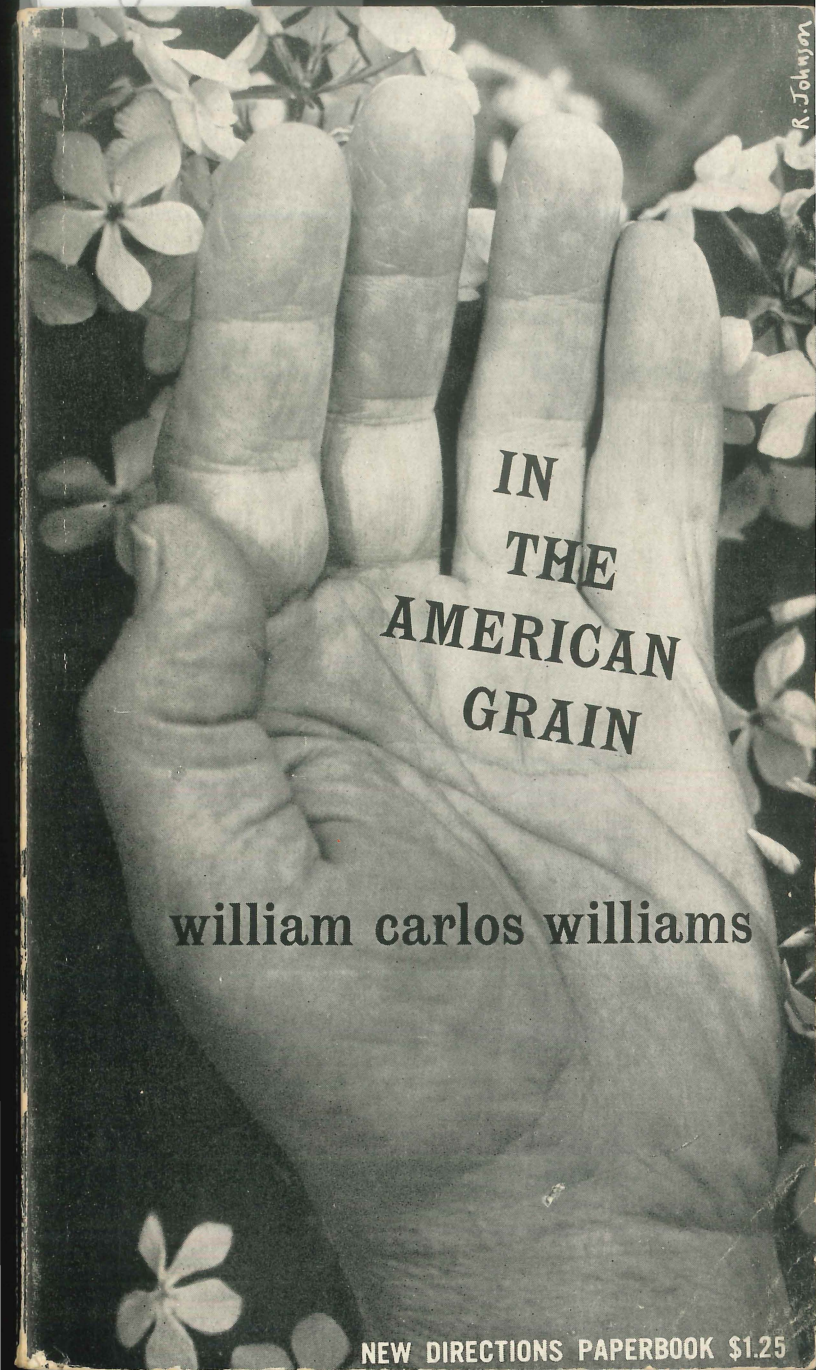
R. Johnson
IN THE AMERICAN GRAIN
william carlos williams
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IN THE AMERICAN GRAIN

BY

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

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In these studies I have sought to re-name the things seen, now lost in chaos of borrowed titles, many of them inappropriate, under which the true character lies hid. In letters, in journals, reports of happenings I have recognized new contours suggested by old words so that new names were constituted. Thus, where I have found noteworthy stuff, bits of writing have been copied into the book for the taste of it. Everywhere I have tried to separate out from the original records some flavor of an actual peculiarity the character denoting shape which the unique force has given. Now it will be the configuration of a man like Washington, and now a report of the witchcraft trials verbatim, a story of a battle at sea—for the odd note there is in it, a letter by Franklin to prospective emigrants; it has been my wish to draw from every source one thing, the strange phosphorus of the life, nameless under an old misappelation.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

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THE DISCOVERY OF THE INDIES

THE New World, existing in those times beyond the sphere of all things known to history, lay in the fifteenth century as the middle of the desert or the sea lies now and must lie forever, marked with its own dark life which goes on to an immaculate fulfillment in which we have no part. But now, with the maritime successes of that period, the western land could not guard its seclusion longer; a predestined and bitter fruit existing, perversely, before the white flower of its birth, it was laid bare by the miraculous first voyage. For it is as the achievement of a flower, pure, white, waxlike and fragrant, that Columbus' infatuated course must be depicted, especially when compared with the acrid and poisonous apple which was later by him to be proved.

No more had Columbus landed, the flower once ravished, than it seemed as if heaven itself had turned upon this man for disturbing its repose. But the initiative taken, the course broached, the story must go on. He left a handful of colonists in the islands while he, himself, returned to Spain with the news and for aid.

As the outward journey had been pleasant "like April in Andalucia"—still seas, clear, fine weather and steady winds, so now the return was difficult. Through tempest, assault, trickery among the Portuguese Azores, capture and despair, he fought his way. But as he neared the home coast at last his trials grew worst of all. Everything hung on the point of being lost:

* * *

. . . daylight until sunset, great trouble with the wind, high and tempestuous seas. Lightning three times to the N.N.E. —sign of a great storm coming from that quarter or its opposite. We lay to most of the night, afterwards showing a

During the night a terrible storm, expecting to be overwhelmed by the cross seas, while the wind seemed to raise the caravel into the air. In these straits, not knowing whether there was any port for shelter, I set the mainsail. . . .

