WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS AND PATERNON V

Tradition and the Individual Talent

By it they mean that when I have suffered . . . I too shall run for cover; that I too shall seek refuge in fantasy. And mind you, I do not say that I will not. To decorate my age. —I Wanted to Write a Poem

In the opening of the fifth book of Paterson it could be Stevens speaking, it could be Eliot. This Williams must have known when he began with an unmistakable reference to the rock of Stevens, the March of Stevens, and the birds of Stevens' last piece in his Collected Poems, which speak not prophecy but are the thing itself. And just a few pages later in Paterson V we hear the voice of Eliot's Four Quartets intoning "What but indirection / will get to the end of the sphere?" Certainly it is surprising that Williams should take this as his text, but it is even more surprising that in the last part of Paterson V he should expand the text into Eliotic testimony of religious experience and triumph over time and death:

The (self) direction has been changed

the serpent

its tail in its mouth

"the river has returned to its beginnings"

and backward

(and forward)

it tortures itself within me

until time has been washed finally under:

and "I knew all (or enough)

it became me . . ."

[I, iii]

Eliot and Stevens—these are the two poets in the American Modern tradition one would least expect Williams to honor. Yet honor them he does and, in fact, he could be said to join their ranks. For in the seven years between the publication of the fourth and fifth books of Paters-
son, between 1951 and 1958, Williams and his poetry underwent a profound change.

In 1951 Williams suffered his first stroke and was forced to retire. Three years later he published *The Desert Music and Other Poems*, a transition volume marked on the one hand by energy, confidence, and curiosity in the "local" and on the other by an almost desperate confusion in the face of an exhausted and weak old age. Of these two extremes, marked by "The Desert Music" and "For Eleanor and Bill Monahan," "The Desert Music" came first.

"I must gather together the stray ends of what I have been thinking," Williams wrote to Louis Martz after his stroke, "and make my full statement as to their meaning or quit." "The Desert Music," a long poem about his brief trip across the Mexican border in 1950, does just this. Written in the manner of the first four books of *Paterson*, it deals with essentially the same problem but accomplishes what they never could—it glorifies the city. In Mexico Williams finds the poetic line to celebrate this city of paper flowers and dried peppers, poverty and laughing young girls. Talking and walking, drinking and carrying on, here Williams is in the city, a real part of it, not, as he often is in the first four books of *Paterson*, a silent observer whose near-allegorical mission is literally to conceive its inhabitants. "Desert Music" is not a poem of reminiscence, of an agony of descent, or of memory, as some have read it, but a poem of action and characteristic Williams shoulder-to-shoulder contact with a living culture, the local, the real.

Why was this possible in Juárez and El Paso and not in Paterson, New Jersey? All these cities are stamped by poverty. But in the south Williams discovers a culture which is full of color, music, and a people who are alive, vital, and vibrant. The reason: these people are the descendants, the survivors, of the Aztec culture which Williams rapturously idealized and which, he had more than once mused, could have been "the pure American addition to world culture." Latins, Spanish Indians, Mexicans, displaced white Americans—what is most important is that these people have not divorced the soul from the body. As we see even in "Desert Music," Williams believed that it is from the association of the body and the soul—even a perverse association—that a healing and glorifying poetry of the city is born.
The scene, for example, is a tourist-trap dump of a bar. The form of beauty is "flagrant" (as it often is in Paterson), an un-American (yet more truly American) version of the female, lower class, with whom Williams is so obsessed in the first four books of Paterson. An old whore in a sequined G-string does bumps and grinds to the incongruous song of soul and love. But nonetheless, almost unaccountably, the body is linked to the soul, and from this "worn-out trouper from / the States" (from "slime") comes "so sweet a tune":

Andromeda of those rocks
the virgin of her mind . those unearthly
greens and reds
in her mockery of virtue
she becomes unaccountably virtuous .
though she in no
way pretends it .

What in the form of an old whore in
a cheap Mexican joint in Juárez, her bare
can waggling crazily can be
so refreshing to me, raise to my ear
so sweet a tune, built of such slime?

This is the music of poetry, "a protecting music." "I am a poet!" Williams writes triumphantly, "I / am. I am."

"The Desert Music" is Williams' strongest affirmation of both his power as a poet and the power of poetry as a "music of survival." Sadly, it is also his last muscular, masculine poem and as such would appear the appropriate sequel to Paterson IV, a better Paterson V than the poem itself. For Williams, the poem had always been the locus of the body and mind (or the imagination, as Williams often calls it), and this is achieved, with vigor, in "Desert Music." The triumph is all the more moving because Williams was struggling against physical odds; the constant fear is that the mind will be weakened also. Moreover, necessarily the relationship between the body and the mind (and it was always an intimate connection for Williams) must change, and thus we may not be surprised to see that after "Desert Music," Williams' notion of what a poem is also changes; the mind now lives first and foremost in words, not the body.
As we read in the poignant "To Daphne and Virginia,"

Be patient that I address you in a poem,
there is no other
fit medium.
The mind
lives there. It is uncertain,
can trick us and leave us
agonized. But for resources
what can equal it?
There is nothing. We
should be lost
without its wings to
fly off upon.

If Williams' notion of poetry changes with age and physical infirmity, we might also observe that so do his poetic mode and his poetic line (the physical ease of his triadic line has been explicitly linked to his difficulties in reading after his strokes by Jerome Mazzaro in his splendid study of the late poems of Williams). The fertile profusion of rhythms, the open form, the voices of everyday speech of "Desert Music"—all contract to the meditative religious chant of the not-so variable foot in "For Eleanor and Bill Monahan." In this strange poem Williams confesses to an anguish, weakness, loss of potency, and confusion about his sexual identity (something, it must be said, which he had rarely if ever felt before or admitted). In an almost self-pitying meditative address to the Virgin Mary he declares her (in, however, true Williams irreverent fashion) both "young and fit to be loved." But the lament is that he is not fit to do it. Not only is he "half man and half / woman," but worse, he does not have the will:

But I
am an old man. I
have had enough.

This must be understood as one of the most intimate of Williams' confessions. Pound he had charged with the sin of having developed "androgyneically from the past itself mind to mind." The sign of Pound's sin, Williams believed, was his refusal of the form of the
present and his hope for a return of "political, social and economic autocracy." This is, we could infer, what Williams feared for himself and for that reason he appealed for help from the Virgin Mary:

The female principle of the world
is my appeal
in my extremity
to which I have come.

O clemens! O pia! O dolcis!

Maria.

