

Ut Pictura Poesis:

William Carlos Williams' Poetic Embodiment of Brueghel

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"The design of the painting and of the poem I've attempted to fuse. To make it the same thing,"¹⁾ says William Carlos Williams (1883-1963) in the 1961 interview with Walter Sutton (1916-2006). This remark concerning his series of poems on the pictures of Pieter Brueghel the Elder (c.1525/1530-1569) seems to be a touchstone in the comprehension of his passionate relationship with the visual image, the painting. Embarking on his journey from the Keatsian lyrics, Williams, throughout his lifetime's strain of countless 'fights'²⁾ against the arrangement of the lines, has reached the apex of the finest abstraction possible in his poetics.

While his contemporaries such as Ezra Pound (1885-1972) and T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) were enjoying their transatlantic séjours in Europe, Williams was maintaining a domestic life as a resident doctor in the borough of Rutherford, New Jersey, without feeling any particular need for overseas trips.³⁾ It seems that, thanks to his remaining in Rutherford, Williams kindled his ambition to attain his one and only American measure. Be that as it may, it would be astounding if the innovation in his lines had been derived only from his day-to-day contact with his patients at 9 Ridge Road, where he spent half a century of his life, a stone's throw from his birthplace at 131 Passaic Avenue, now West Passaic.

Rutherford is undoubtedly a commuter town to New York City, especially to Manhattan, whose location is the most westerly in the City, closest to New Jersey. Williams' debut as a commuter dates as far back as his high school time. He also commuted later as an intern in the old French Hospital on New York City's west side from 1906 to 1909.⁴⁾ All things considered, Williams seems to have found a balance between the urban Manhattan and more rural Rutherford in his daily routine. Also, apart from his surroundings, Williams did have artist friends and acquaintances, such as Charles Demuth (1883-1935), Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946) and Charles Sheeler (1883-1965), to name a few, from whom he received artistic updates and stimulation. Furthermore, Williams himself once dreamt of becoming a painter: "Had it not been that it was easier to transport a manuscript than a wet canvas, the balance might have been tilted the other

way.”⁵⁾ According to *William Carlos Williams and the American Scene, 1920-1940*, Williams seems to have simply chosen to become a poet rather than a painter because of the smaller amount of equipment required in making a poem.⁶⁾ In this sense, Williams had already come to the realization of the two distinctive artistic media as more or less the same thing.

Such was his background. The above statement of Williams’ about the experimental identification of the poem with nothing other than the painting was something very much inherent in him that was eventually to be embodied in *Pictures from Brueghel*⁷⁾ (1962). Nevertheless, in response to the question posed by Sutton relating to Brueghel; “for you, [what is] the equivalent of a painting or what is the relationship between the poem and the painting?” Williams did no more than conclude, “...well, it’s kinda hard to generalize.”⁸⁾

How can the poetry and the painting be the same thing? In quest of an answer to this question, reminiscent of *ut pictura poesis*, this paper explores Williams’ late work, *Pictures from Brueghel*, by clarifying his notion of what poetry is. For Williams, poetry is to a certain extent a visual art and does not have a rigid form into which the words can be confined.

The contrastive analysis, in the second chapter, of “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus” by Williams and “Musée des Beaux Arts” by W. H. Auden (1907-1973) will enable us not only to distinguish the American poet’s novelty from the conventionality of the English expatriate⁹⁾ but to realize how Williams’ *Icarus* manifests what Brueghel is “saying”¹⁰⁾ in his painting. Williams autonomously designs his original loose form independent not only, needless to say, from already existing forms; such as the sonnet, villanelle and sestina, all of which, on the contrary, Auden utilizes; but also from rhymes and punctuations.

Also, for the fullest reliability possible in the argument, the conception of the painting from the painter’s point of view cannot be neglected. In doing so, a reference to “Cézanne’s Doubt,” an essay by the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), will be a fruitful source, explicating the aesthetic proximity between Williams and Cézanne, the poet and the painter. Even a perfunctory perusal will lead us to a further grasp of the ‘design’ which Williams sets in his painterly poems.

