To Elsie

By William Carlos Williams

The pure products of America
go crazy—
mountain folk from Kentucky

or the ribbed north end of
Jersey
with its isolate lakes and

valleys, its deaf-mutes, thieves
old names
and promiscuity between

devil-may-care men who have taken
to railroading
out of sheer lust of adventure—

and young slatterns, bathed
in filth
from Monday to Saturday

to be tricked out that night
with gauds
from imaginations which have no

peasant traditions to give them
character
but flutter and flaunt

sheer rags—succumbing without
emotion
save numbed terror

under some hedge of choke-cherry
or viburnum—
which they cannot express—

Unless it be that marriage
perhaps
with a dash of Indian blood

will throw up a girl so desolate
so hemmed round
with disease or murder

that she'll be rescued by an
agent—
reared by the state and

sent out at fifteen to work in
some hard-pressed
house in the suburbs—
some doctor’s family, some Elsie—
    voluptuous water
    expressing with broken

brain the truth about us—
    her great
    ungainly hips and flopping breasts

addressed to cheap
    jewelry
    and rich young men with fine eyes

as if the earth under our feet
    were
    an excrement of some sky

and we degraded prisoners
    destined
    to hunger until we eat filth

while the imagination strains
    after deer
    going by fields of goldenrod in

the stifling heat of September
    Somehow
    it seems to destroy us

It is only in isolate flecks that
    something
    is given off

No one
    to witness
    and adjust, no one to drive the car
