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APPROACHING DEATH:  
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PATERSON BOOK FIVE

by

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Abstract

This thesis is basically a study of William Carlos Williams' Paterson, with emphasis on Book Five, the final completed book of the poem. Because Williams is repeatedly concerned with the Unicorn tapestries in Book Five, much attention is given to them, and the rest of Book Five is seen as complementary to this central metaphor. And because this metaphor is a restriction to the essentials, or what Williams calls "by multiplication a reduction to one," the thesis is largely involved in interpreting the implications of this metaphor, developed and determined by the context of the rest of the poem.

Previously, most critics have either treated Paterson V as a postscript to Paterson I-IV, or have dismissed the book by stating in general terms that Williams in Book Five takes Paterson into the realm of the Imagination. In either case, a detailed analysis of Book Five has been avoided. This thesis attempts such an analysis, in order to reveal that Paterson V is not a postscript to the rest of the poem, but its culmination. Though Book Five is in a sense in a different realm from the first four books, the transition from the realm of life to that of art is not only foreshadowed

by the former books, but is also the means of solution to the Paterson dilemma, struggled with and developed in Paterson I-IV, but never crystallized. This occurs in Book Five, where the Unicorn tapestries are the metaphoric "hub" of the crystallization.

Though the dilemma involves both Paterson the man and city, it is mostly concerned with Paterson the poet, and his manifestation, the poem Paterson. Hence the dilemma is to a large extent autobiographical. Paterson's problem is Williams' problem: the necessity of transforming the poet's life quest, with all its implications, into a culminating work of art. To this basic problem must be added several crucial obstacles. The first is that of approaching death. By the end of Book Four, Paterson has reached the end of his life course. Williams, in the year of Book Four's publication, has had several crippling strokes. In other words, Williams' life, like Paterson's, may soon be terminated, and thus the work of art may never be created. Secondly, Williams' work of art must include the processes of art and life, as well as their products. Without process, the product will stagnate, and without product, the process will remain a confused delirium. In this sense, Book Five becomes the product of the processes involved in Paterson I-IV, the product that clarifies both the poet's quest and his poetics, saves

both Williams and Paterson from meaningless death, and gives the poet impetus to continue his craft.

Intrinsic to the union of process and product is the union of life with literature, the poetic with the anti-poetic, and the Dionysian aspect of creation with that of the Apollonian. In Paterson, these turn out to be the "inter-penetrating realities" that the poet seeks to unite throughout the poem. The following analysis attempts to reveal how the union does symbolically or metaphorically occur, how the various disparate forces in the poem become embodied in a complex but harmonious whole, and why this union, as portrayed in the Unicorn tapestries, does succeed, where similar earlier attempts had failed.

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## Introduction

His Autobiography closes with William Carlos Williams standing on the cliff that overlooks the Passaic Falls, quietly contemplating the view from where Mrs. Cumming of Paterson I had fallen. Accompanying him is his grandson Paul, who, after a few minutes reflection, poses the seemingly innocent question, "How deep is the water? ... I mean at the deepest place"<sup>1</sup>—which is the final sentence of the book. The figurative implications of Paul's question have attracted Williams' critics ever since the completion of Paterson I-V, and as the studies of Paterson increase, the water gets correspondingly deeper.

Part of the difficulty in gauging the precise depth of the Passaic—the profundity, literary skill, or artistic vision inherent in William's Paterson—stems from the addition of Book Five to the preceding four books in 1958, a book that on the surface, given the usually assumed development of Paterson I-IV, leaves a gap just as baffling as the blank following Paul's unanswered question. As with many of what might be called Williams' "gaps", those spaces between or after words, lines, or stanzas in poetry which normally imply some sort of logical or thematic transition, the space between the end of Book Four and the beginning of Book Five presents a problem to the reader, largely because Williams believes

that explanatory or deductive solutions are the job not of the poet but the reader, whose task is to fill in any logical or interpretive transitions necessary for understanding the work. Blake says, "The wisest of the ancients believed that what is not too explicit is the fittest for instruction, because it rouses the faculties to act"<sup>2</sup>. In like manner, Williams says,

Without didactically telling what happened, you make things happen on the page, and from that you see what kind of people they were...you can't tell what a particular thing signified, but if you see the thing happening before you, you infer that that is the kind of thing that is happening in the area.<sup>3</sup>

For both Williams and Blake, the function of the artist is to create, not to explain his creation.<sup>4</sup>

This inferential quality of Williams' poetic, called "transitional metaphor" by Linda Wagner, "relies on the impact of consecutive images, which means that the reader has to make his own transitions"<sup>5</sup>. In other words, the poet fully exploits the space between the words, between the lines, and in the case of Paterson, between the books. This is a technique much used in later twentieth century poetry, and because of its dependence upon the reader's level of awareness, or for that matter interest, it is much more difficult to appraise than more conventional techniques. T.S. Eliot, in the Preface to his translation of Anabase, somewhat clarifies the nature of



this difficulty for the reader, and his comment is relevant here since St. John Perse's use of images is strikingly similar to Williams' "transitional metaphor":

...any obscurity of the poem, on first readings, is due to the suppression of "links in the chain", of explanatory and connecting matter, and not to incoherence, or to the love of cryptogram. The justification of such abbreviation of method is that the sequence of images coincides and concentrates into one intense impression ...the reader has to allow the images to fall into his memory successively without questioning the reasonableness of each at the moment; so that, at the end, a total effect is produced.<sup>6</sup>

The advantage of the "transitional metaphor" is that the image, metaphor, or description is given freedom to attain its fullest associational value, the degree of interpretive flexibility being determined only by the subject's context. As Wagner says,

the more direct a presentation, the more indirect it becomes, in that no discursive remarks interfere with the reader's response.<sup>7</sup>

For Williams, one disadvantage of language as we constantly use it is that meanings tend to be frozen, phrases become cliché, and the language itself throws up a barrier between our perceptions and the world of objects. Hence, in 1923, he called for a revolution of the word, and in so doing leads us to "transitional metaphor":

The word is not liberated, therefore able to communicate release from the fixities which destroy it until it is accurately

tuned to the fact which giving it reality,  
by its own reality establishes its own  
freedom from the necessity of a word, thus  
freeing it and dynamizing it at the same  
time.<sup>8</sup>

This dynamization through cognitive freedom means that the word can "be understood again in an original, a fresh, delightful sense."<sup>9</sup> Thus, context, and not preconception, is the only valid control. The obvious disadvantage here is that a lesser writer can camouflage his own shortcomings under the pretext that his "skillful" obscurity will imply his profound vision, or, to borrow Frye's phrase, that this artist's work is "too occult for syntax."<sup>10</sup> Such, I believe, is not Williams' case.

The other important development of the poet's "word-revolution" is what Wagner calls "symbolic metaphor"<sup>11</sup>. Where transitional metaphor places its emphasis on the spaces or gaps between descriptive words, symbolic metaphor places emphasis more on the words themselves. The terms refer to two basic processes in any important metaphor in Paterson, not necessarily to two different types of metaphor. The difference here is more of perspective. Symbolic metaphor refers to the Protean flexibility of a Williams' metaphor, its ability in the context of a poem to be used polysemously. In other words, throughout the course of the poem, the image or metaphor may acquire multiple meanings, which in turn will inter-relate and inter-develop. Since the reader is to play a significant role in the understanding of the poem, the symbolic metaphor must be

capable of carrying any historical or traditional associations it may have, though again these are to be defined ultimately by the context of the poem.

Theoretically, at any rate, it should be within the reader's capabilities to relate the dominant metaphors and themes of Paterson V to those of Paterson I-IV—i.e.—to fill in that "ominous" gap between Book Four and Book Five—without violating the context of the complete poem. This is especially true when considered in light of Williams' statement, after the completion of Book Five:

I had to take the world of Paterson into a new dimension if I wanted to give it imaginative validity. Yet I wanted to keep it whole, as it is to me...a form...keeping a unity directly continuous with the Paterson of Paterson I-IV. Let's hope I have succeeded in doing so.<sup>12</sup>

Here, he is almost inviting us to investigate this unity. The object of the thesis then, is to demonstrate that Williams realized these aims, not only in the sense that Paterson V is a congruent part of the Paterson I-IV continuum, but also in a deeper sense that Paterson V is some sort of culmination, though perhaps temporary, of Williams as man, as poet, and as Paterson. In a letter to Louis Martz, in 1951, Williams says of Book Five, "I must gather together the stray ends of what I have been thinking, and make my full statement as to their meaning or quit."<sup>13</sup> And in a letter to John C. Thirlwall, in 1955, Williams further says, "As far as I know, as my forth-

coming book [Book Five] makes clear, I shall use no other form [the variable foot] for the rest of my life, for it represents the culmination of all my striving after an escape from the restrictions of the verse of the past" (SL, 334).

When Williams makes statements like these, it becomes fairly difficult to dismiss Paterson V as a postscript to the rest of the poem. Unfortunately, several of Williams' critics have done just that.<sup>14</sup> In fact, after reading some of the scholarship written on Paterson I-V, the poet had to cry out "Christ! Are there no intelligent men left in the world!"<sup>15</sup> In Williams' view then, some sort of full statement is indeed intrinsic in Paterson V.

Two of the "stray ends" mentioned in Williams' letter to Martz are actually two dominant movements working throughout the first four books. The first can be referred to as the "divorce to marriage" progression, in which the conditions of separation and sterility must be resolved into some sort of fertile unity. The second can be called the "sleep to awakening" progression, in which the dream-like condition of mesmerization must be transformed into the alertness of life. The two are in turn intimately related through Williams' concept "La Vertue est toute dans l'effort" (IV, iii, 221) which, like many of Williams' concepts, could take the entire thesis to discuss. Both of these progressions become resolved, or gathered together, only in Book Five.

Through transitional and symbolic metaphor, the concept of effort also involves the reader. In other words, this main virtue the poet speaks of and acts upon throughout Paterson, he also wishes to be directly applied in the reading of the poem. The gaps between the metaphors, or for that matter, any part of the poem—for instance, the gaps that imply some sort of transition between the poetry and the prose excerpts—ask the reader to make the effort necessary to complete the transitions. Similarly, concerning Anabasis, Eliot says:

And if, as I suggest, such an arrangement of imagery requires just as much "fundamental brainwork" as the arrangement of an argument, it is to be expected that the reader of a poem should take at least as much trouble as a barrister reading an important decision on a complicated case.<sup>16</sup>

For Williams then, a thematic concern becomes a structuring principle, manifested in symbolic and transitional metaphor.

The most obvious metaphor of this nature in Williams' epic is Paterson himself, the man, the city, the river, etc. A less obvious though just as important metaphor is that of the Unicorn tapestries, the dominant image of Book Five. During the course of this fifth section, the tapestries acquire an almost equal degree of Protean flexibility in terms of symbolic associations as does Paterson himself. Although the Unicorn metaphor is actually just another extension of the symbolic metaphor, Paterson, it is a significant extension for two reasons. The first, and least, because it is Paterson's

final disguise, or identification, at least as far as Williams had completed the poem. The second, and more important, because that identification occurs after his confrontation with death at the end of Book Four. In Williams' poem, as in many other literary works, the presence of death acts as a sort of catalyst that gives impetus to the poet's quest for a fully realized life. The awareness of death approaching provides for the poet a jolt of necessity that, in terms of the two dominant movements mentioned earlier, urges, if not forces, Williams/Paterson to make the prevalent condition of divorce into one of marriage, and the prevalent condition of sleep into one of awakening. In other words, death makes a significant contribution to effort. As Williams points out in his discussion of another form of approaching death,

...one great thing about the "bomb" is the awakened sense it gives us that catastrophic (but why?) alterations are also possible in the human mind, in the arts, in the arts.... We are too cowed by our fear to realize it fully. But it is possible. (SE, 287)

This awareness seems to be involved in Northrop Frye's statements: "the only point at which one visibly enters into an identity with nature is death," and "death is the most accurate symbol of the ultimate meaning of life."<sup>17</sup> Paterson's final identification then, must in some sense be the answer to, or the revelation of, his life quest. To go back to Williams' discussion of the "bomb":

In desperation now before the Death, life begins to move violently...it is to legitimize the products of that power released by the Death and induct it into the services of life that the arts are addressed and we are its servants. (SE, 247-8)

Consequently, if we keep in mind both the principles of the transitional and the symbolic metaphor, and Williams' sense of his approaching death, a detailed study of the Unicorn tapestries as metaphor, their relation to the rest of the poem, should reveal that Book Five is indeed a "gathering," a "full statement," or a culmination of the entire poem, Paterson.

## II

Between Books Four and Five, Paterson, due to the dilemma of its protagonist, shifts in emphasis from the realm of life (the dominant symbol being the river) to the realm of art (the dominant symbol being the Unicorn tapestries). By the end of Book Four, according to the basic symbol of the river as the poet's life course, or, as Sister Bernetta Quinn suggests, "the giant Paterson's stream of consciousness,"<sup>18</sup> Paterson here supposedly reaches the end of his life course, or the termination of his consciousness, for at this point "the Ocean yawns" and "it is almost the hour." (IV, iii, 219) However, for the poet, this hour comes "too soon, too soon!" (219), since he has not yet found the meaning to his life course, the meaning to "law white beside the sliding waters" (III, iii, 173). The poet still hopes for all this to be "made clear," and hence

give value to his mutable life, but "weakness dogs him," and fulfillment seems "only a dream, or in a dream." (IV, iii, 222) He would be ready for death, if the meaning could be realized, but the "rocks of Areopagus"<sup>19</sup> have not "kept their sound."

(235) The fact that Williams was in his early seventies at this time, and also that he had by now suffered several often crippling strokes, most likely intensified this awareness of approaching death, and therefore made this desire for transcendence all the more necessary. If Williams allowed Paterson as river to be engulfed by the sea, "the sea that sucks in all rivers / dazzled," (234) the protagonist would be merely remaining in the mesmerized state of one of the "lifeless automats" of Book One, captured "in this dream of the whole poem." (234) In this state, "you cannot believe that it can begin again." (234) Consequently Paterson says "Turn back I warn you (October 10, 1950)," (234) the actual date of writing included to serve as a reminder of the reality of death, and therefore the necessity of this decision.

Thus Book Four sees Paterson heading finally inland from what would appear to be the sea of ordinary death, the death of no identity. When he says repeatedly, "the sea is not our home," the poet may be saying that he is not ready for death, the great immersion, and therefore heads inland. But it seems more likely that he is saying that the true death, death as



the ultimate meaning of life, does not lie there. For in the sea, there is no renewal, no resurrection. The sea is the place where "all rivers / (wither) run," (235) and "where the day drowns." (236) Since the sea is unrelated to the locale of the land, it is therefore the intoxicating, but destructive irrelevant: "the blood dark sea, nicked by the light alone." (236) Because of the superficial nature of the sea's tempting surface, the sea is actually an illusory locale, not the millefleurs background, but a filthy surface "afloat with weeds." (234) Thalassa (wife of Poseidon) can be seen as akin to, though in reverse of, Odysseus' sirens. The sirens attempt to shipwreck Odysseus and his crew on the rocks by enticing them from the security of the sea. In like, though opposite manner, Thalassa attempts to taunt Paterson into leaving the land (remember that the river's identity is formed by the land, especially the rocks) and drowning his identity in the sea. And like Odysseus, Paterson fights against his temptation: "I say to you, put wax in your ears against the hungry sea." (235)

Louis Martz interprets this sea as a representation of "the pull of longing toward a lost culture, a pull outward from the source," which makes good sense since an important part of Book Five is involved with Paterson and his various symbols returning to their sources. Martz, however, does not examine this. Also he is mistaken in thinking that Williams'

references to the "rocks of Areopagus" and "the great theatre of Dionysus" (235) in this section are a parody of "the longing of a Pound or an Eliot."<sup>20</sup> If they are meant to be a parody, they are also a parody of Williams himself, since, as we shall see, Williams spends a good part of Book Five incorporating these references into his solution. Further, these two references are significantly related to the land, not the sea, as shall be discussed later. True, the sea may represent this longing for a lost culture, but it is a longing in the wrong direction, as the poet realizes. Williams' "Satyric foot" of Book Five would only sink in the sea.

In Paterson then, the sea is the illusory anti-poetic. Throughout Paterson, the anti-poetic is basically the female counterpart to the fundamentally masculine act of writing, a counterpart involving both the poet's subject matter and his source of inspiration: "We express ourselves there (men) as we might upon the whole body of the various female could we ever gain access to her. (SE, 259) Unlike Milton's Muse though, Williams' inspirational anti-poetic is basically earth-bound, for "there can be no ideas, but in things." (I, i, 18) Though this shall be more fully discussed later, it is to be remembered that this anti-poetic woman-land metaphor is just as Protean as Paterson himself.

Williams' true, as opposed to illusory, female anti-

poetic is the land, against which "Paterson can instruct his thoughts." (II, i, 57) If the poet is to fulfill his commitment of Book One, "Never in this world will a man live well in his body save by dying," (Preface, 12) he must turn inland, for in the sea, the river loses its body. Or, if we take Quinn's interpretation of the river as Paterson's "stream of consciousness," in the sea, Paterson would no longer have any thoughts or consciousness to "instruct." In either case, it would be a marriage of no identity.

Williams' thematic attitude to the sea in Book Four is similar to certain Romantic attitudes revealed in W.H. Auden's study of the romantic iconography of the sea, The Enchafed Flood:

The sea or the great waters...are the symbol for the primordial undifferentiated flux, the substance which became created nature only by having form imposed upon or wedded to it.<sup>21</sup>

This "barbaric vagueness" of the sea is essentially antithetical to Williams' quest, since the sea drowns both a sense of identity, and any hope of return. Williams' references to "a girl standing upon a tilted shell," (IV, iii, 236) who could be a personification of Thalassa, the sea, as well as, clearly, a reference to Botticelli's Venus, and to his "rocks of Areopagus" are also similar to Auden's study. Auden says that the siren voice of the poetic shell "calls men to the sea to put off their nature and be Trolls...to have no

conscious discerning ego." To submit to the sirens would be "to be swallowed up in the waters, to be drowned in the deluge." Consequently, Williams' sea is a "hungry sea." The "rocks of Areopagus," the voices of the law, on the other hand, are similar to Auden's treatment of the Euclidean stone, the stone of transcendent stable reality, which "speaks of a world of pure truth, the image to the weary mariner of all that is true to itself."<sup>22</sup> In this way, Paterson is in the dilemma of the romantic hero, a dilemma which he overcomes by turning inland. Consequently, like the new world of the Book of Revelations, Williams' reawakened Paterson in Book Five has no more sea.

