

# William Carlos Williams (1883–1963): Physician-Writer and “Godfather of Avant Garde Poetry”

Richard Carter, MD

Indian Wells, California

William Carlos Williams, Pulitzer Prize-winning physician-writer, was born in Rutherford, New Jersey, where he practiced medicine until he was incapacitated by a stroke at age 68. After graduating from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, Williams trained in New York City and Leipzig, Germany, settling in Rutherford in 1909. Doctor Williams revolutionized American poetry by rejecting traditional conventions of rhyme and meter, and he masterfully used “American” English—brusque, colloquial, and incisive—in his poetry. Williams is recognized as one of the most original poets of the 20th century. His medical life sometimes trivialized, Williams was a serious student of medicine and considered himself “in the front lines, in the trenches.” He

regarded art and medicine as “two parts of a whole,” and the intimate doctor-patient interface proved a powerful inspiration for his writing. Dr Williams was a physician of immense integrity and dedication; he regarded allegiance to humanism as important as excellence in medical science. Prolific in various genre, Dr William Carlos Williams attained belated recognition in spite of astonishing productivity and originality. His stature and influence has steadily increased since his death in 1963, and Dr Williams is now considered “the most important literary doctor since Chekhov.”

(Ann Thorac Surg 1999;67:1512–7)

© 1999 by The Society of Thoracic Surgeons

How do you do it? How can you carry on an active business . . . and at the same time find time to write? . . . But they do not grasp that one occupation complements the other, that they are two parts of a whole, that it is not two jobs at all, that one rests the man when the other fatigues him.

—*Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* [1]

William Carlos Williams, among the few full-time practicing physicians to achieve literary distinction, is considered one of the most influential American poets of this century. Doctor Williams’ fresh, distinct style revolutionized poetry by using conversational “American” English, differing in cadence and structure from traditional English poetry. With clarity and concrete imagery, he skillfully portrayed the ordinary as extraordinary in verse, such as “The Red Wheelbarrow,” “The Road to the Contagious Hospital,” and “The Cat in the Jam Closet.” Called the “godfather . . . of nearly all . . . existent avant garde poetry,” [2] Williams practiced medicine until he was incapacitated by a stroke at age 68, and still continued to create an enduring literary legacy (Fig 1).

Williams was born of multicultural ancestry, the first of two sons, on August 17, 1883, in Rutherford, New Jersey. In this northern industrial town, he spent nearly all his life, including 40 years of practicing medicine. Both parents were immigrants. His English father, William George, a businessman, married Raquel Hélène Rose Hoheb from Puerto Rico, half French and half a genetic amalgam of Dutch, Spanish, and Jewish extraction. Although puritanical and lacking in warmth, William

George introduced Shakespeare, Dante, and the Bible to his children. Young Williams—a truly hybrid creature—attributed his mercurial temperament, strong sensuality, and artistic inner drive to his Spanish-speaking mother. She studied art in Paris for 3 treasured years during the era of Cézanne and Renoir. The Spanish ring to Williams’ circuitous name is derived from his Uncle Carlos, a distinguished surgeon in Santo Domingo.

Williams characterized his early life as “terror . . . not fear,” [1] interpreted by Breslin as reflecting the “moral perfectionism his parents tried to instill in him” [3]. Williams wrote that his mother was “a foreigner to me,” who experienced disturbing spiritualistic trances, even seizures [4]. Williams and his younger brother, Edward, attended local public schools and the Unitarian church, where their father was Sunday school superintendent. At 14, Williams traveled to Europe with his family, remaining nearly 2 years. Both boys attended school near Geneva and at the Lycée Condorcet in Paris, were enriched by a cosmopolitan perspective, and returned to Rutherford in the spring of 1899.

Hoping to prepare Williams for a career in medicine or dentistry, his parents transferred him to the reputable Horace Mann High School in New York City. Williams graduated with a mediocre academic record, but demonstrated interests in science, mathematics, languages, and great books. Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* ignited in Williams an emerging consciousness of writing, and inspired him to create his first poem.

