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PATER'S SON

Perhaps one of the most succinct definitions of mentorship comes from Irene C. Goldman-Price and Melissa McFarland Pennell's introduction to their collection of essays on *American Literary Mentors*. In describing the relationship between Lizette Woodworth Reese and Edmund Clarence Stedman, they say,

> [L]iterary mentors in some way encourage, enable, and nurture creative expression and help an author negotiate the complicated pathway from creation to publication…They offer truthful criticism mixed with sympathetic engagement in the lives and work of their protégées. (2-3)

Interestingly, one of the sources Goldman-Price and Pennell used to create this definition is Marsha Sinetar's self-help-like book *The Mentor's Spirit: Life Lessons on Leadership and the Art of Encouragement* where Sinetar calls this spirit of mentorship, "an unseen, affirming influence and positive energy" (1).

Looking to the origins of the term "mentor"— from Odysseus's friend and Telemachus's guide of the same name *The Odyssey* as "both a man and a vessel for Athene"— Goldman-Price and Pennell further imply a decided imbalance within the power structure of the relationship, thus pointing to the potential for an imperfect relationship (2). They expand on this paradigm by focusing on the psychoanalytic implications of such a relationship:

> In this metaphor of the relationship, deliberately juxtaposed with the more "insistent, judgmental, and directive exhortations" of literary fathering…the "mother" provides a nurturing space in which the child/artist can play in safety with benign approval. (3)

And indeed, the relationships William Carlos Williams had with the younger poets who looked to him for approval varied between these two extremes and are ultimately very indicative of such mentorship power-plays.

Before analyzing one such relationship in detail, let me consider the essays written after Williams's death. Denise Levertov first wrote to Williams in 1951, and her letter includes the comment,

> If a man is a force in one's life, and you are in mine and my husband's, if his work has given not only great pleasure and excitement but is felt to enter the fabric of one's thinking & feeling & one's way of trying to work, he certainly ought to know it. So, thank you. (*The Letters of Denise Levertov and William Carlos Williams* 1)

Her compliment reflects Williams's influence on her creative process before the two poets met. This seems the very definition of Sinetar's "unseen, affirming influence and positive energy." Yet ultimately this is not how I want to define mentorship; it is Levertov's personal relationship with Williams that marks him as her mentor.

Levertov's letter led to a correspondence that would last until Williams's death and eventually involve visits to Williams and his wife Florence (Floss) at their home in Rutherford as well as an exchange in which Williams provided Levertov with sometimes unwanted criticism. But even more important to forming a concept of mentorship generally, and Williams as a mentor specifically, is his obituary, which Levertov wrote for *The Nation* less than two weeks after Williams's death.

The obituary's later inclusion in her collection of essays *The Poet in the World* only partially reflects the significance of its subject to her poetic life. Indeed, Levertov opens the piece, "William Carlos Williams has left more for us than we realize" (254). Her words here provide an understanding of Williams as a mentor to Levertov, despite her resistance against his American Idiom in her own work:

> …he has given us also, a great gift within time: that is to say, his historical importance is, above all, that more than anyone else he made available to us the whole range of the language, he showed us the rhythms of speech *as poetry*—the rhythms and idioms not only of what we say aloud but of what we say in our thoughts. It is a mistake to suppose that Williams's insistence on "the American idiom" ever implied a reduction; on the contrary, it means the recognition of wide resources. (254)

And indeed, Levertov's recognition of Williams as making language available to others suggests his role as an influence on countless poets, some who may have never known Williams personally. Here, in other words, Levertov refers to literary influence and intertextuality, which I seek to distinguish from mentor/mentee relationships.

Beyond the obvious historical and biographical significance of defining the term, mentorship implies a rapport between poets that may manifest in an exchange of poetic language. Aside from the ethical concerns of such an exchange, the power dynamic of a mentor/mentee relationship skews what might otherwise be a relatively balanced exchange of language. Indeed later in their relationship, Levertov responded to this implied power dynamic by ignoring Williams's criticism of her poetry and separating herself from his "American idiom" by reminding him she was the British daughter of Russian immigrants.

