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A Knowable World: America, the City, and the Thematics of Book Five of William Carlos Williams' "Paterson"

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A KNOWABLE WORLD:

America, the City, and the Thematics of Book Five of William Carlos Williams' Paterson

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate whether Book V of William Carlos Williams' Paterson completely maintains, as Williams claimed, "a unity directly continuous" with the first four books. There are two distinct types of unity contained within the poem's fragmented form: narrative and thematic. Williams acknowledged that Book V disrupts the narrative unity of the poem, and thus it is the thematic unity which he hoped he had maintained. To a great extent, Williams succeeds in maintaining the thematic unity of the first four books. He incorporates the central themes of art and renewal into Book V, and he develops the themes of old age and immortality, themes which are more common to Williams' 1950's poems than to Paterson I-IV. Yet Williams stated that a main purpose of Paterson, with its focus on the city, was to be "purely American" by "celebrating the local material" (Interviews 71). The theme of history, specifically as it relates to the local material of Paterson and America in general, is a vital theme, both in the first four books and in the fragments of Book VI, which serves as common link to the poem's other major themes such as art, renewal, the environment, Native Americans and religion. Book V, however, in spite of its attention to some of the poem's major themes, does not rely on the theme of Paterson's and America's history to link its concepts, and thereby disrupts the thematic unity of the poem.

Some critics, however, such as Michael Bernstein, claim that the history of Paterson, which is a microcosm for America in the poem, is not a fully developed theme in Paterson. Bernstein claims, "It is the political, historical, and economic reality of Paterson, its existence as a city, that is curiously missing, a virtual blank at the poem's core" (Bernstein 209). But others such as Mike Weaver and Benjamin Sankey maintain like Williams that the history of Paterson and America is central to the poem. A close analysis of the poem reveals how, contrary to Michael Bernstein's conclusion, the theme of Paterson's and America's history is intrinsic to the thematic unity of the first four books. Book V, however, refers to the city of Paterson a few times in Parts 1 and 2, but the references do not include any specific events or local details. Part 2 contains two short passages touching on American history and economics, but Part 3 of Book V contains no references to local history or to issues regarding America. Few events specific to the city of Paterson occur in Book V. In light of the previous books, Book V's marginalized treatment of local events and American causes a significant disruption in the thematic unity of the poem.

Paterson's formative history as well as a majority of the critical responses to Book V reveal that Book V, like Williams' other 1950's poems, has a more relaxed tone than the rest of the poem which was caused mainly by Williams'

increasing age and failing health. As Breslin notes, Book V also resolves "discordancies" and tensions which are abundant in the language and images of Books I-IV in a mood of "harmonious affirmation," and my thesis does not dispute Book V's new harmonious mood (Breslin 206). A majority of critics, however, like Breslin, conclude that Book V, because of its harmonies and relaxed tone, is an epilogue or coda. Yet Book V is thematically related to the previous books of Paterson, and even though there are new themes such as old age and immortality, Book V emerges as more than a mere epilogue or coda.

William Carlos Williams stated in his 1951 Autobiography that with his long poem Paterson he hoped to achieve a poetic form with which he could encompass "the whole knowable world" about himself (Autobiography 391). Williams wrote this just prior to the publication of Book IV of Paterson, and the process of Paterson's development reflects Williams' concerns with portraying this "knowable world." Although Williams made his first notes on the idea for the poem as early as 1925, he revealed the concept of a poem in "4 sections" in 1943 (Paterson xi). Book IV, the intended final book, was published in 1951, but Williams published a fifth book in 1958 and composed three fragments for a projected sixth book in 1961.

A critical debate over Book V centers on Williams' 1958 claim that with Book V he hoped that he maintained "a unity directly continuous with the Paterson of Pat. I to 4." (Paterson xiv). James Breslin, in William Carlos Williams: An American Artist, concisely describes the debate over the poem's unity:

> The publication of [Book V], seven years after the apparent completion of the poem, revived the critical debate about the nature and even the existence of the poem's unity.
>
> (205)

As Breslin recognizes, the issue of Paterson's unity is central to an analysis of Book V. The critical response has mainly been that Book V violates in some way

the unity of books I-IV.

A major problem with critical discussion on the issue of Book V and the poem's unity, however, is that critics do not adequately define the term "unity," as Williams used it in 1958. The first four books are characterized by two distinct types of unity: narrative and thematic. The narrative unity of the first four books is what Williams described as the "purely physical aspect" of the poem (Mariani, New World 720). This physical aspect of the poem is the continuous progression of the action from above the Passaic Falls of Paterson, to below the Falls, down the river and finally into the sea at the fourth Book. Characteristics of the narrative unity of books I-IV include interruptions and digressions with prose and poetry regarding the history of Paterson, New Jersey, and events from Williams' own life.

In a July 1958 letter to Edward Dahlberg, Williams conceded that the poem's narrative, or physical journey, ended with Book IV, but that Book V continued the poem's mental journey:

> The purely physical aspects of the story, the descent of the river to the sea, was completed. But I in my own person had not died but continued to live and go on thinking. The mind, my own mind persisted.
>
> (Mariani, New World 720)

Williams acknowledged that Book V disrupted the poem's narrative unity and therefore, he hoped he had maintained the thematic unity of the poem.

To a great extent, Williams succeeds in maintaining the thematic unity of the

first four books. Nevertheless, Williams stated in a mid-to-late 1950's interview that a main purpose of Paterson, with its focus on the city, was to be "purely American" by "celebrating the local material" (Interviews 71). The historical theme of the poem is embodied by the social, economic, environmental and religious background of the locale, mainly of Paterson, which Williams argued was a microcosm for America. It is this theme of Paterson's and America's history which appears briefly in Book V, but does not run consistently through the Book as it does through the first four books and in the Book VI fragments. Although Williams intended Paterson to contain the "whole knowable world" about himself, and although Book V is an essential book which contributes a great deal to his "knowable world," Book V lacks the key element of history, as it pertains to America and Paterson. The Book VI fragments are significant in that they return the poem to the history of Paterson and America which is intrinsic to the unity of books I-IV.

Most critics conclude that Book V is a coda, epilogue or separate poem containing themes more or less unrelated to the first four books (Mariani, New World 700; Martz 155; Breslin 206; Bernstein 213; Peterson 11; Sankey 213). Breslin concludes that Book V is a coda because it is more similar in tone and theme to Williams' 1950's poems (210-11). Breslin writes, "Book V is a coda in which the author reviews earlier episodes and motifs, their discordancies now resolved in a new mood of harmonious affirmation" (Breslin 206). Sankey provides a similar assessment. Louis Martz, in his 1960 essay "The Unicorn in Paterson," also views Book V as a belated epilogue to a concluded poem, but

Martz argues that Book V serves to "recapitulate and bind together all the foregoing poem" (Thought 538). Martz, in this sense, emphasizes the "wholeness" of the poem rather than the discontinuity of Book V (539).

