

The Image of the American Woman In William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*

Mahel Al - Sawda
Department of English
Faculty of Arts
Al-Zaytoonah University

Abstract

This paper seeks to demonstrate that William Carlos Williams's career as a medical doctor has aroused in him a deep concern and sympathy for the women of his society. The paper also aims at defining the "maladies" that proved detrimental to American women, such maladies that incite Williams to adopt an unprecedented pro-feminist position. In his *Paterson*, he pathetically reflects the American woman's wretched position in a capitalistic society. Here Williams finds her inarticulate and marginal, suffering social and sexual inhibition, and above all financially impoverished, all of which contribute to her spiritual and emotional barrenness and physical sterility. He makes it clear that age-old misogyny still persists even today. The American woman, as the granddaughter of Puritanism, is made to fear her body.

Williams's sympathetic concern for woman, however, goes far beyond his recognition of her suffering and even beyond his affectionate care and material help. He realizes that her voice should finally be heard and be made articulate, hence his poem dedicated to her. He attempts to raise her to the status of an epic hero in *Paterson*. By incorporating an "idyll" of two lesbians in his poem, Williams endeavours to assert that the lesbian has a perfect right to exist. And by making the virgin and the prostitute an identity, Williams strives to eliminate the social differences among women themselves. But most important to Williams is his attempt to blow up the blockage separating men and women, and he can do so by declaring that men possess feminine qualities in them, therefore, men and women are complementary.

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ملخص

يحاول الباحث في هذا الدراسة تبين أن مهنة الشاعر "ويليام كارلوس ويليامز" كطبيب أيقظت عند اهتماماً وتعاطفاً كبيرين حيال واقع المرأة في المجتمع، كما يحاول أن يبين "الآفات" التي كان لها أثر سلبي على حياة المرأة مما دفع الشاعر ويليامز ليتبنى موقفاً نسبياً في كتاباته. وتعكس ملحمة الشعرية (باترسون) الألم والظلم اللذين تعاني منهما المرأة في المجتمع الأمريكي الرأسمالي، إذ يصور لنا ويليامز وضع المرأة البائس ومعاناتها الاجتماعية وكتبها الجنسي مما أفضى إلى عقمها الروحي والجسدي. إن اهتمام ويليامز بوضع المرأة المأساوي يتجاوز إحساسه بألمها وعنايته بها كطبيب، ويدرك أن صوت المرأة يجب أن يسمع في قصيدة قد أهديت لها. وهنا يحاول الشاعر أن يرقى بالمرأة إلى مكانة البطل الملحمي عندما يصورها كند له، كبطل (باترسون). ويحاول ويليامز أن يزيل الفوارق الاجتماعية بين النساء أنفسهن، بيد أن أهم ما يذهب إليه ويليامز هنا محاولته إزالة العوائق بين المرأة والرجل حين يقول: إن الرجل يمتلك صفات أنثوية تماماً كما للمرأة صفات ذكورية، وعليه فإن المرأة والرجل يكملان بعضهما بعضاً.

William Carols Williams believes that if a writer cut himself off from the female, his writing would become sterile and dull. The female is for Williams a sort of artistic renewal, a source of the creative energy and inspiration⁽¹⁾.

Being a doctor who examined thousands of women and delivered at least one thousand babies, Williams expressed concern for women that went beyond his everyday relationship with them, a concern that became inseparable from his writings.

His interest in women, however, stems from two facts: first, due to his everyday relation with them he, more than anyone else discovered their true condition in a male-dominated world. Second, he believed that "women are neglected in the arts"⁽²⁾. In relation to the first fact,

Williams found women inarticulate, suppressed and suffering an economic injustice in an industrial, capitalistic community. Hence, Williams envisages the poem as a "social instrument" and the poet as a social worker on whom "devolves the most vital function of society: to recreate it"⁽³⁾ and repair it.

Williams spent some thirty years of writing in preparation for his epic poem *Paterson*, and preliminary materials for this poem lie scattered everywhere in his works. But he could not begin until he developed the idea that Paterson (a city) is to be a person. Paterson is, then, both a place- the New Jersey city near which Williams lived - and a man: the symbolic figure in whom the person (the poet/doctor's own life) and the public (the history of the region) are combined. He is a married giant lying asleep among women, whose dreams are the people of the city. Beside Paterson, there lies a mountain "female to the city", the park her head ornamented with flowers and trees, and "upon whose body Paterson instructs his thoughts/(concretely)"⁽⁴⁾.

