stein's daughter, Mrs. Stein-Carlos, Williams-Hemingway maybe, what would I be, like Margaux or Mariel now today? Maybe my father would've been Donald Sutherland or even Larry Rivers! But in either case I might be a lunatic or a socialite, though I know this kind of speculation is not your intention. Now this baby inside me is doing everything short of howling, pushing me around incredibly, I have a cold and the midwife says you wont go into labor if you have a cold, so now I've had one for two weeks but there was something else I wanted to say. Did I tell you my students, when I talked about Dr. Williams and made them read him, all for the first time, found him to be reactionary, they thought he was ordinary, they thought his poetry was just like what old-fashioned poetry was like to them. And there is a situation in this house that relates to this. We rent this house from a child psychiatrist who gets insulted if he's called a psychologist because that means somebody hasnt noticed he's an M.D. Now I dont know if this is all worth going into, but it's a way of avoiding saying anything literary, --

there's this other person, a painter named Arthur Yanoff who's a friend of both Paul Metcalf's and Russell Banks', who is a close friend of the doctor's, in our case, Dr. K, and this Arthur was the one who led us to this house and he is so impressed with doctors and with a doctor's credentials and identity as to render himself practically the child in the face of it and Dr. K seems pleased by this kind of vulnerability, in fact when we listen to Dr. K fighting with his girlfriend, it's obvious he takes advantage of his doctorhood and plays the role of the all-knowing fatherhood to make her feel unsure of herself & thus the pawn. I myself have always been impressed with doctors, not doctors like this Dr. K, who seems to know nothing, but ones like Dr. Williams who seem to encompass everything as if a doctor-poet, a general practitioner as it were, was the only representative of what might be called the contemporary American hermetic tradition, not that I'd believe a word they said... So now I have to talk about Doctor Williams, and I remember what I started out to say before, it's another excuse not to talk about him quite yet-- when I was ordering books for my classes and one of them was his *Imaginations* the woman at the bookstore had me spell out his full name and then she said, gee it's amazing what mothers will name their children nowadays. Let's see, I always see Williams in the tradition of Dante so that *Spring and All* becomes his *Vita Nuova* or maybe *Kora in Hell* does and then *Paterson* becomes *The Divine Comedy*. Then again there is the question of "The Red Wheelbarrow" or does it even have a title? so much depends upon, and so on... It was written on the blackboard when I was in high school and I can still see it and recite it much the same as I can do with Emily Dickinson's "I'm nobody who are you..." but somehow, as I've made these two poems be opposites, I associate the one, the wheelbarrow of course, with all my ideas and instigations and inspirations to write poetry and the other, the being nobody, with all the Catholic teachings on humility which might actually prevent that from happening. So that it always seemed to me from Williams I could deduct that the wonderful capac-

ity for the world to exist without an I was good for me and that the rest of a person's studies of him or her self ought to be relegated to prose which I later noticed he had sort of done too. Although I know in saying that I'm not being entirely accurate, but I am just telling you my adolescent fantasies about what could or couldn't get done in writing well. Then again all this also made me think that women were more Catholic than men and for a long time I took Williams' hard-nosed attitude about things (by this I don't mean things) to be the result of his being a man although I knew the same womanly sensation could result from, say, my reading Catullus or even everyone, if I could only get beyond my own self-conscious judgments about poetry. That's why I always liked the French writers. So this is my memoir of Wm. Carlos Williams! I've always been very grateful to him for resuscitating the prose mixed with poetry form which is a form I like and seems like a good form to be in a hurry in. I like what he says about Yorkville and about having babies, oh god I hope I never have to be a literary critic to earn my livelihood, I'd rather be a doctor any day, the doctor who delivered me was named Peter Neyland. He was rather a bad doctor but he had fantastic offices full of giant palms and leather chairs and vials of stuff. You see you started all this by keeping on referring to Williams as the doc. I've often wondered why all the pretentious people who talk all the time about "Olson" don't refer to him rather as "Charles" or the something. For many years, for all the years I had a car, I would always carry around the complete poems of Wm. Carlos Williams in my trunk because I always thought it was somehow necessary to have them there, just like I read somewhere about a taxi-driver, or actually it was that I met one once who told me that he always had a case of beer in his trunk because he knew that no matter what the exigencies of driving around NY might turn out to be, that would be all that he needed. Then sadly when I no longer had a car I found the condition of my Williams books to be awful and when Lewis and I put our books together, he excoriated me on

my lack of devotion to the books but it was really just the opposite of that! Well if any more maybe more abstruse or profound thoughts do come, you can be sure I'll be sending them or unless the baby comes first—you ever have a baby when you had a cold?

