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IMAGISM AND VISUALITY IN WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS'S POEMS

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I confirm that this thesis is my own work written using solely the sources and literature properly quoted and acknowledged as works cited.

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Acknowledgement

Anotace

Diplomová práce se zabývá dílem jednoho z předních představitelů americké modernistické poezie Williama Carlose Williamse. Zkoumá konkrétní projevy imagismu v jeho básních, především se pak zaměřuje na vlivy výtvarného umění na jeho dílo.

V první části práce budou nastíněny klíčové teoretické pojmy a relevantní literárněhistorický kontext autorovy tvorby. Praktická část bude na základě těchto východisek a s pomocí těchto termínů analyzovat vybrané básně Williama Carlose Williamse, přičemž se zaměří především na jeho básně ekfrastické nebo k efrázi směřující.

Klíčová slova:

poezie, vizualita, ekfráze, modernismus, imagisms, Williams

Abstract

This thesis deals with the work of one of the leading representatives of American modernist poetry, William Carlos Williams. It examines the specific manifestations of Imagism in his poems and, in particular, focuses on the influence of visual arts on his work.

The first part of the thesis will outline the key theoretical concepts and the relevant literary-historical context of the author's work. The practical part will use these premises as a basis for the analysis of selected poems by William Carlos Williams, with particular focus on his ekphrastic poems or poems that are close to ekphrasis.

Key words:

poetry, visuality, ekphrasis, Modernism, Imagism, Williams

Contents

Introduction

William Carlos Williams is a poet who nowadays already has a stable place in the American literary canon. He is recognised as one of the key authors of Modernist poetry and an important member of the Imagist movement. Apart from being a poet and a doctor, he had a lifelong interest in visual arts, which is reflected in both his personal life and his poetry. On the personal level, we can follow his love for painting mainly through his active participation in the New York artistic circles, which soon led to close friendships with several of his contemporary painters.

The visuality in his poetry is even nowadays still a subject for literary research, to which this thesis aims to contribute. The pioneering works that related Williams's poems with visual art were published in the 1970s by Bram Dijkstra and William Marling, who both focused on different movements and painters that influenced Williams's work. The more recent works that continue in this legacy are, for example, those of Christopher MacGowan, or Peter Halter. These were soon followed by the critics, who searched for the visuality rather in the form of the poem, the specific way it is structured, such as Henry M. Sayre, or Grant F. Scott. However, it must be acknowledged that although these approaches differ in some ways, they are not contradictory in their findings. Instead, they complete and enrich one another, which is why this thesis is based on the sources of a full spectrum of the so far conducted research.

Although the poems of William Carlos Williams have been discussed by many a scholar during the past century, we are far from exhausting their possible interpretations regarding imagery, and neither does this thesis aim so high to do so. The purpose of this thesis is to analyse how Williams brings visuality into his poems as well as the strategies he uses to achieve intense imagery in these poems. To achieve this goal, an analysis based on the method of close reading was conducted. The examined poems that were classified into three categories are as follows: ekphrastic poems ("The Parable of the Blind", "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus", "The Corn Harvest", "The Wedding Dance in the Open Air"), quasi-ekphrastic poems ("Classic Scene", "The Great Figure"), and non-ekphrastic poems ("The Red Wheelbarrow", "This Is Just to Say", "The Yellow Chimney").

1. William Carlos Williams's Life and Influences

At the beginning of the 20th century, which gave birth to Modernism, there was a strong tendency in supposedly all kinds of art to come up with something new, something fresh and original or perhaps even deliberately shocking. And poetry was, of course, no exception to this tendency. In fact, "Modernist poets and poetry react[ed] especially productively to the period's pre-eminent modes of avant-garde experimentation: manifestoes and the leading techniques of modernist visual art, collage and abstraction" (Davis and Jenkins 29). One of the authors, whose work was also influenced by visual art, and later became one of the most prominent modernist poets, was William Carlos Williams. His originality lay, among other things, in using plain and simple language in free verse, which helped him to emphasise the importance of visuality in his poems.

William Carlos Williams was born on 17 September 1883 in Rutherford, New Jersey, as the eldest son of English-born William George Williams, who was brought up in the Caribbean, and Raquel Hélène Rose Hoheb Williams of Puerto Rican origin. (Mariani 24). From his parents, who moved to New York already before their wedding, young William inherited, among other things, Spanish as his mother tongue, for it was the language the family spoke at home. However, thanks to his grandma Emily Wellcome, who came from England and was very fond of her grandson and taught him from his childhood, he learned the language with ease, although it was initially not his mother's tongue (Mariani 25). However, Williams was an American, who spent the majority of his life in English speaking surroundings, therefore his bilingualism was by no means a handicap for his literary career. After all, his writings where he plays with each word, twists it, reduces the words to its minimum and then puts them back into a beautiful flow of poetry, only prove that he mastered the language to a great extent.

In 1906, he graduated from medical studies at the University of Pennsylvania and started his practice as a small-town doctor soon after. Although this duality of his career might seem as something quite surprising, some critics even believe that being a doctor helped him in his writing as it gave him new inspiring perspectives and "access to lives that would otherwise remain unknown and unrecorded" (MacGowan, CC 2), which he adapted into his poetry. It must be admitted, though, that he was very lucky to make many contacts during his studies at the University and early in his literary career with people,

who later became important figures of American literary or generally artistic scene, which surely helped him in pursuing his poetic dreams as well.

Many of the modernist authors were influenced by the experiments of avant-garde in visual arts, which was very progressive by that time. Since the roots of avant-garde lay in Europe, for Williams was very forming his close friendship with the poet Ezra Pound and the painter Charles Demuth, who by that time both lived in Europe. They were both "in close contact with the local art scene", about which they had informed Rutherford based Williams. Furthermore, Demuth, who met in Paris such artists as "Duchamp, Picasso, Braque, Matisse, and the other Fauves", returned to the US in 1913 and "introduced [Williams] not only to the New York avant-garde but also, in due time, to Marsden Hartley and Charles Sheeler, both of whom then also became Williams's lifelong artist friends". It is, therefore, no surprise that for Williams, the most influential was the New York avant-garde of the 1910s and 20s, which brought into art "a tremendous liberation that resulted from a radical break with the past and all of its accepted criteria". In New York, Williams often visited different salons, performances, and galleries, and attended appointments with other poets and artists, with whom he had discussed the opinions about what direction should the modern American art aim (Halter, CC 37-38).

The change and experimentalism, most prominent in painting, were seen as the beginning of the age of freedom in art, and Williams surely took advantage of it to develop his poetic style inspired by the modern visual arts. He managed to become an important figure of the events of the big city's cultural life and a family doctor at the same time.

