PATERSON AGONISTES:

A STUDY OF THE BIBLE AS INTERTEXT IN WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS' *PATERSON*

BY

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A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

This thesis proposes to study the ways in which Biblical language and structures appear transformed and adapted in the long poem *Paterson* by William Carlos Williams. Although Williams' monist theology is far from what may be considered orthodox, *Paterson* is in fact suffused with the language of the Bible, and the figure of Paterson may be read as a composite figure whose Biblical antecedents include such poets, prophets, and patriarchs as David, John the Baptist, and Isaiah. Williams' revisions of the Biblical narratives concerning these figures, and of the language of worship and prophecy ascribed to them, serve to underline Paterson's authority as a prophet of the new American Word, while foregrounding the specific ways in which Williams' revisionist theology departs from the orthodox.

Paterson Agonistes:

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Introduction: I Wanted to Write a Different Poem

"I will sing a new song unto thee, O God." - Ps. 149.9

Before the poem he wanted to write there was the poem he wanted to forget, the silenced Word. That was in the beginning.

The event which became the earliest memory of William Carlos Williams, as reported by Paul Mariani in his biography of the poet, occurred as follows:

> . . . he stepped off into the white, only to find himself disappearing into it, and then he heard himself crying and his mother burrowing down after him to retrieve him. . . . it was a merging with an alien, formless, frozen world: a plunge . . . a short leap . . . and a retrieval. (2)

This experience may well have been, as Mariani suggests, a primal experience for Williams, one which defined for him the method, the territory, and the inherent terror of knowing; perhaps it was, but this was not an experience with language. The boy in the snowdrift grew up to want to write poems--to want to write a new and original poetry that would speak truthfully of the ancient and eternal, would clear for himself a space among the ranks of strong precursor poets, and would earn for himself a place by surpassing the sway of their powerful orthodoxies. It is therefore worth closely considering Williams' own description of the first poem he learned, as recorded in *I Wanted to Write a Poem* (*IW*). This rhyme he still remembered at the age of seventy-three, although he could remember no nursery rhymes whatsoever:

> I do remember my grandmother teaching me my prayer. It was:
>
> Gentle Jesus, meek and mild
> Look upon a little child
>
> Pity my simplicity . . .
> And the rest of it. I can still say it word for word. But at one point
> I refused to say it every night . . . expecting to be struck dead. (2)

In this memory (which, transformed into poetry, surfaces also in *Paterson* 2), orthodox theology and

orthodox poetics inextricably combine. The memory is of a poem that is also a prayer, one which Williams once refused to recite and perhaps therefore has never forgotten. He refused, decades later, to finish the poem for his interviewer, but he made sure she knew that he remembered all of it.

Certainly its themes recur in Williams' work. The first two poems in his first published book are entitled "Innocence" and "Simplicity" (*IW* 8). The prayer Williams remembers likewise emphasizes the "simplicity" of the little child even as it implies that "innocence" belongs only to "Gentle Jesus," and is his to give or withhold to the abject, pitiable child in need of salvation. The poetry of Williams, in contrast, recognizes and celebrates child-like "simplicity," but departs from orthodoxy when it comes to defining, or locating, "innocence." The long poem *Paterson* (*P*) may in fact be read as a quest to redefine, relocate, and reclaim "innocence," to reunite it with "simplicity," and through them both to create "beauty" (*P* 3), thereby achieving immortality for the poetic spirit without the abjection of repentance or the subjection to a divine Other. Williams' subsequent comment would suggest as much: "The first line in the first poem reads, 'Innocense [sic] can never perish.' I really believed that then, and I really believe it now. It is something intrinsic in a man" (*IW* 8-9).

As part of the very same interview, intriguingly enough, Williams also reported the following: "And Pop read passages from the Bible, over and over. Isaiah was my favourite. I was not influenced by the New Testament" (*IW* 2). Williams' critics and biographers appear to have agreed a bit too fully with the latter assessment. For instance, although Mariani also mentions that William George "would read from Shakespeare" and from "Gilbert and Sullivan" (11), he does not mention the Bible. The index to his generally comprehensive biography, moreover, contains 8 references to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 33 to William Shakespeare, 45 to Walt Whitman, over 100 to T. S. Eliot, over 200 to Ezra Pound, and none to the Bible, to religion, or to Christianity. The same absence of references characterizes Reed Whittemore's biography of the poet.

But Williams' disavowal of influence is so final and absolute that it must invite questioning, even were it not juxtaposed with a contradictory assertion, supplementing the completeness of the first: "I went to church to hear the readings and the music" (*IW* 3). Readings from the Gospels, the Book of Acts, and the Epistles (more rarely from Revelation) are all selections from the New Testament that, along with readings from the Old Testament (especially the Psalms), constitute the schedule of readings in any Christian church. We know that Williams was raised in the Unitarian Church, which emphasizes "the value of personal development, of a creed earned from Biblical study set within the experience of life," according to Ron Callan, an emphasis which requires "attempting to balance scriptural authority and human reason" (3). This attitude of independent inquiry is also part of Williams' legacy from Ralph Waldo Emerson, from whom, as Conrad writes, "Williams seems to have appropriated much" (21). This independence often leads, in Williams' writing, to results that look like heresy, paganism, or both. For instance, of his poem "Choral: The Pink Church" (published in 1949, the year after *Paterson 2),* Williams says, "It *is* a Christian poem, very definitely," though his readers and critics at the time of publication found it shockingly Communist (*IW* 76).

In fact, for direct evidence of the New Testament's influence on Williams' writing we need look no further than *Paterson 5,* actually published in the same year as *I Wanted to Write a Poem.* For *Paterson 5* contains a passage quoted directly from the New Testament:

> The Gospel according to St. Matthew, Chapter 1, verse 18,--Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Miriam was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. (*P* 228)

And *Paterson* as a whole is suffused with the language and imagery of both Testaments. I do not suggest that Williams was a Biblical scholar; nor does this thesis pretend to Biblical scholarship: the goal is to read *Paterson* in the context of the more familiar Biblical passages and in light of their orthodox or popular readings. By these passages I mean the ones commonly taught in Sunday school,

rendered into rhyme in hymnals, recited during services, stitched into samplers, and alluded to by hundreds of writers, the passages which until very recent decades could be assumed to be familiar, or at least recognizable, to a writer in English and his readers. Of course, I cannot prove that Williams was familiar with any of the particular Biblical passages cited in this paper (with the obvious exception of Matthew 1.8). My emphasis will be on the ways in which structural similarities and differences between the two texts serve to foreground and clarify certain themes in *Paterson*. I have followed Williams' lead in referring to the King James Version of the Bible, since that is the one he quotes in *Paterson 5*, besides being by far the most influential translation of recent centuries.

It is worth noting, to begin with, that even where Williams does quote from the Bible he insists on misreading it, for example renaming Mary as "Miriam." It may be that Williams makes this change for the same reason that he denies the New Testament any influence: both acts indicate in their very inaccuracies his poetic anxieties and ambitions. If this is so, then the New Testament is one of the palimpsests on which *Paterson* is written--hence Williams' attempts at erasure of earlier entries. In any case it is the nature of the revisions that is particularly interesting. They are too consistent one with another, and too effective, to dismiss.

The Bible, like *Paterson*, is a collection of books written over many years, containing a multiplicity of voices and of genres. In both texts may be found narratives of individuals and nations; inventories of property; poetry of despair and disillusionment and eroticism; parables, prophecies, and praise. Of course there are marked differences too. Obviously *Paterson* is much shorter. In form *Paterson* is at once more orderly and more chaotic: each book of *Paterson* is divided into three parts and each book is about the same in length; on the other hand, the Bible does not fragment and mix genres in the collage style of *Paterson*, nor, of course, does it employ the triadic foot or other typographical devices favoured by Williams.

Like many of the books in the Bible, as well, *Paterson* is named for its protagonist.

Moreover, neither book invites--or even allows--one to read it as a text of systematic theology. While either may invite interpretation and close reading, neither provides an orderly, coherent explication of one system of thought developed from the beginning through to the end of the text. The Bible might even be considered chaotic if compared to *Paradise Lost,* Milton's attempt to systematize its theology. Williams' resistance to what Allen Dunn terms "repressive coherence" (54) in general, and to the monolith of English culture in particular, has, I believe, led him in some respects to privilege Biblical models over those of Milton and others of the canon.

It may, then, be worth observing the similarities in form between *Paterson* and the Bible if only as a caution against committing too fully to reading the former as "this epic narrative" (Callan 142). Audrey T. Rodgers calls *Paterson* Williams' "American *Paradise Lost* [*PL*]," arguing that, "Like Milton's great epic, it has to do with a paradisal past, the loss of Eden, and the search for its recovery; in sum, with life, death, and resurrection" (95); Peter Schmidt locates *Paterson* in the Romantic epic tradition. Certainly a case may be made for Paterson as an epic hero, and I would not argue that "the poem is," as Rodgers asserts, "structured on a recurrent theme of death and rebirth: descent and ascent, dispersal and metamorphosis" (96), although this in itself is not sufficient to claim a strong allegiance for *Paterson* to the epic style: one could say the same thing of the Bible.

In fact, the first obvious gesture in the direction of the epic which Williams makes in *Paterson* is one of dismissal, again combining acknowledgement with an attempt at erasure. This "reply to Greek and Latin with the bare hands" (*P 2)* begins with a refusal to invoke the Muse, a refusal to identify the Muse as being outside or above the poet:

> "Rigor of beauty is the quest. But how will you find beauty
> when it is locked in the mind past all remonstrance?"
>
> To make a start,
> out of particulars
>
> . . . .
>
> Sniffing the trees,
> just another dog (*P* 3)

The opening lines, appearing as they do in quotation marks, contain the question asked, the assignment given by an unnamed Other (who is also the self) to the subject, the poet of *Paterson*. In answer to the challenge, Paterson refuses to begin an epic, Invoking no "aid" to his "advent'rous Song" (*PL* I.13). He will, instead, make his own "start," out of the "particulars" at hand. This refusal has the effect of foregrounding Williams' commitment to keep all the action of his narrative on Earth, instead of visiting all three realms of Earth, Hell and Heaven as an epic poet is expected to do.

Like Milton, though, Williams does announce a belief in poetry as prophecy, and his claim is substantiated, in part, by the ways in which *Paterson* recalls and transforms certain aspects of the Parable of the Sower and the Seeds. This is one of the better-known parables, reported in two of the four Gospels and one of the longest in any. Consider Paterson the man: father (*pater*) as well as son, divine giant, homely human, and begotten, proclaiming word. Not only does Williams' protagonist resemble the protagonist of the New Testament significantly, but Williams also speaks of his literary *alter ego* in terms that recall Jesus' teachings: "Even though the greatest boon a poet grants the world is to reveal that secret and sacred presence," writes Williams in his "Author's Note" to *Paterson*, they will not know what he is talking about" (*P* iv). Jesus speaks in very similar terms to his disciples, after they have asked him to explain his Parable and just before he does so:

> Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them [the Pharisees] is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, by hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing. (Matt. 13.13-15a)

It is apparent that Williams' "Note" contains several echoes of Jesus' *caveat.* Their presence in the contemporary text have several effects: they validate Willliams' position that people often "will not know what" a wise man is talking about, they enhance the air of authority with which he speaks, and they challenge the reader to accept the role of disciple in which the text positions them. Finally, the reader is invited to identify Williams with Jesus as one whose task is to sow precious seed on thorny

ground, to find a language appropriate for an audience who are equally hard of hearing and of heart.

Like Jesus, then, who in the Gospels claims that many Old Testament passages apply to him and offers his disciples fresh interpretations of familiar passages (see, for example, his expounding of "Moses and all the prophets" on the road to Emmaus, Luke 24:13-27), Williams offers *Paterson* as a revolutionary but authoritative interpretation of the originary sacred text. Even the collage form of *Paterson* may be considered an exaggeration of the Bible's "disorderly" aspects, an organizational strategy necessary to Williams' goal of revealing (without explaining) that "secret and sacred presence" to an uncomprehending world.

The Bible, too, engages in revision, of course. One of the most interesting parallels between it and *Paterson* is the relationship later parts have to those written earlier. The New Testament, as its name reminds us, was added to the Old (just as the rest of the Old Testament was added to the Pentateuch). This was done by the Fathers of the early Church who considered the books of the New Testament to constitute an authoritative supplement to the Old Testament: that which completes something which had earlier appeared to be complete. In like manner, *Paterson* may be read as a New American Testament intended by Williams to take its place as the (next) final authority. The Gospel of John begins again, imitating the opening of Genesis; *Paterson*'s opening is likewise "cosmogonic" (Rodgers 97). As Williams explains, "The concept of the beginning of a river is of course a symbol of all beginnings" (IW 74). *Paterson 5*, furthermore, was added to the text after *Paterson 4* had already completed the project, and opens with a "reawakening" of " the world" (*P* 207). Harold Bloom refers to this kind of poetic act, which is both completion and antithesis of an authoritative precursor text, as *tessera* (14). Read in such a way, *Paterson* could be seen as Williams' New American Testament, or, one might say, his New Tessera.

None of this is to suggest, of course, that Williams' theology, his notions of eternity, of the divine, of sin, purity, proper forms of worship, or of redemption, could be considered anywhere near

orthodox by any Christian Church; nor, more particularly, is Williams' celebration of passion and intuition consistent with the Unitarian Church's emphasis on logic and learning, although he draws on the heritage of both. For one thing he derives, too, from other sources, Greek mythology being an example.

The influence on Williams' writing of Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* generally, and the Kore/Demeter myth particularly, may account, at least in part, for the difference identified by Callan between Williams and Henry David Thoreau. The two are very like each other, Callan argues, in that (in a significant departure from Emerson) "neither shirks . . . the experience which defies logical definition" (35). A point of departure between the two which Callan identifies is the fact that one explicitly "recognizes a supreme value, God" (35) and the other does not. Callan concludes that for "Thoreau the end is redemption, for Williams a showing. For one, it is an opening into spirituality; for the other, the spirituality of intercourse" (32-33). I would suggest that Callan has been slightly misled by "Williams' inclination to view all experience in sexual terms" (Rodgers 7). If, indeed, Williams does try to secularize the moment, to find whether "that sense of otherness, that purity of image, is viable without a divine connective" (Callan 49), he is also equally committed to seeking redemption, and *Paterson* does not always succeed in its attempt to keep all of experience, revelation, and redemption on the horizontal axis. Williams, like an American Jacob, wrestles with orthodox dualism, attempting with only imperfect success to construct instead a monist philosophy that locates all we know and all we need to know of either heaven or hell right here on (American) earth, and right now in the fully-experienced moment.

As I have mentioned, *Paterson* is structured on a recurring theme, or more accurately on several recurring themes, such as "continuity, rebirth, and the cyclical pattern of the seasons in nature and in man" (Rodgers 8). But there is another cyclical pattern to consider: that of Oedipus, wanting to requite the Father, to replace him, to beget where he was begotten. One of Williams' literary

fathers is Walt Whitman, with whom, in an act Callan considers vital "to any father and son relationship, Williams finds fault . . ." (55). This need to "find fault" with the Father appears to be an essential part of Williams' process of clearing space for his own poetic offspring, and it is evident in his treatment of many father figures in *Paterson*, including God.

Daniel Morris misses the point, I believe, when he writes that "Williams' version of authority is like Whitman's in that he claimed attention for his poetry through having noticed facts that, because they are a part of human experience, should be known by others. This brand of authority," Morris concludes, "is also what left him in a crisis of authority from the point of view of poetic custom" (42). Morris may be right about the crisis of authority but I cannot agree with him about its cause as he states it here. First, he neglects to take into account Williams' Romantic idealism which asserts, as Carl Rapp explains, "the predominance of the self-conscious artist over natural facts as well as over the artistic medium" (77). Second, Morris does not appear to be giving Williams appropriate credit for his passionate commitment to the poetic line: it is naive to hold that any poem can just present facts of human experience without suggesting any particular point of view, as if selection and arrangement of details, as if form, were irrelevant. Williams, who criticized Whitman for the lack of structure of his *vers libre*, who wrote numerous essays and letters on the subject of lines and invented the triadic line, could never think it either desirable or possible for poetry to function in such a way. In one of his letters for instance, published in *The American Idiom* (*Idiom*), Williams writes:

> Be assured that measure in mathematics as in verse is inescapable, so to the fixed foot of the ancient line including the Elizabethans we must have a reply: it is the variable foot which we are beginning to discover after Whitman's advent. (146)

Williams' "crisis of authority," as Morris calls it, may be more profitably read as the result of his poetic Oedipal complex, not of any fear that his chosen form might deny him a distinctive point of view from which to speak. I am not primarily seeking to read *Paterson* psychoanalytically, but any

book which announces its content as "sacred," written by an author who is committed to the task of heralding, if not conveying, a reply to "the ancient line including the Elizabethans," has some significant precursors to wrestle with. Furthermore, many of the Biblical allusions in *Paterson* refer to kings, fathers, and sons. This being the case, it appears to me useful, if not essential, to investigate father imagery generally in Williams' work, before proceeding with my investigation of the function of particular Biblical images and structures.

In his willingness to name Whitman as a precursor Williams reveals traces of other father figures by whom he has felt much more threatened, and to whom perhaps he has in some cases felt more obligated as well. *Leaves of Grass*, unlike the New Testament, is one precursor-poem that Williams does not hesitate to name. "'It all began with Whitman of course,'" is another of Williams' sweeping statements about the genesis of his poetry (cited in Callan 63). Williams ascribes the greatness of Whitman's achievements to:

> the enunciation that "The common ground is of itself a poetic source." This is the summation of the direction of Transcendentalism from Emerson through Thoreau to Whitman and it offers Williams an invaluable source to resist sterility and death. (Callan 72)

Unlike Whitman, however, Williams' father, another locus of the poet's literary beginnings, refused to share "common ground" with his son, a refusal which seems to have come to represent "sterility and death" in Williams' writing.

"My father," says Williams, "was an Englishman who never got over being an Englishman. He had a love of the written word. Shakespeare meant everything to him" (IW 2). William George Williams' firm commitment to the English tradition and the poetic ideal of the Victorian sublime, which found no place in poetry for "the tawdry and the mundane" (Mariani 12-13), meant that he was, to the end, fundamentally opposed to his son's "poetic creed" (IW 70). The younger Williams was equally committed to his Americanism: "From the beginning," he asserts, "I felt I was *not* English" (IW 14). Nevertheless, that first book of poems was edited by his father. The first printing

had "Pop's corrections all through it and suggestions for changes," says Williams, most of which he followed (IW 10). In fact, until his father's death, Williams "turned to him" with his "literary problems" (IW 20).