* * *

Forced by the storm into Lisbon harbor, the turn of his destiny quickly multiplied his misfortunes. In Spain, when he finally arrived there, they immediately accused him of playing traitor to Castile, of having tried to bargain with the Portuguese sovereign.

But that passed; there was too much still for him to endure for catastrophe to have overtaken him so early; some savage power had him in its care, preserving him for its later pleasure. Now his triumph was acclaimed, his captives were paraded in Madrid, his gold was witnessed, his birds, monkeys and native implements were admired. This over, immediately the urge was on him once more. He must return at once to the New World. Never content would he be for the balance of his whole life, following his fortune, whose flower, unknown to him, was past.

But now he saw before him the illusive bright future of a great empire founded, coupled with a fabulous conquest of heathendom by the only true church. Much had been promised him. He had succeeded in the sternest hazard, the great first step; should not the rest prove easy and natural? It rose before him like a great gilded mountain. Again and again he calls before his mind their agreements:

* * *

. . . that henceforth I should be called Don, and should be Chief Admiral of the Ocean Sea, perpetual Viceroy and Governor of all the islands and continents that I should discover and gain in the Ocean Sea, and that my eldest son should succeed, and so from generation to generation forever.

. . . . . .

Item: that of all and every kind of merchandise, whether pearls, precious stones, gold, silver, spices, etc., of whatever kind, name and sort which may be bought, bartered, discovered within the said Admiralty, your Highnesses grant from henceforth to the said Don Cristóbal, the tenth part of the whole . . . granted, in the town of Santa Fe de la Granada on the 17th day of April, in the year of our Lord Jesus Christ, 1492. I, the King. I, the Queen.

* * *

Unhappy talk. What power had such ridiculous little promises to stay a man against that terrific downpour on the brink of which they were all floating? How could a king fulfill them? Yet this man, this straw in the play of the elemental giants, must go blindly on. More and more he threw everything he had into the contest, his sons, his brothers, in the hope that his fortunes would be retrieved in the end. How could he have realized that against which he was opposed? His instinctive enemies, however, were not so backward on their part. With malicious accuracy, finding him more and more alone, they sensed everything and turned it to their own advantage, being closer to that curious self-interest of natural things than he.

Heroically, but pitifully, he strove to fasten to himself that enormous world, that presently crushed him among its multiple small disguises.

With its archaic smile, America found Columbus its first victim. This was well, even merciful. As for the others, who shall say?—when riding a gigantic Nature and when through her heat they could arrogate to themselves a pin's worth of that massive strength, to turn it against another of their own kind to his undoing,—even they are natural and as much a part of the scheme as any other.

There is no need to argue Columbus' special worth. As much as many another more successful, everything that is holy, brave or of whatever worth there is in a man was contained in that body. Let it have been as genius that he made

his first great voyage, possessed of that streamlike human purity of purpose called by that name—it was still as a man that he would bite the bitter fruit that Nature would offer him. He was poisoned and his fellows turned against him like wild beasts.

Bewildered, he continued, voyage after voyage, four times, out of his growing despair; it seemed that finally by sheer physical effort a way must be found—till the realization of it all at last grew firmly upon him:

* * *

Seven years passed in discussion and nine in execution, the Indies discovered, wealth and renown for Spain and great increase to God and to his Church. And I have arrived at and am in such condition that there is no one so vile but thinks he may insult me.

What have I not endured? Three voyages undertaken and brought to success against all who would gainsay me; islands and a mainland to the south discovered; pearls, gold, and, in spite of all, after a thousand struggles with the world and having withstood them all, neither arms nor counsels availed, it cruelly kept me under water.

If I were to steal the Indies or the land which lies beyond them from the altar of St. Peter and give them to the Moors, they could not have greater enmity toward me in Spain.

When on my last voyage, having turned homeward, I had left Paria (Brazil) and come again to Española (Porto Rico), I found half the people in revolt; and the Indians on the other side grievously harassed me. It was at this time that Bobadilla came to Santo Domingo. I was at La Vega. He took up his abode in my house and, just as he found it, so he appropriated everything to himself. Well and good; perhaps he was in want of it. On the second day after his arrival he created himself Governor.

I thought the affair would end like that of Hojeda and the others, but I restrained myself when I learned for certain from the friars that your Highnesses had sent him. I wrote

course was north and west, a march of about a hundred leagues —through obscure and intricate parts: native villages in the swamps, Caliquen, Napateca, Hurripacuxi, Paracoxi, Tocaste, Cale—outlandish names.

She—Who will recognize them? None but you. To the rest without definition but to you each a thing in itself, delicate, pregnant with sudden meanings.

* * *

The way had been difficult: through a great morass, misled, ambuscaded at the fords, fighting, swimming, starving for a month at a time, thankful for a little parched corn, not even ripe, the cob and all being eaten as it was, and the stalk, too, for want of better.

* * *

She—It is de Soto! all goes forward somehow. But I am before you. It is my country. Everything is in accordance with my wish. Eight men start from a thicket, naked and tattooed, your lancers rush upon them, but one falls to his knees crying out, "Do not kill me. I am a Christian! It is Juan Ortiz, relic of Narvaez' forces, whom I have nursed tenderly for you these twelve years, teaching him the wild language. Witness my love. But I shall take him from you when he is most needed."—

* * *

At Anhaica Apalachi, through the winter, they lived with difficulty on game and other stores, such as they could take from the natives, miserably, as best they were able.

On Wednesday, the third of March, 1549, the Governor left his winter quarters at Apalachi to seek Yupaha, of which a young slave had told them: a country toward the rising sun, governed by a woman, where there was gold in quantity.