In search of a new inherently American poetic style, he joined the Imagist movement alongside Amy Lowell, H.D., Ford Madox Ford, or his life-long friend Ezra Pound. The Imagist movement was one of the key literary movements at the beginning of the 20th century, although it never was a doctrine-based homogenous group of writers. The origins of Imagism are often connected with the turbulent development in the visual arts, mainly with different kinds of French -isms such as Cubism, Dadaism, or Symbolism. Moreover, "the imagists were the first to base their own work on the success of modern French experiment and to interpret for English and American readers the spirit as well as the technique underlying those successes" (Hughes 7). Yet, their innovativeness did not lie only in the fact that they were local artists. The characteristic features of their works were

direct treatment of the topic, economy of language, which goes hand in hand with its clarity, free verse, and focus on an exact visual image.

Williams met his Imagist colleague poet Ezra Pound during his studies at the university, and although their friendship was contentious, for they soon started to differ significantly in their opinions (not only) about literature, he was of great help and influence at least at the beginnings of Williams's literary career. Even after some of his peers abandoned Imagism and leaned towards other different styles of Modernism – more international, socio-historical, and overall European, Williams's "poetry remained largely pictorial, local, and concerned with immediate experience" (MacGowan, CC 3). We can find the influence of Imagism in his work even years after, when the whole Imagist movement was far behind him, and his poetic style was more mature.

Towards the end of his life, Williams suffered a heart attack, several strokes, and depression and died on 4 March 1963. At his time, he was not given as much praise as his contemporaries, by whom he was, at least at the beginning of his literary career, often sharply criticised. However, he managed to become an established poet, who even posthumously won the Pulitzer Prize in 1963 for his publication of *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems*. Nowadays, he is known mostly for focusing on the local, searching for inspiration in his surroundings, whose importance he emphasised, experimenting with both form and content of his poems, and for being a great innovator of American poetry.

2. Poetic Style of William Carlos Williams

The importance of visuality in Williams's works comes hand in hand with his poetic style. Therefore, it is necessary to firstly sketch out the exact poetic devices he uses to achieve visuality in his work. As Henry M. Sayre observes, "[a]t the center of [his] poetic is his conception of language as physical material", which, however, is "by no means reductive" for in his conception "the poem is an object to be perceived and read" (7), meaning that the focus is both on its form and content, which are both highly visually expressive and therefore both extremely important subjects of our focus.

Williams is known for the clarity of his poems achieved by using rather plain but precise language in free verse. At the same time, it is important to note that this clarity or even ordinariness of language does not mean that his poetry is simple or shallow in its meaning. More likely, it is as if he was describing a scene to the reader so that they can picture it clearly, but at the same time, there is given no explanation of what is seen. In most of his poems, Williams combines imagist techniques of directness, precise use of language, short carefully designed lines, enjambment, and direct treatment of the topic. This, as a result, evoke an impressive image or a series of images to the reader. In the majority (if not all) of his poems, Williams carefully focuses on working with the layout of the poem, the visual pattern. But in several cases, he goes even further into the visuality and uses *ekphrasis*, a verbal description of a physical object of visual art. In Williams's poetry, we can thus follow the visuality in both ekphrastic and non-ekphrastic poems.

2.1 Williams and Visuality

Williams Carlos Williams is well known for creating impressive, visually expressive poems both on the level of form and that of content. As he recalls in his Autobiography, from his childhood, he was influenced by the artistic passion of his mother Raquel, who "had lived three years in her beloved Paris as an art student" (36). She studied painting and occasionally continued to paint even after she had to give up her dream and decided to settle down. William himself with his younger brother Edgar "consequently painted, using her old tubes and palette which [they] found in the attic" (47). Moreover, Williams even admits that before he found his ultimate passion in poetry, he was "undecided whether or not [he] should become a painter" (52). It is then no surprise that he created a great number of poems that are visually expressive to a great extent. Although neither of the brothers in the end pursued the career of a painter, they both continued in their interest in visual arts, as well as they occasionally painted in their private lives.

Apart from the influence of his family, the greatest importance of his development towards visuality is usually understood to relate to the beginnings of his career. By that time, Williams explored the art scene of the lively modernist New York side by side with his friend, young aspiring painter Charles Demuth (1883 – 1935), who later became one of the pioneering artists of Precisionism. Similarly as Williams's other very peculiar and very influential friend Ezra Pound, Demuth spent several years in Europe, where he was in the heart of the avant-garde, of the anticipated great change in arts. Naturally, as a close friend of Williams for many years, he stayed with him in contact through letters in which he described all the changes that were already happening in Europe. And as already mentioned in the previous chapter, once Demuth came back to America, he introduced Williams to the New York avant-garde. After that, it did not take long until Williams (as well as Demuth) became an important member of the art circles of his time, which was undoubtedly influential for his own works.

The Modernism Williams believed in was not just about the dictum of Ezra Pound, who once famously exclaimed: "Make it New!" (Danius 74). He believed in the Modernism he learned from visual arts and from paintings, in which the tradition of realistic depiction based on naturalism was rejected, and the perspective had shifted. Furthermore, as "photography took over the representational tasks of painting, artists were free to think" (Weston 245), in a sense that they were freed from creating art as *mimesis*, as a representation of reality, for that was now a task for photography. This switch of roles

made the artist question the possibilities of visual art and search for the new forms of art since *mimesis* was no longer a desirable option. The freedom of creation liberated from the binding traditional conventions that had resulted in elitist forms of art was what enchanted Williams the most. And in certain aspects, his poetry truly was revolutionary in the mid-1910s, when he decided to include the "'unsuitable' subject matter, rejected as banal, trite, vulgar, or meaningless" (Halter, CC 39). He chose to create in a sort of Duchampian style, only less radical, and to transform the reality of everyday life, which was not treated as a subject of art ever before, into poetry. Closely connected to this everyday life experience was also the topic of urban environment, which, in fact, was the "environment that brought [the Imagists] all together as a cultural formation" and it was therefore no surprise that "many of [them] sought to reflect upon [it]" (Thacker 88), Williams being one of them.

2.2 Visual Patterns (Opsis)

Williams, probably inspired by his beloved visual art, was very much focused also on precisely designing the layout of his poems. After all, the first contact between the reader and the poem is always visual (as long as we suppose that the poem is read by the reader themselves). In the case of Williams's poems, it can be claimed that "[t]he patterns of speech by which the poems are composed imitate the visual array across the retina in the act of perception", which results in "a constant metamorphosis of images" (Baker 5).