The fact that William George "insisted quietly but firmly on remaining a British citizen all his life" (Mariani 9), combined with his commitment to the requirements of his job, which often took him traveling for months at a time, may account for the fact that Duty seems strongly identified with the repressive aspects of the Father in Williams' work. Admiration and resentment for the Father and his Law are combined in "Adam," Williams' poem about his perception of his father, first published in *Adam and Eve in the City* (1936), and reprinted in *Selected Poems* (SP):

> He grew up by the sea
> on a hot island
> . . . .
> Thence he was driven
> out of Paradise--to taste
> the death that duty brings
> so daintily, so mincingly,
> with such a noble air--
> that enslaved him all his life
> thereafter--
> . . . .
> Englishmen
> . . . .
> whom duty has marked
> for special mention
> . . . .
> But the Latin . . .
> . . . .
> . . . never sees
> or seldom
> what melted Adam's knees
> to jelly and despair--and
> held them up pontifically-- (SP 99-102)

In this poem, published 18 years after the death of Williams' father and 10 years before the publication of *Paterson 1*, Williams uses elements of the Genesis and *Paradise Lost* narratives of Eden and the Fall to explore the subjects of liberty, death, duty, temptation, and patriarchy. The

deadliness of duty is foregrounded through Williams' device of assigning it the role traditionally assigned to sex: for this Adam it is duty, not desire, that tempts him to his death and exile, that leads him out of an already erotic Paradise. Duty is identified both with Satan and with Eve in its tempting femininity, bringing death to Adam "so daintily, so mincingly." The feminine aspect of duty, in this edenic context, adds further complexities to the construct of duty here: as represented in this poem, it is also Adam's Muse and his divine Father: duty is female as Eve but also female as Milton's Urania, who is one with the Holy Spirit and therefore one with the Father.

What we have, then, is an innocent, obedient son, who dies because the father requires it of him. This identification of the Adam in the poem with Christ is reinforced by the poem's New World setting, which makes clear that the subject of this narrative is not the "first" Adam. If he is, then, a "second Adam" he is to be identified with Christ, for "the second Adam" is what St. Paul terms Jesus. Like Christ, too, this English Adam who is obedient to the Father even unto death experiences a martyr's Passion, a *kenosis*, a wilful emptying out of self that both melts Adam's knees and gives them strength, holding them up "pontifically."

Duty, then, not desire, is the set-up, the temptation (to disobey the desire that would keep him in Paradise) and also the Law of the (English) father that, according to Williams, leads an English Adam or Christ to his death. "Keep your pecker up," is what Williams reports his "father used to say" to encourage his sons (*Idiom*, 19). However, Williams' use of the adverb "pontifically" tells us that the kind of English stiffening Adam's sense of duty gives him, the stiffening of knees and of upper lips that keeps a man on the straight and narrow, keeps a man in line, is uncreative, deadly and destructive. This kind of stiffening is, as I seek to demonstrate in Chapter 2, associated in *Paterson* with bridges and with Popes, inflexible and sterile representatives of overly-structured systems.

What locks beauty "in the mind," then, is in "Adam" the Law of Duty, which keeps a man

from recognizing that he is already in Paradise. That, in his father, Williams found duty combined not only with English culture but also with deadly judgement is made dramatically clear in the following:

> So much did the shadow of his father's judgment on what he was doing disturb him that, for several nights after William George died (Christmas Day, 1918), Williams himself had a dream of his father that seems to have both devastated and--paradoxically--freed him at last. In the dream he could see his father descending a flight of stairs, preoccupied as he had been in life with his duties. (Those stairs, Williams would later come to realize, were a composite both of the Judgment steps from which Pontius Pilate, in Tadema's painting, *Ecce Homo*, had summoned a condemned Christ to stand before an angry mob, and the broad steps that led down from his father's New York office.) "He was bare-headed and had some business letters in his hand on which he was concentrating as he descended," Williams remembered. "I noticed him and with joy cried out, 'Pop, so you're *not* dead!' But he only looked at me over his right shoulder and commented severely, 'You know all that poetry you're writing. Well, it's no good.'" (Mariani 14)

Both as dedicated business man and as Pontius Pilate, the pontifical Father of Williams' dream narrative stands in judgement, demanding the death of the creator son. The structure of this narrative bears a strong resemblance to the essentials of Williams' first epic poem (or his only one, depending on whether we consider *Paterson* to be his second), about a king who kills himself and his entire family in order to destroy his ineffectual son, the prince. About that early poem Mariani comments, "It points to Williams' deeply felt need to erase as effectively as he could his dependence on his parents and to strike out on his own into a brave new world" (54). I would add that, if we choose to read it in Freudian terms, the dream points equally to Williams' fear of being erased by his parent. The same desire and the same fear are significant issues in Williams' dream narrative, produced years after the youthful Williams destroyed his *Endymion* imitation and years before the writing of *Paterson*, in which they continue important topics. So I am not really sure what Mariani means by suggesting that the dream "freed" Williams, unless he was freed, as may be the case, to begin a ten-year gestation with "Adam." But it is his poetry and not his psyche which I seek to analyze, so I will leave that question to his biographers.

In Williams' dream, then, or more accurately his *story* about a dream, the figure of the poet may be identified with the son of Adam, the Christ, condemned. Pontius Pilate (that same Pilate of the "mocking stone bowels" whom "E.D." accuses Dr. Paterson of resembling in one of the letters included in *Paterson 1* [*P* 28]), is now identified with the Father. Thereby he becomes a symbol of English culture generally and of English duty specifically, the Duty which to many Victorians, reeling from Darwinism, was all of Christianity left in which they could believe, but which Williams represents as murderous. This English culture which demands such obedience is the Law that was sacred to William George Williams, that kept him stiff; kept him a working stiff; it is the law that threatened to lead William Carlos Williams to *rigor mortis*, leaving him, instead of tumescent, just another stiff. In Freudian terms, the Law's threat is the threat of castration. In Williams' terms, castration frequently represents the poet's loss of his creative power, which he feels to be divine.

Much of this is suggested by *Paterson*'s opening phrase: "Rigor of beauty" (3) suggests the rigor of a disciplined, studied craft, and it might also suggest to a medical doctor that medical term, "*rigor mortis*." Writing, to Williams, is both discipline and discipling: a commitment to the death; a potential martyrdom, but one which the poet must face proudly under his own strength.

Influenced also by his mother's teachings and his Unitarian Sunday School teachers, Williams in his youth did see himself as a potential Christ, though I am aware of no evidence that he consciously thought of himself as a potential martyr. What we know is that he "was determined to be perfect" (Mariani 20). This perfection, which his mother exhorted him to pursue, Williams believed to be achievable: he was taught in Sunday School that, "As for Jesus, . . . if he was divine, it was not by any special gift of paternity, but because of the divinely human spirit within him, . . . a concept . . . that as a young man he thought he could emulate by truth telling" (24). *Paterson*, too, is concerned with the poet's burden of proof, with Paterson's constant challenge and struggle to prove that he has within himself that beauty of divinity, self-engendered.

Paradoxically, although the poet must, according to Williams, be the father of his own divinity, he must still convince Pontius Pilate to validate him Williams identifies the judgemental, abandoning aspect of the Father with many cultural institutions and their representatives, but chief among them is T.S. Eliot. He is identified with the Father through his refusal to own, to recognize, the common American ground he and Williams once shared: this became for Williams the poet the symbol of the one unforgivable sin:

> William George's refusal ever to adopt the place where he had begotten and raised his sons--that "Oedipus complex,'"as William Carlos himself called it, between an English father and his American son--was to assume macroscosmic implications as the son gradually took on, as he saw it, no less than the entire received English tradition in the figure of T.S. Eliot and the English Departments of every major university, both here and in England. (Mariani 11)

We know Williams resented Eliot deeply. "He was looking backward," Williams says in explanation; "I was looking forward. He was a conformist, with wit, learning which I did not possess" (IW 30). But it would be incorrect to conclude from this that Williams was not interested in learning from the past, even though he himself helped nurture the myth repeated by Edith Hill in her introduction to *I Wanted to Write a Poem*, who says of Williams' poetry that it may be "identified with no literary ancestors, as independent as the American idiom he believes in so passionately" (v). She continues to describe the development of his poetic style as moving from "imitation at first, through dissatisfaction in imitation, and finally" to "bold pioneering" (viii). This would imply that in his mature writing Williams leaves all influences behind. He does not, nor does he wish to, although, as I have sought to demonstrate, he is selective about which influences he will acknowledge.

Williams' interest in explaining the present in terms of the past is evident in, for example, his writing of *In the American Grain*, and Bryce Conrad reports that Williams rails against what he perceives to be the fact that "'Americans have lost the sense . . . that what we are has its origin in what the nation in the past has been'" (cited in 18). In the same paragraph in which he rebukes Eliot for looking backwards, Williams adds, "I was proud to be associated with writers of the past" (IW

30). In fact, Williams' work evidences a strongly felt need to make sense of the American past and of the ancient world; it just may not be quite as compelling as his need to reject the prescriptions and proscriptions of the 600-year-old English heritage.

Thus it is not Eliot's respect for the past but his abandonment of the American present that angers Williams so, for he feels that Eliot "had rejected America" (IW 30). It is this abandonment, analogous to Milton's rejection of Anglo-Saxon syntax in favour of Latinate syntax, that engendered Williams' belief that "In fact Eliot was himself another Milton: an insidious barrier to the younger writers just then coming into their own" (Mariani 1982, 571). Anything but Englishness, to Williams, may, it seems, be forgiven: At one point he comments almost in surprise that Robert Lowell's rhymed couplets "should have been repugnant" to him, but "you couldn't call them or him English" (IW 97), which fact apparently renders them acceptable.

We may, then, read Milton, Williams' father, all universities, and the increasingly Anglo-Catholic Eliot as united in William's imagination into a collective representative of "the old order," the Fathers who rejected America and thereby rejected Williams' poetic creed. Inextricably joined with them is, I would add, the writing of the Bible, strongly identified with William George and with T.S. Eliot, and thus to Williams a piece of literature almost as English as King James.

What, then, does he do with such a powerful literary presence? Orthodox theologians and weak poets, like the author of the children's prayer which has become at once so firmly entrenched in Williams' mind and so firmly rejected by it, may imitate; William Carlos Williams will fight to swerve away from the straight and narrow path, the party line, of any orthodoxy. *Paterson* is in many ways a revisionist text, and it certainly is so in relation to the Bible. Williams invokes and adapts several Biblical narratives to establish his own mythology and to demonstrate its validity.

Paterson, then, may be read as Williams' version of the poet's quest for the perfectly beautiful poem which is also the perfect prayer. Like that small boy so many years ago, however, this

poet's prayer will not be for mercy. Nevertheless, the figure Paterson himself is less a Messiah than he is an imperfect prophet, living a life in service to the Word but anticipating the arrival of what Stephen Tapscott refers to as "a redeeming language" (206), an American perfection which is as yet unarrived. As Paterson laments, the poet is too educated to achieve--or more accurately, release--the artistic purity of the primitive or the infant. But with the prophet's compulsion, he must try, and with the resistance of a Prodigal Son who chooses not to return, he must celebrate and transform his failure. Williams is much more confident in his criticisms of the Pharisees among his acquaintance than he is in his validation of any potential saints, and Paterson himself is a composite figure whose Biblical antecedents include David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jonah, John the Baptist, Noah, Jacob/Israel, and Joseph. Williams also invites the reader to consider whether Paterson might also be a type of Jesus, that the Holy Spirit of poetry might dwell within the humble body of this man/text Paterson, but he does not--at least not consistently or confidently--claim it to be so.

Chapter One

Drunken Poet, Dancing King: Paterson the Psalmist's Poetry of Worship

"And David danced before the Lord with all his might." - 2 Sam. 6.14

Williams explicitly identifies Paterson as both king and lover ("I, Paterson, the King-self, / saw the lady") in *Paterson 5* (234). He also combines the roles of king, lover of many women, and worshipper in the Paterson described dallying adulterously in *Book Four*. "Let us read, said the King lightly," describes Paterson speaking to Phyllis, just before he takes "her nipples gently in his lips" (163-4). The syntax of Paterson's opening invitation, "Let us read," suggests further that this act of kingly love is intended as an act of worship. The phrase recalls--in order to replace or improve upon--that other ritual invitation, "Let us pray," just as Phyllis' body recalls to Paterson, and replaces for him, a sacred text as object of worship.

David and his son Solomon, both kings, both lovers of many women, both committed to the worship of God, are between them considered responsible for most of the content in the Old Testament books of poetry: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and The Song of Songs, this last the most erotic book in the Bible. Many of the images and structures with which Williams explores key notions of worship derive from Psalms and The Song of Songs, although they are significantly revised to support his monist philosophy.

In *Paterson 4* we encounter an instance of form and language clearly borrowed from the Psalms, consisting of more-or-less regular verses followed by a refrain in Hebrew:

> --and to Tolson and to his ode
> and to Liberia and to Allen Tate
> (Give him credit)
> and to the South generally
> *Selah!*

--and to 100 years of it--splits
off the radium, the Gamma rays
will eat their bastard bones out who
are opposed
Selah! (183)

The term "*Selah*," according to Henry H. Halley (whose popular *Bible Handbook* was first published in 1927), is uncertain of translation but may indicate a musical interlude between verses (249). It is found in the Psalms a total of 71 times, and its frequent use indicates a recognition on the part of the Psalmist of a concept central to *Paterson*: that there are times when worship must move beyond words. With the word "*Selah*" spoken, speech is silenced; the Psalmist stops his own words so that his audience may hear the non-verbal voice of the instrument move into the space the poet's word has prepared for it.

Although the rest of the content of the above passage may not at first glance appear to bear any resemblance to Biblical language, consider the following passage from the Bible:

The Lord is known by the judgement which he executeth:
the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. *Higgaion.*
Selah.
The wicked shall be turned into hell . . . (Ps. 9.16-17a)

Predicting the downfall of the ungodly is one thing a Psalmist likes to do. Other passages in *Paterson* resemble or recall the poetry of the Bible in numerous ways: they make poetry out of acts of seeking understanding, inspiration, salvation, and vindication; they call for the language of worship to be supplemented with nonverbal expressions; and they make poetry out of the necessity of making poetry, either seeking or exhorting others to find a new poetics with which to adequately praise an ancient Divine. One of the most common phrases to be found in the Psalms, other than "*Selah*," is "O sing unto the Lord a new song" (Ps. 96.1) and its numerous variations (see, for example, Ps. 33.3, Ps. 40.3, and Ps. 149.9). In *Paterson*, likewise, the poet is committed to singing "a new song," a commitment which, even as it is "new," is, paradoxically, both very ancient and very orthodox.

One noteworthy difference between the two "*Selah*" passages quoted above, a difference

which appears repeatedly between passages in *Paterson* and their Biblical precursors, is that Williams does not mention "the Lord." His poet indicates a righteous indignation and anger which is strongly reminiscent of David's, but the source of retribution for Williams is "the Gamma rays": earth-based, impersonal and amoral forces. The objects of David and Solomon's anger are mere wicked mortals, so their anger is tempered by faith in God's retribution (not in every psalm or passage, but in their poetry taken as a whole). Since they believe that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 111.10, Prov. 9.10), it is the wicked who need to learn to fear, and whose salvation is promised in the same aphorism; mercy, redemption, all are possible to imagine in a dualist philosophy which posits the divine as someone whom they conceive of existing outside of themselves and whom they consider to be eternal. For Williams, in contrast, a man partakes of the divine, of the eternal, through the working of his active imagination.

The conventional reading of The Song of Songs is that it offers erotic love between a king and his bride as a metaphor of the love between God and his people. True worship, for the psalmist and his son, constitutes bringing oneself before God in an attitude of fear and love combined, *as if* approaching one's beloved. Williams likewise constructs worship as the combination of fear and desire, but for him sex is not only the metaphor: it is the act of worship itself, for the object of his worship is the flesh and the world of experience which it exemplifies.

The Judeo-Christian Father has, however, been replaced in *Paterson 1* with three "giants": the somnolent city-self Paterson, and the other two who exist in Paterson's imagination, brought to life as he is aroused: "Earth, the chatterer" (39), source of the Falls' vitality and inspiration, and the giant who will "grind" men's "bones" (23) with his empty language, whom Williams characterizes as "a history that has . . . fangs" (22). Worship, for Paterson at least if not for the more primitive libidinous figures in the text, is as much concerned with resisting the deadly giant of authority as it is with partaking of the divinity of the cthonic father. Since Williams, unlike David or Solomon, does

not believe in an Other who can forgive a repentant servant, he represents mediation between the two giants as highly problematic and at the same time quite crucial.

Julia Kristeva, in her essay "A Holy Madness: She and He," identifies a theme in The Song of Songs which I believe to be key in *Paterson* as well, and which is reinforced in Williams' poem by the presence of the Biblical elements. This is that love, literally erotic love, is "represented in The Song of Songs as the powerful antidote for death" (87). The opening of The Song of Songs contains suggestive parallels to Williams' description, near the opening of *Paterson*, of the embrace between the male giant Paterson and the female mountain. Paterson "lies on his right side" (6):

> And there, against him, stretches the low mountain.
> . . . .
> . . . Colored crystals the secret of those rocks;
> farms and ponds, laurel and the temperate wild cactus,
> yellow flowered . . facing him, his
> arm supporting her, by the *Valley of the Rocks*, asleep.
>
> Pearls at her ankles, her monstrous hair
> spangled with apple-blossoms . . . (8)

The positioning of the lovers is a mirror image of the pose described in the Song of Songs: "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me" (2.6). Both passages also use images of hills and flowers to describe the lovers: "The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills," exults the bride (Song Sol. 2.8), who describes herself as "the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys" (2.1). To her the bridegroom replies, "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice" (Song Sol. 2.14).

I have no arguments with those who identify the Mountain as Demeter, the female principle (see, for instance, Rodgers, 30): there can be no question that the myth of Kore powerfully influenced Williams' writing from the very early years of his career. However, the Song of Songs intertext underlines Williams' ideas about the sacredness of sexuality, besides helping to establish the giant

Paterson as divine, since The Song of Songs is generally taken as an allegory of the love between God and his people.

Now, this divinity, this giant Paterson, "lies in the valley, . . . Eternally asleep," while "his dreams walk about the city where he persists incognito" (6). Although the narrator of *Paterson 1* is not the giant, by imaginatively observing the "things" in which all ideas exist according to Williams (*P* 6), he enters into the dream of Paterson the giant, and begins to think his thoughts. The first two books of *Paterson* convey many scenes which the poet lovingly visits with his imagination, but in which he is not, and may or may not ever have been, literally present. Contemporary and historical events quite distant in time lose their distinction, as the poet's imagination makes each moment live, for him. As he penetrates the secret of each moment with his phallic imagination, his world opens within himself so that he contains it:

> the city
> the man, an identity--it can't be
> otherwise--an
> interpenetration, both ways. (3)

In fact, the text implies that the sleeping giant's dreams depend as much upon the man's penetration into his thoughts as they do upon the inspiration of the voice of the Falls.

This insistence on the interpenetration of man and giant, of concrete fact and vital imagination, neither of which, according to Williams, can exist without the other, is one of the ways by which the poet challenges dualistic modes of thought. In *Paterson 2* this time it is the giant who penetrates the park with his imagination, and thereby becomes an individual:

> Outside
> outside myself
> there is a world,
> he rumbled, subject to my incursions
> . . . .
> which I approach
> concretely--
> The scene's the Park
> upon the rock,

female to the city

--upon whose body Paterson instructs his thoughts
(concretely) (43)

For the remainder of *Paterson 2* Williams describes the giant Paterson as being literally--concretely--present in the scene, walking through the Park, "himself among the others" (43). Just as the people of the city are (only) the giant's thoughts (9), so now is the giant present, a concrete imagination among his physical thoughts.