Now the second year was starting. Led by the youth they continued to bear east and north in the hope of finding the country of which he had spoken: days, weeks, a month—with

small food, such want of meat and salt that oftentimes, in many places, a sick man would say, "Now, if I had but a slice of meat, or only a few lumps of salt, I should not thus die." But the Indians, skillful with the bow, would get abundance of deer, turkeys, rabbits and other game. Crossing a stream after nine last days of forced marching they came out into a pine grove on the far bank. Here all direction was lost. "He went about for the road and returned to us desperate."

The Governor had brought thirteen sows to Florida, which had increased to three hundred swine; and the maize having failed for three days, he ordered killed daily, for each man, half a pound of pork, on which small allowance, and some boiled herbs, the people with much difficulty lived.

From Apalachi in Florida to Cutifachiqui, on the Savanna River, two days march from the sea, where presently after the greatest hardships they arrived, they had traveled northeast it may be four hundred and thirty leagues. At this place, it appeared well to all to make a settlement; but Soto, as it was his object to find another treasure like that of Atabalipa, lord of Peru, would not be content to stay. The natives were asked if they had knowledge of any great lord further on, to which they answered that twelve days' travel thence was a province called Chiaha, subject to a chief of Coca.

The Governor then resolved, having rested his army, to go at once in quest of that country, taking with him a quantity of pearls which the cacique had given him; and being an inflexible man, and dry of word, who, although he liked to know what the others all thought and had to say, after he had once made up his mind he did not like to be opposed, and as he ever acted as he thought best, all bent to his will. So they turned north and continued forward until the fall, bending about through a quiet country.

* * *

She—For you I come severally as envoys from the chief men upon the road, bearing baskets of mulberries, a honey comb, marten skins and the hides of deer, and in calabashes

the oil of walnuts and bear fat, drawn like olive oil, clear and of good taste.—

* * *

And what? Silences, death, rotting trees; insects "so that the sails were black with them and the men laughed, in spite of their forlorn condition, to see each others' faces so swollen and out of shape in the morning;" alligators, reptiles, a wild rose "like that of Spain, but with less leaves, because it grew in the woods." Sun, moon, stars, rain, heat, snow; water to the neck for days; blue-butterflies among the green palmetto leaves; grapes and others that grow on vines along the ground; plums of two sorts, vermillion and gray, of the form and size of walnuts, having three or four stones in them; wolves, deer, jackals, rabbits,—

* * *

She—To make you lonesome, ready for my caresses.

* * *

"Unprepared, we believed ourselves on a footing of peace, so much so that some of us, putting our arms in the luggage, had gone without any."

Then to battle! It is Mabilla, the staked town.

* * *

She—It is I, in my son, Tuscaloosa; tall of person, muscular, lean and symmetrical. All is you; I, too, am all—one either side. Men, horses, hogs—all goes down in our fury. Now you feel me. Many times I shall drive you back from the palisades. But you come again. What shall I do to govern that lust—which if it break, I am the most defeated? Those in chains having set down their burdens near the fence, my people lift them on their backs and bring them into the town. Thus, to anger you, I have possession of all the baggage, the clothes, pearls and whatever else you had besides—lost in the conflagration. I am strong! I shall possess you.

Oh, but I lie. I am weak. I fail. I cannot take you. What are they but savages—who know nothing? they wound you, they wound you, and every arrow has upon its barbs a

kiss from my lips. There is one in your thigh, between the edges of the armor. Thrice you fall before reaching the gate! The fools, madmen. It is into my own flesh, fifty, a hundred times deeper than into yours. And me it kills—but you, though you cannot grip the saddle because of it, you fight standing all day in the stirrups. I divide myself to take you and it is myself that wounds myself, jealous even of your injuries, furious at that sweet touch of your flesh which my tools enjoy but I have—not yet. It is all you. The young Sylvestre fainting on the back track; Pedro Moron diving from the bridge with a shower of arrows about him—swimming to safety; Don Carlos, alighting to pull an arrow from his horse's breast at the stockade, receives one himself, in at the neck, out behind—and falls prostrate.

* * *

After heaviest losses in men, beasts and possessions they prevailed and of the Indians all were killed, two thousand five hundred more or less, all having fought with the utmost bravery and devotion.

The Governor now learning that Francisco Maldonado was waiting for him at the port of Ochuse, six days' travel distant to the southward, he caused Juan Ortiz to keep the news secret, that he might not be interrupted in his purpose; because the pearls he wished to send to Cuba for show, that their fame might raise the desire of coming to Florida, had been lost, and he feared that, hearing of him without seeing gold or silver or other thing of value from that land, it would come to have such a reputation that no one would be found willing to go there when men would be wanted; so he determined to send no news of himself until he should discover a rich country. So that to Tuscaloosa must be given credit, in effect, for a great victory.

On Sunday, the eighteenth of November, the sick being found to be getting well, the Governor again set out, moving west, to Chicaca, a small town of twenty houses, but well stocked with maize. There he determined to pass the second

winter. The Indians, at peace, came frequently with turkeys and rabbits and other food—but secretly they were plotting other matters.

Suddenly, on a certain night, the air above the straw roofs is filled with flame. Sentries and the enemy arrive in the town together; a terrific confusion, four columns converging upon the same point. Indians moving about freely in the town, because of the peace that existed, had that night brought the fire in little pots, not to be seen. Everything is aflame. Men come out naked from their beds. The horses strive to free themselves, some succeed. The hogs squeal and perish. Soto and one other are all that are able to mount. He drives upon an Indian with his lance and transpierces him. His saddle girth, hastily adjusted, slips and he falls. Who will straighten out the confusion in the night? Who will gather the naked and disarmed soldiers, among the smoke, the flames, the noise? The Governor is up. He directs as best he can. But, by luck, the horses dashing about through the smoke, spread terror to the savages who think it the cavalry forming for an attack. Alarmed they escape from the stockade.

* * *

She—Naked, armless, acold you draw off, in the morning, to Chicacilla, protecting yourself as best you can—there to retemper the swords and await what will happen. Some are reduced to straw mats for their only cover, lying now this way, now that to the fire, keeping warm as they are able.

