Chapter IV

"For the beginning is assuredly / the end"

Paterson Book I

The Word ‘incarnate’: Section 1

Book I serves as an introduction to *Paterson*, the long poem, in projecting the task of a long poem that should encompass all the apparent anomalies, complexities and varied experiences that constitute life. It also reifies the power of the word, the word ‘incarnate.’ Thus the poem is visualized as a ground that equates life with art or art with life. The preface to *Paterson* book I sets forth the goal in the opening line. “Rigour of beauty is the quest. But how will you find beauty when it is locked in the mind past all remonstrance?” The task of the poet is to explore that beauty and to make it available to others. This is the modernist urge to encompass the existing reality in coherent viable terms. Efforts to see *Paterson* as a planned exercise in indeterminacy thus seem misdirected. But as *Paterson* proceeds, enfolds itself through the ensuing sections, the irrational, indeterminate elements predominate, and the long poem drifts on to capture, the random, fleeting contours of life. In Book I, we get an anticipation to the problematics of Williams’ ‘indeterminacy’ that Marjorie Perloff has claimed and Joseph Riddel has argued in convincing elaboration. Bernard Duffey in *A Poetry of Presence* comments:

What has been felt to be indeterminate in Williams’ poetry may thus be linked to the universality and unalterability of the immediate presence that his whole approach postulates. [. . .].

The poet could not help but write within his time and his place,
and his work should bear that testimony. The poem of the local
existed not about its scene but within, and because of the
scene's generative potencies and counter pressures [. . .] an
invention; a discovery within that place and time, was the
task of a truly generative imagination. ¹

The poet characterizes himself as "just another dog among a lot of dogs." While
the rest run after rabbits, only the "lame stands digging a musty bone." The poet has in
mind the unwieldy nature of this long poem and the possibility of its achieving the
desired end. To make the particular and local, general and universal, one finds it difficult
to make a start -

For the beginning is assuredly
the end – since we know nothing, pure
and simple, beyond
our own complexities. (12)

Taken in the double sense, the beginnings and ends, point to the problematic of origins.
How can a new beginning be original when the warp and woof of it is the past? Perhaps
one could carve out a repetition with a difference, if things are taken with a beginner's
fresh eyes. The Paterson long poem is propelled by this grim realization, there can be
no true beginnings, nor can there be any proper endings.

The complexities loom large; man is caught in this circular mesh; he is "the nine
month's wonder," "rolling out of chaos: knowledge or understanding is a fusion of the
past and the present – "an interpenetration, both ways."

The poem employs tropes that merge from one into the other. Man the nine-
month’s wonder, transcends the level of metaphor into the world of metonymy and becomes the city. We find man, ‘the nine month’s wonder’ broadening into ‘the drunk,’ ‘the sober,’ ‘the illustrious,’ ‘the gross,’ ‘ignorance,’ ‘knowledge,’ and such gross incongruities that make up the sum of life. It can encompass the particular and general and can merge into each other.

    divided as the dew
    floating mists, to be rained down and
    re gathered into a river that flows
    and encircles,
    shells and animalcules
    generally and so to man,
    to Paterson. (13)

They constitute ephemeral moments of beauty beneath the tawdry veneer of the city and the poetic endeavor is to capture that beautiful thing, which is an indivisible amalgam of beauty and sordidness, virgin and whore.

Audrey T. Rogers in Virgin and Whore: The Image of Women in the Poetry of William Carlos Williams, elaborates on the “beautiful thing” and analyses the first part of Book I Paterson as a mythical scaffolding of the dominant theme:

    The first part of Paterson takes place in the mythic American garden. It is appropriate that in the season of procreation, the first woman we encounter is the female giant resting against the sleeping hero. She is the embodiment of the earth Demeter, but she conveys Kore’s lush beauty. The embrace of the lovers – city and mountain – recalls
the primordial paradise, the reality of the past, now only a dream. The Giant Goddess is the manifestation of female principle without which the artist is incomplete. In his dreams, there is a quite communion between them, but the awakening is powerful, for it unfolds the whole degraded world. Innumerable flowers from the back country will meet degradation and shame in the city.²

The section “The Delineaments of Giants” is a graphic portrayal of Paterson the man, city. The physicality of Paterson landscape merges into the contours and consciousness of the city:

  Paterson lies in valley under the Passaic Falls
  its spent waters forming the outline of his back. He
  lies on his right side, head near the thunder
  of the waters filling his dreams! Eternally asleep
  his dreams walk about the city where he persists
  incognito. Butterflies settle on his stone ear. (14)

In the Author’s note to Paterson Williams explains that man in himself is a city, beginning, seeking, achieving and concluding his life in ways which the various aspects of a city may embody. For Williams, it is a dialectic between man and external reality and man’s relationship to the city is “an identity ... / an / interpenetration both ways.” The anomaly of opposites, the city-man, the drunk-the sober, obverse-reverse, illustrious-gross, and ignorance-knowledge, appears in Book I and reaches up to Book V, where the virgin-whore, the beautiful-vulgar, mix and merge into each other. It is, as the poet says ‘an interpenetration both ways.’ What the poet can do is to float off in the
flux, "Rolling up, rolling up heavy with numbers." Williams' lines take the undulating 'wash of seas,' the seas that can carry up and regather:

[...]

wash of seas —

from mathematics to particulars —

divided as the dew

rolling in top up

under, thrust and recoil, a great clatter:

lifted as air, boated, multicoloured, a

wash of seas --

(13)

The breath paced syllables take a repetitive sibilant (sh, s) note in 'wash of seas.' The alliteration of top-up, great-clatter, lifted-boated, accentuate the undulating move of the sea. The pressure of obverse-reverse is felt in the parenthetical repetitive rhythmic diction:

[...]

rolling

up! obverse, reverse;

the drunk, the sober: the illustrious

the gross; one.