In *Journey to Love*, published a scant year later, it would seem that this appeal had once and for all been answered. The extremes of mood of the previous volume have disappeared, and in their place we find a calm persistence and pervading tone of reminiscence. Overshadowed by the world of memory, the world of particulars shrinks to an occasional window sparrow, a bus station drunk, or a look in his son's eyes. But by and large, "the hollows of the eyes," as he says in "Shadows," "are unpeopled." All no longer depends on the celebrated red wheelbarrow and its white chickens for, as he puts it in the major, and by far the longest, poem of the book, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," which he had originally conceived as the sequel to *Paterson IV* and later rejected:

Approaching death,
as we think, the death of love,
no distinction
any more suffices to differentiate
the particulars
of place and condition
with which we have been long
familiar.

The outlines are blurred, he says; they cannot help him know what he must know about his own death if it is to be "real." It is, in other words, not place, not particulars, which can give him either peace or meaning. Although too simple a formulation, we might say that his creed has become in a very real sense no longer the famous tenet "no ideas but in things" but the opposite—"no things but in ideas."
In this volume of poems, as its title suggests, it is a tender love which gives his world meaning. It is love associated with light and imagination, a trinity with which the Virgin Mary of “To Eleanor and Bill Monahan” could be said to have answered him. From this trinity of love, the memory of the asphodel takes on a significance which it is too frail to bear:

Light, the imagination
and love, in our age,
by natural law,
which we worship
maintain
all of a piece
their dominance.

The rhythms of “Asphodel” are leisurely and rambling. Here the feminine principle is no longer associated with sexual urges and strong rhythms of accumulation and release, but rather with the principle of duration, a long and lasting marriage. Significantly, in this poem the issue of sex, long a central preoccupation in Williams’ work, is not even a mere question. Journey to Love in fact is the first—and only—book in which it does not even appear. Perhaps for Williams sex had to die before the other could fully develop—first sex, then love. We know that this is the line of succession upon which he entered his marriage. Perhaps this is what he means when he writes:

You understand
I had to meet you after the event
and still have to meet you.
Love to which you too shall bow
along with me—

But this delicate balance of love, light, and the imagination with its too sweet interplay between love and the memory of the emblematic flower did not sustain Williams for long. Nor, I might add, does it hold our attention as poetry. We read it with more interest as an autobio-
graphical piece than we do for its lyrical delicacy or psychological truth. Although as readers we want to admire what we take to be Williams’ candor and wish not to be harsh with an old man’s bedlocked confessions, nevertheless to be honest we must question the quality of the poem in terms of both its artistic achievement and its moral dimension, for the two are explicitly connected in the poem. Certainly the poem has moments of lyric fineness and compression, but for the most part it is strung together on the loose and unconvincing principle of the Autobiography: one incident yields to another; Williams writes to keep on writing. Just as we do not learn in his Autobiography what the “hidden core” of his life is (and we suspect that perhaps he did not know either), in “Asphodel” we do not see how his absolution is won. He opens the poem asking for forgiveness from his wife (the symbol of their love, the asphodel, he writes in a touching phrase, has a “moral order”); he presents himself alternately as anguished and self-vaulting, and he closes the poem asserting that she has indeed forgiven him:

You have forgiven me
making me new again.

We want to agree, with some relief, but it is difficult to see the poetic means by which this forgiveness is gotten. I do not wish to beat an old man’s poem to death, but “Asphodel” raises a serious poetic problem. The long poem was not Williams’ strength, nor was, it must be admitted, prose. To achieve a basic transformation of feeling is perhaps a dramatic art which he did not possess. This point I will come back to later.

Nothing if not a consistently restless and courageous man, who perhaps overextended himself, Williams could not rest with the unchallenging sweetness of “Asphodel.” In 1958 Paterson V was published. Acclaimed a masterpiece—and that it surely is—Book V does, as few tire of pointing out, affirm-the-triumph-of-the-imagination-over-death-and-old-age. But, Paterson V, as this paean might lead one to expect, is not just a variation on the theme of “Asphodel.” This is his most complex meditative poem, and as a poem “du Vieux Sage” it differs radically from all others he had written. How does V depart from the first four books
of *Paterson*? Does *V* fulfill or disappoint our expectations of Williams? How can we understand the change which occurred between the first four books and the fifth? And how does the kind of peace which Williams makes for himself compare with what Pound finds in the *Pisan Cantos*, Eliot finds in the *Four Quartets*, and Stevens finds in *The Rock*? These are questions that are considered in this chapter.

I. TENOCHTITLAN AS THE AMERICAN UTOPIA

One is at liberty to guess what the pure American addition to world culture might have been if it had gone forward singly. But that is merely an academicism. Perhaps Tenochtitlan which Cortez destroyed held the key. That also is beside the point, except that Tenochtitlan with its curious brilliance may still legitimately be kept alive in thought not as something which *could* have been preserved but as something which was actual and was destroyed.—"The American Background"

A self-appointed creator of American culture, Williams understood his mission when he conceived *Paterson* in its four books as that of making the American city real, of bringing into being an articulate whole. As he put it in the preface:

> To make a start  
> out of particulars  
> and make them general, rolling  
> up the sum. . . .

By 1958 however, he had shifted from the provincial in the American grain to the Western universal in European art. If before his object was to make the American city real, in *Book V* his object is to make art real. Accordingly, in *Book V* the overlying allegorical structure—the poet as city—is flatly dropped. Williams is no longer a heavily populated Paterson wanting to give voice to his thoughts, the people. Rather he is a private person who has little to do with the noise of the city and all to do with the quiet of a museum. In *Book V* the tone is no longer predominantly that of aggressive pursuit of the city's geography, its workers, books, and Sunday afternoons. Instead it is meditative, reminiscent, and largely lyrical. The flat and jagged edge of prose has almost entirely disappeared, and with it has disappeared the con-
cern with American history. The American Indian is replaced by the huntsman and unicorn of medieval legend. The lower class, scarred, "cheap" black woman ("Beautiful Thing") is displaced by the aristocratic maiden of the French tapestries. Tradition, in short, supersedes, or at least surrounds, individual (local) talent.