For this primordial undifferentiated flux, Williams substitutes the primordial, but differentiated substance, created art, a permanent form which has no barbaric vagueness. As shall be seen, both art and Paterson in Book Five return to the primordial in the sense that both return to their sources, but they return with identity. It is in this return that "the great theatre of Dionysus" (IV, iii, 235) is very much involved.

But to make this transition in Book Five from life to art a valid and meaningful one, a justifiable apotheosis as opposed to say, a convenient ending, this transition must keep within the thematic patterns established by Paterson I-IV. The

transition should conform not only because of the sometimes artificial tenet that a poem be thematically and structurally consistent, but more important, at least to Williams, it should conform because of the poet's sense of integrity and dedication, revealed in practically all of his works. In Paterson, the seriousness of the quest becomes more and more the poem's dominant tone, a seriousness that by the final sections of Book Four reaches a tone of desperation:

Listen!  
Thalassa! Thalassa!  
    Drink of it, be drunk!  
        Thalassa  
immaculate: our home, our nostalgic  
mother in whom the dead, enwombed again  
cry out to us to return .  
        the blood dark sea!  
nicked by the light alone, diamonded  
by the light . from which the sun alone  
lifts undamped his wings  
                    of fire!

not our home! It is NOT  
our home. (IV, iii, 236)

If the solution in Book Five ultimately proves itself to be merely an easy outlet for the Paterson dilemma, then the intensity of the Paterson persona created in the first four books would be thoroughly undermined.

Another factor which should be considered briefly in relation to the problem of thematic and structural consistency is that aspect of Williams' poetics which can be called "open goals." This term basically refers to the poet's dislike of

any preconceptions concerning his goal or solution in Paterson. In a letter to Henry Wells (1955) describing his approach to Paterson, Williams says "I did not theorize directly when I was writing but went wherever the design forced me to go". (SL, 333) In other words, the poem is basically an exploration through language, in which the poet as explorer is not a Christ walking through his wilderness with his preconceived Right Reason, but like any true explorer, is a man who is partly committed to his sense of dedication, and partly committed to wandering. Even when on the brink of solution in Book Five, Williams is anxious to keep his preconceptions in check:

Not prophecy! NOT prophecy!  
but the thing itself!  
(V, i, 242)

and later,

What but indirection  
will get to the end of the sphere?  
(V, i, 246)

Like Columbus, Williams does not draw a map of America before he has even discovered it. As Williams reveals in In The American Grain, exploration is a process, not a product which one places neatly into history books. The "open goal" then, is having some sense of dedication to purpose, but not having any closed notions about how one is going to accomplish that purpose, for closed notions may defeat or distort that accomplishment. This openness involves a liveliness to the possibility

that such purpose may itself become arbitrary, and thus subject to change. For example, if Columbus and his men had remained on the "Santa Maria," merely content to view their discovery from the boat, they might still have thought that America was India. In terms of thematic consistency then, if one begins an epic with "India" in mind, but finds later that the end of his poem discovers "America", the general theme of the finished poem may on the surface appear to be inconsistent, but it certainly isn't invalid. Moreover, if, because of the accident, the poet changes the name of one of his themes for the sake of consistency, then he is being artificial, if not false, and he consequently undermines the seriousness of his dedication, and makes his poem relatively worthless. In this sense, to take one of several examples in Paterson, Williams, because of his belief in the "open goal" strategy, can finally reject the sea at the end of Book Four if he feels that it does not hold the true solution to Paterson's dilemma, without undermining the intensity or the value of the entire poem, even though he may appear to be not as thematically consistent. In short, the "open goal" strategy is the proper strategy for an epic whose style is structurally open, whereas Milton's preconceived theme, or "closed" goal, to justify the ways of God to man, was the proper strategy for his epic whose preconceived blank verse was structurally closed.

However, if not completely consistent thematically or structurally in relation to the rest of Paterson, Book Five must at least be definitive or culminating if the "museum" of Paterson is to "become real." (244) Though America wasn't India, Columbus' discovery of the land was a culmination of his voyage, one which made his voyage worthwhile. By the end of Book Four though, Paterson has not yet discovered his "land" that will make the voyage of his life worthwhile. The following quotation partially illustrates this sense of necessity to make the life of Paterson/Williams something of permanence and value, and also reveals Williams' belief in the principle of transitional metaphor:

Paterson V must be written, is being written.... Why must it be written?  
Paterson IV ends with the protagonist breaking through the bushes, identifying himself with the land, with America. He finally will die, but it can't be categorically stated that death means anything. When you're through with sex, ambition, what can an old man create? Art of course, a piece of art that will go beyond him...and live on.23

Art then, is Williams' culminating discovery that transforms the rest of Paterson into that realm. Further, this quotation suggests that the "piece of art" is created only after Book Five is added to the rest of Paterson.

It is hardly surprising then, that Williams should seek in art "an image large enough to embody the whole knowable



world about (him)." (Auto, 391) If Paterson is this unifying image of the whole poem, then it follows that the Unicorn is that image for Book Five, since the Unicorn is also meant to embody Paterson's life, but "transmuted to a tighter form".(SE, 198) The last lines of Williams' prefatory statement,

hard put to it; an identification and a  
plan for action to supplant a plan for  
action; a taking up of slack; a dispersal  
and a metamorphosis, (Preface, 10)

seem, on closer analysis, to refer to Paterson's final Protean identification in the poem, that of the Unicorn in the Cloisters tapestries.

Significantly, the tapestries are real objects of art, since they occur in the actual life of Paterson—i.e.—Williams visited the Cloisters Museum quite regularly during the early fifties. Therefore, the use of the tapestries in the poem does not violate one of the poet's more important credos established earlier in Paterson, that there can be "no ideas but in things." At the same time, the tapestries belong in the realm of permanent artifact, since like most valuable works of art, they are not subject to mutability. However, unlike Keat's Grecian Urn for example, not just any timeless artifact will be capable of acting as the philosopher's stone for Williams, since the deeper thematic patterns of Paterson I-IV must also be taken into account. To go back to the

Columbus analogy, even though America wasn't India, his "deeper" theme was consistent in that he was still on an exploratory voyage, and his voyage was in the right direction. Williams' objet d'art must have qualities that relate to both Paterson as man and Paterson as city, otherwise this final transformation would again be just a convenient ending. The Unicorn et al must be "the single object" in Paterson's quest that "resolves (his) complex feelings of propriety." (SE, 256: IWWP, 76-7) If Williams can say of Whitman's poetry,

What he did not do was to study what he had  
done, to go over it, to select and reject,  
which is the making of the artist,  
(SE, 230)

and later of Dylan Thomas',

But it is the way the metaphors are identified with the meaning to emphasize it and to universalize and dignify it that is the proof of the poet's ability,  
(SE, 327)

then he would most likely apply the same criteria to his own work. Otherwise, Paterson's subsequent identification with the Unicorn is relatively worthless.

Though the Columbus analogy is obviously limited, it should suffice, at least for now, to reveal the nature of Williams' "open goal" strategy, and its relation to thematic consistency. Keeping this strategy in mind, the following thematic study of the Unicorn and other related metaphors attempts to reveal that Williams in Book Five did adhere to

the above criteria concerning Whitman's and Thomas' works, though it is to be remembered that the resultant interpretations are the product of just one writer's investigation, and further, that spatial and temporal limitations make the study incomplete. And when Williams says that "an artist should always speak in symbols even when he sees most passionately, otherwise his vision becomes blurred," (SL, 319) this basic principle of both symbolic and transitional metaphor should make any critic of Williams realize that his study is automatically one of secondary inference. This is especially so when dealing with the metaphor of a Unicorn, that rarest element which dwells obscured in the life before us.

## Chapter One

Aside from a brief yet important reference to the Unicorn in Book Three, which shall be discussed later, Williams' first direct reference to the Unicorn is in the opening pages of Book Five. This first description immediately begins a furthering process of identification between Paterson and the mythical beast. This hint of identification is suggested through the use of two structurally parallel stanzas:

The Unicorn  
                    the white one-horned beast  
                                thrashes about  
root toot a toot!  
                    faceless among the stars  
                                calling  
for its own murder  
  
Paterson, from the air  
                    above the low range of its hills  
                                across the river  
on a rock-ridge  
                    has returned to the old scenes....  
                                (V, i, 243)

In this first description of the Unicorn are two characteristics that serve to align the beast with the reawakened world of Paterson, mentioned in the first stanza of Book Five. The "faceless" characteristic of the Unicorn is similar to "the angle of a forehead / or far less" that makes Paterson "remember when he thought / he had forgot." (V, i, 241)

Secondly, the "root toot a toot" reminds one of the "song of the fox sparrow / reawakening the world / of Paterson," (241) mentioned just several stanzas earlier.

This identification process is further developed a stanza later, where "The Cloisters—on its rock," the museum where the tapestries are preserved, is physically akin to "Paterson...on a rock-ridge." The rocks themselves are in turn an integral part of the reawakening or resurrective process established in the first stanzas of Paterson V: "In March—the rocks / the bare rocks / speak!" (242)<sup>1</sup> This aligning of the rocks with resurrection can be seen as a kind of prelude to solution, fulfilling the poet's wish uttered in desperation towards the end of Book Four: "Oh that the rocks of the Areopagus had / kept their sounds, the voices of the law!" (IV, iii, 235)

Following these stanzas is the first prose excerpt of Book Five, which serves to identify Williams as Paterson with the tapestries. The descriptions of the farm in this letter from Josie are similar to the poet's subsequent descriptions of the Unicorn's "millefleurs background," and since Josie is inviting Williams to come to the farm, this letter is remarkably suited to the theme of identification (and also to that of resurrection):

Forgetmenot, wild columbine, white and  
purple violets, white narcissus, wild

anemones and yards and yards of delicate wild windflowers along the brook showed up at their best.....If you ever feel like coming and get transportation please come ....How lovely to read your memories of the place; a place is made of memories as well as the world around it. Most of the flowers were put in many years ago and thrive each spring, the wild ones in some new spot that is exciting to see. (V, i, 244-4)

As Book Five progresses, the Paterson - Unicorn identification becomes stronger, descriptions such as "The Unicorn has no match / or mate... the artist / has no peer," (V, i, 246) and later, "Now I come to the small flowers / that cluster about the feet of my beloved — the hunt of the Unicorn and / the god of love," (V, iii, 271) making the identification more and more complete. Each tends to reinforce the former until finally, towards the close of the poem, the declaration "a milk-white one-horned beast / I, Paterson, the King-self" (272) makes the identification of the Unicorn with Williams/Paterson a total one.

If one can assume from such a brief outline that Paterson's attempt to identify with the Unicorn is one of the main concerns of Book Five, then it should prove worthwhile to try to relate the various implications and traditional associations pertaining to the Unicorn with the thematic concerns of Paterson. In other words, Paterson/Williams must have valid reasons why he should wish this specific identification to take place. The

main clues to these reasons would most likely reside in the particular descriptions, the parts of the Unicorn or the tapestries that the poet wished to emphasize most.

## I

One of the first characteristics of the Unicorn that Williams calls our attention to is the animal's horn; "the white one-horned beast...root toot a toot." The fact that the beast is one-horned immediately suggests the potential resolution of two related themes; the theme of unity or marriage to overcome the prevailing state of divorce and to reconcile certain polar opposites in the poem, and the theme of phallic or sexual effort to overcome the prevailing state of mesmerization or sleep. Both themes are related to the poet's concern over the whore-virgin identity, and to his idea of the anti-poetic as female. Both of these will be more fully discussed later.

According to myth, and to legends recorded in bestiaries, the Unicorn's horn, aside from its physically unified shape, has two basic traditional qualities, both of which relate to other thematic concerns of Paterson. The first can be referred to as the medicinal properties of the horn. Legend has it that if the Unicorn dips its horn into poisonous waters, these waters shall be cleansed. Figuratively then, this horn

is a solution to the corruption of the "filthy Passaic" and the "deformed morality" of Books One to Four, a pollution affecting the physical environment, the language, and the character of the place. In I Wanted to Write a Poem, Williams says that the end of Book Four is "the identification of the filthy river with the perversion of its characters .... I was getting closer to the city, international character [which can be seen as another interpretation of the sea] began to enter the innocent river and pervert it; sexual perversion.... the river reaches pollution." (IWWP, 78) In the opening pages of Book One, the seed of resurrection or meaning, or for that matter, seed of life, is unrealized and surrounded by this filth:

(The multiple seed,  
packed tight with detail, soured,  
is lost in the flux and the mind,  
distracted, floats off in the same  
scum). (Preface, 12)

And at the end of Book Four, this multiple seed is still unrealized, and covered with pollution:

— though seeds float in with the scum  
and wrack . among brown fronds  
and limp starfish . (IV, iii, 235)

However, in Book Four, there is finally some hope of resurrection for this seed:

Yet you will come to it, come to it!....  
You must come to it. Seed  
of venus, you will return. (236)



For this resurrection to occur, this scum and wrack in the filthy river must first be cleansed, and this cleansing doesn't occur until Book Five.

The Corydon and Phyllis dialogues of Book Four are in a sense a concretizing of the language and character aspects of this perversion. Corydon, Theocritus' idyllic virtuous shepherd, and Phyllis, the female counterpart of faith and love, would normally reveal an ideal marriage of pastoral bliss. But Williams has their intended relationship one of moral perversion and thwarted desire, which when coupled with their plastic, worldly dialogue, provides an ironic contrast to the ideals of their historical connotations. Through this contrast, the poet reveals the extent of this corruption of the Passaic urban life. For example, consider the following typical section of the Corydon/Phyllis dialogue:

Have  
you ever been to bed with a man?

Have you?

Good shot! With this body? I think I'm more  
horse than woman. Did you ever see such skin as mine?  
Speckled like a Guinea hen .

Only their speckles are white.

More like a toad perhaps?

I didn't say that.

Why not? It's the truth, my little Oread. In  
dominatable. Let's change names. You be Corydon! and I'll

play Phyllis. Young! Innocent! One can fairly hear the pelting of apples and the stomp and clatter of Pan's hoofbeats. Tantamount to nothing . (IV, i, 187)

In fact, they have so corrupted and falsified their identities, that it no longer matters which is male, and which is female, for the two no longer have any meaningful function. Though parts of their dialogue such as the above have important relations to the marriage and unity themes resolved in Book Five, which shall be discussed later, they also serve as an epitome of the poisoned character of Paterson as man and as city. And in Book Five, this poisoned character is partly cleansed through this legendary medicinal property of the Unicorn's horn. Paterson's subsequent identification with the Unicorn can allow him to say towards the end of the poem that "the times are not heroic / since then / but they are cleaner and freer of disease," (V, iii, 271) for Paterson and all his symbolic embodiments have now been cleansed.

The medicinal properties of the horn also imply Williams' other life-long career, that of doctor. Since Williams had established his practice in Rutherford, on the banks of the Passaic River, and since most of his patients lived around this riverside area, it can be said that the man was an actual, as well as a figurative, healer or saviour of the Passaic community life. In both vocations, he attempted to cleanse the poisonous waters of Paterson; as doctor, the diseases of

the Passaic community, and as poet, its language and character.

The second traditional property of the Unicorn's horn is that of its magical powers concerning sex. In Asia, for example, the horn was valued as an aphrodisiac. Because of these powers, and undoubtedly related to the phallic shape of the horn, the Unicorn in time became a fairly universal symbol of sublimated sex. Williams it seems, is aware of this implication and uses it, for after the identification of Paterson with the Unicorn, he says "Paterson, / keep your pecker up / whatever the detail!" (V, iii, 273) At any rate, the Unicorn in the Cloisters tapestries has been described as a symbol for the ritual of marriage, moreover an ideal and fertile one, since it is believed that the tapestries were originally created for the celebration of the marriage of Anne of Brittany to Louis XII: two more were later added when Francis I married Anne's daughter and heir in 1514.<sup>2</sup> For such dignified marriages, the Unicorn must have been a fairly appropriate marriage symbol.

These implications of the horn's magical powers, seen in light of the principles of symbolic metaphor, are intimately and subtly connected to the poem's major thematic concern of the poet as male, and the anti-poetic, or the poet's subject matter and source of inspiration (no ideas but in things) as

female, and the poet's desire for the union or marriage of the two. In keeping with this theme is the related legend that the Unicorn can be only captured by a virgin. In spite of the fact that the beast is reputed to live over a thousand years, and is able to evade any other form of hunter, the Unicorn will fall meekly into the lap of a virgin. Because of this, and because of Williams' repeated descriptions in Book Five centering around this legend, it can be fairly certain that the ritual of the Hunt of the Unicorn is used by the poet as an allegory of his marriage to his anti-poetic. Though the nature of Williams' virgin and hence his female anti-poetic needs to be more fully discussed, it is important to remember that after Paterson's identification with the Unicorn, he refers to himself as the "King-self", which both suggests the original function of the tapestries as a wedding gift of royal marriages, and provides a complementary partner to the poet's various descriptions of the virgin Queen. The hunt then, becomes an act of union, especially desired by the poet, for Williams has his Unicorn "calling for its own murder." (V, i, 243) This calling can be seen as a subtle evocation of the aphrodisiacal quality of the horn.

## II

Much of Book Five is concerned with resolving the nature

of the anti-poetic, the female counterpart to the basically masculine act of writing. Both are necessary for the creation of art. This of course has an obvious relation to the masculine and feminine principles involved in the creation of life, an analogy that most major artists have recognized. Williams' recognition of this principle can be seen in the following statement:

I am extremely sexual in my desires: I  
carry them everywhere and at all times. I  
think that from that arises the drive which  
empowers us all. Given that drive, a man  
does with it what his mind directs.