I

The poems in *Pictures from Brueghel* consist of flush-left stanzas of three lines, without a single exception. After a sequence of the so-called triadic-stanza poems¹¹⁾ in *The Desert Music and Other Poems* (1954) and *Journey to Love* (1955), the arrangement of words and lines on Brueghel’s pictures reminds one of Williams’ most distinguished subject-matter poem, “The Red Wheelbarrow” (1923). Except the difference in the number of lines and stanzas, the characteristics

such as the lack of punctuations and the rupture in syntax, and even in a word, can be immediately seen in *Pictures from Brueghel*:

In a red winter hat blue
 eyes smiling
 just the head and shoulders

 crowded on the canvas
 arms folded one
 big ear the right showing ¹²⁾ (ll. 1-6)



Figure1. *Self-Portrait*
 (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna)

Suffice it to look at the first two stanzas of the first poem “Self-Portrait” in *Pictures from Brueghel*. The enjambments such as ‘blue¹³⁾ / eyes’ and ‘one / big ear’ are a real surprise first to the eye and then to one’s emotional systems due to the abruptness of the word. Without sight of the picture, the reader would hesitate where to make a syntactic pause and wonder if there might be a little bit of blue on the red hat. Unlike ‘the red wheel / barrow’ and ‘the white / chicken,’¹⁴⁾ which are more or less identifiable without any further explanations, the attributes of a human face should be more unique and distinctive.

Williams’ poems on Brueghel’s pictures expect to be accompanied by their corresponding pictures,¹⁵⁾ for one can hardly reproduce what the already existing pictures are like. This impression of the poems in *Pictures from Brueghel*, however, is most probably far from what Williams is aiming at in his attempt of making poetry and painting the same thing. “Yes, I don’t care whether it’s representational or not,” he reiterates, “[b]ut to give a design. A design in the poem and a design in the picture should make them more or less the same thing,”¹⁶⁾ in the interview with Sutton, who asks Williams an affirmative question: “You’re interested in it [the attempt to fuse the design of the painting and of the poem] as an abstract work regardless of whether it’s representational or not?”¹⁷⁾

Why did Williams apply the flush-left stanzaic form instead of his typical variable foot stanza, which is prevalent in the previous collections? In “The Parable of the Blind,” the subject of analysis in the last chapter, for instance, its ‘diagonally downward’ motion from the left to the right

on the page would suit well enough to mischievously imitate the rightward proceeding of the blind, leading them straight into a bog on Brueghel's canvas. Rather than making his poem emblematic of the subject matter,¹⁸⁾ Williams designs a certain formal consistency. Henry M. Sayre classifies the stanzas in *Pictures from Brueghel* into roughly two types, and more particularly into four types, by emphasizing that these four categories in stanza serve as "a sense of plastic orderliness in the poetry."¹⁹⁾ Williams indeed seems to use an indefinite stanzaic form as a canvas to be fulfilled with words, but he never had a thought of trying to fit the words to the form. In this sense, Sayre's observation, even in an attenuated and obscure manner, that "the stanzas can be seen as a kind of uniform grid system into which Williams fits the range and multiplicity of his material"²⁰⁾ is doubtful. Williams loathed the idea of fitting the words, the American idiom, into any sort of form. Auden was always a victim on the issue concerning form:

"How can an intelligent man say to himself that he will take some line, some arbitrary or convenient stanza, and that he is going to use it and make the words fit? He may even succeed but if he does it will be only at the cost of missing his MAJOR opportunity, as Auden obviously does and a whole train of copyists in his train. The major imperative is to make the line fit the language, not the language the line, and to discover there the new structural integer, completely new, forged under the hammering of contemporary necessity to make a more comprehensive and significant structure."²¹⁾