What does this radical shift of priorities mean? It means for Williams failure in the attempt to make the local universal. It means failure in the attempt to realize in the American city a sustaining culture. It means, to use one of the dominant metaphors of the first four books, divorce from the city. Moreover it means an acceptance of the long-familiar and long-rejected position of Pound and Eliot—that the tradition of other cultures can give sustenance where our own wasteland cannot. Here the objection may be raised that Book V is to be understood simply as Williams' metacommentary on the art of writing in reference to the first four books of Paterson. But this hypothesis too easily avoids the troublesome problem of the subject matter and origin of the very two examples of art which he focuses on—the fifteenth-century French tapestries housed at New York City's Cloisters and Peter Breughel's Nativity. This is what Williams chose, not, as one might have expected from his American background, native American sources for his myths, or twentieth-century American painters and photographers (a Charles Sheeler or an Alfred Stieglitz, for example) for his art. In Book V it is as though he had never written his brilliant, precocious, and passionate book In the American Grain. It is as though he could no longer write a "Desert Music."

This being understood, the fruitful approach, in other words, is not to struggle with reconciling the unexpected ground of Book V with the rest of Williams' work, but to come to terms with the very significant differences which exist. And the suspicion inevitably occurs. Was Williams running off to the peripheries, as he had accused Pound and Eliot of doing? Would it be fair to characterize him as a "subtle conformist," as he himself had once characterized Eliot? Would it be accurate to say that in Book V Williams chooses caviar, not bread; that he reveals a taste for the exquisite which he had more than once associated with Pound? It seems fair to say he does.
The basic opposition set up in the whole of Paterson thus can be defined as the conflict between culture (American) and art, or alternatively put, the city and the museum. The two, it is clear, cannot be reconciled; neither can contain meaningfully or for long the other. Just why this is so has much to do with Williams' concept of the city and his notion of culture. Consider Paterson itself. The first four books are built on the almost mystical and twin belief that man is defined by the city which he has built and lives in, and that the city itself is a living organism defined not only by its parts (its people) but also by its relationship to its surrounding landscape as well. Like the twentieth-century visionary architect Paolo Soleri, Williams sees the city as more than a machinelike sum of its parts. There is an interpenetration between the city and water and land, an identification between city and a new kind of man. More importantly, the city is a work of art, a moral entity.

Thus Williams chooses a passage from Santayana as the epigraph to Book III, "The Library":

"Cities, for Oliver, were not a part of nature. He could hardly feel, he could hardly admit even when it was pointed out to him, that cities are a second body for the human mind, a second organism, more rational, permanent and decorative than the animal organism of flesh and bone: a work of natural yet moral art, where the soul sets up her trophies of action and instruments of pleasure."

A fitting introduction to Book III, perfect because it could not be integrated into the main text, only contrasted to it. For Book III turns on the contradiction between city and museum. Instead of "library" read "museum," a museum of books which the poet decimates by an all powerful blast of the imagination, which he destroys by fire, wind, and flood. "The Library is desolation, it has a smell of its own / stagnation and death": it is a prison of "Dead men's dreams" which threatens to absorb the artist, to black out his consciousness, to possess and oppress him in the past. For the books are hollow. Like the Puritans Williams describes in In the American Grain, they are shells only, they lack life. As he writes in familiar metaphor as late as 1954 in his preface to his Selected Essays, "Masterpieces are only beautiful in a tragic sense, like a starfish lying stretched dead on the beach in the sun."
The reason for this, he explains in "An Approach to the Poem," is that the work of art lives only in the period in which it is created. It has a finite historical life. The "monumental poems of the past," he says, mark the record of certain accumulations of human achievements; summations of all that is distinguished in man, the most distinguished, as far as we know, that those various ages produced. But those times came to an end leaving those works of art, those poems in their perfection, like complex shells upon a shore. Men lived in those poems as surely as fish lived in the shells we find among the fossils of the past. But they are not there now.13

Before Book V, Williams (unlike Eliot and Pound, for whom the literary tradition exists in space, not time) held to an historical view of art. In this context, then, it is clear that the library, the museum, acts to keep the poet from the city. And it is the city which for Williams is the object of the poem. As he writes in Book III:

The province of the poem is the world.
When the sun rises, it rises in the poem
And when it sets darkness comes down
And the poem is dark

In Book III what saves the poet from the museum and draws him back into the world? It is the form of the world, the sexual world, in the shape of the black woman, "Beautiful Thing."

But Williams was unable to make the city the province of Book V, the only book he left untitled, but which we might dedicate to the care and preservation of the museum. Paterson, that swill hole of democracy, was beyond saving. It could never be transformed into a Tenochtitlan, Williams' early vision of what the ideal American city had once been but could never be again. Williams' extraordinary essay on "The Destruction of Tenochtitlan"14 (which is written in a prose so charged with emotion as to be poetry) and his 1934 essay entitled "The American Background" together form the clearest—even luminous—statement he ever made about the city (culture). Tenochtitlan is a utopian city, whose people were infinitely gracious, whose ruler daily shared his food (his "natural wealth") with the people, and whose beauty was to be found in its markets of "onions, leeks, watercresses,
nasturtium, sorrel, artichokes and golden thistle" and "artifices" woven into architecture and clothing, not winnowed out as art and put away in a museum. It was a city whose tribe remained in touch with the primal ground and whose leader, Montezuma, was a poet, an American cacique who "was the very person of their ornate dreams, so delicate, so prismatically colorful, so full of tinkling sounds and rhythms, so tireless of invention."

Montezuma is the personification of the New World, not Prufrock, says Williams in his Prologue to Kora in Hell. Because Montezuma's Tenochtitlan, unlike the industrial Paterson, understood, and understood consummately, that culture is not a thing, but an act, not this or that isolated product of the artist but the entire process of adjusting to local conditions, of creating a community, a city, the process in fact of the first four books of Paterson, where emphasis is on the poet walking, talking, on art in the making as a way of life. "The burning need of a culture," says Williams in "The American Background,"

is not a choice to be made or not made, voluntarily, any more than it can be satisfied by loans. It has to be where it arises, or everything related to the life there ceases. It isn't a thing: it's an act. If it stands still, it is dead. It is the realization of the qualities of a place in relation to the life which occupies it; embracing everything involved, climate, geographic position, relative size, history, other cultures—as well as the character of its sands, flowers, minerals and the condition of knowledge within its borders. It is the act of lifting these things into an ordered and utilized whole which is culture. It isn't something left over afterward. That is the record only. The act is the thing.15

The implication is this: in a perfectly realized culture such as that of Tenochtitlan, art is so flawlessly integrated in the city that it disappears as a separate entity. Here the "pure" and the "real" (or the virgin and the whore, the two elements which Williams so desires to unite in Book V) merge. But just as Tenochtitlan collapsed "to be reënkindled, never, Never, at least, save in spirit"16 when it was conquered by the Cortez-rude, acquisitive people from Europe, so Paterson scarcely had a chance to develop a culture of its own. The "local" was exploited by such federal money-makers as Hamilton and sabotaged by the imposition of a culture purchased from without. And as cities in the United States grew and museums were built by robber barons to assuage their
guilt, Williams argues, the spirit of local community progressively disintegrated. Williams believed, in other words, that in the United States there was historically a pernicious relationship between the rise of the city and the founding of its traditional complement, the museum, which in this case housed an imported, not an indigenous culture. And the corrupting nexus between the city and the museum was wealth.