However, it is important to mention first that combining visual arts with poetry was no invention of modernism nor Williams himself. In fact, on a very basic and conventional level, there are two categories of the lyric can be distinguished. They are not exactly in opposition, but one of them is usually more dominant in the poem – these are *Melos* and *Opsis*. To put it simply, *Melos* means a poem that "is sound pattering (voicing)" or "produces/represents voices", and *Opsis* means a poem that "is a visual construction" or "produces/represents images" (Culler 256). Without trying to make any general conclusions at this point, it is rather obvious that when focusing on Williams's poetry, the term *Opsis* seems to be more relevant in most of the cases. Not only that he thoroughly focused on the layout of the poems, but his poems also produce or even represent very vivid visual images.

For *Opsis*, in the sense of both designing a visual pattern and evoking images, the use of language is absolutely crucial. When describing the way Williams works with words, Peter Halter even comes up with a metaphor of "bricklaying", stating that "[t]he poet uses words as the painter uses pigment or the architect bricks" for what "these forms of construction have in common [...] is the element of design" (Visual Arts 212). For such "construction", a proper division of the poem into stanzas is crucial. In the selected poems, Williams uses mostly equivalently long stanzas of three lines, where the line length is either irregular or follows some regular pattern. We can find in the poems for example descending/ascending line length or longer/shorter middle line of a stanza, typical is also regular alternation of two different patterns. But, of course, there are numerous other patterns Williams uses. Sometimes he keeps the regular three-lined stanzas ("The Parable of the Blind"), or changes only the number of lines per stanza (such as in "Classic Scene", where there are four lines, except for the last one-lined stanza), other times he completely omits any division of the poem and serves us one line after another without any space in between ("The Great Figure"). But in general, in terms of

form, Williams is mainly known for the "triadic variable foot of his late poetry", which is the supposedly the "poetic form by which [he] synthesized visual order and aural irregularity" (Sayre 84).

There are also other poems, both regular and irregular, which Williams deliberately shaped into some concrete design. An obvious example of such arrangement is to be found in "The Red Wheel Barrow", where, if one uses a bit of imagination, it is easy to see that each stanza looks as if formed into a shape of a wheelbarrow. The first and longer line consisting of three words represents the handles, and the second line, which is shorter and always consists only of one single word resembles the body/wheel. However, such "visual reading" is in Williams's poems usually impossible to do without the actual reading, which gives the layout its meaning. The poems are simply not shaped that explicitly to function as a clear image. Even though it is true that Williams is usually very expressive and direct with the titles of the poems, so that the reader can often approach the visual dimension simultaneously with the actual reading and grasping the meaning of the poem. In case of "The Red Wheelbarrow" then, the perception of the reader works as if on more levels – they are reading the words "wheelbarrow", which evokes the mental image of a wheelbarrow, and at the same time, they are invited to notice that the text, which speaks about a wheelbarrow, is itself also in a shape of a wheelbarrow.

Figure 1 Layout of The Red Wheelbarrow

Another very important term regarding the spatial disposition of the poem is the so-called enjambment, or in other words, the run-on lines in which a clause or a sentence continues past the line break. As we can see again for example in the poem "The Red Wheelbarrow" (*Figure 1*), where all lines are enjambed, Williams separates even such constituents as "depends // upon" (1,2) or "white // chickens" (7,8), that clearly come together. He goes even a bit further and breaks "wheelbarrow", which is used as a single word in the title, into two separate words on lines 3 and 4. The enjambment sweeps the reader's attention immediately to visual the appearance of the poem even before they have a chance to approach the poem's meaning. They are interested in its layout, for it is clear that the division of the lines is by no means random and thus plays an important role for understanding the poem. The clear cuts in the middle of a supposedly continuous flow of speech, which are even more stressed by not using any punctuation in between them, not even commas, simply strike the reader at first glance. However, we must not forget that by engaging the feature of enjambment, the "poem [also] raises the question of the relation between the visual form and sound sequence, as the reader seems invited to treat the lines as breath groups, pausing at line and stanza endings" (Culler 31). Of course, in case of "The Red Wheelbarrow", it is impossible to take the lineation as a doctrine as one would have to stop after every other word, but there is no doubt that the voicing of the poem is to a certain extent suggested or influenced by the line division.

The enjambment fundamentally challenges the reader's approach to the poem. First of all, they must pay increased attention to and closely observe the line sequence as it no longer holds that words that semantically belong together are ordered on one line. It might even happen that it is unclear whether some substituent refers to the previous or the following one, which indeed complicates the interpretation of the poem. But on the other hand, the ambiguity is only rarely unintentional and in all cases results in enhancement of the poem as it adds yet another layer of possible meanings. All in all, the enjambment raises many questions, and to exhaust the interpretation to the fullest, we must strive to understand the author's intention regarding the exact division of the lines (not that we must take this intention dogmatically). As already suggested, there could be several reasons for such use of enjambment. The most common seem to be the following ones: intention to fit into a certain visual (layout) or voicing (rhyme, stress, metre) pattern, catching the reader's attention by breaking traditional poetic forms, or as a way of stressing out certain words and their meanings that would otherwise remain unnoticed.

It is important to say that even though Williams was well aware of the importance of visuality, and his poems are certainly intentionally designed, the design never sidelines other aspects of his poems. Visuality, although it was always very important for him, was not the only (often nor the primary) means of his poetry. After all, we can talk about design also in terms of language, for the poems are full of "unconventional syntax, unusual grammatical forms, enjambments, emphases on articles, conjunctions, prepositions, lack of punctuation, idiosyncratic lineation" (Giorcelli 122). Thus, in Williams's poems, visuality is to be perceived as a key part of the whole. It completes the meaning of words as if Williams was always able to find asynthesis of semantic meaning (which is often visually expressive) and the actual visual appearance, the layout, of the poem.

2.3 Visual Expressivity of WCW's Language

As already sketched above, Williams was in his poetic style inspired by the spirit of Imagism, which led him to several experiments in his poems. Concerning his attitude towards visuality, it is significant that he was not focused on the visual aspects of his poems only on the level of form and layout (as described in the previous chapter). He strived to achieve some visual effect also through a specific use of language, which consequently also forms the content of a poem.

