

A Walk in the Park: Paterson as Flâneur and Nature Walker

Julia Daniel

Loyola University Chicago

Book II of William Carlos Williams's *Paterson* is characterized by an emphasis on walking that, at times, verges on the comedic. Huffing after his hike up the footpath to Garret Mountain Park, Paterson interrupts his own strolling meditations with a chunk of clinical prose describing the action of walking: "The body is tilted slightly forward from the basic standing position and the weight is thrown on the ball of the foot, while the other thigh is lifted and the leg and opposite arm are swung forward" (*Paterson* 45). As Benjamin Sankey notes in his companion to *Paterson*, this abrupt insertion "insist[s] that this scene is literally a man walking before it is anything else" (74). If this passage amounts to insistence, the reader is left to ask: why? Why are we constantly reminded that Paterson is *walking* through the park? The word "Walking" is employed as a transition phrase throughout *Sunday in the Park*, each time graphically set apart and capitalized. Beyond emphasizing embodiment, this attention to walking raises the specter of other strolling literally figures. Specifically, in the person of Paterson, Williams achieves the conflation of two iconic walking types: the nature walker and the flâneur. In one sense, Paterson represents the traditional nature walker, as his stroll leads him to witness a transcendent flight of grasshoppers and a vision from the mountaintop. However, that vision is not of sublime wilderness, but of the city below. In this other sense, the natural zone of the park is simultaneously an urban zone, as Paterson the flâneur catches glimpses of trysts, dancing and drinking bouts that the working-class city population enjoys during their Sunday in the park. Not only is Paterson a hybrid walking figure, but he becomes one by virtue of his setting: Garret

Mountain Park. This planned mountain-top public park is both elemental and architectural, wild and civilized at once. Paterson's walk in the park therefore not only links two seemingly antithetical literary traditions, one organic and the other metropolitan, but also demonstrates the fundamental comingling of natural and human environments in the modern American landscape. What follows is a brief overview of both the flâneur and the nature walker, coupled with a short history of American landscape architecture and some of the unique features of Garret Mountain Park. This background then facilitates a reading of part one of Book II that interrogates the relationship between nature and the city in both Paterson the walker and his park surroundings.¹

The flâneur, a strolling urban observer, first walked the streets of nineteenth century Paris and was later made famous (or infamous) by Walter Benjamin's reading of Charles Baudelaire (Tester 1).² As is also true of the nature walker, the flâneur is a genus that admits of a wide variety of species, but a few generalizations can be made of flânerie's literary manifestations. By his very title, the flâneur is a stroller. The idea of a stroll stands in contrast with a goal-oriented walk: the flâneur wanders through urban haunts, rather than marching off to the grocery. Just as Paris and London experienced urban booms toward the end of the nineteenth century, so too did the United States witness a massive spike in city populations following the close of the frontier in 1890.³ The city arises as a zone of modernity, the constantly expanding locus of human

¹ Critics like Joel Connarroe have suggested a wide variety of other literary sources for *Paterson* that are similarly invested in the activity of walking or journeying, as well as with landscape: "The pilgrimage or quest motif, for example, relates it to *The Canterbury Tales*, to *Endymion* (Williams' first long poem was imitation Keats), and to Shelley's *Alastor*. In its handling of the awakening sensibility of the poet and treatment of landscape as 'a kind of emotional topography' it claims kinship with Wordsworth's *The Prelude*" (15). The present analysis is not an argument against any of these sources, but is rather a contribution to the complex constellation of influences that shape Williams's presentation of Paterson as walker.

² The following account of the flâneur is indebted to Keith Tester's Introduction to *The Flâneur*.

³ 1890 serves as a rough date for the close of the American frontier. It was in this year that the census bureau printed their first map of the nation without a frontier boundary line, as population density in the West increased. Between

activity, full of both promise and danger at once. Witness and voyeur to the urban scene that forms his natural habitat, the flâneur is a creature both of the crowd and apart from it. His detached intimacy with the crowd affords the flâneur special vantage points for observation within the city.⁴ In observing these urban spectacles, the flâneur's artistic temperament allows him to unearth special meaning or beauty from what he sees. Sometimes this is achieved through a kind of ecstatic union with the crowd, while at others it arises by meditating on a particular vision or fleeting glimpse of a city vignette.