(12)

There is the conscientious use of the plosives and labials, 'd,' 'b,' and 'v' and the repetition of 's.' The weighing and balancing, addition and subtraction, constitute the irreconcilable tension of opposites. There is subversion, "the craft subverted by thought" (13). It is this craft of subversion that Paterson sets forth as it's strategy of presentation. The poet wants to rise above the mediocre, "that of writing stale poems." The poetic
endeavour will undergo eternal renewal'—"in additions and subtractions." The divided scattered dew will thus turn into floating mists, the harbingers of rain:

floating mists, to be rained down and

regathered into a river that flows

and encircles

The poet is leading us to this centreless encircling river of Paterson.

Joseph. N. Riddel in *The Inverted Bell*, explains Williams' refusal of the beginning and his acceptance of the local as the centreless centre, as an attempt to seek a new measure. Williams' world thus flattens out into a chaos of present things and relations:

Williams' gathering of the local detail does not reveal the priority of things to ideas but, on the contrary, unveils the true ground of ideas as the undetermined relation of things. Williams seeks a new measure because the old measures have been exposed as interpretations, fictions of the centre. What he projects as the new must escape the fate of the old. It must recognize itself as interpretation, as fiction. It therefore must recognize itself as measuring, and not as a set measure, as saying and not the said. The first act of measuring is to bring into question old measures, to create a dissonance.³

As we move on to the other parts of Paterson, we begin to understand the poetic urge to create something growing stronger." [. . .] without invention the line will never again take on it's ancient divisions, when the word, the supple word, lived in it, crumbled now to chalk " ( P 65). Book I gives a vivid portrayal of Paterson as the valley under the Passaic Falls that stretches out to the low mountain towards the park. The rootedness
of the objects – the river, the butterfly, the rock – is powerfully portrayed through detailed description. Williams is in line with the Heideggerian thought that the history of western civilization is the story of how 'being' came to be forgotten. It was looked at from two vantage points, of metaphysics after Plato and of science and technology after Aristotle and Descartes. Williams respects the objective existence of nature – a premise that he shares with science; but he goes beyond science in his conviction that objects perceived with sympathetic imagination reveal value – a quality that science, since Descartes, has increasingly relegated to subjective status. The elaborate treatment of factual data highlights the Williamsian creed, "No ideas but in things." (P18)

A true poet is able to vitalize language by establishing its primordial relation between words and things. "In the beginning was the word," Heidegger writes:

What is it the poet reaches? Not mere knowledge. He obtains entrance into the relation of word and thing. This relation is not, however, a connection between the thing that is on one side and the word that is on the other. The word itself is the relation which in each instance retains the thing within itself in such a manner that it 'is' the thing.4 If the "word did not have this bearing," he explains the whole of thing and the world would sink into obscurity.

The emphatic avowal of William's poetic creed occurs just after the picturesque powerful relocating of Paterson.

— say, it, No ideas but in things. (18)

Like a meta commentary we find this appearing in Book I off and on as extra-poetic.

Obviously this famous utterance has evoked varied types of critical response.
It has become the measure of Williams' objectivism and his questioning of the priority of the subject to replace it with the priority of the object. Efforts are being made to place Williams in the romantic, or post-Romantic tradition. The position taken by Joseph N. Riddell in *The Inverted Bell* strikes a balance:

The utterance does not say that ideas emerge from things, but that there are no ideas unrealized and thus no thing except in the identity and difference of things. The initial saying brings to expression a primordial difference, primordial because it denies priority. It denies unity, the master idea. It therefore leaps beyond what Heidegger has called the fundamental misinterpretation that governs all Western thought, the Socratic and Platonic elevation of the logos to a status of priority and origin. Intuitively, this "saying" recalls for the poet a more original, primordial moment, when language is made to speak itself and the poet puts "into language the experience he undergoes with language." (9)

For Williams the word is a raw piece of reality, an incarnation of the 'thing, like the first reality of The Bible: "In the beginning was the word." It establishes the thing and is a crystallisation of experience.

Failure of communication, a hushed futile cry and a wilted attempt at expression sums up the agony of the meaningless existence — you may call it a cry that creeps over them, a shiver as they wilt and disappear

[..........................]
The language is missing them

they also die

incommunicado

The language, the language

fails them

They do not know the words

or have not

the courage to use them. (20)

When language is 'divorced' from the minds, there is death 'incommunicado.' The word, communicate, negated in such forms as incommunicative and incommunicado, recurs throughout this part of the poem. The historic narrative that follows presents a rustic pastoral environment in the Rampos only to highlight the suffering and violation of helpless women.

[. . . ] by a man named Jackson under contract with the British Government to provide women for the soldiers in America.

Cromwell in the middle of the seventeenth century shipped, some thousands of Irish women and children to the Barbadoes to be sold as slaves. Forced by their owners to mate with the others these unfortunates were followed by a few generations of Irish speaking Negroes and mulattoes. And it is commonly asserted to this day the natives of Barbadoes speak with an Irish brogue. (22)

If silent suffering is the fate of these women, the desperate recourse of an individual blocked in an impulse towards genuine expression, winds up in self destruction. The
two tragedies that are described, that of Mrs. Sara Cummings' suicidal plunge into the falls during a sight seeing excursion in 1812 and Sam Patch, the famous jumpers' decisive leap at the Falls of the Genesse river in 1826 point to that. The reports of these incidents embody the average man's expectation of a report—sensation, pseudo—sentimentalism—violence and spectacle. Yet the central theme gets resounded in the last part.

— speech had failed him. He was confused. The word had been drained of its meaning. There is no mistake in Sam Patch. He struck the water on his side and disappeared.