Williams approaches the language almost in a phenomenological way as if he was trying to use the method of bracketing to find the distilled meaning of every single word he carefully took into consideration and subsequently decided to use. Each and every word stripped to its very core in its purest form. This clarity of language is also closely tightened with its simplicity, which Williams stresses out for example in the 1951 introduction to his epic poem *Paterson*: "This seemed to me to be what a poem was for, to speak to us in a language we can understand. But first before we can understand it the language must be recognizable. We must know it as our own, we must be satisfied that it speaks for us" (1). This proves just how important it was for Williams to use simple everyday language that is easy to understand. This, however, does not mean at all that the poems are simple in their meaning. Once the words are precisely ordered in the way Williams arranged them, they start to evoke different visual perceptions, which together create a complete, semantically rich picture full of connotations. But as it is with pictures (and Williams's poetry as well), they are usually open to many interpretations without any conceivable right to find the correct solution, as if there was any in the first place.

Probably the most prominent instance of verbal visual expressivity that is to be found in many of Williams's works is as simple as a mention or at least a suggestion of colour, whether he uses an actual colour term or a metaphorical expression. In fact, there is a colour-referring term to be found in most of the poems that have been selected for the following detailed discussion. We can therefore find there a painting "without a red" ("The Parable of Blind" 9), "a grey sky" ("Classic Scene" 15), "silver / rings that / strap the yellow /brick" ("The Yellow Chimney" 4-7), or the famously known "white / chickens" in "The Red Wheelbarrow" (7-8). However, even the poems where there is no explicit colour expression to be found evince certain visual quality, mostly through very clear connotations. For example, it is inevitable to imagine the scene of Icarus's fall differently than being bathed in sharp gold tones of the high sun after Williams's

description of "sweating [...] sun / that melted the wings' wax" ("Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" 10-12), just as much as it is impossible not to imagine the deep rich purple colour with the slight tinge of black when reading about the fresh plums in "This is Just to Say". Williams simply uses the imagery to its full potential as much as he can.

2.4 Ekphrasis

Another fundamentally important feature of Williams's work regarding visuality is the use of ekphrasis. As its Greek name suggests, it is a very old traditional literary practice of verbally describing objects of visual art. As Valentine Cunningham observes, "the imperative that literature seems to feel to picture such nonverbal items, to incorporate them into text, to have us picture them along with the writer, the poet, the novelist and their characters, does appear to be simply inescapable" (57). It is then of no surprise that it was a practice very well-known and frequently used also by the Modernists. In fact, Williams, who had an undeniable interest in paintings and visual art in general, dedicated a great number of his essays and poems to the ekphrastic tradition of writing about paintings. In 1962, he even published a full collection of ekphrastic poems named *Pictures from Brueghel: And Other Poems*. However, it is important to note that ekphrasis does not mean to try to wipe out all the differences between literature and visual art and put them on the same level as if there was no distinction between them. And as Lawson-Peebles points out, that was no intention of Williams either, for "[a]lthough he admitted in a 1961 interview that in later years he had attempted to fuse poetry and painting, he was always aware of the difference of medium". (20)

All four ekphrastic poems selected for the following analysis were taken from the above-mentioned collection *Pictures from Brueghel: And Other Poems* (1962), which was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1963. As the title suggests, the poems were inspired by the paintings of Pieter Brueghel the Elder, one of the leading painters of the 16th century Dutch and Flemish Renaissance. The fact that Williams chose to dedicate the poems to paintings of Brueghel instead of choosing some unconventional modernist artist is beyond doubt interesting in itself. Moreover, he referred to Brueghel already in the fifth book of *Paterson*, Section III, which "opens with a poem devoted to Brueghel's *Nativity*, anticipating the cycle of [the ten ekphrastic poems]" (Halter, CC 51). From the ekphrastic poems we learn that what connects Williams to Brueghel is "[t]he passion with which [he] makes an art from his vision of the everyday, from the […] 'local ' Dutch peasantry" (Baker 161). Not that Williams would focus on the topic of peasantry, yet the focus on the local as well as the topics of his own everyday reality is evident. Furthermore, it must be mentioned that Williams had never completely rejected the traditional art. His intentions were just to come up with something new, to create and not just to copy the tradition. And that is exactly what he does with his ekphrastic poems. In a sense, he

follows on from the tradition, for ekphrastic art is by no means anything revolutionary, yet he works with this tradition in his own way. He uses unconventional form of the poems and does not simply copy what he saw in the paintings. Instead, he creates something new, something of his own.

Furthermore, surprising as it is, in his ekphrastic poems devoted to Brueghel's paintings, Williams goes as close to tradition as he can while still remaining true to his own characteristic style. He refers straight to Brueghel and thus emphasises the importance of his role, for he is the author of the paintings, he represents the tradition, the origin, the source that enabled the modern authors, such as Williams himself, to create. Williams proudly claims allegiance to tradition and puts himself almost into an inferior position by suggesting that he is only the second author, the first one, the one with a unique way of seeing and describing the world, was Brueghel. By his rhetoric in the ekphrastic poems, Williams suggests that his role is only to mediate the ideas of the great one to the readers through his poetry. In these poems, we can thus find phrases such as: "[a]ccording to Brueghel" ("Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" 1), "In Brueghel's great picture" ("The Dance" 1), or "[d]isciplined by the artist" ("The Wedding Dance in the Open Air") that can be understood sort of a tribute to the tradition represented by Brueghel. On the other hand, by referring to Brueghel, Williams, almost paradoxically, brings attention also to himself, for the reader is suddenly well aware of the poet's presence.

No matter how closely connected the poem and the painting are, for every ekphrastic poem, it is crucial that it is able to function independently of the source (in our case the painting). The reason is that the readers may approach the target ekphrastic art without being familiar with the source art. They might not have seen any of Brueghel's paintings before reading Williams's poems about them, and perhaps they never even will. The only (and completely sufficient) connection between the reader and the painting is the poet and his words. Thus, as suggested above, in Williams's ekphrastic poems, we are typically well aware of the presence of the poet himself. It is as if we could almost see him contemplating the painting and expect him to tell us what he sees, or even better, to show us through his poetry.

In the sample of selected poems, there are two that were categorised as "quasi-ekphrastic". These two poems do not follow the above sketched scheme of Williams's ekphrastic poems inspired by Brueghel's paintings. The first exception is the poem

"Classic Scene" from 1937, which supposedly refers to a 1931 painting of Williams's friend and artist Charles Sheeler. The second exception, "The Great Figure" from the collection *Sour Grapes*, which was published already in 1921, differs from the rest of Williams's ekphrastic poems on several levels. First of all, the poem is an instance of the so-called reversed ekphrasis, meaning that this time, poetry was the source art while the painting, a product of visual arts, was the target. The year of its publication is also significant as it was way before Williams started with his ekphrastic poems about Brueghel's paintings. These were the years when he was surrounded by Modernist art rather than looking up to the tradition. It is, therefore, only logical that this modernist poem was transformed into a painting in 1928 by another Modernist, Williams's very good friend Charles Demuth.