Thus if Williams’ purpose in Paterson was to make the local universal, to roll up the particulars into a whole, this is one reason why he ultimately failed. Historically he saw that the cards were stacked against him. For his poetics do not include the romantic belief of beholding the world in a grain of sand. The intervening term in his often-repeated tenet “The local is the universal” is culture, an indigenous culture, and the process is an historical one: Local yields culture yields universal. But an authentic, articulate culture could not be raised from the grounds of Paterson, polluted as they were by the industry-saturated Passaic. The city could not be made real.

So in Paterson V Williams came as close as he ever did to joining other Moderns in building a personal system—call it a mythology—to replace what had been lost in the course of the Nietzschean nineteenth century and the industrially polluted twentieth century. If he did not create a full-blown Yeatsian system, he did propose a kind of utopia to replace his lost Atlantis, the lost city of Tenochtitlan. What was missing in Paterson was the splendid element of social harmony and beauty found in Tenochtitlan or even in the vital music of Juárez, Tenochtitlan corrupted. What was missing was the union between the pure and the real, a union impossible either to find or create in one-dimensional mid-century America. What was missing, in short, was the visionary, for certainly there was more than an abundance of the “real.” And the visionary was to be found, Williams concluded, only in art—in, for example, Breughel’s painting of the nativity.

But Williams had his own sacred tenet. It was not an Eliotic union of the Christian Father, Son, and Holy Ghost he wished. Nor the Poundian process based upon the teachings of Confucius and resulting in the building of the city of Dioce “now in the mind indestructible.” Nor simple Stevensian contact with the real, something he had had all his life. For Williams it was first the union of virgin and whore:
As we saw in "Asphodel," it is survival and permanence, not the New, that are the values by which Williams swears in Paterson V. But they inhere no longer in the "local" marriage, but rather in the world of the imagination, or more precisely, the realm of the imaginary. It is neither the virgin nor the whore "which / most endures," both being defined in terms of time, either by what has not happened to them or by what has happened to them. It is not the creation of one out of the other, the making of a virgin from a whore, which could be said to describe the process of "Desert Music." It is instead a fusion of the two into one by the force of the imagination. Williams, in other words, abandons the historical world of Paterson for the timeless world of the imagination, which exists outside of it: the museum. Accordingly, his utopia is not a social construct but a personal image: the unicorn.

The union of opposites, the figure from mythology, the alchemical image of the uroboros—this is a strategy completely new to Williams, a class of images totally new to his poetry. If we understand his lifelong poetics as originating from the dictum "no ideas but in things" and read the late poem "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower" as a reversal of this, we see exactly how unprecedented this final stage of his development is. Neither "thing" nor "idea," the unicorn belongs to the realm of the imaginary. Granted, Williams had to locate another solution when he found that in Paterson the city could not be made real. Granted, there is a dialectical logic to the change between the first four books and the fifth. If in the first four he wanted to make what was living a sustaining fiction, in the fifth he wants to give a fiction life. If in Book III he destroys the library as the prison house of language, in Book V he exalts the living museum. But why did Williams move beyond or reject the "solution," the peace and contentment, he discovered in "Asphodel"? The central images of whore, virgin, and unicorn suggest an answer.
No man in my country has seen a woman naked and painted her as if he knew anything except that she was naked. No woman in my country is naked except at night. — Contact, IV

Of all the major American poets since Whitman, Williams is without question the most sexual of our major poets, consistently so, with abundant evidence ranging from the cover design of the 1920 Kora in Hell, which pictures an ovum surrounded by sperm, to the poet Paterson some thirty-odd years later treading the female ground of the park to "kindle" his mind. Williams' poetics—blunt as they are—he himself frames as a sexual poetics. When in his seventies he looked back at his beginnings, he specifically linked his desires for a non-English poetry, a local, American poetry, to sex:

I came to look at poetry from a local viewpoint; I had to find out for myself; I'd had no instruction beyond high school literature. When I was inclined to write poems, I was very definitely an American kid, confident of himself and also independent. From the beginning I felt I was not English. If poetry had to be written, I had to do it my own way. It all happened very quickly. Somehow poetry and 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.

He was, he disclosed in his 1951 Autobiography with the candor and openness he had always displayed toward the matter of sex, "extremely sexual" in his desires. And in that year, which also saw the publication of the fourth book of Paterson, he used the present tense: "I am extremely sexual in my desires: I carry them everywhere and at all times." "I think that from that arises the drive which empowers us all." Williams' particular version of sexual psychology was codified as early as the 1910s, elaborated in In the American Grain in 1925 and A Voyage to Pagany in 1928, and displayed allegorically in Paterson I-IV.

In a 1917 issue of the Egoist Williams advanced his idiosyncratic version of the Lockean proposition that sense experience is the basis
for our knowledge of the world. The male and the female have radically different sense experiences, he states, arguing that the female is naturally in touch with the earth, the ground, the concrete, fact, and that the male, having no direct link of his own with the earth, is naturally given to stargazing and daydreaming. The male, he therefore concludes, is driven by a kind of earth-envy to pursue the female and thereby possess the earth. "Man’s only positive connexion with the earth is in the fleeting sex function," he wrote, warning that "either sex must hold to his own psychology or relinquish its sense of reality."

This tragedy, of course, is exactly what Williams believed befell the Puritans, both sexes, and, through them, America. For the Puritans repressed, suppressed, oppressed the right to touch. Touch: the word and theme resound throughout *In the American Grain*. "It is this to be moral: to be positive, to be peculiar, to be sure, generous, brave—TO MARRY, to touch—to give," proclaims Williams. It is this contact with the ground, the land, the female body of America which the Indian possessed and through which, Williams asserts, the soul grows, the spirit of an individual and a place (whether a city or an entire country) develops. Given this, he argues that the liberation of the Indian residual in every American, the release of passion in every American woman, "might be the opening of wonders, of freedom to 'save the nation.'" He offers Daniel Boone, that "'great voluptuary,'" as an example of one of the few Americans who discovered America by undergoing the twin processes of discovering its land and the Indian within himself. Boone, says Williams, allowed himself to be driven by the sexual desires which characterize all men. "Because of a descent to the ground of his desires," writes Williams, "'was Boone’s life important and does it still remain loaded with power—to strengthen every form of energy that would be voluptuous. passionate, possessive in that place which he opened'" (italics mine).