Baudelaire refers to the flâneur as the botanist of the sidewalk and this figure shares significant similarities with another kind of strolling botanist, the nature walker.⁵ Like the flâneur, the nature walker engages in a journey that is less about achieving a specific goal and is more about participating in his landscape.⁶ Whereas the flâneur is an animal of the crowd, the nature walker is typically a solitary figure wandering through an emphatically anti-urban environment. However, like the flâneur, the nature walker also embodies an attached-detached

1800 and 1900, the proportion of the American population living in cities skyrocketed from three to forty percent (Smith xv).

⁴ I am here emphasizing acts of seeing, but this is not to say that the flâneur is limited to only one of his senses (nor is the nature walker). While sight and spectacle play a prominent role in flânerie, critics have investigated the function of touching, tasting and hearing as well. (See David Frisby's "The flâneur in social theory," Barry Smart's "Digesting the modern diet: Gastro-porn, fast food and panic eating," and Bruce Mazlish's "The flâneur: from spectator to representation" respectively.) The role of hearing in flânerie may provide even more points of contact with *Paterson*, as "the command to "Listen!" emerges later on in Book II.

⁵ The following account of the nature walker is taken from Scott Slovic's "Nature Writing and Environmental Psychology." Slovic argues that the fundamental narrative of the nature walker emphasizes human acts of epiphany and cognition more than it foregrounds the physical environment. Nature is the occasion that initiates an essentially artistic process of understanding and realization.

⁶ Unlike the flâneur, the nature walker is admittedly a broader conceit. I am here re-appropriating Slovic's usage of the term "nature writer." His analysis argues that the act of writing or verbal articulation is part of the nature walker's act of cognition and synthesis: "[P]utting things into language helps people see better; and this can happen either at the moment of confrontation or in retrospect while sitting at a desk hours later" (355). In the pieces Slovic investigates, the narrator is most often identifiable with the writer in a manner that cannot be easily mapped on to *Paterson*, and so I have altered the designation.

dynamic, at times enjoying sympathetic intimacy with his organic surroundings, and then at others experiencing the shock of nature's alterity and radical distance from the human.⁷ As a kind of voyeur of the wilderness, his unique knowledge of and sympathy with his environment affords him a privileged point of view. This special perspective can offer him an experience of transcendence, at times terrifying and at others uplifting, as his sensitive temperament allows him to appreciate the particular beauty or even horror of the scene.⁸

As these brief overviews suggest, the flâneur and the nature walker share a similar story: a sensitive speaker, both intimately a part of and yet apart from his surroundings, goes on a stroll and witnesses a vision that opens up into a kind of revelation. The fundamental difference between these two walking figures is their environment, zones so apparently opposed that one can hardly imagine the nature walker stumbling upon the flâneur, or vice versa. However, in Williams's modern American landscape, it grew increasingly difficult to disentangle natural and urban environments, particularly in the space of the public park. As more people moved into the city and as urban parks proliferated during the first half of the twentieth century, the American experience of nature became increasingly attached to these highly planned zones. As with city planning in general, landscape architecture hoped to produce both health and democratic spirit in park-goers by creating shared areas where classes would mingle in a wholesome environment. Parks also provided recreation spaces for working classes that could not afford expensive trips to the country or seaside. The new discipline's title, "landscape architecture," emphasized the

⁷ "Most nature walkers, from Thoreau to the present, walk a fine line (or, more accurately, *vacillate*) between rhapsody and detachment" (Slovic 353). Slovic refers to this mode of vacillation as a "dialectical tension between correspondence and otherness," and cites examples from Henry David Thoreau, Annie Dillard, and Edward Abbey. As Slovic notes, the degree of vacillation can vary from writer to writer.

⁸ See William Cronan's "The Trouble with Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," for a brief history of the sublime in American culture. Cronan argues that the transcendental experience of awe and horror is eventually replaced by a more domesticated experience of beauty in nature.

artificiality of such apparently natural locations: they are spaces “scaped” according to particular artistic principles.⁹ What at first blush seems a natural expanse is, in fact, an architectural creation crafted for weary urbanites, meant to mask the city while remaining fundamentally a part of it. However, as we will see in *Paterson*, the ideals of early landscape architects rarely materialized in these spaces. Rather than providing a classless pastoral idyll, public parks were often infected by the woes of city life.