A silence followed as the crowd stood spell-bound. (27)

This ruthless exploitation, suffering and suppression is verbalised in "a geographic picture of 9 women of some African Chief, semi naked," who get "stiffened" in a descending scale of freshness (P 22.) Bruce Book in his book The Beat Generation observes:

William Carlos Williams was always passionately and self-consciously an American poet. Anything but a chauvinist, he resented deeply what was being done to America, how the land, the people, and their resources were being plundered for the personal gain of a few, and this resentment spilled out to become one of the dominant themes of Paterson.5

Possessing a sensibility that could value each thing and object of this world that are apparently dismissed as insignificant, Williams couldn't but resent deeply the ruthless exploitation of the helpless.
The 'divisions and imbalances': the influx of the indeterminate: Book I Section 2

Section 2 opens with a frank avowal of indeterminacy;

There is no direction. Whither? I
cannot say. I cannot say
more than how. The how (the howl) only
is at my disposal (proposal): watching —
colder than stone.

The typological spacing of the first line projects 'I,' the poet-protagonist, the Paterson-self or the reader-self, who is surrounded by a group of objects:

... a mass of detail
to interrelate on the ground, difficultly
an assonance, a homologue
triple piled
pulling the disparate together to clarify
and compress. (30)

The section teems with 'divorced' fragments—a bud for evergreen/tight curled upon the pavement, two half grown girls hailing hallowed Easter, the weak necked Daisy bending to the wind, the bird alighting that pushes its feet forward nevertheless among the twigs, the absurd dignity of a locomotive hauling freight, books with pithy philosophies of daily exits and entrances... Not only objects in all their inviolability and sanctity, but events that are objectified through the typical Williamsian perception fill up the canvas of this section: Reference is made to events like

Patch leaped but Mrs. Cummings shrieked and fell—unseen[...].
both silent, incommunicado .

Their was an attempt to seize the moment; two lovers who appear later long for the same.

: 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 .

The deliberate placing of line breaks, both enjambed and end stopped give a visual
design of a fall and crash. The ardent desire for it is powerfully brought forth in the force
of isolation given to preposition ‘to’ that is repeated after each caesura. The run on lines
follow the pace of breath where lineation and content go together to reach the ‘brink’
‘before.’ The repetitive labials (b, m) give the climatic pitch for the catastrophic fall. The
typographic irregularities of Williams create a broken appearance on the page.

The broken or disjunctive style of Williams activates the separate and
discontinuous nature of reality. This brokenness of composition is a way of breaking
down more orderly and conventional uses of language. As Williams himself puts it
(SE 14):

By the brokenness of his composition the poet makes himself master of a
certain weapon which he could possess himself of in no other way. [...] Thus a poem is tough by no quality it borrows from a logical recital of events nor from the events themselves but solely from that attenuated power which draws perhaps many broken things into a dance giving them thus a full being.

The ensuing verse paragraphs provide a geographical picture of ‘Haiti’ and its somber mountains to be juxtaposed against a prose narration of the queer ‘Billy,’ who helps her mother. The ‘divisions and imbalances’ predominate and the section winds up in “No ideas but in the facts.” As an end that refuses an end, the last segment of this part is hard fact intruding in the form of a letter from Edward Dahlberg. The poet cannot escape the divisions and imbalances; they are entailed by the program of starting from things.

The Visible Flux of the Present: Book I Section 3

The preoccupation with ephemeral is the dominant note of Part 3. It teems with images, signifiers that sway all over, to create an elusive, dispersive and mutable meaning. The poet argues in the opening stanza about the reality of the green rose other than the conventional red rose.

How strange you are, you idiot!
so you think because the rose
is red that you shall have the mastery?
The rose is green and will bloom
[.............................. ..............................]

What is perpetrated is the multivalence of things, perspectives. To search for a centre is meaningless:
My surface is myself
Under which
to witness, youth is
buried. Roots?

Every body has roots. (44)

The Paterson-self immerses into this visible flux that the present offers. As in a montage, the juxtaposition of apparently disjointed surfaces appear in the prose narrations that fill up the space. The doctor-self of Paterson is surrounded by the world of medicines and patients. Among them are tempting women who offer chances for moral digression. A very down to earth narration of the tangible possessions of Cornelius Doremus, is given in full factual accuracy:

Cornelius Doremus, who was baptized at Acquackonock in 1914, and died near Montville in 1803 [. . .]

24 shirts at 82 ½ cents, $19.88:5 sheets, $7.00, 4 pillow cases, $2.12 [. . .].

(45)

These are the inescapable bare facts of life; Cornelius Doremus who died 89 years’ old had turned his farm over to his children so that he retained only those listed items for his personal comfort. One has to keep on living till the moment of his death. “We go on living, we permit ourselves / to continue” (44), even in the midst of the cutting edges of life. The knowledge that the universities offer gives no consolation or solace. They only contribute to the stasis. The futility of academic exercise is held up to ridicule:

[. . .] a chemistry, corollary
to academic misuse, which the theorem
with accuracy, accurately misses . . . (49)
The pungent vituperation goes to the extent of branding the university as the perpetuator of the stasis for its own profit.

[. . .]. And if it is not
the knowledgeable idiots, the university
they at least are the non-purveyors
should be devising means
to leap the gap. Inlets? The outward
masks of special interests
that perpetrate the stasis and make it profitable. (46)

Paterson differentiates himself from

[. . ] the men that ran
and could run off
toward the peripheries
to other centers, direct -
for clarity ( if
they found it ) (48)

These are people like Eliot and Pound who went in search of roots elsewhere in Europe. What others sought elsewhere, Williams explored in himself, within the immediate world that impinged on his consciousness. It comes out as a prayer that expresses in a new form his commitment to the local.
Why should I move from this place
where I was born? knowing
how futile would be the search
for you in the multiplicity
of your debacle (93)

The narration of a social event, the drying up of the Paterson Lake and the removal of
mud, by the night fall of 28th is dealt with in elaborate ease. “The whole bottom was
covered with people and the big eels” and people make it a gala night. Another prose
interlogue is the detection of Mr. Leonard Saud Fords’s “sight of a human body over the
precipice.” Sensational fragments like this encroach and disrupt the poetic meditative
density of this section:

What can he think else
[.................................]
He thinks: their mouths eating and kissing
spitting and sucking, speaking; a
[.................................]
He thinks: two eyes; nothing escapes them. (49)

The teeming multitude of humanity is cleverly condensed in metonymic parts like eyes
and mouths which indulge in the varied acts of survival. Each face in the crowd is significant,
nothing escapes notice. This meditative mood reaches a point where there is a splitting
of two selves: P and I, who indulge in a dialogue:

P. Your interest is in the bloody loam but what I’m after is the finished
product.
Leadership passes into empire: empire begets insolence; insolence brings ruin.

