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Intertextual and Inter-Ethnic Relations in William Carlos Williams's "To Elsie": A Poetics of Contact

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Of any work the important thing to ask is: What are its contacts? One may almost say there is nothing else of importance to be asked. There will be established thereby — what? A color; something in any case ponderable in the experience of other men.

(Williams, "Yours, O Youth" 34)

William Carlos Williams's well-known poem, "To Elsie," included in *Spring and All* (1923), features a real-life character, a retarded young female by the name of Elsie, whom the Williamses brought into their home from the New Jersey State Orphanage to help Mrs. Williams run her household. Elsie was a *mestiza* with just "a dash of Indian blood" whose extreme vulnerability in a racist, market-driven society caused Williams to perceive her as a scapegoat of American capitalism. Yet the speaker in the poem insists that the neglectful treatment of minorities has also contributed to the moral degradation of the WASP elite. There is another piece by the same author, written almost concurrently with "To Elsie," that shows striking similarities of diction and intent. I am referring to the central chapter of *In the American Grain* (1925), an autobiographical piece entitled "Père Sebastian Rasles," written in 1924, in which Williams also takes on the defense of the Native Americans over and against the legacy of Eurocentric values. There he also extols the vio-

lent physicality of the wilderness at the expense of material progress and the superficial spirituality of civilization.

In his programmatic manifesto "Comment," written for the first issue of the avant-garde magazine *Contact* (1921-1924), coedited with Robert McAlmon, Williams explained what he meant by a felicitous literary "contact."¹ James Joyce was to be considered the quintessential enabler of "contacts" and "disclosures" on account of his systematic defamiliarization of extant literary discourses, so that the readers of his works were forced to explore on their own, through an active use of the imagination, the range of references and allusions in what they had just read. Williams also used the word "contact" in "To Elsie" with clearer social implications, and a related term, "touch," plays a crucial part in the argument for social "crosspollination" developed in "Père Sebastian Rasles." When I say that Williams articulates a "poetics of contact" I simply follow the New Jersey author in suggesting that his texts of the early 1920s are meant to allow the reader to "become awake to his own locality" so that he or she begins to "perceive more and more of what is disclosed and find himself in a position to make the necessary translations" ("Comment" 28).² Indeed, in the opening fragment of prose in *Spring and All*, the contact metaphor is designed to elicit readers' willingness to open up their consciousness to both nearby and faraway realities, which are seen, in strictly transcendentalist terms, as being more or less interchangeable or at least reversible: "There is a constant barrier between the reader and his consciousness of immediate contact with the world. If there is an ocean it is here. Or rather, the whole world is between: Yesterday, tomorrow, Europe, Asia, Africa — all things removed and impossible, the tower of the church at Seville, the Parthenon" (*Collected Poems, Vol. 1* 177).³ This seems to imply that the "barrier" is also the place of contact or the contact itself, a comprehensible reversal if we concede that the metaphorical bridge facilitating contact is also a linguistic barrier, a mediation.

In "To Elsie" the speaker's presentation of the localities through which he passes features diverse efforts to make contact (visual and emotional) with characters socially removed from his privileged position, including the *mestiza* Elsie. Admittedly, the speaker does not always complete the attempted translations or "adjustments," as they are also referred to in the poem. He does not always succeed in following all social branches (rich and poor, white and colored) back to a "common trunk of understanding," which is the final goal he assigns to any meaningful contact. This is the transcendentalist impulse in Williams, which may be at odds in the mutually respectful experience of togetherness and distance present in the term "*con-tact*." Elaborating on the automobile analogy introduced at the close of "To Elsie," we could perhaps say that in this composition the carrying into practice of the "poetics of contact" is suddenly interrupted by a transmission failure, that somewhere along the way the speaker loses control of the translation process, causing the car to careen out of control. Alterna-

tively, perhaps the fulfillment of such a desire for contact or fusion functions as the intellectual equivalent of a car-crash. I will be arguing later on that this loss is inscribed in the final silence of Elsie and in the speaker's retreat into the language of surrealism. Despite these ideological hesitations, however, the poem is remarkably meaningful as an intertextual construct, as a modernist collage of classic poetic modes and modern ethnographic field-work. As such, it registers the impact of pre-existing texts (e.g., Robert McAlmon's "Elsie," Williams's own "The Wanderer," and more fortuitous references to the literature of the Great War and to Native American folk-tales) at the same time as it prepares the way for another one of Williams's masterpieces, the 1924 essay "Père Sebastian Rasles."

In what is one of the best social commentaries yet published on the early poetry of Williams, Barry Ahearn has shown how the poet from New Jersey, in his treatment of ethnic minorities, immigrants, and the working class, evolved from the use of racial clichés and a patronizing sentimentality to a more mature understanding of the marginalization of these groups. The condescending attitude is most apparent in "Sicilian Emigrant's Song" (1913), "The Sick African" (1917), "Chinese Nightingale" (1917), and "The Young Laundryman" (1919), while the sentimentalizing of lonely women burdened with an army of children is characteristic of such poems as the powerful "Dedication for a Plot of Ground" (1917) and the less successful "Complaint" (1921).⁴ "Dedication" adapts the portrayal of strong-willed pioneer women to the experience of British immigrants first in the West Indies and later in the United States, freely recreating the life of Williams's paternal grandmother, Emily Wellcome, who followed the poet's father, William George Williams, to Rutherford after her husband's death in the West Indies. This early poem advances the author's characteristic argument for regarding an itinerant life of hardships and disappointments spent in contact with *alter* realities as a form of transcendence.

In his strikingly original *Spring and All*, Williams chronicles his "discovery of a class cutting across racial lines, a class that has hitherto escaped the public's notice and therefore escaped stereotyping" (Ahearn 70). Some of the prose and verse pieces in this collection are exuberant and life-affirming. For example, "Horned Purple" is a documentary or even an ethnological poem in which a multiethnic group of characters actively searches for meaning in the shared experience of dwelling in the margins of mainstream American culture (that is, outside bourgeois conformity).⁵ These working-class adolescents are allowed to express their imaginative powers and their vitality by means of the stolen flowers that they wear as trophies in their hair and hats.⁶ Because the group identity of these teenagers cuts across racial lines (some are black and some white), and because they are collectively compared to "Dirty satyrs" (l. 12), their spring ritual of stealing flowers acquires the cohesive force of a pastoral celebration. "To Elsie" is, however, a different type of poem in that it focuses instead on the economic exploitation and

social marginalization of America's underprivileged groups, whose condition can be characterized as one of detachment and even of isolation. The erratic acts of these people lack the cohesive and soothing quality of the spring rituals of passage, fertility, and self-renewal found in "peasant traditions" (l. 19) or in urban ones, like those seen in "Horned Purple." In sum, the situation of the working-class men and women depicted in "To Elsie" is one of spiritual as well as material deprivation.