But most Americans unfortunately followed the example of Washington and the penny-thrifty Franklin, thus neutralizing their native energy with an equal and opposite force of restraint. As a result the country as a whole suffered from a lack of touch. And from lack of touch followed a lack of closeness, a lack of generosity, a fear of
embrace, a brittleness of national soul. "From lack of touch, lack of belief," 27 Williams succinctly sums it up. For what is moral, he believed, grew out of contact with the ground. The two major themes of *In the American Grain*—America's historical repression of "touch" and its need for a culture of its own—are thus causally related. It is through a sexual approach to the concrete, Williams implies, that an authentic culture is created. Moreover it is through a sexual approach to the text, to writing, that a language is born. This is perhaps seen most clearly in *A Voyage to Pagany* where Williams describes Evans who "made a wife of his writing, his writing—that desire to free himself from his besetting reactions by transcending them—thus driving off his torments and going often to sleep thereafter." 28

Not surprisingly, it is this twin process which Williams chose as the rather crude allegorical structure for *Paterson I–IV*. Paterson, male, doctor and writer, personifies the city. The park, female, personifies the ground, both the land and the body. And the predictable problem is to bring the two together in a satisfying manner. The problem is to give real voice to the thoughts (the people) of Paterson:

Who because they
neither know their sources nor the sills of their
disappointments walk outside their bodies aimlessly
for the most part,
locked and forgot in their desires—unaroused.

[I, i]

To arouse the people, that is the problem. But as the poem progresses nothing could seem less probable. *Book I*: "The Delineaments of the Giants" pictures Paterson youth as sexually immature:

—unfledged desire, irresponsible, green,
colder to the hand than stone,
unready—challenging our waking:

[I, ii]

*Book II*: "Sunday in the Park" is an anti-Seurat scene of flagrant desire and frustration. "Frank vulgarity" is the best that can be expected from the working classes, what with some men too fat and
flaccid to move even a minor muscle and others unaroused and worse, unaware of the impulse of desire itself. By *Book IV*: "The Run to the Sea," the decay of healthy sexual relationships has spread to the upper classes. In the lesbian scenes ironically titled "An Idyl," Williams exposes sex as not just abortive or unrealized, but as unnatural. And it is either this, he implies, or nothing at all. For in the city, in the financial district, the people are completely stripped, "unsexed":

At the
sanitary lunch hour packed woman to
woman (or man to woman, what's the difference?)
the flesh of their faces gone
to fat or gristle, without recognizable
outline, fixed in rigors, adipose or sclerosis
expressionless, facing one another, a mould
for all faces (canned fish) this

[IV, i]

Yet throughout the first four books of *Paterson* Williams does present a model of a healthy sexual being who falters only once or twice, and that is Paterson (Williams) himself. There is no need to detail this since each and every page could stand as document. Paterson? "His mind drinks of desire." Let it suffice to point out that Paterson's explicitly sexual sensibility is revealed in his countless images of flowers and tongues of bees, pubic groves of trees, and pearl grey towers. In his sensitivity to the land (female) upon which he "instructs" his thoughts, focusing his mind on the concrete, on for example the recurrent, rhythmic, flaming flight of grasshoppers from which he again realizes that there is "no flesh but the caress!" In the letters from "C" which expose his sexual (if not sexist) approach to the text, or it could be said, his textual approach to sex. And finally in the scenes in which Williams dramatizes Paterson's actual physical involvement with women—in Paterson's insisting, in fact shouting, that the black girl he calls "Beautiful Thing" take off her clothes ("let me purify myself," he says), or in *Book IV*, Paterson's effort, though unsuccessful, to seduce the very young and somewhat virginal nurse Phyllis in his office.

With his sexual orientation to the world, Paterson is entirely unlike
the personae Stevens and Eliot chose for themselves in their profoundly personal late poems.

Sing me a song to make death tolerable, a song of a man and a woman: the riddle of a man and a woman,
says Williams in Book III. Such a song, sexual and stronger than any in Book V, appears in Book I. It is Williams’ version of the still point:

We sit and talk,
quietly, with long lapses of silence
and I am aware of the stream
that has no language, coursing beneath the quiet heaven of your eyes

which has no speech; to go to bed with you, to pass beyond the moments of meeting, while the currents float still in mid-air, to fall—
with you from the brink, before the crash—

to seize the moment.

We sit and talk, sensing a little the rushing impact of the giant’s violent torrent rolling over us, a few moments.

If I should demand it, as it has been demanded of others and given too swiftly, and you should consent. If you would consent

We sit and talk and the silence speaks of the giants who have died in the past and have returned to those scenes unsatisfied and who is not unsatisfied, the silent, Singac the rock-shoulder
emerging from the rocks—and the giants
live again in your silence and
unacknowledged desire—
And the air lying over the water
lifts the ripples, brother
to brother, touching as the mind touches....

[I, ii]

If Eliot could reach this peak of ineffable experience, a point where all
time is stopped, only through the rhythms of abstract language,
Williams can reach it only through the body, through sex, through the
union of male with female. Suspended beyond the world, beyond the
need for language and the desire for speech, Williams discovers in this
silence that the giants of the past live again.

At first this might appear a contradiction of Williams’ much talked
about mission in Paterson to invent the exact language to evoke the
people, an American idiom to find the rhythm of Paterson life. And it
would be if Williams’ search were interpreted, as it often is, on the
level of poetic technique—the variable foot et al.—and on that level
only. But Williams was not so narrow a man. In Paterson he wanted
also to dramatize the need for touch, for as we’ve seen it was from this
that a culture could be created. The touch of the mind must be sensual:

And the air lying over the water
lifts the ripples, brother
to brother, touching as the mind touches....

The process is this: from the sexual (sensual, local) to the cultural, to
the universal.

III. THE WOMAN IN THE MIND INDESTRUCTIBLE

Old men cut from touch.

“The Old Men”29

If the Williams of Paterson I-IV, a man in his mid-sixties, were to
be described, one would characterize him as a lusty old man. If one of
the questions he asked himself was

Doctor, do you believe in
“the people,” the Democracy? Do
you still believe—in this
swill-hole of corrupt cities?
Do you, Doctor? Now?