The wandering consciousness is one among the scattered objects, occupying a space accommodating everything. There are "tenement windows no face, seen, an incredible clumsiness of address, senseless rapes- caught on hands and knees scrubbing a greasy corridor, paper flowers and the sink with waste farina in it." All have their 'forthright beauty' because they have the right to exist, in this world that is meant for them. The thunderous earth quake of the 7 December (1737) is another prose interlude to be followed by a poetic expression of bafflement over the mysteries of nature, "the pouring torrent" that has its birth and death, there", "the myth that holds the rock and the mighty earth."

inspiring terror, watching

And standing, shrouded there, in that din,

Earth the chatterer, father of all

speech........... (52)

A totally anachronistic fragment from the studies of Greek Poets, John Addington Symonds, on the origin of the metre, Choliambi, ends the section on an odd note.

"Voices! / multiple and inarticulate": Paterson Book II

The Spatio-temporal Standpoint :Section 1

The opening part of the section is a spatial spreading up of the reality which the poet perceives in minute accuracy and unmolested sanctity. The lines spread out on the page.
Outside

Outside myself

there is a world,

he rumbled, subject to my incursions

- a world

(to me) at rest

which I approach

concretely- (57)

For Williams a poem was a thing on the page and its visual form was given the physical reality. Getting inspired by painters like Duchamp, Stieglitz, Walter Arensberg and others, the objective reality of the subject was the pivotal point of his artistic expression. This kind of treatment of spatiality was tantamount to his poetic creed, no ideas but in things’. By his spatial co-existence in the world of objects, the poet was approximating the temporality that this approach engendered. Things or particulars reached out to be universals that are pervading the present. That Williams was very conscious of this is clear in his Author’s Introduction to The Wedge (SE 257):

When a man makes a poem, makes it mind you, he takes words as
he finds them interrelated about him and composes them - without
distortion which would mar their exact significances - into an intense
expression of his perceptions and ardours that they may constitute a
revelation in the speech that he uses. It is not that he says that counts as
a work of art, it’s what he makes, with such intensity of perception
that it lives with an intricate movement of its own to verify it’s authenticity.
According to Aristotle a true work of art is an 'imitation,' an effort to select
arrange and represent elements of reality so that it creates a new object that imitates
the universal than the particular. Williams falls in line with Aristotle and Coleridge and
believed that imitation required an active mind on the part of the artist. Donald W.
Markos in IDEAS IN THINGS: The Poems of William Carlos Williams observes:

Thus a poem, for Williams, is an object in two senses: it is a unified
dynamic pattern of prosodic elements (visual and aural), some of
which may have little to do with a theme; and it is also - despite surface
incoherencies - an 'imitation': a unified representation drawing on the
referential and connotative meaning of words to make a statement of
truth.6

For Williams imagination played an important role in creation because "it is transfused
with the same forces which transfuse the earth." (Imagination 121) Markos, traces a
kind of organic poetics in Williams, which Williams inherited from Alfred North
Whitehead who believed:

My theory involves the entire abandonment of the notion that
simple location is the primary way in which things are involved in
space - time. In a certain sense everything is everywhere at all
times, for every location involves an aspect of itself in every other
location. Thus every spatio - temporal stand point mirrors the world.7

Thus each object and each person is a product of the existing bits of
environment. In Williams' organic conception of the universe, true form proceeds from
within some given core or essence, though the given form takes the shape of objects,
or men, work of art or an entire culture. The section 'The Sunday In The Park' roughly approximates a kind of coherence through fragmentation. It is a collage of prose and verse presenting reality through various facet-planes. The resonance and reverberations of a psyche that is mired in stagnation, yearning for rescue and invention pervades the whole arena. The numerous individual fragments defined by a kind of sequence, spatial metaphors, parallelism and repetition become comprehensible only when seen in relation to the whole configuration.

The male – female juxtaposition recurs all throughout through finely developed metaphors. The Paterson-self is the male-self that creates meaning in the female-self of the physical world embodied by the Park, Garret mountain and the Passaic Falls.

The scene is the Park

up on the rock

female to the city.

-up on whose body Paterson instructs his thoughts

( concretely )

The struggle to create poetry is compared to the battle between men and women, to the frustrations and achievements that are found in sexual and marital life. Thwarted love is portrayed in the vulgarity of the lovers in the Park where the loveless lovers are making love. The mythic beauty of the Falls and mountain debased by the industrial hideousness is powerfully brought out through the metaphors of, pleasure seeking 'amnesic' Sunday crowd, 'ugly legs' of young girls, and the prose analogue depicting complete damming up of all creative capacities and a kind of 'blocade.'
The personal letters, documentaries, historical accounts, dialogues and news paper-clippings create a space where life-space fuses into the art-space. These build up a poet's world that moves from life into art and then back into life, from present into past and past into present. Ralph Nash in "The Use of Prose in Paterson," divides the prose in Paterson into two: the prose of contemporary fact and prose of historical fact. Both are examples of invention — the discovery of material appropriate to the meaning and decorum of the poem. The first type of prose are the mighty chunks of materials coming into the poem from outside. These letters are not 'constructs of the poet, they are given quantities, entities in their own right,' that must be fitted into the structure of the poem. According to him their direct presentation or intrusion is an artistic device intended as a forceful marriage of the poem's world with the world of reality from which Williams is fearful of divorcing himself. Another special effect is the objective presentation with the poet as a mere detached recorder.