In *Paterson*, the female, like the male principle, adopts a number of identities: first, she is the giantess lying asleep beside the giant Paterson; then, in the course of the poem, she is metamorphosed into multiple women: Cora, a woman dying in loneliness; Mrs. Sarah Cumming, who fell to her death into the falls; the "Beautiful Thing" in Book Three, who was repeatedly raped; the young nurse and Corydon in Book Four, etc. All these women, however are compared to the flower spreading "its colored petals/wide in the sun/But the tongue of the bee/misses them," so "They sink back into the loam/crying out" (*Paterson*.p.11).

In his *Autobiography* Williams writes: "Men have given the direction to my life and women have always supplied the energy" (p.55). This statement is particularly pertinent to the composition of *Paterson*, for it was a woman who, in many respects, got the project started

again. In March 1942 a woman - called Marcia Nardi - appeared with a sick boy at Williams's office in Rutherford, seeking help. Within two months of their meeting, Miss Nardi became largely connected with the composition of *Paterson*. Earlier in 1938, a man from Paterson called David Lyle had written Williams many letters leading, for a while, to Williams's intention of making him the hero of his poem, *Paterson*, and his wife (Lyle's) Mary the female version of *Paterson*. But Williams had to change his mind, for Lyle's wife was suffering from cancer, and her death was too near. "I'm almost afraid to ask you, but - How is Mary?" Williams wrote Lyle, realizing that "the death of Mary was in one sense the death of Paterson's wife, and therefore of the women in *Paterson*"⁽⁵⁾. Now, with The appearance of Nardi, Williams allocates her the role of the female version of himself as Paterson.

Marcia Nardi, or Cress, sent Williams some poems of hers to comment on, which he found particularly interesting because they were angry and painful, coming from a woman representing the epitome of social injustice and maladjustment. Nardi, according to Williams, was desperately trying to lead a writer's life but she was blocked, divorced from the environment in which she lived due to the "sorry schemes of things" (*Paterson*, p.48). Through Cress's letters, Mariani writes, Williams recapitulates most of the major themes in *Paterson*:

The woman as victim, complaining, accusing, crying out in pain, the divorce between the two sexes and the danger that woman would turn to other women for solace: the woman as the energy and the flower of a man's life; the poem itself as a confession of inadequacy; the socioeconomic ills that had created so many of the tensions between men and women, making of the man a false nurturer and forcing the woman into an unnatural dependency on the man
(6).

In her letters, Cress accuses Dr Paterson (Williams) of splitting li-

terature from life, and whatever he says about woman's attitude in society remains "nothing but empty rhetoric", for she takes her failure with him as the proof.

Here Nardi insists that "Only my writing (when I write) is myself: only that is the real me in any essential way" (*Paterson*, p. 87). In her opinion, what Dr Paterson says is something, but the real man is a quite different thing.

The point she is trying to suggest, however, is that writing must be associated with action which, she thinks, Dr Paterson has so far failed to do. Thus, she forces Williams to treat her as a woman, not as a literary image.

Eight years later in 1950, Cress wrote Williams again, complaining of the same desperate loneliness and explaining how she and Williams remained friends despite his refusal of her offer to be emotionally involved with him. In Book Five of *Paterson*, Williams is probably still thinking back to this moment, when he says: "Paterson has grown older/the dog of his thoughts/has shrunk to no more than 'a passionate letter'/to a woman, a woman he had neglected/ to put to bed in the past./And went on/living and writing" (p.230). W.C. Peterson suggests that Cress is to be seen as an example of modern Puritanism. Williams "cannot accede to her demands for an exclusive, 'puritan' love without utterly destroying himself"⁽⁷⁾.

In summation, Cress has not been presented in *Paterson* merely because she was a neurotic woman, but Williams's real intention of inserting her letters in the poem is to depict her as a woman who is emotionally sterilized, sexually inhibited, and therefore disconnected from life. Cress's letters represent the blockage and failure of communication caused by lack and inadequacy of language to which Williams attributes most of the maladies in his society ⁽⁸⁾. Cress in *Paterson* is to be understood as a "replica" of modern love in America whose roots

are still deep in the past.

Here, Cress emerges as a “tragic giantess out of the whole past of woman’s suffering, haunting male sensibility with guilty remorse”⁽⁹⁾.

In *Paterson* everything strains towards marriage, but “Marriage comes to have a shuddering/implication” because the prevailing law is “divorce! divorce!” (p.18) which exiles one’s self from one’s self, man from woman and spirit from matter. This separateness is clearly exemplified in Book One when a man and a woman are on the verge of communion, but something, probably inadequacy of communication, prevents love-making:

We sit and talk
I wish to be with you abed, we two
As if the bed were the bed of a stream
-I have much to say to you
 we sit and talk
quietly, with long lapses of silence
.... to
go to bed with you, to pass beyond
the moment of meeting...