Williams’ mother was the mainstay of the home because his father traveled to Latin America for weeks, even months, and once for 1 year. She exerted a powerful influence on Williams and introduced him to art and

Address reprint requests to Dr Carter, 75-310 14th Green Dr, Indian Wells, CA 92210.



Fig 1. William Carlos Williams in attendance at the 1953 National Book Awards Dinner. Doctor Williams was awarded the first annual NBA Gold Medal for Poetry in 1950. (Grateful acknowledgement to Judith H. Munzo and the Rutherford Public Library for permission to reprint this photograph.)

poetry, especially John Keats. The poetry of Keats, whom Williams later emulated in college, profoundly shaped his early poetry; he declared Keats to be “my God.” Of his mother, Williams wrote: “Her interests in art became my interests in art” [5].

His mother, a defeated romantic and frustrated in her own artistic aspirations, persuaded young Williams to study medicine in memory of his late Uncle Carlos. In 1902, it was possible to enter medical school directly from high school. Although ambivalent about becoming a doctor, Williams passed a special examination and was admitted to the University of Pennsylvania. He entered the Dental School at age 19 and later transferred to the School of Medicine.

Although Williams reveled in the liberty upon leaving a rigid home environment, his primary interest was not medicine but poetry. At Penn, he met a strikingly bright but eccentric poet, Ezra Pound, “often brilliant but an ass” [1]. Meeting Pound was a watershed event in the life of the young medical student; Williams declared that “before meeting Pound is like B.C. and A.D.” Pound’s influence endured throughout Williams’ life despite ups and downs in their friendship. Pound also introduced the aspiring writer to imagist Hilda Doolittle (H.D.) and

acclaimed painter Charles Demuth, all of whom became lifelong friends.

Of his medical studies, Williams wrote his mother on October 10, 1904: “I do like it as well as anything else, but my mind is a book of questions and until I find their answers I will never be settled” [6]. However, Williams confessed to his brother that he was bored and depressed with his studies and felt he would not be a success at anything: “I sort of keep going out of an instinctive dread of failure but Lord knows I don’t feel that divine fire which I long for and I know a man must have to succeed. I’m just a low down mediocre lazy mucker and I know it.” Furthermore, Williams acknowledged that were it not for strong family support, “I’d throw up the whole thing” [6].

Halfway through his medical studies, Williams decided to pursue seriously a life of writing, fully aware of the financial insecurity of a literary life. Medicine was not mentioned in this letter to his brother on November 12, 1908: “I have been writing a great deal recently and somehow or other at some time or other I will succeed and if I ever do succeed Bo, I know it will be real, real, real” [6]. Williams was determined to succeed, as illustrated by his college stationery featuring the emblem of a turtle slowly stepping over the word “*j arrivai*: I will get there” [7]. In his *Autobiography* he wrote: “I would continue medicine, for I am determined to be a poet; only medicine, a job I enjoyed, would make it possible for me to live and write as I wanted to. I would live: that first, and write, by God, as I wanted to if it took me all eternity to accomplish my design” [1].

In 1914—4 years into medical practice—the young poetry-writing doctor was fighting for financial survival; 5 years later he confessed, “I want to write, to write, to write. My meat is hard to find. What if I have not the courage?” [8]. A decade later he openly declared, “I’d like to be able to give up the practice of medicine and write all day and all night” [9].

Planning to have a life “balanced in everything,” Williams realized the trade-off in juggling two careers: choosing a frenetic existence demanded by a medical practice that offered financial security versus a burning drive to be a poet, which promised little money but time to write. Writing demanded both leisure and inspiration—“drunkenness” in the Williams lexicon, and the doctor knew he could afford to be drunk on rare occasions only. His decision was final: “It was money that finally decided me. I would continue medicine for I was determined to be a poet.” Literary talent and an indomitable will allowed Williams Carlos Williams to succeed in both professions.