(Auto, Foreword)

Assuming that the drive to create is masculine, the object to which this drive is directed will inevitably be female, everything other than the poet that he desires to capture, or unite with. Hence the millefleurs background and its personification in the virgin is the anti-poetic of the Unicorn as poet, just as in Book One, Paterson as man and city is the masculine principle of the Passaic Valley, who builds himself upon the female principle of the land, and "against which Paterson instructs his thoughts." Against Paterson, "stretches the low mountain / the Park's her head...farms and ponds, laurel and the temperate wild cactus / yellow flowered...facing him, his arm supporting her...her monstrous hair spangled with apple blossoms." (I, i 17) And just as there is only one Unicorn against a thousand

flowers, so too for Paterson there are "innumerable women, each like a flower / But / only one man — like a city."

(I, i, 15) Basically, this poetic-anti-poetic duality is concerned with the masculine pole of man/city and the feminine pole of woman/land. And for their fullest possible realization, the two work together in harmony. The difference between the Book One metaphor and the Book Five metaphor of this duality is largely a difference in emphasis; the City/Park metaphor is more concerned with the realm of life; the Unicorn/millefleurs metaphor is more concerned with the realm of art. Both though, are integrally related.

In Paterson, as in many of his other works (notably, In The American Grain), Williams must explore these masculine and feminine elements of the life/art analogy individually, and personally, if they are to be of any thematic worth, for tradition only lives when seen in the light of the contemporary and the individual: as Williams says:

the classic can only be fully developed  
when used in a contemporary and active  
environment, not a past historical one.

In other words, the classic is valid only as a process, not a product. However, this does not mean that Williams wishes to destroy tradition, for:

it is precisely a service to tradition,  
honouring it and serving it that is

envisioned and intended by my attack, and not disfigurement - confirming and enlarging its application. (SE, 284)

It is only through treating tradition as a present and ongoing process that it can achieve its truest meaning.

By 1950, Williams' individual approach to these masculine and feminine roles in the creative process became more fully realized. Since Book Five was written in the early fifties, it is worth noting a comment of his made in 1950, in relation to the proposed marriage theme:

There is one thing God himself cannot do.  
He cannot raise the arm and lower it at  
the same time. Therefore duality, therefore  
the sexes. Sex is at the bottom of all art.  
He is unity, but to accomplish simultaneity,  
we must have two, multiplicity, the male and  
the female, man and woman — acting to-  
gether — the fecundating principle. There-  
fore everything we do is an effort to achieve  
conjunction, not to say unity.  
(Auto, 373)

Here, between the City/Park metaphor of Book One and the Unicorn/millefleurs metaphor of Book Five, lies the problem and hence the motive for much of Paterson's quest. In the first lines of Book One, Williams has recognized this basic masculine/feminine duality, and the necessity of its polar harmony, but at the same time, the poet sees that the present state of this harmony is divorce, and the effort needed to overcome this separation is asleep. The Passaic Valley is comprised of dreams, "the rumors of separate worlds," (I, ii

36) and the "vague accuracies of events." (I, ii, 34) There is no "love . combating sleep." (II, i, 64) People are "automatons" who "walk outside their bodies...unroused." (I, i, 14) Although the poet in Book One recognizes the dilemma, he sees no solution; "They walk incommunicado, the equation is beyond solution, yet the sense is clear." (18) The poet realizes that there must be "an interpenetration — both ways," (Preface 12) but in this state "hot and cold (are) parallel but never mingling," (36) and "the birds (are) against the fish." (36) Where the poet in Book Five sees marriage as a solution to these separate worlds, in Book One, marriage is "a shuddering implication." (I, i, 20)

Divorce in Book One is also apparent in the language of the people, and because Williams is a poet, this is an important part of the problem. As J. Hillis Miller points out in his introduction, for Williams, "the failure of language... means necessarily a failure of man's power to perceive...and share...life. The loss of a proper language companies man's detachment from the world and from other people."<sup>3</sup> To Williams the language of the people is "false," and "divorced from their minds." (I, i, 21) Like their sexually unroused condition, and hence their mesmerized attitude to life, their minds "are like beds, always made up." (Preface, 13) Mrs. Cumming and Sam Patch, two of the few individuals who in Book One try to



break this condition, both ultimately fail, because in the end the language fails them:

Patch leaped but Mrs. Cumming shrieked  
and fell — unseen....  
:a body found next spring  
frozen in an ice-cake; or a body  
fished next day from the muddy swirl —

both silent, uncommunicative.  
(I, ii, 31)

Between the words describing their deaths, and their actual deaths, is too wide a chasm. This gulf then, becomes a figurative implication of the distance between the top of the cliff and the bottom of the falls which Patch and Cumming tried to bridge, but failed. However, the poet recognizes that Patch and Cumming have in a sense challenged "this roar of eternal sleep," (I, ii, 28) and as early as Book One, he realizes that the true meaning to his life may lie in confronting death. Though Williams at this point is afraid of this solution, he has to ask himself, "Why have I not....long since / put myself deliberately in the way of death?" (I, ii, 31) The answer is that if he too attempted to confront death at this point, the language would also fail him, for in Book One, the poet only has "a delirium of solutions," and therefore the theme (of his poem, of his life) might still be "as it may prove, asleep, unrecognized." (I, ii, 30)

What the poet does ascertain in Book One is that the bridge

necessary to cross this divorce, "the sign of knowledge in our time," (I, ii, 28) may be one of perception. What may be needed in Paterson the man, and hence the city, is a revitalization of perception to clear the delirium:

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: (I, ii, 31)

The key to this perceptual bridge lies in the "revival power of detail" which, as shall be revealed later, plays a very important role in the poet's reawakening in Book Five.

Much of the problem of divorce comes from the fact that we are product—instead of process—oriented. And though Paterson itself is in the last analysis a product, Williams does attempt, as Roger Seamon points out, to "make the process of creation a central part of the finished product."<sup>4</sup> This is why Williams makes such heavy demands on the reader. It is those people, in Williams' view the majority of the people, who wish to see everything in terms of product that he is against. The third section of Book One is largely involved with condemning this orientation:

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,  
overtopping you, green, livid,  
green when you shall no more speak, or  
taste, or even be. (I, iii, 41)

To be involved with process is to be involved with detail. To generalize by saying that the rose is red is to say nothing of the life of the rose. The flower or the product of the rose is red, but its living processes, its stems, thorns, roots, and leaves, are green. Here the "master's theorem with accuracy, accurately misses." (I, iii, 49) Product-orientation induces stasis, and stasis deadens life. Part of the blame for the perpetuation of this product orientation Williams places on institutions such as the universities or the encyclopedias.<sup>5</sup> He even makes a statement by his close friend Ezra Pound seem ironic, in order to reveal the extent of this orientation; "P. Your interest is in the bloody loam, but what I'm after is the finished product." (I, iii, 50) In fact this statement is doubly ironic in that Williams is also after the finished product; it's just that Williams wants to go through the loom so that he can be part of the tapestry, as Seamon suggests. But in the final analysis, this product-dominant stasis is much more difficult to pinpoint, and is more of a general condition:

Who restricts knowledge? Some say  
it is the decay of the middle class...  
so that we do not know (in time)  
where the stasis lodges. 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 the special interests  
that perpetuate the stasis and make it  
profitable. (I, iii, 46)

The prose passages of this final section in Book One also serve to develop this product/process theme. In contrast to the prose excerpt concerning the mayonnaise jar, (I, iii, 44) in which the edge of the coloured label held down by glue is more interesting to the medical student than the specimen within, there is the prose list of Cornelius Doremus' belongings, (I, iii, 45) where Doremus' petty assortment of goods and chattels is deemed to be of more interest than his death. In the former passage, the interest is in detail and process, and therefore the poet approves; in the latter, the interest is in the products, and there is just a vague mention of the man's death. Consequently, the above quoted passage follows this excerpt.

In the eel hunt passage, (I, iii, 46-7) the generality of this deadening condition is most revealed. Here the community has drained the water (or life process) of the lake, leaving the fish and eels to lie in heaps on the mud. The people then swarm onto the lake bottom and scoop them into baskets. By draining the lake, the community has extinguished the process of life, the resultant condition for the marine inhabitants being stasis. The people's interest is only in hunting down products. Through placing this historical

excerpt into the final section of Book One, Williams thus transforms an otherwise flat prose description into a remarkably flexible and apt metaphor that epitomizes the nature of this general decay in life around the Paterson area.

Having established these conditions, the poet as Paterson sets out in Book Two to employ the reviving powers of detail. And the best way to begin to investigate detail is to take a walk.<sup>6</sup> Consequently much of Book Two is concerned with doing just this, for through the vehicle of walking, Paterson is able to avoid the abstractions of product orientation; "outside myself / there is a world.... which I approach / concretely." (II, i, 57) Armed with his new weapon of perception, Paterson probes for details of this deadened condition, in the hope of finding some solution. Yet, the details he discovers such as "the ugly legs of the young girls," (58) "the roots...writhing upon the surface," "the punk-dry rot," (59) "the stubble and matted brambles," and "the matt stone solicitiously instructed to bear away some rumour" (62) all reveal signs of confusion and divorce. These details are "wings (that) do not unfold for flight." (62) Paterson's observations of the state of these "modern replicas" largely prove to be the same as those of Book One. Consequently, "he

is afraid!" (62) Further images such as "an orchestral dullness," "the amnesic crowd," "voices multiple and inarticulate," "feet aimlessly wandering," "thoughts still in sleep — pitiful," and the frequent references to divorce also reveal that these conditions still prevail. Towards the end of Book Two, Paterson becomes so disillusioned with his world that he begins to be skeptical of his original marriage solution; "be reconciled with your world, poet — it is the only truth. Ha! / The language is worn out." (II, iii, 103) Though this marriage of the poet to his anti-poetic is to prove itself largely the means to solution in Book Five, the poet has only pessimism and despair for it in Book Two.

The letters from C, especially the last one, also serve to reveal the poet's stilted uncommunicative relationship to his anti-poetic. The first letter (II, i, 59) refers to the poet's influence upon "the damming up of (her) creative capacities," her having to work from "the surface crust" of herself. Here again is a remarkable instance in which Williams puts his prose excerpts to work. C's use of the description "surface crust" enables the poet to make a subtle illusion to earth as well, and hence he relates the woman aspect of his anti-poetic to that of the land. Both implications of "surface crust" are concerned with divorce:

That kind of blockage, exiling one's self from

one's self — have you ever experienced it?  
I dare say you have, at moments; and if so,  
you can well understand what a serious psychological injury it amounts to when turned into a permanent day - to - day condition.  
(II, i, 59-60)

Here it is as though the poet's anti-poetic is reproaching him for not relating to his subject properly. Paterson, whether man, city, or poet, has failed his anti-poetic because he has not lived up to his half of the bargain in the necessary "interpenetration — both ways." And though there are several more optimistic passages in Book Two, the long final letter from C serves to epitomize, and in a sense clarify, what is basically wrong with the generally deadened world of Paterson:

You've never had to live, Dr. P<sup>7</sup> — not in any of the by-ways and underground passages where life so often has to be tested [cf. W's description of the roots writhing on the surface]. The very circumstances of your birth and background provided you with an escape from life in the raw; and you confuse that protection from life with an inability to live — and thus are able to regard literature as nothing more than a desperate last extremity resulting from that illusionary inability to live.  
(II, iii, 111)

Illusionary or not, Paterson does feel this inability to live; in himself and in his city, and perhaps C is right in saying that Paterson as Williams is protected from life. If not, it is somewhat ironic that C is accusing Williams of ignoring the processes of life. But if Williams has escaped from life

in the raw, then C's accusation throws a new light on the prose excerpt concerning the medical student. In this case, the mayonnaise jar label becomes the useless product, or shall we say, the false approach to process. The medical student then, is actually Williams, who is ignoring "the twenty or more infants" ready to be examined and treated, and thus in this perhaps semi-autobiographical excerpt, Williams is indeed ignoring life in the raw. In other words, in Book Two, Williams literary approach to process may have been just as bad as the product orientation he condemned.

C goes on to say that Paterson's language is failing him because he has divorced life from literature. This accusation, as shall be seen, has important implications concerning Williams' treatment of art in Books Three and Five, where Paterson ultimately tries to unite the two. In Book Two however, C may be rightly accusing Paterson of seeing his anti-poetic as a "flower in (his) buttonhole" (111)—ie.—as a dead product—instead of properly regarding it as a live flower growing from the land. Thus this early false approach may be part of the reason why his first attempt to unite life and art in Book Three fails. This attempt shall be discussed later in connection with sun imagery. But also inherent in this letter is the fact that art can be a unifier of identity, which becomes very important regarding the Unicorn tapestries



in Book Five:

...in writing (as in all forms of creative art) one derives one's unity of being and one's freedom to be one's self, from one's relationship to those particular externals (language, clay, paints etcetera) over which one has complete control and the shaping of which lies entirely in one's own power.  
(II, iii, 106)

Here lies a partial justification for why the poet spends so much time in Book Five describing the compositional particulars of the tapestries.

Working in conjunction with the dominant pessimistic and despairing images of the first two books are less obvious patterns of images that begin to develop slowly, perhaps because of Williams' "open goal" approach. In other words, at first, he is insecure about their validity because he has not yet realized their significance. Therefore the poet wishes to keep these early treatments of the images independent of any "closed notions." If the poet finds later that he again wishes to use them as the poem develops, and his meaning through more discoveries becomes clearer, then he can be more certain of their significance. If Columbus spotted a headland (a hopeful discovery) on his way across the Atlantic, he would not know if that headland was just part of a small island, or a small part of a much larger mainland, until he

progressed further in his exploration.<sup>8</sup> In this analogy, Paterson's dominant images of pessimism and despair would be the ocean. Generally, these "headland" images in Paterson are concerned with those few individuals who, in the first two books, try to break this deadened, divorced condition. Though they all in some sense ultimately fail, they are important because they have made an effort, and because Paterson will eventually follow in their paths, and try to succeed where they have failed.

One of the main patterns that serves to set apart those few individuals from the rest of the "great beast" is that of the sun imagery, though it is to be noted that this pattern, partly because of the "open goal" approach, is not completely consistent. Generally, those who are part of the mesmerized crowd are involved with images of shade, while the few individuals who try are involved with direct sunlight. The sun itself is an image of resurrection, common enough in elegies (for example, "Lycidas"), and belongs to the masculine side of the poetic/anti-poetic harmony. For example, note the sexual implications of the following image:<sup>5</sup> "The flower spreads its coloured petals / wide in the sun," (I, i, 20) and in Book Four, "waiting for the sun to part the labia / of shabby clouds." (IV, ii, 210) Early in Book One, the sun as resurrective is established, though unrealized. Here it is an

"ignorant sun, rising in the slot of hollow suns risen."  
(Preface, 12) But at the end of Book Four, its resurrective potential is fully realized, for when confronted with the sea of ordinary death, "the sun alone lifts undamped / its wings of fire." (IV, iii, 236) And in Book Five, in the image of the birds weaving the tapestries, the birds are working together "in the sun's glare." (V, iii, 269) Between Book One and Book Four, the sun images become more and more developed when seen in conjunction with the qualities of those few individuals, forming into complementary patterns in which Paterson will eventually enter. At the end of Book One, however, Paterson is very much a part of this deadened condition, and therefore his,

Thought clambers up,  
snail like, upon the wet rocks  
hidden from sun and sight — ...  
and has its birth and death there  
in that moist chamber, shut from  
the world — and unknown to the world.  
(I, iii, 51)

In Book Two, Paterson sees that the pleasure seekers in the park "lie protected from the offending sun;" (II, i, 65) the white girl, for example, "lies under the bush," (66) and her boyfriend has "a sunshade over his eyes." (66) Later, in Williams' description of the working classes, since "some sort of breakdown has occurred," (67) they are seen as partly in the sunlight, "mottled by the shadows of the leaves." (67)

However, the few individuals who try, such as Mary, who dances in the sunlight trying to get her friends to respond, or Klaus Ehrens, the man who preaches to the mesmerized congregation on the virtues of poverty, his "glabrous skull (reflects) the sun's light." (II, ii, 80)

And in one of the poet's more famous passages of Book Two, in fact Williams' favourite passage,<sup>9</sup> which begins "The descent beckons / as the ascent beckoned," the sun plays an important part in this momentary revelation of a solution:

With evening, love wakens  
                                  though its shadows  
  which are alive by reason  
of the sun shining — ...  
Love without shadows stirs now  
                                  beginning to waken  
  as night  
advances. (II, iii, 96)

Here the sun is related to the sleep / awakening progression mentioned earlier. However, this revelation is temporary, for "night advances," and therefore his "new awakening" is "without accomplishment." And "though he sweat for all his worth / no poet has come." (II, iii, 97)

The sun's main thematic importance in relation to Paterson is in their parallel relationship to art. Though it is interesting to note that like the micro-macro situation of Paterson the man, and his manifestation the city, so too there is the sun as a physical flaming object, and its more universal

manifestation, sunlight. In discussing the various verbal implications of Paterson, that is, the name Paterson, as a symbolic metaphor, Sister Quinn points out that its "connotations include the homonym of son (sun), "which in some sense means that Paterson is the father (pater) of the sun."<sup>10</sup> Though this does tie in quite nicely with the thematic implications of the sun imagery, a direction which Quinn doesn't pursue, this verbal implication of the name does seem to be a bit of an interpretive stretch, especially since Williams has stated that he chose Paterson the city for reasons other than its name.<sup>11</sup> After all, one could just as easily look for aesthetic and decadent qualities in Paterson on the grounds that the name implies that Williams is the "son" of (Walter) Pater.