3. Close reading of selected poems

For the following analysis of the selected poems by Williams, the method of close reading with focus on visually relevant aspects of such analysis was applied. Close reading is generally understood as a practice of "[r]eading individual texts with attention to their linguistic features and rhetorical operations", which are practices that "have certainly been a persistent feature of Anglo-American literary studies" (Smith 57). Or in other words, it is a reading strategy that thoroughly focuses on possibly all layers of both language and text structures that can be found in the particular examined text. Based on the results of such reading, the readers are (supposedly) able to analyse the text in detail and thus uncover the potential meaning(s) of it and come to a deeper comprehension.

As Jonathan Culler points out, there are "different traditions of close reading: practices inherited from Anglo--American New Criticism and those that derive from the French tradition of explication de texte, as well as more recent versions of deconstructive, rhetorical, and psychoanalytic reading" (20). It is, therefore, extremely difficult, if not almost impossible, to find and state the exact rules and definitions of the practice of close reading as its execution varies a lot depending not only on the school of thought but on the time of the reading as well. Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, I have decided to approach the method of close reading not in the way of a strict set of tools that must be used and topics that must be addressed to develop a proper text analysis but rather as a philosophical strategy that aims to uncover as many possible meanings that are connected to visuality as possible. At the same time, the analysis is well aware of its limits, that is, the probable inexhaustibility of the meanings of the examined poems.

It must be also acknowledged first that this thesis is by no means the first one that aims to examine Williams's poems by using the method of close reading. And although the following examination of the poems of course works to some extent with several interpretations by other authors, the purpose of the analysis is not to approve or confront what was already written but to come up with own reading of the poems that "[grounds] in personal observation and experience", which in the spirit of close reading "does not compromise the interest or usefulness of that interpretation" (Smith 68).

3.1 Ekphrastic poems

As already mentioned, although being ekphrastic, these poems are not dependent on the source paintings and can be, of course, read even without the reader being familiar with Brueghel's works. However, to approach an ekphrastic poem as if it was a non-ekphrastic one means that the reader completely and deliberately overlooks a full range of potential meanings. Therefore, the following analyses are always accompanied not only by the text of the original Williams's poem but also by the corresponding painting by Brueghel.

In fact, by not including the source art, in our case, the painting, we could easily deprive ourselves of certain aspects of reading that come into consideration when observing ekphrastic art. It is in these poems, where the imagination works hand in hand with visuality on several levels at the same time. What strikes the reader first is always the layout of a poem, which is inevitably written in a certain shape. On this level of the visual pattern, we are not yet presented with any objects, feelings, or a story. Instead, there is a picture (although most of the time an abstract one) created out of the words ordered on a page. The second and third levels come together since they are tightly connected in their core. These are the level of language, which Williams uses in quite a specific way, and consequently, also the theme of the poem. Both the language and theme of each poem mirror their source art paintings to a great extent. Naturally, the images are evoked in the reader's mind through the semantic meaning of the words read. However, as Williams proves in his poems, it is not only about the specific word choice but also about their grammatical order and the layout of the poem. The following analysis will then focus on the visuality on the level of the poem's form, theme, and language, while it will take into consideration also the influence of the source art.

When A. D. Baker examines some of the poems from *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems*, he states that Williams did not create a copy of what Brueghel has painted, but he "made an imitation of his painting by transforming it into the medium of words" (163). Without any ambition to oppose such statement, I would not be afraid to go even a bit further and talk about inspiration and interpretation instead of "imitation", which, at least in the sense of *mimesis*, appears to be a bit undervaluing the importance of Williams's original artistic work. After all, it does not seem that Williams was trying to imitate anything in his poems. Instead, he was the one who creates. Although he openly refers to Brueghel in his ekphrastic poems, these poems are by no means simple descriptions of the paintings. They do not even have the ambition to cover everything that was painted.

In fact, most of the time, Williams does not bother to describe the whole scenery of the painting. Instead, he focuses only on certain parts and aspects and stays true to his plain style in which he presents the reader with all the important details he decided to share with them. Therefore, Williams's ekphrastic poems should be understood as reflections of very carefully chosen parts of his own perception of the paintings and the way he decided to present them to the reader rather than any kind of imitation of the paintings.

3.1.1 The Parable of the Blind

Painting 1 Pieter Brueghel the Elder - The Parable of the Blind Leading the Blind

THE PARABLE OF THE BLIND

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 man

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

to the composition one

follows the others stick in

hand triumphant to disaster

                                    (Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems 8-9)

In case of the first poem selected for the analysis, "The Parable of the Blind", Williams took the name from Brueghel's 1568 painting, which is also known as *The Blind Leading the Blind*. It is, of course, only practical and convenient when writing an ekphrastic poem to use the name of the painting the poem refers to. However, it must be acknowledged that it is very implausible that Williams was simply copying the names of the paintings without being well aware of their meanings and thoroughly considering them as important parts of his poems. Therefore, even the title must be taken into consideration when trying to interpret this short poem. What strikes the reader's eye the most at first is the topic of blindness and the word "parable", which means "a short, simple story that teaches or explains an idea, especially a moral or religious idea" (Cambridge Dictionary). Naturally, the reader then expects that Williams is about to teach us something or even give us a moral lesson in his poem. This is in itself deeply ironic, for reaching some insight by contemplating the blind figuratively means being led by the blind, which is exactly what the parable tries to teach us not to do so.

The Renaissance masterpiece of Brueghel's was highly influential, and Williams was far from being the only one inspired by it. There are several painters, writers, and other artists who chose to base their work on the same painting. But not even Brueghel was the first, who depicted the blind leading the blind, nor is he the one who came up with such parable. In fact, the parable originally comes from the Bible, Matthew 15:14:"Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into a ditch". It is usually understood in a sense that there is no good ending to the scenario in which those who are incompetent are led by equally inept people. In the Bible, it is, of course interpreted, regarding faith. Thus, the blindness, which is represented in Brueghel's painting as a medical condition and, interestingly enough, also depicted as several different types of ocular affliction, was most likely to be understood in a metaphorical sense as lacking faith in God and Jesus Christ. This connection to Christianity, although indirect, comes quite unexpected from a poet such as Williams, who usually does not work with religious themes in his poems, at least not explicitly.

What catches the reader's eye immediately is definitely the way Williams structured the poem. At first glance, the layout is very simple, in this sense, Williams is indeed loyal to his characteristic style. In the whole poem, we can find no commas, no full stops, nor other punctuation marks that would interrupt the smooth flow of eight stanzas of three relatively short lines arranged in free verse. The language used is also typical of Williams – clear, direct, ordinary rather than poetic, and yet evoking extraordinary insights.