The challenge to defining literary semiotics is also significant when later examining the specifics of intertextuality in William Carlos Williams's long poem about the industrial city in New Jersey, *Paterson*, particularly considering his use of traditionally private texts like letters in the language of his poem. In order to clarify the ways that I am using the terms influence and intertextuality, I will briefly turn to Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein's *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*. They explain:

> The shape of intertextuality…depends on the shape of influence. One may see intertextuality as either the enlargement of a familiar idea or as an entirely new concept to replace the outmoded notion of influence…. [I]nfluence has to do with agency, whereas intertextuality has to do with a much more impersonal field of crossing texts. (3-4)

Rather than considering intertextuality strictly post-structurally, as Clayton and Rothstein do, I find using the term to refer to more historically and biographically rooted literary relationships far more fruitful for my purposes. More specifically, I will refer to Williams's moments of literal quoting from other writer's texts as intertextuality, while influence will mark extra-literary

exchanges. Mentorship, then, will mark both the negotiations between intertextuality and influence, as well as the ways personal relationships affect intertextuality, influence and poets as people.

Williams was actively aware of the implications of intertextuality, particularly in his adaptation of varied personas in order to emphasize the variety inherent to the American Idiom. However, in trying to write around it, he succeeded only in figuring *Paterson* as alternating between art and reality creating a kind of part-epistolary poem. Furthermore, considering the format of *Paterson*, Williams's work visually manifests the struggle to invent what Leonard Diepeveen calls "original terms," to avoid literally using others' language in his work. Thus, when Williams incorporates blocks of historical or epistolary text into his poem, but keeps the texts in their organic visual form rather than lineating and thus assimilating the adopted language into his own, he is visually indicating that this language is not his "original term."

This very awareness is one reason that Harold Bloom finds Williams to be a lesser poet—though despite this exclusion from the pantheon of approved Modernists, Bloom further expands the definition of intertextuality as a frame of analysis for Williams's mentor/mentee relationships. Consider Levertov's obituary for Williams. In "Charting the Territory," Bloom responds to such comments:

> In making the precursor a god, the ephebe already has begun a movement away from him, a primary revision that imputes error to the father, a sudden inclination or swerve away from obligation; for even in the context of incarnation, of becoming a poet, obligation shines clear as a little death, premonitory of the greater fall down to the inanimate. (13)

Even more significant than his challenge to such notions of precedence is Bloom's direct challenge to older views of poetic influence, "Poetic influence, in the sense that I give to it, has almost nothing to do with the verbal resemblances between one poet and another" (19). Despite appearances, this expands our concept of intertextuality.

When considering Williams's relationships with other poets, especially those played out within the pages of *Paterson*, Bloom's comment is particularly apt because Williams actively avoids quoting from the poetry of other writers, instead focusing on their prose. [1] Ultimately, in focusing on Williams and *Paterson*, I hope to create a kind of case study of post-war American poetic mentorship. Williams is an apt example because so many poets openly acknowledge his influence on their writing, but his appropriation of letters sent to him by these younger poets is what makes his position as a mentor particularly interesting. Such a mentor-mentee link existed between Williams and Allen Ginsberg.

In November 1949, Allen Ginsberg wrote a poem he called "Paterson" after his hometown in New Jersey. Later published in 1961 in a collection of his earliest poems, *Empty Mirror*, which appeared after the success of *Howl and Other Poems*, "Paterson" is a study of stagnation and desperation that clearly reflects Ginsberg's progression towards his most famous poem, "Howl." Indeed, the second stanza of the poem, "I would rather go mad, gone down the dark road to Mexico, heroin dripping in my veins," is reminiscent of the famous opening lines of "Howl" written on the opposite coast six years later. It is no coincidence that William Carlos Williams was the poet Ginsberg asked to write the preface to his first published collection of poetry or that Ginsberg would write a poem like "Paterson" in the year Williams's own third book of *Paterson* was published. As will be shown, Ginsberg's progression toward the style that would make him an icon of the American counter-culture relied largely on the early influence of Williams as a poet and mentor. I will look at Williams's role as Ginsberg's mentor, asking how both Ginsberg's gender and his eventual success and celebrity as a poet may have affected Williams's relationship with this younger poet. I will also focus on the influence that Ginsberg had on *Paterson*.

[1] A possible exception to this is his reference to Elizabeth Barrett Browning in Book II of *Paterson*.

As the preeminent poet of the Paterson-Rutherford area, Williams was involved with the Ginsberg family, themselves nearly all poets, as early as fall 1946. Indeed, according to Paul Mariani's biography, Williams was then reading *The Function of the Orgasm: The Discovery of the Orgone* at Louis Ginsberg's suggestion (534). This was approximately the same period in which Allen Ginsberg was approached to write a review of Book I of Williams's *Paterson*, and a subsequent interview with Williams was planned (Morgan 74). Ultimately, Allen Ginsberg and Williams's interaction did not begin in earnest until spring 1950 after Ginsberg's release from an eight-month stay at the Columbia Presbyterian Psychiatric Institute. Ginsberg wrote to Williams before Ginsberg had received any recognition as a poet, sending him an unsolicited sheaf of poems. Williams received the first of Ginsberg's letters on March 30, 1950, which he later quoted verbatim in *Paterson* Book IV. Thus began a friendship and correspondence that would continue until Williams's death thirteen years later.