And for this your people begin to hate you. It is my work. But again I am defeated, your last thought shall be for their safety. Because you have found no gold, only increasing hardships; because of your obstinacy, unexplained, incredible to them—you will be compared meanly with far lesser spirits. It is their revenge, making you solitary—ready for my caresses.

And if, to survive, you yourself in the end turned native, this victory is sweetest of all. Bitter the ..eed that at Nilco will cause that horrid slaughter: You already sick, in grave

harm might be done; but finding the Governor and his people on their guard, the chief began to draw off from the shore, when the crossbowmen, who were in readiness, with loud cries shot at the Indians, and struck down five or six of them.

* * *

She—Well done, Spaniard! like an Indian. Witness then my answer:

* * *

They retired with great order, not one leaving the oar, even though the one next to him might have fallen, and covering themselves they withdrew. These were fine looking men, very large and well formed; and what with the awnings, the plumes, and the shields, the pennons, and the number of people in the fleet, it appeared like a famous armada of galleys.

During the thirty days that were passed there, four piraguas were built, into three of which one morning, three hours before daybreak, the Governor ordered twelve cavalry to enter, four in each, men in whom he had confidence that they would gain the land notwithstanding the natives and secure passage or die. So soon as they had come ashore the piraguas returned and when the sun was two hours high, the people had all got over. The distance was nearly half a league: a man standing on the shore could not be told whether he were a man or something else, from the far side.

* * *

She—Now you are over, you have straddled me, this is my middle. Left to right, the end is the same. But here in the center I am not defeated. Go wander. Aquixo, Casqui, Pacaha. Take what you will. Clothe your men, yourself you will never clothe save as I clothe you, in my own way. They have suffered, they have gone nearly bare. At Pacaha I have provisioned them in advance.

* * *

Shawls, deer skins, lion and bear skins, and many cat skins were found. Numbers who had been a long time badly

covered here clothed themselves. Of the shawls they made mantles and cassocks. Of the deer skins were made jerkins, shirts, stockings and shoes; and from the bear skins they made very good cloaks, such as no water could get through. They found shields of raw cowhide out of which armor was made for the horses.

* * *

She—Look, then, Soto, upon this transformed army.—Here forty days and at the end I am beside you once more. Where is she now, Doña Ysobel, your helpmate, years since, in Cuba?

* * *

The chief of Pacaha bestowed on him two of his sisters telling him that they were tokens of love, for his remembrance, to be his wives. The name of one was Macanoche, that of the other Mochila. They were symmetrical, tall and full; Macanoche bore a pleasant expression; in her manners and features appeared the lady, the other was robust.

* * *

She—Ride upon the belly of the waters, building your boats to carry all across. Calculate for the current; the boats move with a force not their own, up and down, sliding upon that female who communicates to them, across all else, herself. And still there is that which you have not sounded, under the boats, under the adventure—giving to all things the current, the wave, the onwash of my passion. So cross and have done with it, you are safe—and I am desolate.

But you are mine and I will strip you naked—jealous of everything that touches you. Down, down to me—in and under and down, unbeaten, the white kernel, the flame—the flame burning under water, that I cannot quench.

I will cause it to be known that you are a brute. Now it is no sea-ringed island, now it is no city in a lake: Come, here is room for search and countersearch. Come, blackbeard, tireless rider, with an arrow in the thigh. I wait for you—beyond the river. Follow me—if you can. Follow me,

Señor, this is your country. I give it to you. Take it. Here are carriers for your burdens; here are girls for your beds; my best men for adversaries. You have beaten them all. My time is coming: you have seen how they defend their palisades for me; they have driven trees into the ground about their villages. They are men, tall, slim, full of strategies; they come against you naked, with their bows and arrows; they die at the paddles but none quivers. It is me they defend. I am for the brave, for the wise, for the victor. Watch yourself at the fords, at the porches of houses.

See how I have fled you, dashing into a lake there to freeze all night, coming forth at dawn, half drowned, my brows hidden in lily leaves. At the sight of your boats, at the breath of your name, the villages are left empty. Nothing can induce the chief to show himself. All have gone upstream to an island, carrying their goods with them. At the sight of your men in armor, terror strikes them; they plunge into the stream, pushing their possessions on little rafts, that escaping in the haste, float downstream. I have fled, a single man, among my own people but your hounds scenting me out have dragged me down.

* * *

Now it begins to change. The third winter past, at Alimamu, it is the fourth year.

At Alimamu, where they learned to catch rabbits with Indian snares, Juan Ortiz died, a loss the Governor greatly regretted; for, without an interpreter, not knowing whither he was traveling, Soto feared to enter the country, lest he might get lost. The death was so great a hindrance to our going, whether on discovery or out of the country, that to learn of the Indians what would have been rendered in four words, it now became necessary to have the whole day; and oftener than otherwise the very opposite was understood to what was asked; so that many times it happened the road traveled one day, or sometimes two or three days would have to be returned over, wandering up and down, lost in the thickets.

For four days marching was impossible because of the snow. When that ceased to fall, he traveled three days through a desert, a region so low, so full of lakes and bad passages, that at one time, for a whole day, the travel lay through water up to the knees at places, in others to the stirrups; and occasionally, for the distance of a few paces there was swimming. And he came to Tutelpinco, a town untenanted and found to be without maize, seated near a lake that flowed into the river with a great current.

* * *

She—Nearer, nearer.

* * *

Cayas, Quigaltam, Guachoya—thither the Governor determined to go in a few days to learn if the sea was near. He had not over three hundred efficient men, nor more than forty horses. Some of the beasts were lame, and useful only in making out a show of a troop of cavalry.

At Guachoya he sent Juan de Anasco with eight of the cavalry down the river to discover what population might be there and get what knowledge there was of the sea. He was gone eight days and stated, when he got back, that in all that time he could not travel more than fourteen or fifteen leagues, on account of the great bogs that came out of the river, the canebrakes and thick shrubs that were along the margin, and that he had found no inhabited spot.