At any rate, the relationship of Paterson to the sun becomes more specific in Book Three in the poet's metaphorical discussion of art, and because of the treatment of the images of flame and heat in relation to art and life in art, this discussion has an important relevance to Book Five. Consider for example the following brief outline in terms of this sun imagery development. In Book One occurs the line, "Ignorant sun rising in the slot of hollow suns risen." (Preface, 12) Then in Book Three, in the library section, the poet says "When the sun rises, it rises in the poem." (III, i, 122)

Then later, the poet's description of the books (art) of the past are like the hollow suns risen, where "We read not the flames / but the ruins left / by the conflagration." (III, ii, 148) A sun without flames is a hollow sun. Similarly, a book or work of art without the "flame" of the artist present is a hollow artifact, "as there are fires that / smolder / smolder a lifetime and never burst / into flame." (III, ii, 142) As the poet says, "That which should be rare is trash because it contains nothing of you." (III, iii, 148) This passage is immediately followed by the only reference to the Unicorn tapestry other than Book Five. Therefore, it merits consideration.

Similar to the process of Paterson's identification with the Unicorn in Book Five, Paterson in Book Three attempts to overcome the "stagnation" and "death" of the hollow artifacts in the library by giving his life (flame, blood) to the art of the past:

Awake, he dozes in a fever heat,  
cheeks burning [like the sun] ... loaning blood  
to the past, amazed . . . risking life.

And as his mind fades, joining the others, he  
seeks to bring it back — but it eludes him,  
flutters again and flies off and  
again away. (III, i, 124)

As in Book Five, Paterson is "awake," which is significant in contrast to the dominant sleep imagery of the first two books.

And because Paterson is risking his life, Thalassa appears on the scene:

O Thalassa, Thalassa!  
the lash and hiss of water<sup>12</sup>

The sea!

How near it was to them!

Soon!

Too soon .     (III, i, 124)

Similarly, in Book Four, she is to reappear when Paterson as river is coming to his life's end. Unlike the confrontation in Book Four though, Thalassa in Book Three thwarts Paterson from his attempt:

Breathless and in haste  
the various night (of books) awakes! awakes  
and begins (a second time) its song...

It will not last forever  
against the long sea, the long, long  
sea, swept by winds, the "wine-dark" sea...

they cannot penetrate and cannot waken, to be again  
active but remain — books

that is, men in hell,  
their reign over the living ended.  
(III, ii, 140)

In this passage the term "reign" has an important implication regarding his later identification with the Unicorn as Paterson, the "King-self." Further, it is this risking of life for the sake of art that again motivates Paterson in Book Four to turn away from the sea of death, and in Book Five, he succeeds.

When in Book Four both the poet and the sun turn their "undamped wings" of "fire" away from the sea of ordinary death, Paterson is in a sense aligning himself with the symbolic implications of the flame and heat characteristics of the sun, established in Book Three. In Book Five, this identification becomes more developed, for just as the tapestries are being weaved under the sun's "glare," so Paterson in this book is in a sense "glaring" at these tapestries. Now when Paterson identifies himself with the Unicorn he, because of his parallel with the sun, becomes the "flame" for the tapestries, the flame that makes them rare instead of trash, and in this way he allows the museum to become real. Thus, at the moment of Paterson's complete identification with the Unicorn, the tapestries are referred to as "the living fiction." In other words, Paterson resurrects Art, Art resurrects Paterson, and again there is "an interpenetration — both ways." Consequently, both survive. Here, the Santayana excerpt at the beginning of Book Three becomes significant, for when Paterson the man resurrects Art, and vice versa, they also resurrect the deadened condition of Paterson, the city:

...cities are a second body for the human mind, a second organism, more rational, permanent and decorative than the animal organism of flesh and bone: a work of natural yet moral art, where the soul sets



up her trophies of action and instruments  
of pleasure. (III, 116, *My italics.*)

In other words, the city is in a sense an intermediate link between Nature and Art. Thus, the interpenetration and inter-resurrection becomes threefold.

Working along lines similar to the sun images are the images of birds, those "couriers to the ceremonial of love." (II, i, 63) Love, in turn, is seen by the poet as a flame. The fact that the poet means these sun and bird images to be related can be seen in such lines as "aflame in flight! — aflame only in flight!" (63), referring to birds; and "wings of fire," (IV, iii, 236) referring to the sun.<sup>13</sup> Like the ignorant sun of Book One, the birds in this book are observed, but at the moment seen as insignificant, just part of the generally sterile pattern. These first descriptions of the birds show them as not in flight, but on the ground. For instance, Williams' first reference to birds is:

Womanlike.... floating like a pigeon  
after a long flight to his cote.,  
(I, i, 23)

which is an image of weariness and repetition, and is something that the poet doesn't wish to be a part of:

Certainly I am not a robin nor erudite,  
no Erasmus nor bird that returns to the same  
ground year by year. (I, ii, 29)

Similarly, the "white crane will fly / and settle later,"  
(30) and:

the bird alighting, that pushes  
its feet forward to take up the impetus  
and falls forward nevertheless  
among the twigs. (I, ii, 34)

In Book One, the birds seem merely a manifestation of the  
deadened, divorced condition, for they are only "the birds  
as against the fish." (36) The beginning of Book Two treats  
birds in a similar, if not worse fashion:

Signs everywhere of birds nesting, while  
in the air, slow, a crow zigzags  
with heavy wings before the wasp-thrusts  
of smaller birds circling about him  
that dive from above stabbing for his eyes.  
(II, i, 61)

Then suddenly, during his walk, Paterson practically stumbles  
over some birds, causing them to take flight, and his surprise  
at their action causes him to realize their significance:

They fly away, churring!...  
.. and disappear  
-- but leave, livening the mind, a flashing  
of wings and a churring song...  
...afame only in flight!...  
He is led forward by their announcing wings.  
(II, i, 62-3)

Here then, is a clear example of the value of "open goals."  
When Williams allows us to see his transformation, or shall  
we say, the process that led to his inspiration, the signi-  
ficance of the birds "livening the mind" which leads the poet  
forward seems all the more real, and hence all the more

valuable. If Williams had persisted in retaining any "closed" notions of the birds, persisted for the sake of thematic consistency to keep the birds in the divorced state of "the birds as against the fish," as the poet says the product-oriented institutions tend to do, then the pattern of his bird imagery would have been forced and artificial, and hence invalid. And it would have been just as invalid for Williams to have revised those earlier images to make them consistent with the inspirational significance he discovered later. Although Williams is a poet who believes in the necessity of revision, it is important to realize that he rarely revises the meaning of a particular work or phrase, but the language which he has used to convey that meaning. A quick comparison of earlier and later drafts of many of Williams' poems will reveal that he usually revises his approach to the subject, and not the subject which he is approaching. The later drafts thus result in a more direct perception, as the poem happens, not as it abstractly happens, or should happen.

After Williams' fortunate "accidental" discovery, he relates the birds, like the sun, to what can be referred to as the heat of life. A synonym of this heat is what has previously been called "effort," which manifests itself in love. And it is this love that will eventually overcome the deadened divorced sleep that Paterson's world is now in.

Consequently, it is particularly appropriate for Williams to have the song of the fox sparrow reawaken the world of Paterson in Book Five, and have the image of the birds working together to produce the tapestries. And when Paterson does reawaken in Book Five, "He looks out the window / (and) sees the birds still there —". (V, i, 242)

### III

The second main characteristic of the Unicorn that Williams calls our attention to, in fact repeatedly, is the white colour of the Unicorn. Although this is the legendary colour of the beast, its whiteness seems significant not only because the poet repeatedly mentions this colour, but also because a colour motif, especially the colour white, runs throughout the preceding four books. This motif becomes so developed in Paterson that by Book Five, the colour white has as many implications as other symbolic metaphors in the poem. Further, these implications are integral to the poet's solution. As Williams says, towards the close of Book Three:

No meaning. And yet, unless I find a place  
apart from it [the falls], I am its slave,  
its sleeper, bewildered — dazzled  
by distance . I cannot stay here  
to spend my life looking into the past:

The future's no answer. I must  
find my meaning and lay it, white,  
beside the sliding water: myself — .  
(III, iii, 172-3. My italics.)

In Book Five, that "place apart" is discovered. In general terms, the place is the realm of art, detached from life, yet integral to it. Specifically, the place is the Cloisters Museum, detached from Paterson's life in that it is about fifteen miles from Paterson the city, yet integrally related to the thoughts of Paterson the man. And in this museum is "the single object" that is to resolve Paterson's "complex feelings of propriety," the white Unicorn.

In this sense, white is the single colour that resolves all the "complex" manifestations of all the other colours. That is, in the world of colour, white is "by multiplication a reduction to one." (Preface, 10) Williams himself has said that "Color is light. Color is what most distinguishes the artist," (SE, 334) and that the colour white is "the background of all good work" because it "is at the intersection of blue and green and yellow and red." (SE, 122) In colour symbolism, these four colours are basic divisions, a fact which Williams here seems to be aware of. In terms of archetype, blue is usually associated with clear reason or rarefied thinking; yellow with implications of the sun such as intuition; red with the emotions, blood, fire, the life-giving principle; and green with sensation or living. Though Williams develops these basic connotations much further in Paterson, these conventional associations are not that incompatible with his

use of the color motif. For example, Williams "wine-dark sea" is also "the sea of blood," and the poet's rose, discussed earlier, is a green rose because it is a growing and living plant. The important thing, however, is that both Williams and archetypal convention see white as the culmination, or the balanced unity of these four main aspects of colour symbolism. On this level then, white is the appropriate colour for the poet's final identification.

In A Dictionary of Symbols, from which these identifications come, J.E. Cirlot points out another important aspect of this colour that relates quite significantly to Paterson: "The function of white is derived from that of the sun: from mystic illumination — symbolically of the East; when it is regarded as purified yellow (genius)." That Williams is aware of this implication can be seen in this passage of Book Four: "Yellow, for genius, the Jap said. Yellow / is your colour. The sun. Everybody looked." (IV, iii, 226) Thus, in Book Five, when Paterson and the sun align themselves with the white Unicorn, Paterson in this sense does become purified yellow, and in this way their union may become a symbol of "illumination, ascension, timelessness, ecstasy, revelation, faith."<sup>14</sup> etc. Earlier in Book Two, in the famous descent passage, it is therefore not surprising that the colour white is related to Williams' treatment of the sun:

a world unsuspected  
beckons to new places  
and no whiteness (lost) is so white as the memory  
of whiteness .

With evening, love wakens  
Though its shadows  
which are alive by reason  
of the sun shining.... (II, iii, 196)

In this passage then is another implication of Paterson's  
"reawakening" in Book Five, where the protagonist remembers  
"when he thought / he has forgot." (V, 241)

These mystical connotations of white are in turn related  
to Williams' description of the final tapestry in the series,  
the tapestry where the Unicorn "is penned by a low / wooden  
fence / in April." (V, iii, 270) As Wagner says, "April, the  
Unicorn, and the snake suggest Williams' increasing preoccu-  
pation with timelessness, infinity, and God."<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately,  
perhaps labouring under the fear that the passages here are  
too occult for syntax, Wagner does not reveal how these images  
are related to these mystical implications. However, these  
passages are too important to be ignored. In this final  
tapestry, the Unicorn is in what is traditionally known as the  
"hortus conclusus" or enclosed garden which, according to Jung,  
is an archetypal symbol for the discovery of the true self.<sup>16</sup>  
Interestingly enough, Jung sees the discovery of the true self  
as the marriage of the masculine (conscious) and feminine  
(unconscious) elements in our personality, and that the quest

for the discovery of the self is actually the attempts to come to terms with the unconscious and to try to bring about a synthesis of these conscious and unconscious opposites.<sup>17</sup> In this sense, Williams' desire to unite the poetic with what has been called the anti-poetic is intimately related to his quest for identity. Since Paterson is also described as being in the garden; "coming / to search me out — with a rare smile / among the thronging flowers of that field / where the Unicorn / is penned...", (V, iii, 268) the passage can be interpreted as Paterson on the brink of discovering his identity. Since Paterson's identification with the final tapestry is an identification in light of the fact that "Paterson has grown older," (V, iii, 268) and that his "ageing body" (270) is coming for him, in other words, that death is approaching Paterson, Williams seems to be indicating some sort of relationship between death, and the hortus conclusus discovery of the true self. Again, another of Northrop Frye's comments on the nature of the romantic death becomes pertinent:

Death is a kind of flight of the alone to the alone, where the individual becomes a universe in himself, a microcosm of the actual universe, and so attains a genuine sense of being at the centre of reality.<sup>18</sup>

Thus Paterson, after his identification with the Unicorn in the final tapestry, can finally say that "anywhere is



everywhere," (273) for once the individual fully discovers himself he, like the relationship of Atman and Brahma, becomes universal, and in this sense is everywhere.

To support this sense of illumination or timelessness, Williams juxtaposes the two ends of his life in two stanzas, paralleling the image of Ouroborus, "the all-wise serpent." (271) In the first stanza, he refers to "the aging body / with the deformed great toe nail," (270) which is immediately followed in the second stanza by a description of Williams' early childhood episode concerning his Uncle Godwin and a snake, whose "tail / would not stop wriggling til / after the sun / goes down." (270) Though this passage is also related to the sun imagery discussed earlier, its main significance is in its relationship to the poet's childhood. Consider its similarity to Williams' description of what he sees as an important event in his early life:

Once they were digging a post-hole and  
turned up a large red snake. I remember  
as though it were yesterday that Godwin  
said it would not die until sunset though  
its head had been completely crushed, for  
its tail was still wriggling.

(Auto, 7)

In this juxtaposition of the poet's old age and his youth is an image paralleling Ouroborous, the world-serpent whose tail of death and crown of life meet together. For Williams, this sense of timelessness provides some sort of culmination, for

"in every man there must finally occur a fusion between his dream which he dreamed when he was young and the phenomenal world of his later years if he is to be rated high as a master of his art." (SE, 236) Like the poet's concept "death is a hole," (V, i, 246) this fusion of both ends of the poet's life is a circular image. Both resemble the figure of Ouroborus. Thus Williams' revelation "anywhere is everywhere" does not mean that "place is only place," to borrow Eliot's phrase, but like "the end of the sphere," true death is not a vast generalized sea, but a point, a place, a thing; the fullest realization of any one specific locale. Thus death must be seen as some sort of specific place, that is, a hole, if the imagination is to escape intact. By placing the stanza of the red snake in the post-hole immediately after the stanza describing the penned Unicorn and saying that they both occur in "the same month," April, Williams is aligning the pen of the wooden fence with the post-hole, and in this way both become representative of the "hole / at the bottom of the cavern / of death, (through which) the imagination escapes intact." (V, i, 247)

This resurrection/death alternation is also inherent in the colour white. Like any culminatory symbol, white is a balance or synthesis of polar opposites. Just as this colour symbolizes revelation, timelessness, illumination etc., it

also, like the ambiguous Moby Dick, symbolizes death. This is important in relation to another characteristic of the Unicorn, that of its use by the alchemists as the Monstrum Hermaphroditum. Like the "spiritus mercurialis," which was also white, that the Unicorn of the alchemists came to represent, the Unicorn because of certain of its ambivalent implications became one of their symbols for transformation. As Cirlot says, basing his study on Jung, "on one hand, (the Unicorn) is related to primordial monsters and appears on occasion with certain evil characteristics, harboring ill will toward men; on the other hand, the Unicorn is related to Christ, an emblem of the sword or Word of God."<sup>19</sup> Jung observed that the Church ignored this negative side of the Unicorn. For Paterson, the importance of this ambivalent characteristic is not in the specific nature of these opposites, but more in the general characteristic of the beast as a symbol for the reconciliation of opposites. For example, just as the "whore" and the "virgin" form an identity to Paterson, so too the fullest realization of life at the point of death forms Paterson's identity. In this way, the Unicorn is the philosopher's stone for Paterson, though unfortunately the revelation or awakening it provides for the poet seems only momentary. Though his union with the Unicorn provides for the protagonist some sort of culmination, nothing can thwart

Paterson's inevitable death. Similarly, nothing seemed able to thwart Christ's crucifixion. And in the closing pages of Book Five, as shall be discussed in the next chapter, Paterson realizes this inevitability. At any rate, the hermetic quality of the Unicorn makes the beast a mystical supporter of the marriage theme, the spiritus mercurialis for the poet's marriage to his anti-poetic, a union in which the two can become, though only momentarily, "inter-penetrating realities."

#### IV

As mentioned earlier, the concept of union in this act of momentary resurrection necessarily involves the concept of return. When Paterson says in the Preface of Book One that "the beginning is assuredly the end — since we know nothing, pure and simple, beyond our own complexities," (Preface, 11) it seems at first that the poet is saying there is no solution to the dilemma. As with the poet's early despair over the "ignorant sun" and "the multiple seed... lost in the flux and the mind," the poet in Book One also believes that "there is no return." (12) Just as the sun's importance in Book One seems only in "winding the yellow bindweed about a bush," (I, ii, 34) so too, in Book One, Williams' serpent is no Ouroboros: "The pitiful snake with its mosaic skin and frantic tongue." (34) However, by Book Five, an important part of the poet's thematic activity is involved with

returning to the beginning, implying that the statement reads more "the end is assuredly the beginning;" that, like Ouroborous, the tail of death and the crown of life become "an interpenetration — both ways." In Book Five, Williams' treatment of the river is very similar to his treatment of this snake, for just as "the snake rolls backward into the past," (V, i, 249) Paterson as river "has returned to its beginnings;" (V, iii, 271) both in a sense completing the circle of the life/death alternation. The fact that Williams wishes the snake image and the river image to be related can be seen in the following line from Book Four: "My serpent, my river! genius of the fields." (IV, iii, 226) Further, the return of the river to its sources becomes more important when seen in light of Williams' statement in I Wanted to Write a Poem, a book written approximately the same time as Book Five: "the concept of a beginning of a river is of course a symbol for all beginnings." (IWWP, 74) And for Paterson as man, he "has returned to the old scenes." (V, i, 243)

In terms of the traditional implications of Ouroborus however, this return is really no solution, but an inevitable part of the cycle of life. The union of the serpent's tail with its mouth imparts a sense of cyclical movement that, like the wheel of Samsara, indicates the ceaseless alternations between life and death, light and dark, white and black (for Ouroborous is half black and half white), disappearance and

appearance etc. In fact, the Ouroborous figure has been referred to as "the terrible circle."<sup>21</sup> But Williams' treatment of Ouroborous and his other related images of return in Paterson do not necessarily imply this inevitable meaningless circle. For one, Williams' Ouroborous rolls backward into the past; his snake is not a static mandala. However, this by itself is not reason enough. Secondly, according to tradition, there is one way the closed double circle can be broken, and that is through love. Like Williams' treatment of death as a hole, which is also an image of a circle, the fate of the Ouroboric circle can be broken through the Imagination, what for the poet is synonymous with love, and what he generally refers to as effort. In this sense, the image of the snake rolling backwards into the past is an image of effort. Here then is another key to Paterson's resurrection. Just as effort (love) is necessary to unite the poet with his anti-poetic in the marriage allegory, so too this effort is to break Paterson from the bondage of ordinary meaningless death. Though Paterson is unavoidably going to die, as shall be seen, Paterson's life will be transformed into something else more meaningful and permanent, the realm of art. Through the satyr images in relation to "the great Dionysian theatre," both the effort involved in the marriage theme, and the effort necessary for the perpetuation of the life cycle are involved with

another aspect of return in Book Five, that of art returning to its beginnings.