It may appear nonsense, but Williams' treatment of words is similar to that of hair by the hairdresser. One goes to the hairdresser's for a trim, a nicer look. The purpose of a haircut is to reduce unnecessary hair length. As a hairdresser knows when to put down his scissors, so does Williams in trimming the form. Long²²⁾ straight hairs 'trimmed' into a straight one-length cut would look impeccable but dull and conservative. Williams, always in search of an unprecedented measure and form, rather trims the length of lines to make them fit the words. Although it would be arbitrary to say that no one really knows where to stop trimming but the artist himself, "the better artist he is, the better he's able to recognize what is good and *why* it's good—and how to organize it into a satisfactory poem."²³⁾ Let us further analyze "Self-Portrait":

the face slightly tilted
a heavy wool coat
with broad buttons

gathered at the neck reveals
a bulbous nose
but the eyes red-rimmed

from over-use he must have
driven them hard
but the delicate wrists

show him to have been a
man unused to
manual labor unshaved his

blond beard half trimmed
no time for any-
thing but his painting²⁴⁾ (ll. 7-21)

Each stanza out of seven in "Self-Portrait" contains at least one part of the body. In the course of reading, the state of being 'crowded on the canvas' (l. 4) is approved by the constellation of these corporal words on the page. Written in sparsely populated triadic stanzas, the density of color and composition crucial to the painting would not be appreciated. The antithetical use of 'bulbous' (l. 11) and 'delicate' (l. 15), 'blue / eyes smiling' (ll. 1-2) and 'the eyes red-rimmed' (l. 12), 'over-use' (l. 13) and 'unused' (l. 17), 'unshaved' (l. 18) and 'half trimmed' (l. 19) appears to be somewhat perplexing, but when reminded of how one scrutinizes a picture, the apparently contradictory arrangements make sense.

Interrupted by the repetitive 'but'²⁵⁾ (ll. 12, 15), as is seen in a microscopic observation of objects in "The Red Wheelbarrow," a priori recognition of the things within eyesight gradually takes on a different hue; 'unshaved' beard at first glance, with a more focused inspection, turns out to be 'half trimmed,' as if the viewer's impression of the same picture is being endlessly renewed. Throughout the entire poem, one shortened line bookended by two lengthened lines in each tercet creates a ragged outline to the right, thoroughly completed by the amputation of 'any- / thing' in the penultimate line. We can almost hear Williams saying: "See how much better it conforms to the page, how much better it looks?"²⁶⁾

II

Not until in his later life did Williams make poems using Brueghel's paintings as models. As many as three and a half decades had passed since he encountered the old master's œuvre in Vienna with his wife Florence.²⁷⁾ Both "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" and "The Parable of the Blind" could have drawn their source not necessarily from Brueghel but directly from Greek mythology and a biblical allegory in Matthew 15:14. In the 1961 interview, Williams reveals his sympathy with Brueghel's work: "Well, my concern with Brueghel came rather late in my life. I was tremendously interested in the pictures of Brueghel. And it was a very humane interest...the image of Brueghel on the canvas is poetic, but I had to interest myself in what he was saying about the humanity."²⁸⁾

As for Auden, whose "Musée des Beaux Arts" is another referential poem,²⁹⁾ it was in Brussels in the winter of 1938 that he wrote this occasional poem, after the visit to the Brussels art gallery. Auden mentions that "what interests me most about a painting is its iconography."³⁰⁾ Iconography, signifying the reconstruction of the meanings associated with particular visual images,³¹⁾ has nothing to do with Williams' kinship with painting. According to Williams, "[i]n telling the incidents that occurred to people, the story of the lives of the people naturally unfolds. Without didactically telling what happened, you make things happen on the page, and from that you see what kind of people they were—what they suffered and what they aspired to."³²⁾ Auden's counterpart poem is in full abundance of didactic meanings:



Figure 2. *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels)

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking
dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.⁽³³⁾