[III, i]

the answer he gave throughout those four books was, on balance, yes. Yes, he could embrace, desired to embrace, women, even though, in fact because, they did not embody classical (European) beauty. Their beauty was in defiance of authority, a quality Williams had singled out in "The American Background" as being quintessentially American.³⁰ And yes, because at the end of Book IV Williams in spite of it all could still head inland, toward other centers of culture. Yes, in short, because Williams in Paterson I–IV had a sexual hold on life.

But if we were to ask this same question of the Williams of Paterson V, we would have to answer no, he does not still believe in that swill-hole, now he wants to "avoid / the irreverent." Whereas in Book II he had enjoined himself to "Be reconciled, poet, with your world, it is / the only truth!," now he insists upon embracing other less tangible worlds, other centuries. And if we were to characterize him now it would be as the wise old man reminiscent of the elder Eliot, Pound, and Stevens, a calm figure who seeks to preserve and hand on tradition. Before Williams had instructed young writers to "write carelessly so that nothing that is not green will survive." Now he sees himself as imparting courage, answers, and his own tradition in order to get the young

    to foreshorten
their errors in the use of words which
he had found so difficult, the errors
he had made in the use of the
poetic line

[V, iii]

Why this change? Because the link between the body and the mind, sex and the text, had been snapped. And with the loss of touch, Williams lost his American background. He says as much in I Wanted to Write a Poem, published the very year Paterson V was published:
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... *Paterson V* must be written, is being written... Why must it be written? *Paterson IV* ends with the protagonist breaking through the bushes, identifying himself with the land, with America. He finally will die but it can't be categorically stated that death ends *anything*. When you're through with sex, with ambition, what can an old man create? Art, of course, a piece of art that will go beyond him into the lives of young people, the people who haven't had time to create. The old man meets the young people and lives on.31

"When you're through with sex, with ambition, what must an old man create?" We must not be hesitant to take this literally, for Williams was a very literal-minded man. Accordingly, the opening lines of *Paterson V* do not so much express a breakthrough for the poet, as they rather frame this very problem:

In old age

the mind

casts off

rebelliously

an eagle

from its crag

—the angle of a forehead

or far less

makes him remember when he thought

he had forgot

—remember

confidently

only a moment, only for a fleeting moment—

with a smile of recognitions

[V, i]

For some readers Williams is now triumphant, "less bound by his locality and his immediate present"; he now is free "from time and place."32 But when had Williams ever desired this? I read the passage this way: in old age, his old age, writes Williams, the mind attempts to rebel from the body, the rock which represents the poem. And it is a rebellion nearly successful because the body is almost completely passive, *but* fortunately a physical sign will occasionally restore himself
to himself. The very problem, in other words, is that his mind is no longer stirred by actual contact, by touch, by sex, but only by experience once removed—memory. The problem is a collapse of his world. The flesh of the female, the one indispensable element in his way of being in and with the world, has been removed.

How to define himself? How to adjust? A curious kind of narcissism confronts him:

—shall we speak of love
seen only in a mirror
—no replica?
reflecting only her impalpable spirit?
which is she whom I see
and not touch her flesh?

[V, iii]

The mood is that of melancholy, elegy. As he unsentimentally characterizes himself,

Paterson has grown older

the dog of his thoughts

has shrunk
to no more than “a passionate letter”
to a woman, a woman he had neglected
to put to bed in the past

[V, iii]

Much less neglect to put to bed, worse, he does not even manage to ask the name of his “Solitary Reaper,” his “To the One of Fictive Music,” the plain woman he sees in the streets. What does he want of himself? “Paterson, / keep your pecker up / whatever the detail!” What does he wish? He includes the long letter from G. S. telling in rushing, drunk-high prose about the whore in all-white, the virgin, bride, but this is no longer a part of his life. He translates a poem of Sappho’s but “a delicate fire” no longer runs through his veins.

What he desires is desire itself. What he wants is a vision. “The dream / is in pursuit!” he says, and although he is here referring to the making of an artist, the lines sum up his need as well. He needs a new
goal—and he defines it as the element of splendor. Or, to read the situation somewhat differently, he needs *to be* pursued. No longer able to *possess*, no longer active as he was in *Paterson I–IV*, now he wants *to be* possessed. But he has retired from the world of people. In the world of the first four books his dreams were the people themselves. Now he asserts:

Dreams possess me
and the dance
of my thoughts
involve animals
the blameless beasts.

[V, ii]

And in the third and final section of *Book V* he observes in the calm tone of the third person that "Though he is approaching / death he is possessed by many poems." To be possessed by dreams, by art, that is his desire. Desire, we might say, is in *Book V* (dis)placed in art. The calm he experiences, we might say, is not so much a finding of a balance he had never had, but a way of achieving a dynamic equilibrium he had once had with the world and lost. Since neither of his two models of perfection—that of Tenochtitlan on the social level, or that of the still point on the sexual level—are possible, he creates a substitute: the imaginary.

Williams thus moves from the "hot" society of *Paterson I–IV* where meaningful human exchange is defined for him in sexual terms (if not for the other characters) to the "cold" society of *Paterson V*, inhabited by himself, a few letter writers, a few works of art, and a few, only a few, memories (Williams is not given to much nostalgia here), and initially empty of the Woman he must create in order to create a role for himself.

In *Book V* he finds himself turning to tradition for models, or at least inspiration, because, following Pound's economic theories, in times past, there was local control of purchasing power. As he puts it, shorthand, in *Book IV*, "Difference between squalor of spreading slums / splendor of renaissance cities." The Renaissance? It stretches for him from at least the twelfth century (the century he attributes to the
fifteenth-century Cloister tapestries in which he imagines the people "All together, working together") to the seventeenth, to Brueghel’s three wise men who "had eyes for visions / in those days." And so did Brueghel, who knew what Williams found himself just learning, or just needing:

Peter Brueghel the artist saw it
from the two sides the
imagination must be served—
and he served
dispassionately

[V, iii]

Until Book V, if I may simplify, Williams had been concerned with one side only, the real. Now confronted with death (which on one level was very certainly the death of desire) Williams needed a living fiction. The triumph of his imagination was this: not to invest a few past masterpieces with life by showing just how concrete they were, but to work with traditional image clusters in a way unknown to him before and create from them a new language of the self within which he could survive. If before his was an unmediated vision, now he found it necessary to devise a system, or at the very least, assert a belief to stand between himself and both the world he could no longer touch and approaching death. Interpreted this way, the development of his poetic career is seen to be the very reverse of that of Wallace Stevens, who spent a lifetime imagining reality and only at the very end made the American breakthrough to perceiving the blunt edge of the thing itself. Like Stevens’ concept of the imagination, Williams’ “system” is not so much a strategy for putting himself in contact with the world of particulars—it does not act at all as a pipeline to the concrete—as it is a way of allowing the imagination to exert an equal pressure on the now intolerable force of reality, intolerable because it was either too much with him in the shape of death, or intolerable because it was not enough with him in the shape of sex. The imaginary is a way, we could say, of countervailing the all-too-sharp reality principle.