Spring and All combines a series of numbered metrical poems with fragments of broken prose, the poems themselves having the rhythm and texture of expository prose. The prose pieces are also given the shape of poems through the reiterated use of abrupt enjambments that draw attention to the isolation inherent in the experiences being presented and to the fragmentariness of syntactic units. The entire book plays on the formal asymmetry of its smaller units. For example, the regular poems use a triadic stanza in which the first and third lines are considerably longer than the second. According to Sharon Dolin, the aim of this procedure is to make the reader experience the sequence of poems as a series of structural and thematic antitheses and repetitions: "One way a reader processes the visual effect [of each poem] is to view the first line as being mirrored, or reflected, by the third, with the second acting as a reminder of difference, or of the alienation, between the two" (40). Indeed, many of the poems in *Spring and All* are about either experiences of social estrangement or attempts at breaking through ethnic and class boundaries. "To Elsie" is no exception. Its alternative title, derived from the first line, ironically advertises its contents as a spring sprout of the Virgin Land: "The pure products of America." The immediate political context for the use of "pure products" may well have been the enactment in 1922 of the Fordney-McCumber Tariff, which gave the nation its highest import rates in peace time history, protecting especially such New Jersey goods as chemicals and textiles, or on the other hand the enactment of the Emergency Quota Act, which restricted immigration from eastern and southern European countries, including Italy, whence many of Williams's patients came. The Emergency Quota Act was the culmination of an unfortunate public debate on whether the true indigenous Americans were the almost extinct American Indians or the so-called Nordic Natives (i.e. northern Europeans), an ethnic group in which neither Williams nor Elsie could claim full membership.⁷

"To Elsie" consists of 22 stanzas, which can be divided into three parts. Stanzas 1 through 5 paint a portrait of two underprivileged communities in early twentieth-century America: the woodsy "mountain folk" (l. 3) of Kentucky and the inhabitants of the "isolate lakes" (l. 6) of New Jersey. Representatives of both groups meet in the industrial belts of big cities, but in many cases they fail to adapt to the brutal demands of a mechanized and exploitative *modus vivendi*, eventually becoming either victims or victimizers. They are called "pure products of America/ go[ne]. crazy" (ll. 1-2) because their economic and social situation is a direct consequence of America's rapid transformation into an indus-

trial nation with an expanded market economy and new communities more permeable to social and technological change. This was a favorable situation for the privileged class of educated professionals like Williams, who lived in suburban neighborhoods, from where they could reach a diversified clientele comprised of other professionals, mill workers, and farmers. Nevertheless, as John Beck has suggested in an important recent reading, Williams must have been aware that the same economic order that allowed him to have a busy practice and greater freedom of movement (symbolized by the automobile) had also uprooted entire communities from their original localities, causing them to migrate to the bustling cities. Williams makes reference to the rugged, if naive and often misdirected, individualism of some of these characters, portraying them as “devil-may-care men who have taken/ to railroading/ out of sheer lust for adventure — ” (ll. 10-12; Beck 89-90).

Stanzas 6 through 13 of “To Elsie,” which together constitute the second part of the poem, concentrate on some acts of “promiscuity” (l. 9) between itinerant railroad workers raised in Kentucky and New Jersey and the “young slatterns, bathed/ in filth/ from Monday to Saturday” (ll. 13-15) who attend to their sexual needs. The same applies to the relationships established between the dispossessed Indians of New Jersey and the slatterns they meet.⁸ The speaker envisions the life of one such woman who ends up marrying a “dash of Indian blood” (l. 30), subsequently giving birth to a baby girl. An important point to be made here is that poverty and marginalization from middle class privileges affect a broad spectrum of groups regardless of their ethnic origins, which of course means that for Williams modern conceptualizations of “race” may be, at least in part, an effect of the preexisting concept of “class” (note that the Kentucky and New Jersey folks portrayed in the poem have “old names” [l. 8]). The neglected children born from uprooted and abused women are sent to the State Orphanage. Up to this point, then, the poem has dealt mostly with the rootless underclass, with groups of underprivileged Americans who have lost contact with the “peasant traditions” (l. 19) their ancestors brought from Europe, or else with the communal rhythms of Indian life. Yet in neither case have they found opportunities for self-realization in the culture of industrialist capitalism. “To Elsie” is also a typical Williams poem in its inclusion of the motifs of alienation and dysfunctional parenthood, which traverse his earlier collections of poems. To be sure, it is Williams himself, as an avid reader of pastoral, who feels nostalgia for unspecified peasant traditions at the same time as he welcomes the opportunities afforded by a liberal technological modernity and its symbols — notably, the automobile that enabled his medical practice in suburban New Jersey. As we will see below, in “To Elsie” the speaker essentializes the lack of control that the “pure products” have over their destinies mainly in order to draw a parallel with his own feelings of confusion and guilt.

Stanzas 13 through 16 identify the character of the nameless child raised in the State Orphanage with the young *mestiza* brought tem-

porarily by the Williamses into their home to help Mrs. Williams with the house chores. This young woman, Elsie, has, in her almost inarticulate innocence, a candidly prophetic message to deliver to “us” (l. 43), a plural pronoun that invites the middle class to which Williams and the reader belong to assume their share of responsibility in the actions narrated in the poem. As Richard Sennett has explained, one of the most reliable indices of a text’s anxiety over the situations of social inclusion and exclusion caused by ethnic differences is the speaker’s series of alternations between the “I/me” and the “we/us” pronouns, or between “they/them” and “we/us” (196-200, 205-06). Although the Williamses accepted Elsie almost as one of their family, the speaker in the poem avoids mentioning a direct relationship between himself and Elsie, as if to signify that he too is a potential abuser and victimizer of the innocent young female. Indeed, by taking the “filth” (l. 14) of the slatterns quite literally upon his shoulders, the speaker voices his sense of obligation to others less fortunate. To use Joli Jensen’s rich taxonomy of critical stances variously adopted by modernist intellectuals, we can say that although in “To Elsie” Williams does not represent himself as a direct “participant” in bringing about social change, he is not content with remaining a detached “onlooker” full of bemused disdain for what he sees around him. This would be the case in “The Young Housewife” (1916). Rather, in “To Elsie” he seems more interested in dragging other bourgeois readers along with him in the process of *thinking through* America’s social problems, so that some of those readers may *work toward* the necessary changes. He acts as what Jensen calls a “catalyst,” a stance often used by the like-minded Young American critics (Randolph Bourne, Waldo Frank, Lewis Mumford, and Van Wyck Brooks), all of whom advocated the renewal of American life by creating a unifying culture out of the peculiarities of existing local cultures, although in some cases these efforts were tainted by an overemphasis on the Euro-American contributions (46-48, 27-29). We can investigate further the workings of the catalyst stance by comparison with another portrayal of Elsie published just before Williams’s poem.