The concept of a coda is useful for illustrating that Book V does not fully address the themes of the first four books, but it is not a completely accurate concept to use in defining Book V as a whole. Breslin, Martz and Sankey are correct in noting that Book V reviews earlier episodes and themes, but the Random House Dictionary defines a coda as "a more or less independent passage concluding a composition" (Random House 259). Book V, while it illustrates the new concerns of Williams' 1950's poems, still fully addresses many of the earlier books' issues such as language, art and renewal. In fact, art and renewal are at the core of Book V. In this respect, Book V does not function as "a more or less independent passage," and the Book VI fragments demonstrate that Book V does not "conclude" the poem. From a thematic standpoint, Book V is not a "coda" in the strictest sense of the word.

While as noted above, Book V focuses primarily on the themes of art and renewal which are also important themes of the first four books, Book V also develops the new themes of old age and the immortality of art which are central to much of his 1950's poetry. In 1956, Williams explained to Edith Heal some of his reasons for writing Book V:

> "Paterson V must be written.... Why must it be written? ... it can't be categorically stated that death ends *anything*. When you're through with sex, with ambition, what can an old man create? Art, of course, a

piece of art that will go beyond him ....

(I Wanted to Write 22)

Williams' belief that death is conquered by the immortality of art is a major theme which sets both Book V and many of his 1950's poems apart from his 1940's poetry.

In fact, it is the threat of dying and of being unable to write which in part spurs Williams to break the four part plan of Paterson, and helps shape the tone and content both of Book V and his other 1950's poems. After the publication of Book IV in 1951, Williams suffered a severe stroke which forced him to end his medical practice. Williams wrote Louis Martz soon after his stroke that he was now able to view things more clearly:

> I seem to have come out of [the stroke] with a clearer head. Perhaps it derived from a feeling that I might have died or, worse, have been left with a mind permanently incapacitated.
>
> (SL 298)

The prospect of being "permanently incapacitated" and unable to write drove Williams, as Breslin notes, to "acknowledge continuities between his work and that of the past" (204). Williams acknowledged such "continuities" in part by utilizing a new poetic measure:

> We have been looking for too big, too spectacular a divergence from the old. The 'new measure' is much more particular, much more related to the remote past than I, for one, believed. It was a natural blunder from the excess of our own feelings, but one that must now be corrected .... there is a new sensitivity that is required.
>
> (SL 299)

Williams used the "new measure" and "new sensitivity" to recapture "the old" and "remote past" from which he believed he had excessively diverged.

As Breslin summarizes, Williams' 1950's poems, including Book V of Paterson, place less emphasis on the contemporary moment (204-205), and focus rather on old age, the immortality of art and the power of the imagination. The opening lines of Book V introduce the Book's main themes:

> In old age
> the mind
> casts off
> rebelliously
> an eagle
> from its crag
>
> (Paterson 205)

The poet is older, but he is also possesses a renewed, rebellious mind. The renewal of the first four books through physical destruction, like the flood and fire in Book III, and the deaths in Books I, II and IV, changes to a mental renewal in Book V brought about by memory and the power of the imagination:

> the angle of a forehead
> or far less
> makes him remember when he thought
> he had forgot
>
> -- remember
>
> confidently
> only a moment, only for a fleeting moment --
> with a smile of recognition
>
> (Paterson 205)

In Book V, the poet celebrates the act of remembering "what he thought/ he had forgot," rebelling against the fading light of life and the loss of memory itself. The previous books of Paterson are also concerned with the issue of memory, but whereas Book V concentrates on the memory of "A WORLD OF ART/ THAT THROUGH THE YEARS HAS/ *SURVIVED!*" (Paterson 207), the first four books focus on the recollection of events relating to the city of Paterson or America's history. In Book V, imagination makes the poet and art immortal:

> 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
>
> (Paterson 210)

Art provides an avenue to escape death and to achieve immortality. The opening of Book V establishes an important shift from the first book in which Paterson, not art or the imagination, is immortal. The opening lines of Book I introduce the landscape as well as Paterson, the man:

> Paterson lies in the valley under the Passaic Falls
> its spent waters forming the outline of his back....
> ... *Eternally* asleep,
> his dreams walk about the city where he *persists*
> incognito. Butterflies settle on his stone ear.

Immortal he neither moves nor rouses and is seldom
seen, though he breathes and the subtleties of his
machinations
drawing their substance from the noise of the pouring
river
animate a thousand automatons.

(6, emphasis added)

The opening of Book I emphasizes the immortality of Paterson and the Falls, and defines Paterson in terms of the landscape. The specific location of Paterson is the focal point around which Williams constructs the major themes of language, renewal and history in books I-IV. Such is not the case with the opening of Book V where the poet is "reawakening the world/ of Paterson/ – its rocks and streams" (205) to focus immediately on Lorca's The Love of Don Perlimplin, Dante and Shakespeare (206). Paterson returns in Book V to "witness" not the history of the city or the landscape, but rather the "WORLD OF ART" itself (207).

In contrast with the generally limited setting of Paterson in the first four books, passages in Book V reference Paris (207), The Cloisters (207), Rutherford (208), Louisville (208), Mexico (212), Rio (213), Denmark (226), Spain (227), and France again (233). There are also references to Greek history (226-227), England (232, 235) and to the work of numerous foreign artists. It is not that the first four books never venture outside the city limits of Paterson. On the contrary, each book contains references to events in other cities or other countries, but each of the first four books relates such discussions to American history and quite often to events from Paterson's past. The

international settings and various artists in Book V do not relate to the theme of America's and Paterson's history, but rather, they constitute examples of the universal immortality of art and the power of the imagination. In fact, Williams abandons the idea of "a local pride" which are the first words in the poem, and writes in Book V that "Anywhere is everywhere" (231) and that "The past is for those that lived in the past" (235).

To understand some of the reasons behind the differences between Book V and the first four Books, a look at the process of Book V's creation is useful. While Williams was working on the fourth Book, in late 1950 or early 1951, he was contemplating a fifth Book. On the typescripts of Book IV, Williams wrote "maybe even a 5th Book of facts--Recollections" (Paterson xi). After Book IV was published, however, it took more than five years of consideration as well as a series of crippling strokes, a near-fatal heart attack, and at least one false start to the poem, before Williams settled on Book V's final direction.