The three central images—virgin/whore, unicorn, and the uroboros—are distinctly related: the first two form an idiosyncratic
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religious symbol from which, we could say, the uroboros, a figure of wholeness, can be generated. Williams' desire, announced in the first section of Book V, is to build a "secret world" so that he can "get to the end of the sphere." In the third and final section he asserts that he has done just that:

The (self) direction has been changed
the serpent
its tail in its mouth
"the river has returned to its beginnings"
and backward
(and forward)
it tortures itself within me
until time has been washed finally under:
and "I knew all (or enough)
it became me."

[V, iii]

In Book IV Williams presented us with a modern-day industrial equivalent of the virgin/whore in the uneducated, unscrupulous, teasing Phyllis, who, it is clear, is qualified to be taken for a virgin and damned a whore, but for precisely the wrong reasons. As a counterpart to Phyllis, in Book V he postulates an ideal synthesis of the virgin/whore—that of mistress/wife—through a characteristic Williams mixture of the traditions of Christianity, courtly love, and Toulouse-Lautrec. Book V is dedicated to Toulouse-Lautrec because, as Williams observed in Book III,

Toulouse Lautrec witnessed
it: Limbs relaxed
—all religions
have excluded it—
at ease, the tendons
untensed

[III, i]

Williams' "religion," however, does include it—the sexual. For Williams, the virgin/whore unites both the innocent and the seductive in a sacred union. The virtuous woman gives herself like a gift, unhesitatingly, to her lover, as does the ideal whore. And the ideal whore is
a virgin, and the ideal virgin, Mary, mother and whore of the Holy Ghost. This virgin/whore is a purely imaginary construct. Since sex is no longer an affair of the body, it must exist in the mind:

—every married man carries in his head
  the beloved and sacred image
  of a virgin
  whom he has whored

[V, iii]

In this vision Williams identifies himself with the unicorn, legendary touchstone of virgins and long established symbol of Christ, a fabulous, solitary, ferocious, gentle, beautiful, melancholy, magical creature. We can assume that Williams chose the unicorn—which legend tells us appears freely only to wise men and is tamed only by virgins—as symbol for himself and the artist, as well as the symbol of what he himself pursued, because the unicorn, “la licorne,” is both “dame” and “demoiselle,” both whore and virgin, virginal in its whiteness and power of purification and whorelike in its possession of the horn. In French tradition the unicorn, although androgynous, is thus considered essentially feminine, an incarnation of the multivalent nature of woman. But Williams diverges from this tradition by casting the unicorn as male, thereby merging three in one in a new-found trinity, itself an image of wholeness, a virile analogue to the uroboros. In the unicorn, Williams thus finds an image for what was only a hypothesis in Book III (“Say I am the locus / where two women meet”) and fulfills a dream of Book IV:

To bring himself in,
  hold together wives in one wife and
  at the same time scatter it,
  the one in all of them
  Weakness,
  weakness dogs him, fulfillment only
  a dream or in a dream.

[IV, iii]

Thus from out of his long-held theory of the sexual origin of the text (whether it be a poem or a person, a city or a culture), in Paterson V Williams turns to the corollary that art is both male and female and
constructs an imaginary set to mediate between a diminished life and a coming death. From this point, theoretically he can re-member, return, re-awaken. Now his world can come round again: "The (self) direction has been changed." Although trapped, penned-up, and penned-in, he can face the "aging body," for he lives in a safe and secret world of symbols which "rolls back into the past":

Through this hole
at the bottom of the cavern
of death, the imagination
escapes intact.

[V, i]

In the fifth book of *Paterson* then, the poem becomes for Williams a personal instrument in a way that it had never been before. As late as 1950 he had defined the poem as having a social function. As he said then, "The poem to me (until I go broke) is an attempt, an experiment, a failing experiment, toward assertion with broken means but an assertion, always, of a new and total culture, the lifting of an environment to expression. Thus it is social, the poem is a social instrument—accepted or not accepted seems to be of no material importance." But in *Paterson V* the poem becomes first and foremost a means of personal salvation, not a vehicle for raising an American culture.

In *Book III* Williams had prophesied *Book V*:

The descent beckons
as the ascent beckoned
Memory is a kind
of accomplishment
a sort of renewal
even
an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new
places

[III, iii]

New spaces, new places—this is just what Williams makes in *Book V*. But the form this memory takes is not so much the memories of his own past—for these are few and fleeting as he himself admits. Nor
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would suggest, is it the larger field of the unconscious, although the unicorn and uroboros are indeed what we have come to call archetypal symbols. Rather this “memory” is that of Western consciousness objectified in European art from which Williams borrows a goal (the inclusion of the element of “splendor,” I have called it) and adopts, adapts a set of images for his own use. As I suggested earlier, this strategy sounds curiously like what Williams had accused Pound and Eliot of in Book I—of running off

toward the peripheries—
to other centers, direct—
for clarity (if
they found it)

loveliness and
authority in the world—

[I, iii]

And it is. But Williams’ understanding of what Pound and Eliot were doing was meager. If we compare the Williams of Paterson V with the Pound of the Pisan Cantos, the Eliot of the Four Quartets, and the Stevens of The Rock, we understand just how much his poem suffers in comparison.

As we have seen, the impulse of the long, meditative poem among these American poets is to find what will suffice in old age, or, as in the case of Eliot, what can be projected for an old age. And as a form it is impressive, primarily because its successes are hard won over a long period of poetic practice, but also because the emphasis is on process and becoming. Process: this by now has become a commonplace of criticism, but we must not let familiarity harden us to what should remain fresh. The meditative poem has a hidden dramatic form, and for this reason, insights can be revealed which are persuasive, moments can “occur” which are similar to Joycean epiphanies.