The prose in Paterson is thus constantly reinforcing an immediate sense of locale. News paper clippings, letters addressed to Paterson, excerpts from local history, all insist upon Paterson as a place. The appearance of both contemporary and historical passages augment the theme as a search for language and thus tends to give the poem continuity, to increase the sense of structural and contentual unity and validity. Here also the prose section gives historical continuity to the modern Sunday crowd, and serves as another reminder of the violence latent in the mass. The German singing societies of Paterson used to meet on Garret Mountain, but one day in 1880, a nearby property owner, William Dalzell became angry because they walked over his garden, and he shot a man to stop them from "crossing any part of his grounds" (60).
The group of singers, enraged and transformed into a mob, chased Dalzell and burned the barn in which he was hiding. The dialectic – people versus property owner, the fight between one and many recurs. The very next passage bears out the image of a group of small birds attacking a crow (P 61).

We gather the notes of discontinuities within this network of random coherence. The poetic self is alert on it and as a self-reminder it comes. Certain thoughts are dismissed presumably as a bad attempt at historical fiction.

 Forget it ! for God’s sake, Cut
out that stuff. (68)

This bears semblance to post modern writing which possesses a self-conscious awareness of the act of fictionality involved in writing and it’s status as a satirical scepticism. What Patricia Waugh projects as meta fiction, fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to it’s status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality, here also comes to the surface.9

An invention, an act of creation withstands the ravages of time. Paterson admires with envy, a stone grasshopper, a work of art, which has bequeathed some of the life of it’s creator.

The stone lives, the flesh dies
-we know nothing of death. (64)

An instance of what art can do, the carved grasshopper leads the poet to reflect on the powers of invention in a passage apparently suggested by Pound’s Usura sermon in the Canto’s.10
nothing lies under the witch-hazel
bush, the alder does not grow from among
the hummocks margining the all
but spent channel of the old swale,

This long lyric stanza is a passionate plea for the new measure, a new line. The
phrasal repetition ‘without invention’ renders a power of prophesy to the lyrical outburst.

The urge for renewal is strong.

[...] unless there is
a new mind there cannot be a new
line, the old will go on
repeating itself with recurring
deadliness: [...] (65)

Language has lost its meaning, its powers to connote and denote, through its constant
use and misuse through ages. Hence,

[...] 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. (65)

Heidegger argues that in its essence, the word is no thing; it does not have the being of
signified and it has no meaning at all. It is by the naming of the thing that the poet
facilitates its presence. The word gestures from the open into the open; it is the
movement which bears the interplay of the past and future and in doing so, it gives
things their "staying power." Joseph N. Riddel is of the view that the central terms of Williams' poetics, the 'local', the sense of place, the 'new measure' for a new world, and even the 'city', resonate into something beyond an empirical or geographical interest in things. He reads Williams' sense of measure in an original sense that engrosses the fundamental question of language, man's and therefore the poet's place of dwelling. In one of his several essays on Holderin, Heidegger dwells upon the poet's vision of man as 'dwelling' on earth, dwelling 'poetically'. To dwell means to built, take ground, establish a place, cultivate, make. Thus it means to take the measure of one's place. Man exists only in a measure, an object in a world of objects.

Williams' concept of the local was very broad. He writes (SE 28) that if the poet becomes "awake to his own locality" he will discover his relation with the classical. To be "local" is to be attached with "integrity to actual experience" (SE118). That has nothing in common with defensive insularity or mere "local colour." The American contribution to culture as Williams' understood it "is a relation to the immediate conditions of the matter at hand, and a determination to assert them in opposition to all intermediate authority" (SE143).

Williams realized that the symbolic systems tempt us to fall under the spell of a certain mode and indulge in stale abstractions (SL 118). Of course Williams never eliminated from his writing an emergent and variable symbolism that results as objects discover larger patterns in which they participate. That Williams' theory of the poem harmonises with Pound's definition of the "image as that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time," is clear in a comprehensive statement in Spring And All: "To refine, to clarify, to intensify that eternal moment in which
we alone live, there is but a single force – imagination."14

To describe the moment as something that transcends time and place, it had to be reexamined and reorganized in a new mode. More than any other writer Williams was conscious of the complexities of the age he lived in. "Now above all things else, life is at any moment subversive of life as it was the moment before – always irregular, new" (SL 23). To absorb it in writing is some thing that preoccupies his sensibilities all throughout. "A life that is here and now," he said, "is timeless. That is the universal I am seeking; to embody that in a work of art, a new world that is always real" (SE 196).

The voyaging consciousness of Paterson can witness the loveless love making of lovers whose ‘pitiful thoughts do meet in the flesh’; the picnickers who come and go. It moves from place to place and melts into those voices:

So during the early afternoon, from place to place he moves,

his voice mingling with other voices.

—the voice in his voice

(72)

The melting and merging is repeatedly referred to in the following lines.

—the fall’s roar entering

his sleep (to be fulfilled)

reborn

in his sleep—

(76)
Paterson the long poem is devoid of a central hero of epic dimensions. On the other hand it opens up a metonemonic vista of varied sensibilities and facet planes. Robert Lowell in his review of Paterson II in The Nation wrote:

The subjects of great poetry has usually been characters and passions, a moral struggle that calls a man's whole person into play. But in the best long American poems — Leaves of Grass, The Cantos, The Wasteland, Four Quartets, The Bridge, no characters take a sufficient form to arrive at a crisis. The people melt into voices.

Voices pervade and penetrate the nooks and corners of the park.