Louis Ginsberg and his oldest son Eugene were both poets of some local fame before Allen decided he too wanted to write poetry; this familial association with poetry had an obvious influence on Ginsberg's early writing. According to Jonah Raskin, upon discovering that Allen had been secretly writing poetry while in college at Columbia sometime in the mid-1940s, Louis Ginsberg said, "I don't want you to write poetry only because Eugene and I write…If you write poetry I want you to do so only because you have an inner compulsion" (58). Ginsberg's decision to hide his writing from his father seems at least in part motivated by his father's introductions of Allen as his "normal" son because he was the only member of the family who did not write (Schumacher xxiv). Louis later became jealous of the influence Williams had over his son. Raskin quotes Louis's wife and Allen's stepmother Edith Ginsberg as saying, "'I believe that Louie always felt hurt that Allen considered Dr. Williams more his mentor than his

father was…he felt Williams was sort of taking his place as a father figure'" (102). Williams himself figured Ginsberg as a son, whether literal or literary, in *Paterson*.

Turning then to *Paterson*, with this brief biographical sketch in mind, we might begin by noting that Williams's persona in the poem, Dr. Paterson, opens the second section of the fourth book by addressing his son, thus framing this fourth book as a way of providing his son with advice about the proper way to live. By then including Ginsberg's introductory letter, *Paterson* Book IV seems to follow a logical progression: address the son, advise the son, show the son an example of a man also leaving home and searching for his vocation—by extension figuring Ginsberg as a kind of proxy son. In light of this move toward advising the son, it is useful to look at what Dr. Paterson says, immediately before the letter from Ginsberg is reproduced:

> Come to Jesus! . Someone help
> that old woman up the steps . Come to
> Jesus and be . All together now,
> give it everything you've got!
>
> Brighten
> . . the corner where you
> are! (*P* 172)

This passage's proselytizing tone is reminiscent of the mountaintop sermon from Book II and reinforces the significance of Paterson's advice to his son. Through the lines, "Brighten / . . the corner where you / are," Williams points to the gesture toward fulfillment and vocation which follows the letter.

Williams continues after the above passage with the first Ginsberg letter and returns to verse with an anecdote about Paris drawn from an MGM biopic of Marie Curie. Curie is introduced as both scientist and "woman waiting to be filled"; the passage also forms a comment on vocation and drive that is particularly apt when compared to Ginsberg's letter recalling his recent confinement to a mental hospital and his uncertainty about his future prospects (Mariani 492). Williams quotes Ginsberg as saying,

> I am back in Paterson which is home for the first time in seven years. What I'll do there I don't know yet—my first move was to try and get a job on one of the newspapers here and in Passaic, but that hasn't been successful yet…. This place is as I say my natural habitat by memory, and I am not following in your traces to be poetic: though I know you will be pleased to realize that at least one actual citizen of your community has inherited your experience in his struggle to love and know his own world-city, through your work, which is an accomplishment you almost cannot have hoped to achieve. (*P* 173)

Here, it seems no coincidence that Williams would include this introductory letter of Ginsberg's as Ginsberg casts himself and Williams as son and father, the image that Williams set in motion with the opening lines of this second chapter of Book IV. Indeed, as Mariani suggests, it was through Ginsberg's letter that Williams discovered "his theme and his figure of crossing in Ginsberg, Pater's son," despite having begun the first drafts of Book IV before receiving Ginsberg's letter, earlier in winter 1950 (600, 605).

After concluding this section with a passage on the importance of credit to the working classes, juxtaposed with a mention of Ginsberg's unemployment, Williams turns back to one of the major concerns of *Paterson*: language. Here, Williams introduces a second excerpt from Ginsberg's letters with a passage of poetry about the early people of Paterson and its early modes of production. Williams seems to figure Ginsberg as both a product of Paterson and as a producer from Paterson in the framing of this initial example. He immediately returns to similar descriptions after Ginsberg's letter, providing a more organic place for the letter's appearance than he did for the first of Ginsberg's letters—where his thematic concerns seem to jump from the son and faith to the woman scientist Marie Curie. Ginsberg's second letter, however, as contextualized by Williams, more clearly makes him serve as an example of the industry and production of Paterson. Thus Williams shows Ginsberg fulfilling his vocation— even providing an essential service through poetry— a son following his father into the production of language.