The river, the river.

The Governor sank into a deep despondency at sight of the difficulties that presented themselves to his reaching the sea; and, what was worse, from the way in which the men and horses were diminishing in numbers, he could not sustain himself in the country without succor. Of that reflection he pined.

But before he took to his pallet, he sent a message to the cacique of Quigaltam to say that he was the child of the sun, and whence he came all obeyed him, rendering him trib-

ute; that he besought him to value his friendship, and to come where he was. By the same Indians the chief replied:

"As to what you say of your being the child of the sun, if you will cause him to dry up the great river, I will believe you; as to the rest, it is not my custom to visit any one, but rather all, of whom I have ever heard, have come to visit me, to serve and obey me, and pay me tribute, either voluntarily or by force. If you desire to see me, come where I am; if for peace, I will receive you with especial good will; if for war, I will await you in my town; but neither for you nor for any man, will I set back one foot."

When the messenger returned the Governor was already low, being very ill of fevers. He grieved that he was not in a state to cross the river at once to see if he could not abate that pride; though the stream was already flowing very powerfully, was nearly half a league broad, sixteen fathoms deep, rushing by in a furious torrent, and on either shore were many Indians; nor was his power any longer so great that he might disregard advantages, relying on his strength alone.

Every day the Indians of Guachoya brought fish, until they came in such plenty that the town was covered with them.

Now the Governer feared to repair the palisades that they might not suppose he stood in awe of them; and, lest the Indians rise, he ordered the slaughter at Nilco, to strike dread into the rest.

Conscious that the hour approached in which he should depart this life, Soto commanded that all the king's officers should be called before him, the captains and principal personages, to whom he made a speech. He told them that he was about to go into the presence of God, to give account of all his past life; and since He had been pleased to take him away at such a time, he, His most unworthy servant, rendered Him hearty thanks. He confessed his deep obligations to them all, for their great qualities, their love and loyalty to his person, well tried in suffering of hardship. He begged

that they would pray for him. He asked that they would relieve him of the charge he had over them as well as of the indebtedness he was under to them all, and to forgive him any wrongs they may have suffered at his hands. To prevent any divisions that might arise, as to who should command, he begged that they elect a principal person to be governor, and being chosen, they would swear before him to obey; that this would greatly satisfy him, abate somewhat the pains he suffered, and moderate the anxiety of leaving them in a country, they knew not where.

Baltasar de Gallegos responded in behalf of all, consoling him with remarks on the shortness of the life of this world, attended as it was by so many toils and afflictions, saying that whom God earliest called away, He showed particular favor; with many other things appropriate to such an occasion; and finally since it pleased the Almighty to take him to Himself, amid the deep sorrow which they not unreasonably felt, it was necessary and becoming in him, as in them, to conform to the Divine Will; that as respected the election of a governor, which he ordered, whomsoever his Excellency should name to the command, him would they obey. Thereupon the Governor nominated Luís Moscosco de Alvarado to be his captain-general; when by all those present was he straightway chosen and sworn Governor.

The next day, the twenty-first of May, departed this life the magnanimous, the virtuous, the intrepid captain, Don Hernando de Soto, Governor of Cuba and Adelantado of Florida. He was advanced by fortune, in the way she is wont to lead others, that he might fall the greater depth; he died in a land, and at a time, that could afford him little comfort in his illness, when the danger of being no more heard from stared his companions in the face, each one himself having need of sympathy, which was the cause why they neither gave him companionship nor visited him, as otherwise they would have done.

Some were glad.

It was decided to conceal what had happened, lest the Indians might venture on an attack when they should learn that he whom they feared was no longer opposed to them.

So soon as death had taken place, the body was put secretly in a house, where it remained three days: thence it was taken by night to the gate of the town and buried within. The Indians having seen him ill, finding him no longer, suspected the reason; and passing by where he lay, they observed the ground loose and looking about talked among themselves. This coming to the knowledge of Luís de Moscosco he ordered the corpse to be taken up at night, and among the shawls that enshrouded it having cast abundance of sand, it was taken out in a canoe and committed to the middle of the stream.

Down, down, this solitary sperm, down into the liquid, the formless, the insatiable belly of sleep; down among the fishes: there was one called bagre, the third part of which was head, with gills from end to end, and along the sides were great spines, like very sharp awls; there were some in the river that weighed from a hundred to a hundred and fifty pounds. There were some in the shape of barbel; another like bream, with the head of a hake, having a color between red and brown. There was likewise a kind called peel-fish, the snout a cubit in length, the upper lip being shaped like a shovel. Others were like a shad. There was one called pereo the Indians sometimes brought, the size of a hog and had rows of teeth above and below.

Luís de Moscosco ordered the property of the Governor to be sold at public cry. It consisted of two male and three female slaves, three horses, and seven hundred swine. From that time forward most of the people owned and raised hogs.

THE DISCOVERY OF KENTUCKY

THERE was, thank God, a great voluptuary born to the American settlements against the niggardliness of the damming puritanical tradition; one who by the single logic of his passion, which he rested on the savage life about him, destroyed at its spring that spiritually withering plague. For this he has remained since buried in a miscolored legend and left for rotten. Far from dead, however, but full of a rich regenerative violence he remains, when his history will be carefully reported, for us who have come after to call upon him.

Kentucky, the great wilderness beyond the western edge of the world, "the dark and bloody ground" of coming years, seemed to the colonists along the eastern North-American seaboard as far away, nearly, and as difficult of approach as had that problematical world itself beyond the western ocean to the times prior to Columbus. "A country there was, of this none could doubt who thought at all; but whether land or water, mountain or plain, fertility or barrenness, preponderated; whether it was inhabited by men or beasts, or both or neither, they knew not." But if inhabited by men then it was the savage with whom the settlers had had long since experience sufficient to make them loth to pry further, for the moment, beyond the securing mountain barrier.

