

William Carlos Williams (1883-1963) is one of the great modern American poets. His writing embodies his vision of a free, fresh, and simple language capable of apprehending the world directly, without literary allusion.

The texts of the outer movements of *The Locust Tree* are from Williams' short book of "improvisations" entitled *Kora in Hell*. The Greek goddess Kora, better known as Persephone, or by her later Latin name Proserpina, was the fair daughter of Zeus and Demeter. She dwelt not on Olympus, but within nature, a nature predating human agriculture. While picking flowers one day in a field in Enna, in what we now call Sicily, she was abducted by Hades, who made her his queen in the underworld. Grief stricken Demeter, goddess of the earth, allowed nature to go to ruin as she searched for her lost daughter. Responding to the anguish of the dying natural world, not least the anguish of the human race, Zeus intervened. Hades was forced to return Kora, but not before he was able to trick her into eating three pomegranate seeds, the effect of which was to compel her to return to the underworld once a year. Thus each year while Kora is united in the world with her mother Demeter, the earth is abundant with life, an abundance which fades to barrenness during her yearly sojourn in the underworld. Her story tells of the origin of the seasons, and is an allegory of spring. Perhaps we need her now more than ever before.

Williams writes, "March had always been my favorite month, the month of the first robin's songs signaling the return of the sun to these latitudes; I existed through the tough winter months of my profession as a physician only for that... I thought of myself as Springtime and I felt I was on my way to Hell (but I didn't go very far). This was what the Improvisations were trying to say."

The central movement combines Williams' two versions of another springtime poem, *The Locust Tree in Flower*. The music's fragmented rhythms follow the poet's line breaks; the unifying dramatic arch follows the gradually flowering tone and mood of the poem's first version, while the second version provides the opportunity for a musical reprise.