Significantly, Williams edited the final letter he used from Ginsberg as he did Marcia Nardi's letters in the earlier books. Unlike Nardi's letters where Williams, according to Theodora Graham, rewrote significant passages to exaggerate Nardi's tone, Williams simply omits information from Ginsberg's letter, though this information links Ginsberg and Williams to other literary circles. The passage omitted includes updates about the travels of Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, Robert Creeley and Richard Eberhart, mentions contributors to Michael McClure's literary magazine *Moby*, as well as referring to the FBI (*P* 298-299). Ginsberg wrote Williams this letter as Ginsberg was beginning to gain notoriety on the literary scene, so in then excluding mention of poets other than Williams himself, Williams restricts the literary influences on the Ginsberg he portrays in *Paterson*. This Ginsberg, unlike the real man, communicates only with one poet—Dr. Paterson.

In contrast to this imagined version of an unconnected Ginsberg, the real poet was a sudden celebrity. On October 7, 1955, Ginsberg, Philip Lamantia, McClure, Philip Whalen and Gary Snyder read their work at the Six Gallery in San Francisco in front of an audience of hundreds, including Kerouac, Kenneth Rexroth (who introduced the poets) and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. This reading marked the introduction of the poem, "Howl," which would make Ginsberg famous and which was so enthusiastically received that Ferlinghetti telegrammed him the next day asking to publish it (Morgan 208). Ginsberg became the star of the West Coast literary scene.

Ginsberg had sent Williams an earlier mimeographed copy of *Howl, for Carl Solomon* around the same time he sent Williams the final letter of Ginsberg's to be included in *Paterson*, subsequently inspiring Williams to write an introduction to *Howl and Other Poems*. He said,

> When he was younger, and I was younger, I used to know Allen Ginsberg, a young poet living in Paterson, New Jersey, where he, son of a well-known poet, had been born and grew up…. He was always on the point of 'going

> away', where it didn't seem to matter; he disturbed me, I never thought he'd live to grow up and write a book of poems. His ability to survive, travel, and go on writing astonishes me. That he has gone on developing and perfecting his art is no less astonishing to me.... We are blind and live our blind lives out in blindness. Poets are damned but they are not blind, they see with the eyes of the angels. This poet sees through and all around the horrors he partakes of in the very intimate details of his poem. He avoids nothing but experiences it to the hilt. He contains it. Claims it at his own—and, we believe, laughs at it and has the time and affrontery to love a fellow of his choice and record that love in a well-made poem. Hold back the edges of your gowns, Ladies, we going through hell. (7-8)

This tribute reflects the impact Ginsberg had on Williams during the period when the older poet was revisiting his previously-thought-completed epic.

With this influence on Williams and with Ginsberg's newfound notoriety in mind, the motivation behind Ginsberg's presence in *Paterson* Book V, however brief, is worth considering further. It is also key to this motivation that in Book V Williams returned to a discussion of gender and that his plan was for this book to be a tribute to women, especially his wife. Despite all of these factors, and perhaps because of some, Williams again included Ginsberg. The final excerpt of Ginsberg's letters is introduced by the following passage:

> 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
>
> . he bears a collar around his neck
> hid in the bristling hair. (*P* 210)

Considering how Williams frames the earlier Ginsberg letters, this passage suggests a progression in the depiction of the younger poet as both a native son of Paterson and a kind of son for Williams himself; he also figures Ginsberg as imagination and thus echoing Ginsberg's letter in which he describes his own escape from Paterson as a merchant marine on his 1956 trip to the Arctic. In making the comparison between Ginsberg and some kind of transcendent,

immortal imagination, Williams works against his own figuring of Ginsberg as his literary son by suddenly marking him as a less obviously gendered figure, a contradiction to which I will return.

Ginsberg's letter discussing work already produced with help from Williams, which follows the passage above, bespeaks some kind of a maturation in "Howl," a product of his manhood, a fulfillment of his poetic vocation with the help of his literary father while his escape marks movement outside the home, outside the sphere of the father. This concept is reinforced when Williams continues after the letter is quoted with the following lines:

> —the virgin and the whore, which
> most endures? the world
> of the imagination most endures:
>
> Pollock's blobs of paint squeezed out
> with design!
> pure from the tube. Nothing else
> is real . . (*P* 211)

Again Williams seems to equate the production of art, here the visual arts, with a kind of sublimation of artistic sexuality.