In his youth, Williams, a loner and nature lover, once envisioned himself a tree warden and considered forestry as a career. However, his mother’s interest in visual arts influenced Williams to consider and pursue painting as a profession. A gifted amateur artist, some of his paintings still exist, including an impressionistic view of the Passaic River (1912) at Yale University and a “Self Portrait” (1914) at the University of Pennsylvania. After starting a medical practice, he abandoned painting for poetry. He realized that poetry could be done on the run,

between telephone calls, seeing patients, and without troublesome apparatus. "Had it not been that it was easier to transport a manuscript than a wet canvas," Williams wrote in 1954, "the balance might have been tilted the other way" [10].

Even though poetry was his first love, Williams demonstrated serious motivation for medicine, more than was customary in his time. In tempo with the rise of specialization and after nearly 3 years of training, Williams took additional postgraduate study in pediatrics in Leipzig. During his practice, he volunteered his services at the Babies Hospital three afternoons weekly and attended the Post-Graduate School and Hospital in New York City to enhance his professional skills. Williams also was co-director of the Department of Pediatrics at the Passaic General Hospital for 17 years, where he served as president of the Board of Directors. Author Sherwin Nuland observed that the "medical life of Dr Williams is somewhat trivialized as a curiosity that fed his writing," [11] but Williams considered himself "a man in the front line, in the trenches" [1].

A lover of words and visual arts, Williams painted verbal pictures with crisp, vivid word images, such as a red wheelbarrow, sycamore tree, or plums—revolutionary poems. This became the hallmark of his poetry. "Master of the glimpse," [12] Williams considered his sight to be one of his strongest physical characteristics. "I like most my ability to be drunk with the sudden realization of value in things others never notice," he told the editors of *The Little Review* in 1929. "Words—explosions of linguistic energy—" are to writers what paint is to visual artists, and Williams was an intensely committed wordsmith. He queried in *The Great American Novel*: "but can you not see, can you not taste, can you not hear, can you not touch—words? Words are the flesh of yesterday. Words roll, spin, flare up, rumble, trickle, foam—slowly they lose momentum" [13]. In his *Autobiography*, Williams wrote: "Words offered themselves and I jumped at them. To write, like Shakespeare!" [1].

Williams recognized the interaction between visual arts and poetry, and hobnobbed with the New York artistic avant garde even while practicing medicine. The modern art revolution in America first erupted among painters, followed closely by poets. Maynard Hartley, a rebel modernist painter and friend of Dr Williams, declared that the poet should have "an eye with a brain in it," or a union of aesthetic sensibility and factual observation (Hartley's dictum) [14]. Williams studied aesthetic innovations of painters, hoping to apply their ideas toward new poetic creations, distinct and free of European standards.

Williams ignored accepted poetic academic norms and defined esthetic values as based on direct contact or bodily experience alone. His creed "no ideas but in things," based not on the abstract but on the real, factual, or concrete, was consonant with his scientific training but in opposition to traditional literary standards. Williams vigorously championed this idea throughout his life.

Determined to excel as a writer, Williams pioneered a modern "American" English poetry—a pure distillate of

distinctive American conversational idiom—independent of European influence. He challenged his critics "to let us proclaim that [poetry] isn't made out of the brains of Frenchmen, Englishmen, or Dead Greeks," [14] and felt that all poetry, to reach a valid universal, begins as a local creation.

Williams received his medical degree in 1906, at age 23. He interned for 2 years at the French Hospital in "Hell's Kitchen," New York City. The chief of the hospital was Dr J. Julio Hanna, a friend of Williams' parents. The mission of the hospital was to care for French and Spanish immigrants, so Williams' linguistic agility more than qualified him for this position. The crushing load of 16-hour days, with horrific injuries and illnesses so common to large city hospitals in a slum area, proved to be gut wrenching for Williams. "One thing I'm not going to do," Williams confessed to Dr Hanna, "and that's surgery" [15]. Despite the exhausting work, Williams managed to write poetry at night, much of it modeled after Keats' *Endymion*.