Through the figure of Paterson the giant, then, Williams offers in part his reply to the Psalmist who considers worship to consist of a mortal addressing the immortal. In Paterson Williams portrays a temporal being who enters eternity from time to time--from moment to moment. He becomes, partakes of, the eternal, in every moment in which his divine human imagination fully worships its beloved. The eternal, according to Williams, is not something outside of or after this time lived here. This is what he means by his comment that "Everything exists from the beginning" (cited in *IW* 39): eternity is realized in the flux of the eternal present, an "*up*roar of water falling / and righting itself to refall filling" (*P* 97, emphasis added). Like the water of the falls, experience is constantly pouring down on its way to "the hungry sea" (*P* 201) that "sucks in all rivers" (*P* 200); but at the same time it rises, swirls, and floats, in a paradoxical state of continuous "rise as well as descent" (*P* 23).

Thus Williams affirms both the importance of an active, vital imagination and the primacy of "things," but such a paradoxical situation does tend toward solipsism. The obverse of the coin being tendered us here might read, "No things but only ideas." Bloom describes this tendency toward solipsism as typical of the modern poet writing out of his anxiety of influence (13). Whereas King David experiences despair, triumph, or salvation, takes actions that constitute great leaps of faith, discusses these experiences afterwards with himself and with God and thereby creates poetry (bears poetic fruit), Paterson's despair, triumph, and salvation are only realized, only become reality, insofar

as his phallic imagination is able to locate and release the beauty (both beloved bride and fruit of the embrace) that, too, is already part of the poet, located "locked in the mind" (*P* 3). In other words, Williams maintains, in what may be one of the more remarkable tightrope acts in *Paterson,* both that the imagination must be unleashed, sent out upon all the world (all of experience and all of nature) to embrace and make love to it, *and* that the proper object of the imagination's attention (whose goal is to father the poetic spirit upon the self) is the same mind from which it springs.

The end of worship, then, in Williams' view, is identical with the end of poetry: "'To refine, to clarify, to intensify that eternal moment in which we alone live,' and for which there 'is but a single force--the imagination'" (cited in Callan 66). Intensity as experienced in sexual desire is, in *Paterson*, both a metaphor and an example of the sort of worship that Williams is propounding: speechless awe, an over-riding impulse to make contact, and terror. For instance, he describes "Frazer's Golden Bough" as:

> a prayer such as might be made
> by a lover who
> appraises every feature of his bride's
> comeliness, and terror--
> terror to him such as one, a man
> married, feels toward his bride-- (74-75)

It is, furthermore, only as a result of such a response that, in Williams' view, the long-awaited poetry may be fathered, and that moments of eternity may be realized. Both past and future, as represented in *Paterson*, live eternally in the moment, in any moment, in which the imagination invents them (fathers them forth) anew; and nothing exists, a man dies and so does his world, in any moment in which he fails to approach his life with attentive desire.

However, when Paterson partakes of the eternal flux, when he hears the voice of the Falls, his giants are roused and he must mediate between the two figures who, like representatives of the two aspects of the giant at the top of Jack's beanstalk, are both the source of his sustenance and the threat of his destruction. One resolution which Williams offers in *Paterson* is to replace

consummation with unconsummated arousal as the ideal, most intense intimacy to be experienced with that which is being worshipped.

For his exploration of this theme, too, Williams draws on the images and structures of The Song of Songs. Like his mirror-image positioning of the lovers, Williams' concept of the relationship between desire, absence, and presence may derive from The Song of Songs but operates by significant reversal and inversion of the Biblical elements.

The second theme identified by Kristeva is that love, as portrayed in the Song of Songs, is actually sustained by the lover's absence, by the act of fleeing, the search, the mystery. This erotics of absence, argues Kristeva, introduces the theme of incarnation:

> Sensuality in the Song of Songs leads directly to the problematics of incarnation. The loved one is not there, but I experience his body; in a state of amorous incantation I unite with him, sensually *and* ideally. . . . As intersection of corporeal passion and idealization, love is undisputably the privileged experience for the blossoming of metaphor (abstract for concrete, concrete for abstract) a well as incarnation (the spirit becoming flesh, the word-flesh). (94-5).

Although marriage, polygamy and even rape, rather than unfulfilled longing, are the dominant symbols in *Paterson* of divine "interpenetration," the poet does seek out situations that are sexually arousing yet unfulfilling. These, however, are antithetical to the situations described in The Song of Songs: whereas the bride in Solomon's poem experiences idealized desire and its imaginary consummation in the absence of the beloved (*e.g.* Song Sol. 5.8), Paterson tends to experience ideal desire in its thwarted consummation, in the presence of the beloved. For example, the episodes in *Paterson 4* which describe the affair between Dr. Paterson and the (technically) virgin Phyllis satirize, on the surface, the sterility and hypocrisy of such women. It is one of Williams' tenets that "no woman is virtuous / who does not give herself to her lover /--forthwith" (*P* 229). But the fact that Paterson chooses repeatedly to return to Phyllis suggests another reading: the *jouissance* of unfulfilled desire is actually what Paterson seeks.

Phyllis, in the role of the questioning Other, confronts Paterson with a question which the

reader will likely agree is a very good one: "Look at us! Why do you / torment yourself?" (*P* 158). Paterson ignores her question at the time, but returns to it in a later conversation, attempting explanation once with, "I can't / think unless you're naked" (168), and then again saying (possibly in a tone of bitter irony, given the pun), "I like coming here, I need you" (169). In deferring and revisiting the question, Williams replicates Paterson's treatment of Phyllis in his narrative structure. Furthermore, Williams describes his own attempt to "penetrate" women using similar language of approach and withdrawal. "This was a period in my life when I was tremendously interested in women," he says of 1938. "What made them tick? It was a fascinating experimentaton. I would draw back from them and try to write it down" (*W* 64).

This paradigm certainly appears have significance for Williams. As I suggested earlier, it may represent a kind of compromise between fear and desire, but we should remember that Paterson's acceptance of Phyllis' half-given gift does constitute, in Williams' terms, an act of worship. Consummation is too much like closure: it is the completion, the certainty, that may render a man, paradoxically, sterile or barren; that leaves such men, according to Williams, with "minds like beds always made up" (*P* 4).

At this point I should perhaps clarify that it is not Williams' valuing of solitary reflection that is antithetical to the practices of the psalmist or his successor. For instance, David, not unlike Paterson, appears from his lyrics to make a practice of making poetry while lying in bed. Many of the Psalms describe the narrator at home, alone, in the night, reflecting upon his experiences and making poetry out of the act of reexamining his memories with his imagination (not often, however, "in tranquillity"). This is much the same methodology endorsed by Williams in *Paterson*. The Psalmist often speaks of reliving experiences both grievous and joyful: "I am weary with my groaning; all the night I make my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears," he asserts in Psalm 6 (v. 6). In quite a different mood, he exhorts his audience to "be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds"

(Ps. 149.5). Similarly, Paterson recommends that one "Go home. Write. Compose" (*P* 84), imitating the example of "Mr. / Paterson" who "has gone away / to rest and write" (9).

Where Williams swerves from this meditative model is in his emphasis on preceding meditation by interrupted intimacy. Drawing close, and then drawing back: this is one method which *Paterson* offers the artist of ensuring that his Muse will remain always both whore and virgin, as he requires. In other words, the text suggests that Paterson is inspired by Phyllis precisely *because* she will not let him take that final, perhaps fatal, plunge. Perhaps, indeed, Williams is suggesting that the poet's *jouissance* comes from his refusal of what Roland Barthes terms the intellectual "Oedipal pleasure (to denude, to know, to learn the origin and the end)" (10). Intellectual pleasure denied may enhance other pleasures.

The possibility that there may be such a higher pleasure is raised quite early in the text, as the following passage from *Paterson 1* demonstrates:

> We sit and talk,
> quietly, with long lapses of silence
> and I am aware of the stream
> . . . .
> which has no speech; to
> go to bed with you, to pass beyond
> the moment 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 giants'
> 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 . . .
> . . . and the giants
> live again in your silence and
> unacknowledged desire-- (24-25)

Here, again, we see that the aim of love is to fall but not crash. "The giants," whose "torrent" rolls "over" the lovers, personify, first, their desire ("the stream . . . which has no speech"), but also their history, their culture with its language and its values that are antagonistic toward desire. In this second aspect the giants resemble exaggerated versions of the Watchmen in the Song of Songs, who intercept and interrupt the bride seeking her husband (Song. Sol. 5.7). Here again Williams inverts the structure of the Song of Songs, this time through status reversal. In Solomon's poem, the lovers are a king and his bride, while the watchmen are members of the servant class; here, on the other hand, Williams elevates the giants to supernatural status if not divine, and he does this at the expense of the lovers who, devoid of royal status or any particular mark of privilege, resist the giant representatives of the law with silence. Solomon's bride, in contrast, challenges the watchmen: "Saw ye he whom my soul loveth?" (Song. Sol. 3.3)

This difference has significant implications, for the passage from *Paterson* implies that "the giants / live again" precisely because the lovers' desire is unacknowledged. It further suggests that it is both dangerous and pleasant to have the power to raise up giants, to approach near enough to the brink to hear the voice of the Father which is the Falls. In Williams' view, one cannot simply dismiss the Watchmen or their power because there is no king; there is none greater than the giants. Compare the confidence of Solomon's beloved to the tentativeness of Williams' lovers: the former affirms that "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it" (Song Sol. 8.7). She is confident in another power greater than that of the water. Williams, on the other hand, identifies the water with the voice of the Father, which requires a different attitude. If the giants were to get loose . . . if one

were to "fall . . . from the brink" and "crash" . . . .

Do these giants, we might ask, like the one in the fairy tale who threatens Jack's beanstalk, these patrons of the unsatisfied, stand waiting to revenge themselves upon any who demand satisfaction? I posit this as the implied threat, the ominous condition of contact which cannot even be spoken but trails off, or is cut off, supressed. One subordinate clause ends in a full stop ("If I should demand it, . . . and you should consent."); the next one fades into silence ("If you would consent

"). Both leave the main clause, the consequence, unspoken. The question, like the phallus and like the giants, is raised but unanswered, and perhaps therefore vitally present. To say that "the stream . . . has no speech," is to raise the opposite possibility, in order to defer it; likewise the source of vitality in this scene, the locus of power, is not actually the giants but the desire which awakens them and the deferral of contact which restrains them. Both the desire and the deferral are contained, I believe, in the lovers' silence.

Such "a vigilant censorship" may also express itself in "poetic madness," according to Michael Zeitlin, who reads absurdity in Freudian terms (199). This kind of madness, in Bloom's terms, is an extravagance which seeks to break away from the Law of stale repetition--or necessity--by plunging *upward*, by which "a poem of the air is achieved" (80). The models of this airy extravagance, in *Paterson*, are both the Passaic Falls and Paterson's *jouissance* of solipsistic withdrawal. In its sound the Falls represents the pre-mental language that Williams holds to be most true to nature and to self; in its form and action it models how, according to Williams, one should think and write. Like the water of the river, Paterson's "thoughts / interlace, repel and cut under, / rise rock-thwarted and turn aside / but forever strain forward--or strike / an eddy and whirl, marked by a / leaf or curdy spume, seeming / to forget" (7). When extravagance of language is taken to its extreme, when language is resisted, scattered, dispersed, "divided as the dew" (7), it approaches either silence or nonsense, each of which is, for Williams, a witness to the divine "thunder of the waters / filling"

the giant's "dream" (6).

The image of the Falls conveyed by the above passage may, on first reading, appear to emphasize motion and dispersal. But I would point out that to be "thwarted" and turned aside, and to therefore "forever strain forward," sounds very similar to the eternity that Paterson experiences in the presence of Phyllis. Such thwarting leads to another kind of extravagance: that of tumescence, of intense unassuaged desire. This is one model Williams offers for achieving and surviving the marriage of desire with fear which for him constitutes worship. Williams conflates desire, outwardly-directed attention, and self-isolating withdrawal in his image of "The observation tower" which Paterson notices standing "up prominently / from its pubic grove" (*P* 53). The noun "tower" connotes withdrawal and isolation, but this "prominent" tower is both in the public eye and eyeing the public with what must be, given its "pubic" source, a rather lascivious look.

David, too, as I seek to show, engages in quite extravagant behaviour, but because he locates the divine in heaven rather than in earthly experience, his notion of sin, and the voice his extravagance is designed to silence, pose very little threat. His motives for extravagance and the audiences he finds for his extravagant acts are both very different from Paterson's. Williams' understanding of what constitutes ungodliness will figure in the following chapter, but for now let me point out that, whereas many Psalms celebrate both the Mosaic Law and God's mercy towards those who break it, such subjects in *Paterson* are conspicuous by their absence. Instead, we are exhorted: "Be reconciled, poet, with your world, it is / the only truth" (*P* 84). When one gives himself to perception wholly--to the true worship that is wordless wonder--he is, in Williams' view, innocent.

Now, what Williams means by "innocence" is emphatically not the innocence of traditional purity, nor is it the naivete of inexperience. Williams draws on mythology for the figure of the primitive god, Priapus, who represents pure unsullied desire. As Ivor Evans explains, Priapus is "the god of reproductive power and fertility" and "the chief deity of lasciviousness and obscenity. . . . The

phallus" is "his attribute" (891). One myth tells of Priapus spying a lovely lady swimming on the far side of a lake, detaching his phallus, and sending it across the lake to the object of his desire--special delivery. This act of detachment may be read as a metaphor for what Paterson the poet does, or tries to do, tries to imitate, when he stays at home "to rest and write" (9) while sending his loving imagination out onto the female body of the world.

Priapus is not on the scene in *Paterson*, but he is on Paterson's mind. After commenting on the "observation tower" in Book 2, Paterson uses the observational abilities of his own imagination to lovingly describe, from memory, the "coarse contours" of the goat-like "peon in the lost / Eisenstein film." In the midst of doing so, Paterson suddenly interjects: "(Priapus!)" (58). This is a moment of recognition and invocation: Priapus is the male aspect of Paterson's Muse, the acceptable Holy Spirit, embodying the power of the Phallus without the prohibition of the Father. The peon who recalls Priapus to Paterson's memory, alone of any character in *Paterson*, is named a "Heavenly man!" (58). He is named thus because those who live "life in the raw" (*P* 91) are blessed, according to Williams, for they are the pure in spirit. They have escaped the forces that block, the voice of the giant. The diety who blesses them, however, is according to Williams emphatically not the Judeo-Christian God of David.

Unlike Apollo, Hermes, Dionysius, Orpheus, or Pan, all associated with some aspect of art or of creativity, Priapus is neither known for his glibness nor for any ability to dance, play, or sing. Fruitful silence, in *Paterson*, is one indication of the awe-full desire of a poet who is worshipping his beloved world and its women in the "beauty of holiness" (71). This is Williams' version of the silence of contemplation that the Psalmist also finds to be one of the limits of worship. Psalm 77 (one not ascribed to David) links song with silence through memory and meditation: "I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search" (Ps. 77.6). Similarly joining speech with silence, Psalm 19, identified as "a Psalm of David," concludes

with the plea, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer" (Ps. 19.14).

However, unless intended not to please or to persuade but to defy, silence in *Paterson* is never addressed to the Judeo-Christian God. Of course I am thinking here of the passage in *Paterson 2* mentioned in the Introduction, which describes the child who refused to pray (*P* 74). This defiant silence is also found in nature, according to Williams; nature validates Paterson with such silence when, in *Book 2*, he chooses to turn his back on that spokesman for Evangelical Orthodoxy, Klaus Ehrens. There is no reward or even interest forthcoming from divine nature when Ehrens preaches of laying up treasure in heaven: "*Le / pauvre petit ministre*, swinging his arms, drowns / under the indifferent fragrance of the bass-wood trees . " (82), we are told. The fragrance, like the sound of the Falls, is carried on the wind; it is the eternal present, pouring down, and in its irresistible indifference it is too much for Ehrens.

The above description of Ehrens ends with one of the many full stops, those seed pearls of meaning, which are spilled with such generosity across the pages of *Paterson* and of *Paterson 2* in particular. Remarkably, in an entire book devoted to *William Carlos Williams and the Meaning of Measure*, one which includes a chapter entitled "Visual Prosody and Typographic Inscription," Stephen Cushman never mentions Williams' use of those full stops. Bernard Duffey does cite them as examples of the way in which Williams' "writing is kinetic rather than a static experience for the reader" (x); it is his view that the poem becomes kinetic as we re-experience the rhythms of the poet's journey, bringing it alive into the present through the power of our imagination. I would further argue that these stops represent moments of worshipful silence which, according to Williams, are the imagination's "seeds" dispersed so that they will not be "soured" (*P* 4), so that they may bring forth fruit. They are the response of the loving imagination brought to speechlessness by the body of the beloved; they are both the stop and the step forward, that moment of contact with the ground for the

poet who is walking, step by loving step, over the body of the Park.

In the following passage, for example, the full stop is clearly a step, a stepping away from the promise of heavenly treasure and a commitment to the things of the earth being chosen in their preference: Paterson, otherwise known as "Faitoute, conscious by moments, / rouses by moments, rejects him [Ehrens] finally / and strolls off . " (80). In another instance, also found in *Paterson 2*, the same nonverbal sign is used to signify the worshipful kiss: "Her belly . her belly is like / a cloud . a cloud / at evening . " (85). Each "stop" in this instance represents a moment in which the poet gives his full, silent, attention to the object being considered, but each moment is also a movement, as the passage moves from stop to step, from kiss to simile, from belly to cloud. Finally, each of these signs is a "stop": the "stop" of an interruption. Like a telegram reading "Don't Stop," combining message with punctuation into a teasing double meaning, each "stop" signifies "kiss," and each "kiss" signifies "stop."

Another response which Williams offers to such intense, conflicted, attention is the drunken dance. The major representative of this fruitful drunkenness in *Paterson 3* is Harry Leslie, who "did the Washerwoman's Frolic, in female attire, staggering drunkenly across the chasm, going backward" (103). It is the newspaper report of this undignified crossing of the falls that prompts in Paterson this reaction:

> And as reverie gains and
>   your joints loosen
>   The trick's done!
>
> . . . .
> drunk and bedraggled to release
> The strictness of beauty (*P* 104)

Leslie's clumsy and curious dance represents both of Williams' solution to the poet's dilemma in one: his dance on the tightrope exemplifies, in Williams' view, the way to hold one's "being taut, balanced between / eternities" (103). This "taut" state (this tumescence?), paradoxically, permits release: for as

the being is taut, the "joints loosen," and beauty is released into new lines.