Would a speaker with a poetic temperament, wandering through an American park, observing masses of trees and people, be a flâneur or a nature walker? In Book II of *Paterson*, Williams answers this question with an emphatic “Yes.” In the walking person of *Paterson*, Williams combines the flâneur and the nature walker in a manner that expresses both dismay at the unhealthy relationship between city and nature, which Williams calls a state of divorce, and hope in the possibility of a right relationship between the two, a balanced and passionate marriage. Williams does so by taking us on a Sunday stroll through Garret Mountain Park, a site that is representative of wider trends in American parks while also embodying a unique local history. When *Paterson* “starts, possessive, through the trees” (44), his sense of possession connects to the larger metaphor of marriage between city and mountain, man and nature. There is

⁹ In 1899, park designer Frederick Law Olmsted helped found the American Society of Landscape Architects, the first professional organization for landscape architecture in North America. In taking on the career of a landscape architect, Olmsted was simultaneously creating profession into which he entered. The title “landscape architect” that Olmsted and his partner Calvert Vaux agreed upon arose from the necessity of distinguishing themselves from gardeners or botanical collectors. Besides lending an air of gravitas to their undertakings (over and against that of the humble gardener), this emphasis on design and architecture allowed Olmsted and Vaux to position themselves as both theorists and artisans, as well as positioning their parks as architectural spaces and art objects. For more on Olmsted and the rise of landscape architecture, see Beveridge and Rouchelleau’s *Frederick Law Olmsted: Designing the American Landscape*.

also, however, a very basic way in which Paterson literally possesses the park: Garret Mountain Reserve became public property in 1929, thus transferring from private ownership to the people of Paterson. It is their, and, symbolically, his park. In 1926, Passaic County formed a parks commission that hired the prestigious Olmsted firm to design this public space which was officially opened on July 4th, 1929.¹⁰ Frederick Law Olmsted, father of American landscape architecture, is perhaps best known for his work on Central Park, though the work of his prolific firm is widespread.¹¹ Olmsted's work on residential communities and public parks was born out of an excitement over the potential of urbanization. He believed that the high density of these environments would place health and education resources within easy reach of the masses and that proper landscape architecture would integrate the best of these urban conveniences with the wholesomeness of natural environments (Beveridge and Rocheleau 43). In order to simulate those natural environments, Olmsted designed spaces that deliberately erased his own creative intervention by mimicking "natural" landscapes, eschewing the kinds of botanical displays and flowerbeds found in English parks in favor of wide expanses of "greensward" and open vistas. Garret Mountain Park presented an unusual obstacle for the firm, in that this particular landscape was already punctuated by human structures that required integration with the wider design.¹²

As Williams emphasizes throughout Book II, it is impossible to disentangle the natural history of this glacial mountain from the cultural history of the region, including the less than

¹⁰ My thanks to Mr. Edward Smyk, official historian of Passaic County, for this information about Garret Mountain Reserve.

¹¹ Park historian Carol Nicholson estimates that Olmsted's firm designed over one-hundred public parks, two-hundred private estates, fifty residential communities, and forty college campuses, not including his famous preservation work on Yosemite National Park (336).

¹² Before the park became public land, it had a variety of owners, including the affluent silk merchant Catholina Lambert, who constructed Lambert Castle in 1893. The park still includes this structure (Connarroe 99).

laudable effects of industrialization. In its physical arrangement, the park design memorializes moments of that industrial past while also embodying a particular Olmstedian design of nature, one that simulates the appearance of untouched wilderness while also providing shared public leisure spaces for local urbanites. This is ground that critics must tread carefully. While the elemental force of the location remains a prominent feature throughout Book II, we cannot simply equate the illusion of untouched nature with Nature itself in this carefully planned and maintained architectural space made specifically for the city-dwellers below.¹³

What follows here is a stroll through part one of *Sunday in the Park*, the section in which walking is most prominent, and an analysis of some representative scenes. Book II begins with a turn to the outside world: “Outside / outside myself / there is a world, / he rumbled, subject to my incursions” (43). By casting both his musings and his walk as a series of “incursions,” Paterson initially casts his engagement with the park as a kind of potential invasion or attack (“Incursion”). Paterson’s walk through the park, and the tread of the crowd at large, vacillates between a loving caress of the mountain’s body (“[. . .] she finds what peace there is [. . .] / stroked / by their clambering feet”) and a kind of thoughtless assault (“scratched by their / boot-nails more than the glacier”) (54; 56). The act of walking in itself can be an instance of either union or divorce, an incursion or an embrace. The basic kinetics of both the flâneur and the