The understanding of the nature of this transformation lies in the third and most important reason for not seeing Williams' concept of return as merely the ceaseless alternation of opposites. This reason comes from Williams' treatment of the falls in Book Three. Chronologically, the metaphor of the river as the poet's life course or stream of consciousness has the falls as the present, with the relatively quiet part of the river above the falls as the past, and the uncertain course of the river below the falls as the future:

The past above, the future below  
and the present pouring down: the roar,  
the roar of the present....  
(III, iii, 172)

For Paterson at the end of Book Four and throughout Book Five, though he has already had several revealing glimpses of the uncertain yet fatal sea of the future, Paterson, in terms of the falls metaphor as present, is now at the bottom of the falls, at the point where he has the choice to continue the now short-lived course of the river into the sea, or become part of the "falls unseen," which "tumbles and rights itself and refalls — and does not cease, falling and refalling with a roar, a reverberation, not of the falls, but of its rumour unabated." (III, i, 119) In other words, when Paterson heads

inland, he chooses to become part of the "falls unseen."  
Therefore, Williams concept of return is not a return to past  
life as life, "not of the falls, but of its rumour." And what  
is this "rumour," or the "replica" of this falls but art. Con-  
sequently, Williams says:

What else can make the Ouroboric snake roll backwards into the past but art? Thus, at the end of Book Three, like the end of Book Four, Paterson realizes that "the future's no answer," (173) and so chooses to become part of the falls unseen, the place apart from the falls of life, where the protagonist says:

Here the return of the "falls unseen" or Paterson's return to his sources in this way becomes mostly a transformation from the realm of life, for Paterson's life must inevitably end, into the realm of art. In terms of one thematic pattern, this is a transformation from images of water to images of flame. These images include both the flame of creation (developed



mostly in Book Three) and the flame of love or imagination (developed mostly in Book Five): "the waterfall of the flames, a cataract reversed, shooting upward (what difference does it make?) / the language." (III, ii, 146) And, several lines later: "Rising, with a whirling motion, the person passed into the flame, becomes the flame — the flame taking over the person... a secret joy in the flame which we dare not acknowledge." (146-7) In Book Five though, as previously discussed, Williams does acknowledge this flame, and so escapes the bonds of the ordinary life course. This then is the true significance of Williams' images of return in Book Five, the return of Paterson as art to find the identity and the meaning of his life. And in passing from the realm of life into the realm of art, Paterson also transforms from water into flame; on the one side, the flame of creation to overcome the prevailing deadened, sterile condition, and on the other side, the flame of love to combat the prevailing state of mesmerization and divorce. Both functions of the flame are inextricably bound through the Imagination, Williams' ultimate manifestation of effort, and as shall be seen in the next chapter, both creation and love are inevitably involved in the poet's desire for union with what has been called his anti-poetic.

Also pertinent to this concept of return is what can be termed the "hunt motif" in Paterson. Like the motifs of marriage, effort, and awakening, it serves to bind together Book Five with the preceeding four books of Paterson. Paterson is not only concerned for his own divorce and mesmerization, but also for those of his city. Where the other thematic movements in Paterson have the protagonist like Christ bearing the brunt of his community, the hunt imagery, like the sun imagery, serves to distinguish Paterson as artist from the rest of "the great beast." In this sense, the hunt imagery serves to define their relationship. For though Paterson is a saviour figure in that his quest is also done for the service of his mankind, Paterson, again like Christ, is subject to mankind's assault. Since another important legend has the Unicorn in the tapestries as an embodiment of Christ, this relationship of Christ and Paterson is another important concern of Book Five, and shall be discussed further in the next chapter. At any rate, though the artist is in a sense a redeemer of his mankind, he also, as Williams says, "is the prey of life. He is easy of attack." (IWWP, 21) In this way, when the artist becomes the "hunter" of the meaning to his life, he also becomes the hunted. The clues to this somewhat paradoxical relationship seem to lie in Williams' treatment of dogs or hounds, the dominant image pattern in the hunt motif.

This pattern runs throughout the five books of the poem, and culminates in the descriptions of the hounds in the "Hunt of the Unicorn" tapestries.

In the beginning lines of Book One, since the poet feels himself as just a part of the general dilemma of "the great beast," Paterson is described as "just another dog / among a lot of dogs. What / else is there? And to do?" (Preface, 11) Though at this point he is a long way from his subsequent identification with the Unicorn, which is attacked by dogs, even here Paterson is a unique dog in that he is lame: "The rest have run out — after the rabbits. Only the lame stands — on three legs." (11) By itself, this image of the crippled dog doesn't seem too important. However, concerning Williams himself, this image relates quite significantly to an episode in the poet's young life that, to borrow a Paterson metaphor, changes the protagonist from a dog into a Unicorn. The episode is obviously important to the poet because he discusses it in the opening pages of two of his other works. In his Autobiography, Williams says:

I had put on my sprint and was getting ready to quit when someone yelled "You've got one more lap to go!" I knew whoever had given the order was wrong...I went around the track once more ....and collapsed....The local doctor was called and that ended my running. "Adolescent heart strain" was the verdict....I was told I would never be able to take part in athletics again; the most that I could do would be to

take long walks in the country. I was...  
considered to be little better than an  
invalid. That, too, played a major part  
in determining my career. Mentally, I was  
crushed. (p. 46)

Referring to the same incident some years later in IWWP, he says, "I began poetry with a heart attack (16-17 yrs old). This forced me to be more of a recluse." (IWWP, 1) In this way, the lame dog in Book One most likely refers to Williams himself, and since this accident started him on his career as artist, it is a fitting beginning for the poem that is meant to embody his life quest.

Earlier than this episode however, Williams experienced incidents of hunting that gave the poet pejorative connotations of dogs. Like the Uncle Godwin / snake episode, these incidents reveal that the hunt motif in the tapestries significantly relates to Williams' childhood and hence is involved with Paterson's return to his sources. Again, there is a fusion occurring "between his dream which he dreamed as a young man and the phenomenal world of his later years." In Chapter Five of his Autobiography, the poet somewhat clarifies the nature of this fusion when he says that "there is a long history in each of us that comes as not only a reawakening, but a repossession when confronted by this world." (19) By Book Five, Williams has confronted this world since, as previously discussed, death approaching provides the ultimate confrontation

in life. Therefore, when the poet says in the opening stanzas of this fifth book that the world of Paterson is "reawakening," he is also saying that his childhood is reawakening, and fusing with his later "phenomenal world." Consequently, it is not surprising that both Paterson V and Williams' early childhood episodes as revealed in his Autobiography are concerned with images of the hunt. For example, the poet mentions several times his childhood revulsion to the hunting activities which took place around the Bagellon House, where as a child he lived for a time:

Another day I saw Uncle Irving shooting  
...at a red squirrel...at last the squirrel  
fell, all bloody, at our feet. (Auto, 7)

and, half a page later:

Men would come to hunt rabbits in the open  
fields back of the orchard. There I saw  
some hunter who had killed a rabbit take  
a sharp knife and laughing stab it into  
the poor creature's body just under the  
tail. It made me ill. (Auto, 7)

Further descriptions such as the lamb being slaughtered or the squirrel chased by a hunter then eaten by his dog tend to reveal that hunting was a definite concern of the poet in his early life, and further, that many pejorative connotations surrounded this concern. Though perhaps most significant in relation to the poet as Unicorn in the tapestries is Williams' childhood game of hare and hounds, a game which he devotes several pages of his Autobiography to. Basically, the game

consisted of two teams, the hares who would run off into the thicket and try to elude the hounds, the other team, who would try to catch them. The poet remembers this as their best game, a game in which "a few of us kept on, in a sort of frenzy, for no reason at all except that we weren't going to let them beat us." (Auto, 13) Although at this age, because he as yet wasn't an invalid, Williams loved to play one of the hounds, by the time of Book Five's writing, Williams was more of a Unicorn than a dog, for "the dog of his thoughts (had) shrunk." (V, iii, 268) Consequently, in his description of the tapestries, he calls our attention to "the rabbit's rump escaping / through the thicket." (V, i, 251) Since the poet is no longer interested in being a hound, the rabbit is allowed to escape. Though this interpretation at first may seem far-fetched, it is important to note that of all the manifold details in the tapestry, Williams happened to describe this one. True, Williams does describe other details, notably the variety of the flowers, but there are many omissions. Since many of the described details relate thematically to the rest of Paterson, it should most likely hold true for the detail of the rabbit. This is especially so, when one regards the tapestries and discovers that the rabbit, appearing in only the first of the series, is indeed quite difficult to locate, and further, that this rabbit in the tapestry is not trying to escape through

the thicket, but sitting like many of the other animals watching the Unicorn's capture. That Williams would purposely distort this description must then be important. And the importance of the distortion of the rabbit's description seems to lie in its relation to Paterson's return to his childhood sources.

In contrast to Williams' childhood enthusiasm for chasing the "hares," the rabbit in the tapestries escaping practically unnoticed indicates some sort of transformation. And in light of Williams' identification with the Unicorn and the fact that he eventually became a "lame dog," the transformation for the artist seems to be in leaving the rest of the hunters, the mob of the great beast, and becoming one of the treasured victims or one of the "wonders" of Book One, a rare treasure that the rest of the mob wishes to hunt down. However, like the rabbit who escapes, Williams as Unicorn will not be captured by the hunters, but by a virgin. But since the poet also desires to be captured by her, the hunt then assumes the paradoxical shape of the hunter being the same thing as the hunted, and again we have "an interpenetration — both ways." If this is true, what then is the motive of the hunt? Williams provides the answer in the very first line of Paterson:

Rigor of beauty is the quest. But how will  
you find beauty when it is locked in the

mind past all remonstrance.

(Preface, 11)

For both the Unicorn, who desires to be captured by the virgin, and for the virgin, who desires the capture of the Unicorn, the motive is beauty. In this way, the hunt becomes an act of union, the poet united with his anti-poetic, which, like the momentary union of life and death, unleashes the Imagination which in turn will unlock the mind, producing the revelation necessary to realize the meaning of the entire quest.



## Chapter Two

Book Five is mostly concerned with the realm of art, for it is through art alone that the imagination, the true life of the poet, will escape the hole of death. And further, it is this imagination or life of the poet that will, in turn, resurrect art. Finally, it is again art alone that can unite the masculine and feminine polarities of creation; only art can marry the poet to his anti-poetic.

It is the imagination  
which cannot be fathomed.  
It is through this hole  
we escape . .

So, through art alone, male and female, a field of flowers, a tapestry, spring flowers unequaled in loveliness.

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

(V, i, 247)

Since Williams in Book Five is using the tapestries as the artifact for the allegory of his marriage to his anti-poetic, much of Book Five is concerned with revealing the various aspects or implications that are most pertinent to this female counterpart necessary for the masculine act of creating. As previously mentioned, the virgin in the tapestries with her

mille-fleurs background seems to be some sort of development of the woman-land identification in Book One. However, if left with only her traditional connotations, such as purity, chastity, innocence, beauty, this virgin would be a rather incomplete personification of Williams' anti-poetic. Consequently, much of Book Five, chiefly through various images of women, attempts to support and develop this personification in order to make it a suitable complement for the Unicorn as poet. As he says, "Like Toulouse-Lautrec [to whom Book Five is dedicated] (who had the advantage of his deformity), I would gladly have lived in a brothel." (Auto, 224) Williams needs to enlarge the traditional connotations of the tapestries in order to transform the hunt of the Unicorn legend into a suitable allegory for his type of marriage. As the tapestries stand by themselves, they merely represent what Williams says of Lorca's The Love of Don Perlimplin, that this is "the first phase," since in both the tapestries and Lorca's work, it is only "the young girl / no more than a child / (leading) her aged bridegroom / innocently enough / to his downfall." (V, i 242) Though this young girl's alluring is only the first step, the word "bridegroom" does provide a pertinent foreshadowing to the later transformation.

The next two stanzas serve to immediately develop this "first phase." The first consists of two prose excerpts

which juxtapose the concept of the virgin with that of her opposite, the whore. Both are then linked through the concept of marriage. In contrast to Juliet, Beatrice, and Lorca's young girl, we have the phrase "she was a hot little bitch but nothing unusual," (242) and then both the connotations of whore and virgin are united in an image of marriage: "Love's whole gamut, the wedding night's promiscuity in the girl's mind."

(242) The second stanza then clarifies the nature of this union: "The moral / proclaimed by the whorehouse / could not be better proclaimed / by the virgin, a price on her head / her maidenhead!" (242-3) Thus, by the time we reach the first mention of the tapestries in Book Five, which immediately follows this passage, Williams has so altered and developed the traditional connotations of the virgin in the tapestries that we tend to associate her with her contrary.

Throughout the rest of this book, the poet continues to enlarge these by interspersing various related images concerning the anti-poetic between descriptions of the tapestries, particularly those passages which tend to link Paterson with the Unicorn, as discussed in Chapter One. For example, after the initial passage that aligns Paterson with the Unicorn through two parallel stanzas, Williams mentions Soupault's novel, The Last Nights of Paris, (243), which significantly, is a novel about a marvelous French whore.<sup>1</sup> And, after the first reference

to the Cloisters "on its rock / casting its shadow,"<sup>2</sup> Williams says "la réalité! la réalité! / la réa, la réa, la réalité!" (244) Since "la réa" is a Spanish word meaning "a female who is charged with the commission of a crime,"<sup>3</sup> in other words, a whore, and is presented by the poet in conjunction with "la réalité," Williams here is developing the application of the whore-virgin concept in relation to the woman-land metaphor, established in Book One. This réa-réalité parallel also hints a relationship with royalty, since the word "royal" is according to the Oxford English Dictionary, related to "reality" through "real" (Latin—"regal"; Spanish—"real"; Old French—"real"). The word "reality" in turn comes from either the Latin *realitas* or the French *réalité*. Although the Latin "regina" and Spanish "reina" (English "queen") are not etymologically related to "réa,"<sup>4</sup> it is worth recalling that "réa" is feminine, is juxtaposed to "réalité," a term related to royalty, and is its near homonym; it is worth recalling, too, that this juxtaposition occurs in the context of tapestries which treat of royalty, specifically the marriage of a king and queen. It should not be at all surprising, then, to discern in the etymology and pronunciation of these words a connection between "la réa," the whore, and "la reina," the virgin queen of the tapestries, both of which in turn relate to their "réalité" or millefleurs background.<sup>5</sup> This interpretation is strengthened

by the fact that Josie's letter immediately follows this passage, since, as previously discussed, Josie's letter provides an autobiographical millefleurs background for Williams, which supports his subsequent identification with the Unicorn. And since Josie is inviting Williams to come there, she is similar to the virgin enticing the Unicorn, and hence she is another aspect of this anti-poetic personification.

As with Paterson's progressive identification with the Unicorn, Williams in the above manner employs transitional metaphor to develop an identification of the tapestry virgin with various aspects of the anti-poetic concept. By the end of Book Five, again like the Unicorn, the virgin queen in this way becomes a symbolic metaphor. By the end of Josie's letter, through the passages discussed above, Williams has so developed his concept of the virgin that, even at this point, he can afford to reconcile her with her opposite in the phrase: "The whore and the virgin, an identity." This statement is again strengthened by Gilbert Sorrentino's (G. S.) descriptions of whores whose seductions are interlaced with allusions to virgins. Significantly, these descriptions also relate to the colour white<sup>6</sup> as discussed in the previous chapter:

a smooth faced girl against a door, all white  
... snow, the virgin, O bride....  
... making love to a whore is funny but it is

not funny as her blood beneath flesh....  
but heat and passion bright and white, brighter-  
white than lights of the whorehouses, than the gin  
fizz white, white and deep as birth, deeper than death.  
(V, i, 250)

Here, like Williams treatment of white, the colour is ambivalently involved with both life and death, and in this reconciliation of opposites, we also tend to see a reconciliation of the whore and the virgin. In this first section of Book Five, Williams has thus established this basic identity. It remains for subsequent passages concerning the anti-poetic in the second and third sections to more fully explain how these opposites inherent in Williams' anti-poetic are related.

Once again, like the male and female polarities, the whore-virgin polarity is united through the Imagination: "The virgin and the whore, which / most endures? the world / of the imagination most endures." (V, i, 248) And this world of the imagination is integrally involved with effort, for whether it be whore or virgin, "no woman is virtuous / who does not give herself to her lover / forthwith." (V, iii, 266) Unlike Phyllis of Book Four, the anti-poetic must be receptive to the efforts of love; Phyllis denied these efforts to Corydon, was content with just playing games, and hence was a false and artificial version of the anti-poetic; the superficial anti-poetic created by international character. Because of this, there was no marriage in the relationship of Phyllis and Corydon

The Sappho translation in Book Five is in direct contrast to Phyllis' attitude, for the voice in her poem is one of complete reception to love. For example, consider the following excerpts:

At mere sight of you  
my voice falters, my tongue is broken.  
Straightway, a delicate fire runs in my limbs,  
my eyes are blinded, and my ears thunder...  
a trembling hunts me down.