Voices!

multiple, inarticulate voices
clattering loudly to sun, to clouds. Voices!

assaulting the air gaily from all sides.

The deliberate spacing after the 'multiple and inarticulate' and before the period in the second line allows the white blankness of the page to get filled up, to reach the absolute finitude of the period. This space can accommodate the reader's consciousness also as it merges into the collective voice of contemporaneity.

his voice mingling with other voices
- the voice in his voice

The poet's perception (consciousness), the objective reality and the reader's apprehension (consciousness) of it, create a mixed up unified level. Nelson Cary in his
essay, "Suffused - Encircling Shapes of Mind: Inhabited Space in Williams" explores that "the two fold space - of the object and the poet's perception - is encircled by and suffused with consciousness."\textsuperscript{16}

The roaring voice of the manifold crowd, the picnickers 'celebrating the varied Sunday of their lives' in the Park, at times melts into a single voice (of a lone girl in love addressing Grandma) or merge into the roar of the fall, the Passaic Falls. Together they enter into the Paterson psyche.

--- the fall's roaring
his sleep(to be fulfilled)

reborn
in his sleep. \textsuperscript{(76)}

The Cop directing traffic is an ordering principle that the poet stands for, in regulating and ordering his material. Hence the emphatic avowal, "No Dogs Allowed At Large In The Park."

Stasis and Ek-stasis: Book II Section 2

Section 2 opens with the emphatic tri-syllabic plosive utterance, "blocked." It is a kind of blockade that has enveloped the self, the world, and the word. It leads to a stasis that inhibits movement in and out. It has paralysed the economy and brought out spiritual stagnation. There is a struggle to get out of it (ek-stasis – to go outside the self). Even the characters who struggle like Marcia Nardi (the woman correspondent who writes letters to Paterson) are thwarted human beings and what we find is their unimpaired though distorted vigour.
Human greed, and rapacious, cut throat money making drive are dwelt upon in the preacher's sermon in Book II. The alternative offered by the poet, the familiar Christian doctrine of treasures in heaven, does not provide a satisfactory new synthesis, and the preacher merges into the figure of an unsuccessful poet. The stasis or blockade is irresistible.

Give up money!

—with monotonous insistence

the falls of his harangue hung featureless

up on the ear, yet with a certain strangeness

as if arrested in space

(87)

Williams resented deeply the self seeking plundering and exploitation of America, the land, the people and it's resources for the personal gain of a few. These prose passages in this section provide credible documentation for the inadequate economic reforms: the meaninglessness of The Federal Reserve System and Hamilton's efforts. Williams was disgusted with Alexander Hamilton's class conscious Capitalism and social views. The poor always deserved the sympathy of the doctor-poet.

Minds beaten thin

by waste —among

the working class SOME sort

of breakdown

has occurred.

(66)

Williams detested materialism and the debasement of human affairs (sex, language, environment, learning) at the hands of modern exploitative industrialism.
This resentment of Williams resonates through time. Even in contemporary times this ruthless exploitation persists in the form of the multinational grip under the garb of globalization and liberalization. What is sucked out is the sap of indigenous culture and labour.

The prose passages intervene and provide a credible documentation for the inadequate economic reforms and the rottenness of The Federal Reserve Systems which is another "private monopoly." A note of tedious neurotic complaint is struck in the concluding line

- in your
composition and decomposition
I find my

despair

Williams' despair is a creative despair a vision that can be contrasted with the negativism of The Waste Land. This is the kind of despair that Williams describes to Marianne Moore (SL 147) that he experienced when he was about twenty in 1903, "a despair that made every thing a unit and at the same time a part of myself.... As a reward for this anonymity I feel a part of things as trees and stones." This despair anchors him to his own soil to explore and inhabit new spaces in it.

J. Hillis Miller elaborates on this aspect of despair in Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth Century Writers (291): "Williams gives himself up in despair and establishes a self beyond personality, a self coextensive with the universe. Words, things, people, and God vanish as separate entities and everything becomes a unit." The personality of
the poet is obliterated in a total adhesion of the mind to the object in its actuality. In "The Wanderer" (CP 108) this obliteration of distinctions is poetically reenacted: "swallowed up by the depth of its rottenness," he takes the river into himself and it is 'an interpenetration both ways.'

The decision to stick on to his own place is strong; what others sought elsewhere, he explored in himself, within the immediate world that impinged on his consciousness.

Why should I move from this place
Where I was born? [. . . .

. . . . . . . .]. The world spreads
for me like a flower opening – and
will close for me as might a rose –
wither and fall to the ground
and rot and be drawn up
into a flower again.

Williams' insistence on a poetry of the local, his concern with touch or contact, with divorce and blockade, with the city and the modern failure of language, and the need for a new measure transcend the mere boundary of Americanness and attain an elevated plane of a "centreless centre." Williams is able to escape out of the stasis to ek-stasis. Instead of running off towards peripheries or other centers in search of a remote past or tradition which are the signs of a lost plentitude, Williams indulges in a 'refusal.' Riddle elaborates on it in Inverted Bell:

This "refusal" rejects any nostalgia for an ultimate ground that is
itself undetermined, or not an interpretation of some previous
metaphor. [. . .]. Rejecting this search for a some lost centre,
authority, presence or plentitude, Williams turns to the local as the
centreless centre and rediscovers “the joy” of Nietzschean
invention. (13)

This is the joy of discovery we find in the next section, “No defeat is entirely made of
defeat.”