Surprisingly, Williams starts his first stanza with "This horrible but superb painting" (1), emphasising not only the fact that this poem is a result of the process of ekphrasis by referring to the source art (the painting) as soon as he could, but also the general importance of visuality in the poem. As readers who may approach it without any further context, we cannot see the painting, and perhaps we never will. Still, after this introductory line, we are well aware of the presence of the painter as well as the poet himself. By starting with the pronoun "this", he creates an atmosphere in which we could almost see him contemplating the painting and expect him to tell us what he sees, to show us through his poetry. Here one cannot but find it quite paradoxical that in a poem that deals with the topic of blindness, visuality plays such an important role. Furthermore, when reading the poem without looking at the painting which inspired it, we are the blind ones who must rely on the poet's words, and we can only hope that he is not blind himself, otherwise we would become the blinds led by the blind.

Regarding the contrasting "horrible but superb" (1) expression, there is an interesting interpretation, at least for the "horrible" part, which creates a half-rhyme with "parable". It is understood by Mary Ann Caws as placing "an immediate stress upon the very awfulness of the picture, presented with an accent on the terrible irony of painting a painting of the blind: *Painting the parable* is then to picture the kind of fall from which no lesson can be learned" (329). By this bleak interpretation, Caws almost kills all the expectations of a moral lesson that the reader might have hoped for when approaching the poem, but of course, there is still the *superb* part. However, that is supposedly dedicated rather to Brueghel's artistic skill, which made it possible to depicture the horribleness just perfectly.

The second line mirrors the title, and the third one reads „without a red" (3) and is of no less importance. Firstly, in its literal sense, Williams is quite right with this statement, for there truly is not a pure shade of red nor any other vivid colour to be found in the painting. However, such specification of a colour palette is quite an unusual observation for a poet, which makes us question the reasons for pointing it out. One of them unfolds from a close study of the painting in which, instead of using red shades that create warm, almost sun-drenched tones, Brueghel used dimmed earthy colours avoiding any bright tones, probably to evoke the sense of misery of the blind. The other reason that suggests itself is based on synecdoche in the sense that red represents any and all of the colours. Without trying to impose that blind people are completely lacking the concept of colours, it is undeniable that they are unable to perceive and distinguish them only by using their eyes. Therefore, they find themselves in a world without colours, "without a red", and consequently without any warning sign that they are heading towards the bog.

The second stanza specifically speaks about the characters of the painting, recognising them as beggars, even though Brueghel clothed them in garments one would not expect to see on poor peasants. However, there are other significant attributes identifying them as beggars. First of all, they are blind, and for such, being beggars is quite a typical representation to be found in literature and art in general. After all, what else could they do in the world ruled by sighted people. Secondly, Williams made sure to emphasise their wretchedness further throughout the poem, especially when he speaks about "the unshaven / features of the des- / titude" (13-15) or even better about their "pitiful possessions" (16). Nor does he help their poor image by describing how they lead "each other diagonally downward (…) to stumble finally into the bog" (6, 9). This can be, again,

understood both metaphorically and literally since Brueghel's unique diagonal composition of the painting does imply their fall just as Williams's parable does. It is as if they were destined to tumble, for that is what happens when the blind leads the blind.

Regarding the contrast of visuality and blindness, it is also remarkable how Williams almost forcibly stresses out not only the composition but also the explicit fact that "no seeing man / is represented" (12-13) as if anyone would expect to find one in the parable of the blind. But as it is typical of him, Williams enjoys presenting us with several possible readings full of ambiguities without telling us the exact key. This peom is of no exception. The double-edged sense is clearer if we put the expression in contrast to the following designation of the blind as being "destitute". Then, of course, there is no seeing man, for he who sees can never be destitute, for he has the property of vision, the most valued of the senses. Moreover, metaphorically it also represents the richness of the spiritual world that is in common understanding strongly connected to sight. After all, the blind procession from the painting will in their misery never see that there "is seen … a church spire" (18), a path to salvation, even though their "faces are raised / as toward the light" (19-20). Instead, they aim straight into the bog and perhaps it is the only certainty they have in their miserable lives since there is no light in the darkness, no church spire can be *seen* by them.

At the end of the poem, there is a crucial twist in the last stanza, which reads: "… one / follows the others stick in / hand triumphant to disaster" (22-24). Not only does Williams use an oxymoron in the very last line, but he also explains and emphasizes that the true disaster is not in being blind nor a beggar but in following someone blindly without using our own senses to question and examine the path we are being led into or furthermore, to verify the capability of the leader himself. Otherwise, we may easily end up as the blind led by another blind. Thus, although with several ambiguities and ironical if not almost contradicting moments, Williams fulfils the criteria he stated himself by using Bruegel's painting referring to Bible – he did truly write a parable.

In "The Parable of The Blind" Williams greatly works with visuality on several levels, not only with the typical above-examined features of structure and visual expressiveness achieved by the use of language, but he also makes it a central topic of the poem and its fictional world. He himself as an author examines visuality by observing the contrast between seeing and blindness.

3.1.2 Landscape with the Fall of Icarus

Painting 2 Pieter Brueghel the Elder - Landscape with the Fall of Icarus

LANDSCAPE WITH THE FALL OF ICARUS

According to Brueghel

when Icarus fell

it was spring

a farmer was ploughing

his field

the whole pageantry

of the year was

awake tingling

with itself

sweating in the sun

that melted

the wings' wax

unsignificantly

off the coast

there was

a splash quite unnoticed

this was

Icarus drowning

The second ekphrastic poem chosen for closer analysis is "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus". It was written in response to an oil painting of the same name attributed (although nowadays doubtfully) again to Pieter Brueghel the Elder. At first glance, the topic of the painting (and the poem) seems quite self-evident. We are dealing with the Greek mythological figure of Icarus, who, according to the story, did not listen to his father and flew too high and too close to the sun, which melted the bee wax in his wings and subsequently killed him as he drowned in the sea. Yet, what is quite interesting is that in the painting, Icarus himself seems to be only a figure of secondary importance and the main focus of the title (where Icarus is actually a subordinate element of the syntactic construction), the scenery of the painting, just as well as of the whole poem, is actually on the landscape instead of on the ancient hero.