¹³ Critical analyses of Book II at times have difficulty negotiating this relationship. For example, Roger Gilbert rightly notes that “the park is not a true wilderness but an urbanized parcel of ‘nature,’” but goes on to say that it is “contaminated” by that urban modern culture (128). In this construction, the park is contaminated just by being the thing that it is. In contrast, Walter Scott Peterson emphasizes the importance of human activity over and against an interest in the environment: “More important, Paterson also sees the human beings who surround him” (47). In one critical formulation, human presence infects landscape: in another, landscape is simply a backdrop for human activity. Neither reading is wrong in its content, but both fail in overemphasizing one aspect of the human-nature relationship. It is the quality and dynamism of that relationship that is Williams’s focus in Book II.

nature walker are therefore morally ambiguous from the start: the bare fact of walking in the park is no guarantee of right relationship with one's surroundings.¹⁴

Paterson then “goes by the footpath to the cliff (counting: / the proof) / himself among the others” (43-44). This elliptical insertion cuts two ways. The lines may be read as a nature walker ascending by a footpath, counting his own steps as a kind of quantitative proof of his nature hike, then realizing himself part of a crowd. Alternately, they may describe a flâneur counting himself as a member of the crowd, a group membership that proves his sympathy with the urban masses and his role as a poet. Paterson maintains a connection to this crowd while then distancing himself in the next lines: “treads there the same stones / on which their feet slip as they climb” (44). Unlike the clumsy mass, the flâneur is a sure-footed poet. However, that reliable step is not on the pavement of the city, but on the stones of the mountain, thus likening the urbane detachment of the flâneur with the tread of the ascending nature walker. Stanley Koehler also notes the careful step of the poet in this section, contrasting it with that of the crowd: “[T]he difference between the poet's response to the environment and that of the crowd is spelled out by their actions; the inconsequential scampering, scattering, charging, loitering, and general filtering . . . in contrast to the situation of the speaker” (65-66). However, the difference here, to argue a fine point with Koehler, is not found in actions. Indeed, Paterson and the crowd are performing the same action: loitering, strolling, filtering. What, in fact, is the speaker there to do? There is no clear object to his walk, other than amassing the observations this leisurely stroll affords him. He in fact explicitly states the pleasant purposelessness of his walk later in part one: “Mount.

¹⁴ Sankey adds an emphasis on the role of gender in negotiating the relationship between person and place: “In one set of meanings, the woman is the American wilderness, mauled and raped by invaders from Europe, as well as the ‘ravished Park,’ invaded and abused on Sundays by picnickers from the city. In other terms, she is ‘reality’ (contemporary reality—the back streets) offering herself as wife to the reluctant poet” (12). Here, Sankey comes very close to articulating a similar thesis in the inverse: if Paterson is both nature walker and flâneur, then his wife is both wilderness and city, park and back streets.

Why not?" (52). It is the artistic remove from the crowd, the sensibility rather than the action, that characterizes Paterson as a previously unknown animal: the mountaintop flâneur.

The first sights and sounds on this park ascent are those of the city crowd "laughing, calling to each other," and their sturdy, working-class limbs: "ugly legs of young girls, / pistons too powerful for delicacy! / the men's arms, red, used to heat and cold" (44). These bodies, raw from life in the city and likened to its industrial materials, morph into a fluid mass that Williams likens to the waterfall: "--over-riding / the risks: / pouring down!" (44). As the city crowd becomes, for a brief, transcendent moment, like the Passaic Falls, the viewpoint of the flâneur merges with that of the nature walker beholding an overwhelming natural phenomenon. The ability of the crowd to become like their habitat hints at the possibility of right relationship between person and place, or a kind of marriage between civilization and nature.

Yet this is only a momentary glimpse of such a possibility, as Paterson then "looks back (beautiful but expensive!) to / the pearl-grey towers! Re-turns / and starts, possessive, through the trees" (44). The use of punctuation adds to the complexity Williams embeds in this passage. The city is expensive not only monetarily, but also in the cost of human labor, suffering, and environmental harm. The two exclamation points stand in uncomfortable contrast: the one following "expensive" seems to undercut the beauty of the costly scene while the punctuation following "pearl-grey towers" recaptures the sudden apprehension of their loveliness. In the same breath, the mountaintop park is an idyllic space apart from the mechanized ugliness of the urban world, in the tradition of the nature walker, while it also provides the vantage point from which one can appreciate the unique beauty of that same urban habitat, in the tradition of the flâneur. Paterson then "Re-turns" from this view as he turns back to the trees of the park. He does not, however, "return," but rather turns again. Like the pastoral idyl, the park is not a final,

stable place of dwelling, a home one can return to. It is rather a zone of excursion, a location an urban population can turn to again, every Sunday, for momentary refreshment, before returning to the city.¹⁵ By spinning our speaker around, Williams muddies grounds of origin: while the mountain seems to provide a natural state that urban civilization can return to, the city below is the actual place of return, and Paterson will descend back to it in Book III. With the small flourish of a hyphen, Williams undercuts a simple return-to-nature solution for urban ills.