The Variable foot – A Mediation of Order and Disorder, and Collage as a Device
for Erosion of Boundaries: Book II Section 3

Section 3 of Book II, indulges in an analysis summarizing in part the poet’s bleak
view of what he has seen during the day (the park closes at nine o’clock) and
assessing what is demanded of him on behalf of that world. The famous ascent–
descent passage occurs here with a haltingly breath-paced metrical scheme:

The descent beckons
as the ascent beckoned
    Memory is a kind
of accomplishment
    a sort of renewal
    even
    an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new
    places
    inhabited by hordes
    heretofore unrealized
of new kinds --

since their movements

are towards new objectives

(even though formerly they were abandoned)

No defeat is entirely made up of defeat—since

the world it opens is always a place

formerly

unsuspected. A

world lost,

a world unsuspected

beckons to new places

and no whiteness (lost) is so white as the memory

of whiteness

(96)

The wave like flow of lines, opening up spaces for filling up, speak for the aspiration of the unattainable. It is a stretch towards unrealized new kinds and new directions and new objectives. Continuity of life is visualized as a fusion of fringe horizons, the descent merging into the ascent, the world lost opening up space for new places, the end merging into the beginning. There is a sense of achievement or partial victory in the face of defeat. Even in defeat there is a joy of participation and a stirring streak of anticipation. So too the poet’s efforts at a willed, willing acceptance of the contemporary flux might endlessly defer the process of life and open up possibilities of expression that are unrealized.
Williams prided himself in referring to this passage as his experiment in variable
foot. While looking over "The Descent, I realized I had hit upon a device
and my dissatisfaction with free verse came to a head," Williams wrote (IWWP 82).
He was of the view that a measure of some kind was necessary as a means for giving
the poem a regular movement and that the measure should be flexible or 'relative.'
From this stand evolved the variable or relative foot, arranged in 'triadic line,' an
assembly of three line groups arranged after a pattern which offers the artist much
freedom of movement and regularity. Any one foot may consist of one syllable or a
caesura. In the given section, the sixth line is just a disyllabic word, 'even'; yet on it
dangles the world that is opening up to new places.

These lines do have all the relativism of free verse plus a kind of order. The wing
like expansion of triadic stanza allows scope for the growth and expansion through
added syllables and enjoys the freedom of free verse. This mode accentuates the
theme of widening horizons. There is a strong wave like movement engendered by
syllabic units varying in number, yet possessing a kind of order. Look at the syllabic
divisions:

The,de,scent, be,ckons (5 syllables )
as, the, as, cent, be,ckoned (6 syllables )
me,mo,ry, is, a, kind, ( 6 syllables )
of, a,ccom,pi,sh,ment ( 5 syllables )
e,ven (2 syllables )
an, i,ni,ti,a,tion, since, the, spa,ces, it, o,pens,are, new (15,)
pla,ces ( 2 )
The syllabic division here is significant; the lines possess a uniform yet varied nuance and there is careful placement of disyllabic words as single lines in "even," "places," and "world lost," for the special effect of a halt and emphasis. This halting projection of the central idea makes the swing like movement a bit staggered. A similar pattern is worked out in the trisyllabic line units, "of new kinds," "formerly," "of whiteness." The lines that tend to expand 1. an initiation...new (15 syllables), 2. no defeat...since (13 syllables), 3. and no whiteness...memory (13 syllables) vary in length. Interspersed in between are line units that vary between five and six syllables. Here the three step lines take a regular flowing natural turn from descent to new spaces with variance; there is a continuity and regularity of pace as well as content.

Williams' letter of May 1954 to Richard Eberhart (SL 325-27), is considered his proper prolegomenon of the variable foot. After emphasizing the necessity of 'measure,' by which he means 'musical pace,' he instructs Eberhart to "count a single beat to each numeral." Neither the word "time" or "accent" appears in the letter, although "beat" suggests a combination of the two. To measure the line is to measure the time of the line. The measurement of time depends on the movement of the earth in relation to the sun. When we perceive motion, we perceive it occurring in space through time. Stephen Cushman argues that if by this Williams meant that each line occupies the same amount of time as others, sections like "The descent," appear problematic. He writes:

What can it possibly mean to say that the two lines "even / an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new" occupy the same amount of time? [. . .]

Perhaps Williams intended for readers to pad shorter lines with musical
rests. […] Perhaps time is not a matter of duration but a metaphor for attention and expectation.¹⁸

Williams prosodic theory on ‘Variable foot’ thus offers scope for varied interpretation, providing enough food for his defenders as well as detractors.

Marjorie Perloff, while discussing, "Williams and the visualization of poetry"(The Dance of The Intellect), writes that the discussion of the triad has been confused by Williams’ own claim that the variable foot which he defines as foot “that has been expanded so that more syllables, words, or phrases can be admitted into its confines.”¹⁹

Alan Stephen referred to the variable foot as “a contradiction in terms.”²⁰ In the interview with Walter Sutton, Williams makes a more helpful comment about the triad. When Sutton asks him whether he thinks of feet in terms of stresses Williams replies, “Not as stresses, but as spaces in between the various parts of the verse.”²¹

Williams was upholding the need for a ‘new discipline’ or a relatively stable foot, a “measure by which may be ordered our poems as well as our lives”(SE 339-40). As a unit of time the variable foot works as line units had often worked for Williams. The temporal and auditory measurement was one of Williams’ methods for controlling the line. Both visual and syntactic arrangements were also there. Williams own measure thus centered round the texture of sequential units of attention and meaning.

The bark of stray dogs “Bow, Wow; Bow, Wow,” echoes the struggle of language and its urge for expression. Later when the park closes and the evening fades into night, the group of preachers leave and the individual listener Faitoute also strolls off. Every thing was a failure, only the squalor of the debased city persists. Perplexed, discouraged but still attempting to discover a meaning in the scene, Paterson is caught
(in mind) beside the water. Yet he can discern no "syllable" in the confused roar, having no means to express the meaning of the place or the turbulence of his thoughts.

The feminine principle exhorts Paterson, exhorts him to invent:

Stones invent nothing, only man invents
What answer the waterfall? filling
the basin by the snag toothed stones? (100)

Paterson is urged to get above 'divorce' to attain marriage. The choice is between

Marry us! Marry us!