The two eternities Leslie balances between may be identified with, on the one hand, the past, including its deadly heritage of literature, the avenging Father, or fear; and, on the other hand, the future, which also leads ultimately to the ocean which represents death, the consuming Mother, or desire:

> The past above, the future below
> and the present pouring down: the roar,
> the roar of the present . . . (*P* 104)

The poet, according to Williams, needs to become that drunken washerwoman in order to achieve and survive the reverie, that dream like the dream of the giant lovers which permits a man to get over the Falls and confront both eternities at once: to make of them one and be consumed by neither. Every tense, every "taut" moment in which the poet engages in his art roars the threat of failure in his ears, which is also the threat of death to the poetic self.

Although such convoluted "connivance" (*P* 189) as Leslie's drunken act is the best solution offered in *Paterson* to the anxious young poet who has, sadly, experienced "being tau[gh]t," purer versions of the drunken dance may be found celebrated both in *Paterson* and in the Bible. In *Paterson 2*, for instance, the poet observes in admiration and approval that, while others may not dance:

> Mary
> is up!
> Come on! Wassa ma'? You got
> broken leg?
> It is this air!
> the air of the MIdi
> and the old cultures intoxicates them:
> present!
> --lifts one arm holding the cymbals
> of her thoughts, cocks her old head
> and dances! raising her skirts:
>
> La la la la!
> What a bunch of bums! . . . (57)

Mary exhibits what Williams considers to be the appropriate response to history: to become intoxicated by it and thereby in one's response bypass reason and intellect. Through this intoxication she becomes wholly, wonderfully present.

Mariani has identified in Mary's "gesture . . . the image of the goddess older than the others--Shiva, her head too cocked, hand held high with cymbals (symbols), dancing, though she does not know it, with the poet who has discovered her here and dances her into the heart of his poem" (542). This ancient pagan Mary, this Muse who is partnered in Paterson's imagination with the priapic peon mentioned above (*P* 58), may also be considered a literary descendant of the Biblical David. The disgusted wife of this poet-king wrongly rebukes him for, like Mary, raising his "skirts," but his seemingly indecent actions are affirmed in the Bible as holy, appropriate, behaviour:

> And David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.
> And as the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal Saul's daughter looked through a window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord: and she despised him in her heart.
> . . . .
> And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel today, who uncovered himself today in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!
> And David said unto Michal, it was before the Lord . . . therefore will I play before the Lord. And I will yet be more vile than thus . . . . (2 Sam. 6.14-16, 20b-22)

Michal is here a judgemental agent of blockage, an Old Testament precursor of the New Testament and Patersonian Pharisees whom I will delineate more fully in the following chapter. David, the favoured womanizer, he of the sacred shameless unrestrained dance, replies to the woman who would leash him that he "*will* play before the Lord [emphasis added]."

Paterson, then, is following David's lead when he asserts that "beauty is / a defiance of authority" (*P* 119). However, David insists on raising his skirt in Michal's despite as a reminder to her that hers is a false authority, that there is one Higher. His dance is not in any way a defiance of

his God. Mary's drunken dance, in contrast to David's, has as its initial motivation the impulse to defy her companions who will not "play." Furthermore, her dance originates not as a response to God but as a reaction to "the air of the Midi / and the old [intoxicating] cultures." She is leaving God quite out of the picture. Her disregard for the divine is perhaps balanced by her heightened regard for what her companions think. Yes, her dance is an act of defiance but it is directed at them; David, on the other hand, does not even consider what Michal will think of him before kicking up his heels.

Perhaps inspired by David's reaction to his wife's false authority, Williams is advocating a similar response, or challenge, to "the old cultures." Williams describes *Paterson* as a whole as "a reply to Greek and Latin with the bare hands" (*P* 2) Perhaps it would not be unreasonable to characterize Williams' understanding of the method and purpose of extravagant dance to be "a reply to Greek and Latin with the bare bum." Barthes seems to be operating out of a similar understanding of art when he suggests that "The text is (should be) that uninhibited person who shows his behind to the Political Father" (53).

Describing Mary's dance in terms that identify her with David is itself an act of resistance to Biblical teachings about worship, for the association with Shiva foregrounds Mary's dance as a primitive "fertility rite" (Rodgers 104). Since the two dancers enact essentially the same ritual, Williams is underlining the theme that David's audience may not have been the God David believed him to be, that all worship is a form of nature worship.

Drunkenness or its imitation is, then, in *Paterson*, one way for the mind to enter fully into experience without being trapped too firmly in the mode of understanding that normally accompanies language use: naming, ordering, reasoning and analyzing, all acts of completion, of demystification, of detumescence. It is also, in Williams' view, one of the appropriate ways to respond to the divine, because drunken movement imitates the form(lessness) of divine language, represented, of course, primarily by the Falls. In that natural phenomenon the voice of "Earth, the chatterer, father of all /

speech" (*P* 39) speaks to those who will listen. As Paterson explains on the last page of *Book Three:*

> The language cascades into the
> invisible, beyond and above: the falls
> of which it is the visible part--
>
> Not until I have made of it a replica
> will my sins be forgiven and my
> disease cured . . . (145)

Dance, the supplement of desire, in Williams' view offers would-be worshippers and poets a means, not just of celebration, but of redemption proper, achieved through the replication of desire's extravagant absurdity that constitutes resistance to, and some measure of freedom from, the Law. Williams' syllabic response to David's instruction, "*Selah*," is the "la la la la" of old intoxicated Mary.

Not every inarticulate reply to the divine voice proves adequate in *Paterson*, however. For those who recognize and release it in time, it will bear fruit; those who recognize it for the vital power that it is too suddenly or too late, however, face sterility or death. This voice is "the tongue of the bee" which in some instances "misses" the female flowers so that they "cry . . . wilt and disappear" (*P* 11). The flowers' cry in this passage approaches, but falls short of, an appropriate response: it is non-verbal, but it is a cry either of dread or disappointment, not of ecstasy. Williams implies that it is the flowers' fault, not the bee's, that they are missed: they have failed to acknowledge how vital to them is this spirit pouring (or buzzing) down. "They may look at the torrent in their minds," in other words, but "it is foreign to them" (*P* 12).

The shock of such a sudden realization is also fatal to the minister's wife, Mrs. Cummings (the story of whose death is first related in *Paterson 1* and revisited subsequently in *Paterson 2*). The revelation of the fact that she "was married with empty words" (82), that there exists an imaginative power in nature that she cannot understand, the language of which is "pouring (misinterpreted) without / dignity, without minister, crashing upon a stone ear" (15), coupled with the realization of

her own spiritual/linguistic poverty, lead her to a death like that of the daredevil Sam Patch who too realizes that "language" has "failed him" (*P* 17).

Of Mrs Cummings's death, Paterson comments:

> She was married with empty words:
> better to
> stumble at
> the edge
> to fall
> fall
> and be
>
> --divorced (83)

And "Divorce is / the sign of knowledge in our time" (*P* 18), Paterson asserts when first reflecting upon her death, in *Paterson 1*. While this certainly may be read as a critical comment on the ways in which contemporary systems of knowledge have the effect of separating, or divorcing, a man from the beauty to which he should be making love, it is also an acknowledgement of a sometime necessity or even a sometime preference. One must divorce the empty language, Williams suggests, before beginning (or in order to continue) the quest for a new one.

What Williams considers to be "empty," however, is not the incomprehensible language of the Falls, but the language of repressive, even aggressive, reason. In the Bible this is identified with Michal but not with God; in *Paterson*, it is identified with the repressive Father. David, the Bible implies, never sleeps with Michal again after she speaks against his dance, and she dies childless (2 Sam. 6.22-3). It is Michal, who speaks out against worship, who comes up empty. In *Paterson*, however, it is the dancers and tight-rope walkers who take the biggest risk, for they have to deal with both giants at once.

This notion, of necessary but painful separation from old systems and relationships, is developed in *Paterson* using terms which recall the New Testament:

> If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. . . .

> For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? (Luke 14.26, 28)

Williams is very much aware of "The cost. The cost" (*P* 109) of raising his particular tower. Some of the implications of this awareness will figure in Chapters Two and Three, but for now let us note that Leslie's drunken dance leads him literally to the brink of death, and the inarticulate roar of the divine also makes itself heard in the roar of flame which destroys in order to release or transfigure.

Fire, in *Paterson* as in the Bible, is another symbol for the inspiring spirit. "Is not my word like a fire?" asks God, according to Isaiah (4.21). And both the Psalmist and Williams identify flame with inspiration and with endings. In Psalm 39, we encounter David describing an experience of inspiration, thereby reminded of the difference between himself, mortal, and the Immortal:

> My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue. Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. (Ps. 39.3-4)

A similar thought process may be traced in the following passage from *Paterson*:

> --the voice in his voice
> opening his old throat, blowing out his lips,
> kindling his mind (more
> than his mind will kindle) (56)

Here it is clearly a flame that effects the production of inspired language, but the passage ends with an ominous afterthought: the divine fire will destroy even as it inspires.

Certainly the burning of the Library in *Paterson* 3 is an inferno, a horror. Yet it produces that beautiful and enduring bottle, transformed--transfigured "to a new distinction" (*P* 118). The spirits trapped within the books are also released by the destruction of the physical pages, their vitality no longer restricted.

Beautiful Thing, too, is described as a flame in this frequently cited passage:

> BRIGHTen
> the cor
> ner

where you are!

--a flame,
black plush, a dark flame (*P* 128)

Mariani points out how Beautiful Thing is, here, identified with the female principle, "Kore: one of the many grim jokes and riddles propounded in *Paterson.* But the gist of this joke--this riddle--is central to getting all the riddles. Kore: Curie; Core: Cure: Care; Cor--ner: Caw Caw" (582). Our appreciation of the joke must, however, be heightened if we recognize that Williams' lyric also recalls both The Song of Songs and that old Sunday School tune: "Jesus bids us shine like a pure, clear light . . . . You in your small corner, and I in mine." Beautiful Thing, like the holy bride of Solomon, is "black but lovely" (Song Sol. 1.5). Beautiful Thing is radiant, and thus partakes of the shining childlike innocence invoked by the tune; but the flame here is not "pure, clear." It is "plush, dark," and thus more reminiscent of Milton's "darkness visible" than of divine fire as conventionally conceived.

The real reason why this fire is dark, however, is that its source is neither hell nor heaven but earth. Again we find Williams bringing together two eternities to make one divine flame that, in *Paterson*, is frequently green:

alone
in a wind that does not move the others--
in that way: a way to spend
a Sunday afternoon while the green bush shakes. (*P* 19)

This "green bush . . . is whence" Paterson draws his "breath" (*P* 22); it is Williams' version of the burning bush encountered by Moses, which with God's voice tells him how to draw his breath before Pharaoh (Exod. 3). In another instance, Williams writes:

And the myth
that holds up the rock,
that holds up the water thrives there--
in that cavern, that profound cleft,
A flickering green
inspiring terror, watching . .

> And standing, shrouded there, in that din,
> Earth, the chatterer, father of all
> speech . . . (*P* 39)

That "profound cleft" recalls Solomon's "dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs" (Song Sol. 2.14). It also recalls "the [female] slot" in which rises "the ignorant son" (*P* 4). This may be read as an Oedipal "terror" of which Williams is writing, for the "flickering green" represents the voice of the dead ("shrouded") Father, who yet "stands" erect in the place where speech is fathered, where the son would father speech.

The "lightnings that stab at / . . . a man" (*P* 21), then, do not emanate from heaven or from hell, but from his own flesh, and from the earth. The burning bush burns green. But what bush in summer is not green? In *Paterson*, vitality of nature can speak of the divine in every bush to him who will draw near in awe.

Now, whereas David does associate inspiration with drunkenness on one occasion, with flame on another, it is the New Testament that most memorably makes the connection between all three. The first pouring of glossalalia into the world, that fall of incomprehensible and therefore empowering language upon the disciples, is announced by what appear to be tongues of fire to some, drunken babbling to others:

> And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.
>
> . . . .
>
> And [the hearers] were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine. But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell in Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words; For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. (Acts 2.2-4, 12-13)

By similarly conflating fire, drunkenness, and speech, Williams partakes somewhat of the authority of Peter. Like the Apostle, who returns mocks for mocks, the poet Paterson is engaging to do more

than worship with dance and with song; he is also undertaking, although "in fear and in much trembling" (I Cor. 2.3), to teach. Since he rejects the kind of teaching that is a mere ordering or explication of others' words, and attempts to speak a word that is new, authentic, and divinely inspired, he shares characteristics with Biblical characters other than the Psalmist and his son. According to Halley, "Many Psalms, written a thousand years before Christ, contain references to Christ," and he identifies ten which are "obviously Messianic" (250). It is not clear whether David thought of himself as a prophet, but there are other Biblical figures who explicitly identify themselves as such to their audience. So too does Paterson.

Chapter Two

Self-Appointed Prophet: Paterson Takes on the Pharisees

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

- Luke 3.4

Numerous among the literary precursors of Paterson are Biblical prophets, figures such as Isaiah, Jonah, John the Baptist and Ezekiel: men imperfect, even uncouth, who yet speak on behalf of the divine; men misunderstood, mistreated, relegated to the margins of an often already exiled nation; men glossing in immortal verse their national and their individual pain. Paterson's role, his vocation, is to identify the scribes and Pharisees of his day, rebuke their hypocrisy, and refute their teachings: it is they who wield the Law as a weapon against children, animals, and the natural beauty these represent.

Like many Biblical prophets, Paterson looks both backward and forward, calling on the one hand for a return to a less decadent past, attempting on the other hand to prepare his people for the anticipated advent of a redeeming Word. Both Paterson's message and the mode by which he conveys it depart significantly from standard Biblical practice: one of his purposes is to encourage his audience to connive against the crippling Law, and however he gets the message across he will not preach. Typical also of Biblical prophets, Paterson's pride and confidence in his mission is coupled with humility, a conviction of his own inadequacy for the task at hand. However, unlike the prophets portrayed in the Bible, this humility is complicated by an anxiety which stems from the fact that he is self-appointed, that the word is not given to him to speak. He is concerned, as Schmidt points out, not only with reforming his people but also with "reforming . . . language, and himself" (170). He must re-form the language, and he must do it himself.

Paterson contains no parallel to the calling of the child Samuel, no divine voice explicitly

demanding Paterson's attention out of the darkness, no responding, obedient, "Here am I, for thou didst call me" (I Sam. 3.6). This is a highly significant omission, given that the very source of a man's virtue is in question. The Evangelist Klaus Ehrens (portrayed in *Paterson 2*) does, in contrast, claim to have been explicitly called by name to serve God (53), but according to Williams this claim constitutes evidence of Ehrens' fraudulence. As Williams explains in his "Preface" to *Paterson*, "The Falls let out a roar as it crashed upon the rocks at its base. In the imagination this roar is a speech or a voice, a speech in particular; it is the poem itself that is the answer" (*P* iv). Whereas in *Paterson* the poet answers this "speech in particular" with a poetry of particulars, his is the answer of the unnamed and uncalled, an answer which is actually a challenge to the incomprehensible. The "Other" whose voice opens *Paterson 1* acknowledges that "'Rigor of beauty is the quest,'" and then proceeds to inquire, "But how will you find beauty . . . ?'" (*P* 3) The voice, which may be identified both as Paterson's imagination and his ultimate antagonist, acknowledges that Paterson has elected to become a questor but challenges his competence, his fitness for the role.

Despite the fact that the Falls is identified with the Law which must be resisted, it also is identified with what for Williams are positive aspects of history: personal experience and the primitive. The giant Paterson benefits from these positive aspects when he is inspired by "the thunder / of the waters filling his dreams" (*P* 6). Since this is the voice that keeps the imagination alive, it becomes in Williams' view extremely important to locate an appropriate means of mediation. False mediators, false ministers, in *Paterson*, are those who translate the pre-verbal language of the Falls into systems instead of replicating it with dance or laughter. These I identify as *Paterson*'s Pharisees: they are those who enslave others to their paradigms and grow deaf to the divine voice, hearing only their own sermons or lectures instead of the voice of "Earth, the chatterer."

Aside from the fundamental uncertainty of his position, the question of his legitimacy, Paterson considers himself to be a prophet inadequate to his task as a consequence of the fact that he himself has been

contaminated by the education and sophistication that lead to American Pharisaism. His is an impossible task, since no language, in Williams' view, can do justice to the ineffable divine. To pretend that language can do such justice is, in Williams' doctrine, one of the mortal sins; and the more sophisticated a man is, the more difficult it is for him to resist that sin. Dr. Paterson is, alas, an educated man, and it is for this reason that, ironically, his "brain is weak. It fails mastery" (*P* 191). Of this resulting inadequacy he is painfully conscious, and he laments it:

> Only of late, late! begun to know, to
> know clearly (as through clear ice) whence
> I draw my breath or how to employ it
> clearly--if not well . . . (*P* 21)

The anguished determination of this passage has its antecedent in that well-known lament of Isaiah: "Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isa. 6.5). Identified thus with Isaiah, Paterson's anxiety appears more respectable than it might otherwise and enhances his authority more than it diminishes it.

The above passage from *Paterson* also alludes to that other reluctant prophet Jonah, first invoked on the preceding page of the text:

> Why have I not
> but for imagined beauty where there is none
> or none available, long since
> put myself deliberately in the way of death?
>
> Stale as a whale's breath; breath!
> Breath!
> Patch leaped but Mrs. Cummings shrieked
> and fell--
> . . . .
> : a body found next spring
> frozen in an ice-cake; (20)

Jonah, we may recall, comes to understand *very* late whence he draws his breath and how to employ it, choosing to serve the Father and convey his Word only after it speaks to him with "this great tempest" (Jon. 1.12), only after taking such a plunge that he is almost deprived of breath

permanently.

Williams revises the Jonah narrative significantly, however. In fact, Williams is revising the Biblical conception of prophecy generally: the "whale's breath" that filled Jonah's lungs is in his view, after all, "stale." That Paterson imagines himself to have "begun to know . . . as through clear ice" identifies him as a wintry New Jersey Jonah, one who has experienced the local version of submersion followed by revelation. By comparing the understanding gained to a vision seen through ice's filter, Williams also implies that this vision is somehow blurred, distorted, or altered from what those on the surface would see. This metaphor of blurry revelation is Williams' visual equivalent of the pre-verbal roar of the falls. Yet this same image, while seeming to speak of humility in its suggestion of hazy outlines, simultaneously claims priority over any Christian vision through its allusion to another Biblical metaphor. St. Paul explains that we only see "through a glass darkly" (I Cor. 13.12), until heaven. Paterson's heaven is here, and thus the ice through which he sees is, not dark, but "clear."

With Williams placing such evident emphasis on local vision, it is not surprising that the prophet whom Paterson is most closely akin to is one sent, not to strangers as Jonah is, but to his own people: John the Baptist. It is the latter's task not only to rebuke sinners but also, and especially, to announce the immanent arrival of the new Word; it is furthermore his privilege to witness that arrival. John the Baptist's message, he tells his audience, is to prepare the way of one "whom ye know not, . . . who coming after me is preferred before me" (John 1.26b-27a), "one who is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear" (Matt. 3.11). Consider the opening of *Paterson 4*, Part III, the same Part that ends with a mysterious and possibly divine arrival:

> Haven't you forgot your virgin purpose,
> the language?
> . . . .
>
> It is almost the hour
> --and did you ever know of a sixty year

woman with child . ?

