

19.II.70 William Carlos Williams: Patterson (& Brown: Love's Body)

Two paragraphs after the selection from Duncan, "2 Chap from H.D." (quoted last week), Duncan connects this to Patterson.

Williams uses discovery of radium as example of division & analysis to achieve energy (as opposed to dispersal). (Cf. H. Adams: radium as one of the scientific changes he had to cope with.) Williams' method is itself one of discovery & fusion. (See Mottram, "The Making of Patterson", in Stand, vol. 7 no. 3). In looking at P., Bk. iv, bear in mind (1) transformation of the ground, (2) the alchemic "work", (3) the combination of the self & experimental action, & (4) myth of Psyche & Eros.

Patterson, Book IV, juxtaposes divorce, division, & analysis with composition, fission, & integrity. The action moves between the human (Eros) & the atomic (chemical).

Section one: abortive sexual encounter related to failure of silk mills in Patterson; separation of poor, criminal, superannuated, & insane, as examples of alienation & division. Poet himself involved in carelessness, which he fuses into drunkenness, careless sexuality, & affair between lesbian & homosexual.

Criticism of "love by numbers". (See John Retchie, Numbers)

Perversion of value (as virginity). Suicide's body turning up at Hell Gate area; relates to Dante, Voi ch'entrare. ..

Also a tunnel under insane. (p. 194) Body suffers "sea change", but far from Prospero. Poet questions how much of the foulness should go into his poem (spreads the corruption). Image of confident power is the business buildings (p. 195). Undifferentiated life of city labour & transportation as part of general condition of disruption

Section two: begins with visit of poet & teen-age son to lecture on atomic fission in a room above the hospital. Father's anger at world son will live in; Norman Douglas: "The best thing a man can do for his son, when he is born, is to die" (p.201) Surpasses son "only in experience, that drug" (202)

Valences: an important word in this section. Active force; the power of certain elements to combine with or displace atoms. (atomicity) Not related to value (though Duncan or Olson would search this out in their origins)

The room is a solarium; light disperses into night sky, "rivalling night's queen" (goddess of destruction & creation). When Williams presents Madame Curie, he has background of the lecture & its light dispersal; her action of fission & diffusion becomes part of great creative action. (For rest of notes on this section see text)

Williams on Ginsberg, Black Mountain Review no. 7, 1952: "This young Jewish boy, already not so young any more, has recognized something that has escaped most of the modern age. He has found that man is lost in the world of his own head, & that the rhythms of the past have become like an old field, long left unploughed & fallen into disuse. In fact, they are excavating there for a new industrial plant. There the new inferno will soon be under construction. Here the terror of the scene has been laid bare in subtle measures. The pages are warm with it.

The scene they invoke is terrifying, more so than Dante's pages. The poem is not suspect; the craft is flawless."

One of the poems in Empty Mirror is called Patterson; dates from 1949, named after town, not Williams' poem. It is a preliminary runthrough for "Howl!" (1956). Partly derived from Hart Crane, "The Bridge" (Tunnel section- Poe straphanging! p. 56) Ginsberg, Crane, Williams have used NYC image of corruption, corrosion. (Williams wrote short poem, "Paterson"; appeared in Dial 1926. CEP, p. 233; a reply to "Waste Land")

Important thing about Howl (which Williams recognized) is how much of the external & particularly internal disaster Ginsberg understands & puts down: poem is a definition of madness. In Reichian terms, how the mad external environment maddens you.

Milton: bible materials are used to create epic of man's descent into himself.

Relate Patterson, p. 210; Buckminster Fuller Reader, Plate 9; Henry Adams, acceleration curve. Discovery based on that relationship between the personal life & the impersonal prediction. Fate of Adams' sister: "catastrophe as law of change"; Fuller's daughter's death (pp.29-30, Reader)--recognizes "responsibility" (Pound). See Reader, p. 55, 92. A line from H. Adams' warning in 1906 to Fuller's confidence in "comprehensive anticipatory design science" (Reader, p. 92). Adams' orientation is historical-political; he is not sure where to place the scientific events which Fuller deals with so confidently. Remember than H's despair was partially based on Brooks' Law of Decay of Civilizations. (Chap. 22, "Chicago", Education: "The instability was greater than (Brooks) calculated; the speed of acceleration passed bounds. Among other general rules he laid down the paradox that, in the social disequilibrium between capital & labour, the logical outcome was not collectivism, but anarchism." p. 339)

Williams: Besides synthesis of Mendelief & fission-fusion of Curies, there are forms of spurious destruction & birth syntheses (e.g., historical empires, & the historicist determinism that writes about them.)