In an illuminating note on the origins of “To Elsie,” Henry M. Sayre has explained that Williams’s piece was conceived as a direct response to a short story entitled simply “Elsie,” which was a “thinly veiled sketch of the Williams’ household” written by Williams’s friend, Robert McAlmon, and included in the latter’s first collection of stories, *A Hasty Bunch* (1922). The Elsie who appears in both pieces, McAlmon’s and Williams’s, is characterized by “an over-developed body and an under-developed mind” (“Elsie” 47), a paradox that ironically echoes the legal enactment of involuntary sterilization of the so-called “feeble-minded” in many states in the early twentieth century and, even more tragically, the public advocacy by racist zoologist Madison Grant of a government program for the sterilization also of “unfit” racial types, whose proverbial fertility was construed as a threat to Nordic supremacy (Goldberg 153). According to Sayre, the metacritical prose fragment that in *Spring*

and *All* follows "To Elsie," which compares the craft of poetry with that of prose, was prompted by Williams's own awareness that his poem took as its main subtext a preexisting story, that it was a free versification of prose. Similarly, in one of his 1921 *Contact* manifestoes, "Yours, O Youth," Williams had explained that the extroverted and intertextual dimensions of his work derived from his fondness for "direct contacts with certain definite environmental conditions" — i.e., all sense impressions and the "immediate objective world of actual experience" — and "'outside' worlds," such as preexisting texts, "memory," and "the basic pyramid of tradition" (34-35). "To Elsie" could be said to encourage the reader to participate in both the freshness and the "circuitous progressions" of the stored experiences of others while also acknowledging the repressive idealization of the other that this implies. Furthermore, the poem is also a genuine work of "criticism," at least in the sense Williams uses this term in "Yours, O Youth," insofar as the speaker strives to make contact with "[his] own environment," and specifically with Elsie, at the same time as he addresses a concrete audience of bourgeois readers with a guilty conscience: "criticism must be first in contact with the world for which it is intended. That contact alone can give it life, reality" (36-37).

In line 43 (stanza 15) the speaker's attention swerves decisively from the genealogy and the present situation of Elsie to his musings on the complicity of his social class in perpetuating the economic and social alienation of the underclass. In line 49 (stanza 17), the description of Elsie gives way to the chain of surrealist images that her presence awakens in the speaker. This part of the poem has no basis in either Elsie's family history or McAlmon's fictionalized version of it. Yet it is here where "To Elsie" becomes interlaced with another well-known piece by Williams: "Père Sebastian Rasles" (1924; pub. 1925). If "To Elsie" is the product of the conversations that Williams and McAlmon conducted during the latter's visits to Rutherford in the early 1920s, the prose piece "Père Sebastian Rasles" is the product of another creative conversation that Williams and the French man of letters Valéry Larbaud presumably conducted in Paris on 26 January 1924.⁹ I will explain the terms of this second dialogue before I connect it with "To Elsie."

In the course of what he called a "sabbatical" semester in Paris, Williams paid a visit to Larbaud, and the two allegedly conversed about the multicultural origins of the United States of America. The gist of the conversation, at least as it is reproduced in "Père Sebastian Rasles," revolved around the distinguishing features of three independent colonizing efforts in early America: those of the Spanish, the French, and the English. Specifically, Williams defends the Spanish conquistadors, who had a remarkable appreciation for the exuberance of America and at least recognized that the Indians had a soul and a religion of their own. He undertakes this defense against Larbaud's enthusiasm for the seventeenth-century Puritans. As the conversation progresses, Williams and Larbaud strike a note of agreement on the humanity and tolerance of the French Jesuit missionaries of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth

centuries.¹⁰ This concern for reestablishing contact with largely misrepresented and neglected episodes in the early history of North America prepares the way for Williams's long eulogy to Père Sebastian Rasles, which is artfully cast in the form of a dialogue with Larbaud. The Jesuit Rasles lived among the Abenaki Indians of western Maine between 1691 and 1724, the year of his death at the hands of greedy English soldiers and colonists.¹¹ According to Williams, the French Jesuits were the only European Christians who accepted that their evangelical mission in America required their willing acceptance of syncretism and the realization that the Indian religions were a moral force as powerful as the Christian Gospel.

"Père Sebastian Rasles" is the most autobiographical of Williams's prose pieces prior to the publication of his *Autobiography* (1951). It is also the most poetic of all the historical essays included in the collection *In the American Grain* (1925). The chapter is full of metaphors and images of eating and fighting interlaced with Amerindian themes. Williams's own emotional states correspond to what James Clifford has called "ethnographic surrealism" in a book that opens with a commentary precisely on "To Elsie." Ethnographic surrealism is a literary mode involving two related techniques based on the model of surrealist collage: the first technique is the conflation of rituals of modern Western cultures with rituals of pre-scientific cultures; and the second technique is the presentation of exotic cultures as if they were the contents of the speaker's reverie, thereby juxtaposing his immediate reality with remote worlds (Clifford 118-21, 146-47). The ethnographic-surrealist mode is used in "Père Sebastian Rasles" in such passages as the following:

— if it [that freshness] exist! (John Barrymore's "Hamlet" wins first night ovation in London.) A herd of proofs moved through my mind like stumbling buffalo; ornaments of woven moose-hair! There *is* the Indian. We are none. Who are we? Degraded whites riding our fears to market where everything is by accident and only one thing sure: the fatter we get the duller we grow; only a simpering disgust . . . reveals any contact with a possible freshness.