Clinging narrowly to their new foothold, dependent still on sailing vessels for a contact none too swift or certain with "home," the colonists looked with fear to the west. They worked hard and for the most part throve, suffering the material lacks of their exposed condition with intention. But they suffered also privations not even to be estimated, cramping and demeaning for a people used to a world less primi-

tively rigorous. A spirit of insecurity calling upon thrift and self-denial remained their basic mood. Opposed to this lay the forbidden wealth of the Unknown.

Into such an atmosphere, more or less varied, more or less changed for better or worse in minds of different understanding, was born Daniel Boone, the foremost pioneer and frontiersman of his day. A man like none other about him Boone had for the life of his fellow settlers, high or low, no sympathy whatever. Was it his ancestry, full of a rural quietness from placid Dorset or the sober Quaker training of his early associations that bred the instinct in him, made him ready to take desperate chances with his mind for pleasure, certainly he was not, as commonly believed, of that riff-raff of hunters and Indian killers among which destiny had thrown him—the man of border foray—a link between the savage and the settler.

His character was not this. Mild and simple hearted, steady, not impulsive in courage—bold and determined, but always rather inclined to defend than attack—he stood immensely above that wretched class of men who are so often the preliminaries of civilization. Boone deliberately chose the peace of solitude, rather than to mingle in the wild wranglings and disputings of the society around him—from whom it was ever his first thought to be escaping—or he would never have penetrated to those secret places where later his name became a talisman.

Three years the junior of George Washington, Boone was taken while still a child from his birthplace on the upper waters of the Schuylkill River near Philadelphia to the then comparatively wild country of western Pennsylvania. Here he grew up. Soon a hunter, even as a boy men stepped back to contemplate with more than ordinary wonder the fearlessness with which he faced the fiercer wild beasts that prowled around. It was the early evidence of his genius. At eighteen, with his love of the woods marked for good, and his disposition for solitude, taciturnity and a hunter's life determined, the family

moved again this time from the rapidly settling country of Pennsylvania to the wild Yadkin, a river that takes its rise among the mountains that form the western boundary of North Carolina.

With his arrival on the Yadkin, Daniel Boone married a neighbor's daughter, Rebecca Bryan, and together the young couple left the world behind them. Boone at once traversed the Yadkin Valley at a point still more remote from the seaboard and nearer the mountain; here he placed his cabin. It was a true home to him. Its firelight shone in welcome to the rare stranger who found that riverside. But he was not to remain thus solitary! The lands along the Yadkin attracted the notice of other settlers, and Boone, at thirty, found the smoke of his cabin no longer the only one that floated in that air. These accessions of companionship, however congenial to the greatest part of mankind, did not suit Boone. He soon became conscious that his time on the Yadkin was limited.

The fields for adventure lay within his reach. The mountains were to be crossed and a new and unexplored country, invested with every beauty, every danger, every incident that could amuse the imagination or quicken action, lay before him, the indefinite world of the future. Along the Clinch River and the Holston River hunting parties pursued their way. As they went, the mysteries of forest life grew more familiar. Boone learned even better than before that neither roof, nor house, nor bed was necessary to existence. There were, of course, many things to urge him on in his natural choice. It was the time just preceding the Revolution. The colonial system of taxation was iniquitous to the last degree; this the pioneer could not fathom and would not endure. Such things Boone solved most according to his nature by leaving them behind.

At this point Boone's life may be said really to begin. Facing his first great adventure Boone was now in his best years. His age was thirty-six. He is described by various

writers as being five feet ten inches high, robust, clean limbed and athletic, fitted by his habit and temperament, and by his physique, for endurance—a bright eye, and a calm determination in his manner. In 1769, John Finley returned from a hunting trip beyond the mountain. He talked loud and long of the beauty and fertility of the country and Daniel Boone was soon eagerly a listener. It touched the great keynote of his character, and the hour and the man had come.

"It was on the first of May, in the year 1769, that I resigned my domestic happiness for a time and left my family and peaceful habitation on the Yadkin River in North Carolina, to wander through the wilderness of America, in quest of the country of Kentucky, in company with John Finley, John Stewart, Joseph Holden, James Monay, and William Cool. We proceeded successfully and after a long and fatiguing journey through a mountain wilderness, in a westward direction on the seventh day of June following, we found ourselves on Red River, where John Finley had formerly been trading with the Indians, and from the top of an eminence, saw with pleasure the beautiful level of Kentucky."

Thus opens the so-called autobiography, said to have been written down from Boone's dictation, late in his life by one John Filson. But the silly phrases and total disregard for what must have been the rude words of the old hunter serve only, for the most part, to make it a keen disappointment to the interested reader. But now, from everything that is said, all that Boone is known to have put through and willingly suffered during the next two years, there ensued a time of the most enchanting adventure for the still young explorer. For a time the party hunted and enjoyed the country, seeing buffalo "more frequent than I have seen cattle in the settlements, browsing on the leaves of the cane, or cropping the grass on those extensive prairies, . . . abundance of wild beasts of all sorts through this vast forest; and the numbers about the salt springs were amazing." Here the party practised hunting till the twenty-second day of December following.

"On this day John Stewart and I had a pleasant ramble; but fortune changed the scene in the close of it. We had passed through a great forest, Nature was here a series of wonders and a fund of delight, and we were diverted with innumerable animals presenting themselves perpetually to our view. In the decline of the day, near the Kentucky River, as we ascended the brow of a small hill, a number of Indians rushed out of a thick canebrake upon us and made us prisoners." Escaping later the two returned to their camp to find it plundered and the others of their party gone.

But now, by one of those determining chances which occur in all great careers Squire Boone, Daniel's brother, who with another adventurer had set out to get news of the original party if possible, came accidentally upon his brother's camp in the forest. It was a meeting of greatest importance and unbounded joy to Daniel Boone. For a short time there were now four together, but within a month, the man Stewart was killed by Indians while Squire Boone's companion, who had accompanied him upon his quest, either wandered off and was lost or returned by himself to the Colonies. Daniel and Squire were left alone.