In turning back to the park, Paterson begins his walk in earnest. “Walking” serves as both the binding that holds part one together and a transitional break between each distinct episode. In moving on from site to site (and sight to sight), Paterson keeps the poem moving. The walk allows this montage to remain a whole of unique parts. The first use of “Walking—” occurs around forty lines into the poem and precedes a description of tree clusters and their root systems. This passage condenses the standard conventions of the nature walk: during his stroll, the walker happens upon a natural phenomenon that leads to profound meditation or an experience of transcendence. Here, sand-pine, cedars and sumac present “—roots, for the most part, writhing / upon the surface,” leading Paterson to ruminate: “(so close are we to ruin every day!)” (45). The exposed roots reveal a tenuous relationship between struggling plants and stripped, dry soil that, when taken with Paterson’s exclamation, symbolizes a variety of nearly ruined relationships: the people’s inability to root themselves firmly in their local surroundings,

¹⁵ Ann Mickelson has argued that Williams draws upon and revises the pastoral mode through his focus on excrement, dirt and impurity. She focuses primarily on Book IV, arguing that it culminates in “a pastoral interlude that subtly redefines the parameters of the poetic subject and the representative American self” (603). While Mickelson’s interest in impurity is tied to the depiction of marginalized or “dirty” members of Paterson (and America by extension), impurity can also be read onto the landscape itself. Instead of presenting untouched wilderness, often imagined as a virginal female body, Williams here describes a landscape that is never completely disentangled from a history of human usage. In Book II, it is the pastoral landscape, rather than the pastoral speaker, that is “contaminated” in a way that Williams can, at times, celebrate. For more on Williams and the pastoral, see Mickelson’s “‘The Truth about Us’: Pastoral, Pragmatism, and *Paterson*.”

or a thin cultural soil that prevents Americans from flourishing. The push towards the symbolic also makes of the trees a kind of human community: the cedars are “man-high,” and the thickets “gather about groups” of pine, like members of a crowd. The vision of a natural habitat here bleeds into a vision of human culture, just as the vision of the masses blurred into a vision of the Falls in the lines above.

The second use of “Walking—” follows this passage, serving as a transition into the textbook definition of walking, complete with a reference to an unavailable figure: “the leg and opposite arm are swung forward (fig. 6B)” (45). While the first usage of “Walking—” prepared us for its implementation as a linking phrase between episodes, here it functions like an encyclopedia entry, pointing us to both the usage of the word and the mechanics of the action. The discomfort of referencing an unprinted illustration captures the oddity of Paterson himself as a walker: while the actual kinetic physicality of walking is here emphasized, sinews and all, the walker is a speaker both embodied and yet disembodied, one representative citizen in the park and yet a symbolic representation of the city itself. He is, in other words, an individual walking figure and a representative figure of walking that is both present and abstractly absent at once.¹⁶ This embodied disembodiment functions along similar lines of the flâneur’s attached detachment. Paterson is, in one sense, just another man in the crowd, and so is part of masses. In another sense, he remains apart from them in his very abstraction as a symbol of the masses. The same is true when considering Paterson as a nature walker. As just another park-goer, he remains

¹⁶ This play of embodiment/disembodiment has generated readings that, much like those treating the human/nature binary, tend to overemphasize one element of the pair. As mentioned above, Sankey posits that the description of walking emphasizes the real physicality of actual walking (74). In contrast, Koehler argues the exact opposite: “The most practical mode of approach to such a ‘world’—walking—is analyzed in Book II in such detail as to reduce it to theory” (66). Rather, Paterson’s stride straddles both the abstract and the physical at once.

at a distance from the natural landscape, another pair of shoes scuffing the rocks. But as a miniature of Paterson the city, he is the husband meant to achieve union with the female mountain, and so represents an attached detachment to the mountain herself. Furthermore, this detailed kinesthetic description of walking makes the mode of movement as much a subject of the book as are the episodes seen on this Sunday stroll. As the textbook reminds us, walking is essentially a collection of small leaps and falls. Williams equates successful jumps, like that of the daring Sam Patch, with successful poetry, and falls, like that of the tragic Sarah Cumming, with poetic failure. Walking therefore emblemizes in miniature the poetic project of *Paterson* as a whole, both in its potential and its pitfalls.