(p.24)

Although this couple has a burning desire for communion and marriage, that marriage never occurs. Instead, they talk, or is it the “past” (the Puritans) who talks? “We sit and talk and the/silence speaks of the giants/who have died in the past and have/returned to those scenes unsatisfied/...the giants/live again in your silence and/unacknowledged desire” (*Paterson*, p.25). This divorce, Williams implies, is therefore the responsibility of the “giants” of the past who sup-

pressed or "unacknowledged" their sexual desires and other instincts. "Do we not see that we are inarticulate?" Williams says in his *Autobiography*, "This is what defeats us. It is our inability to communicate to another how we are locked within ourselves, unable to say the simplest thing of importance to one another, any of us" (p. 361). In his *In the American Grain*, Williams explains how the people of the past are still alive! What Americans are today has its origin in what the nation had been in the past: "there is a source in AMERICA," Williams writes, "for everything we think or do".⁽¹⁰⁾

The new-comers, or the founders of America, Williams says in *In the American Grain*, committed themselves to the will of God, but they stressed the spirit against the flesh, suppressed the self and "martyrized" lust.

The outcome was, therefore, "a race incapable of flower" (p. 66). Such attitude to life, however, has its negative consequences, especially on women. The American woman who is considered "a low thing" (p. 183) is consequently made to feel that "she is vicious, evil" (p. 183). The American woman in short, whether in the pioneer camps or even in present time, Williams says, was and is still degraded and demeaned: she fears herself. she has therefore become wholly unfit, sterile, afraid of communion, for if she wants to give herself it is to the "butcher boy" (p. 183), as she has been taught. She is, in Williams's view, spiritually barren, emotionally and mentally shallow. "Woman-givers (but they have been, as reservoirs, empty)" (P. 181). "Never a woman", Williams writes, "saw sun here" (p. 179).

In *In the American Grain*, too, Williams gives an example of the American woman by telling the story of a "lascivious" woman who spent her time spying on men during the war. She was too timid, Williams explains, with horrible "passion", and due to sexual repression she finally turned to other women for solace. In one of her letters.

She tells Williams, "No one could imagine what it meant to a girl to lose her virginity. It means that she gets such a violent jolt from her past teaching and such a sense of the hatred of the world (as she conceived it must be) against her that she is ready to commit suicide. Or 'go to the dogs'. ...she is crushed" (*In the American Grain*, p.184).

Williams and D.H. Lawrence agree that it was the legacy of the Puritan tradition which prevented Americans from expressing or experiencing freely their own humanity by imposing on them a preconceived set of beliefs and prohibitions. "The pilgrim Fathers", Lawrence writes, "soon killed off in their people the spontaneous impulses and appetites of the self. By a stern discipline and a fantastic system of repression, they subdued every passion into rigid control"⁽¹¹⁾. For Williams, this heritage is still living, but as James E. Breslin suggests, the "external conflict in the past is identified with a psychic conflict in the present"⁽¹²⁾. These figures of the past, however, are not dead, and their force continues to act in contemporary life. The modern American is then segmented, exiled from himself and from society, his emotions and intellect are severed because he is unaware of his sources and roots. He knows he is a descendant of the Puritans, people who denied their feelings and emotions, and this has resulted in his alienation or estrangement. "In presenting the Puritans", Alan Holder affirms, "he [Williams] would appear to assume the role of psychiatrist to a vulture, his patient the American mind, its' malady a crippling inhibition that affects our sexuality, makes us avoid real relationships with others, and prevents us from opening ourselves to the spirit of the American earth"⁽¹³⁾.

Book Two of *Paterson* follows Dr Paterson in his excursion to Garrett Mountain Park-his female. The function of this book is to juxtapose the life of the past with its "modern replicas". As Paterson walks along the back of his female, he listens to what women and

young lovers are particularly struggling to articulate, but discovers that they are piteously and pathetically attempting to communicate with each other and failing to do so. This visit, however, is actual, for as Williams says: "I had just been out on the mountain, I was always concerned with the plight of the young in the industrial age who are affected by love". "To escape as an artist, to escape from the scene would be a defeat for me"⁽¹⁴⁾. So, for this reason, Paterson makes himself part of the scene. He attempts, as he is shocked, to bring about the marriage among people themselves, and to bring about their marriage with the environment and language form which they are divorced. The scene, however, reaches its climax with the poet's striving to write a poem commensurate with the social and economic life of the place, a poem expressive of the people and landscape.

What do I do? [Dr. Paterson asks] I listen, to the water falling.