Ginsberg is figured as the "imagination [that] most endures" in contrast to the transience of the virgin and whore (P 211). I characterize the virgin and whore as transient states because they are common concepts but also difficult to define, whereas jungle and pole are theoretically permanent states. A virgin can become a whore, but a jungle can never become a pole, global warming notwithstanding. Ginsberg literally breaks from the binary logic of this dichotomy by departing from the landscape of the poem. Williams quotes Ginsberg:

> I am leaving for the North pole this time on a ship in a few weeks. . . . .
> I'll see icebergs and write great white polar rhapsodies. Love to you, back in October and will pass through Paterson to see family on my first trip to Europe. I have NOT absconded from Paterson. I have a whitmanesque mania & nostalgia for cities and detail & panorama and isolation in jungle and pole, like the image you pick up. When I've seen enough 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. When I come back I'll make big

> political speeches like I did when I was 16 only this time I'll have W.C. Fields on my left and Jehovah on my right. Why not? Paterson is only a big sad poppa who needs compassion. . In any case Beauty is where I hang my hat. And reality. And America.
> There is no struggle to speak to the city, out of the stones etc. Truth is not hard to find . . . I'm not being clear, so I'll shut up . . . I mean to say paterson is not a task like Milton going down to hell, it's a flower to the mind etc etc (*P* 210-211)

Literally, Ginsberg leaves the landscape of Paterson to seek inspiration in the world. Ginsberg is now the poet with vocation, as shown through his successful production of poetry in *Howl and Other Poems* and his move away from the sphere of his literary father, Williams. In juxtaposing the his own consideration of the imagination contra the virgin and whore with this letter, in which Ginsberg mentions the imminent publication of his book, Williams marks Ginsberg as a producer and figure of imagination's success; including Ginsberg's thanks for Williams's introduction marks Ginsberg's success as a producer as in part due to Dr. Paterson's influence. Williams's subsequent use of Ginsberg's letter acknowledging an exchange of help, and more literally of language, claims Ginsberg's ultimate success as a poet, already cemented by the extreme popularity of *Howl and Other Poems*, results directly from Williams's aid.

Turning again to Williams's introduction of Ginsberg's letter in Book V: "So through art alone, male and female," here in figuring Ginsberg as imagination, Williams refigures Ginsberg as a producer while still differentiating between Ginsberg's generation and Paterson's:

> 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

. he bears a collar round his neck
hid in the bristling hair (*P* 210)

Here, in the final line before beginning Ginsberg's final letter, about Williams's introduction to *Howl and Other Poems* and his planned trip to the arctic, Williams refers to the imagination, and by extension Ginsberg, as "he." This pronoun is still marked as different from the "male and female" above it, making Ginsberg a member of a kind of in-between gender, especially considering the final lines of the passage. Ginsberg as the author of this letter is neither male nor female now that he has fulfilled his vocation and become a figure for imagination and escape. The image of the collared figure is largely based on the images of the Cloisters Unicorn Tapestries themselves, which MacGowan and Mariani identify as Williams's primary source of inspiration. In figuring Ginsberg as imagination/unicorn, and using these specific tapestries as his referents, Williams implies that some more powerful force attempts to capture and subdue the imagination. Escape, rather than the reality, is the ideal.

This move away from distinct gendering can be seen in Williams's comparison between this characterization of Ginsberg and the unicorn that dominates much of Book V.[2] By figuring Ginsberg as imagination Williams implicitly compares him to the unicorn, and the last two lines of this passage introducing Ginsberg's letter expand this comparison. Indeed, the Unicorn is pivotal to understanding Williams's final depiction of the younger poet.[3] Both a symbol of virginity and possessor of a phallic horn, the unicorn is ambiguously gendered as is Ginsberg himself in the final book of *Paterson*. In the original monograph released by the Cloisters in 1940, reprinted in 1962 as *The Unicorn Tapestries at the Cloisters*, James J. Rorimer, then director of the Metropolitan Museum of which the Cloisters is a part, examined the allegories

[2] My reading of Book V and the unicorn was largely guided by Louis L. Martz's 1960 essay "The Unicorn in *Paterson*" as reprinted in the Harold Bloom edited *Modern Critical Views: William Carlos Williams*.
[3] Reference to the unicorn first appears much earlier in *Paterson*. In Book III, Williams compares the scarred legs of the Beautiful Thing to, "A tapestry hound / with his thread teeth drawing crimson from / the throat of the unicorn // . . . a yelping of white hounds" (*P* 126).