After an epistolary selection from Cress, the speaker responds to her complaint of detachment and blockage: “How do I love you? These!” (45). “These!” hovers without a referent, gesturing outwards to a momentary absence, as the line is followed by a blank before the next lines: “(He hears! Voices . . . indeterminate! Sees them / moving, in groups” (45). “These!” may cast backwards to something prior: these trees in the above passage, these walking limbs in the figure, even as a meta-gesture to these lines of poetry, each a sign of possible love or connection within place, body, or art. “These!” then also flings forward to these voices in the crowd, a group of city-dwellers “filtering / off by the way of the many bypaths” (45). Love is embodied now in the masses that, again, move like water, filtered through the planned landscape of the park. The complaint of divorce and blockage is answered by the union of the flowing human mass and the architectural, organic landscape. The sound and the vision (“He hears!” “Sees them”) are, again, natural and urban at once. That “These!” never comes clearly to rest on any one referent allows Paterson’s token of love to be natural and human simultaneously.

However, these promises of union are temporary, and Williams soon after includes the prose account of the 1880 shooting of John Joseph Van Houten by William Dalzell, a property owner who “claimed that the visitors had in previous years walked over his garden and was determined that this year he would stop them from crossing any part of his grounds” (46). This passage contributes to an investigation of individuals and crowds developed throughout *Paterson*, but it also foregrounds a history of human engagement with this natural location. As was mentioned earlier, land on Mount Garret went through a variety of private owners, and on this occasion the tension between private and public resulted in a near riot, as “many had come from the city to join in the conflict” (46). The mountain is therefore not excluded from the violent history of industrialization and class conflict that characterizes the city of Paterson below it.¹⁷ The park cannot serve as a natural *tabula rasa*, a fresh wilderness on which to write a new American culture, mired as it is in a long narrative of human settlement, industry, and violence. Several of Williams’s historical prose interludes in Book II serve as reminders of the fundamental admixture of nature and culture within Passaic County and, by extension, America as a whole.¹⁸

The history of Dalzell is then followed by another nature passage: “Signs everywhere of birds nesting, while / in the air, slow, a crow zigzags / with heavy wings before the wasp-thrusts /

¹⁷ Williams’s inclusion of the detail that Dalzell was protecting his garden links this shooter with the arrival of Priapus, the Roman protector of gardens (58). Priapic statues were often accompanied by threats of violent rape against trespassers in private gardens. The sexually thwarted Priapus stands as an instance of blockage: “Rejected” (58). Dalzell, like Priapus, violently threatens garden trespassers and, even after the land passes into public ownership, this satyr still lingers as a local deity. The choice of Priapus over another satyr, like Pan (who is mentioned earlier), also emphasizes that the park is not a wilderness, but is a planned, garden-like space that is also verdant and sexualized.

¹⁸ For example, just as urban discontent finds its way into the landscape of the park in this episode, so too does nature, in the later account of the wily mink, find its way into the city while evading human regulation, symbolized in the thwarted police officers (49).

of smaller birds” (46). By following the account of the shooting, this scene mirrors the dynamic of one against many as the crow is besieged by a host of smaller birds.¹⁹ Yet what is the overall effect of linking this natural observation with the report of the mob? Influence spreads in all directions, as the comparison uncomfortably naturalizes human violence, another instance of many small animals attacking a single foe, and also turns nature into a cultural allegory, likening the birds to a mob of people. The nature walker sees how red in tooth and claw the local fauna can be; the flâneur sees the sordid dark side of the crowd. The historically thick backdrop of the park, urban and natural, past and present, holds both views together in tandem.

“Walking—” again transitions from this section to Paterson’s adventures off the beaten path: “finds hard going / across-field, stubble and matted brambles / seeming a pasture—but no pasture . . . / --old furrows, to say labor sweated or / had sweated here” (47). This adventure across the field, while off the common walkway, is still not a diversion into unkempt wilderness.²⁰ Rather, the field of matted brambles is only a “*seeming* pasture” (emphasis mine). The land bears hints of old furrows, suggesting former use as land for planting crops. More immediately, this piece of field is only a seeming pasture because it is part of a parkscape no longer put to private use. The reminder of human labor, whether the farmer, the landscape architect, or both, prevents this location from becoming a stand-in wilderness or unproblematic pastoral backdrop.