It may even require some effort to notice Icarus in the painting, for he is located in the lower right-hand corner, way out of the centre of the composition. Moreover, he is also further in the distance so that the figure appears to be small. Furthermore, we cannot even see his figure in full, there are only his legs and perhaps a slight hint of wings visible. In the poem, on the other hand, the reader does not have to search for Icarus for too long, as Williams serves him to us directly in the second line. However, then he completely changes the focus to other parts of the scenery and comes back again to poor Icarus only towards the end of the poem. It is as if Icarus was sort of a framing topic, which, however, stays in the corners rather than in the central focus. Furthermore, as Irene R. Fairley points out, even the syntactic role of Icarus is in the poem again only subordinate: "Although the noun «Icarus» occurs in the title and in the first and last stanzas, which are marked

positions, it is not given a syntactically prominent role; it is never placed in the subject position of a main clause." (7).

The fundamental role of visuality in the poem is on the formal level apparent from the very beginning. It starts with the title, which clearly refers to a painting of the same name, continues with Brueghel being mentioned right in the first line, and is evident also from the overall composition. It is clear that Williams, who is known for experimenting not only with the content of his poems but with the form as well, intended "to make his readers attend to the poem at one level as they would to any visual object, urging them to read the text and its visual texture simultaneously" (Baker 88). The poem is divided into seven stanzas, each of three relatively short (no more than four words) lines. There is no clear regularity in terms of metre, rhyme, or length of these lines, yet, on the other hand, the poem is for sure not irregular at all. Firstly, as already mentioned above, all the stanzas consist of the same number of short lines. Secondly, there are only two types of line length patterns, and these are both used in the first two stanzas of the poem. And lastly, we can even notice that the first two and the last two stanzas are of the same line length pattern, and thus, they are similar in terms of their visual appearance.
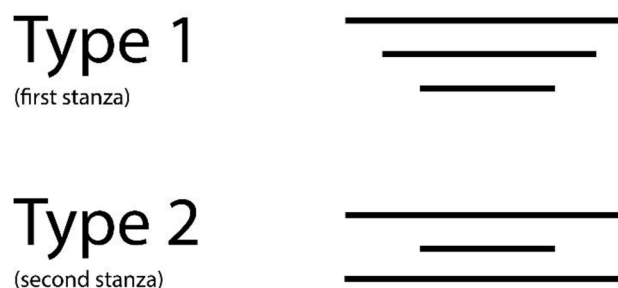
Figure 2 Line length of stanzas in Landscape with the Fall of Icarus

In the first line, which reads "According to Brueghel" (1), Williams tries as if to almost renounce his own authorship and pass it to Brueghel since he clearly states that he is not the one who tries to recount the mythological story. It is as if he even tried to persuade the reader that he, as an author, completely steps aside and presents only what Brueghel wanted us to see. Nevertheless, by bringing attention to the question of authorship, he paradoxically made more visible also himself as an author. Thus, from the very beginning, the poem is supposed to be read not as a poem about Icarus, nor the landscape, but about

Brueghel's painting and his way of seeing and thinking about the world, just as much as Williams's consequent understanding and interpretation of that. However, we must keep in mind that although there is a strong resemblance between the painting and the poem (after all, it is an ekphrastic poem), the resemblance is by no means isomorphic. Williams, no matter how much he tries to persuade his readers, is not simply reflecting or mirroring what was already shown in the picture. Instead, he goes straight into the middle of the scenery, looks around and shows us all the little yet crucia, details that may slip out the observer's eye.

It is not quite unusual for Williams to at least hint the time of the poem's setting to the reader. Here he goes even a bit further and tells us explicitly that "when Icarus fell / it was spring" (2-3). This, indeed, immediately evokes the images Williams saw in Brueghel's painting and wanted to present to the reader. These are not only the typical spring scenery of "a farmer [who] was ploughing / his field" (4-5), but also all the other realities that he does not name specifically in the poem, but their presence in the landscape is implied and they are to be seen in the painting, such as the shepherd with his dog and lambs, the angler, the numerous ships on the sea, just as well as the number of birds flying over the water or sitting on the tree branches full of green leaves. Thus, albeit the author uses a plain style and simple expressions, he chooses them very carefully and adroitly, which in this case results in leaving the readers with full picture of what Brueghel believed comes with the season of spring by the sea.

The poem continues with the lines "the whole pageantry // of the year was / awake tingling" (6-8), which again refers to the above-mentioned spring season and develops the suggested images of nature at its awakening even further. However, what is more interesting in this particular part, is the use of the word "pageantry" at the end of the second stanza. "The word pageantry may be interpreted as referring to the other beings in the painting (humans and animals), objects, as well as the natural elements that compose the vivid atmosphere of the landscape." (Vlad 89) It brings huge irony into the poem since the reader definitely knows the story of Icarus, and therefore his death is imposed to them very clearly from the second they read the title. Yet, Williams presents us with vivid pictures of spring, pageantry, and waits with the death till the last stanza of the poem, the last line in fact, that reads "Icarus drowning" (21). Until then, the reader can only have a very dark anticipation of the inevitable, which keeps him in tension throughout the whole poem. But such tension is, of course, in great contrast with the

blooming nature in spring described in the poem. By calling the events in nature pageantry, Williams accentuates the contrast and the irony of nature's indifference to man's life and death even more.

The whole poem is, in fact, deeply ironical, which probably has its roots in the painting as well. In the painting, "[t]he pathos of Icarus' fall seems minimized, even ridiculed, by merely showing Icarus' small legs" (Latham 130), which is evidently in great contrast to how much space was given to other figures in the scenery or even to the nature. In the poem, irony starts with the already discussed secondary grammatical role of Icarus in the title and in the first stanza. As suggested, it then only increases and escalates with each next stanza of the poem. In the second and third stanzas, the tragic fatal story is compared to the awaking nature full of life. In the fourth stanza, Williams invites the sea into the story, which in the end became Icarus's grave. It is also no coincidence that he speaks specifically about "the edge of the sea" (10), for that is the place where Brueghel painted Icarus, at the edge, in the corner. It is also again stressed that the sea was "concerned // with itself" (11-12), for, even though the sea in the end brought death to Icarus, it (or the nature in general) had no intention to intervene with the human life for it is utterly indifferent to it. Consequently, it suggests that the tragedy was solely Icarus's fault and he is the only one to be blamed for his own death.