(No/sound of it here but with the wind)! This is my entire occupation.(*Paterson*, p.45)

What Paterson here is actually listening to is the people's speech, for out of this speech he will formulate a complete conception of them and define exactly what ails their minds in order to cure them. Everywhere he goes in this park, he finds people, men and woman either sitting, talking or eating, but no communion. As he wanders further he comes across a woman and a man: "she lies sweating at his side:/she stirs, distraught, / against him-wounded (drunk), moves/ against him, (a lump) desiring, / against him, bored, / flagrantly bored, sleeping, a /beer still grasped spear-like/ in his hand". (p. 59)

In contrast to these scenes of sterility in the modern industrial town of Paterson, there is, in Book I of *Paterson*, the picture of the nine women of an African chieftain in the *National Geographic*. This picture is a strong suggestion of the fertility and order in the so-called primitive society and culture. The proto-wife of this African chief is

metamorphosed into the log she straddles, while her eight successors become branches springing from her thighs and body. This image of the first wife's "breasts sagging from hard use" is expressive of a lifetime of giving and fertility; while the image of the latest and youngest is suggestive of complete readiness to give, she is depicted with "uppointed breasts/... tense, charged with pressures unrelieved. / and the rekindling they bespoke/ was evident".(pp. 13-14).

A comparison between the African chief's wives and the wife of the young minister, Sarah Cumming (mentioned in *Paterson*), would clarify and emphasize the disparity between the chaotic and fragmented society of *Paterson* and the more unified African one. Mrs. Cumming, recently married to a young minister, is blessed with a "flattering prospect of no common share of temporal felicity" (p. 14). On Saturday, the 20th of June, 1812, Mrs. Cumming, accompanied by her husband, made an excursion to the falls of the Passaic River. While enjoying the "romantic" scenery, Mrs. Cumming made a fatal plunge into the falls to be found next morning in the "depth of 42 feet" (p.15). There are two things to say about Mrs. Cumming's suicidal death. First, she leaps into the falls rather than face "The temporal felicity" with Rev. Hopper Cumming, whose life is probably devoid of meaning and felicity, despite the bogus happiness of the couple described by the "sentimentalized newspaper" that ignores the "reality of suicide and reflects a hypocritical and stifling gentility"⁽¹⁵⁾. Second, Mrs. Cumming represents a Puritanical attitude to nature; there is no wonder in her toward the wild beauty of the Falls. Sarah Cumming, obviously, did not feel the pride of the African wives. Nor did she reflect that sense of fertility, because she had come from a society and culture representing sterility of passions and unresponsiveness to the mythic beauty of the New World and landscape.

In Book Two, section one of *Paterson*, Williams inserts a signi-

ficant letter exemplifying the puritanical fear of the sexual contact. The letter describes how the dog "Musty" copulated with another dog despite the keeper's care to prevent her from doing so. This letter ironically suggests that the Puritan tradition of suppressing sexuality is to be imposed not only on people but on animals alike. "Don't think I haven't been worrying about Musty", the woman (Keeper) wrote to someone intialed B., "She's occupied my mind every day since that awful event." (p.54).

In Book Three, after the destruction of the industrial town of Paterson by fire and flood, Williams's search for the "Beautiful Thing" is renewed. This image (The Beautiful Thing) is a complex one, for it is first manifested in the destroyed city, then in the poem itself purged by fire from traditional associations and the world of the past exhibited in the burning library. But in the end, Williams comes to identify the Beautiful Thing, the sacred beauty, with a nameless negress who has been gang-raped, mauled, disfigured, in the living hell of the modern city: "So long./Later/Beautiful thing/I saw you:"

(I don't at all think that you were ill)...

Where is the pain?

.... Persephone

.... -for I was overcome

by amazement and could do nothing but admire

and lean to care for you in your quietness-

(pp. 124-125)

With this figure of the black woman repeatedly raped by the guys from Paterson and Newark, Williams has come to identify with all victimized women in his society. Yet, despite the unpleasing appearance of this negress, Williams finds her beautiful and fertile; he

can do nothing but be "shaken" by her beauty "among the scabrous/dirt of the holy sheets", brightening the corner⁽¹⁵⁾ (p. 125).

The role of the poet as a doctor in *Paterson* is most apparent in this scene of the raped black woman "stretched out negligently on the dirty sheet" (p. 125). Dr. Paterson tends her wounds, while the poet strives to raise her to an elevated status by identifying her with Persophone, the goddess who was raped by the underworld god, Pluto. She is, then, inextricably associated with the poem *Paterson* whose "head/through fruitful exaggeration/was reaching the sky" (p. 127).

Williams's medical profession has, no doubt, made him compassionate to women in general, and to sick and pregnant women in particular, partly because of the pain they suffer in the action of giving birth, and partly because of their being life-givers. In his poem "*Complaint*", for example, the poet/doctor jubilantly evokes our emotions and wonder at a woman in labour; simultaneously, he expresses his fascination and devotion for this woman who is about to give birth to a tenth child:

Here is a great woman
On her side in the bed.
She is sick,
Perhaps vomiting, perhaps laboring
To give birth to a tenth child. Joy! Joy!
I pick the hair from her eyes
And watch her misery
With compassion ⁽¹⁷⁾.