In October 1952, after two strokes and the heart attack, Williams published a twenty-four line poem entitled "Paterson, Book V: The River of Heaven" which he had started in March of that year. "The River of Heaven" eventually became the long poem "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower" (Paterson xi-xii), a confessional poem to his wife. "Asphodel" focuses on the themes of love and marriage, which are also themes of Book V, but in Paterson they appear in a more universal and celebratory sense, as opposed to personal and confessional. The Unicorn Tapestries in Book V depict a wedding, but as Breslin notes, they

are also metaphors for the story of Christ and the poet's universal search for beauty (207). Another section of what becomes "Asphodel" was published in Perspective in October 1953, entitled "Work in Progress (Paterson V)." Williams eventually changed the title in his copy of Perspective, as Mariani notes, but MacGowan clarifies that Williams did not remove the "Paterson V" subtitle until at least November 1953 as Williams noted in a letter to Richard Eberhart (Mariani, New World 704; CP2 495). The first draft of Paterson V in fact turned into something else.

Williams did not begin seriously thinking about Book V again until early 1956 when he wrote to Richard Eberhart that Book V would take "him out of himself and into a 'real' world of the imagination, looking down" over Paterson (Mariani, New World 692). By March 1956 Williams was hard at work on Book V. He signed the final manuscript of Book V on December 4, 1957 and it was published in 1958 (Mariani, New World 718).

While removing itself from the locale of Paterson, Book V expands important themes of art and renewal beyond the scope of the first four books. In the first four books, art is a means by which the poet searches for a redeeming American language. With quotations from others' works and letters, and with his own poetry, Williams attempts in the first four books to unravel the language of the Falls, the language of America's past, of chaos and struggling humanity. James Miller explains this point clearly in The American Quest for a Supreme Fiction:

> The loudest language of Paterson is the language of chaos, of

> criticism, the language which the poet finds as the reality of Paterson, the reality of America. Indeed, a first reading of the poem might well leave the impression that it is the only language because it is so dominant.
>
> (Miller 143)

Chaos, which is in part "the reality of Paterson" and "the reality of America," dominates the first four books and the Book VI fragments. In Book V, art continues to unravel reality, "la realite! la realite!/ la rea, la rea, la realite!" (Paterson 207), but not the reality of Paterson or America. Art takes on a broader role -- it is the means by which humanity renews itself and conquers death. As Miller notes, "In Book V of Paterson, the images of chaos decrease considerably, and they are integrated almost inseparably with images of renewal" (Miller 148). Miller is accurate in noting that Book V reduces the poem's focus on images of harsh reality, but he does not note that of Book V's handful of images of harsh reality, only a few remotely address "the reality of Paterson" or "the reality of America."

In Book V, Williams includes a 1956 letter from Ezra Pound in which Pound states, "That sovereignty inheres in the POWER to issue money, whether you have the right to do it or not" (216). Williams was sympathetic to Pound's views on money (Interviews 51), but Williams was also skeptical of Pound's general economic ideas and found them to be "fetishistic, muddy, stupid, and full of obfuscations" (SL 338-339; Mariani, New World 713). In fact, Williams wrote to James Laughlin in March 1958 to say that he had "only included [Pound's letter] for purely literary reasons, to relieve monotony" (Mariani, New World 714). Thus, Pound's brief comment on America in Book V is not central to the

poem's discussion of the theme of America's or Paterson's history.

The only other passage involving historical themes pertaining to America or Paterson in Book V follows the description of Breughel's The Adoration of the Kings. With the poor figures and the "ragged" soldiers in the painting as background, Williams writes, "It is no mortal sin to be poor -- anything but this featureless tribe that has the money now -- staring into the atom, completely blind" (225). Williams generalizes the wealthy as a "featureless tribe" who cannot see the potential dangers in accumulating wealth at the expense of the poor. In this passage in Book V, Williams also discusses the devaluation of labor and the reduction in quality of the products being manufactured:

> we have come in our time to the age of shoddy, the men are shoddy, driven by their bosses, inside and outside the job to be done, at a profit. To whom? But not true of the Portuguese mason, his own boss "in the new country" who is building a wall for me, moved by oldworld knowledge of what is "virtuous" . "that stuff they sell you in the stores now-a-days, no good, break in your hands . that manufactured stuff, from the factory, break in your hands, no care what they turn out"
>
> (225)

The combination in the present of a lack of respect which bosses have for their workers and which workers have for their jobs results in workers having "no care what they turn out," thus resulting in the production of inferior quality products. This is the only significant allusion to American economic and social issues in Book V, but even as such, it serves only as a generalization of American industrial society, not as a specific event or example from Paterson's history.

The statement would fully complement the historical theme of the previous books if it were juxtaposed with details from Paterson's past. Instead, wedged between two longer passages regarding a European tapestry and the Bible, the theme of history as it pertains to America is reduced to a brief comment in Book V.

Furthermore, in Book V chaotic images are almost always balanced with images of renewal (Miller 148). The unicorn is maimed, but like art and the poet, "has no match/ or mate" and thus transcends death (Paterson 209). The image of the whore is balanced with the image of the virgin; they are "an identity" (Paterson 208). The Jew in the pit, while "the machine gun/ was spraying the heap/ ... had not yet been hit/ but smiled/ comforting his companions" (Paterson 221). Miller describes Williams' technique in the above Book V passage, "Paterson does not evade evil and horror, but seems now to see it in a totality that balances: there is the man who shoots, but there is also the man who comforts" (Miller 149). In Book V, as well as in Williams' other 1950's poems, there is a balance between images of chaos and images of redemption or renewal. James Breslin describes this balance as a circling process: "Most of [Williams'] later poems share the impulse of Paterson V to pull things together into this easygoing, circling process" (Breslin 210). Breslin also refers to Book V's focus on renewal as well as to its "stress on the harmonies, rather than the tensions, among its parts" (Breslin 209).

This "stress on the harmonies" is included in many of Williams' 1950's poems, such as "To Daphne and Virginia" in The Desert Music in which the poet declares that "The mind is the cause of our distresses/ but of it we can build anew ...

A new world/ is only a new mind" (CP2 247). Other poems in The Desert Music such as "The Yellow Flower," "The Host," "Deep Religious Faith," "The Mental Hospital Garden," "Theocritus: Idyl I" and "The Desert Music" address the themes of old age and the redeeming power of the imagination and art. The poem "Tribute to the Painters" in Williams' 1955 collection Journey to Love is repeated almost in its entirety in Book V and includes the image of the Jew in the pit (CP2 296-298; Paterson 219-221). The poem "The King!," which includes the lines "Happy the woman/ whose husband makes her/ the 'King's whore'" (CP2 296) is closely related to the Book V passage in which Paterson, "the King-self," declares, "—every married man carries in his head/ the beloved and sacred image/ of a virgin/ whom he has whored" (231). Other poems in Journey to Love discuss the imagination's power, such as "The Ivy Crown" in which the poet recognizes, "At our age the imagination/ across the sorry facts/ lifts us/ to make roses/ stand before thorns" (CP2 289). In the poem "Shadows," Williams notes his belief that the world of the imagination is far greater than the world of history:

> So that we experience
> violently
> every day
> two worlds
> one of which we share with the
> rose in bloom
> and one,
> by far the greater,
> with the past,
> the world of memory,

the silly world of history,
the world
of the imagination.