(108)

This is of course another example of the nostalgic essentialism that Williams shares at times with numerous modernist writers, from critics of corporate capitalism like Ezra Pound to structuralist anthropologists like Claude Lévi-Strauss. Since I will come back to this passage later, for now I will only point out that the phrase "[We are] degraded whites driving our fears to market where everything is by accident" echoes lines 52-54 of "To Elsie": "we [are] degraded prisoners / destined / to hunger until we eat filth."

The idea of moral and physical degradation is a familiar one in the literature of the early Puritans. Among the poets, the *locus classicus* of

this contrast is provided by Anne Bradstreet in her philosophical poem, "Contemplations." There she calls humankind a "backsliding race" (l. 77), arguing that the history of the Church of Rome is one of progressive separation from the teachings of Scripture, which means that with each generation individual Christians are alienated a little further from the word of God. Just as Williams's contemporaries lead purposeless lives ("everything is by accident") that make them "fatter" and "duller," so Bradstreet's English contemporaries "are alive . . . Living so little," that is, they devote their lives to "eating, drinking, sleeping [and] vain delight" (ll. 116-17). The Puritans fare no better than the undaunted and hedonistic non-Puritans, since they are "Clothed all in [Adam's] black sinful livery, / Who neither guilt nor yet the punishment could fly" (ll. 111-12). However, whereas Bradstreet finds consolation in the Puritan immigrants' new opportunities for moral regeneration in America, Williams denounces the repressive mechanisms at work in that same project. In the concluding three pages of "Père Sebastian Rasles" Williams ironically notes that the characteristically Protestant emphasis on possessive individualism and on a prohibitory federal legislation, together with the Puritans' repression of sensuality, have paved the way for the resurgence of Catholicism in twentieth-century North America (127-29).

The word that links Elsie's origins with the speaker's self-revelation in the present of the poem is "filth" (used in lines 14 and 54), which was one of Williams's favorite terms to refer to the self's alienation from its environment in the poetry of the 1910s and 1920s. The stanza in which the speaker redirects his attention from the passive fluidity of Elsie's large body to the generality of educated readers (signified as "we") is noteworthy for its fusion of different realms of experience, all of which foreground the extreme tension between an ideal of freshness and a nightmare of filth:

as if the earth under our feet
 were
 an excrement of some sky

and we degraded prisoners
 destined
 to hunger until we eat filth

while the imagination strains
 after deer
 going by fields of goldenrod in

the stifling heat of September
 Somehow
 it seems to destroy us

(ll. 49-60)

These are the lines in "To Elsie" that have received the least attention by critics. Among the handful of exceptions to this neglect, Peter Halter's comments stand out for their incisiveness. He considers the references to "excrement" and "filth" as key markers of Williams's subversion of the genre of the pastoral idyll:

This rural America is a cruel parody of any genuine pastoral vision. It is a world in which all things physical and natural have been for so long bedeviled that the Promised Land has been turned into a prison and fruit into "filth" . . . There is an element of self-mockery in these lines; the poet is not only acutely aware of the clash between an ideal pastoral world and the actual life in the regions still untouched by rapid urbanization and industrialization; he is also aware of the dangers of trading off the actual world for a romance ideal that remains fictional.

(139-41)¹²

I think, however, that Halter's analysis does not exhaust the potential allusiveness encoded in what I do not hesitate to call the ethnographic-surrealist moment in "To Elsie." It does not suffice to read such lines as simply the "cruel parody of any genuine pastoral vision." The root-word "filth" occurs five times in an earlier poem, "The Wanderer: A Rococo Study" (1914; rev. for its inclusion in *Al Que Quiere!* [1917]), which is also the direct antecedent of *Paterson*. In the last section of "The Wanderer," entitled "Saint James' Grove," the nouns "filthiness" and "degradation" occur in successive lines (first version: II. 46-47), while the root-word "filth" is used a total of five times. Furthermore, in the same poem the Passaic river bears the mock-heroic epithet "the Passaic, that filthy river" (l. 15) because of the industrial waste dumped in its waters. Following a "backward and forward" movement (l. 51), the tide of the river alternates a stream of water that is "cool and limpid / Clear" (ll. 42-43) with one that is "Muddy then black and shrunken" (l. 45).

A similar emphasis on the purifying cycles of nature can be seen in "To Elsie." In the two poems, filthiness is not only a condition of modern colonial and industrial processes, as James Clifford has argued, but a reminder of the dialectical interdependence of opposing forces that characterize both the natural world and Williams's poetics.¹³ This charged term, like "disease" in line 33, may even convey, through its intertextual allusion to the hate-filled rhetoric of the anti-immigrant press (which used "filth" and "disease" as standard derogatory terms to signify the threat posed by southern and eastern European immigrants), a plea for the abandonment of racial purity (the "pure products") in favor of what the same journalists disparagingly called "mongrelization" (Goldberg 142, 161). In "To Elsie" the filth pouring down from the sky may herald an opportunity for regenerating both society and the earth, on which "the imagination strains / after deer / going by fields of

goldenrod" (ll. 55-57). In the last section of "The Wanderer," the already cited "Saint James' Grove," the river enters the poet's heart and "edd[ies] back cool and limpid" (l. 42), a transparency that leads the poet imaginatively back to "the beginning of days" (l. 43) and "the older experiences" (l. 50), that is, leads him back to the Golden Age of pagan pastoral and to the pristine landscapes of the Virgin Land. Because "The Wanderer" is a modern, demythified adaptation of a rococo pastoral, in the third section, "Broadway," its characters are periphrastically called "toilers after peace and after pleasure" (l. 27).