In Book Four, section I of *Paterson*, there is an idyl disclosing another aspect of Williams's sterile sexuality. Phyllis and Corydon are two lesbians, Phyllis is a young nurse from Ramapo trained in Pater-

son, and Corydon is a lame wealthy old woman from New York city using Phyllis as her masseuse. "Good Morning (in a common sort of way) I wonder if you know how lovely you really are, Phyllis, my little Milk Maid (That's good! The lucky man)! I dreamt of you last night" (*Paterson*, p. 156). The sterility of Corydon, however, is manifested in the fact that she feels ashamed of herself being more like a "horse than woman" whose skin is 'speckled like a Guinea hen, and with "hands like a man" (pp. 157,159).

Williams's intention in presenting Corydon in *Paterson*, however, is not to display her shortcomings and defects, but rather to crave for our sympathy and concern for a woman who turned to other women to vent her libido due to her exclusion from normal sexuality. The poet's compassion for her is enacted in allowing us to hear her voice when he makes her read a poem of hers to Phyllis:

If I am virtuous
 Condemn me
 If my life is felicitous
 Condemn me
 The world is iniquitous
 Mean anything? (p. 159)

Corydon is so lonely in this big world (New York), suffering maladjustment and the cruelty of the world. Despite her wealth and the luxurious life she is leading, she feels she is an alien who could only find consolation in her poetry.

Phyllis, on other hand, has a boyfriend, but she does not know "why I can't give myself to you", she addresses Paterson. "A man like you should have everything he wants" (p. 159). Nevertheless, she strips in front of Paterson and he takes "her nipples/gently in his lips"

(p. 164), but no actual sexual intercourse takes place. A close examination of Phyllis, however, shows that she is not completely sterile, for her proposal that she may marry the Indian guide, "(maybe I'll marry him and stay up there for the rest of my life", (p. 168) and her sweaty dress while she is with Paterson suggests that she is capable of fertility.

Williams's insertion of Dr. Paterson in this scene of sterile sexuality could probably be interpreted psychologically as an allusion to his fear of sexual impotency in old age (Williams was sixty-eight years old when he wrote Book Four of *Paterson*). His identification with the sterile Corydon could also mean that he was once a "victim" of traditional morality. Phyllis could not give herself completely to Dr. Paterson, simply because she is afraid of losing her virginity which society demands as a prerequisite for marriage. Therefore, all Paterson could do was "Kissing and talking while his/hands explored her body, slowly, /courteously. Persistent (p. 155). At the end of this scene, Phyllis tells Dr. Paterson; "After I am married/you must take me out sometime/If that's what you want" (p. 168).

In presenting the lesbian Corydon in *Paterson* Williams, also, tries to assert that the "lesbian exists and has a perfect right to exist"⁽¹⁸⁾. As Sappho, (a 6th-century B.C. Greek lesbian poetess), "has been treated as a normal phenomenon," Williams says, "the lesbian today has to be treated in the same way". Williams told Robert Lowell in 1951, "Take Corydon for example, I don't mind telling you that I started writing of her in a satiric mood- but she won me quite over. I ended by feeling admiration for her and real regret at her defeat"⁽¹⁹⁾. Nonetheless, the lesbian poetess "epitomizes" as Paterson says, "the sterile sophistication and artificiality represented by 'the great city'⁽²⁰⁾. While Phyllis, unlike Mrs. Cumming, Cress or even the Beautiful Thing, "is not lost or corrupted in the life around her; she preserves

her virginity and waits for marriage". She seems to "represent the renewal, in a new form, of conservative, traditionally feminine value: the preservation of integrity (virginity) amidst temptation"⁽²¹⁾.

The only woman who stands alone in contrast to all others presented in *Paterson* is Mrs. Curie. "A different type of woman", Williams says in his work sheets for *Paterson*. As for contemporary women in Williams's society, he says: "women have been for us unreal. We balk or run away or trample them, our women are not the sea for us... they are not knowledge". "Curie", in contrast, "is woman and the sea to us"⁽²²⁾. Mrs. Curie is an ideal woman for Williams, creative at every level and is neither divorced from the male nor from knowledge. She is a wanderer and explorer in the field of science, for she opens new possibilities in the field of knowledge. In short "No other figure in *Paterson* is regarded so admiringly, for her embodiment of the creative spirit, as the true meeting-ground of the sexes"⁽²³⁾.