Or! be dragged down, dragged
under and lost. (102)

without invention, without marriage, the other alternative the poet seeks is to

better to

stumble at

the edge

to fall

fall

and to be

divorced (102)

The typography visualizes one standing at the edge, the perilous edge, to peep into the depth probably for the giant leap, the suicidal leap that Sam Patch and Mrs. Cummings indulged in Book I.

The urge of "She" falls like a thud on Paterson's ears:

Go home. Write. Compose (103)
The dislocated sensibility of Paterson who flees pursued by the roar, is juxtaposed against an odd contrast offered by the prose analogue. It is a weather broadcast. This is the discontinuity that accommodates the inescapable apparent anomalies of quotidian life. The disruption of movement suggests Paterson’s frantic search for the refuge which can be the “library,” the records of the past for assistance (Book III).

Book II winds up with the long letter, the letter from Cress complaining of Dr. P’s coldness. According to Sankey Benjamin, the woman represents the claims of the real world and demands something better than to be turned into poetry. She thus provides a meta commentary on the efforts taken to fictionalize reality infusing a self awareness of the act of fictionality. She refuses to honour the poet’s commitment to formal beauty.

You have never had to live. Dr. P – not in any of the by ways and dark underground passages where life so often has to be tested ..

The intrusion of art into real life is the predominant thought. Art and nature are parts of one cyclic process of descent and return and through both one may live more fully. What is sought is a balance of poetry somewhere in between, and this three page letter is quite relevant to the theme of Paterson. Williams wrote that his purpose in including this long letter was partly ironic, partly to show that “there is a logical continuity in art, prose, verse: an identity” (SL 265). The prose-verse juxtaposition was the continuation of an experiment Williams began in Spring And All (1923), and The Descent of Winter (1928). The Cantos showed for the first time that poetry can actually incorporate prose, without privileging either medium, to work out a relation of similarity, equivalence or
juxtaposition. As Marjorie Perloff observes, in the collage structure of Pound, the speaking subject functions as a kind of "unspoken marginal presence which silently articulates (makes sense out of) the gaps in the printed text, a voice we really discover in the process of speaking it ourselves," here also the speaking self of Paterson diffuses itself into the gaps, audible in the medley of voices and visible as a marginal presence in those faces that teem the Paterson canvas.

The collage serves as a post modern device of the "erosion of boundaries between modes and genres" (Perloff 189). The poet's prose exercises an important meta poetic function by calling attention to itself as discourse. Much of contemporary writing, Ashbery's three poems, Creeley's Presences: A Text for Marisol, Cage's performance pieces, David Antin's talk pieces like the "Death of a Hired man," do employ prose to full advantage. As Stephen Fredman puts it in Poet's Prose: The Crisis in American Verse, the most encompassing freedom that the post war poets seek is the freedom to construct a poetic entity capable of including what poetry has been told to exclude. The pleasure of the text thus depends upon the "play and interchange of possibilities" as David Antin puts it. Perloff cites from John Cage that the function of art at the present time is to preserve us from all logical minimalisations that we are at each instant tempted to apply to the flux of events, to draw us near to the process which is the world we live in. Contemporary poetry also approximates this aim through a kind of discovery, moving from one relational thread to another. Marjorie Perloff aptly sums it up, "In the poetry of the late twentieth century, the cry of the heart, as Yeats called it, is increasingly subjected to the play of the mind - a play that wants to take account of the "process which is the world we live in" (197).
Notes

1 Bernard Duffey, A Poetry of Presence, The Writing of William Carlos Williams (Madison: Wisconsin UP, 1986) 26. Perloff in The Poetics of Indeterminacy argues that modernism is constituted of two separate strands: the symbolist mode of Yeats and Eliot inherited from the Romantics, and the anti-symbolist mode of ‘indeterminacy,’ of literalness and freeplay, whose first real exemplar was Rimbaud of the “Illuminations.” Duffey defines it as an interplay between background (what is assumed as given), and foreground (what may be made of it), to seek a middle ground as imaginative realm.

2 Audrey T. Rodgers, “The Myth of Demeter / Kore,” Virgin and Whore: The Image of Women in the Poetry of William Carlos Williams (Jefferson: Macfarland and Company Inc. 1987) 8. Rodgers argues that Neitzsche’s observation that ‘man today stripped of myth stands famished among his pasts’ must surely have excluded the poet, for whom myth has always served as an artistic scaffolding. According to him, for Williams, the myth of Demeter / Kore was compatible with his artistic vision.

3 Joseph N Riddle, The Inverted Bell: Modernism and the Counter Poetics of William Carlos Williams (Baton Rouge: Louisiana UP, 1974) 14.


6 Donald W. Markos, IDEAS IN THINGS: The Poems of William Carlos Williams
He argues that Alfred North Whitehead's notion of "objective idealism" gives a more accurate account of Williams' position in negotiating the dialectic between himself and external reality.


9 Patricia Waugh, Practising POSTMODERNISM: Reading MODERNISM (New York: Chapman and Hall, Inc, 1992) 71

10 Canto XLV. "with usura hath no man a house of good value." Edgar F. Racey, Jr. discusses the main differences between these two passages in "Pound and Williams: The Poet as Renewer," Bucknell Review XI (March 1963): 21–30.


17 William Carlos Williams, *I Wanted To Write a poem*, ed. Edith Heal (Boston: Beacon, 1958) 83. "One of the most successful things in Paterson Book II is a passage in section iii of the poem which brought about - without realizing it at the time of writing - my final conception of what my own poetry should be; a passage which sometimes later brought all my thinking about free verse to a head."


20 Alan Stephen, "Dr. Williams and Tradition," *Poetry* 101 (February 1963): 36


24 Stephen Fredman, Poet’s Prose: The Crisis in American Verse (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1893) 7