Two stanzas comprise “Musée des Beaux Arts.” The above first stanza, to Williams’ eyes, would run extremely dull. Along with the prosy line resonating the chaotic rhyme scheme of *abcadedbfgfge*, the streamline antitheses between the sufferer and the non-sufferer, the old and the young, the human and the animal, culminate in ‘disaster’ in the second stanza. Human being or beast, every single living thing has its own business to expedite, embodying a cruel indifference. The only unrhymed ‘place’ (l. 3) symbolizes both the loneliness of the hapless victim and the absence of any help in the midst of a catastrophic event. After too redundant a prelude, the second stanza impatiently offers a rendition of a relevant Brueghel’s picture:

In Brueghel's *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.³⁴⁾ (ll. 14-21)

With a rhyme scheme much more organic and coherent, *aabccddbc*, the enumeration of possible bystanders and surroundings alike is in desperate search of someone available for his rescue, but

in vain. The oxymoronic coupling of 'important failure' intensifies the reason for being 'forsaken,' surmising a more important failure, such as a crop failure. A complete deliberate indifference is tolerated and even accepted since Icarus is not 'white' in his hubristic act. Life goes on just the same as always.

In 1959, twenty years behind "Musée des Beaux Arts," Williams was composing 10 poems modeled after Brueghel's pictures. "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" occupies the second place of the series, in which the didactic and moralistic rendering of Brueghel's *Icarus* disappears. Williams observes that "sometimes when I write I don't want to say anything. I just want to present it. Not a didactic meaning. I don't care about the didactic meaning—the moral. To add some tag is absolutely repulsive to me."³⁵ Somewhat surprisingly, Auden's voluminous "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Williams' terse "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" are equal in the number of lines, twenty-one:

According to Brueghel
when Icarus fell
it was spring

a farmer was ploughing
his field
the whole pageantry

of the year was
awake tingling
near

the edge of the sea
concerned
with itself

sweating in the sun
that melted
the wing's wax

unsignificantly
off the coast
there was

a splash quite unnoticed

this was

Icarus drowning³⁶⁾

(ll. 1-21)

The instantaneous difference in appearance on the page is undeniable. As always in his later works, he considered the usage of rhymes and punctuations to be redundant, and to be avoided. As Robert J. Clements indicates, Williams “chose to summarize the painting with his traditional economy and to interest himself more in surface form than in depth of content.”³⁷⁾ His variable, loosely measured foot, has an impressive role of making the line go faster, thus well embodies the undetectable fall of Icarus. No sooner is the poem read than Icarus finds himself fallen. By the time we reach the final line, Icarus is seen ‘drowning.’ How brief the fall was can be traced along with the actual reading of the poem. A number of embedded ‘-ing’ words; ‘according’ (l. 1), ‘spring’ (l. 3), ‘ploughing’ (l. 4), ‘tingling’ (l. 8), ‘sweating’ (l. 13), ‘wing’s’ (l. 15), ‘drowning’ (l. 21), emit vivid and vibrant echoes in the midst of the dominant past tense. The manipulation of words is far beyond semantic norm. Also, Williams succeeds in rendering the connotation to the poem, where Auden spends the second entire stanza with ‘may have heard’ and ‘must have seen,’ with a simple usage of ‘unsignificantly’ and ‘unnoticed.’ Both contain prefix ‘un-,’ denoting the reversed meaning. Thus, ‘unsignificantly’ contains ‘significantly’ and ‘unnoticed’ ‘noticed.’ Suddenly, the possibility of a witness to this spectacular scene existing will arise. Among the ten poems on Brueghel’s pictures, this is the most abstracted of all. The shorter lines, quickening the frequency of downward zigzagging gaze upon the page, represent the unchecked downfall and its marginalization not only in its significance but also on the page.

Williams attributes the tragedy of Icarus with ‘pageantry’ whereas Auden does with ‘disaster.’ The former is devoted to the workaday peasants’ life; the latter highlights the extraordinary event. Williams’ ‘humane interest’ in Brueghel’s grim but affectionate strokes on the canvas can be thus summarized: “Poetry can be used to dignify life, which is so crass and vulgar.”³⁸⁾ Just as Brueghel depicts the ordinary people as a subject of prime importance, so Williams describes Icarus as a subject of subordinate importance.

