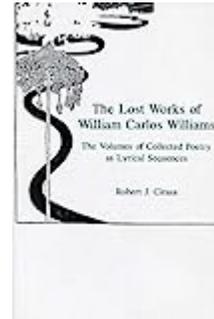




**Robert J. Cirasa.** *The Lost Works of William Carlos Williams: The Volumes of Collected Poetry as Lyrical Sequences.* Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995. 342 pp. \$49.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8386-3576-6.



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## William Carlos Williams and Poetry Sequences

Robert Cirasa's book examines the lyrical sequences that give unity and coherence to the major collections of poetry that William Carlos Williams assembled during his life. Citing *The Complete Collected Poems 1921-1931* (1934) and *The Complete Collected Poems 1906-1938* (1938) as the poet's effort to demonstrate that he was more than a "miniaturist" only capable of achieving occasional brilliance in an individual poem, Cirasa argues that Williams created a "lyrical super-sequence" in these two collections. That same impulse underlies the two collections Williams assembled in the early 1950s, *The Collected Later Poems* and *The Collected Earlier Poems*, yet Cirasa finds these volumes less successful as lyrical sequences, since Williams devoted less attention to their composition, having already found at that stage in his career "Paterson" to be the more appropriate vehicle for expressing the "profundity" of which an extended lyrical sequence is capable.

*The Lost Works of William Carlos Williams* is a valuable addition to Williams scholarship because it carefully documents how Williams structured his collections to be books of poetry with their own animating vision

rather than merely convenient compilations of his work. Cirasa's study is divided into three parts, with the first two devoted to extended and detailed explications of the "super-sequences" Cirasa finds in *Collected Poems 1921-1931* and *The Complete Collected Poems 1906-1938*. Yet Cirasa's work is not just a recovery of a "lost" aspect of Williams's poetic achievement—it is also an attempt to vindicate M. L. Rosenthal's approach to modern poetry in general. Drawing explicitly on the premises of Rosenthal's *The Modern Poetic Sequence*, Cirasa advocates an "evaluative" criticism founded on close and "sympathetic" textual analysis of the literary artifact.

If there is a problem with Cirasa's book it is that he seeks to champion the cause of "evaluative" criticism by discrediting virtually all post-structuralist theory. The Preface may alienate some readers in this regard. Indeed, one wonders why Cirasa felt the need to package his book with a not very enlightening polemic about the egregious errors of contemporary theory. An unfortunate adjunct to Cirasa's refusal of theory is perhaps his failure to engage the work of other Williams scholars. Although it is good to have a reading of the lyrical se-

quences in the collections that have been threatened with extinction by the fairly recent publication of a definitive edition of the poet's work (*The Complete Collected Poems*, 2 vols. 1986), it would also be useful to have Cirasa position his readings in relation to the rich body of scholarly discourse on Williams's poetry, especially since many of the poems Cirasa treats at length have been the subject of important studies by J. Hillis Miller, James E. Breslin, and Thomas Whitaker, to name but a few. Nonetheless, *The Lost Works of William Carlos Williams* may well present

an enduring contribution to Williams studies by virtue of its bibliographical research (schematized in three appendices) and its focus on the neglected topic of Williams's poetic collections in the 1930s as lyrical sequences.

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