Williams chose to focus on pediatrics and obstetrics as a specialty. In 1908, he continued a third year of training at the nearby Nursery and Children's Hospital. Williams gave a lecture series to the nurses, delivered over 300 babies in 8 months, and independently published his first book, entitled *Poems*. Although the professional services of this facility were excellent, the hospital administration was thoroughly corrupt. In March 1909, after the hospital's Board of Directors demanded that Williams sign falsified records to augment their state funding, Williams resigned his position on principle and to avert dismissal. Some months before this unpleasant confrontation, a senior staff member had offered Williams a position in his Park Avenue office. The furor of this episode destroyed this promising opportunity, and Williams returned to Rutherford and soon enjoyed newly found leisure.

Williams soon met and fell in love with beautiful and talented Charlotte Herman, who rejected him for his brother Ed, a recent M.I.T. graduate. Despite this shattering blow, Williams quickly rebounded and, 3 days later, proposed to Charlotte's younger, shapely legged sister Florence (Flossie), age 18. The proposal was bizarre. Williams admitted that he did not know the young woman enough to love her, but he assured himself that by observant and instinctual evaluation he could, in time, will himself to love her. On July 5, 1909, Flossie agreed to marry Williams at some future time.

Three weeks later, he left for Leipzig to begin postgraduate studies in advanced pediatrics. During the year, he traveled widely on the Continent. In March 1910, he visited Pound in London and met William Butler Yates and other members of the literary coterie. After a stormy week with Pound, Williams was anxious to escape the eccentric, demeaning poet. He met his brother in Milan and the two entrained for Rome where Ed was studying at the American Academy of Architecture, having been awarded the coveted Prix de Rome. Williams spent 2 months in Italy with his brother, who was fluent in Italian and an expert *cicerone*, viewing the historic and art

treasures of the country. He then completed his sojourn to Europe by touring the major cities of Spain before departing for the United States.

The brief romance between Flossie and Williams had cooled, due in part to critical letters he had written to her. When the wild-eyed doctor disembarked at Hoboken on June 4, 1910, his "fiancée" was not present to welcome him. The rift between the couple was resolved shortly after Williams returned, and they agreed to marry when his practice was established. His New Jersey medical license arrived on September 2, 1910, and Williams started practice in the kitchen pantry of the family home as a general physician and pediatrician. He was soon appointed school physician for Rutherford Public Schools at \$500 per annum, a position he held for 14 years. Although Williams worked diligently, his total income during his first year was \$750.

On December 12, 1912, after waiting three and a half years for his practice to stabilize, William Carlos Williams and Florence Herman were married at Rutherford Presbyterian Church. The following year the newlyweds purchased a house at 9 Ridge Road in Rutherford, where he practiced and the family lived for the remainder of his life.

Williams described his strange courtship in the novel *The Build-up* (1952). He characterized his ambivalent relationship to Flossie, confessing that their love was "not romantic love" but "a dark sort of passion . . . a passion of despair as all life is despair" [16]. In his *Autobiography*, Williams wrote that Flossie was "the rock on which I have built," [1] but Breslin observed that he was fascinated by women and "frequently wandered off" [3].

Williams immersed himself into the community life of Rutherford, and the intimate patient contact proved to be catalytic to his creativity. "Five minutes, ten minutes, can always be found," he wrote in his *Autobiography*. "I had my typewriter in my office desk. . . . If a patient came in at the door while I was in the middle of a sentence, bang would go the machine—I was a physician. When the patient left, up would come the machine. . . . Finally, after eleven at night, when the last patient had been put to bed, I could always find the time to bang out ten or twelve pages" [1]. Williams recorded poetic flashes on note pads, which he called the "inarticulate poems" of his patients. Nevertheless, he never broke the one rule he made about writing: "No matter what I was writing, the practice always came first" [1].