III

One painter Williams admired was Paul Cézanne (1839-1906); “[h]e was a designer. He put it down on the canvas so that there would be a meaning without saying anything at all. Just the relation of the parts to themselves.”³⁹⁾ Cézanne was a Williams’ favorite. Indeed, Cézanne’s still lifes do share a common sense with Williams’ poems. In considering Williams’ ‘design’ in “The Parable of the

Blind,” the penultimate poem in *Pictures from Brueghel*, the French painter’s working process would be a fine reference.



Figure 3. *The Blind Leading the Blind* (Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples)

Williams applies the word ‘disaster’ to the above Brueghel’s picture, as Auden does to Brueghel’s *Icarus*. The poem may well be considered as a more appropriate counterpart of Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts,” for unlike “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus” there lies a subjective interpretation:

This horrible but superb painting
the parable of the blind
without a red

in the composition shows a group
of beggars leading
each other diagonally downward

across the canvas
from one side
to stumble finally into a bog

where the picture
and the composition ends back
of which no seeing man⁴⁰⁾ (ll. 1-12)

A strikingly personal statement in the first line was not present in the original printing in *The Hudson Review*. The introductory line cannot help acknowledging the presence of the poet, contemplating the painting. The demonstrative pronoun on top asks the reader to read this painting and to see this poem. Baudelairean mockery toward the reckless and hopeless procession of the blind is heavily underlined.⁴¹⁾ As far as the color is concerned, this poem is the only one in *Pictures from Brueghel* in which no reds are stroked. In spite of the absence of reds in the painting, in Williams' poem 'a red' (l. 3) miraculously appears. Why in the world would Williams conjure a color which does not exist? Let us answer this inquiry about the usage of colors using "Cézanne's Doubt":

To achieve sunlit colors in a picture which will be seen in the dim light of apartments, not only must there be a green—if you are painting grass—but also the complementary red which will make it vibrate. Finally, the Impressionists break down the local tone itself. One can obtain any color by juxtaposing rather than mixing the colors which make it up, thereby achieving a more vibrant hue.⁴²⁾

Incongruent colors can be juxtaposed to each other in order to attain the ultimate hue. In Williams' case, by juxtaposing a missing red, which is a prevailing hue across Brueghel's world, with other existing colors in the picture, the poet signalizes not only the pale tonality in this tempera painting but also the unfortunate lot of the blind who are unable to recognize neither red nor a bog.

Similar to "The Hunters in the Snow,"⁴³⁾ the poem displays the blind in the foreground, 'from one side' (l. 8) to 'where the picture / and the composition ends' (ll. 10-11), finally returning to the foreground by skimming away the background. The foregrounding diagonal path, with its unusually precipitous and level slope, appears to be torn off from the remaining composition, leaving the destitute completely forlorn. The same effect can be seen also in the two previous pictures of Brueghel: the 'delicate' porcelain-like hand for a laborious painter in "Self-Portrait" and a pair of relatively gigantic legs of drowning Icarus by the grand ship in "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus." Merleau-Ponty explores the secret allure of Cézanne's painting as follows:

[I]t is Cézanne's genius that when the over-all composition of the picture is seen globally, perspectival distortions are no longer visible in their own right but rather contribute, as they do in natural vision, to the impression of an emerging order, of an object in the act of appearing, organizing itself before our eyes.⁴⁴⁾

The deceiving perspective in Brueghel's pictures is also explicable. After all, our eyes cannot see things in their fullness and entirety. It is just as impossible as looking into both eyes at once of the person you are talking to. What we perceive is subject to arbitrariness. Thus, the entire image before our eyes is a compilation of each glance we have taken of the canvas. The result is the same in Williams' poems, in which each radically trimmed line is hard to define and is only able to be grasped as a member of the whole train of words, the totality. Williams explains the poetic effect on the page:

In poetry, we have gradually discovered, the line and the sense, the didactic, expository sense, have nothing directly to do with one another. It is extremely important to realize this distinction, between what the poem says and what it means, in the understanding of modern verse—or any verse. The meaning is the total poem, it is not directly dependent on what the poem says.⁴⁵⁾

Although the short lines without notable punctuations seem to contain a seamless world, syntactic or semantic breaks do occur within the line. As Grant F. Scott argues, Williams "imposes on the artworks his own highly wrought design, transforming lively canvases into subdued modernist still lifes."⁴⁶⁾ Williams indeed, with his designed lineation, adjusts the visual rhythm:

The Hudson Review version:

the unshaven features of the des-
titute with their
few pitiful possessions

a basin to wash in
a peasant's cottage are seen
and a church spire

the faces are raised as toward
the light no detail
extraneous to the compos-

Final version:

is represented the unshaven
features of the des-
titute with their few

pitiful possessions a basin
to wash in a peasant
cottage is seen and a church spire

the faces are raised
as toward the light
there is no detail extraneous

ition one following the other
tentative stick in
hand triumphant to disaster⁴⁷⁾

to the composition one
follows the others stick in
hand triumphant to disaster⁴⁸⁾
(ll. 13-24)

The last four stanzas of "The Parable of the Blind" have survived tremendous modifications. The backward displacement of 'few' (l. 15) 'a basin' (l. 16), 'a peasant' (l. 17) creates an awkward motion into the line, making it more difficult to detect the seam in a line, such as 'in' (l. 17), which actually qualifies 'wash' (l. 17) instead of 'a peasant' in the same line. Throughout the line, we are being obsessed by the three-time repetitive 'composition' (ll. 4, 11, 22). Is there truly 'no detail extraneous // to the composition' (ll. 21-22)? There are additional details accompanied by negation, such as 'without a red' (l. 3) and 'no seeing man // is represented' (ll. 12-13). And, most of all, the repetition of the word 'composition' itself, urging that the poem be looked at and be considered as a painting.

Williams once compared a manuscript to a poet with a wet canvas to a painter. One cannot easily compare the necessary tools between poetry and painting, but consider Cézanne's struggle with colors and Williams' with lines; the former to be stroked, the latter to be trimmed, both in pursuit of the design. "In considering a poem," Williams says, "I don't care whether it's finished or not; if it's put down with a good relation to the parts, it becomes a poem. And the meaning of the poem can be grasped by attention to the design."⁴⁹⁾

Conclusion

Four centuries later since the production of Brueghel's pictures, Williams once revived them with his American pen and ink. As Joel Conarroe mentions, it is indeed "pleasant to speculate about how Brueghel would have responded to the poet's work, and to the poet himself."⁵⁰⁾ One can imagine that he would be overwhelmed by Williams' poetic recomposition. The question remains; why did Williams use so many of Brueghel's pictures as models as his proof of the fusion between poetry and painting? The answer can be found in his following statement regarding 'a usable past':

In all work in any period there is a part that is the life of it which relates to whatever else is alive, yesterday, today, and forever. To discover that in past work makes that work important to me. How can we say that the work of Henry James is more relevant to the present and future of American writing than the writing of Walt Whitman, or vice versa? The only question of any relevance in either case is, Was that work alive to its own day? If so then it is alive

every day. If it was a palpable denial of its own day then—if I can discover it as such—out with it. I want to look in a work and see in it a day like my own, of altered shapes, colors, but otherwise the same.⁵¹⁾

Both Williams and Brueghel selected ordinary people as protagonists in their works. The poems of Williams and the pictures of Brueghel are compelling in that they evoke extraordinary insights into the ordinary in life. These two artists from completely different eras and places have a strong 'humane interest' in common. This might be the reason why the pictures of a sixteenth-century painter rest colorfully and comfortably in the poems of a twentieth-century poet.