"We were then in a dangerous and helpless situation, exposed daily to perils and death amongst the savages and wild beasts—not a white man in the country but ourselves. Thus situated many hundred miles from our families, in the howling wilderness, I believe few would have equally enjoyed the happiness we experienced. We continued not in a state of indolence but hunted every day, and prepared to defend ourselves against the winter's storms. We remained there undisturbed during the winter. . . . On the first day of May, following, my brother returned home to the settlement by himself, for a new recruit of horses and ammunition, leaving me by myself, without bread, salt or sugar, without company of my fellow creatures, or even a horse or a dog.

"I confess I never was under greater necessity of exercising philosophy and fortitude. A few days I passed uncom-

must have known that it was the great ecstatic moment of his life's affirmation.

By instinct and from the first Boone had run past the difficulties encountered by his fellows in making the New World their own. As ecstasy cannot live without devotion and he who is not given to some earth of basic logic cannot enjoy, so Boone lived to enjoy ecstasy through his single devotion to the wilderness with which he was surrounded. The beauty of a lavish, primitive embrace in savage, wild beast and forest rising above the cramped life about him possessed him wholly. Passionate and thoroughly given he avoided the half logic of stealing from the immense profusion.

Some one must have taken the step. He took it. Not that he settled Kentucky or made a path to the west, not that he defended, suffered, hated and fled, but because of a descent to the ground of his desire was Boone's life important and does it remain still loaded with power,—power to strengthen every form of energy that would be voluptuous, passionate, possessive in that place which he opened. For the problem of the New World was, as every new comer soon found out, an awkward one, on all sides the same: how to replace from the wild land that which, at home, they had scarcely known the Old World meant to them; through difficulty and even brutal hardship to find a ground to take the place of England. They could not do it. They clung, one way or another, to the old, striving the while to pull off pieces to themselves from the fat of the new bounty.

Boone's genius was to recognize the difficulty as neither material nor political but one purely moral and æsthetic. Filled with the wild beauty of the New World to overbrimming so long as he had what he desired, to bathe in, to explore always more deeply, to see, to feel, to touch—his instincts were contented. Sensing a limitless fortune which daring could make his own, he sought only with primal lust to grow close to it, to understand it and to be part of its mysterious movements—like an Indian. And among all the colonists, like an Indian,

the ecstasy of complete possession of the new country was his alone. In Kentucky he would stand, a lineal descendant of Columbus on the beach at Santo Domingo, walking up and down with eager eyes while his men were gathering water.

With the sense of an Indian, Boone felt the wild beasts about him as a natural offering. Like a savage he knew that for such as he their destined lives were intended. As an Indian to the wild, without stint or tremor, he offered himself to his world, hunting, killing with a great appetitie, taking the lives of the beasts into his quiet, murderous hands as they or their masters, the savages, might take his own, if they were able, without kindling his resentment; as naturally as his own gentle son, his beloved brother, his nearest companions were taken—without his rancor being lifted. Possessing a body at once powerful, compact and capable of tremendous activity and resistance when roused, a clear eye and a deadly aim, taciturn in his demeanor, symmetrical and instinctive in understanding, Boone stood for his race, the affirmation of that wild logic, which in times past had mastered another wilderness and now, renascent, would master this, to prove it potent.

There must be a new wedding. But he saw and only he saw the prototype of it all, the native savage. To Boone the Indian was his greatest master. Not for himself surely to be an Indian, though they eagerly sought to adopt him into their tribes, but the reverse: to be *himself* in a new world, Indian-like. If the land were to be possessed it must be as the Indian possessed it. Boone saw the truth of the Red Man, not an aberrant type, treacherous and anti-white to be feared and exterminated, but as a natural expression of the place, the Indian himself as "right," the flower of his world.

Keen then was the defeat he tasted when, having returned safe to the Colonies after his first ecstatic sojourn, and when after long delay having undertaken to lead a party of forty settlers to the new country, his eldest son, among five others of his own age, was brutally murdered by the savages at the very outset. It was a crushing blow. Although Boone and

others argued against it, the expedition turned back and with his sorrowing wife Boone once more took up his homestead on the Yadkin. And this is the mark of his personality, that even for this cruel stroke he held no illwill against the Red Men.

Disappointed in his early hopes and when through subsequent years of battle against the wild tribes, when through losses and trials of the severest order, he led at last in the establishment of the settlers about the fort and center of Boonesborough, he never wavered for a moment in his clear conception of the Indian as a natural part of a beloved condition, the New World, in which all lived together. Captured or escaping, outwitted by or outwitting the savages, he admired and defended them always, as, implacable and remorseless enemy to the Red Man that he proved, they admired and respected him to the end of his days.

You have bought the land, said an old Indian who acted for his tribe in the transaction which now made Kentucky over to the white man, but you will have trouble to settle it. It proved true. An old lady who had been in the forts was describing the scenes she had witnessed in those times of peril and adventure, and, among other things, remarked that during the first two years of her residence in Kentucky, the most comely sight she beheld, was seeing a young man die in his bed a natural death. She had been familiar with blood, and carnage, and death, but in all those cases the sufferers were the victims of the Indian tomahawk and scalping knife; and that on an occasion when a young man was taken sick and died, after the usual manner of nature, she and the rest of the women sat up all night, gazing upon him as an object of beauty.

It was against his own kind that Boone's lasting resentment was fixed, "those damned Yankees," who took from him, by the chicanery of the law and in his old age, every last acre of the then prosperous homestead he had at last won for himself after years of battle in the new country.

Confirmed in his distrust for his "own kind," in old age

homeless and quite ruined, he must turn once more to his early loves, the savage and the wild. Once more a wanderer he struck out through Tennessee for "more elbowroom," determined to leave the young nation which he had helped to establish, definitely behind him. He headed for Spanish territory beyond the Mississippi where the Provincial Governor, having gotten wind of the old hunter's state of mind, was glad to offer him a large tract of land on which to settle. There he lived and died, past ninety, serving his traps as usual.