Medical training, a powerful force in shaping his life and art, created in Williams a tolerance of human foibles and imperfections, altering how he absorbed and recorded human experience. In his *Autobiography*, he confessed that his profession made him a licensed voyeur of the human condition. "My medicine," wrote Williams, "was the thing which gained me entrance to those secret gardens of the self. I was permitted by my medical badge to follow the poor, defeated body into those griefs and grottos . . . to be present at deaths and births, at the tormented battles between daughter and diabolic mother" [1]. Poetry evolved during a split second: "It has fluttered before me for a moment, a phrase which I

quickly write down on anything at hand, any piece of paper I can grab" [1].

Williams also discovered that his medical practice and poetry together created a sense of balance, with medicine allowing freedom from financial and political pressure, while his profession fueled inspiration for writing. "I've got to write to relieve myself of any tensions," the caged rebel wrote to friend and writer Robert McAlmon [17].

Williams defined medicine and poetry as "two parts of a whole." He declared: "As a writer I never felt that medicine interfered with me but rather that it was my very food and drink, the very thing that made it possible for me to write. Was I not interested in men? There the thing was, right in front of me" [1].

Undoubtedly, the hallmark of the true physician is empathy, or the capacity to put oneself in the patients' place and share their feelings. Doctor Williams clearly defined empathy: "I lost myself in the very properties of their minds. For the moment at least I actually became them, so that when I detached myself from them at the end of the half hour of intense conversation, it was as though I were awakening from a sleep." Williams later reflected that he was "lucky" to have become a doctor "because it forced me to get used to people of all sorts, which was a fine thing for a writer or potential writer" [18].

An indefatigable professional, Dr Williams exemplified the empathetic physician, treating his patients as individuals, with honesty, affection, and respect. He believed, as did his literary god, Keats, that the poet is "a humanist, physician to all men." To Williams, allegiance to humanism was as important as excellence in medical science. Because of a deep sense of humanity, pervasive in both his medical work and his writing, Williams often is recommended for study in medical ethics curricula. He was a secularist and observed the human condition with a clinical but sympathetic eye. To Williams, "medical ethics" was not an oxymoron but of vital importance, and the strict code of propriety was a central theme in his doctor stories. Quick to refer his patients to a more knowledgeable physician when necessary, Williams loathed the "money grubber" physicians he portrayed in his short stories, vivid cameos of life.

Williams' solo medical practice allowed little leisure for writing. Although he specialized in pediatrics, his practice became mainly general, with a heavy obstetrical population. It is remarkable that such an incredibly busy doctor could create such a varied and immense amount of writing. However, Williams did take 2 sabbatical years in 1924 and 1927, which were periods of enormous literary productivity. These were the only long breaks in his medical practice until his first major stroke at age 68 in 1951.

Williams' neighbors accorded him minimal recognition for his literary efforts. One acquaintance inquired of Williams' son Bill if his father was still writing "those shitty verses?" [14]. Overlooked and undervalued by some critics as "local" or "regional," Williams was not an isolated small-town physician, but rather led a cosmopolitan life among literary and art circles in greater New York City. During his lifetime, Williams knew many

writers in addition to those already mentioned, such as Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, e.e. cummings, Ford Maddox Ford, Robert Lowell, and Ernest Hemingway. Williams met many of these world-renowned authors during his sabbaticals in Europe.

In February 1948, at age 65, while leaving the hospital at 1:30 a.m., Williams suffered a heart attack. On his way home his car became stuck in snow and, while shoveling his way out, he developed chest pain. He had been inundated with administrative problems as president of the Hospital Board. After 6 weeks of bed rest and an ounce of brandy 3 times daily, Williams recovered and resumed his usual activities. To poet Robert Lowell, Williams wrote on March 3 that he had an attack of "angina (not vagina) pectorus" [4].

In his early 20s, Williams had been obsessed by a sense of destiny and desire for immortality [6]. The unexpected heart attack led Williams into a reflective mode, with apprehension of death and anxiety over his ultimate literary legacy. This sparked Williams to write his *Autobiography* quickly. Although not entirely factual, the book was completed in 4 months.

The year 1950 was a preeminent one for Williams. He finally was beginning to gain recognition as an important poet and short story writer, and that year he published *Make Light of It: Collected Stories* and *The Collected Later Poems*. In addition, he received the National Book Award for *Selected Poems* and *Paterson, Book Three*.