Listen!
someone's coming up the path, . perhaps
it is not too late? Too late .

JONATHAN, bap. (*P* 187)

This passage evokes the story of John the Baptist's mother, Elizabeth, who conceives him by divine intervention when she is long past child-bearing age; the text then goes on to describe how this particular eighteenth-century "JONATHAN, bap." was--as was his first-century forerunner--brutally murdered.

Williams significantly revises the well-known cry of John the Baptist, however. The recognizable narrative elements of the above passage lead us to expect the words, "Prepare ye the way of the lord, make his paths straight" (Matt. 3.3b). Instead, the imperative "Prepare" is replaced with "Listen!" One effect of this revision is to emphasize the theme that holiness has its basis in humble, loving attention, and that learning to listen, to attend, is the basis of any true self-reformation. Another change Williams makes is to deny his prophet the language of certainty that one might expect along with such Biblical associations: instead, the tone is edgy, anxious, and uncertain. Someone's "coming up the path, . *perhaps* [emphasis added]."

Here again, furthermore, is that ambiguous "Other" addressing the poet, challenging his commitment to and competence for his task: "Haven't you forgot your virgin purpose, / the language?" Of course this question can and should be read as rhetorical, both acknowledging and defying any doubters, reassuring them that Paterson does indeed know what he is doing. Underlying its defensiveness, however, is anxiety--anxiety that it may rather be "too late," that Paterson may not yet have succeeded in transforming himself into an adequate prophet, that the new Word will fall on barren ground because no one has prepared for it a way. Paterson's doubts concern the possibility that a prophet may be found (that he may be found a prophet) who is capable of speaking an inspired

and inspiring Word, and that his people may not be too degraded, too hardened of ear and of heart--too blocked by Pharisaic reason which is also the Law of the Father--to hear and receive the new Word proclaimed. He doubts, also, whether the incarnation for which he longs, the true poetic spirit made flesh (made text), will be manifest before his death. Miracles of arrival might happen; it might not be too late, but the hopeful question, "perhaps / it is not too late?" prompts its dark echo, "Too late ." Perhaps, on the other hand, it is.

Whether despite or because of these anxieties, Paterson persists in his struggle to find the redeeming language and to rebuke those who are stumbling blocks for the innocent dancing drunk. Much like his Biblical Baptist precursor, it is not the abject sinner but the arrogant, educated Pharisee to whom Paterson is most opposed, because it is he who blocks others from hearing the voice of the Falls, drowning it out (or cutting it off) with his own voice of rule and reason. The Pharisees are false interpreters, deniers of the essential mystery of the divine, trying to build bridges using logic and reason to mediate between mystery and the flesh. Those who do not hear or see the falls, according to Williams, cannot dream (that is, imagine); they are unfruitful, leading lives of physical and spiritual sterility.

Both in *Paterson* and in the Bible, spiritual sterility is represented as barren soil. For instance, Williams describes "those poor souls" as living by "the eternal stony, ungrateful and unpromising dirt" (*P* 62). The Biblical terms which he uses here imply that he is writing of a spiritual poverty as much as a physical one: their minds and spirits are by association the trampled "way side" and the "stony places" on which the Sower's seed falls and lies, fruitless (Matt. 13.5-9). Jesus explains to his confused disciples that "When any one heareth" his "word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, . . . This is he which received seed by the way side" (Matt. 13.19).

The possibility that the swimmer described at the end of *Paterson 4* may be divine is reinforced by his identification with Christ in that each is a sower of seeds. Making holy, appreciative

contact with the physical world, the swimmer samples "some beach plums . . . , spitting the seed out" (*P* 203). This seed, however, in a significant revision of the Christian mythos, does not originate with the sower. Paterson plucks it from the local ground to which he returns it, where it will bear fruit, not because of divine origin (except insofar as all nature is divine), but certainly through his attentive mediation. He is a respectful and appreciative vehicle of the seed, respect being indicated in this case not only by his enjoyment but also by the intuitive randomness of his spitting. This seed is sown by way of the mouth, which identifies it with language; through this image of the seed Williams revises the concept of *Logos*. As represented in *Paterson*, the divine word is native to the shores of America and may be uttered and made fruitful through a man's contact with the things of this earth.

Now, the fruit or offspring of a vital imagination is not, in *Paterson*, what might traditionally be considered "good works"--a bit of good poetry, perhaps. As I sought to demonstrate in the previous chapter, the sinning self according to Williams is not separated from God (since Williams denies he exists); it is separated from the self's immanent experience by the Law which asks it to live according to stale paradigms. It is self being blocked from self that Cress complains of in *Paterson 2*, Part I, for example (45). *Paterson* is largely concerned with the nature and consequences of such blockage; the poet's quest is not only to take his place among the giants, but, like a good doctor, to diagnose the diseased. These are popes, preachers, professors, lawyers, and librarians, mainly: the clerks and clerics of the world, in other words, who make their livings by preserving and promoting dishonest or outmoded systems of thought and language.

"Disease," or blockage, manifests itself in a wide variety of ways, then, but its chief symptoms according to Williams are naming and measuring, acts which deny mystery and preclude wonder. The history of the Passaic, as Williams represents it in *Paterson*, is a history of naming, and wildly inaccurate naming at that. Paterson's early immigrants--much like their spiritual ancestors the Pharisees--have a habit of confusing monsters and wonders each with the other. A particularly

grotesque example of such mis-naming is the prose description of the dwarf in *Paterson 1*:

> This is a monster in human form, he is twenty-seven years of age, his face . . . measures *twenty-seven inches* . . . . His body is twenty-seven inches in length, his limbs are small and much deformed (10)

This form is obviously unnatural, yet the admiring anonymous historian refers to the dwarf as a "natural curiosity" (10). He is named once, casually and in passing, as a monster, but the tone is clearly one of admiration rather than horror, and the single "monster" is more than outweighed by the repeated, insistent call to worship: "A wonder! A wonder!" (10). By contrast, the true natural wonder of the area--the Falls--is spared only four words of mention at the opening of the lengthy passage about the dwarf. The scribes of the region see the Falls only as a warm-up act for the main star of the Passaic stage.

What makes the dwarf especially horrible, from Williams' point of view, is his immobility: like the clergy whose friendship he enjoys (10), this deformed version of a man is all head and no body. He never comes in contact with the earth at all. In a grotesque parody of the babe in the manger, this small horror lies "in a large cradle, with his head constantly supported in pillows" (*P* 10), receiving the homage of the wise men of his day. In reminding us that they "craved the miraculous!" (10), Williams recalls the frequent rebukes of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels, accusing, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe" (John 4.48). The irony here is that, to Williams, true miracles are beyond the capacity of such language to describe. They belong most properly to the realm of non-verbal experience.

Some critics have seen the dwarf as Williams' self-portrait. Mariani, for instance, characterizes him as "The poor, crippled dwarf who'd stayed home in Paterson to contemplate the falls," and therefore "another image of Williams himself, who'd always stayed at home to write his crippled, monstrous poem" (464). It is consistent with the rest of the text to identify Paterson/Williams with the crippled intellectual, but, especially given the ironic effect achieved by

the use of Biblical references, I cannot agree that the tone of Williams' description of the dwarf invites sympathy, as I take Mariani's comments to imply. Since the dwarf is not a true "wonder," he is its antithesis, a horror. The horror he provokes in the poet could only be enhanced by a recognition of identity, for since the dwarf is also identified with the Pharisees he represents both what Paterson is opposed to and that which Paterson most fears he may be.

Juxtaposed with the dwarf is Hamilton, who is portrayed as being too interested in thoughts of American Mammon even to see the Falls (10). And the unholy trinity of pioneering perversion is completed with the anecdote immediately following that of Hamilton, which relates the brutal torture and killing of the huge old sturgeon that had lived for so long in the river at the foot of the Falls (10-11). Once again mis-naming, the newspaper reports the event under the heading "'The Monster Taken,'" as if the fish had been some sort of threatening horror. In fact, the sturgeon (like the lame dog of *Paterson 2*, Part I, another martyr "pelted with stones") is an image of holy innocence, of vital intuition. The wordless fish, that survived for so long its intimacy with the Falls, that does not need to fear the plunge because the holy water is its element, is a thing of wonder; the boys who destroy it and the complicit writers who celebrate its destruction, Williams implies, are the true monsters.

Coupled with the mis-naming described in these passages is excessive naming, and that in its most extreme form: counting and measuring. This, Williams is suggesting, is a compulsion, a compulsive disorder, endemic among those of the blocked eyes and ears. The dwarf's age and his various dimensions are precisely measured. We are told that "there were in 1870, native born 20,711, . . . foreign 12,868 of whom 237 were French, 1,420 German, etc." (*P* 11). And all of the sturgeon's vital statistics are recorded, along with the exact day and date of its capture. Williams is working within the Biblical tradition here by equating a desire to count with avarice and lack of faith: King David was punished by God for presuming to take a census of Israel's population (2 Sam 24); he made the mistake of thinking that Israel belonged to him, instead of living in wonder at the mystery

of the country's existence and his position as its king. Obsessive measuring on a very small scale is also rebuked by Jesus, who says, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgement, mercy, and faith" (Matt. 23.23a). Endless counting and measuring, unrestrained and/or unconsidered naming and labelling, are in Williams' view acts, not of loving appreciation, but of selfish appropriation; they are the acts of captors taking inventory of their spoils, of misers counting their hoards, of parents dominating their children.

Williams' description in *Paterson 4* of Billy Sunday (the divine Billy S.: any relation to the sacred Shakespeare, another of Paterson's precursors?) is a particularly apt example of how the various kinds of measures become blurred and equated with each other in *Paterson*. The ironically named Sunday is one of Hamilton's spiritual heirs, another one of the moneylenders in the temple and, in particular, a Judas figure, betraying the people in order to count "his 27 Grand in the hotel room / after the last supper (at the *Hamilton*)" (*P* 173). Williams combines the languages of religion and usury with the language of poetic meter to include all traditional systems in his contempt for this false prophet, who gets up on the table with "Both feet, singing / (a foot song) his feet canonized" (172). These canonized feet mark Sunday either as as a Catholic saint or the owner and originator of a poetic meter enshrined in the literary canon. Because he is identified first with Judas and because he and his feet are then portrayed so ignobly, the suggestion that anyone might canonize those feet appears so incongruous that the gullible followers of Billy Sunday are almost as much a target of Williams' satire as the possessor of the feet himself.

Another representative of the old deadly measures who is also a popular performer is the stunt-diving Sam Patch of *Paterson 1*. Having already encountered those earlier examples of nominal monsters, we are now prepared to recognize that the repetition of the exclamatory phrase, "A wonder!" (*P* 17), used to describe Patch, is our cue to interpret his self-serving exhibitionism as,

actually, monstrous. Furthermore, his confidence in his measures ("There's no mistake in Sam Patch!") must confirm our diagnosis: "He would leap 125 feet," we are told. "He went to great length to ascertain the depth of the water below" (*P* 17). Yes, Sam Patch, whose tale turns out to be a cautionary one, appears successful--but only at first. Unlike the humble and reluctant Jonah, whose plunge represents a deep commitment to mystery, Patch is much too calculating and much too interested in appropriating the Falls themselves for his own honour and profit. His "Speech," his false measures, "failed him" (17) therefore, and his plunge has fatal results: it is an example of the fall that cometh after pride.

Patch, then, is one of the many rapacious swine before whom the female mountain has cast her pearls. His response, like the response of the hard of heart described in the Bible, is to "trample them under their feet, and turn around and rend" them (Matt. 7.6b), with the consequence of great loss to the destroyer in return. In fact, the early settlers described in *Paterson* do come close to literally trampling the pearls. At first the people do not recognize them; then they measure, price, hoard, and destroy them (*P* 8-9). It is part of Paterson's creed that "beauty is unheeded . tho' for sale and / bought glibly enough" (106). However, when Jesus speaks of casting pearls before swine (Matt. 7.6) or "pearls of great price," he is referring to words of wisdom which the blind and ignorant either overlook or reject (Matt. 13.45-46). Thus, by association, these priceless pearls are also images of the new language itself, the Good News (*i.e.* Gospel) of salvation: the precious seed spat out of the Sower's mouth; the pure original which Williams' seed-round steps, stops and kisses attempt to replicate in the text.

If we are looking for Pharisees who are Paterson's contemporaries, the spiritual heirs of Sam Patch, Billy Sunday, Hamilton and the dwarf, we may find them, in *Paterson*, at the universities. Scientists and other professors are represented by Williams to be Pharisees who not only reject the pearls offered but also compound the offense by simultaneously leading their students astray with

false teachings. For instance, in describing the time he took his son "to a lecture, in the Solarium / topping the hospital, on atomic / fission" (*P* 171), Paterson recollects another instance of natural beauty unappreciated by swine:

> How pale and young the boy seemed
> among those pigs, myself
> among them! Who surpassed him
> only in experience, that drug,
> sitting erect to their talk (172)

The doctors are "pigs" and thus less human than the "erect" boy. The latter's uprightness suggests creative potency; it also reminds us of the difference between animals and their further-evolved descendants, whose new line is distinguished by the fact that they walk erect. The boy, not the doctors, Williams implies, contains within himself the nation's future.

But the doctors are not paying attention to the boy; they are discussing valances. This young boy fallen among doctors (this traveller fallen among thieves?) is like the "green bud fallen upon the pavement its / sweet voice suppressed" (*P* 27), the seed on barren ground. Who, then, can see and hear the bud and its voice? "Certainly NOT the university" (*P* 22), announces Williams in loud upper case, describing it as a place inhabited by:

> clerks
> got out of hand forgetting for the most part
> to whom they are beholden.
>
> spitted on fixed concepts like
> roasting hogs, sputtering . . . (*P* 32)

Once again it is the fixedness of their concepts--their paralyzing certainties--that degrade and, ultimately, destroy these clerks, by tempting them into forgetting the rightful attitude of awed appreciation. Roasted hogs, this time, not just pigs, these clerks are dead and they do not even know it. Their sputtering may sound like language to them but to Paterson it is the sound of death.

In Williams' view, then, the "knowledgeable idiots" of the university (34) block with their hand-me-down systems the release of what is already locked up in the mind. It is the harsh voice of

academic Law which, in *Paterson*, suppresses the sweet voice of the green bud.

Equally paralyzing in his pretentious appropriation is a man in tweeds, observed by Paterson during his Sunday afternoon walk in the park (*Paterson 2*). He may not be entirely the positive figure that some critics have considered him (*e.g.* W. S. Peterson 47). The former's tweeds and pipe identify him as a university professor or a self-conscious artiste, either way a Pharisee according to Williams's taxonomy. Williams' reference to a "`sea-chamber'" in this passage suggests that the man may be specifically associated with T. S. Eliot (*via* his paralyzed anti-hero, Prufrock). Eliot is also invoked, rebuked and dismissed at the end of *Paterson 3*:

> Who is it spoke of April? Some
> insane engineer. There is no recurrence.
> . . . .
> build no more
> bridges. (142)

Eliot's speech of April is a famous (or, in Williams' view, infamous) example of recurrence and bridge-building: the opening of his *Wasteland* repeats the opening of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, in an attempt to convey the literature of the past into the literature of the Twentieth Century. The man in tweeds may be identified with this "insane engineer": engineers deal in measurement and construction, and so does the man in tweeds. Our evidence of his Pharisaic nature lies in the fact that he is engaging in an act which combines measurement with restriction: combing out his collie bitch on that treeless knoll. Just as the unnamed author of the note (which Williams inserted into *Paterson 2* on the page following the description of the man in tweeds) leashed Dr. Paterson's dog Musty, this man has leashed that which should never be leashed. Dogs, in *Paterson*, represent intuition and copulation, both of which in Williams' view should be given free rein. Furthermore, the man in tweeds has not only leashed his dog, but is also trying to comb out her hair until "it lies, as he designs" (*P* 53). It lies, as--or because--this tweedy engineer designs.

In other words, this man too is trying to restrict natural phenomena into patterns that he can

name and measure. If he combs out the dog's hair into a pattern of his own imposing then he is leaving no room for the possibility of something new that he might not yet be able to define. He is the antithesis of Marie Curie, whose faith in "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11.1) proves her worshipful attitude towards nature. Only such an attitude, according to Williams, can prepare the way for new knowledge to evolve: "identity / predicted before found" (*P* 179). Marie Curie, he implies, had the grace and the humility to leave the meaning vague, but the sense clear; the man in tweeds, on the other hand, cripples sense by insisting on reducing a complex mathematics to a set of engineer's equations. The quotation marks around the phrase "'sea-chamber'" (53) tell us that the phrase is not native to Paterson but is part of the inauthentic, infertile language of the man in tweeds. What is active here on the "treeless," and therefore barren, "knoll" (*P* 53) is the principle of restraint and contrivance, not that of the loving imagination. There is no true transformation going on here, no "sea-change" (*P* 165): no re-birth, just a confinement.

With the exhortation to "build no more / bridges" in the passage quoted above, Williams dismisses all insane engineers and their kindred in a gesture which recalls his dismissal of invocations at the opening of *Paterson 1*. It is time, he asserts, for new paradigms, new modes of connection. While he would agree that past and future, Old World and New, must somehow be linked, the building of bridges is not what Williams would consider the appropriate method or metaphor. It is the wrong kind of erection. In *Paterson* bridges represent a damming and damning faith in the authority of old forms and measures, and in overly rigid, quite unnatural, structures. It is ironic to observe how commonly Williams' critics call on the "bridge" metaphor to explain what he is trying to attempt in his poetry. Both Tapscott (153) and Rodgers (9), for example, claim that Williams sees the artist as functioning as a bridge between two realities. While I acknowledge that Williams is very aware of the power and significance of the bridge metaphor (one, not coincidentally, that has been appropriated by Christianity although it is not dominant in the Bible itself), and also

very interested in problems of connection, unification, and reconciliation, when he actually invokes the bridge metaphor in *Paterson* he generally does so in order to condemn it. Bridge-building, in *Paterson*, is what popes and professors do, not poets.

There are several bridges and bridge-builders in *Paterson*, and the latter are all portrayed as being, like the engineer, somewhat "insane": dangerous to themselves and to others. When the tavern-keeper Tim Crane decides to build a bridge across the falls "because his rival, Fyfield, "is getting the benefit of the 'Jacob's Ladder,' . . . making his place more easy to get to" (*P* 16). His bridge is prompted by competitiveness and greed; it sparks more competitiveness in the "crazy" (16) Sam Patch who dives into the water to rescue "one of the rolling pins . . . from the water below" (16). His motive is made clear by the comment he makes just before leaping: "'Now, old Tim Crane thinks he has done something great; but I can beat him'" (17). Crane's mercenary motive means in Williams' view that he has not done anything great. Indeed, the escalating one-upmanship he begins with his bridge-building leads the measure-obsessed Patch into the jumping career which, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, ends in his death.