In the woods he would have an Indian for companion even out of preference to his own sons, and from these men, the Indians, he had the greatest reverence, enjoying always when afield with them the signal honor of disposing them in the order of the hunt.

Too late the American Congress did follow him with some slight recognition. But that was by then to him really a small matter. He had already that which he wanted: the woods and native companions whom, in a written statement of great interest, he defends against all detractors and in that defense establishes himself in clear words: the antagonist of those of his own blood whose alien strength he felt and detested, while his whole soul, with greatest devotion, was given to the New World which he adored and found, in its every expression, the land of heart's desire.

his wife might return; failing in this, he resigned the governorship of Tennessee, left everything behind him and took the descent once more, to the ground. He rejoined the Cherokees, now removed to Arkansas. The state was in an uproar, people spoke badly of him; there was nothing too bad for them to say. His wife divorced him and remarried. For a while he took to drink. . . . He turned back to the Indians, it is the saving gesture—but a gesture of despair. Poe can be understood only in a knowledge of his deep roots. The quality of the flower will then be seen to be normal, in all its tortured spirituosity and paleness, a desert flower with roots under the sand of his day.

Whitman had to come from under. All have to come from under and through a dead layer.

But this primitive ordeal, created by a peculiar condition of destiny (the implantation of an already partly cultured race on a wild continent) has a plant in its purpose, in its lusts' eye, as gorgeous as Montezuma's gardens of birds, wild beasts and albino natives in wooden cages.

But he who will grow from that basis must sink first.

If he goes to France, it is not to learn a *do re mi fa sol.* He goes to see a strange New World.

If not definitely a culture new in every part, at least a satisfaction. He wants to have the feet of his understanding on the ground, his ground, *the* ground, the only ground that he knows, that which *is* under his feet. I speak of æsthetic satisfaction. This want, in America, can only be filled by knowledge, a poetic knowledge, of that ground. Since this is difficult, due to the hardships which beset the emergence of a poet: A poet is one related to a basis of material, æsthetic, spiritual, hypothetical, abnormal—satisfaction, . . . since this is so, the want goes for the most part unsatisfied in America or is satisfied by a fillgap. The predominant picture of America is a land æsthetically satisfied by temporary fillgaps. But the danger remains: Taste is so debauched in the end that everything of new will be forgotten and—

In spite of size its genius is shy and wild and frail, the loveliest, to be cherished only by the most keen, courageous and sensitive. It may die.

Meanwhile, taste is pandered to somehow. . . . Among the Indians Houston lived, from the time of his separation from his wife, eleven years. He was adopted into the tribe; he, maintaining silence upon the calamity which had overtaken him, preferred to be among those who accepted him for what he was and let no rumor of his past affect them. It was a courtesy he knew how to find as they to proffer. It came from the ground like water. He took an Indian woman for his wife.

The instigation to invasion is apparent: ready profit. The excuse also is apparent: progress. The refusal of these things is like feathered darts on armor. We are tyros in what we are glad to believe are the fundamentals of artistic understanding. We crave filling and eagerly grab for what there is. The next step is, floating upon cash, to wish to be *like* the others. Now come in the Universities, the conformists of all colors from the arch-English to the Italian peasant and his goats.

It is imperative that we *sink*. But from a low position it is impossible to answer those who know all the Latin and some of the Sanskrit names, much French and perhaps one or two other literatures. Their riposte is: Knownothingism. But we cannot climb every tree in that world of birds. But where foreign values are held to be a desideratum, he who is buried and speaks thickly—is lost.

There is nothing for a man but genius or despair. We cannot answer in the smart language, certainly it would be a bastardization of our own talents to waste time to learn the language they use. I would rather sneak off and die like a sick dog than be a well known literary person in America—and no doubt I'll do it in the end. Our betters we may bitterly advise: Know nothing (i.e., the man on the street), make no attempt to know. With a foreign congeries of literary clap-

trap, come without courtesy to a strange country and make for yourself a smooth track to the pockets of the mob by catering to a "refined" taste and soiling that which you do not know how to estimate. Courtesy would at least bid him be informed or keep still. . . .

Those who come up from under will have a mark on them that invites scorn, like a farmer's filthy clodhoppers. They will be recognized only from *abroad*, being so like the mass out of which they come as to be scorned from anear, etc., etc., etc. . . . After the many years with the Cherokees, having settled down thoroughly, this time, Houston rose again: defeated Santa Ana at San Jacinto and received the soubriquet, "Sam Jacinto," Governor of Texas, U. S. Senator during a long term, several times mentioned for the presidency, married again, several children, when in deep thought whittled pine sticks, tigerskin vest, blanket, sombrero, joined Baptist Church, opposed secession of southern states, lived to have Lincoln recognize him by offer of a Major-Generalship, which he refused.

However hopeless it may seem, we have no other choice: we must go back to the beginning; it must all be done over; everything that is must be destroyed.

The ambiguity of this Houston
& his legend
Mimmy Cash & the Mamo-o-o.

IN THE AMERICAN GRAIN

BY WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

This modern classic, which, like many classics, went generally unnoticed during the years after its first publication (in 1925), has reached out gradually to a larger and larger audience, until today its place among the primary works of American literature in this century is widely recognized. It is a magnificent book. In speaking of the "heroic prose" of one chapter, "The Destruction of Tenochtitlan," even so austere a critic as Yvor Winters has said that it "is superior in all likelihood to nearly any other prose of our time and to most of the verse."

Dr. Williams has looked at the texture of American history in much the way that he might examine anew the grain of his own hands in the picture on the front cover of this edition. He has found in the fabric of familiar episodes, from Red Eric and Columbus to Abraham Lincoln, new whorls of meaning, new configurations of character and intent. He has brought a poetic imagination to the task of reconstructing a live tradition for Americans, and the result is a genuinely consistent and integrated expression of the American inheritance. Dr. Williams has not invented the native conscience, but he has found it, often in the more remote gestures of history, and has given it enduring stature in prose.

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