Williams suffered his first incapacitating stroke in 1951, forcing him to retire after 40 years of practice. This incident proved to be a prelude to another major stroke in August 1952, resulting in paralysis of his upper right side, partial blindness, and a speech impediment. For the last 11 years of his life, Williams was forced to write and use his electric typewriter with only his nondominant left hand.

Although his health gradually deteriorated, Williams' indomitable spirit enabled him to continue writing, completing his long poem, "Paterson," and Pulitzer Prize-winning *Pictures from Brueghel*. Williams also was appointed as Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress, delayed first by his health, then held up and finally withdrawn because of political accusations of leftist sympathies and acquaintance with Ezra Pound. An enormous disappointment to Williams, this politically charged event during the McCarthy era contributed to a deep depression, necessitating 8 months of "living hell" in a mental hospital. After the big stroke in 1952, as physician-poet Merrill Moore also observed, "it was remarkable that preservation of the creativity center of Williams' brain allowed him to produce an astonishing volume of writing in the mid 1950s" [15].

In 1958, Williams survived another succession of progressively debilitating strokes. In addition, in late 1959, the emaciated but courageous Williams underwent a successful sigmoid colon resection for a malignant tumor in the New York Hospital. Williams went steadily downhill after the surgical operation, with additional small strokes, rendering him hardly able to read, with failing

WILLIAM C. WILLIAMS M. D.  
9 RIDGE ROAD  
RUTHERFORD, N. J.

April 12, 1954

Dear Captain Carter:

In this letter I include my autograph. Writers that have influenced me in the past are Ezra Pound, Whitman, Shakespeare. James Joyce, Villon and Keats played their part.

Sincerely yours

William Carlos Williams

Fig 2. Letter written by Dr Williams 2 years after a major stroke and right arm paralysis, typed with his nondominant left hand and demonstrating a tremulous signature. (Photograph by author.)

memory, even confusional—a condition lasting about 2 years.

On the morning of March 4, 1963, Flossie tried to awaken Williams in his room at 8:30 and found her husband, lifeless in bed, facing the wall. Her pediatrician son, Dr Bill Williams, confirmed the finding, death at 79 attributed to "cerebrovascular thrombosis." Williams was buried in Hillside Cemetery at Rutherford on a cold, rainy morning. The closed casket funeral service, simple, and without "a lot of religious stuff," as Williams had requested, was conducted by a Unitarian minister. Nothing from the Bible was read, rather the minister intoned to the Rutherford citizens Williams' frequently anthologized poem "Tract":

I will teach you my townspeople  
how to perform a funeral . . .  
No wreaths please—  
especially no hot house flowers . . .  
I think you are ready. Go now

Always generous to help young writers, Williams wrote, "I always answer letters" [1] and this author, having received a friendly letter from Dr Williams, can attest to this (Fig 2). However, he never forgot when people failed to respond to his letters. Upon the death of D.H. Lawrence, Williams wrote "An Elegy to D.H. Lawrence":

Once he received a letter—  
he never answered it—  
praising him: so English  
he had thereby raised himself  
to an unenglish greatness.

Williams Carlos Williams, a complex, multifaceted personality, challenged his readers that "the hidden core of my life will not be easily deciphered" [1]. In 1923, Marsden Hartley wrote of Williams: "I never saw so

many defined human beings in one being" [19]. A remarkable physician-writer, leading a double life, integrating two demanding careers simultaneously, and driven to achieve, William Carlos Williams has emerged as a dominant influence in American poetry. The lives of many writers are of great human interest and may exceed even their literary creations in enjoyment, even importance. Williams' prose and plays, with their strong autobiographical thread, are especially engaging, confessional, and revelatory of his persona. *A Voyage to Paganry* (1928), also autobiographical, is second in importance to his *Autobiography* in narrating his life. With *In the American Grain* (1925), Williams diagnosed the American character and culture, defined "Americanness," and revealed invaluable insights not only into American literature but also of himself.