¹⁹ Ornithologists refer to this group protective behavior in birds as mobbing (“Mobbing, *d*”).

²⁰ Sankey reads this passage as setting up a contrast between the crowd of humanity and a pre- or anti-human environment: “The people as a disorganized ‘mass’ is one key term in this stretch; uncultivated nature is another. Paterson’s walk brings him into an uncultivated field, ‘stubble and matted bramble’ (77). However, Williams presents a landscape already shaped by prior human use that now, while perhaps uncultivated, is certainly not unplanned or unused by a human community.”

What follows in this space is Paterson's vision of a cloud of grasshoppers: "When ! from before his feet, half tripping, / picking a way, there starts . . . / a flight of empurpled wings!" (47). Here, the nature walker literally stumbles upon an epiphanic vision of grasshoppers "from the dust kindled / to sudden ardor!" (47). This revelation, "livening the mind" of the walker, is in part his own creation (47). It is Paterson's tripping, picking feet that actually disturb the insects and send them into flight. Here, the nature walker does not so much happen upon a transcendent vista that exists apart from him as he participates in its generation. His tread also sustains it: "Before his feet, at each step, the flight / is renewed [. . .] / courtiers to the ceremonial of love!" (48). The churring purple mass is a kind of erotic response to the presence of Paterson, the city-as-lover, moving through the body of "the Park [...] female to the city" (43). While the passage at first blush seems empathically rooted in a nature-writing tradition, the occasion is created by the flânerie of this nature walker from the city and as the city. Furthermore, the churring love-song of the grasshoppers reappears throughout the book, as this Romantic (and romantic) cloud converges around a couple during their awkward embraces in the lines following.²¹ In other words, this vision of love, seen by the nature walker, spreads out and colors later, more urban scenes of attempted human connection in the park. After all, the park is, as Williams reminds us, a "—park devoted to pleasure : devoted to . . . grasshoppers!" (50). The punctuation evokes the relationship of an analogy and links human acts of pleasure and recreation to the natural grasshoppers. "Devoted" also balances between a sense of ownership, invoking a space set aside

²¹ "Their pitiful thoughts do meet / in the flesh—surrounded / by churring loves! Gay wings / to bear them (in sleep)" (52).

and devoted to certain kinds of activity, and a sense of love, invoking the female park devoted to both pleasure and grasshoppers at once.²²

Meditations on art, punctuated by more Cress correspondences and historical asides, give way to thoughts about invention's relationship with landscape: "without invention / nothing lies under the witch-hazel / bush, the alder does not grow from among / the hummocks margining the all / but spent channel of the old swale" (50). In this moment, the poet considers the necessity for a new kind of poetry that can express a fresh and yet "ancient" experience of the world (50). Williams goes so far as to say that, without this "new line," the very landscape ceases to be. On one level, this true for the reader, as the poet's description of the scene makes the park come alive. The lines oddly create the very environment they threaten; we see the alder growing among the hummocks in the same utterance where Williams tells us it does *not* grow. On another level, the need for invention is a physical fact in a landscape that is its own kind of invention, the invention of the landscape architect. The parkscape, like the poem, is a marriage between the plan of an artist and the natural elements of the mountaintop. The poet here acts as a kind of Olmsted figure, inventing this particular arrangement into being, resulting in a location unavoidably human and natural at once.

Paterson then pulls back from a meditation on the crowd, "The 'great beast' come to sun himself" (54), the better to consider his surroundings: "limited by the escarpment, eastward; to / the west abutting on the old road: recreation / with a view!" (55). This lookout point is limited by both natural and man-made barriers as the escarpment and the road frame the view. In the

²² Peterson rightly argues that the reappearance of the grasshoppers in later scenes also extends the hope of genuine love throughout Book II: "The Cupids that surround the lovers ('Churring loves'—cf. grasshopper lyric) suggest that love, at least in some form, remains" (64).