Mrs. Curie's presence in *Paterson* among other American women may, nevertheless, seem strange, but she serves Williams's purposes in two respects: first, by presenting her as a woman not divorced from the male, Williams is showing us how different she is from all the women of his society. Second, the radioactivity, "the radiant gist" (*Paterson*, p.185) which she extracts with great effort from the pitchblende becomes a metaphor in *Paterson* for the poet's search for the Beautiful Thing-for the meaningful language. "Curie (the movie queen) upon/the stage at the Sorbonne./... walking solitary/ as tho' in a forest, the silence/of a great forest (of ideas)" *Paterson*, pp. 171-2) is very much like Dr. Paterson who is walking in the forest of words on Garrett Mountain, or in the flood of books in the library looking for a new language.

In *Paterson* V Williams takes the world of Paterson into a new dimension, the dimension of timelessness and the world of the imagin-

ation. He discovers that his quest will never end, though his personal quest has reached a conclusion in his ability to fully recognize himself as an artist participating in a world of art that will always continue. So, he leaves the city of Paterson and the Falls of the Passaic River for the Cloisters museum where "A world of art/that through the years has/survived" (p. 209). From there he could contemplate old age and the world of fourteenth and fifteenth century French tapestries of the lady and the unicorn. And from there also he could remember Philippe Soupault's "Dadaist novel" *The last Nights of Paris*, which he translated from French into English in 1929, and admired a great deal for Soupault's concern with the mysterious Parisian prostitute. The Book is also a celebration of the Greek lesbian poetess, Sappho. Williams, in paying tribute to her, has translated one of her famous poems in the beginning of the second section of *Paterson V*. In the early drafts of Book Five, Williams says that she "was half a man/small and dark"; "Sappho was half a man anyhow-and she/could WRITE - her tail in her mouth/deny it who may: the virgin turned/whore: and identity" (24).

The central image of *Paterson V* is the Unicorn, embroidered in seven tapestries hung in the European Romanesque church in upper New York, above the Hudson River. Five of these tapestries were in all probability made for Anne Brittany (1476-1514) in celebration of her marriage to Louis XII (1462-1515). The other two, somewhat later in date, may have been added to the original set when Francis I married Anne's daughter and heir in 1514.

As for the legend of the unicorn, "It was believed that the unicorn could be caught only by a virgin. It was related that this wild and unconquerable animal became tame when confronted by a maiden; he would lay his head in her lap and was easily taken by the hunter" (25). The story of this hunt was used as an allegory for the Incarnation, the unicorn being a symbol of Christ, the maiden the Virgin Mary, and the

hunter the angel Gabriel. In time, the legend of the unicorn caught by a maiden came to be associated with allegories of courtly love. And since Anne (Louis XII's wife) was a window, "the unicorn was associated with marriage as well as with virginity"⁽²⁶⁾. The seventh tapestry, showing the unicorn alone, symbolizes Christ incarnate, "whose unique horn possesses healing powers, is tamed by the Virgin, ensnared by love, pierced by the evil of men, dies... and rises"⁽²⁷⁾.

In Williams's work, the unicorn stands for the artist, ("The Unicorn/has no match/or mate. The artist has no peer" (*Paterson*, p. 209), who is in pursuit of the sensuous virgin, the black Kora, or the Beautiful Thing discovered in the basement in *Book III*. And since the unicorn symbolizes the artist, who is moving through these tapestries, then, he must be "seeking his own murder and rebirth in the imagination"⁽²⁸⁾. Thus, through art, the physician Paterson, having spent a long life healing others, now finally heals himself, and just as the unicorn absorbs poison, so Paterson, the poet, can absorb the poison Williams finds in American life. While Williams's search for the virgin in the tapestries could be interpreted in terms of the poet's search for the virgin language and woman whored and mauled but finally "transformed by the poet-lover's desire into something virginal and new, the woman and the language translated to the eighth day of creation, assuming a new condition of dynamic permanence" ⁽²⁹⁾.

Henry Toulouse Lautrec, to whose memory *Paterson V* is dedicated, was the artist of the whore-house. Lautrec sought and found beauty in the brothels and the whores of Paris. Here Williams (in *Book V*) is seeking to make "The whore and virgin, an identity" (p. 210). "It is my instinctive affection", "Williams writes in his *Autobiography* "for these lost girls that is the best part of me - and them, I loved them all. Like Toulouse Lautrec who had the advantage of his deformity), I would gladly have lived in a brothel (of them) for the warmth (extra-

curricular) and the comfort to be derived therefrom" (p. 224). Therefore, in Williams's equation, the virgin and the whore are an identity, and both are virtuous, one for purpose, the other for love, which is the ultimate human virtue: "No woman is virtuous/who does not give herself to her lover/-forthwith" (*Paterson*, p. 229). It follows, then, that all married women are virtuous and whores at the same time-paradoxical though it may seem. Williams justifies this by claiming that "every married man carries in his head/the beloved and sacred image/of a virgin whom he has whored" (*Paterson*, p. 231). Thus, in Williams's opinion, the Virgin Mary was to be honored, not for her infinite inaccessibility or perpetual chastity, but because "she had given herself to her lover freely and fully". "That whore", Williams says, "that glorious whore adored by the ages, rightly adored by the ages into perpetuity"⁽³⁰⁾. Virtue, then, according to Williams, is devoid of any traditional, abstract concept; it rather consists in the generosity of the spirit, in selfless giving unhampered by any traditional customs or ideas.