(CP2 309-310)

In "Shadows," as in Book V, the poet extols the virtues of the imagination and focuses on the glory of memory and artistic tradition rather than on the "silly world of history" or daily events. Towards the end of Book V, Williams includes the lines "'unless the scent of a rose/ startle us anew" (235) which is almost a direct quotation from the last lines of "Shadows":

unless—unless
things the imagination feeds upon,
the scent of a rose,
startle us anew.

(CP2 310)

In shifting its focus from the world of Paterson and America's history to the world of art and the imagination, Book V is more closely related to Williams' other 1950's poems than to the first four books of Paterson.

By way of contrast with Book V, the Book VI fragments emphasize the missing themes of Book V by returning the history of Paterson to the forefront of the poem (237-240, 307). The typescript fragments, quoted below from the 1992 edition of Paterson, were found among Williams' papers at his death, and a corrected transcription was published in 1963. The fragments of Book VI contain specific references to Hamilton, George Washington and to details of Paterson. The opening stanza of the first typescript fragment is a discussion of Hamilton's

death:

> The intimate name you were known as
> to your intimates in that reaks was The Genius, before
> your enemies got hold of you
> you knew the Falls and read Greek fluently
> It did not stop the bullet that killed you - close after dawn
> at Weehawken that September dawn
>
> (237)

As Mariani notes about Williams' work on Book VI, "The figure of his old enemy, Hamilton, was very much on his mind" (760). Williams emphasizes that Hamilton's death occurs near "dawn," both the beginning of a new day and the dawn of a new country, thus connecting the event to the poem's renewal theme. By discussing Hamilton in the fragments, Williams returns the poem to its focus on history as it pertains to America and Paterson, but he also connects history in the fragments to the poem's other central themes.

Echoing the economic theme of Book II, the third fragment of Book VI illustrates Hamilton's influence on the development of American cities, and thus on the founding of the entire country:

> As Weehawken is to Hamilton
> is to Provence we'll say, he hated it
> of which he knew nothing and cared less
> and used it in his scheems - so
> founding the country which was to
> increase to be the wonder of the world
> in its day
>
> which was to exceed his London on which he patterned it
>
> (A key figure in the development)
>
> (239)

In even more direct terms than the previous books, Hamilton, the founder of Paterson and "the country," promises to become central to Book VI. Williams returns Hamilton to the poem in part to focus on his death at Weehawken in a duel with Aaron Burr. If Book V represents what Williams called the "eighth day of creation" (Mariani, A Usable Past 59), then Book VI is a new day which finds the poet reborn, focusing again on history, America, Paterson and on the death of Paterson's founder. George Washington also reappears in a fragment, a tall man "with a weak voice and a slow mind . . . . [who] had a will bred in the slow woods so that when he moved the world moved out of his way" (239). The Book VI fragments provide a thematic counterpoint to Book V by returning history to the forefront of the poem.

Some critics, like Michael Bernstein, claim that the history of Paterson and America is not a fully developed theme, even in the first four books of Paterson. Bernstein claims, "It is the political, historical, and economic reality of Paterson, its existence *as a city*, that is curiously missing, a virtual blank at the poem's core" (Bernstein 209). But others such as Mike Weaver and Benjamin Sankey maintain, like Williams, that history and factual events are central to the poem. An analysis of the first four books reveals how, contrary to Michael Bernstein's conclusion, the theme of history as it pertains to America and Paterson is intrinsic to the thematic unity of these books. In light of the previous books, Book V's relatively minor attention to local details and American history constitutes a significant disruption in the thematic unity of the poem.

The concept of history is for Williams an important part of Paterson throughout the first four books. Book I was published in 1946, when Williams was 63, but the poem had many precursors in his work, most of which contain some mention of Paterson or American history. One such precursor is Williams' "The Wanderer: A Rococo Study," a poem of seven sections which he published in 1914 in the Egoist (Mariani, New World 113). He revised "The Wanderer" and included it in the 1917 collection Al Que Quiere! (CP1 27-36, 108-117). As in Paterson, a central image in "The Wanderer" is a river which marries with the poet's spirit and is a means through which the poet memorializes and modernizes himself. Williams includes the lines from "The Wanderer," "I knew all (or enough)/ it became me" in Paterson V, as Breslin notes, "as an instance as well as a definition of memory" (Breslin 210). Also, in a section of "The Wanderer" entitled "Paterson--The Strike," the poet is tossed by the ubiquitous "electric" of Paterson in the same way that "a great father [tosses] his helpless/ Infant " (CP1 31). The presence of the Paterson strike in "The Wanderer" foreshadows Williams' use of history and events in the poem to help unravel the language of the city.

In 1927, Williams published in The Dial an 85-line poem entitled "Paterson," parts of which Williams later worked into Book I, including the central pronouncement "Say it, No ideas but in things" (CP1 263-66). Ten years later, Williams published "Patterson: Episode 17" in New Directions 2, sections of which are contained in the final version of Book III, including a long passage

about the "Beautiful Thing" in which "the guys from Paterson/ beat up/ the guys from Newark and told/ them to stay the hell out/ of their territory" (CP1 439-443). The "Beautiful Thing" passages are integrally related to the theme of renewal and to art, because just as Beautiful Thing is "socked ... across the nose" by the fighting guys, the violence is juxtaposed with the creation of poetry:

> The stroke begins again---
> regularly
> automatic
> contrapuntal to
> the flogging
> like the beat of famous lines
> in the few excellent poems
> woven to make you
> gracious
> (CP1 442-443)

Paterson's precursors contain references to art and renewal, and they are usually related either to American history and the Passaic River or to the city of Paterson and its people.

Williams reworked the concept for Paterson from the mid-1930's until the 1940's (Paterson xi), including drafting in the mid-1930's an 87 page manuscript entitled Detail & Parody for the poem Paterson and publishing a sequence of fragments entitled "For the Poem Paterson" in 1941 in The Broken Span (CP2 xx, 14-22). Interspersed with inconsequential details about individuals and generalizations about men and women is a reference to Raleigh who, according to Williams, believed "We cannot go to the country/ for the country will bring us/ no peace" (CP2 17). Even in the fragments published in 1941, Williams was

concerned with American history. In April of 1943, Williams published a 17-line poem entitled "Paterson: The Falls" in which he announced, "This is my plan. 4 sections" (CP2 57-58). The poem not only announces a specific structure for the long poem Paterson, but it indicates that each section will refer to specific people, events and places in the poem, such as "the Falls," "the shirt-sleeved/ Evangelist," the "eels from Barbados," "the old town: Alexander Hamilton/ working up from St. Croix," "the factory bell" and finally "the modern town, a/ disembodied roar!" (CP2 57-58). In "Paterson: The Falls," Williams presents the first and only clear plan for the poem's structure before the publication of Book I in 1946. Williams confirms his intention to unravel simultaneously the interconnected languages of the Falls, of poetry and of Paterson's and America's history. It is to understand the chaos of all these languages, "a disembodied roar," which is the poem's original aim. The first four Books were published in 1946, 1948, 1949, and 1951, respectively (Paterson ix).