(V, ii, 253)

In this giving of the lovers, we have the interpenetrating realities that create the necessary union of the poet and the anti-poetic, for both must "Loose (their) love to flow...male and female." (V, i, 251) In this interpenetrating union is the beauty of art, and the moral stability that enables the whore and the virgin to become an identity.

In contrast to the Sappho translation is another section of correspondence from the poet's friend, Ezra Pound. (254) And as with Pound's other statement in Book One, Williams here seems to treat his friend's correspondence derogatorily. Although Pound, even in this excerpt, is much more serious and intellectually concerned than Phyllis is, Pound is unfortunately similar to Phyllis in one important way: both Pound and Phyllis are divorced from life because of their entanglement in international character. In his reply to Pound's letter, Williams writes, "Dear Assen Poop:....Don't speak of apes and Roosevelt to me....YOU DON'T EVEN BEGIN TO KNOW what the problem is...

you don't come CLEAR enough, and the only result is further obfuscation: as fast as you open your mouths you put your feet in them." (SL, 338-9) The word "mouths" here seems to refer to Pound's false international character. Pound's obsession with the abstractions of international economics is completely irrelevant to, and in direct contrast to, Williams' loving concern for his anti-poetic. Consequently, to reveal this contrast, Pound's correspondence is followed by:

There is a woman in our town  
walks rapidly, flat bellied  
in worn slacks upon the street  
where I saw her. (V, ii, 255)

No word abortions, no condescension, no flippancy, and no abstractions; Williams' description is just a plain statement of a real fact.

At the same time, Williams uses this description of the woman to control the nature of his anti-poetic. Perhaps in fear of becoming, like Pound, too lofty in his treatment of the tapestry virgin—i.e.—working in light of C's accusation in Book Two that he is divorcing life from literature—Williams in this description seems to be drawing a parallel between the tapestry virgin and this somewhat ordinary, earth-bound, if not epitome of a woman. In this sense, the purpose of this parallel may be as Roger Seamon proposes: "The function of the commonplace in Paterson is to guarantee that... ennobling evasions are not permitted to remain uncriticised



by the basic reality they would ignore."<sup>7</sup> That this woman seems a representative of women can be seen in such phrases as "neither short / nor tall, nor old nor young" and "any woman might have / done the same to / say she was a woman and warn / us of her mood." (255-6) Although Williams describes this woman in detail, as he does the tapestry virgin, she is basically a woman of no special identity. Establishing this basic "everywoman" description, Williams then relates her to the virgin queen, for without the life of this real woman, the virgin queen would merely remain part of a hollow artifact. One method the poet uses to create a parallel between the two is through similarity of detail. For example, just as this "everywoman" is described as "dressed in male attire," "her hair...gathered simply behind the ears," and "her expression...serious," (255-6) the virgin queen is similarly described as "her hair slicked back...like her cousin's, the King," and "The lady's brow is serene." (V, i, 250-1) And since the Unicorn as Paterson is fascinated by the virgin in that he will meekly fall into her lap, and calls for his own murder, there is a further parallel drawn through Paterson's fascination with this ordinary woman: "She stopped / me in my tracks... if I ever see you again / as I have daily sought you / without success." (V, ii, 256) Finally, when Williams says "have you ever read anything that I have written? / It is all for you,"

(257) there is no doubt that she is to be considered as part of his anti-poetic. Consequently, the virgin-queen is given life, just as Paterson gives life to the Unicorn, and the bond between the tapestries and Paterson the community is strengthened.

In the remaining pages of Book Five: Section II, Williams continues to enhance this concept of the anti-poetic, a concept that on one level can become an obsession. For example, Williams uses Mezz Mezzrow's description of his fascination for Bessie Smith as a musical parallel for this: "Every note that woman wailed vibrated on the tight strings of my nervous system: every word she sang answered a question I was asking. You couldn't drag me away from that victrola, not even to eat." (258) Similarly, Williams refers to Durer's Melancholy as an awareness of this obsession, and says that Leonardo Da Vinci in La Gioconda "saw it, the obsession, and ridiculed it." (259) Since these references to the anti-poetic are quite subtle, as with those referring to the Dionysian theatre in these pages (to be discussed later), Williams places the television interview at the end of this section to remind us how his transitional metaphor functions. The interview is important because it re-emphasizes the fact that anything is good material for poetry, that the poet is indeed concerned

with meaning, and that in poetry, true to the principles of transitional metaphor: "You're listening to two things...to the sense, the common sense of what it says. But it says more. That is the difficulty." (262) Part of what the poet "says more" in this section is concerned with enlarging the concept of the anti-poetic. Though Williams continues to enlarge this concept in Section III, this final section is more concerned with the nature and significance of the poet's marriage to his anti-poetic. Further enhancements of this anti-poetic will thus be treated in relation to the significance of their union with the poet.

Before directly revealing Paterson's identification with the allegory inherent in the tapestries, Williams discusses Breughel's Nativity painting in a manner that reveals the work's similarity to them. Both the tapestries and Breughel's painting have an allegory that unites the poetic or masculine side of creation with that of its female counterpart. And since Breughel's Nativity is concerned with the birth of Christ, it relates to the Christ implications of the Unicorn. Similar to the savage hounds and armed hunters in the tapestries, in the Nativity we have the "savagely armed men.... showing their amazement at the scene / features like the more stupid German soldiers of the late war." (V, iii, 263) Both artifacts show

these personifications of the "mob" or "great beast" as detached from, and unable to comprehend or capture, the central "wonder" in their respective scenes. Yet, these are not the same as the "wonder / great beast" descriptions of Paterson I-IV. In the earlier descriptions, Paterson was an onlooker, in despair because the language was failing the attempts of the "wonders." In Book Five, however, Paterson has committed himself to the realm of art, and like Sam Patch, Mrs. Cumming, and Klaus Ehrens, has also become a "wonder;" though unlike the former in that he is now equipped with "real rhetoric" (III, iii, 173), and thus is potentially successful. Just as the Unicorn tapestries are basically concerned with the union of Williams/Paterson as an old man with his anti-poetic, as personified by a beautiful virgin, so too Breughel's Nativity is concerned with "a baby / born to an old man / out of a girl and a pretty girl / at that." (265) And like the flowers in the millefleurs background, which the poet later in Book Five refers to as poems, the union in Breughel's painting is adorned with the gifts of the three wise men; gifts which, like the flowers, are referred to as "works of art." (265) Thus the line that follows the description of the painting, "how else to honour / an old man, or a woman," (265) seems to refer to the relationship of the old man and the girl in both

artifacts. Finally, Breughel's artifact is similar to Williams' because, like Williams,

Peter Breughel the artist saw it  
from the two sides: the imagination must be served —  
and he served  
dispassionately. (265)

Because of the context in which this passage appears, these "two sides" most likely refer to the poetic and the anti-poetic.

On a mythological level, this relationship of Williams as the old man and the virgin as the young girl symbolizes the union of "the Unicorn and / the god of love." Though in other of his poems, Williams' "god of love" appears to be God himself, for example "Calypsos:" "Well God is / love / so love me / God is love so / love me God,"<sup>8</sup> in Paterson V the god of love is female and of "virgin birth."<sup>9</sup> (V, iii, 272) Therefore the god of love in this context appears to be Venus. Because of her virgin birth and her implied parallel with the tapestry virgin since she is seen as a complement to the Unicorn, she must in some sense be an embodiment of the anti-poetic, even though there is a disturbing sensual paradox created by Williams' reference to her as the god of love. If intentional, the paradox does strengthen the union of these masculine/feminine polarities in the Unicorn/god of love relationship.

Significantly, Venus at her birth rises from the sea, and

like Paterson, heads inland. Then, according to myth, she becomes associated with images of the land, most notably flowers, for she also appears as the goddess of gardens. Here then, is mythological support for the "seed of Venus" coming in from the sea at the end of Book Four. In Book Five, this seed becomes the millefleurs background to the tapestries, for Venus is the goddess of gardens, and Venus herself, because she is also the god of love, becomes the virgin queen in the tapestries. In other words, Venus herself can be seen as a woman-land metaphor. Through her union with the Unicorn then, we have a union of connotations that best describe the union of the poetic and the anti-poetic, necessary for the creation of art.

Also significant is the fact that in most classical stories, Venus is said to be the wife of Hephaestus (Vulcan, Mulciber). Since, in Paterson V, Venus is seen as the wife of Paterson (through his identification with the Unicorn), Williams may be suggesting a parallel between Paterson (Williams) and Hephaestus. At any rate, their similarity in terms of certain image patterns in Paterson, previously discussed, is too great to be ignored. Firstly, like Williams, because of his track accident and later strokes, and hence like Paterson, "the lame dog," Hephaestus was a lame god. Robert Graves<sup>10</sup> states that Hephaestus was crippled by Zeus when he threw him from Olympus,

though Larousse says<sup>11</sup> that Hephaestus was lame from birth. Both agree, however, that Hephaestus became married to Venus through the Zeus/Hera/Hephaestus entanglement. When Hera gave birth to him, she apparently threw him into the sea in disgust. There he came under the protection of sea-goddesses, who kept him in an underground grotto. Later, Hera discovered that Hephaestus was still alive, brought him back to Olympus, and through her married Venus. Thus, like Venus and Paterson, Hephaestus also turns inland away from the sea. Thirdly, Hephaestus was the god of fire, which is important in relation to Paterson's alignment with the implications of the sun imagery,<sup>12</sup> discussed earlier, where Paterson becomes the "flame" for the tapestries. Like Hephaestus, Paterson's "flames" are beneficent, not destroying. In fact, this sun-fire relationship is intrinsic in the name itself. Larousse says that "Hephaestus" comes from the Greek words meaning "hearth" and "to kindle," and thus can be seen as a personification of terrestrial fire.<sup>13</sup> Graves, on the other hand, believes that the name is etymologically related to the sun, through the word "hemero-phaistos," which means "he who shines by day." This interpretation is strengthened through Hephaestus' relationship with Athena (moon-goddess—"she who shines by night"<sup>14</sup>), where, central to the life of the city, they are the two patrons of the arts. Fourthly, when children of

ancient Greece were formally admitted into city organization, the god of the ceremony was Hephaestus. In this way, Hephaestus as husband of Venus is a mythological embodiment of Williams/Paterson as man, in that he is lame; Williams/Paterson as artist, in that he is patron of the arts and the god of fire; and Paterson as city, in that he is concerned for the city's welfare.

An interesting sidelight to this lame Smith-god tradition is Hephaestus' relationship to "the great theatre of Dionysus," as revealed by Graves:

...a hobbling partridge dance was also performed in erotic orgies connected with the mysteries of smithcraft and, since Hephaestus had married Aphrodite, he may have been hobbled only once a year: at the Spring Festival.<sup>15</sup>

Since an important characteristic of the Unicorn tapestries is its intrinsic Dionysian ritual (to be discussed in the second section of this chapter), the interpretation of Hephaestus as part of the Unicorn symbolic metaphor is strengthened through this dance honouring his smithcraft.

Also inherent in the relationship of Venus and Hephaestus is the reconciliation or union of the sun and flower image patterns in Paterson, as discussed above. Because of Williams' earlier treatment of the two patterns, they symbolize the union of the poetic (sun) with the anti-poetic (flowers). In this light, the purpose of the following bold italics in Book



Five becomes clearer: "IF YOU DON'T HAVE ANY TIME FOR ANYTHING ELSE / PLEASE READ THE ENCLOSED "SUNFLOWER SUTRA" (V, i, 248). The fact that Williams emphasizes these lines most likely indicates that we should literally do as they say—i.e.—read Ginsberg's "Sunflower Sutra," for the "YOU" here is the reader, as well as the elder poet, Williams. In 1952, Williams wrote to Robert Lowell, "I've become interested in a young poet, Allen Ginsberg, of Paterson — who is coming to personify the place for me." (SL, 312) This statement increases the importance of the above italics. In "Sunflower Sutra," Ginsberg's sunflower transcends the scum and wrack of international pollution, as Williams himself must transcend the poisoned waters of international character, if the poet is to be poet. Aside from the union intrinsic in the name "sunflower," Ginsberg's images of the sun and the sunflower are similar to Williams' treatment of sun and flowers. Since Ginsberg's images reconcile Williams' in his poem, Ginsberg's poem is an important part of Book Five's resolution. "Sunflower Sutra" gathers towards Williams' full statement:

and those blear thoughts of death and dusty  
loveless eyes and ends and withered roots  
below, in the home-pile of sand and sawdust,  
rubber dollar bills, skin of machinery, the  
guts and innards of weeping coughing car, the  
empty lonely tincans with their rusty ton-  
gues black, what more could I name, the  
smoked ashes of some cock cigar, the cunts  
of wheelbarrows and the milky breasts of  
cars, wornout asses out of chairs &

sphincters of dynamos — all these  
entangled in your mummied roots — and you  
there standing before me in the sunset,  
all glory in your form!  
A perfect beauty of a sunflower! a perfect  
excellent lovely sunflower existence! a  
sweet natural eye to the new hip moon,  
woke up alive and excited grasping in the  
sunset shadow sunrise golden monthly breeze!

... we're all beautiful golden sunflowers inside.

Like the "wonder" of the Unicorn (sun) and the tapestry virgin  
(flower) surrounded by the hunters and hounds, the sunflower  
is surrounded by its form of "the great beast," yet it too  
stands apart in all its glory. And further, like Paterson's  
identification with the Unicorn as man and city, the sun-  
flower is representative of the potential resurrection in all  
of us.

Another of Venus' important contributions to Book Five is  
in her relation to the whore-virgin identity. As Williams  
points out in Chapter One of his Autobiography, the word Venus  
is related to venereal. And though she was "of virgin birth,"  
she was widely renowned for her whore-like personality, for  
Venus was one "who laughed sweetly or mockingly at those her  
wiles had conquered; the irresistable goddess who stole away  
even the wits of the wise."<sup>16</sup> Consequently, Venus in the  
tapestries can be seen as an embodiment of the whore-virgin  
identity. This is important to the poet because the whore-  
virgin concept provides a necessary union within the anti-

poetic that, like the "everywoman" description in conjunction with the tapestry virgin, relates life or reality (whore) to the ideals or abstractions (virgin) in art. In other words, through this concept, life and literature are interpenetrating realities, or, more accurately, are a new reality. This is what the poet is implying in the following passage which occurs just after his mention of the Unicorn and the god of love, and just before Paterson's complete identification with the Unicorn in the tapestries:

—shall we speak of love  
    seen only in a mirror  
        — no replica?  
reflecting only her impalpable spirit?  
    which is she whom I see  
        and not touch her flesh?  
            (V, iii, 272)

As C. points out in her long letter of Book Two, "one must bring...one's life to literature," otherwise one has only "the insights and humanity of words on paper only." (II, iii, 111) Williams realizes and acts upon this in Book Five, and thus at the point where the poet completely identifies with the Unicorn, thereby "marrying" his anti-poetic, he says:

every married man carries in his head  
the beloved and sacred image  
of a virgin  
whom he has whored.      (V, iii, 272)

In this way, life is fused with artifact, both the poetic and the anti-poetic are a combination of art and life, and the tapestry becomes "a living fiction." (272) This is why Paterson

must "keep (his) pecker up / whatever the detail!" (273)

## II

If Paterson is to succeed finally as poem, however, the Unicorn must function not simply in relation to Paterson the man and poet, but also to Paterson the city, the community of man. In such community, and certainly here, the poet becomes priest or saviour, for his endeavors will inform the lives of his fellow citizens. Hence, in Book Five there is close attention both to "the great dionysian theatre" and to Christ, and once again, the Unicorn is the common denominator linking these together.

James Rorimer, in a description of the hall of the Unicorn tapestries, identifies the story of the hunt with the myth of the incarnation, where "the Unicorn is a symbol of Christ, the virgin is the Virgin Mary, (and) the huntsman is the angel Gabriel."<sup>17</sup> That Williams is aware of this interpretation is first of all hinted at by his inclusion of Klaus Ehrens' sermon in Book Two, where Klaus tells his congregation how the Lord advised him to give up his money, in order to inherit greater riches. Williams however, uses money in the context, or as a symbol of, international character, as even a superficial reading of Book Two will reveal. In this sense

to give up money is to foresake all the falseness, meaninglessness, and greed associated with this international pollution. Therefore an important implication of the Unicorn as Christ, which supports the medicinal cleansing quality of the horn, is that Christ is the antithesis of this worldliness, a rootless vice condemned throughout Paterson. Secondly, Williams supports this religious interpretation of the tapestries by his inclusions in Book Five of Peter Breughel's Nativity, as discussed earlier, and the excerpt from the Gospel according to Saint Matthew. On this religious level, the Unicorn's capture and captivity may be seen as the crucifixion, where Paterson is like Christ in that his spirit (the Imagination) is resurrected. And just as Christ redeems mankind, Paterson cleanses the poisoned character of his city. Also inherent in this allegory is the act of resignation, where the Unicorn, like Christ's humility, falls meekly into the lap of the virgin. This resignation, according to Williams and indeed implied in the Bible, also applies to Mary, the anti-poetic, for after the Matthew excerpt, the poet says "no woman is virtuous / who does not give herself to her lover / forthwith." (V, iii, 266) The resultant union of mother and child then, through mutual resignation, is one of love and faith, personified by the Holy Ghost or God himself. But since the union involves God, Christ, Joseph, and Mary, the terms

poetic and anti-poetic are difficult to assign to any one of these figures. Further, this interpretation by itself is rather an incomplete picture, if not an irrelevant solution to the dilemma of the entire Paterson. Therefore this Christ interpretation should be seen as more of a general embodiment of the poetic / anti-poetic movement, resembling, but not directly correlated to, the more specific, and basically earth-bound embodiments of this duality in the rest of the poem.