The movement of today's lecture: From Duncan, to Patterson IV, to Ginsberg, Wihita . . ., to Henry & Brooks Adams, & back to Duncan: "If the work has to do with Eros (& for the poet the poem is a return to the work in the charged sense that we will pursue here) the would-be poet stands like Psyche in the dark, taken up in a marriage with a genius, possessed by a spirit outside the ken of those about him. That there be gold, or wonder, or the beloved in such a blind matter no one else can believe. So William Carlos Williams in Paterson IV sees the work of poetry in the chemistry where the Curies work with the pitchblend. Knowledge the contaminant, Williams writes, luminous is the dark. And so Madame Curie works. It haunts Williams that it is a woman, for she is the poet, but also here too she is Psyche: "and so with coarsened hands she stirs & love, bitterly contesting, waits that the mind shall declare itself not alone in dreams." (p.209) Hints of the old story, letters (?) of Psyche & Eros, inform the scene."

The gist of what follows in Duncan's essay is this: The myth of Psyche is that she was to inherit the wealth of the palace of Eros, provided she sought him in the dark. The palace represents all the wealth, culture & the world's plentitude together. So Psyche's search is "the creative work of union in knowledge & experience, in order to reach a new Eros." Under love, we are subject to daemonic powers; this is where one links to a "primal authority" (the only place where we may use the word authority (?) Mottram.)

Analysis: Eros is also, in Egyptian mythology, Osiris, & in Roman, Lucifer (as the Gnostics saw him: one who controls light in darkness). Like the devil (in Love's Body) he is the image of creative life. (This, as Blake understood, is why he is so complex in Milton). He is the image of our creative life rendered base, bitter, & treacherous through repression & denial. Eros--Lucifer--Satan: in the Christian tradition, he becomes someone you must put down. Garden of Eden myth is translated from its origins (snake a symbol of life, of the earth's power). Eros/Lucifer/Osiris has to do with where we turn for vitality, for cosmic energy. Duncan is not referring to Reich or Brown here, but let us make the connection:

B Norman O. Brown, Love's Body, 1966, VIII, "Boundary" Brown is here in the middle of a complex argument involving separation & community (as in Williams). Originally in old myths (cf. Pound & Olson, last week's notes) "everything was one body". And the body fits the structure of the cosmos. Brown quotes Emerson's Nature (see also Coleridge, "all one life". C. tried to define continuous energy structure between human & universe, "the infinite I Am", Biographia Literaria.) We are concerned with romantic recovery of unity of body & environment. Boundary between self & what is beyond must be destroyed. It is "an artificial construction, A boundary line based on love & hate recorded the self's relation to the external world." "The fall" is separation into "mine" & "thine", "self" & "property". The fall is in fact the origin image of property; if you're separated from it, you might want to own it. Cain: "ownership was the originator of the earthly city" (St. Augustine, De Civitate Dei, Chap. 15) The crucial aspect of property isn't nature, natural produce, factories, or manufactured products, but persons. Free persons are those who own their own persons.

Therefore ego & soul are historic semantic devices to project & maintain this alienation. Brown wishes to criticize what Freud calls "instinctual ambivalence": i.e., that good-bad, love-hatred, Eros-Thanatos are fixed & ~~separated~~ separate. Brown quotes the major philosopher of property, whose beliefs are built into the American Constitution, Locke: "By property, I must be understood here as in other places ^{to mean} that property which men have in their persons as well as goods." (2 Treatises on Civil Government) Under this corrupt system, the defense of personal liberty becomes identical with the defense of property. One source of Marx's theory of wage-slavery is the enforced sale of the propertyless proletariat's labour.

Brown: "This dilemma is escaped only by those willing to discard personality." Economics-psychology-physics: "The dualism of self & external world is in fact not a dualism at all, but a continual process of reciprocal exchange. A self is continually made into many persons. Under Freud's analysis the self is continually repressed and the ego continually split. The boundary between the self & the external world is the model for the boundary between the ego & the id. (For rest of Brown notes, see Love's Body, p.148 ff.

All these writers trying to portray the complexity of the creative act: i.e., putting things together to make a synthesis. Duncan: "creation of the new Eros": Psyche goes into the palace of earth, art, social culture, in darkness. The product is a new Eros, a new kind of light, the creative act. The key passage is on p. 155: "The human body is an energy system . . ." The gist of Paterson, Book IV.