In Paterson V this is missing. For if Williams intended to adopt the meditative mode of the Stevens of The Rock and the Eliot of the Four Quartets, as indeed his allusions suggest and his age required, it is clear that he either did not understand it or his long life in poetry had not prepared him for an entirely new way of writing. Certainly the
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meditative mode was new to him. Earlier he had most often structured his poems in simple terms of anecdote ("This Is Just To Say," for example), portraiture ("Sympathetic Portrait of a Child"), the image ("Spouts") and/or combinations of the three, which tended to result in a fleshing out of the narrative line, upon which Paterson I-IV, however much it may look on the page like a modern collage, is bedrock built. Nor did "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower" provide him with experience in the strategy of the meditative poem (no matter how much we wish to be genuinely, not sentimentally, moved by it), being as it is a rather flaccid amble down an associational memory lane:

And so
with fear in my heart
I drag it out
And keep on talking
for I dare not stop.

But Paterson V falls into none of these categories. Williams drops the structural methods of the narrative and association and substitutes—what? What is the process by which he would win the discovery of the uroboros, symbol of integrations, wholeness? Although the reader can point to an Eliotic question in section one of Paterson V and an Eliotic assertion in section three, it is much more difficult to locate an underlying dramatic or rhetorical logic which allows Williams to make this affirmation. The truth is this—that Williams does not so much experience as assert. His purpose was dramatic, but he could not escape the tyranny of the object. In Paterson V he continued his old habit of description: he chose a brilliantly defined object—the tapestry which weaves the narrative of the unicorn—for his symbol, not something ineffable, irreducible to an object, such as Eliot’s notion of the still point.

In I Wanted to Write a Poem Williams said that those people who had accused him of writing antipoetry had prophesied that "when I have suffered... I too shall run for cover; that I too shall seek refuge in fantasy. And mind you, I do not say that I will not. To decorate my age."37 It would not be too outrageous to suggest that this is indeed just what he does in Paterson V—that he decorates a substitute world
with unicorns and flowers and a grim reaper and serpents gripping their
tales in their mouths as though they were so many paintings to be hung
on the wall of the text. There is something, in other words, curiously
unconvincing about Paterson V, and Louis Martz’s definition of the
goal (not the procedure) of meditative poetry helps us understand what
it is. For Martz the meditative poet “seeks himself in himself in order
to discover or to construct a firm position from which he can include
the universe.”38 Williams, cut off from his lifelong concept of himself,
divorced from the ground (the sexual) and thus divorced from his
native culture (the American grain), sought himself outside himself,
ever reaching a still point from which he could include the universe.
This was his failure, but his courage was also in this: the infirmities of
age demanded that he do what he had not done before, and confronting
those weaknesses, he invented something new.

1. William Carlos Williams, I Wanted to Write a Poem, ed. Edith Heal (New York:
2. Letter from William Carlos Williams to Louis Martz, May 27, 1951, in The
Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams, ed. John C. Thirwall (New York:
3. See, for example, Sherman Paul, The Music of Survival: A Biography of a Poem
4. William Carlos Williams, “‘The American Background,’” Selected Essays of
5. William Carlos Williams, Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems (New York:
New Directions, 1962). This volume also contains the poems of The Desert Music and
Journey to Love.
University Press, 1973) is a superbly researched, impressively thorough, and clearly
written full-length study of Williams’ late poems. Given the time lags between re-
search, writing, and publication, I must confess that I had not read Mazzaro’s book at
the time I conceived this chapter. It must be clear to any reader familiar with his book
that we have much in common. Mazzaro’s study links “the phenomenal world of the
older writer with the dreams he had in his youth”; in addition, we both agree that “the
line between artistic form and life in Williams . . . often blurred” and therefore need
not be obsessively dealt with as a thorny theoretical problem. I refer the reader
especially to Mazzaro’s fascinating work on the figure of the wise old man in
Williams’ writing and his chapter on the relationship in Williams between sex and
writing.
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9. See, for example, Joseph Riddel’s brilliant study of Williams entitled *The Inverted Bell: Modernism and the Counterpoetics of William Carlos Williams* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974). Riddel argues that *Paterson V* is the discourse of the method of *Paterson* (‘‘that consummate metapoem in Williams’ canon’’ [p. 35]). For Riddel, the figure of the virgin and the whore represents the poet’s act of naming. But here I see a problem. Riddel interprets the counterpoetics of Williams as inhering in his recognition that we must abandon the search for authority (which Riddel understands as the lost center, presence, the origin, plenitude), and thus he understands the unicorn’s pursuit of the virgin as one that is consistently thwarted and ‘‘must repeatedly involve itself in a violation of the object it desires—the inevitable whoring of the virgin’’ (p. 260). But when was this violence disagreeable or lamentable to Williams? The pursuit, it seems more likely to me, is of women, not the Word, the missing center. The problem here is raising every image to a level of abstraction which the text can not persuasively carry.

10. ‘‘Prologue to *Kora in Hell,*’’ in *Selected Essays*, p. 21.


16. ‘‘The Destruction of Tenochtitlan,’’ in *In the American Grain*, p. 32.


18. Williams could be said to be a forerunner of the Tradition of the New. See his ‘‘Prologue to *Kora in Hell,*’’ in *Selected Essays*, p. 21: ‘‘Nothing is good save the new. If a Thing have novelty it stands intrinsically beside every other work of artistic excellence. If it have not that, no loveliness or heroic proportion or grand manner will save it.’’


23. *In the American Grain*, p. 121.

24. *In the American Grain*, p. 185.

25. *In the American Grain*, p. 130.

27. *In the American Grain*, p. 128.


30. As he wrote in "In the American Background," in *Selected Essays*, p. 143: "One might go on to develop the point from this that the American addition to world culture will always be the 'new,' in opposition to an 'old' represented by Europe. But that isn't satisfactory. What is actually is something much deeper: a relation to the immediate conditions of the matter in hand, and a determination to assert them in opposition to all intermediate authority. Deep in the pattern of the newcomers' minds was impressed that conflict between present reliance on the prevalent conditions of place and the overriding of an unrelated authority."


32. See, for example, Walter Sutton's "Dr. Williams' *Paterson* and the Quest for Form," in *The Merrill Studies in Paterson*, ed. John Engels (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1971), p. 55.

33. This identifies one of the basic structural weaknesses of *Paterson I-IV*. Williams characterizes Paterson the man and poet as being sexually aware and aggressive, but describes Paterson the city as being the opposite.


37. *I Wanted to Write a Poem*, p. 38.