Williams announces at the poem's outset that the poem is to be "a reply to Greek and Latin with the bare hands" (2). Part of Williams' original plan for Paterson is to avoid connections with the European world, which other American poets such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound had embraced. Discussing Paterson in one of his mid-to-late 1950's interviews with John Thirlwall, Williams claimed that he wanted to write a poem exploring and celebrating the American experience: "I always wanted to write a poem celebrating the local material . . . . to have no connection with the European world, but to be purely American, to

celebrate it as an American" (Interviews 71).

Williams infuses the first four books with details from America's and Paterson's history. Sankey confirms that "Paterson makes extensive use of local geography and history" (9), and that the city's history is intrinsically related to the history of the United States:

> The city's history provides a synecdoche for the history of the United States as Williams saw it – colonization, struggles with the Indians, the exploitation of natural resources, industrialism, and the gradual degradation of the environment.
>
> (Sankey 10)

Paterson's history provides Williams with a microcosm of America, of its history and its people (I Wanted to Write 71-73). Bernstein suggests otherwise, and does not even acknowledge that Paterson's history serves as background for other important themes such as art and renewal (Bernstein 202-204, 209-210).

By carefully including the events and history of the city in books I-IV, however, Williams is able to make particular statements about America itself. As Williams notes in a June 1951 New Directions press release distributed two weeks prior to the publication of Book IV, "Paterson has a definite history associated with the beginnings of the United States" (Paterson xiii). In the same release, Williams writes that he must "use the multiple facets which [Paterson] presented as representatives for comparable facets of contemporary thought," and that "the city I wanted as my object had to be one that I knew in its most intimate details" (Paterson xiii).

Although Williams was aware of Paterson's past, a vital source for the details of Paterson in the first four books was David Lyle, who is, according to Mike Weaver, the "Faitoute" Paterson of Books I-III (Paterson 15, 63, 85, 100; Weaver 124). Lyle's methods and details surface frequently in each book of Paterson. An ex-Merchant Marine employee who came to Paterson in 1938 to be an engineer for the Wright Aero Factory and to work with communications systems, Lyle sent numerous letters to Williams filled with details of Paterson. Much more than Williams, Lyle was intimately familiar with the city's daily events, newspaper articles, artists, politics and folklore. Williams also adopted the methods in Lyle's letters by connecting the details of the city to broader issues regarding America's development and to other themes in the poem. Weaver notes that Lyle represents the man-city, the "old time Jersey Patriot," at the center of the poem's "...GRRREAT HISTORY..." (Paterson 15), and that Lyle's writing methods strongly influenced Williams:

> [Williams] had learnt to impersonate Lyle so well that he was completely identified with Faitoute -- the man doing all all the time. Faitoute was a man through whom the whole contemporary scene disclosed itself.
>
> (Weaver 127)

Lyle is Williams' "Paterson correspondent" for the first four books (Paterson 259, 272), to a much greater extent than Allen Ginsberg is the Paterson correspondent in Book V. In fact, as Weaver notes, "At one point in [Paterson's] genesis Williams was willing to share the authorship with Lyle" (127) or, as

Mariani claims, make Lyle "the real hero of Paterson" (468). In contrast, Ginsberg provides only a brief allusion to the city in Book V:

> I have NOT absconded from Paterson. I have a whitmanesque mania & nostalgia for cities and detail and panorama ... I'll be back to splash in the Passaic again only with a body so naked and happy City Hall will have to call out the Riot Squad ....
>
> There is no struggle to speak to the city, out of the stones etc. Truth is not hard to find.
>
> (210-211)

Aside from the claims that he will return to "splash in the Passaic" and "make big political speeches" (211), Ginsberg's letter does not focus on the details of the city for which he claims to have a "mania and nostalgia." In contrast with Lyle's influence on the first four books, Ginsberg's letter does not offer significant historical or local details in order to illustrate Book V's central themes.

Book I, on the other hand, contains details from Paterson's history which relate to many themes, including the theme of America's disregard for its natural resources. David Hower, a poor shoemaker, discovers the "finest pearl of modern times" in a mussel near Paterson. The Hower story provides an example of how natural resources are destroyed through carelessness, because in this case the pearl was ruined by "boiling open the shell" (9). The brutal death of the striped bass (11), the destruction of the huge eels (35), and the "river, red, half steaming purple/ from the factory vents, spewed out hot,/ swirling bubbling" (36) are details from Paterson's history which relate to the pollution and destruction of America's natural. Williams offers such examples in part to

show figuratively how people, by polluting the river and destroying marine life, simultaneously destroy a redeeming quality which the Passaic River, the Falls and other local waters possess.

Local details also reinforce other important themes in the poem. Sam Patch, a key figure in Book 1, is a waterfall jumper from Paterson who becomes a "national hero" (15) through his bold leaps:

> These were the words that Sam Patch said: "Now, old
> Tim Crane thinks he has done something great; but I
> can beat him." As he spoke he jumped.
>
> There's no mistake in Sam Patch!
>
> The water pouring still
> from the edge of the rocks, filling
> his ears with its sound, hard to interpret.
> A wonder!
> (16)

Patch's jumps, like the Falls, are shortly thereafter described as "a wonder" which people "came from great distances" to witness (16). Patch, like Mrs. Cumming who slips into the Falls and dies in Book I, are criticized for playing with the Falls. Both Patch and Mrs. Cumming are actual people who, according to Williams, do not take up the real challenge of the Falls or understand its language, and both pay the price of indulging in escape fantasies.

Williams also includes American historical figures such as George Washington in the first four books to illustrate the poem's themes. Washington appears twice in Book I, Part 1. First, Washington asks Peter van Winkle, a severely deformed resident of Paterson, "whether he was a Whig or a Tory," and

Peter responds "that he had never taken an *active* part on either side" (10). Second, General Washington stays at "lovely Ringwood," the luxurious country house which is hidden from the nearby "ironworkers' cabins, the charcoal burners, the lime kiln workers" (12). Williams juxtaposes the poor workers' cabins and Ringwood as a representation of the diverse American social strata. In the same passage, the story of the Jackson Whites, although not indigenous to Paterson, provides an example of the social degeneration which is at the center of American society for Williams (12-13). Such details in Book I demonstrate Williams' concern with connecting Paterson's events and American history with the poem's central themes.