tradition of the nature walker, mountain-top views typically provide a privileged vantage onto a sublime natural landscape below. However, what Paterson here sees is a vision of the city in the gorge. We achieve that urban vision with him, as he provides a description of his surroundings in a style that verges on that of a travel guide: “Stand at the rampart,” “look away north by northeast where the church /spires still spend their wits against the sky . . . to the ball-park” (55). The reader is here placed next to Paterson as he instructs us in our own bit of visual *flânerie*. He guides our eyes on a quick walk about town while also firmly locating us on the mountain at the same time, like tourists looking through the binoculars “chained / to anchored stanchions along the east wall” (55). The Baedeker-like command of these lines makes earlier uses of “Walking” retroactively feel like a hiker’s guide through the park. Not only has Paterson embodied the conflation of *flâneur* and nature walker, but he also didactically instructs us in his unique mode of walking and seeing.

Williams resists resolving this scene into a dichotomy of natural mountain top and urban waste below as the view of the “churches and factories” in the valley transforms into a meshed urban-natural sublime vision (55). As the eye moves downward into the gorge, the “imagination soars” upward (55). Yet this rise of imagination does not lift Paterson away from the cityscape, but rather sends him back into the gorge as he hears the “thunderous voice” of the Falls somehow “summon[ing]” the “churches and factories” “from the pit” (55). Just as the park instantiates a mix of the urban and the natural, the city now appears as a natural outgrowth of the river. In a literal sense, the force of the Falls did occasion the creation of this mill town that relied upon the river for energy and the transportation of goods.²³ Yet this mountain-top vision

²³ The importation of European mill-town models into this environment is one of the forms of divorce Williams laments: “For Williams [Hamilton’s] plans ignored the ‘local genius’ and in trying to reproduce European civilization in this country thwarted the promise latent here” (Peterson 10).

transcends bare history by presenting the city as a creature summoned by the environment, rather than a construct imposed upon it: “a voice / beckons” “the voice / that has ineluctably called them—” “summoned them from the pit” (55). A natural summit becomes a city outlook, as the city looked at becomes a natural wonder. As both man and city, Paterson, maintains this doubled vision as both nature walker and flâneur.

Yet this vision is not, as it may seem, the culminating moment of part one. After this spectacle, Paterson melts back into the crowd and takes up his wandering walk again: “So during the early afternoon, from place / to place he moves, / his voice mingling with other voices” (56). Nor, as it turns out, is the lookout point the final summit: “At last he comes to the idlers’ favorite / haunts, the picturesque summit” (56). This structure of dual climax prevents the walk from having a clear teleology: the purpose is not to reach the point, but is to continue the stroll and observe the life in and of the park. Paterson also does not describe the view from this summit, but the view of it, moving from a description of the soil and plant-life (“ferns rife among the stones”) to the activities of “Loiterers in groups” (56). Looking out is here replaced by looking around, and the scenes on these “rough terraces” are of city-folks enjoying a moment of “gaiety” (56): a young man playing guitar (56), “eating and drinking,” Mary’s wild call for a dance, and the lovers tucked away in their “grassy den” (58). These observations and voyeuristic peeks into how the crowd is “celebrating / the varied Sunday of their loves” (58) are achieved by the continued flânerie of Paterson who walks through and watches this urban population at play on the “blue-stone” of the mountain (56). The move from city to park has not, however, enabled the crowd to achieve mythic union with either their landscape or one another. Rather, the same difficulties of dissociation that mar life in the city are transplanted into this green environment: the teenaged guitar player performs “dead pan,” suggesting both his link to the satyr and his

inability to fill its ritual and mythic role. In his flat affect, he represents a dead Pan in what should be a mountaintop saturnalia, just as Mary bemoans the lethargy of her group: “Everybody too damn / lazy” (56; 57).

Williams’s depiction of divorce and blockage within Garret Mountain Park echoes similar failures of the lofty ideals landscape architects like Olmsted hoped public parks could achieve. The combination of these two figures, nature walker and flâneur, represents the admixture of urban and natural environments within this parkscape and, more broadly, Williams’s desire for a healthy union of natural ecosystems and human habitats. Yet, in Book II, that admixture is ultimately unstable: the park cannot serve as a permanent home any more than simply entering it can undo the isolation suffered in the city or bring about a balance between the elemental landscape and the culture that shapes it. What the park can provide are fleeting moments of connection between man and woman, city and nature, person and place. The act of walking ultimately allows both Paterson and the reader to glimpse these moments and re-imagine the way we engage with our modern American landscape: our steps can be a blow or a caress, a fall or a leap.

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