One of the defining topoi of pastoral literature is the *hortus conclusus*, a self-enclosed space located outside the hurrying world of economic pursuits and social strife. Semantically, the *hortus conclusus* is connected, by an inversion of values, to other outdoor settings that are also closed worlds. I am referring to the concentration camps set up in wartime.¹⁴ Fictionalized accounts of the Allied soldiers' harrowing experiences in the European trenches and prison camps began to circulate in France as early as 1916, when a landmark novel was published: Henri Barbusse's *Le feu*, translated in 1917 as *Under Fire: The Story of a Squad*. This was followed shortly by Roland Dorgelès's *Les croix de bois* (1919) translated in 1921 as *Wooden Crosses*. The two French books had been widely read by American intellectuals by 1921, and in Barbusse's novel in particular references abound to the stench of the dead bodies and the debris found in the trenches, while the effects of nearby shell explosions are depicted as stormy showers and volcano eruptions that leave the surviving soldiers literally buried under successive layers of "filth" and "mud."¹⁵ In 1922 E. E. Cummings's vaguely autobiographical *The Enormous Room* was also published. Cummings predates Williams by one year in the use of images of ingestion and coprophagy to highlight moments in which the identity of the first-person protagonist-narrator is threatened by external forces. Unlike Williams, however, the apologist for lower-case orthography adopts throughout a cavalier and cynical approach that prevents a fuller destabilization of his identity.¹⁶

The motif of the filthy trenches dug up in the open fields of Europe is indeed a cruel inversion of any genuine version of pastoral, which perhaps may be further explained through another pastoral tradition of Native American folklore. Between the years 1918 and 1923 Williams devoted much of his reading time to researching the early contacts between Amerindian peoples and Europeans, developing a lifelong interest in pre-Columbian mythology and ritual. To be sure, Elsie is no more a shepherdess singing a song of love than her mother, designated in the poem as a "young slattern," was a chaste nymph assaulted by a satyr. Yet as a negative foil to a pastoral figure and a socially marginalized and sexually abused victim, Elsie delivers a prophecy which is also a warning: she "express[es] with broken/ brain the truth about us — " (ll. 42-43). In the lines immediately following the paradoxical characterization of Elsie as a prophetess, the "truth about us" is explicitly con-

nected with the exploitation of one person by another characteristic of industrial capitalism. The whole poem is structured around the American pastoral/waste land opposition, including the replacement of "deer / going by fields of goldenrod" with the driverless car of the concluding line.

Perhaps the greatest challenge posed by "To Elsie" is how to interpret the extraordinarily graphic images in lines 49-54, and, if possible at all, how to connect them with the main historical and literary contexts surrounding the composition of the poem: the apocalyptic mentality bequeathed by World War I, the new anthropological work on Native American and in general non-Western traditions, and the social and environmental fractures caused by the rapid industrialization of the North Atlantic Seaboard.¹⁷ I have found an analogous set of images and situations in Paul Radin's *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (1956). The trickster is a restless and mischievous character whose erratic actions continually subvert the norms of behavior dictated by his community. He is a distant ancestor of such stock-characters as the medieval court jester, the bungling Yiddish *schlemiel*, the Spanish *pícaro*, the Falstaff-like *miles gloriosus*, and, going further back in time, even of the lusty satyr of pastoral literature. A well-known Winnebago folk-tale features a trickster who runs into a talking laxative bulb. Like Elsie in the eponymous poem, the talking-bulb has a message to deliver to the itinerant character: "He who chews me, he will defecate, he will defecate!" The trickster disbelieves this warning, thus defying the natural order that is the basis of all happiness. Contracting a bad case of diarrhea, he defecates until he and the earth (the animals, the trees, and even the mountains) are fully covered with excrement (Radin 25-27). Although in the principal version of the tale the trickster learns to trust and respect nature again, and is therefore led, in a manner reminiscent of Orpheus, by the trees through the mass of excrement to a fountain of clear water where his nightmare ends, there is another, more disturbing version. In this alternative version the trickster, in order to restore the natural equilibrium he has disrupted, is forced to eat his way out of the mountain of excrement he had created in the first place.

Williams believed that only the Indians had from the beginning accepted America in all its vastness and exuberance, and that for WASP Americans to reconcile themselves to the repressed sensual and material aspects of their own identity, first they had to accept the Indian inside themselves as much as the Indian outside. At least this is the main lesson he wishes to impart in "Père Sebastian Rasles." As the French Jesuit began to participate, at the turn of the seventeenth century, in the Indian Wars, on the side of the Indians, hungering with them and worshipping their pagan deities, he was "released AN INDIAN" (121). There is an Indian buried underneath the surface identity of each civilized American. A forty-year-old Williams reiterates this idea in the same essay, apropos of his earlier inability to open up to the inexhaustible richness of the American experience: "after my brutalizing battle of

twenty years to hear myself above the boilermakers in and about New York [. . .] I felt myself with ardors not released but beaten back" (105).

Elsewhere I have argued that Williams's use of "rocks" and "stones" as poetic symbols of ritual renewal does not derive exclusively from Celtic mythology, as is the case with other contemporary poets, from the Anglo-Irish W.B. Yeats to the Frenchman Yves Bonnefoy. At least Williams shows a remarkable acquaintance with the stone calendars and altars that the Aztecs used in their human sacrifices.¹⁸ This can be traced in several important texts from "A Sort of Song" (included in *The Wedge* [1944]) to "Père Sebastian Rasles," where we read: "Who is this man Larbaud who has so little pride that he wishes to talk to me? The lump in my breast hardened and became like the Aztec calendar of stone which the priests buried because they couldn't smash it easily, but it was dug up intact later. At least so I prided myself that I felt" (107). As the autobiographical essay connects the cross-cultural encounter of Williams and Larbaud with that of Rasles and the Abenaki Indians, it also moves from the particulars of Williams's personal crisis to sweeping historical generalizations: "Lost in [successively Puritan and Catholic Boston] and its environments as in a forest, I do believe the average American to be an Indian, but an Indian robbed of his world — unless we call machines a forest in themselves" (128).

In a book that explores precisely the adoption of ethnic masks by white modernist writers, Walter Benn Michaels has shown how a significant number of best-selling American authors of the 1920s, including middlebrow ones like Zane Grey in *The Vanishing American* (1925) and highbrow ones like Willa Cather in *A Lost Lady* (1923) and *The Professor's House* (1925), featured white characters who identified themselves *with* and *as* Indians. At a time of rampant anti-German and anti-military feelings, and of increasingly restrictive immigration laws, the Native American was perceived by anti-imperialist authors as a "vanishing identity," a threatened "pure race" in danger of further assimilation and eventual extinction (Michaels 37-40). The new emphasis on the autochthonous roots of American communities was meant as a counterbalance to the alternative ancestries that became dominant in the years following the end of World War I: while racist historians like Lothrop Stoddard (ridiculed as a certain Goddard in chapter 1 of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*) claimed that true-born Americans were the descendants of the Anglo-Saxons — the vanishing "Nordic native Americans," as he anxiously called them — President Calvin Coolidge claimed they were the modern inheritors of the ancient Greeks and Romans (Michaels 36-37).¹⁹ Like Grey and Cather, Williams partakes in the imaginative effort to establish a new line of descent for post-World War I America stretching back to the Indians of North and Meso America and to the Spanish.