The most significant American historical figure in the poem, who is alluded to in every book except Book V, is Alexander Hamilton, the founding father of industrial Paterson and American economics who is always portrayed negatively in Paterson. To Williams, Hamilton was, if not the immediate cause of Paterson's industrial turmoil and squalor, certainly a powerful influence on the growth of the city and the exploitation of Paterson's local resources. As Sankey points out:

> The growth of Paterson tests the program that Williams associates with Alexander Hamilton: to make the new country a commercial and manufacturing nation along European lines by encouraging local industry, repaying the debts incurred during the Revolution, and harnessing the country's natural resources. Hamilton's ambitious plans for the city of Paterson, though never fully implemented, determined the direction it was to take. For Williams the plans ignored the "local genius" and in trying to reproduce

> European civilization in this country thwarted the promise latent here. Paterson grew into a company town known for its labor troubles; the Passaic River became a "swillhole."
>
> (10)

Hamilton's influential economic ideas, according to Williams, helped to corrupt the foundation of Paterson and America's financial system.

In the middle of the 18th century, Hamilton "kept his counsel" over Paterson, a city consisting of a "heterogeneous population" (Paterson 10). Williams notes in Book II that Hamilton did not have faith in the people whom he called "a great beast":

> [Hamilton] never trusted the people, "a great beast," as he saw them and held Jefferson to be little better if not worse than any. . . [Hamilton] came out with vigor and cunning for "Assumption," assumption by the Federal Government of the national debt, and the granting to it of powers of taxation without which it could not raise the funds necessary for this purpose. A storm followed in which he found himself opposed by Madison and Jefferson.
>
> (67)

Williams writes that Hamilton not only wanted to shift financial power from the localities to the government through "Assumption," but also envisioned Paterson as an industrial and "Federal City" (70, 73-74). The Falls, rather than a wonder of nature, were to Hamilton a "show of . . . overwhelming power" which would feed the "groups of factories" (73). By becoming a "National Manufactory" (74), Paterson would produce wares for the entire country. For Williams, the details about Hamilton and Paterson's history in books I-IV are important windows on

America's history.

With his effect on the formation of Paterson's economy, Hamilton provides a foundation for the theme of economics in the poem. Hamilton's views of "Assumption" lead directly to the founding of the national bank, the Federal Reserve, which Williams mentions several times in the poem. Passages in Book II taken from letters and pamphlets written by Alfredo and Clara Studer criticize the Federal Reserve System as a "Legalized National Usury System" which accumulates an enormous debt based on interest being paid for by the American people (73-74, 273-274). These prose passages precede and follow poetry about America, early Americans, and money itself. References to the Federal Reserve, national banking and centralized financing, as opposed to local control over money, illustrate Hamilton's influence on Paterson and the nation in Books I and II. Ezra Pound's letter in Book V briefly mentions that U.S. Treasury reports indicate that America "had paid ten billion for gold that cd/ have been bought for SIX billion" (216), but the letter is not a significant contribution to the theme of American history in the poem. Williams denied the importance of the letter, but also, because Pound wrote the letter from St. Elizabeth's in old age and in a deteriorating mental state, the garbled and disjointed letter actually illustrates Williams' own lines about aging which precede the letter: "Sweat pours out: a trembling hunts/ me down. I grow paler/ than dry grass and lack little/ of dying" (215). Even the passage in Book V regarding the "age of shoddy" and the deterioration of factory production quality does not mention Hamilton or provide

examples from Paterson's history.

In Book III, the poet, in despair, faces the question of whether he still believes in "'the people,' the Democracy" (109). The poet confronts the hopelessness of his task, but instead of turning against "the people" as did Hamilton, the poet finds hope, the "radiant gist" (109), facing the prospect of death which becomes a "kindly brother to the poor" (109).

Book IV mentions the "Hamilton," the Paterson inn where Billy Sunday the "evangel" stays after trying "to 'break' the strike" (172). The building named after Hamilton is associated with the strike breakers who are trying to control the "great beast." The National Credit system, which Williams criticizes in Book IV, fails the people in that it does not "Take up the individual misfortune/ by buffering it into the locality" (181), but rather it favors the needs of institutions such as hospitals, for example, by permitting hospitals to charge the poor with "surgeon's fees/ and accessories at an advance over the/ market price for/ 'hospital income'" (181). Williams supported socialized medicine (Interviews 51-52), and in Paterson he criticizes the National Credit system primarily because it lost sight of specific needs of "the poor" (181) and focuses rather on issues such as financing ". . . THE BUILDING OF AIRPLANES . . ." (180). As discussed above, Hamilton also plays an essential role in Book VI. Hamilton is thus a central figure in books I-IV and Book VI who connects Paterson and America's history with the themes of disregard for natural resources, economics and renewal.

Hamilton's violent death in Book VI is a counterpoint to the Book VI fragment about Lucy, the mother of "13 children" (240), who is an image of renewal and rebirth. In Book V, the Virgin Mary is a similar image of renewal, but the counterpoint is not an image of Hamilton or Paterson's past, but rather the "Armed men,/ savagely armed men/ armed with pikes,/ halberds and swords" pictured in the same sixteenth century Brueghel painting with the Virgin Mary (223). Williams does compare the soldiers in the painting with "the more stupid/ German soldiers of the late war" (223) but there is no correlation in Book V between the World War II German soldiers and Paterson's or America's history.

Another example of how American history is central to the earlier books is in connection with the theme of Native Americans. The Tuscarora are a tribe "forced to leave their country" to join the Six Nations in Upper New York (12). These Native Americans are displaced by the settlement of Europeans and are thrown out of their native land.

Williams focuses on injustices inflicted on Native Americans in a passage in Book III where certain "Indians were accused of killing two or three pigs" (102-3). As the passage clarifies, Kieft's accusation of the Indians is unsubstantiated. Nevertheless, Kieft's soldiers brutally kill two of the Indians in front of "24 or 25 female" Indians. One Indian is stabbed repeatedly while dancing the "Kinte Kaye," the ceremonial death dance. The other is mutilated while doing the death dance, and then is decapitated while Director Kieft and his French "Councillor," a physician, sit nearby laughing at the spectacle (102-3). This scene, which

depicts the inhumanity of early Americans to their fellow man, is compounded by the Dutch digging up the corpse of the Indian priest and stealing the furs with which the priest is buried (102-3). A related detail emerges in Book IV as the coffin of Peter van Winkle, the dwarf who told George Washington in Book I that he was neither a Whig nor a Tory, opens and reveals Peter's tiny body. It is unclear how Peter dies, but his head is located in a separate box nearby (192). Like the innocent Indian in Book III, Peter the dwarf is decapitated, albeit possibly because his large head would not fit in the coffin. Williams condemns the mistreatment of Native Americans and is sympathetic with figures like the Tuscarora and the Indian priest who are considered outcasts.