In a letter to Viola Baxter in 1911, Williams admits: "You are quite right, viola, quite right, men are not strong enough to 'bat air' with women. That forever proves to me I am not a man; they, men disgust me and if I must say it fills me with awe and admiration. I am too much a woman"⁽³¹⁾. In *In the Money* Williams has Doc Mobbot confess: "there's lot of woman in most men.. in doctors anyhow-a lot of woman" ⁽³²⁾. The idea Williams tries to assert here is that every man possesses some feminine qualities within him, a concept Freud announced in 1905 and affirmed in 1932⁽³³⁾. The significance of this to Williams, however, is that man and woman are complementary. Woman, then, is no longer to be seen as inferior to man, but quite his equal.

In the opening section of his *Autobiography* Williams admits

that he never had a sister, or aunts or any female cousins in his family, and apart from his mother and grandmother he never knew "a female for my entire young life. That was very important. It generated in me enough curiosity to burn up fifty growing boys" (pp. 4-5) In *In the Money*, too, Williams makes Doc Mabbot confess to Gurlie: "I always wanted a girl. I always wanted to play with her, undress her, put her to bed, watch her run around the place and grow up"⁽³⁴⁾. Interpreting this in terms of Lacanian psychology, we discover that Williams's "lack" of the female body in his young life may, in part, account for his later obsession with the idea of woman. It is also an affirmation of his hankering desire for becoming whole again through woman. The woman in this case is needed to fill this gap in his life.

Any woman, who is badly needed by a man to fill the lack which he suffers from, could be characterized as having the phallus (a neutral term for power); at the same time, the woman's desire for the man is a desire for the phallus (the penis) which he has and she lacks. This "substitution of one partial-object for another renders the man's penis and the whole of the woman's body psychically equivalent. The woman's body is the object of the man's desire in the same way that a part of his body, the penis, is the object of hers. "Therefore, "ideally if not in practice, the two sexes complement each other: through a man, a woman can become the phallus (his object of desire); through sexual relation with a woman, a man can be affirmed as having a phallus"⁽³⁵⁾. This brings to mind the myth Aristophanes recounts in Plato's *Symposium* which describes how the primeval man was a double (whole), but because he committed the typical Greek sin of hubris he was cut into two halves; consequently, he was destined to be forever in love with his other half as a punishment. Most significant in Aristophanes's myth is that "he locates the origin of eros in an essential incompleteness in the human being - separation from other humans, and assigns to eros the aim of bringing us together - completion and wholeness by

union with another person”⁽³⁶⁾. Thus, we conclude that Williams’s desire for wholeness has led him to make woman his equal, in her role as the wife of Paterson.

Williams’s affectionate care and sympathy for the women of his society arises from his feeling of the injustice done to them throughout the ages. Modern American women, Williams declares, are victims of the American past that still lives on in one form or another. Hence, Williams’s therapeutic poetry is an attempt to restore their self-confidence and some of the old honour and respect; it is also a compensation, imaginative though, for the wrong done to them. It is true that all the examples of the American women Williams presents in *Paterson* are passive ones, but this is so in order to shake male sensibility and to awaken men to the harsh reality of women’s wretched conditions. In this regard, Williams takes upon himself the responsibility of liberating American women from the inhibiting forces of Puritanism, still prevalent even in his day, that prevent them from flowering and from being effective participants in the building of society. The other factor that spurs Williams to adopt pro-feminist concepts (his attitude towards lesbians and whores) lies in his regret at their defeat, and in his feeling that women are needed in the arts to unleash the artist’s creativity. In this connection, it is worth quoting from one of his late poems, (“Asphodel, that Greeny flower”), in which Williams offers to condone Helen’s “Public fault”, because but for this fault there would have been no *Iliad*: “All women are not Helen,/I know that,/but have Helen in their hearts”⁽³⁷⁾.