present in the tapestries. In this contemporary discussion, Rorimer points to the Unicorn as both a symbol of Christ resurrected and of marital fidelity. The second of these two readings relies largely on the tapestries likely purpose as a celebration of the marriage of Anne of Brittany and Louis XII in 1499 (5). The reading of the tapestries as representative of Christ resurrected centers on the most famous of these tapestries, depicting the unicorn tied to a pomegranate tree, last in a series depicting the hunt and killing of the unicorn. Throughout the text Rorimer refers to the Unicorn as "it." So then it might be more accurate to say that, like the unicorn, Ginsberg as Williams depicts him in Book V is not so much genderless as he is a poet whose gender exists outside dichotomy of "one man, many women," to quote lines from Book I.

Indeed, in this fifth book of *Paterson*, Williams characterizes Ginsberg less like a son and more as an abstract zoanthropic figure for imagination, though Williams continues to affiliate Ginsberg and Paterson through the image of birth present in these lines. Though he literally refers to imagination's escape from a hole, Williams implies Ginsberg, as imagination, is born of the man and woman mentioned in the next verse paragraph. Rather than literally figuring Ginsberg as Paterson's son, Williams reinterprets Ginsberg as imagination but still points to Ginsberg's deference to Paterson, and by extension to Williams himself. This is doubly enforced by the image of the unicorn with the collar around his neck. Not only does Ginsberg defer to Paterson, he is literally kept captive by the world, captive like the unicorn and figured into a position of deference in the generational gap. Williams again points to Ginsberg as his literary son by pointing to this unjust domestication, as indeed, Williams himself was considered the wild man of American poetry when he, like Ginsberg, was on the cusp of recognition (Wagner-

Martin).[4] Thus Williams implies both that Ginsberg was the recipient of his literary inheritance but also that Ginsberg was indebted to Williams as a result.

Book V can briefly focus on Ginsberg because Williams is not including him as a second man. That is, when he figures Ginsberg as a son to Paterson, Williams avoids marking Ginsberg as a grown man by making him subject to the experience and advice of the adult Paterson. By later making the successful son and poet ambiguously gendered, Williams returns the focus of the poem to women, despite Ginsberg's real life maleness.[5]

Recall the jealousy Louis Ginsberg felt toward Williams, the new literary father to Ginsberg. Considering the integration of Ginsberg's letters into the text of *Paterson*, Louis Ginsberg's concern about Williams's replacement of Louis as poetic father figure to Allen Ginsberg seems at least textually justified. Indeed, as Allen Ginsberg's collected interviews indicate, Williams was the predominant inspiration for Ginsberg's writing; Williams himself shows the influence of Ginsberg on his writing more subtly through *Paterson*. In a 1972 interview for *Entretiens*, Yves Le Pellec and Ginsberg ended their conversation talking about Ginsberg's organic farm and the transmission of "vibrations" from nature to man. Ginsberg specifically figures Williams as his mentor in this interview, saying,

> …the transmission of consciousness and ideas through time was already a heavy element in the original literary activity we were concerned with, in that Gary Snyder and Phillip Whalen met William Carlos Williams in 1950 and learned directly from him, as I learned directly from him, as he cooperated with me, wrote prefaces to my early work and incorporated my letters to him in his Paterson text, as Robert Duncan and Charles Olson for many years corresponded with Pound and Williams, as Robert Creeley

[4] Here, it is important to remember that though his poetry is likely more universally studied academically, Williams was not an anthologized poet until well after his death and certainly never achieved the popularity of Ginsberg. Ginsberg commented on this himself in an interview, "In America when I was at college, the English department still considered that William Carlos Williams had no formal preoccupations and was some sort of embarrassing provincial, awkward, primitive…uncouth, naïve, senseless, not "aesthetic," or high class, like T.S. Eliot." (Carter 112)

[5] It should be noted that Ginsberg is far from the only male figure in Book V, as Williams quotes from letters from Edward Dahlberg and Ezra Pound. Ginsberg is distinctive because, like Marcia Nardi's Cress in earlier books, he is given a concrete role as a character in the text.