Scattered throughout the poem are references to that ultimate bridge and bridge-builder, chief Pharisee and professor of the Law of the Father: the Pope, the *pontifix* himself. In him order, control, and sterility are clearly brought together. As *pontifix* he is named the bridge between man and God; his writings are held by Catholics to convey, bridge-like, God's will and meaning to his people. The Pope insists on writing regularly to Paterson, on trying to establish a connection between Rome and New Jersey, even though there is no evidence that Paterson wants him to, that he ever responds, or that he even reads what "the Holy Father" writes:

> Twice a month Paterson receives
> communications from the Pope . . .
> . . . .
> . . . And clerks in the post-
> office ungum rare stamps from
> his packages and steal them for their

children's albums . (*P* 9)

It would seem that Paterson is more interested in the fact of the communications than in their content, perhaps because the content is no fruitful seed.

The first thing wrong with these messages from the Pope is their regularity, the dishonest certainty and confidence that such repetition implies. A true Sower does not spit or scatter his seeds in such a manner, in Williams' view. The fact that the Pope does not cease his regular messages, despite never receiving a reply, underlines his sterile rigidity: he seems stuck, like his stamps, to fixed concepts. These messages of the Pope represent, in *Paterson*, institutionalized and established interpretations of history and experience, and systematic theology with all the answers worked out. As I have sought to demonstrate, such naming and ordering actually imply a fundamental absence of true worship, true wisdom, or true creativity, according to Williams.

The second target of Williams' criticism in the above narrative is the clerks' treatment of the rare stamps, another example of hoarded resources. Unlike the actual communications from the Pope, the stamps are of value or were so once, but they now have become divorced from their original function and so useless, the province not of poets but of clerks. This, however, is not only another example of the ignorant greed that Paterson encounters everywhere. It is also an example of poetic justice. After all, in Williams' view these clerks are doing to the Pope's stamps just what other popes, enemies of poetry and desire, might have done to Sappho's poems, still possibly "hid / in the Vatican crypts" (*P* 119). The poems and stamps themselves are not under criticism here. Such works of art are in themselves vital, not sterile. However, when hoarded they are taken out of circulation (the flow is dammed up) and forced into an ordered design which leaves nothing to wonder.

In this sense the Dewey Decimal System is quite similar to Catholic theology in that it offers a place for everything, and everything in its place. Like the Vatican, the Library of *Paterson 3* has become both crypt and bridge, one of the institutions of society implicated in the paralysis of such

figures as Cress whose "creative capacities" (*P* 45) have gotten dammed up:

> Texts mount and complicate them-
> selves, lead to further texts and those
> to synopses, digests and emendations. So be it.
> Until the words break loose or--sadly
> hold, unshaken. Unshaken! So be it. For
> the made-arch holds, the water piles up debris
> against it but it is unshaken. They gather
> upon the bridge and look down, unshaken. (*P* 130)

The liturgical recurrence ("So be it . . . So be it") contributes to our association of church with library, but the most important word in this passage must be "Unshaken," which Williams employs four times in four lines. He is naming the disease. As I sought to show in the previous chapter, extravagance is one way to break away from repetition; in this case, Williams repeats "Unshaken" extravagantly. This helps the language of the passage resist the stale structures of thought and language which, in Williams' view, keeps clerics and clerks unshaken. The effect of the insistent "unshaken" is to shake the reader up, to insist that church and library be shaken up. Both are sadly unshaken, and badly in need of a good shaking: their over-confidence needs to be shaken up, and their hoarded treasures need to be shaken out, broken loose. In a passage which precedes the one quoted above by only a few pages, Williams makes it clear that it is as undesireable for a man to be "unshaken" as it is for words to be. Here Williams positions Paterson as an accolyte, almost chanting, to Beautiful Thing:

> and I
> attendant upon you, shaken by your beauty
>
> Shaken by your beauty .
> Shaken. (125)

We may identify this shaking with the worshipful awe which I discussed in the previous chapter. Tight-ropes, in *Paterson*, are privileged over bridges: the tight-rope is much more likely to lead a man to shake, and this shaking he may transform into dance or laughter.

Texts mount and pile up against the made-arch of the bridge, which identifies the bridge as a

library, and identifies the library as another kind of damnable bridge. Williams positions librarians among the misers who, like those at the universities, "restrict knowledge" by hoarding it:

> They block the release
> that should cleanse and assume
> prerogatives as a private recompense (*P* 34)

Such a rebuke invokes in its tone and syntax Jesus' mocking rebuke of the Pharisees:

> . . . ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe unto you! (Luke 11.46b-47a)

One of the most ghastly images in *Paterson* is that in *Book Four* of the totally dehumanized occupants of "the tall buildings . . . where / the money's made" (*P* 165). In a purgatory of self-satisfaction they slide:

> up and down
> directed missiles
> in the greased shafts of the tall buildings .
> They stand torpid in cages, in violent motion
> unmoved
> but alert!-
> predatory minds, un-
> affected
> UNINCONVENIENCED
> unsexed, up
> and down (without wing motion) This is how
> the money's made . using such plugs. (*P* 165)

These bankers are named "plugs," which means "geldings." Their lack of any human spark of feeling or creativity is reinforced by the prefix "un-," which appears four times in this passage, once isolated at the end of a line and then shouted in upper case. However, the plugs, as Williams represents them here, are not impotent in their capacity for violent destruction; it is only creation that they cannot manage. The military language comparing them to missiles invokes the Cold War and possibly even the United Nations (UN); these association suggests that the wealth, power and influence of the nation depends on a military-industrial base which requires an enemy in order to thrive. These people, Williams would have us know, these plugs, are the people who are running this country

without touching it, without any of love's inconvenience or attention.

Now, this passage is actually a part of the poem written by the wealthy lesbian Corydon, a stale "pastiche of Yeats, Eliot" and "Hart Crane" (Mariani 617). As such it should be read as satire. However, it is not the content of this passage which he is satirizing so much as Corydon's lack of awareness of her own writing's significance. The sentiments which Corydon expresses in these lines are actually quite consistent with themes developed elsewhere in the text. What makes Corydon a target of Williams' satire in this case is not what she says but the fact that she does not recognize the perversion she is describing as her own. She cannot recognize her own hypocrisy, her own sterility. She thinks she is criticizing others, but we know from her wealth and her proprietary behaviour towards her nurse/masseuse Phyllis that she is really holding up a mirror to herself. It is the fact that Corydon remains blocked from herself, that the language she uses has not brought her to the point of shaking, that ultimately damns such stale language: the form is too fossilized to allow the content, or the paralyzed poet who sets it down, any real vitality.

Even though a miserly attitude is strongly criticized in *Paterson,* however, we must not make the mistake of assuming that Klaus Ehrens, the preacher in *Book Two* whose congregation Paterson observes and whose sermon he overhears, is intended for our admiration merely because he preaches the evils of material acquisition. He is "ineffective and comic" as Mariani (620) says, but he is more; he is destructive and dangerous. Through his figure, in fact, Williams explores the extent towards which one should accept the New Testament teachings about material poverty which form the basis of Klaus Ehrens' sermon, and points out where one should depart from those teachings, and why. The blocked lives of Ehrens' followers, poor in joy, desire, and liberty, evidence the destructiveness of his philosophy.

The text of which Ehrens' sermon is largely a paraphrase and a personal endorsement is the following:

> Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Matt. 6.19-21)

Williams, we know, does not believe that "your heart" should be anywhere but here "upon earth." The difficulty for readers, however (especially those readers raised on Matthew 6 and therefore already predisposed to approve of anything that invokes it), is that the expressions of sympathy for the poor and contempt for the greedy offered earlier in the text make Ehrens' position at first seem quite attractive. By this means the reader is led to become complicit with Ehrens in his exploitative treatment of those he purports to save, for he is only gradually revealed to the reader as a hoarder of spiritual wealth, as greedy in his own way as the bankers of Paterson.

Although one of the themes of *Paterson* is that "Money sequestered enriches avarice," Williams affirms equally strongly that "poverty" is "the direct cause of / disaster" (182). He refuses to represent poverty as either glamorous or spiritual, showing us its scarred body with unflinching love. Klaus Ehrens, on the other hand, tells his audience:

> Give away your money, He said, and I
> will make you the richest man in the world!
> And I bowed my head and said to Him, Yeah, Lord.
> And his blessed truth descended upon me and filled
> me with joy, such joy and such riches as I
> had never in my life known to that day and I said
> to him, Master!
> . . . .
> So I started to get rid of my moneyl It didn't take
> me long I can tell you! I threw it away with both
> hands. (70--71)

He is still emphasizing the acquisition of "such riches," and he makes to his congregation the promise that, if they will follow his example, "Great riches shall be" similarly theirs (66).

Wilful poverty is something that Williams, with his commitment to things, will never endorse. His belief that churches exploit people "'to pay for huge heaps of stone called churches and

cathedrals'" (cited in Mariani 411) is evident in such passages as this one, with which *Paterson 2* Part II opens:

> Blocked.
> (Make a song out of that: concretely)
> By whom?
>
> In its midst rose a massive church. . . And it all came
> to me then--that those poor souls had nothing else in the world,
> save that church, between them and the eternal stony, ungrate-
> ful and unpromising dirt they lived by . . . (62)

Not only does the church fail to mediate between the "poor" and and the "unpromising dirt," not only does it fail to minister to their needs, it actually steals from them, Williams implies here: the statement that "those poor souls" have "nothing else in the world, / save that church" suggests with its language of ownership that it is in fact the poor who paid for that church's rising.

Ehrens' claim, "his blessed truth descended upon me," is to Williams merely an example of the rhetoric of exploitation, and the poet settles any doubt on the matter by demonstrating Ehrens' claim to be untrue. The diction and syntax of Ehrens' assertion invoke "the Spirit descending" on Jesus at his baptism "from heaven like a dove" (John 1.32). Paterson, in Ehrens' audience and hearing his claim, looks for evidence but sees none: "No figure / from the clouds seems brought hovering near" (65). Williams raises up the image of the Biblical Holy Spirit in order to erase it from the scene. His Holy Spirit or Muse is Beautiful Thing, whom Paterson refers to as his "dove" (126). And as for the presence of Beautiful Thing, here, as for whether the abstract, cliche-ridden Ehrens may claim inspiration for his sermon, Paterson asks incredulously:

> Is this the only beauty here?
> And is this beauty--
> torn to shreds by the
> lurking schismatists? (71)

Ehrens is much too certain of his truths, which alone would qualify him for the title of "lurking schismatist," in Williams' view. "I bring / the riches of all the ages to you here today" (66), is his

immodest claim. He is actually quite typical of the arrogant and appropriative Pharisees whom we encounter in so many guises in *Paterson.*

The source of Ehrens' great confidence is the Law he lives by, and consequently he is much too ready to lay the heavy burden of its prescriptions and proscriptions on his audience. Ironically, while Ehrens is promising to the members of his congregation, "Great riches shall be yours!" (66), Paterson is observing that great riches are theirs already, riches that should be spent or released. And Ehrens is getting in the way. Williams demonstrates that "the riches of all the ages" are already present in the beauty of nature and in "the beauty of holiness" that is the desire of the women in the congregation (71). Ehrens cannot give it to them, and, blind as Corydon, he cannot even recognize it in them. He just does not give them credit.

Thus, Protestants fare no better than Catholics in Williams' treatment of theologians, for all, according to him, are Pharisees. Ehrens may not be the Pope, but he is "protesting--as / though the world," and, we might also add, the children, "were his own" (*P* 65). Since Ehrens paraphrases Jesus and claims a similar experience of heavenly benediction, his treatment of the children in his congregation invites comparison to the treatment accorded children by Jesus. In this he falls short, by Williams' standards or by Jesus'. Both in *Paterson* and in the New Testament the Pharisaic tendency to lay heavy burdens on one's followers is considered particularly grievous when those being burdened are children. In three of the four Gospels Jesus is recorded as uttering this particularly dire warning to those who offend "these little ones":

> And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. (Matt. 18.2-6)

The satiric effect of Williams' portrayal of Ehrens is enhanced by the Matthews intertext, for the

discrepancy is quite marked between the preacher's obedience to the law pertaining to charity and his disregard of the law pertaining to children. In other words, he is a hypocrite. That Ehrens is a false prophet, or Pharisee, is most evident in his treatment of the children in his audience. In his "cramped arena," on "broken benches . . . . a few children have been propped by the others / against their running off ." These benched players constitute "the Lord's line," and their coaches are "three middle aged men with iron smiles . . . behind the benches" (*P* 63). The men's smiles are like shackles; these children, images of the innocence and wonder that according to Williams should be set free, are therefore in jail.

Lest there be any doubt that these little ones are much offended, Paterson continues:

> Behind him the drawn children whom his suit
> of holy proclamation so very badly fits,
> winkless, under duress, must feel
> their buttocks ache on the slats of the sodden
> benches. (*P* 64)

Not surprisingly, in his revision of the Matthew text Williams switches the emphasis from the children's necks to their buttocks, which here are aching from Ehrens' infliction of the Lord's line, his weapon drawn against them. "Suffer little children to come unto me," Jesus implores his disciples, "and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10.14). Of course, what these children are being forbidden is not, in the *Paterson* passage, made clear, but it almost certainly involves moving freely and happily, enjoying their play and relieving their bodies' ache. Again, Williams is re-directing his audience away from the direction gestured in by the Biblical text. If Ehrens were to obey Mark 10.14 and release the children, where or to whom should they go? Not to Jesus. He is absent from the scene. The concepts of liberty and worship as developed in *Paterson* suggest that the adults should, like Pharoah, simply let the children go: go join the dogs sniffing the trees, go find a green bush.

The divine, Williams would have us remember, is inseparable from the natural world by

which we must know it; knowing God can mean knowing only "how futile would be the search / for you in the multiplicity / of your debacle" (*P* 75). In Williams' view God does not reveal himself to man as Ehrens claims. So who is to say where, and how, children should seek Him?

Set into *Paterson 2* is a fragment of a letter from Cress in which she writes, "You might as well take all your own literature and everyone else's and toss it into one of those big garbage trucks . . . " (82). Williams appears to have taken her advice to heart, for he begins immediately with the millstone of Ehrens's literature:

> . and there go the Evangels! (their organ
> loaded into the rear of a light truck) scooting
> down-hill . the children
> are at least getting a kick out of *this*! (82)

This light truck may be identified with those big garbage trucks invoked by Cress. Yes, Williams implies, dispose of the Evangels, not your money; deprive the Fathers of *their* "organ": dump it, if the ocean is too far away, "down-hill." Children should not just be "suffered"; they should be empowered, handed the knife of laughter that allows them to get back at Cronos. Now, for the first time on this Sunday afternoon, they are partaking of the drunken dance of laughter; they are, in Williams' view, worshipping.

What, then, has Ehrens to give these people? From the point of view of one who believes that the only treasure, the only heaven, resides in the experience of the moment here on earth, his promises of heavenly treasure are empty. As far as Charity goes, he has indeed given his money away, perhaps, but it was not to these people. They are already poor, yet he wants them to give away all that they have. They already have nothing, Williams would remind us, but their desire. And the Puritanical Ehrens is doing all he can to destroy that.

The Pharisees of *Paterson* are, generally, enemies of desire. Here in the Park on this Sunday afternoon, a true religious experience *could* occur, Williams suggests, if the women sitting in Ehrens' congregation could express their "flagrant . . . desire" (91). This desire he calls "the beauty of

holiness" (71), employing a phrase used in the call to worship of many Christian churches: "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 96.9). In fact, the temple in which we may worship--the temple of the Holy Spirit of desire--may be, according to *Paterson*, the body of a whore, the body of an adulterer. Williams is revising the second "Great Law" of Christianity, which is "Love thy neighbour." He would replace *Caritas* with *Eros*. *Paterson 2* is a celebration of "the ceremonial of love!" (48), and here Paterson exults: "No flesh but the caress!" (48). Since love makes real, since this world of the flesh is brought to life (in our minds, where it either finds existence or does not) when we make love to it, the poet's imperative is this: "I must find my meaning and lay it" (*P* 145). Charity will not do.

Those who seek to interpret experience without celebrating the flesh must misinterpret, and thus speak a false language, according to Williams. Preachers are supposed to interpret the divine word to their congregations, and minister to their needs. Men who abuse their position of authority to impose a false language on others are rebuked in *Paterson*:

> A false language. A true. A false language pouring--a
> language (misunderstood) pouring (misinterpreted) without dignity,
> without minister, crashing upon a stone ear. (*P* 15)

The above passage refers in part to the Reverend Mr. Cummings, and his wife, whose mysterious death is one of the subjects of *Paterson 1*. He, named a minister, proves himself spiritual brother to Klaus Ehrens during his wife's crisis on the edge of the Falls. As a false minister he has been pouring a "false language" upon his wife; now she hears the "true," but the fatal consequence demonstrates that there is no one to interpret it for her, no true mediator or minister. In Williams' imagined version (or revision) of this historical event, Mrs. Cummings, overwhelmed by her sudden recognition of the Fall's vitality, throws "herself upon the bed" of the river (84).

Ehrens and Cummings, then, are like the Biblical Pharisees to whom Jesus says, "Woe unto you . . . ! for you have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that

were entering in ye hindered" (Luke 11.52). Their words are both false and misleading. Ehrens is a pathetic failure as Paterson's rival for the position as prophet. His sermon is also an important reminder of what form the true word will not, must not, take. Paterson makes no promises; he neither harnesses nor harangues. He does not deal in abstractions. One effect achieved by the disappointing sermon is that Williams' unconventional style in other sections of *Paterson* becomes privileged by comparison. After hearing Ehrens' stale hypocrisy the reader may be more willing to attend, with open eyes and ears, as Williams seeks to reveal the divine mystery in his own way. The poem *Paterson* must not, cannot, sound like Klaus Ehrens' sermon.

This is not to say, however, that Paterson is sure that he is speaking the true word. He knows most surely only that he must invent a new form, one as different from the sermon as can be. True invention, according to Williams, requires the discarding of all traditional measures, whether they be pounds, inches, dollar signs, or poetic feet:

> Without invention nothing is well spaced,
> unless the mind change, unless
> the stars are new measured, according
> to their relative positions, the
> line will not change, the necessity
> will not matriculate: unless there is
> a new mind there cannot be a new
> line, the old will go on
> repeating itself with recurring
> deadliness.
> . . . .
> . . . without invention the line
> will never again take on its ancient
> divisions when the word, a supple word,
> lived in it, crumbled now to chalk. (*P* 50)

This poem does what it says, unlike Ehrens. Cushman points out that the opening line of this passage is in iambic pentameter, but that "Having been invoked, however, the old meter is immediately deformed like the iambics of HIpponax, by, in this case, the halting, mutilating conventions of line-sentence counterpointing" (114). There are also important echoes in the above passage to Isaiah's

famous challenge:

> Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? (Isa. 40.12)

Both passages, for instance, challenge man's tendency to arrogance by invoking the mystery of the distant stars. However, whereas Isaiah implies that man needs to cease from measuring the works of the loving Creator, Paterson seeks a new measure in order that there can be a "new / line" invented by lovingly creative men. Given this transfer of responsibility from heaven to earth, the consequences of uncreative rigidity are far-reaching indeed, for the "line" referred to here, the one that will not change "unless / the stars are new measured," is not only the poetic line; it is the line of the human race itself as it descends, ever evolving and always improving in a version of the fortunate fall. Evolution itself is blocked, Williams suggests, by the "recurring / deadliness" of old measures.