Notes

- 1) Linda Wagner, ed., *Interviews with William Carlos Williams* (New York: New Directions, 1976) 53.
- 2) Wagner 48. "Yes, and you can fight and fight and fight a lifetime till you hit a fusion." Williams thus replies in response to Sutton's confirmative question: "The marriage of language and metric?"
- 3) With his wife Florence, Williams went on a trip to Europe for six months in 1924. A few years later in September 1927, he visited Gertrude Stein in Paris. See Paul Mariani, *William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982) xiv.
- 4) A concise but comprehensive article, entitled "William Carlos Williams and Edgar Irving Williams," in William Neumann's *Rutherford: A Brief History*, provides us with Williams' Rutherfordian commuter life, within ten miles west of Midtown Manhattan, 120-29.
- 5) William Carlos Williams, *Selected Essays* (New York: New Directions, 1954) xiv, quoted in Dickran Tashjian's *William Carlos Williams and the American Scene, 1920-1940* (New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978) 18.
- 6) Tashjian 18.
- 7) The fact that Williams' poems on Brueghel's paintings were published under the title *Pictures from Brueghel*, instead of a possible title such as *Poems on Pictures from Brueghel*, is Williams' definitive declaration of fusion between poetry and painting, two sides of the same coin.
- 8) In order to assist Williams, then in quite a difficulty of recalling and articulating the words and responding to the questions with agility, it was in fact Sutton who uttered the verb 'generalize' first.
- 9) Auden immigrated to America in 1939. Williams was unwilling to welcome Auden because of his Englishness, which he feared would affect the course of American poetry. See Aiden Wasley, *The Age of Auden: Postwar Poetry and the American Scene* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011) 223.
- 10) *Mp3.RapidLibrary.com*. 1960. 7 Oct. 2012 <http://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Williams-WC/Williams-WC_Interviews-with-Walter-Sutton_Oct-Nov-1960.mp3>. In this interview, Williams answers, "... I had to interest myself in the...what he was saying about the humanity."
- 11) Only the first of the three lines written flush left, the following two lines are gradually indented to the right, creating the movement diagonally downward:

The descent beckons
as the ascent beckoned.
Memory is a kind

- 12) Christopher MacGowan, ed., *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams*. Vol. 2 1939-1962 (New York: New Directions, 1991) 385. Hereafter cited as *CP2*.
- 13) *CP2* 183. The 'blue' in the first line immediately recalls the 'blue / mottled clouds' in "By the road to the contagious hospital."
- 14) Christopher MacGowan, ed., *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams*. Vol. 1 1909-1939 (New York: New Directions, 1991) 224.

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chicken

- 15) *CP2* 504. "...WCW initially considered publishing the poems with reproductions of the paintings (to Frederick Morgan, 21 Oct. 1959, *Hudson Review* archives)."
- 16) Wagner 53.
- 17) Wagner 53.
- 18) Miller says that "a poem like 'The Yellow Chimney' is a picture of what it represents, the slender column of words corresponding to the chimney." J. Hillis Miller, *Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965) 301.
- 19) Henry M. Sayre, *The Visual Text of William Carlos Williams* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press) 129.
- 20) Sayre 130.
- 21) James E. B. Breslin, ed., *Something to Say: William Carlos Williams on Younger Poets* (New York: New Directions, 1985), 126-27.
- 22) Williams comments on the length of lines: "Olson's line is very much more in the American idiom. A shorter division of the lines, not the tendency of Ginsberg. ... His longer lines don't seem to fit in with the modern tendency at all." See Wagner 41.
- 23) Wagner 85.
- 24) *CP2* 385.
- 25) As a referential study, see Grand F. Scott's semantic reading of the antithetical 'but' (ll. 12, 15): 'Copied with a Difference: *Ekphrasis* in William Carlos Williams' Pictures from Brueghel' (*Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal / Visual Enquiry*, Vol. 15 Issue 1 (Jan., 1999): 63-75) 72.