> wrote back and forth to Pound for instructions on running a magazine when Creeley was running *Black Mountain Review* as far back as 1945, as Philip Lamantia was in connection with (André) Breton and the Surrealists during the war in New York…We were carrying on a tradition rather than being rebels. We were rebelling against the academic abuse of letters but we went to the living masters ourselves for technique, information and inspiration…we had that historical continuity, from person to person. There is no gap. And since that time this poetics has moved onto a larger democratic field, even returned true lyric to pop music, through Dylan. (301-302)

Ginsberg thus figures himself as part of a poetic lineage that includes many of the major male poets of the first half of the 20th century and continues into pop culture through his influence on Dylan's songwriting. Ginsberg makes the connection between Williams's influence and Ginsberg's own break with more academic and traditional rhymed verse repeatedly, but here he connects this break to his position within an alternative American genealogy while reiterating his direct connection to Williams, as Williams did with Ginsberg by figuring him as his son in *Paterson*.

The importance Ginsberg placed on Williams as a mentor and literary predecessor is as clear in his poems as in interviews, like the above quoted one with Le Pellec, when he explicitly discusses Williams's influence on him. Consider both the poem "Paterson," from Ginsberg's earliest attempts to write outside rhymed verse, which opened this chapter, and the poem, "Death News," Ginsberg wrote while traveling in India in response to hearing of Williams's death. In the latter poem Ginsberg reflects:

> Walking at night on asphalt campus
> road by the German Instructor with Glasses
> W.C. Williams is dead he said in accent
> under the trees in Benares;
> …He isn't dead
> as the many pages of words arranged thrill
> with his intonations the mouths of meek kids
> becoming subtle even in Bengal. Thus
> there's a life moving out of his pages; Blake
> also "alive" thru his experienced machines.
> …If I pray to his soul in Bardo Thodol
> he may hear the unexpected vibration of foreign mercy.
> Quietly unknown for three weeks; now I saw Passaic

and Ganges one, consenting his devotion… (*CP* 305) [6]

Ginsberg concluded this short poem by describing Williams's death as a loss for his native New Jersey, now without a poet: Williams was dead and Ginsberg himself was in India experiencing the benefits of his celebrity abroad.

It is no coincidence that "Death News" functions somewhat similarly to a poem Ginsberg wrote in response to his father's death thirteen years later, especially considering his figuration of Williams as a literary father figure. Ginsberg received news of his father's death while he was teaching what had become his usual summer session at Naropa, the university he founded in Boulder, Colorado, in July 1976. He immediately flew to New York upon being notified, and wrote the centerpiece to a multi-part poem he had been working on earlier that summer called "Don't Grow Old" (Schumacher 387). This part of the poem, subtitled "Father Death Blues," was put to music as a blues song Ginsberg wrote for his father while over Lake Michigan on his way home to Paterson. More reminiscent of his father's beloved rhymed lyrics than most writing he had done since meeting Williams—perhaps due largely to the requirements of the music—"Father Death News" began,

Hey Father Death, I'm flying home
Hey poor man, you're all alone
Hey old daddy, I know where I'm going (*CP* 663)

In an interview on the BBC show *Face to Face*, host Jeremy Isaacs asked what Ginsberg would most like to be remembered for after his death; Ginsberg sang this song as his response referring to it as "the fruition of my Buddhist training." In this same interview, Ginsberg refers to breath stop and open form poetry. He said, "You could have a relative measure as William Carlos Williams, my mentor, called it."

[6] This poem is also prefaced by and ended with a comment Williams made to Ginsberg, Kerouac, Gregory Corso and Ginsberg's lover Peter Orlovksy on a visit to the older poet in Rutherford. They asked him for advice, and Williams pointed out the window, declaring, "There's a lot of bastards out there!" This proved one of Ginsberg's favorite and most often repeated anecdotes about Williams (Carter 504).

Through the very act of writing these quasi-elegies, Ginsberg again equates his father and Williams. Indeed, Williams had such a great impact on Ginsberg that he was still writing poems about his mentor more than twenty years after Williams's death. Ginsberg wrote his poem "Written in My Dream by W.C. Williams" entirely within quotation marks, reporting Williams's words from his dream and gesturing toward intertextuality. And indeed, Ginsberg's version of a Williams poem is written entirely in short, free verse couplets, much like Williams's pre-*Paterson* poems "Between Walls" or "Breakfast" (*CP* 453, 457). The poem begins,

> "As Is
> you're bearing
>
> a common
> Truth
>
> commonly known
> as desire
>
> No need
> to dress
>
> it up
> as beauty… (*CP* 901)