Such an understanding of evolution may help account for the tone of anxiety in the *Paterson* passage. The poet worries that the mind may not be able to change. His lines reveal an oppressive awareness of the vitality once possessed by those "ancient / divisions" which once sustained a "supple word." This is the paradox that is rendering Paterson "taut" with anxiety: the old line is a chalky fossil, dry and brittle bones with no spirit or life to them. But the new line must take on "ancient / divisions" in order to sustain a living word. I believe that Williams is not thinking only of lineation when he writes here of "divisions." Lurking behind these lines on the subjects of change, evolution, and division may well be an allusion to that very ancient division of languages in Babel. If so, then Williams is affirming God's anger at the pride and ambition that led the people to say, "Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Gen. 11.4). Such language speaks not only of arrogance but of a desire for a single, monolithic culture in which all would live: this is completely contrary to Williams' affirmation of the local idiom.

Unfortunately, as we know, Williams did grow up within the linguistic systems of such a monolithic culture, which makes it difficult for him to achieve a pure state of Babel. The following passage from *Book Two* exemplifies Paterson's anxiety at his own status as Pharisee turned self-appointed prophet:

> That the poem,
> the most perfect rock and temple, the highest
> falls, in clouds of gauzy spray, should be
> so rivalled . That the poet,
> in disgrace, should borrow from erudition (to
> unslave the mind): railing at the vocabulary
> (Borrowing from those he hates, to his own
> disfranchisement) .
> --discounting his failures .
> Seeks to induce his bones to rise into a scene,
> his dry bones, above the scene, (they will not) (80)

The poet does not wish to repeat the old line, but to revive its supple vitality through invention, to live up to it, to liven it up, to relieve himself of the anxiety its chalky traces have inscribed across his mind.

Now, compare with this passage its precursor from Ezekiel:

> The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones. And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus said the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live . . .
>
> So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. (Ezek. 37.1-5, 7)

In this familiar Old Testament passage, Ezekiel is prophesying to a defeated, captive people, a people who have been punished sorely for their sins and their hardness of heart. He is prophesying the resurrection, the revitalization, of a nation's heart and spirit. Williams, too, writes of a resurrection that is only imaginary, metaphoric. In the above passage from *Paterson*, the poet, who has been observing the degradation of his own people, is commenting satirically on the false prophet Ehrens,

whose sermon he has observed. Paterson decides that Ehrens, like his message, is "Outworn!" for, "though he sweat for all his worth / no poet has come" (79). If we are seeking a present-day John the Baptist, in other words, we must not look for him in "*le / pauvre petit ministre*" (*P* 82) or others of his ilk. Ehrens is a very poor rival of "the poem."

That there exists a satisfactory alternative, however, is not certain. The poet is "in disgrace," because although he "seeks to induce his bones to rise . . . (they will not)." The more readily available explanation for this poetic impotence is that Paterson is still seeking a language adequate to the ideal, that he must, to his detriment, "borrow from erudition (to / unslave the mind)": a mind enslaved by erudition to begin with. The Ezekiel intertext, however, indicates a second reason for the poet's disgrace, a reason as significant as his unfortunately excessive education: whereas Ezekiel prophesied as he "was commanded," Williams revises the narrative so that the poet "seeks to induce his bones to rise" under his own power, of his own will. He is under no one's command but his own and, as a consequence, may have access to no greater power than his own. The poet's bones will not rise; they are, he is, fallen: not in a state of grace. He is a prophet in disgrace, angry and at the same time ashamed that "the poem . . . should be so rivaled."

The "poem" to which Williams is referring is not *Paterson*; it is the ideal poem that exists only in the imagination: "the most perfect rock and temple, the highest / falls," the poem that Paterson cannot write but which he attempts to replicate. This ideal poem is Williams' version of the *alpha* and *omega*, that which exists eternally and is yet to come; it is the anticipated Word for which Paterson is trying to clear a way, of which he is trying to speak. According to this reading of the above passage, Paterson would wish the poem had a better rival (*i.e.* himself, or a better self), not that it be unrivalled.

Ehrens and Paterson are both rivals of the poem, in fact, and thus rivals of each other. Both men compose texts. Both think of themselves as possessing a word that others need to hear; and

Klaus Ehrens has an audience. Williams is suggesting then, that rivalries can and do exist between poets or between poetics. And the self-appointed prophet, the uncalled, always risks finding himself an anxious and inadequate rival of the paternal poem, stuck with a bone that will not rise.

As I sought to show in the previous chapter, in Williams' view one solution for an anxious and insecure rival is to make a virtue of uncertainty. Intoxication, nonsense, and play represent not only a resistance to reason, but also a commitment to an extravagantly noncommittal relationship to meaning. This commitment, of course, calls for extravagant and convoluted forms.

While the Gospel of John only quotes John the Baptist saying, "Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias" (John 1.23), Luke's version of the John the Baptist narrative elaborates on the violence against nature such an action requires:

> Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth. (Luke 3.5)

This is starting to sound like engineers' work, or like plowing instead of spitting out seeds. Paterson, in contrast, asserts:

> Virtue is wholly
> in the effort to be virtuous .
> This takes connivance,
> takes convoluted forms, takes
> time! (*P* 189)

Connivance is not traditionally associated with Christian virtue, though it is a noun that Dionysius or Priapus could own very easily. "Connivance" suggests the existence of an enemy to be outwitted. It is anything but straight, tells anything but a straightforward narrative.

In *Paterson*, then, the road to salvation--if it exists--is not straight and narrow but "convoluted," as convoluted in form as the poem we hold in our hands, "fragmented and formless" (Cushman 103). Only by such paths, suggests Williams, can we hope to get around the agents of blockage. One kind of connivance described in *Paterson* is the connivance against any kind of

planning, aimed at circumventing self-imposed blockages. Drunkenness would come under this category, as would the practice of writing "carelessly, so that nothing that is / not green will survive" (*P* 129). This piece of advice may be read as Williams' revision of Jesus' advice to his disciples: "Take no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye should speak" (Matt. 10.19). Williams affirms the deliberate thoughtlessness recommended in the original, but once again he relocates the source of the inspiring spirit from heavenly Other to divine self. *Paterson*, in its form, imitates the effects of connivance, both impulsive and premeditated. According to Williams the product resulting from acts of circumvention will, as *Paterson* demonstrates, be convoluted, not straight. Paterson the Prophet first enjoins his audience members to "Listen!" Then he exhorts them to make convoluted the way of the Word.

Chapter Three

Banished Exile, Favoured Son:

Paterson Wrestles the Father for His Place as Patriarch

"I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." - Gen. 32.26b

The poet Paterson, that conniver, seeks to do more than call others to a new understanding or a new anticipation. He is also very concerned with demonstrating his own power, proving his poetic bones capable of rising. "When you're through with sex, with ambition," comments Williams, "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" (IW 22). Insofar as *Paterson* is itself an attempt to establish a new poetic line, the poet is also seeking patriarchal status: recognition of himself as one whose craft is capable of passing through rising above the destructive flood; one whose offspring, his new American line, will flourish forever; one who has defeated his rivals, both siblings and Father, to earn a place of preeminence among them.

In other words, Williams wants to make history. Although *Paterson* represents eternity as existing in the flux of the moment, it is also very concerned with the subject of literary immortality, concerned that the new poetry "survive" (*P* 129). For instance, Williams writes of Paterson in *Book 1* that:

> he envies the men that ran
>
> and could run off
> toward the peripheries--
>
> to other centers, direct--
> for clarity (if they found it)
>   loveliness and
> authority in the world-- (36)

The men Paterson envies (Pound and Eliot, according to Mariani [519]) are those who can and do make history, evidenced by the "authority" accorded them "in the world."

Becoming a patriarch, in *Paterson*, involves not only the primal rivalry with the Father but also the equivalent of sibling rivalry. This is true in the Old Testament as well. It is impossible to think of Noah, he who like Paterson floated on the waters to deliverance, without remembering all the others who were not elected to be saved, the nation that was erased so that Noah and his family could build a new one where they had been, write a new narrative over their absence. Almost every major patriarchal figure in the Old Testament is paired with a rival brother, a false heir or an heir apparent whom he supplants, either through divine election or divinely approved connivance. David, for example, has his Jonathan; Isaac, Ishmael; Jacob, Esau. Paterson, as I hope I have demonstrated, has several rivals, among them Klaus Ehrens, Corydon, and the man in tweeds, not to mention "the most perfect" poem (80).

As *Paterson 1* opens Williams names his protagonist "Noah" (15). This concern to establish Paterson as a poetic patriarch, the father of a new "line," is in evidence throughout the text, and as *Paterson 5* draws to a close we find the poet further identified with Joseph, (step)father of the Word (227). Joseph is a kind of patriarch in that he is a man elected to help establish or move forward the history of a people, in the dual capacity of obedient child (for he obeys God's instructions about his forthcoming marriage) and strong loving father (helping to raise Jesus "in favour with God and man" [Luke 2.52b]).

Jacob, unlike Noah and Joseph, is only named once in *Paterson*, in a reference to a "winding stairs in the gorge leading to the opposite side of the river" known as "the 'Jacob's Ladder'" (16), but his narrative is invoked early in *Paterson 1*, and Williams treats Phyllis in such a way that she reenacts in *Paterson 4* one of the more memorable narratives concerning Jacob. I would suggest that he is a particularly significant precursor for the self-appointed Paterson, because he takes such an

active, even aggressive, role in securing his place: Jacob outwits his blind father Isaac, out-cooks his hungry brother Esau, out-tricks his treacherous father-in-law Laban, and (possibly) out-wrestles God himself, all on the way to being re-named Israel, favoured son and chosen father of a chosen people (Gen. 25-32). After being thoroughly tricked, Jacob's father Isaac apologizes helplessly to his older son Esau: "Thy brother came with subtilty and hath taken away thy blessing" (Gen. 27.35). Like Paterson, Jacob clearly believes that preparing a way for himself "takes connivance" (*P* 189). The opening of the Preface to *Paterson 1* contains a line which sums up quite nicely Jacob's trickery of his brother (for whose birthright he traded a mess of potage) and his father (whom he fed with Esau's menu for a blessing): "Deceive and eat" (3).

Williams himself uses the language of Jacob's narrative in describing the process he went through revising *Paterson 3*: "So he kept circling the poem, then jabbing at it, then wrestling," according to Mariani, "until by mid-February [1949] he told Burke that, though the giant had had him on its hip for a while, he'd finally managed to throw it and come up once more for air" (580-1). "The Giant" here refers not only to the poem itself but more particularly to the internalized self-prohibitions, the Law of the Father, that, in Williams' view, can cut a man off before he can cut loose. Williams revisits the story of Jacob in the person of Phyllis, Paterson's almost-lover, one of the "connivers" in the poem. She is a complex figure who serves several functions in the text, one of which, I would argue, is to represent in her relationship to her father the recurring nightmare of Williams' own anxiety of influence. This is what she writes home from New York:

> Look, Big Shot, I refuse to come home until you promise to cut out the booze. . . . Maybe your family did once own the whole valley. Who owns it now? What you need is to be slapped down.. . . I'm having a fine time in the Big City as a Professional Woman, ahem! . . .
>
> I won't wrestle with you all night on the bed any more because you got the D.T.s. I can't take it, your [*sic*] too strong for me. (*P* 150)

The incestuous overtones of Phyllis' nocturnal wrestlings emphasize the erotic aspects of the parallel story in Genesis and invite a psychoanalytic reading of both texts by invoking the primary

prohibition. In many ways, not least of which is the relative dignity accorded the principle figures in each narrative, Phyllis' wrestling narrative serves as a dark looking-glass version of Jacob's:

> And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.
>
> And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. . . .
>
> And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. . . . and he halted upon his thigh. (Gen. 32.24-28, 30-31)

Each narrative relates a highly ambiguous victory, the sign of which in the case of Jacob is a rather intimate crippling. Jacob comes away from this match with a shriveled tendon in his groin, a new name, and a promised land; Phyllis, too, has acquired a new name, but it has been given to her by her employer Corydon, not her father; and the question of what "the Big City" has to offer her, as the very subject of her correspondence, remains far from being resolved. Jacob, blessed son and, now, newly named patriarch, has this encounter on his journey home after many years away; Phyllis is the exile, the (self) banished child, symbolically castrate, reminding her father why she left home in the first place and why she will not return. Jacob feels honoured to have wrestled a figure whom he believes to be God; Phyllis feels disgusted to have wrestled a figure who believes himself to be much more of a patriarch than he deserves credit for being: "Maybe your family did once own the whole valley," she mocks. "Who owns it now?" Times change, we are reminded, historical powers fade, and any history, any national or narrative line, is the enemy to the extent that it is taken to represent an unquestionable authority.

In discussing Williams' attitude towards the past, and his literary heritage in particular, Callan emphasizes that Williams, "Again and again, . . . rejects an imposing order and yet consistently acclaims the value of form, the need for order." He concludes that, "Rather than see history as an oppressor, Williams meets it face to face" (xiv). I contend that it would be far more

accurate to say that Williams acknowledges in his poetry, again and again, that history *is* an oppressor, and a generative power as well: a face-to-face meeting will not do. He must wrestle it, all of it, with all of himself, every limb and joint. And he must win against the beloved enemy.

Thus it is the figure of the Father, not that of the child, that is especially degraded in Williams' version of the wrestling tale. Phyllis' father is afforded little or no dignity, whereas she achieves a measure of victory, and of dignity, in choosing her banishment and in speaking out against him. For these reasons she looks good compared to Jacob, who considers the fact of his mere survival a victory indeed. Williams is rejecting the Biblical view that, when the antagonist is the Father, and when the Father gets to choose his opponent, it is such an honour to be allowed even to wrestle with him that a lame leg, that mark of defeat, is transformed into a mark of victory.

This is not to say, however, that Williams rejects laming or crippling as an appropriate metaphor for this artist: quite the contrary. Paterson's totem is the eagle crippled in its attempt at rebirth:

> The bird, the eagle, made himself
> small--to creep into the hinged egg
> until therein he disappeared, all
> but one leg upon which a claw opened
> and closed wretchedly gripping
> the air . . . (*P* 73)

The eagle described here has much less dignity than the phoenix: a claw wretchedly gripping the air lacks the completeness of self-immolation, let alone the drama. However, Williams' eagle does partake more of the self-renewing phoenix than the parallel Biblical text allows:

> And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, . . . for it is better for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. (Matt. 5.30)

The big difference between such scriptural self-curtailment and the type valued by Williams is that, to the poet, the purpose of such sacrifice is to gain power. Williams writes in one of his essays, "'I was early in life sick to my very pit with order that cuts off the crab's feelers to make them fit into the

box'" (cited in Callan, xiv). Haunted by the threat of creative castration, he responds with the alternative of self-curtailment, and makes himself small, like the eagle. The power which Williams hopes may be gained by such chosen maiming is represented by the suggestion of fertility in the passage describing the eagle's crippling, for the eagle, the male principle, enters under his own power into the ovate world, thus demonstrating vitality and potency at the very moment of his diminishment.

The Passion of Paterson, then, Williams' representation of *kenosis* (emptying out of pride, of divinity), closely resembles, I believe, the daemonic type which Bloom describes as one of the poet's strategies of survival when wrestling the precursor/antagonist. Daemonic *kenosis* is very different from the Passion of Biblical martyrs such as Jesus and Samson, who give their all that the Father's strength may be glorified. Paterson is a poet who will approach death in order to avoid it, to defeat death, but not through true descent and resurrection. He will only fight to the point of crippling, and he strives to inflict more injury than he receives. Paterson, I believe, exemplifies the aspiring poet who, in Bloom's terms, "takes care to fall soft, while the precursor falls hard" (91). Such a poet will accept curtailment if he may thereby curtail the Father as well, but neither must die. "Death of the Father would deprive literature of many of its pleasures," Roland Barthes reminds us:

> If there is no longer a Father, why tell stories? Doesn't every narrative lead back to Oedipus? Isn't storytelling always a way of searching for one's origin, speaking one's conflicts with the Law, entering into the dialectics of tenderness and hatred? (47)

Bloom also warns, however, that the poet's "self-crippling act, intended to purchase knowledge by a playing at the loss of power," may "frequently" result "in a true loss of the powers of making" (109). Williams' fear that this may be so also finds its concrete expression in the figure of Phyllis, who is sexually blocked and blocking.

What we find in *Paterson*, then, are numerous expressions of the anxiety of the banished son, striving to (re)establish himself, to prove himself his father's son by taking his place, by

becoming the father. His desire is to prove himself Isaac or Jacob; his fear is that he may be found to be Ishmael. Williams explores this anxiety through several of the characters in *Paterson*, who either embody it (as in the case of Phyllis) or speak it (as "Cress" frequently does) or both.

For example, in a letter included a part of *Paterson 1*, "E.D." states that "the artist is an Ishmael." He explains: "Call me Ishmael, says Melville in the very first line of *Moby Dick*; he is the wild ass of a man;--Ishmael means affliction" (29). Indeed it does, but Ishmael's affliction is specifically that of the rejected, banished son, the rival whose sibling finds greater favour than he.

Ishmael is the oldest son of Abraham, displaced by the anticipated appearance of Isaac. To his mother "the angel of the Lord" says:

> Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction. And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren. (Gen. 16.11-12)

Whereas Williams recommends taking pride in being a "wild ass" (as I argued in Chapter One of this paper, if my readers will pardon the pun), pride and anxiety are both at work in his consideration of the extent towards which "the artist," this artist Paterson in particular, might be "an Ishmael." Paterson dwells not only under the shadow of the Falls but also "in the presence of all his brethren"; and for Biblical patriarchs as for heroes of the American Frontier, sometimes this "town," this Promised Land, just is not big enough for two.

After all, it was only big enough for Noah. By choosing to embrace the reality of the flux, Paterson-the-poet *is* Noah, another type of Christ, another forerunner, and the drunken father of a new line (Gen. 9.21), whose clumsy and ridiculous "craft" (*P* 4) alone may hope to ride the waters and thus survive: "[r]olling in, top up, / under, thrust and recoil, a great clatter; / lifted as air, *boated*" (5, emphasis added). However, the Biblical Noah embraces the flux because he is invited, called to do so, approved for his superior obedience and loyalty to the Father. Williams resists this relationship to the Father, as I have sought to demonstrate. To build an Ark that will suffice, Noah

needs inspiration: instructions on the lines and measures appropriate to his new craft. Genesis recounts that God provided detailed measurements and directions. Noah Paterson, by contrast, recalls the Old Testament advice to seek divine assistance, only to promptly reject it. After all, his middle name is "Faitoute" (*P* 15), suggesting that he can and will making anything.

The plan of action modeled by the Psalmist for those feeling the need of assistance is this: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help" (Ps. 121.1). Paterson will not construct his craft according to such a blueprint, however. He acknowledges the existence of the hills but refuses to look up and out, away from his immediate surroundings to which he is so committed; he will look *down, here* for inspiration, not *up, there:*

> --there
> in the distance, to the north, appear
> to him the chronic hills
>
> Well, so they are.
>
> He stops short; (50)

Instead of "eternal," the hills are characterized as "chronic": as such they may be associated with the monolith of English culture which, according to Williams, is about as much of a gift as an incurable illness. Again, though, we see the self-curtailment of the poet. As a consequence of his commitment to cutting off the influence of the Father, Paterson, too, "stops short."