Love,  
Bernadette

#### LINES

Leaves are grey green,  
the glass broken, bright green.

\* \* \*

"The first line in the first poem reads 'Innosense can never perish.' I really believed that then, & I really believe it now. It is something intrinsic in a man."

"I won't have to powder my nose tonight 'cause Billie's gonna take me home in his car—"

The perfect type of the man of action is the suicide."

"What then of a life such as mine? I say that Chaucer, Villon & Whitman were contemporaries of mine with whom I am constantly in touch—through the art of writing. They are worthy rivals..."

"I was very late, very slow to find out about the world....The real thing is I didn't know *anything* about life. I was completely ignorant."

"I endowed her with magic qualities. She had seized me from my mother as her special possession, adopted me, & her purpose in life was to make me her own. But my mother ended all that with a terrific clap in the puss."

"Somehow poetry & the female sex were allied in my mind. The beauty of girls seemed the same to me as the beauty of a

poem. I knew nothing at all about the sexual approach but I had to do something about it. I did it in the only terms I knew. Through poetry."

"The rhythmic pace was the pace of speech, an excited pace because I was excited when I wrote. I was discovering, pressed by some violent mood."

"When I spoke of flowers, I *was* a flower, with all the prerogatives of flowers, especially the right to come alive in the spring."

"I was looking for a metric figure—a new measure. I couldn't find it & I couldn't wait for it. I was too impatient; I had to write."

"Something of this sort is what Oscar Wilde must have meant when he said, God created man, then woman, then the child & finally the doll. And the greatest of these was the doll."

"I thought of myself as springtime & I felt I was on my way to Hell (but I didn't go very far)."

"I've always thought of a poet as *not* a successful man except in his own mind, which is devoted to something entirely different than what the world thinks of as success."

"The whole book was written in an excited frame of mind. Floss helped with the research; I was working against time. She is solely responsible for Aaron Burr; she told me what she read, told it so graphically & vividly I sat down & wrote the whole thing in one sitting. She was satisfied & I was relieved, but I should confess right here that I never read a single book on him!"

"I've never understood what upset you about it,' Mrs. Williams said. But the Doctor refused to retract; something about the very phrase anti-poetic apparently enraged him as a poet."

"...I'd always wanted to write a book about a baby. I thought I knew what a baby was... I was filled up with babies & I

wanted to write about them. The devil was in me....I was crazy about babies, the contempt that all babies have for adults. They don't give a damn what goes on & they let go with everything they have & sometimes it's not too attractive."

"I'll die before I've said my fill about women. I feel I am saying flattering things about them but they won't take it....I am so terribly conscious of woman as woman that it is hard for me to write about a woman---I become self-conscious---too aware that she is there ready to tell me I've got her all wrong."

"I knew the reader, any reader, would be interested in scandal so scandal went in...."

"At Wellesley once, they practically carried me off on their shoulders. I was speechless. You could hear a pin drop. A million girls were there...at least it looked that way. A bell kept ringing, it finally stopped. Floss had asked me to read the Coda to 'Asphodel'...I thought I didn't have time...but they stood on their heels & yelled...the girls...my God I was breathless, but I said do you really want more & they said yes so I read what Floss knew they would like. They were so adorable. I could have raped them all!"

"However, we're talking of the art of writing well in a modern world & women haven't much to do with that, I guess. Not directly. America is still too crude for that. I don't think any place is much better... Of course it's ridiculous to think of any land, as a land, in this respect. Women are as various (and as rare) as men."

"And who are you anyway?---with your small personal limitations of age, sex, & other sundry features like race & religion?"

Unimportant.

You, even you are at the moment---the artist, good or bad---but a new creature.

You must let yourself go---release it...

...you are nature in action."

#### WINTER TREES

All the complicated details  
of the attiring and  
the disattiring are completed!  
A liquid moon  
moves gently among  
the long branches.  
Thus having prepared their buds  
against a sure winter  
the wise trees  
stand sleeping in the cold.