Ginsberg wrote these lines in China in 1984. Even then, the voice he identifies as Williams's has a fatherly tone. The poem ends, "What began / as desire // will end / wiser." The poem itself functions almost entirely as a catalogue of advice handed down from father to son, with particular focus on speech, language and the transmission of information from one person to another, "No need / to distort // what's not / standard // to be / understandable." Considering Ginsberg's lifelong obsession with dreams as is demonstrated in his constant documentation of them in his journals, this kind of reply to Williams's figuration of him in *Paterson* comes in a form that reflects the impact the older poet had on Ginsberg.[7] Williams was present in Ginsberg's dreams even twenty years after his death. Indeed, Ginsberg figures Williams as a

[7] Note that in *The Book of Martyrdom and Artifice: First Journals and Poems 1937-1952* entries documenting Ginsberg's dreams largely dominate the journal portion of the text.

father in much the same way that Williams had figured Ginsberg as his son in *Paterson*.

Ultimately, Ginsberg's constant acknowledgment of Williams's influence over him most marks their mentor/mentee relationship. In an interview with Fernanda Pivano, Ginsberg recounted his first meeting with Williams:

> I went to him because he baffled me…. I couldn't understand why he was writing funny-paged writings, with the words scattered around on the page, why there were irregular lines, and I couldn't understand what he was talking about, really. I read it and didn't understand it, literally—I didn't understand the literal meaning of what he was saying, if he was writing about wheelbarrows or whatever. So I went to interview him for a local labor newspaper in Paterson [the 1948 review Ginsberg did of *Paterson* I], as an excuse…I asked him, "Do you think of yourself as a poet, or as a doctor?" And he said, "As a doctor." Then I asked, "Why do you write almost-prose lines?" and he said, "Yesterday I heard a Polish laborer say, "I'll kick yuh eye." And he wrote it down on his prescription pad. "I'll kick 'y' 'u' 'h' 'e' 'y' 'e'," and he said, "How do you put that into iambic pentameter?" "I'll kick yuh eye—" it's a funny little rhythm all its own. So I suddenly realized he was hearing with raw ears. (Carter 266-267)

In recognizing in Williams a new kind of hearing, differentiated from the lyric poetry of his father, Ginsberg changed his approach to poetry. This is clearest in the influence Williams had on Ginsberg's first poems, including his editorial suggestions, and particularly when comparing the above-discussed elegies to Williams and his father Louis Ginsberg and a much earlier elegy to David Kammerer.

The 1944 poem "Epitaph for David Kammerer" is simple and unremarkable in and of itself, but when considered in contrast to the poems already discussed, the effect Williams's "raw ear" had on Ginsberg's writing are evident. The poem begins,

> A weary lover
> once he was
> Who wept as only
> a lover does—
>
> or else he laughed
> as a lover must;
> now his mouth
> is ringed with dust. (Carter 389-390)

The a-b-c-b rhymed stanzas continue throughout, as does the inverted syntax, alone insignificant,

but when considered with a poem like "Death News," where Ginsberg begins the poem with, "Walking at night on asphalt campus / road by the German Instructor with Glasses," the change is remarkable. Indeed in a poem written only five years later in 1949, "Paterson," the discussion of which opened this chapter, Ginsberg's voice had already changed dramatically from the one heard in "Epitaph for David Kammerer."

In Ginsberg's much shorter poem devoted to the city of Paterson, likely a topic deliberately addressed in response to the publication of the first books of Williams's *Paterson*, Ginsberg had already found the voice that would make him famous with "Howl." Ginsberg himself attributed the development of this voice largely to Williams's influence in countless interviews and essays throughout his life. Whether or not this is the case, Ginsberg's frequent references to Williams and his influence force a connection between the poets. And what could be more obviously a tribute to the poetry of a man so concerned with the American language and who felt so abused by the American academic system than a poem that so violently examines the American landscape:

> …crying by a diner in the Western sun;
> rather crawl on my naked belly over the tincans of Cincinnati;
> rather drag a rotten railroad tie to a Golgotha in the Rockies;
> rather, crowned with thorns in Galveston, nailed hand and foot in
> Los Angeles, raised up to die in Denver,
> pierced in the side in Chicago, perished and tombed in New Orleans
> and resurrected in 1958 somewhere on Garret Mountain… (*CP* 48)

In this early, infrequently considered poem, Ginsberg figures himself as a son of Williams as much as he figures himself a son of America itself. Of course, Williams's vision of Ginsberg as his son is more dominated by an ambiguous gendering that allows Ginsberg to exist as a perfect protégé because he is otherworldly. Simply, this figuration synthesizes the differentiation I make between mentor and intertextual influence because it so clearly demonstrates the politics of power inherent to such a relationship.