- 26) William Carlos Williams, *I Wanted to Write a Poem: The Autobiography of the Works of a Poet*. Reported and edited by Edith Heal. (London: Cape Editions, 1967) 76. Hereafter cited as *IWWP*.
- 27) Mariani 747.
- 28) Transcription made from the recording of the 1961 interview.
- 29) According to the study by Robert J. Clements, the poetic translation of Brueghel's *Icarus* has been attempted by many poets. "Brueghel's *Fall of Icarus*: Eighteen Modern Literary Readings," *Studies in Iconography* Vol. 7-8 (1981-82): 253-68.
- 30) See W. H. Auden, "The Problem of Nowness," *The Mid-Century*, No. 19 (November 1960), 14, quoted in John G. Blair, *The Poetic Art of W. H. Auden* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965) 90.
- 31) See 'Iconology' in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012) 656.
- 32) Wagner 65.
- 33) Edward Mendelson, ed., *W. H. Auden: Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991) 179.
- 34) Mendelson 179.
- 35) Wagner 53.
- 36) *CP2* 385-86.
- 37) Clements 260.
- 38) "Appendix IV," a conversation between Williams and John C. Thirlwall, 307-10, appended to Thirlwall's essay, "William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*" (New Directions 17, 1961: 252-310) 253, quoted in Wagner 63.
- 39) Wagner 53.
- 40) *CP2* 391.
- 41) Baudelaire's "Les Aveugles" is worth a careful comparison to Williams' "The Parable of the Blind." Claude Pichois ed., *Charles Baudelaire: Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975) 92.

Contemple-les, mon âme ; ils sont vraiment affreux !
 Pareils aux mannequins ; vaguement ridicules ;
 Terribles, singuliers comme les somnambules ;
 Dardant on ne sait où leurs globes ténébreux.

Leurs yeux, d'où la divine étincelle est partie,
 Comme s'ils regardaient au loin, restent levés
 Au ciel ; on ne les voit jamais vers les pavés
 Pencher rêveusement leur tête appesantie.

Ils traversent ainsi le noir illimité,
 Ce frère du silence éternel. Ô cité !
 Pendant qu'autour de nous tu chantes, ris et beugles,

Éprise du plaisir jusqu'à l'atrocité,
 Vois ! je me traîne aussi ! mais, plus qu'eux hébété,
 Je dis : Que cherchent-ils au Ciel, tous ces aveugles ?

- 42) Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Le doute de Cézanne," in *Sens et non-sens* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996 [Nagel, 1948]), trans. Hubert Dreyfus & Patricia Allen Dreyfus, "Cezanne's Doubt," in *Sense and Non-Sense* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964) 12.
- 43) CP2 386-87. "The Hunters in the Snow," in which the overall orderly composition of the landscape is designated in an orderly fashion; beginning with 'the background' (l. 3) and 'from the left' (l. 5) 'to the right' (l. 15) and then 'foreground' (l. 20):

The over-all picture is winter
icy mountains
in the background the return

from the hunt it is toward evening
from the left
sturdy hunters lead in

their pack the inn-sign
hanging from a
broken hinge is a stag a crucifix

between his antlers the cold
inn yard is
deserted but for a huge bonfire

that flares wind-driven tended by
women who cluster
about it to the right beyond

the hill is a pattern of skaters
Brueghel the painter
concerned with it all has chosen

a winter-struck bush for his
foreground to
complete the picture . . .

- 44) Merleau-Ponty 14.
- 45) Breslin 125.
- 46) Scott 71.
- 47) CP2 506.
- 48) CP2 391.
- 49) Wagner 53.
- 50) Joel Conarroe, "The Measured Dance: Williams' 'Pictures from Brueghel'" (*Journal of Modern Literature*

Vol. 1, Vol. 4, William Carlos Williams Special Number (May, 1971): 565-77) 566.

51) Wagner 82.

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