In "Père Sebastian Rasles," the significance of autochthonous American identities that have been watered down by successive episodes of colonial intrusion is elaborated upon in a paragraph built on a provoca-

tive reversal of values and on an acrobatic association of ideas flowing through Williams's consciousness:

A herd of proofs moved through my mind like stumbling buffalo; ornaments of woven moosehair! There is the Indian. We are none. Who are we? Degraded whites riding our fears to market where everything is by accident and only one thing sure: the fatter we get the duller we grow; only a simpering disgust (like a chicken with a broken neck, that aims where it cannot peck and pecks only where it cannot aim, which a hog-plenty everywhere prevents from starving to death) reveals any contact with a possible freshness — and that only by inversion.

(108)

The rhetorical question "We are none. Who are we?" could perhaps be construed as stating "We have no substantial identity," or, as a Walt Whitman might have put it, "We have lost contact with our soul self." The statement that follows, "[We are] [d]egraded whites driving our fears to market where everything is by accident," is remarkably close to the idea expressed in "To Elsie" of a rootless people with no traditions of their own. Rasles's Abenaki Indians know they are nomads and hunters whose lives are guided by the cyclical rhythms of nature. Even their violence is "fresh," or so claims the nostalgic Williams, insofar as they fight each other in the same way as they kill the deer and the buffalo, driven by a natural instinct of self-preservation rather than greed. Uncontaminated by institutions such as property rights and the just war, which were manipulated to their exclusive advantage by the Spanish in the sixteenth century and by the Puritans in the seventeenth, Williams's Amerindians chose to meet their death in combat. In sum, because they have not deviated from their original rapport with nature, they have managed to escape moral degradation even when they were being physically exterminated.

By contrast with the Native Americans, the European-Americans, while also migrant peoples, are hypocrites who disguise their greed as a Christian crusade. They also profess a proprietary view of nature and a dehumanizing view of the Indian that invests them with governing rights over America and its native peoples. For Williams this acquisitive mentality applies as much to seventeenth-century Puritans as to twentieth-century bourgeois Americans, in whose modern dualistic consciousness Africans, Jews, and Asians have replaced the Indians. This is seen in the similar phrasing of "we degraded prisoners" in "To Elsie," who metaphorically ride in the driverless car, and "we degraded whites" in "Père Sebastian Rasles," who metaphorically "rid[e] our fears to market." Furthermore, both groups of whites show an eating disorder: while the "degraded prisoners" are "destined / to hunger until [they] eat filth," the "degraded whites" eat a disgusting "hog-plenty" that precludes their starvation. Although Thomas R. Whitaker has

interpreted the metaphors of “eating” and “ingestion” in “Père Sebastian Rasles” as an allegorization of the violence inflicted by one culture on another in seventeenth-century America and as an expression of the modernist intellectual’s Emersonian individualism, it is also clear that he who allows himself to be eaten by his environment becomes a fertilizing agent, indeed a yeast extract that makes the eater grow and multiply. In this way, Rasles continued to “live with his village” despite great physical sufferings and deprivations, “ — alone, absorbed in them, LOST in them, swallowed, a hard yeast — ” (121).

To come back now to the speaker in “To Elsie”: his changing perspective moves from an authoritative and patronizing account of the social others surrounding him to an indictment of the objective cultural conditions that produce these misfits and on to his own ingestion of excrements. The verses voicing the speaker’s excremental vision perhaps lead all too abruptly into the famous final saying, a clever three-line recapitulation of the images of aimlessness that pervade *Spring and All*: “No one / to witness / and adjust, no one to drive the car.”²⁰ John Palattella has suggested that the three social viewpoints presented in the poem (in the order of their appearance, the speaker’s “despair” at the cataclysmic changes taking place in his society, the speaker’s “responsibility toward the social world,” and Elsie’s “disdain[ful] observations about his life”) are left unresolved by the abrupt conclusion in the form of the balanced epigram just quoted (13-14). For Palattella, Elsie becomes an image of “uncertainty” that “humbles” the poet’s initial apocalyptic rhetoric. Rather than “offering a social vision that transforms Elsie into a cipher of the cultural catastrophe plotted out in the poem’s first nine stanzas,” Palattella goes on, Williams keeps open the possibility of the subject’s assumption of active responsibility, even if “at this time that change is impossible to manage” (14). Although Elsie’s words are never registered in the poem (Palattella fancifully attributes “disdainful observations” to her, but the text disauthorizes such an attribution), her alleged yet unrealized ability to speak “the truth about us” turns her into a serious competitor for the role of interpreter. As Brian A. Bremen has explained in his brief comment on this poem, “while Williams never does give the other a ‘voice,’ he begins to expose the conditions that doom the other to silence” (61). Instead of a plurality of voices, Williams uses an ethnographer-speaker who finds, in the domestic space of his own kitchen, a servant girl who reminds him — her presumed rescuer — of his complicity with the system that sent her to the orphan home in the first place, and eloquently expresses this truth (“the truth about us”) in *her* disarming inarticulateness. The contact with this girl, who belongs to neither pastoral nature nor technological modernity, triggers off a series of loosely connected images involving showers of excrement, the earth-and-sky dialectics, hungering prisoners, and running deer.

To be sure, the use that Williams makes of modernist techniques of estrangement and juxtaposition can be fruitfully illuminated by inter-

disciplinary work on ethnography and cultural anthropology in ways already sketched out by James Clifford and Brian A. Bremen. The main point to highlight in one such reading is that Williams is not content with documenting and denouncing situations of economic and social marginalization. In fact, as a poet equally committed to the worlds of the imagination and of civil rights, Williams continually urges the reader to occupy alternately the positions of minority victim and victimizer. His view of inter-class and inter-ethnic relations is thus dialectical. Significantly, the semantic field of touching, like the imagery of eating, works toward convincing the reader of the advantages inherent in the *mestizoization* (imaginative, if not biological) of different races:

It is *this* to be *moral*: to be positive, to be peculiar, to be sure, generous, brave — TO MARRY, to *touch* — to *give* because one HAS, not because one has nothing. And to give to him who HAS, who will join, who will make, who will fertilize, who will be like you yourself: to create, to hybridize, to crosspollenize [sic], — not to sterilize, to draw back, to fear, to dry up, to rot. It is the sun.