Williams was regarded as a "windmill tilter," a prosaic anarchist whose iconoclasm and diversity baffled the academic ivory towers. Societal and critical indifference toward the modernist movement in art and literature continued through most of his life. Therefore, it is not surprising that Williams' recognition by the literary world was belated in spite of his remarkable originality and productivity. Williams was likened to Whitman in his use of colloquialism to create delightful and unique poetic forms. Writer Webster Schott noted that "William Carlos Williams freed American poetry from the irons of rhythm and meter" [20].

In his 20s, Williams intensely desired to achieve immortality through the world of literature, not by science alone. Although he became one of the most prolific of American writers, Williams authored only a single medical article, published in the *Archives of Pediatrics* in August 1913. He published more than 50 short stories, 600 poems, 5 plays, 4 novels, a book of essays and criticism, an autobiography, a five-volume epic poem, and much more. Few medical allusions appear in his poetry, unlike his short stories in which insights in the doctor-patient relationship are poignantly described.

According to Schott, Williams "laid the foundation of the most consequential one-man body of modern literature in American history—a total of 49 books in every literary form we know" [20]. Despite his diversity, Dr Williams always considered himself primarily a poet, but perhaps his short stories may eclipse his poems in time.

Poet-critic Randall Jarrell declared that Williams "was the last good poet of his generation to become properly appreciated." A decade after his death in 1963, Williams was recognized as a major American poet. In fact, his stature and influence has steadily increased over the past

4 decades, exceeding that of Eliot and Yeats. Master of the Chekhovian "slice of life" short story, Williams is now considered "the most important literary doctor since Chekhov" [21].

Ironically, it was not until after his death that he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry and the Gold Medal from the Institute of American Arts and Letters. The legacy of Dr William Carlos Williams, established among the great poets of our century, is secure in the pantheon of American literature.

## References

1. Williams WC. *Autobiography*. New York: New Directions, 1951.
2. Shapiro K. William Carlos Williams: The True Contemporary. In: *The Poetry Wreck, Selected Essays, 1950-1970*. New York: Random House, 1970:134.
3. Breslin JEB. William Carlos Williams: An American Artist. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985:4, 214.
4. Mariani P. William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked. New York: W.W. Norton, 1981:17-18, 557.
5. Williams WC. *I Wanted to Write a Poem*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1958:16.
6. Williams WC. Letter to his mother, Buffalo Public Library. In: Weaver M. *William Carlos Williams: The American Background*. Cambridge: The University Press, 1971:3-4, 20.
7. Marzan J. *The Spanish American Roots of William Carlos Williams*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994:52.
8. Williams WC. Three professional studies. *The Little Review* 1919; V(10-11):36-44.
9. Williams WC. Questionnaire. *The Little Review* 1929;XII(2): 87.
10. Williams WC. Preface. In: *Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams*. New York: Random House, 1954:XIV.
11. Nuland SR. Introduction. In: *Collected Stories of William Carlos Williams*. New York: New Directions, 1996:IX.
12. Burke K. Heaven's first law. *The Dial* 1922;72:197.
13. Williams WC. *The Great American Novel*. Paris: Three Mountains Press, 1923:10, 58.
14. Tashjian D. *William Carlos Williams and the American Scene—1920-1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978:20, 53.
15. Whittemore R. *William Carlos Williams: Poet From Jersey*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975:49, 343.
16. Williams WC. *The Build-up*. New York: New Directions, 1952:262.
17. Williams WC. *Selected Letters*. Thirlwall JC, ed. New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1957:255.
18. Williams WC. *A Maker*. *The Little Review* 1919;IV:38.
19. Hartley M. Letter to Alfred Stieglitz, October 9, 1923, Beinecke Library, Yale, cited in Tashjian p. 100, reference 13.
20. Schott W. Introduction. In: Williams WC. *Imaginations*. New York: New Directions, 1970:IX, X.
21. Ellman R, O'Clair R, eds. *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*. 2nd ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 1988:312-3.