\* \* \*

He said say about flowers, say how when you write flowers, are flowers, it's like the way I perceive flowers. I wouldn't say perceive, it's the way I experience them---sometimes little to do with how I see them. I open your red & white book at random to "The Pot of Flowers." It's funny for you 'cause you don't tell which kind of flowers---what this one contains is flowers not particularly named flowers---the setting is strange to me too---you say what you see but the words you choose---it's a lamp & flowers isn't it? The effects of the flowers & light are so heady, that they aren't their names they're the headiness of flowers & light, pink flowers & white made mauve & red

petals aslant darkened with mauve  
red where in whorls  
petal lays its glow upon petal  
round flamegreen throats

It's a drunk-making poem till you include the leaves the flowerpot "and there, wholly dark, the pot/gay with rough moss." That's very rich, but I've sobered just so it's in focus, the pot

has edges & holds up the flowers. This is very funny this poem, instead of showing all mediievally the respective virtues of the flower & the leaf---it's the flower & the flowerpot, & you do make us like the flowerpot as much as the flowers. This poem is from *Spring and All* so I check out the prose that goes with it in the original in *Imaginations*---you say some stuff about Dora Marsden & President Wilson & spring & hope---& I remember, I think, that this is a famous poem. Famous where? famous somewhere. But the guys who make the poems famous usually like the ones in quatrains or couplets. This one has that look, before you read it, like it might not hold up---my favorite kind of poem---& it looks like what it says. It looks like love that way. And I'm very tired tonight.

\*

2 hours later

After a brief spasm of hysteria just now (2:45 AM), a thin ignoble thing taking the form of yelling at my husband because I couldn't finish didn't have the time writing this which is a talk anyway about you---as if it somehow had to be even better than whatever it might ever have been---I started to remember some things about the time when I addressed you directly (as in hubris, according to Ted) in my long poem "Songs For The Unborn Second Baby." I believe I even told you I hated you, though only I said "just now." That poem has been recently published---am I trying to make