(“Père Sebastian Rasles” 121)

I have tried to point out new ways in which a close reading of “To Elsie” can greatly benefit from the light thrown on it by such texts as Native American mythology and folk-tales, Robert McAlmon’s “Elsie,” E.E. Cummings’s *The Enormous Room*, Williams’s own “The Wanderer” and “Père Sebastian Rasles,” as well as from prooftexts by Anne Bradstreet and Henri Barbusse that Williams, like other American authors of his generation, may well have read or even studied. The anti-German and anti-imperialist reactions generated during World War I made progressive American authors like Fitzgerald, Cather, Frank, and Williams question the hitherto unexamined hierarchical gradation of the European ethnic groups settled in the United States, from the privileged Nordic (whether Germanic-Norwegian or Anglo-Saxon) to the Celtic and down to the Slavic and Italian. In Williams and Cather, this new awareness also contributed to their reconsideration of the peoples of color (Native Americans, Chinese, Mexicans, and African Americans) as vital components of the inclusive and centrifugal identity of all Americans vis-à-vis the exclusive and centripetal Aryanism of the restrictionist Nordics. For its part, Williams’s “Père Sebastian Rasles” contributed to the vogue in the 1920s of a vigorous anti-Puritan cultural criticism, whose milestones were Van Wyck Brooks’s *The Wine of the Puritans* (1909), Waldo Frank’s *Our America* (1919), and Lewis Mumford’s *The Golden Day* (1926).

To conclude: Williams seems to have professed a poetics of contact, one in which the interplay of his poems with the literary and pictorial texts of the American and European traditions was to be accompanied by the representation of closer interactions between different social and

ethnic groups. Just as the isolation of all underprivileged groups had been caused, so Williams thought, by their mutual refusal to treat each other as equal partners (that is, with equal rights to claim and/or preserve their own alterity) in an ongoing conversation, avoiding “any possible contact,” their main opportunity at self-regeneration involved their opening up to one another, in a crosspollination process that does not do away with differences. On the contrary, such an exchange highlights the impossibility of working toward social regeneration without accepting and preserving preexisting differences. I have argued throughout that several of Williams’s key texts of the early 1920s are themselves hybrids of metaliterary and social commentary. The poem “To Elsie” is both a palimpsest of earlier texts and an ethnographic report. The 1921 *Contact* pieces are at the same time literary manifestoes advocating the creation of an “indigenous art” and a criticism of the ease with which the American “brood moves through football into business” (like Fitzgerald’s Tom Buchanan) without ever learning to dissociate “freedom of truth from usage” (“Comment” 27-29). Finally, “Père Sebastian Rasles” is both a lyric confession of alienation and a polyphonous reinterpretation of the early encounters between Native Americans and Europeans, presented in the form of a conversation with Larbaud marked by the two related operations of being “released” from one’s monolithic identity and being “touched” by the experience of others.²² Indeed, all three texts are near-contemporaneous, and in all three Williams tries to come to terms with the unvoiced claims of long suppressed subaltern identities at the same time as he adapts preexisting texts and traditions to the new conditions of writing in post-World War I America. While the first operation entails furthering the contact with members of other ethnic groups, the second one entails furthering the contact with previously neglected cultural heritages, including Native American ones. In the 1921 “Yours, O Youth” Williams even went so far as to envision, proleptically as it were, the type of poetry he was going to produce in *Spring and All*, and even the type of “native local” writing he prescribed for his fellow Americans who followed the path of self-exile (e.g., Robert McAlmon, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot): “the experience of native local contacts, which the American expatriates take with them, is the only thing that can give that differentiated quality of presentation to their work” (35). Given the range and the depth of Williams’s writing, it is fair to say that in his poetry (as in that of Langston Hughes among the radical primitivists) the renewal of literature appears intimately linked to the regeneration of society.

Notes

1. Weaver points out that it was McAlmon’s landing experiences as an airplane passenger that suggested the name for the magazine and for McAlmon’s own small Paris press, the Contact Publishing Co. (31-32).

An alternative, more plausible source can be found in the title of Ezra Pound's 1920 *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley (Life and Contacts)*, which, like the 1921 *Contact* manifesto "Yours, O Youth," makes reference to Jules Laforgue and the exchanges between French and American authors. In the opening prose section of *Spring and All*, which was first published by McAlmon's small press in 1923, Williams attempts a typically dadaist characterization of poetry as the violent contact symbolized by a plane crash: "All thought of misery has left us. Why should I care? Children laughingly fling themselves under the wheels of the street cars, airplanes crash gaily to the earth. Someone has written a poem" (*Collected Poems, Vol. 1* 181).

2. I am obviously not the first Williams commentator to adopt "contact" as a heuristic term. Earlier efforts include such phrasings as the "Contact idea" (Tashjian [1975] 84-90; [1978] 24-27), the "poet of contact" (Frail 185-88), the "doctrine of contact" (Crawford 42-45), and the "figuration of immediacy" (Marsh 199-202). In one of the finest readings of Williams to appear in recent years, Lowney has articulated dialectically, in a nice instance of paronomasia, his own version of the contact idea, as both a "poetics of dissent" and a "poetics of descent" (16-20 and throughout).

3. This passage may well have been inspired by the concluding chapter of *Walden*, where Thoreau anticipates Williams's characteristic tropes of "doctoring" and "descent" in a passage dealing with the all-encompassing nature of the American self: "The Universe is wider than our views of it [...] The other side of the globe is but the home of our correspondent. Our voyaging is only great-circling sailing, and the doctors prescribe for diseases of the skin only" (368).

4. Among the exceptions to this treatment, two of his doctor's poems are especially noteworthy: "Portrait of a Woman in Bed" (1917) and "The Poor" (1921), a text that strangely prefigures "Père Sebastian Rasles" in its presentation of a figure of authority, the "School Physician," who is initially rejected by the poor parents of sick children because his presence reminds them of their poverty, only to be accepted later as a well-meaning, caring individual.

5. For an alternative reading that emphasizes exclusively the debased or even parodic quality of the pastoral elements in "Horned Purple," see Schmidt 39. A compromise between Schmidt's and my own reading is to be found in Halter's contention that the poem oscillates between "the repellent and the magical" (141-42).

6. The image of leafy twigs circling around a human head calls to mind a series of associations: the gods Bacchus and Apollo, the satyrs of pastoral, Olympic athletes during a ceremony, and soldiers wearing their camouflage attire.