As we have already seen, Jung points out that though the Unicorn is a symbol of Christ, the beast also has a negative or primordial side, a side which the Christian Church ignores, and in Psychology and Alchemy, Jung points to similar qualities in Christ, generally ignored by the Church.

The western attitude, with its emphasis on the object, tends to fix the ideal—Christ—in its outward aspect and thus to rob it of its mysterious relation to the inner man.<sup>18</sup>

Jung argues that Christianity is a consciousness-oriented religion, whereas Christ is related to both the earth (feminine, unconscious) and the spiritual (masculine, conscious). Since Christ is supposedly the personification of our souls, and since, as Jung observes, our souls are basically dual-natured (both good and evil), then it follows that Christ is also some sort of combination of this duality. Now since the Church is consciousness-oriented, it cannot conceive of Christ as a

union of the two, and therefore this duality is differentiated into Christ and the Devil. In this sense, the closest parallel to this more encompassing Christ is the Apollonian-Dionysian duality. Though the similarities between Christ and Apollo are readily apparent, it is also to be remembered that Dionysus, like Christ, was persecuted by unbelievers, died and came to life again. Again like Dionysus, to be a Christ "involves a suffering that is unendurable to most of mankind."<sup>19</sup> At any rate, the parallels between the two are numerous. As Jung says, "the Dionysian element has to do with emotions and affects which found no suitable religious outlets in the predominantly Apollonian cult and ethos of Christianity."<sup>20</sup> Now since Williams' treatment of Christ in Book Five is in the context of the Dionysian theatre, and since Williams changes the name of Mary to Miriam,<sup>21</sup> (V, iii, 266) thereby relating her to the Dionysian ritual, the fullest appreciation of the tapestry Unicorn as Christ can only be seen in this expanded context, for it is the Dionysian rite, the "pre-tragic play," (V, ii, 258) that provides the necessary link, in terms of Williams' thematic concerns, between art and religion. The fact that this rite is the fore-runner to drama, as opposed to poetry, is irrelevant, for as Charles Olson says:

I gather that drama and theatre were more  
language & movement before Aeschylus than  
since, before he added a second actor, and

had dialogue, and before he added masks (and had a hollow thing, mechanical projection). It was a double change he effected: words as gab and masks to signify sensation. And the result? The birth of that exaggerated individual called hero, and of that exaggerated narrative called tragedy.<sup>22</sup>

In other words, the language and movement of the pre-tragic play is more akin to poetry, at least Williams' conception of poetry, than what we refer to as drama. Williams himself says, "poetry began with measure, it began with the dance." (SL, 331)

Nevertheless, the Dionysian ritual, or what Williams refers to as "a pre-tragic play / a satyric play," (258) is in one sense a symbol for the origin of art, for out of this essentially religious function evolved the artistic medium of drama. When Williams at the end of Book Four says:

Oh that the rocks of the Areopagus had  
kept their sounds, the voices of the law!  
Or that the great theatre of Dionysus  
could be aroused by some modern magic  
to release

what is bound in it,  
(IV, iii, 235)

it is not surprising that the poet in Book Five searches for, and finds the "modern magic" necessary to arouse this ritualistic art origin. For in doing so, he is allowing art, like Paterson, the river, and the snake, to return to its beginnings. The modern magic necessary for the revitalization of art and



the return of art to its sources is inherent in the allegory of the Unicorn tapestries. In terms of the religious interpretation of the tapestries, these rituals, like the whore-virgin identity, provide the necessary union between the sensual and the spiritual, for "All plays / were satyric when they were most devout." (V, ii, 258) This is a fusion which Christ, if left with only his conventional Christian connotations, would be unable to accomplish.

On one level then, Williams uses these Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries as an evocation of these primitive pagan rites. Basically, these Dionysian rituals were fertility rites, in which dancing and revelry predominated. Through them the attempt was made to master the visible and invisible world by getting closer to nature. In doing so, the participants saw themselves as working against death. Here then lies a close parallel to Paterson's quest, for to overcome the conditions of divorce and sleep, Paterson must "keep (his) pecker up, whatever the detail." (V, iii, 273) In other words, like those in the ritual of Dionysus, Paterson must ensure, for himself and for his community, continued fertility. And in doing so Paterson, partly because he is an old man, and partly because it is a prevalent condition of his time, is also fighting against death. Secondly, like the Cloisters Museum on its rock, the Dionysian rite was integrally involved with

stone; for instance, the staging of the ritual was usually within a stone temple. Because the tapestries are in the Cloisters Museum, they too have their stone temple. Hence, "In March — / the rocks / the bare rocks / speak!" (V, i, 242)

John Gassner in his Masters of the Drama provides the closest and therefore most important parallel between these rites and the allegory in the tapestries, as can be seen by his following description of one of the types of the rituals:

Life...was also asserted by the worship of potency in an animal (sometimes a plant, like the "soma" of the Hindus) in which the ancestral spirit and the tribe's unity were often incarnated. It became customary for the community to sacrifice a bull, horse, goat, or other creature and to incorporate its mana or magical power by partaking of its flesh and blood. Then, since it was serious business to kill the sacred animal, its death was symbolically "undone" in various ways.<sup>23</sup>

Now, if we take Paterson the city to be the tribe, and Paterson as Unicorn to be the potent animal, in light of the phallic and aphrodisiacal qualities of the Unicorn's horn, then we have a Dionysian fertility ritual inherent in the Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries. Dionysus was a Spring spirit, and his ritual usually celebrated the resurgence of Spring; Book Five's rocks, speaking in March, begin the ritual; the ritual is terminated in April, when the Unicorn is penned by a low wooden

fence.<sup>24</sup> The resurgence of Spring occurs, with all its associations, in these two months. Finally, though the priests of Dionysus occupied thrones close to the stage, certain of these rituals were held in honour of Aphrodite (Venus). Though this honouring of Aphrodite is usually in connection with Adonis, Robert Graves has pointed out (see page 90) that Hephaestus is occasionally involved in these rituals. But since the Unicorn is a symbolic metaphor, the phrase "the Unicorn and the god of love" on one level can refer to the implications of Hephaestus and Venus, while on another level it can refer to the Unicorn as the potent animal of the fertility rite, held in honour of Venus. Similarly, the interpretation of Paterson as river, or as man does not negate the interpretation of Paterson as city or as Unicorn. On the contrary, it is this flexibility of interpretation concerning the Unicorn that allows Paterson's final identification to be the single image that does indeed "resolve (his) complex feelings of propriety." In this sense, the Unicorn can be seen as a kind of Emersonian "fact" which, for Williams, contains the whole universe, and hence a parallel, though limited, can be drawn between the romantic conception of an organic cosmos, and Williams' symbolic metaphor.

Thematically then, the Dionysian ritual that Williams implies is in the tapestries can be seen as an emphatic

supporter of the marriage theme, since the ritual is primarily concerned with fertility and unity. Further, it expands the resurrectoric implications of the Unicorn as Christ, by balancing Christ's spiritual implications with more sensual ones, thereby performing a function similar to that of the "every-woman" description in relation to the tapestry queen. In this sense, Dionysus is to Christ what the whore is to the virgin. Now, since the marriage of the poetic to the anti-poetic is basically a description of the creative process, and since on one level Paterson can be seen as the evolution of Williams' creative process, it is not surprising that the juxtaposition of the tapestries with the Dionysian ritual can also be seen as an embodiment of this process. In other words, the union of the tapestries with the ritual provides a metaphor symbolic of Williams' basic poetics. To understand the nature of this union, it is first of all necessary to discuss what is meant by the terms Apollonian and Dionysian for, as Nietzsche says, "the continuous development of art is bound up with the Apollonian and Dionysian duality, just as procreation depends on the duality of the sexes, involving perpetual strife with only periodically intervening reconciliations."<sup>25</sup> That Williams is aware of, and acts upon this duality in his poetics or creative process can only be seen after an explanation of the two terms. And in Book Five, through the tapestries as pre-

tragic play, Williams presents a metaphor symbolic for one of these periodic intervening reconciliations of the two.

Significantly, Apollo and Dionysus are the two art deities of the Greeks; two deities, because the creative process is basically a process of duality, if Nietzsche is correct. Jung, at any rate, agrees with Nietzsche's conclusions.<sup>26</sup> Certainly, Nietzsche's view coincides with Williams', as the latter's discussion of the sexes suggests (p. 33 above). On the Apollonian side, represented by masculinity and consciousness, we have the conditions of measured restraint, and what is referred to as the "principium individuationis;" the striving for identity through differentiation. On the Dionysian side, presented by femininity and unconsciousness, we have unconditional exaltation and release. This leads to a collapse of the principium individuationis through the realization of man's primordial unity with nature and mankind, the realization of what Jung calls "the collective unconscious." As Nietzsche says, through the "Dionysian not only is the union between man and man re-affirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man."<sup>27</sup> The clearest example of this type of Dionysian release is Whitman's "Song of Myself." But for Williams, this is only part of the picture, though an important part. Like Coleridge, Williams

wishes to give equal weight to judgement as to genius. For Williams, Coleridge, and Nietzsche then, true art relies on the inter-dependence or balance of these two separate yet inter-related worlds, just as the mind functions according to the relationship of the conscious with the unconscious, and life according to the masculine and feminine polarities of creation in their inter-relationship. These dualities are largely what Williams is referring to when he says in Book One, "rolling up out of chaos, / a nine months' wonder, the city / the man, an identity — it can't be otherwise — an / interpenetration, both ways." (Preface, 12) While the Dionysian longs for unity and exaltation of existence, the Apollonian, the apotheosis of individuation, "knows but one law — the individual—i.e.—the delimiting of the boundaries of the individual, measure in the Hellenic sense."<sup>28</sup> Yet, as Jung, Nietzsche and others reveal, only insofar as the Apollonian genius in the act of creation coalesces with the Dionysian primordial artist of the world, does he know anything of the eternal essence of art. Here again, the long letter from C. at the end of Book Two is relevant. C's accusation that Williams divorces life from literature reveals her Dionysian point of view, and suggests that up to the time we read her letter, Williams' so-called investigation of process was purely an Apollonian employment; it ignored and therefore failed

to coalesce with the Dionysian "life in the raw." By 1942, however, Williams acknowledged this Dionysian element, and his comment at this time provides us with a pertinent foreshadowing of his later use of the Unicorn tapestries, where he speaks of "the unsounded depths of the unconscious, where fertilization and murder struggle to recreate and cleanse the world."<sup>29</sup> In Book Five, Williams' "unsounded depths" coalesce with his Apollonian poetics, thus enabling him to realize the true essence of art.

Williams in "How to Write" reveals his treatment of this union in his description of his creative process, thereby revealing his awareness of the necessity of this coalescence in Book Five:

The faculties, untied, proceed backward through the night of our unconscious past. It goes down to the ritualistic, amoral part of the race, to fetish, to dream, to wherever the "genius" of the particular writer finds itself able to go...unless this is tapped by the writer, nothing of moment can result.... from there it comes to a new field, that of intelligence... then becomes an object of attention that the full mind can give it.<sup>30</sup>

Significantly, this essay was written about the time of Book Five's writing. What Williams refers to as the full mind is basically the conscious mind, "the most recent mind, the fore-brain, the seat of memory."<sup>31</sup> This progression of the creative faculties, what Joyce calls "the he and she of it," is

primarily a movement or development of the unconscious to the conscious, where the unconscious ritualistic amoral part is the Dionysian, and the new conscious field of the intelligence that works upon and gives identity to these unconscious elements is the Apollonian. Therefore, on this particular level, the sun imagery in Book Five relates more to Apollo than to Hephaestus, though both embodiments, because of the flexibility of symbolic metaphor, are valid. Consequently, just as Paterson gives up his false approach to detail at the end of Book Two because it is purely Apollonian, Paterson, at the end of Book Four, turns away from the primordial, undifferentiated sea at the end of his river's life course because it is purely Dionysian. In the sea, the Apollonian tools of memory and measure would be unable to function. Not so, however, with the Dionysian ritual, for through the Unicorn tapestries, both memory and measure can be applied. To understand how the poet can apply these, it is first of all necessary to briefly discuss the unconscious to conscious progression inherent in the opening lines of Book Five, a progression that allows the poet to have his temporary reconciliation or marriage with his anti-poetic.

In light of the above discussion, the opening lines can be seen as a metaphoric description of the poet reawakening or tapping the resources of his unconscious. The first step in this process is the unleashing of the creative faculties by



casting off the chains of the conscious mind, as symbolized by the eagle on its crag (possibly used as an Apollonian symbol of America):

In old age  
the mind  
casts off  
rebelliously  
an eagle  
from its crag

— the angle of a forehead  
or far less  
makes him remember when he thought  
he had forgot.  
(V, i, 241)

By doing so, the unconscious mind, "the angle of a forehead / or far less," is reactivated. Consequently, the unconscious world of Paterson is reawakened "from (its) long winter sleep." (241) In the previous four books, Paterson's "rocks and streams" were inarticulate, since they were symbols for Paterson's dormant unconscious. However, in Book Five, the Dionysian rocks speak. And because at the beginning of Book Five, Paterson is in the world of the unconscious, "it is a cloudy morning." (242) In other words, Paterson as yet does not allow his Apollonian sun—his conscious mind—to interfere. Until Paterson's unconscious is revived, it must be "Not prophecy! NOT prophecy! / but the thing itself!" (242) But since Paterson's rocks now speak, Paterson can now without fear allow his full mind to inter-act with his newly-aroused unconscious.

Similarly, Paterson's return to the old scenes, his snake rolling backwards into the past, and his river returning to its beginnings are basically metaphors of the reconciliation of Paterson's full conscious intelligence with his now awakened unconscious past. In other words, on one level, Williams' concept of return is the poet's indication of the coalescence of the Apollonian and the Dionysian functions of his mind. And since the tapestries are both an evocation of the Dionysian ritual, and objects in the poet's present and conscious reality, therefore objects which the Apollonian elements of the poet's mind can study, the tapestries in this way become a symbol for the reconciliation of the two worlds.

In another sense, the Apollonian-Dionysian duality is involved with the poet's relationship to his anti-poetic. Since the anti-poetic embodies both woman and land (nature), Williams' desire for union with this anti-poetic is actually a Dionysian obsession. As Wallace Stevens points out, Williams' "passion for the anti-poetic is a blood passion, and not a passion of the ink-pot. The anti-poetic is his spirit's cure—is that truth, that reality to which all of us are forever fleeing."<sup>32</sup> However, as Williams realizes, this blood passion does not create art until the measured restraint of the Apollonian mind gives it identity. This necessity of interaction then, is a good part of the reason why Williams in Book

Five spends so much time describing the compositional particulars of the tapestries, for in doing so, the poet is controlling, and hence giving meaning to, the energies intrinsic to them. Similarly, Williams' variable foot technique is a concept of control, a control that leads to the fullest possible awareness of the line's inherent energies. As the poet in Book Five says, "you cannot be / an artist / by mere ineptitude," (V, ii, 258) for pure Dionysian release does not constitute art.

Williams complained of Whitman's poetry that

what he did not do was to study what he  
had done, to go over it, to select and  
reject, which is the making of the artist.

Whitman's poetry is not art because it is pure Dionysian release.<sup>33</sup> Whitman has no Apollonian sense of control necessary to transform his poetry into art. Similarly, Pound says of Whitman, "Whitman broke the wood. Now is a time for carving."<sup>34</sup> It is on this point that Pound and Williams are in complete agreement, though their approaches are clearly different. Both artists see literature as "language charged with meaning;"<sup>35</sup> the Dionysian part of the mind providing the "charge," and the Apollonian providing the "meaning." Williams mentions Paul Klee's work because his drawings, though child-like, are "not the work of a child," (259) because, like Durer and "Leonardo," Klee was aware of his obsession. Though the Dionysian element, largely symbolized in Book Five by the dance, is essential to

art, it is still a dance that must be controlled by measure. As Williams says, in the closing lines of Paterson, measure is all we have to give us identity:

The measure intervenes, to measure is all we know,  
a choice among the measures....  
the measured dance ... We know nothing  
and can know nothing  
but  
the dance, to dance to a measure  
contrapuntally  
Satyrically, the tragic foot.  
(V, iii, 277-8)

At the same time, if there is no dance, there is nothing to measure, and again there is no art. Just as essential to art as the Apollonian poetics is the Dionysian life process, which must of necessity continue. Therefore, Paterson can only be the Unicorn united with his tapestry virgin "once on a time / on a time," (V, iii, 276) for though the Unicorn is the cul- minatory embodiment for the protagonist that transforms the rest of Paterson into the realm of art, the poet must give up his identification. To remain in the realm of artifact, as Book Three reveals, is fatal. The following line, "Caw! Caw! Caw! the crows cry!" (276) is, in this sense, reality's warning to the poet that he must return to the realm of life. If Williams retained his culminating identification with the Unicorn, his life process would cease, become product, and both the tapestries and Paterson would become hollow artifact. In this case, Death would be the victor in every sense. It

is only when Paterson uses his life as a means to renew the processes of art, and uses it to the very end, that Paterson's death will achieve its fullest possible significance, death as the ultimate meaning of life. As long as Paterson is alive, there is a necessity for Book Six. Though the Unicorn does prove to be the philosopher's stone for Paterson, reconciling the divorced condition of both the man and the city, and reawakening Paterson's mesmerization, this resurrection is worthless if the awareness that accompanies the resurrection is not acted upon. For much greater than the acts of resurrection and reconciliation is the sense of renewed purpose. As in Milton's Lycidas, the resurrection of Lycidas' body from the sea is not enough. Lycidas is to be the protecting deity "to all that wander in that perilous flood." (l. 185) If Columbus had remained in America, he would have ceased to be an explorer. If Williams as Paterson had retained his identification with the tapestries, he would have ceased to be a poet.