up for what I said? Well, no. Well, maybe. But I remember, it was in England, & I was very darkly depressed from having had a first child & being pregnant with another, thought I was mad murderous etc., & so isolated in this country town. And how many pregnant women who were how I was then you must have talked to---& how many couldn't talk to each other about it---I couldn't find a female confidante then, but I could talk to my husband, especially, & my doctor (surprisingly), & Dante & Philip Whalen & you. I wrote a letter to Philip & said some-

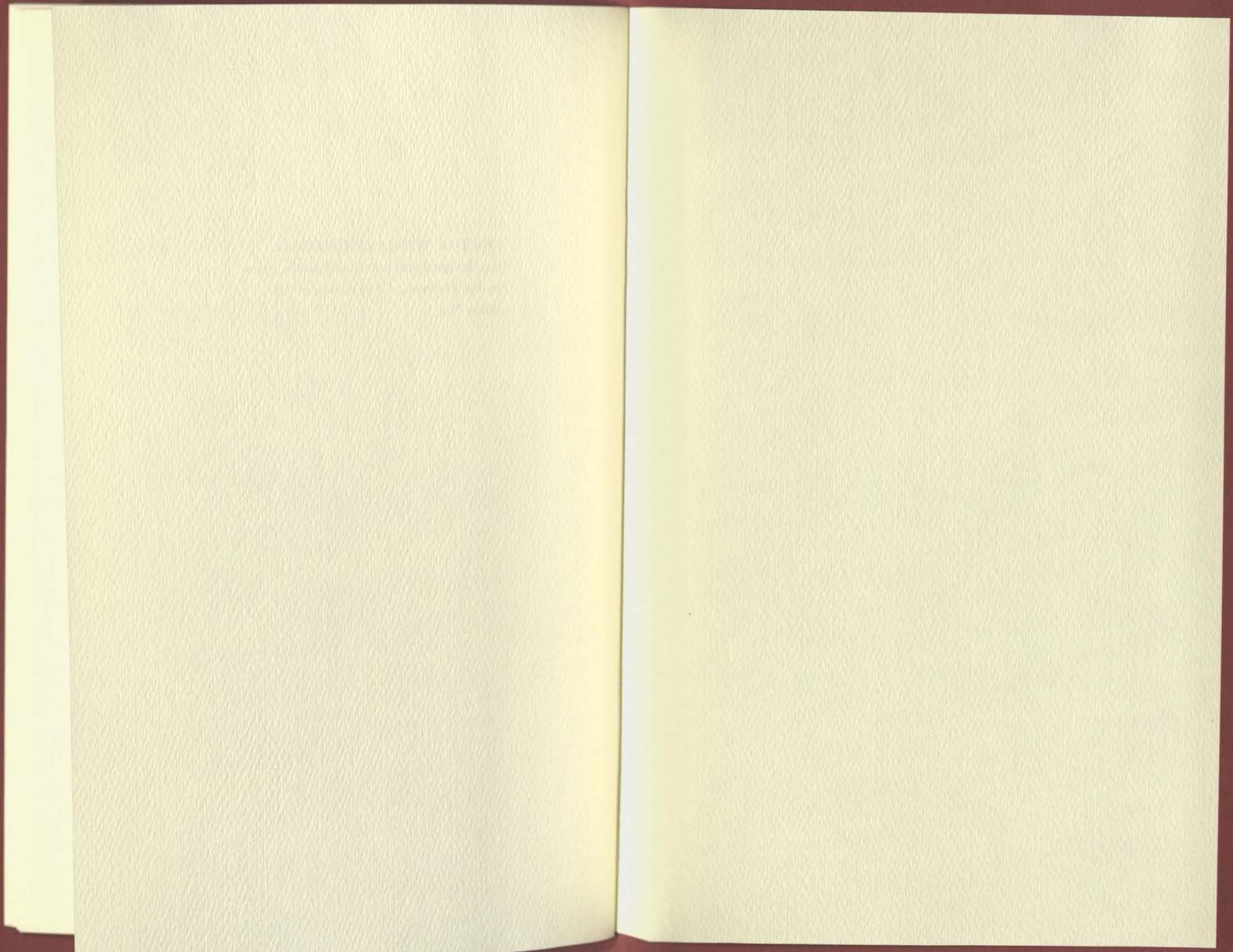
thing like, I can't remember how I said it, something like, "What's the good of love anyway?" Or "Tell me about love, is it of any use?" He wrote back & told me good. Anyway, I wrote myself through this business, this blackness which I'll no doubt go through somehow again, in my poem. Before that though I typed up all of your poem "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," & Honey that took a long time. In that bad time there was always you. To love as a poet & to love & hate as a man. Immobile pregnant & isolate & unhappy, I didn't need to read about your attractions to women other than your wife. Your reasoning seemed specious & was enraging... I'm looking for a passage from "Asphodel" about a "field of women like flowers & what should you do but love them?" Everything that's catching my eye though, in this poem, is something that's beautiful & makes me cry. But to a pregnant woman, I repeat, your reasoning was useless & enraging. We poets take all words personally. But I wrote my poem & I used for its form your *Paterson* & an O'Hara ode & those Cantos... & it is held together by flowers, as "Asphodel" is---we had a bewilderingly luxuriant garden there---& by the presence of the opposite sex "you" & by the will to write poetry. I want to say this only for me I think, I think whoever hears this knows it & knows all about you---I asked about love & Philip said Yes, love, & your great poem is about how it itself is being that & being handed as that as a flower to your wife & how it "gelds the bomb"---no fear of evil death war destruction or pregnancy childbirth---because this poem exists. I suspected then & know now that that's true. And because you had written so, I was able to write & love & live, I don't even ever hate you temporarily anymore,