7. Marzán provides the standard account of Williams's ambivalent feelings toward his experience of growing up in a Spanish-speaking household (his father, a British subject raised in the Caribbean, was completely bilingual) in suburban New Jersey. See Sánchez González (256) for a

critique of Marzán's psychologizing of Williams in terms of a neatly split identity: the Anglo public persona of a "Bill" who was diligent and reserved, and the Hispanic private persona of a "Carlos" who was romantic and flamboyant. Marzán's contention that Williams's bicultural heritage provided him with an intermittent "source of anguish" and a "lifelong source of power" (xii) can be contrasted with North's new-historicist account, in "The Dialect in/of Modernism," of T.S. Eliot's alternate boasting and occultation of his mastery of Southern black English, which being a dialect in standard English could be used as an analogue for the dialect of modernism. In Eliot as in Williams the minority culture construed as different from the Anglo mainstream is used to enact a rebellion against the legacies of both the genteel tradition and Victorian verse.

8. As a Native American, Elsie may have been a descendant of the Tuscaroras, who settled in the Ramapough hills of northern New Jersey (Clifford 6-7).

9. Here as elsewhere I have relied on Mariani's dating of main events in Williams's life from the poet's surviving letters and diaries. On the interview with Larbaud, see Mariani 222-23. In "Comment" the term "conversation" is used metaphorically several times, in very much the same manner as "contact," to designate mutually enriching encounters and interactions between disparate subjects and cultures.

10. On the dialectical resolution of Larbaud's and Williams's respective positions into a "history lesson," see Bremen 140-47. Bremen uses the Gadamerian concept of "fusion of horizons" to help explain and expand Williams's own treatment of "contact."

11. These dates are taken from Conrad, who corrects Williams's own symbolic dating of the Jesuit's personal odyssey among the Abenaki from "October 13, 1689 to October 12, 1723" (Conrad 36-37; Williams, "Père Sebastian Rasles" 120).

12. Although "To Elsie" is among Williams's most written-about poems, to my knowledge only a handful of critics have devoted at least one paragraph of stimulating commentary to the stanzas just quoted. These include Breslin (69-70), Diggory (50-51), Dijkstra (177), Dolin (43-45), Halter (139-41), Larrissy (83-84), and Lowney (71-73). Diggory is the only one who brings into his discussion the context of war, which he introduces by means of the pictorial intertext of the hungry soldiers in Brueghel's *Adoration*.

13. Clifford briefly discusses "filth" in connection with Claude Lévi-Strauss and Aimé Césaire, but unfortunately fails to take account of its significance in Williams's early poetry, and specifically in "To Elsie." See Clifford 15.

14. On Williams's uses of pastoral in his post-World War II poetry, including *Paterson 1 & 2*, see Rodríguez García, "Ruination and Translation." On the recourse to the pastoral as an English mode of "both fully gauging the calamities of the Great War and imaginatively protecting oneself against them," see chapter 7 of Fussell, esp. 235-43.

15. The following is a representative quotation from the chapter entitled "Bombardment": "It was a shell that burst on the ground and threw up earth and debris in a fan-shaped cloud of darkness. Across the cloven land it looked like the frightful spitting of a volcano, piled up in the bowels of the earth [. . .] we are buried up to our necks" (209). For similar, related passages see 224, 310-13, 321. Like stanza 17 of "To Elsie," the opening sections of *Under Fire* play on the metaphorical collision of "earth" and "sky" (3, 5). A brief survey of the principal motifs pervading the French literature on the Great War appears in Green.

16. For a few passages in Cummings's pedantic novel containing references to anthropophagy, rotten food, and reeking urine, see 193, 241, 302. *The Enormous Room* was just one of the many casualties caused by the notorious Society for the Suppression of Vice in its 1922 crusade against immoral art (the recurrent word "shit" was inked out of every copy of the first printing by hand), which also affected such works as Joyce's *Ulysses* and Lawrence's *Women in Love* (North, *Reading* 1922 150-51). On the meager and unsavoury food the English ate in their own trenches during the course of the war, see Fussell 47-50. On 4 October 1922 Williams wrote Kenneth Burke about Cummings's poetry, which he liked very much, explaining that he had also enjoyed the "great intensity" of *The Enormous Room* despite the book's "atrocious" style and cosmopolitan snobbery (qtd. in Mariani 202).

17. In *Paterson 2* the speaker was to confess to having read, many years before, James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (definitive ed. in 12 vols., 1911-19).

18. For a full exploration of rock and stone motifs in Williams, see Rodríguez García, "La piedra y la flor."

19. In chapter 7 of his *Discontented America*, titled "Nordics to the Front: The 1924 National Origins Act," Goldberg offers a brief history of anti-immigrant sentiments and legislation between 1890 (when Italians and Slavs began to arrive in large numbers) and 1924 (when Coolidge materialized his restrictionist agenda in the promulgation of the National Origins Act). He highlights the momentous 1921 quota law and its immediate political consequences for the Chinese, the Japanese, the Italians, the Slavs, the Jews, and even the Irish, who were not considered Nordics or "northwestern European" because of a widespread anti-Catholic bias (156-57).

20. Clifford nicely connects the disorder represented by Elsie's unstructured body with the blind, "runaway history" represented by the driverless car, which seems propelled simply by an entropic "rush of associations" (4-5).

21. Williams's tendency to represent peoples of color as devoid of voice has been underscored by Nielsen, who is concerned exclusively with the representation of African Americans, and especially with black women ("negresses") reified as fertility totems (72-78). Yet he does not grant the possibility that at times these women's silence may derive from the speaker's respect for their inaccessible interiority nor does he acknowl-

edge the fact that Williams was an obstetrician and that in his *Autobiography* he sympathetically represents his less privileged patients in the midst of their struggle to describe their symptoms and sensations articulately. In the *Autobiography* and in *Paterson* poems are compared to babies being born of a woman-city with the assistance of a poet-physician who is also a father to the poems and even a river running through the city. For a full discussion of "female totems" in Williams, see chapter 2 of Marzán, esp. 71-76. For an appreciation of Williams as a "proto-feminist of color" who "testif[ies] to the subaltern experience of the Americas' history," see Sánchez González 246.

22. Three years prior to his interview with Larbaud, Williams wrote in *Contact*: "France becomes a man with whom we can talk" ("Comment" 27).

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