This is why Paterson finally rejects his identification at the end of Book Five: "The past is for those that lived in the past. Cessa!" (V, iii, 277) To remain as artifact is to become part of the past, ignoring the present ongoing processes of reality, which are the only possible form of existence. In "Shadows," a poem that bears an obvious similarity to the end

of Book Five, the poet says:

The instant  
trivial as it is  
is all we have  
unless - unless  
things the imagination feeds upon,  
the scent of the rose,  
startle us anew.  
(PB, p. 151)

Therefore the importance of the dance since, like Williams' "effort," it is an action of the present, and without that, there is no life. Heisenburg says:

a thing can be measured in its mass only  
by arbitrarily assuming a stoppage of its  
motion, or in its motion only be neglecting  
for the moment of the measuring, its mass.  
And either way, you are failing to get  
what you're after — so far as the human  
being goes, his life. There is only one  
thing you can do about kinetic, re-enact  
it.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore if the culmination in Williams' Book Five was permanent, the motion or kinetic of the quest would cease, and neither art nor life would survive. Nietzsche says that the reconciliation of the Apollonian with the Dionysian can only be a periodic intervention. Similarly, the marriage of the poetic to the anti-poetic can only be momentary. In both cases, if the polarities of these dualities are united, there is no more quest, and therefore, no more life. The reason for this is apparent since, as Williams says (see Chapt. One, p. 33), "everything we do is an effort to achieve conjunction,

not to say unity." Thus art and life must remain distinct, if both are to survive. If Williams gives his life up to the tapestry artifact, both remain products, and both decay. But if Williams devotes the rest of his life to uniting and re-uniting the poetic with the anti-poetic, in this way he is continuing and developing the process of art. Thus both art and life become living processes, and both survive. In this sense, the Unicorn tapestries are the thematic measure that, in their embodiment of the rest of Paterson, give Paterson both identity and meaning, thereby raising the poem into the realm of art. But for this realm to survive, Paterson must continually renew his purpose, to give meaning and identity through measure to the only thing that is possible for the poet to measure, his lifetime dance with his lifelong partner, the anti-poetic.

### Conclusion

Though he is approaching death, he is possessed  
by many poems. (V, iii, 269)

On March 4, 1963, Williams ceased his dedication to the life and development of art, for on that day he confronted the death that he'd been expecting for several decades. Yet the poet, fulfilling the resolutions of Paterson V, pursued his quest to the very end, as Denise Levertov's description of his last days will testify:

When I first met Dr. Williams about twelve years ago he had already had a serious stroke. Over the years, I used to say to myself ... "He's old and frail: this may be the last time you will see him." And each time he would astonish me again with his vitality ... his undeviating, illuminating attention to what concerned him — the poem, the poem .... Except for the last time of all, a few weeks ago, [article published March 16, 63] when his tongue could no longer find the words he needed for the ideas one could see in his eyes, and he kept giving up in mid-sentence, sad and baffled. Yet even then, vague as he had become about many things, there remained that eagerness to hear a new poem ... he was more confused that day than I had ever seen him, but poetry remained in pristine focus.<sup>37</sup>

Through the hole of death, Williams' imagination escaped intact.

Because Williams did remain true to his Book Five resolutions



up to the point of death, many of the poems written concurrent with, and subsequent to, Book Five are manifestations of the now clarified, earlier dilemmas. As Levertov says, "when we see the later poems in relation to one another, each separate poem, though it had given us of itself before, begins to release more levels of meaning than we realized when we read it in isolation."<sup>38</sup> This principle holds all the more true in the case of Book Five's relation to them. Williams had said of this book, "I must gather together the stray ends of what I have been thinking, and make my full statement as to their meaning or quit." (SL, 298) Since the poet did not quit, but went on to complete Pictures from Breughel,<sup>39</sup> and part of Paterson VI, it follows that Williams did realize this full statement, as the previous chapters discuss, and therefore was given impetus to continue the development of his craft as manifested in these later works.

To borrow a phrase from Wordsworth, Williams' culminating identification with the Unicorn was one of the poet's significant "spots of time" that gave him the insight necessary for him to realize the validity of his "open goal" quest, and therefore enabled him to continue it. The Unicorn tapestries, however, though mentioned occasionally in later poems such as "A Formal Design" or "The Sparrow," and though an integral part of Book Five's full statement, are not developed in the

majority of the later poems since, in the last analysis, they are not a part of the process of life, but are products. Though the tapestries may be a culminatory symbol for the poet's quest at one very crucial point in his life, they cannot continue to be so, for if the poet's quest is to survive, it must remain a process. Thus the permanent unity implied in Paterson's identification with the tapestries must be broken. The most important condition of the "open goal" strategy is that the striving for those goals must never cease. In unity, there is cessation, the cessation of desire, and therefore the cessation of love. And if there is no more love, the imagination dies. And if the imagination dies, there is nothing to escape through the hole of death.

In the final decade of the poet's life, largely due to his discoveries in Paterson V, Williams became certain of two basic principles necessary for the perpetuation of art and life, a certainty that gave him impetus to continue his "effort" for the sake of art to the point of death. The first is that the creation of art lies only in the continued reconciliation of the poetic with the anti-poetic. Like the "Smiling Dane," what Williams sees "cannot be more / than the male / and female / of it." And though this duality is intrinsic in his entire poetic career, nowhere is it more clearly manifested than in his later poems. On the masculine, poetic

side, we have recurring in these poems such images as man, poet, painter, bridegroom, hunter, city, and sun; on the female, anti-poetic side, we have the recurring images of women, flowers, and earth. And when the two have been successfully united, we have the triumph of the imagination manifested in the favourite of Williams' art-marriages: the painting, and the poem. Three of these that most successfully illustrate the nature of this triumph are "The Chrysanthemum," "The Mental Hospital Garden," and "View by Color Photography." In the first, the poetic sun is in harmony with the anti-poetic flower:

how shall we tell  
the bright petals  
from the sun in the  
sky concentrically

crowding the branch  
save that it yields  
in its modesty  
to that splendor?  
(PB, 17)

Similarly, in "The Mental Hospital Garden," the sun is united with the anti-poetic as woman:

One  
emboldened,  
parting the leaves before her,  
stands in the full sunlight,  
alone  
shading her eyes  
as her heart  
beats wildly  
and her mind  
drinks up  
the full meaning

of it

all!

(PB, 100)

And in "View by Color Photography," the sun is in union with the anti-poetic as land:

there is no horizon ...

...in the mountains

where the sun shines

of a springtime

afternoon. Something

has come to an end here,

it has been accomplished.

(PB, 127-128)

In all three, the union of the sun with the anti-poetic implies for the poet the beauty and meaning of his entire quest. Yet, this quest for reconciliation of the two is, by nature, paradoxical. To remain fully alive, one must continually strive to unite these dualities; but if the two are completely and permanently united, it is the end of life. In the following comment, Williams plays upon this ambiguity: "the end of life is to penetrate the female." (Auto, 376) In this sense, the end of life means both life's quest and life's finish:

What do I look for in a woman? Death,  
I suppose, since it's all I see anyhow in  
those various perfections. (Auto, 222)

To resolve the paradox, the quest must thus become a cyclical process until the point of the poet's natural death. Here then, the poet's relation to the anti-poetic is like the sun's relation to the earth. The harmony that produces the fullest meaning of life and art must of necessity be continuous, but

since the sun sinks every day, also of necessity, the harmony cannot be permanent.

This resolution leads to Williams' second basic principle. Necessary to transform this cyclical process into art is the Apollonian control that the poet must use over his obsessive desire for union with the anti-poetic. It is only through the balance of unconscious passion (the acknowledgement of Dionysian life in the raw) and conscious restraint (manifested in Williams' use of the most specific, most accurate rhythm and the most specific, most accurate word) that the poet is able to measure, and hence give identity to, the union. And through this captured identity is created what we call art. Similarly, the sun's heat (emotion) is always kept at a controlled distance from the earth (anti-poetic). If the poet attempts to violate this balance, he inevitably fails, as Williams' "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" vividly points out:

sweating in the sun  
that melted  
the wing's wax

unsignificantly  
off the coast  
there was

a splash quite unnoticed  
this was  
Icarus drowning.

(PB, 4)

Once this Apollonian-Dionysian harmony is thwarted by the poet, the poet as Icarus is destroyed. Kept in balance, however, as Williams points out in "Asphodel," "the heat will not overtake the light" (PB, 179). Icarus allowed the heat to overtake the light, and so died. Thus, according to Williams' use of "insignificantly" and "quite unnoticed," Icarus' drowning was a death of no identity.

Through the understanding of these two principles necessary for the creation and perpetuation of art, we can now see Paul's enigmatic question for what it is: irrelevant. It is not how deep the water is that matters, but what the poet can bring forth from its depths. If we see "blackfish" as the anti-poetic, the "fishing line and hook" as the poetic, the water's depths as the Dionysian, and the fisherman as the poet employing his Apollonian poetics, then the following poem is a symbolic metaphor, appropriately titled "Paul," that best describes how the four poles involved in these two principles inter-relate to produce that phenomenon called art:

I

when you shall arrive  
as deep  
as you will need go  
  
to catch the blackfish  
the hook  
has been featly baited  
  
by the art you have

and  
you do catch them

II

with what a thoroughness  
you know  
seize that glistening

body translated  
to  
that language you

will understand gut  
clean  
roast granish and

III

serve to yourself who  
better  
eat and enjoy

however you  
divide  
and share

that blackfish heft  
and shine  
is your own.

(PB, 23)

### Footnotes

#### Introduction

<sup>1</sup> William Carlos Williams, The Autobiography (New York: New Directions, 1951), p. 394. Hereafter references are cited with page numbers as Auto in text.

<sup>2</sup> Archibald G. Russell, ed., The Letters of William Blake (London: Methuen, 1906), p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> From a speech about Paterson, August 6, 1953. As recorded by John C. Thirlwall in "Appendix IV" of "Williams Carlos Williams' Paterson," New Directions 17, p. 309.

<sup>4</sup> In his works of non-fiction, however, such as The Selected Essays, I Wanted to Write a Poem, or The Selected Letters, Williams goes to great lengths to explain his poetics.

<sup>5</sup> Linda W. Wagner, The Poems of William Carlos Williams (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1962), p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> T.S. Eliot, trans., Anabasis: A Poem by St. John Perse (New York: Harcourt, 1949), p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Wagner, p. 51.

<sup>8</sup> William Carlos Williams, Spring and All (Dijon: Contact Publishing Company, 1923), p. 93. (my italics.)

<sup>9</sup> William Carlos Williams, Selected Essays (New York: New Directions, 1954), p. 90. Hereafter cited with page numbers as SE in text.



<sup>10</sup> Northrope Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (1957; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1969), p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Wagner, p. 47.

<sup>12</sup> William Carlos Williams, Paterson (New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 4. Hereafter, where the immediate context is not clear, reference is made in the text to book, section, and page number. Where the context is clear, the page number alone is given.

<sup>13</sup> John C. Thirlwall, ed., The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams (New York: McDowell-Obolensky, 1957), p. 298. Hereafter cited with page numbers as SL in text.

<sup>14</sup> For example, see Roy Harvey Pearce, in The Continuity of American Poetry (Princeton, N.J., 1961); An Approach to Paterson (New Haven, 1966); Glauco Cambon, The Inclusive Flame: Studies in American Poetry (Bloomington, Ind., 1963). And, though Joel Conarroe gives Book Five more importance than the former do, he also says that "Book Five...has little surface relation to the material that precedes it" [William Carlos Williams' Paterson: Language and Landscape (Philadelphia, 1970), p. 13].

<sup>15</sup> Unpublished material in the Williams' papers, Lockwood Memorial Library Poetry Collection, State University of New York at Buffalo. As recorded by Conarroe, p. 159.

<sup>16</sup> Eliot, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Northrope Frye, A Study of English Romanticism (New York: Random, 1968), pp. 34, 52.

<sup>18</sup> Sister M. Bernetta Quinn, "On Paterson, Book One," in William Carlos Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. J. Hillis Miller (Englewood, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 111.

19 Areopagus is the name given to the body of men which, sitting on the hill of Areopagus, judged cases of murder, malicious wounding, arson, and poisoning. This body also had the indefinite powers of supervising the magistrates, guarding the laws, controlling education and censoring morals (from Oxford Comp. to Classical Lit.).

20 Louis Martz, The Unicorn in Paterson: William Carlos Williams," in William Carlos Williams: A Collection of Essays, p. 86.

21 W.H. Auden, The Enchafed Flood: The Romantic Iconography of the Sea (New York: Random, 1950), p. 7.

22 Auden, pp. 43-46.

23 William Carlos Williams, I Wanted to Write a Poem, ed., Edith Heal (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. 22. Hereafter cited with page numbers as IWWP in text.

## Chapter One

1 Ironically, Williams actually died in March, the month he refers to as his favourite, in the Prologue to Kora in Hell.

2 James J. Rorimer, The Cloisters (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 1951), p. 120.

3 J. Hillis Miller, "Introduction," p. 13.

4 Roger Seamon, "The Bottle in the Fire: Resistance as Creation in William Carlos Williams' Paterson," Twentieth Century Literature, XL (April 1965), p. 22.

5

Here, Williams maintains an American tradition: his views on education are similar to Emerson's and Whitman's, though apparently Williams was later to change his opinion about the deadening influence of the academies, through contact with people such as John Holmes and J.C. Thirlwall. (see Selected Letters, pp. 315, 328.)

6

When Williams was about 16, he suffered from a heart strain due to an injustice on the track squad. Since then his exercise was mostly confined to long walks. He also says that this accident changed him from an athlete to an artist. (See Autobiography, p. 46.)

7

Dr. P—presumably a sarcastic reference to Williams as "Dr. Paterson."

8

This "headland" analogy is similar to Pound's concept of "periplum" in his Cantos, where the poet as voyager maps his reality from what he can see from his ship.

9

Williams selected this passage from the anthology, Poet's Choice.

10

Quinn, p. 108.

11

For example, see I Wanted to Write a Poem, p. 72.

12

Williams here seems to be aware of the onomatopoeic quality of the name Thalassa.

13

This sun-bird relationship is not unprecedented; for example, the relation of the Phoenix (bird of resurrection) to Phoebus (the sun, with Apollonian connotations).

14

J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 55.

15

Wagner, p. 68.

<sup>16</sup> C.G. Jung, Psychology and Alchemy (Princeton: Bollingen Series XX, 1968), p. 118.

<sup>17</sup> It is interesting to note that many of Jung's archetypal symbols, for example the sun, the serpent, the garden, and the sea, are similarly treated in Paterson. A comparison of Williams' and Jung's treatment of images would be valuable.

<sup>18</sup> Frye, Romanticism, p. 77.

<sup>19</sup> Cirlot, p. 338.

<sup>20</sup> Joel Conarroe, William Carlos Williams' Paterson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), p. 62.

<sup>21</sup> Cirlot, p. 56.

## Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup> Williams translated Philippe Soupault's novel from French in 1929.

<sup>2</sup> Note the use of "shadow" in relation to the sun imagery previously discussed. In other words, the museum is in direct sunlight.

<sup>3</sup> Peers et al, eds., Cassell's Spanish-English Dictionary (London: Cassell, 1964), p. 658.

<sup>4</sup> C.T. Lewis and C. Short, eds., A Latin Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), pp. 1592, 1550.

<sup>5</sup> It is also interesting to note that "res" (things) is etymologically related to "reality," thus supporting the poet's notion that there can be "no ideas, but in things."

<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in his letter incorporated by Williams in Book Five, Ginsberg says "I'll see icebergs and write great white polar rhapsodies."

<sup>7</sup> Seamon, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> William Carlos Williams, Pictures From Breughel (New York: New Directions, 1962), pp. 56-57. Hereafter cited with page numbers as PB in text.

<sup>9</sup> The god of love as God himself should not be ignored, however, for it may be important in relation to the Unicorn as Christ. (To be discussed later.)

<sup>10</sup> Robert Graves, The Greek Myths (Middlesex: Penguin, 1955), I, p. 87.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Aldington and Delano Ames, trans., New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology (London: Hamlyn, 1959), p. 126.

<sup>12</sup> Though Apollo and Helios are more accurately the gods of the sun, Williams' sun imagery in Paterson, especially in light of Venus, tends to make Hephaestus more compatible with the sun's implications. Apollo, as god of light and truth and as healer, is a compatible embodiment, but more incomplete.

<sup>13</sup> Aldington, p. 126.

<sup>14</sup> Graves, p. 87.

<sup>15</sup> Graves, p. 88.

16 Edith Hamilton, Mythology (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1942), p. 33.

17 Rorimer, p. 122.

18 Jung, p. 8.

19 Jung, p. 22.

20 Jung, p. 143.

21 In Hebraic literature and culture, "Miriam the prophetess of the exodus led a dance with timbrels in honour of the Lord. ...Like Dionysus, Jehovah had his dithyramb, and like his Greek counterpart he was celebrated for his benevolence and his potency." Masters of the Drama, p. 108.

22 Charles Olson, "Notes on Language and Theatre," Human Universe and Other Essays (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 73.

23 John Gassner, Masters of the Drama (New York: Dover, 1954), p. 7.

24 Cf. Williams' earlier comment: "March had always been my favorite month, the month of the first robin's song signalling the return of the sun [my italics] to these latitudes" (Prol. to Kora in Hell, 5).

25 Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy (New York: Vintage, 1967), p. 33.

26 Jung, p. 89.

27 Nietzsche, p. 37.

28 Nietzsche, p. 46.

29 William Carlos Williams, "The Invisible University," Trend, I, i, (1942), p. 4.

30 Appendix to Wagner, p. 145.

31 Appendix to Wagner, p. 145.

32 Wallace Stevens, Opus Posthumous (New York: Alfred A Knopf, Inc., 1957), p. 255.

33 That Whitman actually revised his work is of course well known. Williams' view of him is thus partially inaccurate, though this is beside the point. Important is Williams' insistence in 1939, that the poet should maintain control.

34 William Pratt, The Imagist Poem (New York: Dutton, 1963), pp. 11-41.

35 Ezra Pound, "A Pact," Selected Poems (New York: New Directions, 1957), p. 27.

36 As related by Charles Olson, "Human Universe," Human Universe, p. 10.

37 Denise Levertov, "William Carlos Williams," The Nation (March 1963), p. 260.

38 Levertov, p. 260.

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