In Book III, Williams admires the closeness and respect which the Native Americans feel towards the land and animals. Using William Nelson's History of the City of Paterson and the County of Passaic New Jersey (1901) as a source, Williams describes a Native American sacrificial ceremony in which participants represent "animals" and "vegetables," and "imitate the cock, the squirrel and other animals, and make all kinds of noises " (114-115, 282). The fire of the Native Americans, like the blaze which burns through the city of Paterson in 1902, is simultaneously a destructive force and a spiritual rekindling (Book III, Part 2). In this way, Williams symbolically connects the theme of Native Americans, and the Paterson conflagration of 1902, to the theme of renewal in Book III.

Also in Book III, Williams juxtaposes the burial of the "gigantic" Native American warrior, Poggatticutt, with the burial of Paterson beneath the flood of 1902 (129-32). After the burial of the warrior, the tribes mourn "For three days and three nights" which, by analogy to the story of Christ's burial and resurrection which is mentioned during Klaus' sermon in Book II, is a reference to the possible renewal of the American spirit. After the flood subsides, the poet writes, "How to begin to find a shape -- to begin to begin again" (140). Like the Paterson fire, both the flood and the Indian burial are endings, yet they lay the foundations for possible American renewal. In Book IV, Williams includes the "wigwam and the tomahawk, the Totowa tribe" as contributing to a part of Paterson's "colonial days" (193):

> Dominated by the Falls the surrounding country
> was a beautiful wilderness where mountain pink
> and wood violet throve: a place inhabited only
> by straggling trappers and wandering Indians.
>
> (192)

Williams presents the peaceful coexistence of trappers and Indians as an alternative to the ensuing violence which nearly wipes out local Indian tribes. In this way, Williams links Native Americans in the early books to the themes of destruction of indigenous resources, renewal and death. In the first four books, Williams presents Native Americans as a force for possible American renewal which is brutally rejected by early Americans. Book V, however, in spite of its numerous references to foreign artists and various cultures, does not include the theme of Native Americans in its exploration of the themes of art and renewal.

The mistreatment of Native Americans in books I-IV is particularly ironic given the strong Christian moral code of the European settlers and the Puritans which Williams describes in books I-IV. Just as Williams focuses on the details of Native Americans as a counterpoint to other themes in books I-IV, he also relates the theme of Christianity in books I-IV with historical details of America and Paterson.

In Book V, Williams presents many religious images, but primarily to illustrate his ideas about art, immortality and the beauty of women. America and Paterson are not the focus of his discussion of religion in Book V as they are in the previous books. For example, Williams includes Breughel's The Adoration of the Kings not as a comment on religion or America, but as Terence Diggory argues in his book-length study focused on the passage, as a representation of how Breughel succeeded in "dispassionately" (Paterson 225) being "representative of the world of things" (Diggory 10).

Similarly, the passage from Matthew, Chapter 1, verses 18-20 in Book V is not a commentary on American religion or society, but rather it is an example for Williams of how, even in a sacred text, "no woman is virtuous/ who does not give herself to her lover/ -- forthwith" (226). Book V presents religious images in order to elaborate on the themes of marriage, renewal and the immortality of art, not to comment on Paterson's history or of American society, as do books I-IV.

In the earlier books, Williams acknowledges the intrinsic connection of Christianity with the founding of early America, often from an ironic point of view.

For example, in Book II, the "Protestant! protesting" (65) immigrant preacher, Klaus Ehrens, protests the country's obsession with financial success and tells how the Lord instructed him to "Give up my money" (70). Klaus compares spiritual renewal with Christ's dying on the Cross and the relinquishing of money with Christ's resurrection (66, 72-3). The image of "scattering money to the winds" relates to Christ's moving the boulder from His tomb "with both hands" (72-3). In the middle of Klaus' sermon, and between two passages about Hamilton, are the lines "America the golden!/ with trick and money/ damned . . ." (68). Williams includes religion in Book II in part as a voice of possible American renewal ironically juxtaposed with the country's "damned" beginnings.

Religious details related to Paterson's and America's past are central in Paterson. The Presbyterian Reverend Cumming's wife, Sarah, slips into the Falls and dies in Book I. Reverend Cumming then "forced himself out of the hands of his protector, and ran with violence, in order to leap into the fatal flood" (14). The Falls destroy as a "flood" and, like the flood and the Native American sacrifice in Book III, symbolically renew the American spirit.

Book II's title is "Sunday in the Park," set on the Christian Sabbath day. Dean William McNulty of St. Joseph's Catholic Church bravely walks with William Dalzell, protecting Dalzell from the angry mob who wants to kill him for murdering someone who trespassed on his property (46). The Catholic Dean is a symbol of strength who maintains social order amidst chaos in nineteenth century American society.

The religious details in Book V illustrate both the theme of art's universal immortality, as depicted by the Breughel painting and the Unicorn Tapestries, and the theme of renewal, as depicted by the figures of Christ and the Virgin Mary. The religious imagery in the earlier books, however, relates to the history of Paterson and to the basic structure of American society. For example, in Book III, in spite of the quotation from Santayana's The Last Puritan which argues that a city is "a work of natural yet moral art, where the soul sets up her trophies of action and instruments of pleasure" (94), not even the church can withstand the destructive forces of nature. In biblical terms, the narrator warns of "Cyclone, fire/ and flood.So be it.Hell,New Jersey,it said/ on the letter" (97). The city, like a Hell, must be purged by the cleansing flames and the flood waters. Just as Noah survives the Biblical flood, a product of God's anger, "Noah Faitoute Paterson" introduces the flood of 1902 which destroys and purges Paterson. Victims of the flood are "Happy souls! whose devils lived so near" (133). Similarly, the fire raises a roof off a building and the observers say, "My God, did/ you ever see anything like that" (122). Mrs. Van Giesen, a suspected witch, joins the First Presbyterian Church" on Confession, Sept. 26, 1823" after her "miraculous deliverance" from the superstitious visitations of "Mrs. B" in the form of a black cat (133-134). In this poem's version of history, Mrs. Van Giesen's religious conversion is in part an ironic example of how the imagination itself can affect social change. Similarly, the poet writes of the Falls' language, "Not until I have made of it a replica/ will my sins be forgiven" (145).

In this sense, just as a suspected witch can be converted through the imagination, so can the poet's sins be forgiven through the poem which is both an act of the imagination and a confession (Paterson Preface 2).

Williams presents further religious imagery relating to America in Book IV which contrasts with the religious imagery in Book V. For example, the narrator thinks of a loved one "as in Heaven/ She made me believe in/ it . a little" (188). This narrative voice, like Williams himself, is not a firm believer in a Christian afterlife. Williams did not often speak of an afterlife, primarily because of "the damned rot spoken of it in the pulpit and among other devotional writers" (Mariani, New World 688). In Book V, the Unicorn Tapestries represent the story of Christ's death and resurrection, not in an ironic sense, but as an analogy to a real victory over death with the immortality of art. Life after death is a very real concept for Williams in Book V. In Book IV, the religious imagery is ironic. Billy Sunday "the evangel," by breaking the Paterson strike, much like Dean McNulty in Book II, attempts to prevent mass violence and restore order in the city:

> Come up Sister and be
> saved (splitting the atom of
> bitterness)! And Billy Sunday evangel
> and ex-rightfielder sets himself
> to take one off the wall .
>
> He's on
> the table now! Both feet, singing
> (a foot song) his feet canonized .
>
> (172)

By calling striking workers "to God," and staying at the "*Hamilton*" inn (172), Billy attempts to curb the anger and bitterness of the people, prevent violence, and restore American social order. Ironically, Williams notes Billy's dance "as paid for/ by the United States Factory Owners' Ass'n" (172). Billy's religious fervor is in part fueled by the financial interests of the factories, and Billy Sunday is paid to split "the atom of/ bitterness" which is the strike.