Ironically, Williams does insist in *Paterson* that others should acknowledge authority, though he will not always ask it of his protagonist. For instance, when Paterson rebukes the professorial Pharisees of his day for "forgetting . . . / to whom they are beholden" (32) he again stops short, this time short of identifying the Other to whom these learned men are supposed to feel obligated. We could speculate whom that might be: the working class and the poor, perhaps, upon whose backs the privileged have climbed to power; scientists such as Marie Curie, perhaps, who were responsible for the paradigm shifts, the new dispensations, which these now serve, fossilizing

once-vital new ideas into chalky lines. Both hypotheses would find support in the text, as might others. What I wish to emphasize about this passage is the fact that no one is named, the fact of interrupted gesture. Paterson is haunted by his obligations, and naming ghosts gives them too much power.

There are other figures in *Paterson* who remain anonymous; several are ghost-like and threatening. For example, Williams never names the giant who grinds men's bones (*P* 23); neither does he identify the name or origin of the corpse in *Paterson 1* that mysteriously shows up, caught in the "crotch" of two logs, "hanging over the precipice" (*P 36*). The figure is never named: it could be read as the embodiment of the poet's Oedipal nightmare, just another failed poet/castrated son with no identity, no past and no future. The corpse could also be read as the embodiment of the poet's Oedipal fantasy: the dead Father, the spirit of the Falls rendered powerless, no longer standing in "that" maternal "cavern" (*P* 39) but out in the open and out of the Mother's bed, here revealed dead, "shrouded"(*P* 39) in anonymity rather than the mystery of power. In Kristeva's terms, the son who sees his father's corpse is banished or, more accurately, seeks banishment in order to find "somewhere else" to live and love, in an attempt to "flee this permanence of meaning" ("The Father, Love, and Banishment" 150). If Williams believes the paternal body of literature to be dead, and if he suspects or fears himself to be an illegitimate son of that body, unentitled, unauthorized, disinherited by the (possibly) dead Father, he is twice-banished, twice an Ishmael. Either the father of the son is not (is no longer), or the father is not the father of this son.

Several passages in *Paterson* (most notably in *Paterson 3*) express the Passion of the banished son or doomed patriarch, confronting death and abandonment. Here is one example from *Paterson 3*:

> Blow! So be it. Bring down! So be it. Consume
> and submerge! So be it. Cyclone, fire
> and flood. So be it. Hell, New Jersey, it said
> on the letter. Delivered without comment.

So be it! (*P* 97)

In this passage one may well trace a strong family resemblance to King Lear's ravings on the Heath, but the repeated phrase "So be it" (a translation of "Amen") identifies this combination of rage, submission and exultation as a prayer. Williams is writing in a tradition which goes back to the famous sufferers Job and Jesus. Compare Paterson's Passion with that of Jesus:

> My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death . . . O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. . . . O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. (Matt.26.38-39, 42)

In both prayers the hell of submission and the heaven of inspired conviction are united in an intensely experienced moment, as are, in the case of the passage from Paterson, the elemental forces of wind, fire and flood.

Although the determined acceptance of a difficult fate clearly identifies both passages as examples of *kenosis*, Williams' repeated use of the imperative suggests at the same time the upright posture of a Joshua dominating the gates of Jericho. Williams does not make it clear whether Paterson is commanding the Father, commanding the forces of nature in the name of the Father, or commanding them in his own right, under his own authority. This very uncertainty raises the question of whether there be a Father to be commanded, and in any case this assumption of authority at the moment of submission is another striking example of daemonic *kenosis*, which empties the precursor of his divinity more completely than it does the poet, giving thereby power to the latter, and representing the former as, ultimately, powerless.

In Williams' revised *kenosis*, then, the question "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" is invoked and then left to reverberate, unanswered (Ps. 22.1, Matt. 27.46). Paterson addresses the God of Williams's childhood in a tone of bitter irony:

> If there is subtlety,
> you are subtle. I beg your indulgence:
> no prayer should cause you anything

> but tears. I had a friend . . .
> let it pass. I remember when as a child
> I stopped praying and shook with fear
> until sleep--your sleep calmed me--
>
> You also, I am sure, have read
> Frazer's Golden Bough. It does you
> justice-- (*P* 74)

Here Paterson reveals anger at the memory of how the child he once was believed the lie he now recognizes, the lie that God would punish him if he stopped praying. Now, he asserts, in the context of remembering a beloved friend, now dead, "no prayer should cause you anything / but tears": tears, perhaps, of remorse at the suffering of the friend alluded to so elliptically, and at the suffering of the fearful child who believed so mistakenly in God's power to strike him dead. The tears of the child he once was are offered here as Williams' version of the necessary and appropriate memoriam: they are the response of the banished or abandoned son to the presence of the overwhelming fact of death, and to the absence of the Father. Overwhelmed in the face of death and divine silence, the poet empties himself of language in order to prove the father to have been empty, already and always.

Now, another way that a poet may wrestle his literary Father, to wrest from him the Phallus, is to demonstrate that the poet, or that everyone else, already has it. The poem of *kenosis* quoted above concludes with a reference to "Frazer's Golden Bough," which I take to imply agreement with Frazer's belief that the Gospel story is no different in its essential structure from all the other nature myths about sacrifice and regeneration. Sir James Frazer, author of *The Golden Bough*, "remarked once," according to Peter Munz, "that if the story of Christ is so similar to the practices and beliefs of primitive pagan religions, there cannot be much truth in it" (2), and this attitude is certainly implied, if not explicitly stated, in *The Golden Bough*'s concluding chapter. Paterson's statement that *The Golden Bough* does "justice" to the Judeo-Christian God implies that He is identical in all significant respects to the pagan gods described in Frazer's book. Bloom would call this assertion an act of "repression" against the Father, achieved "by absorbing the precursor more thoroughly into tradition

than his own . . . individuation" perhaps "should allow" (Bloom 109).

Williams is also very concerned to explore the extent to which Paterson himself may be a precursor of younger poets, a literary Father. In the earlier books the subject is approached with less confidence than in *Book 5*, by which time of writing the author's reputation was of course more firmly established than it had been earlier. Towards the end of *Book One* we find a discussion of the relationship between poets in which an awareness of how precursors are vulnerable to the attacks of their children is mixed with the desire to have the authority which qualifies one as a precursor:

> Who is younger than I?
>   The contemptible twig?
> that I was?
> . . . .
> A mere stick that has
>   twenty leaves
> against my convolutions.
>   What shall it become,
>
> Snot nose, that I have
>   not been? (31-32)

Here Paterson seems to be imagining poetic offspring, chiefly for the pleasure of imagining himself defying their challenges to him.

By *Paterson 4* the poet is evidencing less anxiety and more pleasure in the fantasy, and he starts to move from the role of authoritarian King to that of kindly Father. Williams' description of the poet's son's visit to the university (*P* 171-2) merits another look here, this time in the context of the following passage from the Gospel:

> And when he was twelve years old, they [Joseph and Mary] went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And . . . as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. . . . And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And . . . they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. (Luke 2.42-7)

Paterson's son is similarly identified as being "not more than 12, . . . 14 perhaps" (171), being taken

to "a lecture, in the Solarium / topping the hospital, on atomic / fission" (171). Like Jesus a 12-year-old boy "in the midst of the doctors," he likewise outshines them, confounding his father, at least, if not the doctors. And although Williams does not specifically name the Solarium a "temple," he juxtaposes this scenario with one of his imagination in which Curie "receives / international acclaim" at the Sorbonne with the language of an Evangelical service: "Come on up! Come up Sister and be / saved" (172). The centers of science and religion are thus conflated, as Williams demonstrates the essential similarity between one kind of temple and another, one degrading system of worship and another. Perhaps the most interesting revision that Williams makes to the narrative, however, is how much better his "Joseph" (Paterson) comes off from the encounter. Unlike the Joseph described by Matthew, Paterson is not upstaged by his son, who remains silent; neither is he at any time bewildered, embarrassed or rebuked by his son's actions or words.

Whereas Paterson is not explicitly identified with Joseph in the above passage, his identification with Joseph develops in *Paterson 5* into one made much more explicit, and explored much more fully. It would seem that Williams (or at least his *alter ego* Paterson) has progressed from the anxious desire for patriarch status to a relative confidence that he has it. In celebration of the evidence of his success, Williams writes:

> Paterson has grown older
> . . . .
> trying
> to get the young
> to foreshorten
> their errors in the use of words (230-231)

Even as Paterson's confidence in his authority appears to increase, however, so does his awareness of the anxiety which his literary sons must inevitably incur in consequence of his influence upon them, their inevitable resistance of that same influence, and his own culpability. The passage quoted above acknowledges the violent aspect of literary or cultural fatherhood. The lineation suggests that Paterson has been "trying / to *get* the young [emphasis added]." This has two meanings:

that he has been trying to *father* them, and that he has been trying to *punish* them. The notion that Paterson's literary begetting entails violence on his part is suggested by the line which follows: it contains only two words: "to foreshorten," which connotes castration or curtailment. The deep indentation of the line further reinforces the effect, as it appears as though either half the line is missing or the whole line ("to get the young to foreshorten") has been cut in half.

Paterson's "get" do acknowledge his paternity, despite the implied violence. "A.G." (Allen Ginsberg) even includes in his letter to the poet a comic version of the wise, inspired upstart astonishing the elders of the temple: "When I come back I'll make big political speeches [at City Hall] in the mayoralty campaigns like I did when I was 16 only this time I'll have W.C. Fields on my left and Jehovah on my right" (*P* 213). W.C. Fields as attending angel: now that's revisionist mythology. Even in his words of gratitude, however, "A.G." manages to suggest the resistance of the son to the father's influence: "Thanks for your introduction . . . you got the point," he writes, adding that "Paterson is only a big sad poppa who needs compassion" (212-213). Although the literal reference is to Paterson the city, Ginsberg's comment may be just as applicable to Paterson the man. Yes, he's "got the point," he has the Phallus, but now so does Ginsberg, and the latter's book, with Paterson's introduction making him a literal precursor, proves it. Thus, mixed with pride of parenthood is the anxiety that he may be challenged, his position usurped. Williams has read *The Golden Bough*. He knows the king must die.

However, although the last Part of *Paterson 5* begins with a description of Brueghel's nativity scene, featuring at its centre a Joseph so elderly that even his lips sag (227), it does not end with this image, but proceeds to a contemplation of the unicorn tapestries. In contemplating the images portrayed therein, Paterson identifies himself with the King who orders the hunt ("I, Paterson, the King-self / saw the lady" [234]), but also identifies with the unicorn, "a one-horned, beautiful white beast" who "dips his horn into a poisoned stream, purifying the water for the rest of nature's

kingdom" (Rodgers 113). In "the fifteenth-century tapestries in the halls of the Cloisters that William Carlos Williams knew so well," Rodgers relates, the unicorn is portrayed purifying a stream, and then being hunted, "tamed by the maiden, . . . killed and brought to the castle," then finally, "miraculously living again, in captivity" (114).

Contemplating the image of "the dead beast / brought in at last / across the saddlebow" (234-5), the poet admonishes himself using the words of Williams' father: "Paterson, / keep your pecker up / whatever the detail!" (234). It would seem that he finds strength to do so in the image of the unicorn resurrected. Furthermore, Williams has chosen to juxtapose this part of *Paterson 5* with the description of Brueghel's Nativity, which brings the "Christian reading" of the Unicorn myth to the fore. In this reading, according to Rodgers, "the unicorn comes to symbolize Christ: he is sacrificed and resurrected" (113). In *Paterson* Williams calls on these associations to construct the unicorn as a symbol for the power of "the imagination" to, Christ-like, escape death "intact" (*P* 212).

Here is one place in *Paterson* where the poet is identified with the ultimate father-son: Jesus. Unlike Jacob or Joseph, the Jesus portrayed in the New Testament is not the kind of patriarch who, for a while, nurtures the living line or Word and then dies, fading away in the light of one who shines more brightly or more permanently. But, just as the ending of *Paterson 4* describes a resurrection that is not a resurrection, occasions on which Williams suggests an identification between Paterson and Jesus usually deny the identification at the same time. For instance, although according to Rodgers the series of tapestries represents different scenes in the hunt, death, and resurrection of one unicorn, Williams describes each scene as if it represented a different unicorn:

> A second beast is brought in
> wounded.
> And a third, survivor of the chase,
> lies down to rest . . . (235)

The poet identifies with the symbol of resurrection while simultaneously denying the significance of that symbol.

Perhaps Paterson's most glorious moment as patriarch, at least in his imagination, occurs in *Paterson* 2, in which Paterson discovers himself working a modest miracle: raising up grasshopper children out of the dust at the outset of his Sunday walk through the Park. This Biblical intertext establishes him in these scene as possessing an authority and power much greater than that of the New Testament Pharisees. Jesus rebukes the Pharisees of his day for taking their status as children of God and Abraham too much for granted. He recognizes that they have not been been expecting any illegitimate upstart to pull all those fundamental familiar, familial certainties out from under them, or off of them. But Jesus, according to Matthew, challenges this complacency, saying, "And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matt. 3.9).

And lo, here is Paterson, raising up blessed and blessing grasshoppers from the rocks and stones at his feet:

> from before his feet, half tripping,
> picking a way, there starts .
> a flight of empurpled wings!
> invisibly created (their
> jackets dust-grey from the dust . . .
> . . . .
> AND a grasshopper of red basalt, boot-long,
> tumbles from the core of his mind,
> . . . .
> --a matt stone solicitously instructed
> to bear away some rumor
> of the living presence that has preceded
> it, out-preceded its breath .
> . . . .
> He is led forward by their announcing wings.
> . . . .
> The stone lives, the flesh dies
> --we know nothing of death. (47-49)

Callan reads this scene as portraying a moment in which Paterson realizes from the flight of the grasshoppers that "he too must make his flight out of chaos" (137). The text certainly allows such a reading, but Paterson makes another discovery in this scene that may be at least as significant. It is, I

would suggest, the discovery of the possibility of incarnation that particularly marks this moment for the poet. Williams' allusion to the passage from Matthew establishes this as a moment in which a simple man's divinity is announced: these grasshoppers we may identify with Gabriel and the heavenly host over the heads of shepherds, ushering Paterson into the world "by their announcing wings"; they are his offspring, created from the dust and thus witnesses to his creative powers; and they are his congregation, his answer to the audience of his rival Klaus Ehrens. Finally (a fine fantasy), because primitive and pre-verbal, these praising and praiseworthy children constitute no threat to their progenitor. But Paterson is only Jesus in the moment, in his imagination, and in this poem: to everyone else, anywhere else, and and at any other time, those were only grasshoppers. Williams does not pretend it to be otherwise.

Conclusion

Son, Father, and Woman (of No Importance)

"For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden." - Luke 1.48[1]

No matter to what extent we decide to consider *Paterson* an epic, it is, as Williams names it, a quest (*P* 3); thus issues of identity and origin are central. Williams' protagonist Paterson is on a quest for beauty, a quest which takes him into the territory of the divine--or, more accurately, presents him with the challenge of mapping out the territory of the divine and identifying his place in relation to it. What Williams is sure of, however, is that this territory will be found to exist entirely in the world of experience, both physical and imaginative.

Williams explores Paterson's relationship to the divine by representing him in a number of roles, and through these roles exploring and developing such concepts as the sacredness of sexuality; the importance of an imagination unfettered; the necessity of invention; the necessity of worship and its appropriate modes; literary immortality; and the consequences of poetic anxiety and other causes of creative blockage. This latter topic in particular is often represented in terms of the father-son relationship, as Williams conflates English culture, orthodox religion, universities, capitalism, duty, and the Father, all of which come to represent in *Paterson* oppressive systems of thought or language which are enemies to desire, to creativity, and to the native American idiom in which Williams is sure the divine spirit of poetry must reside.

Of the many roles Paterson plays, the ones I have focused on are those of poet/minister, prophet, son, and father. In order to explore the dynamics and implications of these roles, Williams relies to some extent on Biblical images and narrative structures. These allusions contribute in numerous ways to the effect of the text. In general terms, one effect is to reinforce the validity of Williams' position where it coincides with conventional readings of the Biblical text; another is to

foreground and clarify the points at which Williams' philosophy significantly departs from the conventional and the directions in which it departs.

Through references to the king and poet David, Williams explores and presents his paradigm of praise and worship, with the poet's attention often divided between the object of his worship and the threatening giants; through references to the prophets Williams explores and presents his understanding of what constitutes sinful behaviour and the ways in which society should reform; as self-appointed prophet and hopeful patriarch he explores the anxieties involved in being an imperfect poet, and their possible resolutions.

Much of my focus has been on Williams' representation of the Law of the Father and the poet's relationship to it. I have, for instance, sought to explore the paradoxical nature of this relationship which seems to centre on the poet/son's compulsion to requite the pontifical father whose Law is Death: to pay him back; to take his place; to erase him; to prove worthy of his love.

If *Paterson* may be read as a revisionist text, in which language is engaged in suppressing, usurping, or transforming the voice of the collective Father who is in one of his aspects the author of the Bible, what, then, of the Mother? The other eternity is the Ocean womb, with which we may also identify the belly of the whale invoked in *Paterson 1*. I suspect that critics such as Conrad (129) may prove correct in their argument that Williams' vaunted "androgyny" may profitably be read as an attempt to appropriate the female principle. If, as Bloom suggests, the anxious young poet wishes to father the poetic spirit upon himself, then he wishes to be father, mother, and poetic offspring, the entire Holy Family in one. Behind the body of the Dead Father, that locus of so much meaning, is, according to Kristeva, the prohibited mother. "Now, how can one fail to see," she asks, "that if Death gives meaning to the sublime story of this first love" (of the son for the father), it is only because it has come to conceal barred incest, to take up all the space where otherwise we would imagine an unspoken woman: the (father's) wife, the (son's) mother?" ("Banishment" 150).

The next step in the investigation I have here sought to begin would be to examine the effects in *Paterson* of such Biblical intertexts as the stories of Mary (the mother of Jesus), Mary Magdalene, and Sarah (wife of Abraham). Mary is celebrated as an example of the ideal woman (virgin/whore) in *Paterson 5*, for instance. Yet In his description of Brueghel's nativity (*Paterson 5),* Williams twice names Joseph as being the one "in the middle," and goes as far as he can to replace Mary with Joseph as the one to whom the baby was given. He writes:

> a baby
> born to an old man
> out of a girl (227)

The girl's role is grudgingly acknowledged, after the baby is identified as having been "born to an old man"; the passage as a whole is a strong statement of priority with the mother named last, least, and lowest. I note as well the recurrence throughout *Paterson* of the one figure in the twentieth century whom Williams is sure has succeeded at inventing a new measure, releasing a "radiant gist": Marie Curie, the other Mary, whom he names "Curie: woman (of no importance) genius." And I wonder whether the real story here is not about who has and who wants the phallus, but about who has and who wants the womb.

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