Although Williams seems at times to repudiate sterile love relationships that, he believes, betray Puritan morality, he has, nevertheless, been indulgent to non-fruitful sexuality on a democratic basis. Williams’s ideal form of sexual love, however, is procreative heterosexuality devoid of any traditional concepts. It is worthy of note here

that Williams never seeks to deify or idealize women, because this leads to sterility; and probably, also, he realizes that idealization would soon dissolve and lead to counter-idealization. So, he neither portrays women as inferior to men nor superior to them.

End Notes:

1- In 1946 Williams stressed the idea that if the artist "cuts himself off from that supplying female, he dries up his sources... heading straight for literary sterility"; quoted in *Profile of Williams* Carols Williams, edited by Jerome Mazzaro (Columbus, Ohio, 1971), p. iii.

2- William Carols Williams, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New York, 1967), p. 373. Further references to Williams's *Autobiography* are given after quotations in the text.

3- William Carols Williams, *Selected Essays* (New York, 1969), p. 103.

4- William Carols Williams, *Paterson* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 43. Further references to *Paterson* are given after quotations in the text.

5- Quoted in Paul Mariani, *William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked* (New York, 1981) P. 539.

6- Mariani, *William Carlos Williams: A new World Naked*, p. 474.

v- W.C. Peterson, *An Approach to Paterson* (New haven, 1967), p. 59.

8- Commenting on the plight of the people of his society Dr. Paterson (Williams) says: "The Language is missing them/they die also/ incommunicado/The language, the language/fails them/they do not know the words.../the language!/-the language/is divorced from their-minds, /the language... the language" (*Paterson*, pp. 11-12).

9- M.L. Rosenthal and Sally M. Gall 'William Carlos Williams' *Paterson* Sagetrieb, (1982), 22-31 (p. 27).

10- *In the American Grain* (Great Britain, 1966), p. 109, Further references to *In the American* are given after quotations in the text.

11- Quoted in James Guimond, *William Carlos Williams: A discovery and Possession of America* (Urbana, 1968), p. 68.

12- James E. Berslin, *William Carlos Williams: An American Artist* (New York, 1971), p. 91.

13- Alan Holder, 'In the American Grain: William Carlos Williams on the American Past', in *William Carlos Williams*, edited by Charles Tomlinson (Harmondsworth, 1972), pp. 240-252 (pp. 245-46).

14- Quoted in Peterson, *An Approach*, p. 65.

15- Walter Sutton, *American Free Verse: the Modern Revolution in Poetry* (New York, 1973), p. 134.

16- Mariani suggests that this black goddess (the negro woman), discovered by the poet in a place like hell, is to be linked with Williams who had been dismissed and laughed at, and like this black goddess he went on singing his poem with unquenchable radiance: "it was a fire that the big boys (Eliot and Pound) wanted put out because it upset all their poetic theories. *A New World Naked*, p. 582.

17- Robert DiYanni, *Modern American Poets: Their Voices and Visions* (New York, 1994), p. 325.

18- Williams, *The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams* (New York, 1957), p. 302.

19- Williams, *The Selected Letters*, p. 302.

20- Peterson, *An Approach*, p. 185.

21- Guimond, *Williams Carlos Williams*, p. 195.

22- Quoted in Linda W. Wagner, *The Prose of William Carlos Williams* (Middletown, 1970), p. 163.

23- Rosenthal and Gall 'Williams Carlos Williams *Paterson*' p. 38.

24- Quoted in Mariani. *William Carlos Williams* p. 711.

25- Jerome Mazzaro 'The Descent Once More: *Paterson* V and Pictures from Breughel' *Modern Poetry Studies* 1. No 6, 278-300 (p. 283).

26- Mazzaro 'The Descent' (p. 283).

27- Mariani. *William Carlos Williams*, p. 701.

28- Paul Mariani. 'The Eighth Day of Creation. William Carlos Williams, Late Poems' *Twentieth Century Literature*, 21, 305-318 (p. 308).

29- Mariani. 'The Eighth Day of Creation', p. 313.

30- Quoted in Mariani, *A New World Naked*, p. 708.

31- Quoted in Mazzaro, 'The Descent Once More', p. 283.

32- Quoted in Mazzaro, 'The Descent Once More', p. 284.

33- In a lecture on "Femininity" Freud tells his audience that "portions of the male sexual apparatus also appear in women's bodies, though in an atrophied state, and vice versa in the alternative case". Therefore, "an individual is not a man or a woman but always both". Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (Harmondsworth, 1986), p. 147.

34- Quoted in Mazzaro, "The Decent Once More", p. 283.

35- Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London and New York, 1990), p. 133.

36- Gerasimos Santas, *Plato and Freud: Two Theories of Love*

(New York, 1988), p. 22.

37- William Carlos Williams, *The William Carlos Williams Reader*, edited with an introduction by M.L. Rosenthal (New York 1966), p. 70.

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