Similarly, Madame Curie's discovery is juxtaposed ironically in the poem with religious imagery, but her discovery, according to Williams, indirectly leads to the discovery of splitting a literal atom. Although Curie is not an American, Williams links her to the 1943 Hollywood dramatization of her story. Williams thus reveals America's fascination with the Curie story and "the movie queen" (171, 288). Curie finds a "dissonance/ in the valence of Uranium" (175) and her scientific discovery precedes religious imagery:

> But she is pregnant!
>
> Poor Joseph,
> the Italians say.
>
> Glory to God in the highest
> and on earth, peace, goodwill to
> men!
>
> Believe it or not.
>
> (175)

Curie's discovery, which Williams relates in the poem to the development of a bomb that annihilates thousands of human lives, is offset by the image of Mary,

the wife of "Poor Joseph," the mother of a God who brought "peace" and "goodwill/ to men." The irony in the Curie passage, like Klaus' sermon in Book II, suggests that there is an inherent contradiction between the Christian morals at the core of America's foundation and the country's immoral fascinations and often destructive inclinations.

Unlike Book V, religious details in the first four books, with irony and metaphor, provides "historically grounded" moral alternatives to the mistakes of the past. Even though Bernstein claims that the entire poem lacks "historically grounded alternatives," Williams seeks to guide the future direction of America in part by revealing the importance of having actions be more consistent with the moral code. It is only Book V that does not provide "historically grounded alternatives," and except for the fact that Ginsberg was a Paterson resident, the tradition of art itself, which is central to Book V, is disassociated from the history of Paterson and America. Williams' renewal for America is founded in part on morality, and it is Williams' aim in the first four books that an increased awareness of the inconsistency between the country's moral core and its social and economic practices may result in future renewal. But Williams does not have this aim in Book V.

Bernstein is partially correct in observing that "it is equally obvious that the poet has finally abandoned [in Book V] any attempt to approach the citizens and life of Paterson, New Jersey" (Bernstein 214). For example, the poem's central city appears only three times in Book V. In fact, it is only mentioned

briefly or in general terms, not as a focused and detailed microcosm of America. In Book V, Part 1, Williams mentions that he is "reawakening the world/ of Paterson" (205) but the poetry in Part 1 does not mention the city again. Paterson, the poet, returns in Part 1 "from the air/ above the low range of its hills/ across the river/ on a rock ridge/ ...to the old scenes/ to witness..." (207), to be an observer. Even more distant are the events in Sorrentino's passage about the "whores grasping for your genitals" which do not occur in Paterson or even in America, but in Nuevo Loredo, a Mexican border town (Mariani, New World 706; Paterson 212, 299).

Similarly, the "flat bellied" woman who intrigues the poet in Part 2 walks only briefly through the streets of Paterson. The poet tries to chase her down, but she and the city disappear quickly and the poet is left with his "thousand questions" (216-218). Furthermore, the passage from Mezz Mezzrow's Really the Blues is not a discussion of the Paterson music scene nor is it a discussion of America. It is a passage about how African-American music, the most "honest music in America," exemplifies the immortality of art and can be an inspiration to other artists (219). The Mike Wallace interview two pages later, likewise, although possibly hinting at the myopia of American media, is not a discussion of Paterson or of American history but rather of art and the meaning of poetry (221-222). Neither the city's nor America's history is mentioned once in the final part of Book V. In Book V, these themes do not make the same connections, as do the previous books and Book VI, with either the history of Paterson or with the

American background for the poem.

By juxtaposing historical details in books I-IV and the Book VI fragments with other important themes, Williams provides the specific historical analysis of Paterson and America which Bernstein charges is lacking in the poem. Bernstein claims that there is no historical analysis in the poem, only a "fixed unchanging opposition between natural beauty . . . and economic-sexual desires" (Bernstein 209-210). This may be true of Book V because of its tendency to balance images of chaos with redemption and renewal, but in the first four books and in the fragments of Book VI, Williams expands on the static oppositions, and goes beyond merely "lamenting the tragedy" of history, as Bernstein claims. In fact, throughout his discussion of Paterson and America in books I-IV and the Book VI fragments, Williams suggests, either directly or indirectly, social and economic changes such as local self-subsistence and control of purchasing power, dissolution of federal lending power, socialized medicine, protection of natural resources, and recognition of racial equality and civil rights. With the exception of Book V, implicit in many of the poem's historical details are specific "historically grounded alternatives" to the actual problems at the core of Paterson's history. A detailed presentation of Williams' solutions or alternatives for the mistakes of history is beyond the immediate scope of the poem. A function of books I-IV and the fragments of Book VI is not, as Bernstein implies, to solve the errors of history, but rather to unravel the poet's "knowable world" and thereby illustrate some of the forces at work in

Paterson's and America's development.

After Book V's publication, Williams did have some concerns about the substance of the fifth Book. In a March 1959 letter to Cid Corman, Williams describes Book V as a partial failure and writes, "I had to say what I wanted but the result is [that] the text turned out rather forbidding" and that the poem contains "defects" which readers "justifiably" will not accept (Mariani, New World 720). As Bernstein notes, Williams writes Corman again a year later, in March 1960, expressing his further doubts about Book V (215). Williams' concerns about Book V justifies critics such as Breslin, who notes that Book V calls into question "the nature and even the existence of the poem's unity" (205).

The primary difference between Book V and the first four books and the Book VI fragments is that Book V marginalizes the theme of Paterson's and America's history. Book V does not follow Williams' mid-to-late 1950's claim to Thirlwall that the poem had to deal "with particular events and a particular place," a claim which holds true for books I-IV and the Book VI fragments (Interviews 72). For this reason, Book V does not completely succeed, as Williams had hoped, in maintaining "a unity directly continuous" (Paterson xiv) with the first four books. Furthermore, although Book V develops the new themes of old age and the imagination's immortality, which are more central to his 1950's poems than to Paterson, Book V is not a coda for it develops the earlier themes of language and renewal. The poem Paterson represents the "whole knowable world" about its author, and because Book V deeply explores

the twilight of this "knowable world," Book V is an essential yet thematically compromised contribution to Williams' opus.

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