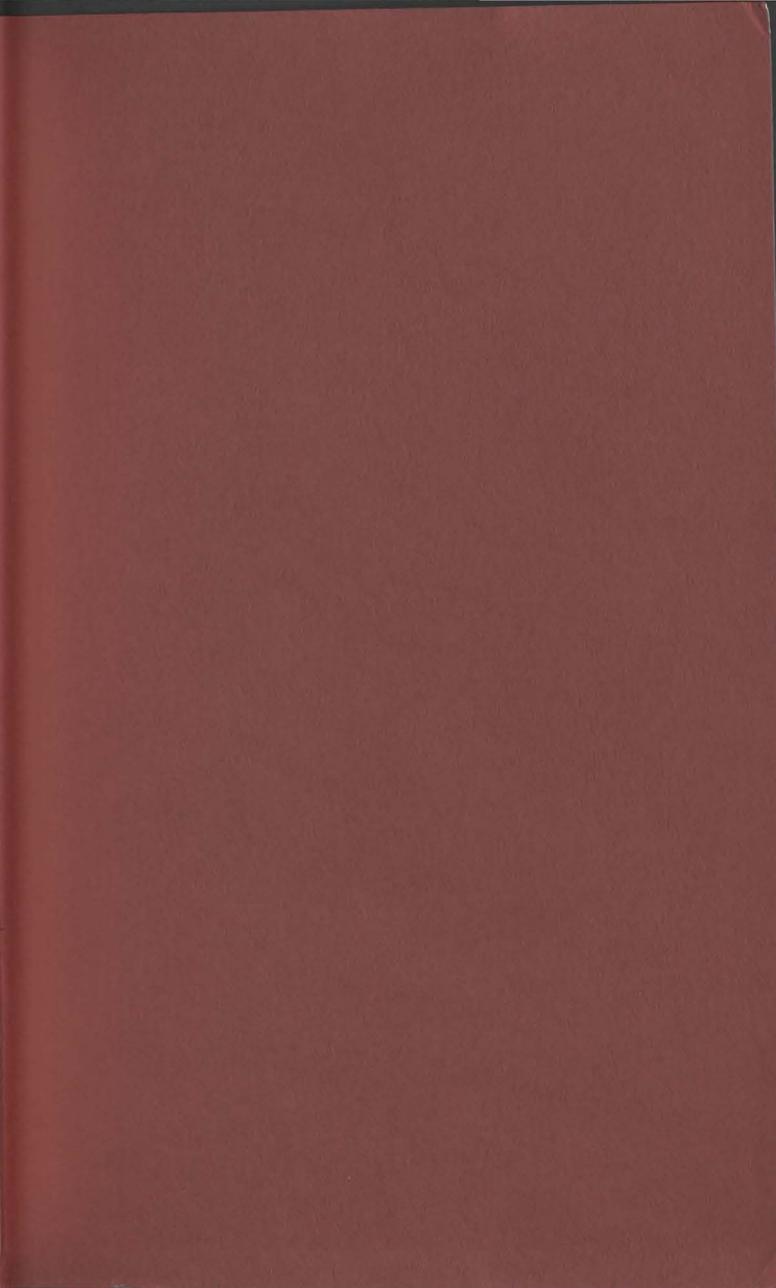
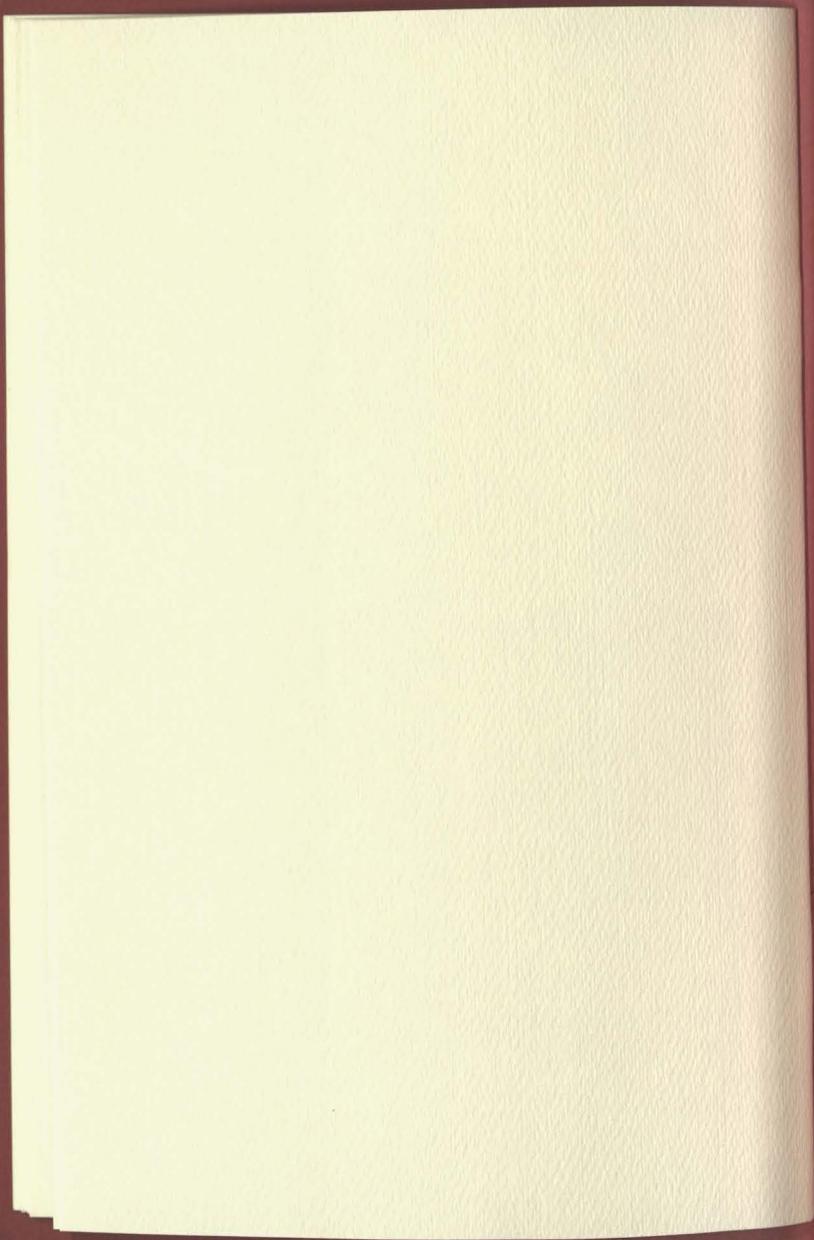
Yours,

Alice

Alice Notley  
Jan 19 - Feb 7, 1980

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