The poem then slowly proceeds to shift the focus from nature to Icarus. First, there is mentioned the sun "that melted // the wings' wax" (14-15) in the fifth stanza, which is in commonly believed to be the cause of Icarus's fall. Thus, the reader is informed that the end is near – that is, the end of the poem as well as the end of the ancient hero. The ultimate ending, against any presumptions about heroes, happens "unsignificantly" (16) and "[…] quite unnoticed" (19), another irony. In the original Brueghel's painting, neither nature nor the people who were preoccupied with themselves seem to pay any attention to Icarus, who had to fall into the water just seconds before the time of the painting's setting. None of them looks that way or acts according to that, even though one would supposedly think it is impossible not to notice a winged man falling from the sky. Williams adopts the apparent indifference into his poem, with only a slight difference – the reader, in fact, witnesses the fall of Icarus. Apart from serving us with visual stimuli, Williams employs also our sense of hearing as he invites us to hear the "splash", although it is, as already mentioned, "quite unnoticed" (19), while the time of the scenery in the

painting must be only after that since we can already see Icarus's legs sticking out of the water.

To sum it up, Williams excellently deals with the topic of Brueghel's painting Landscape with the Fall of Icarus. In simple yet immensely vivid language, he presents us what he saw in Brueghel's adaptation of the myth. We can find here strong motives taken from the painting, such as the contrast of death and blooming nature or the sidelining of Icarus. The whole poem is deeply ironical, starting with the title and the fact, that throughout most of the poem, it is the landscape that is in the focus (both grammatically and semantically) instead of the mythical hero. Or the little detail that a poem that deals with the topic of human finiteness is in the form of an unfinished sentence since it starts with a capital letter but completely lacks any punctuation. But it is perhaps the human unconcern regarding the whole situation of Icarus, which is so shocking, for one does not usually become a mythical character by being ignored by others. The act of flying was revolutionary not only for Icarus, one individual, but for the whole humanity, yet in both the poem and the painting, he is unnoticed and means nothing to others. But it is this complete indifference, that perhaps makes us question our own existence in the human world. Would anyone notice our death, when it is so easy for people to ignore a man who flies, or would our death be just another "splash quite unnoticed" (21) on the sea surface. These are the questions that Williams raises through his visually deeply expressive poem.

3.1.3 The Corn Harvest

Painting 3 Pieter Brueghel the Elder - The Corn Harvest (August)

THE CORN HARVEST

Summer !
the painting is organized
about a young

reaper enjoying his
noonday rest
completely

relaxed
from his morning labors
sprawled

in fact sleeping
unbuttoned
on his back

the women

have brought him his lunch

perhaps

a spot of wine

they gather gossiping

under a tree

whose shade

carelessly

he does not share the

resting

center of

their workaday world

The painting that inspired "The Corn Harvest" can be found under the names *The Corn Harvest*, *The Harvesters*, or *August*, as it comes from a series of Brueghel's sceneries depicting different times of a year (five of them remain extant today). Another similarity with the so far analysed poems lies in its form, or in other words, the visual pattern. Williams once again uses three-lined stanzas, in this case, there are 8 of them, with significant feature of enjambment or the lack of any kind of punctuation, which results in the reader following smoothly the run-on lines.

There is no clear rhyme pattern in the poem, but rather what Mark Scroggins calls a "really quite intuitive free verse with a sense of order" (185). However, there is a certain regularity to be found in the line length. In fact, there are three types of stanza layout. The first two alternate between even and odd-numbered stanzas until the sixth stanza, where the so far regular alternation breaks. The first type can be found in the first, third, fifth, and irregularly also in the sixth stanza, which are all designed to have the middle line longer than the two framing lines, creating as if a shape of an arrow. The second type that

can be found in the second and fourth stanza is descending in their line length, with each line of the stanza shorter than the one before. The remaining couplet, or the last two stanzas, introduce a third type of the stanza layout, which is, in fact, the second type in reverse, meaning that the three lines are as if ascending in their length.

As we are already accustomed to it, a mention referring either to the painting or the artist who made it does not take long to appear. It comes as soon as on the second line that says: "the painting is organized" (2). Williams constructed his first line wittily since it can be read either as a separate utterance, that is, truly as a remark pointing out the organization of the painting, or, if we continue reading, together with the following lines that read "about a young // reaper" (3-4), which, in fact, is true as well. In any case, Williams brings the visual aspects of the painting straight into the poem as soon as he can.

Although in the world of art the painting is known and significant mostly for the specificness of the landscape, Williams continues with keeping the main focus on the human aspects of it. First, he focuses on the young reaper, and later in the poem also on the women, who "have brought him his lunch" (13). More precisely, it is as if he, to a certain extent, tried to follow the way the composition of the painting is organized, that is, with the group of people in the centre, surrounded by nature as if it was framing the humane. After all, Williams starts with the mention of summer in the first line, the utmost natural element. Then he continues by describing the people in there and then comes back to and finishes with nature, when pointing out the tree whose shadow is used by the peasants as a resting place. To complete the painting's scenery, there are to be seen several other reapers working in the field and harvesting the crops, or even a village with a little church spire in a far distance. However, none of these was of Williams's interest, for he, as if he had cut just one particular part from the painting, stayed focused on the central topic of the sleeping young man and his closest surroundings.

Williams starts by painting the complex picture made by words in front of the reader's eyes as soon as in the first line: "Summer !" (1). It is in its simplicity very expressive, despite that Grant F. Scott claims that Williams wrote it "more in joyous recognition than ekphrastic commitment" (71). Not only does it indicate the specific time of the year, but in its almost naïve innocence and simplicity, it also evokes the full spectrum of every single thing, image, scent, memory, or even a feeling that comes with summer. What is also significant is the unusual use of the exclamation mark here. It is the only sign of

interpunction in the whole poem, and it was used at the very beginning of the poem, what is more, in the first line and with an excess space before it as if to make the sign even more distinct and expressive. This finiteness can be understood as an expression of Williams's persisting belief in the precise plainness of language use in poetry, for in just one word, he already said it all.

Another time-related reference can be found in the second stanza, where the reader finds out that the "reaper [was] enjoying his / noonday rest" (4, 5). This leads to creating a more concrete picture in the reader's imagination. The summer noonday brings along also the indissociable connotations of the bright sun up in the sky, the hot and heavy air, and in combination with the word "rest", also the idea of the work that has already been done on the field in the morning. Then Williams serves us with yet another ambiguity with the following line that reads "completely" (6) that can easily refer either to the act of "enjoying" or to the following line "relaxed" (7), which opens the third stanza. However, the most probable interpretation is that Williams did really intend to create such ambiguity in order to refer both anaphorically and cataphorically and thus create a sort of denser meaning. After all, it is true that in the Brueghel's painting, it definitely seems that the young man is completely relaxed while he is completely enjoying his noonday rest.

Thanks to the short lines that often consist just of one word and the cross-references among the lines, Williams creates the impression of a poem that progressively intensifies and escalates. It is as if he was adding a layer of meaning with each word and each line added to the canvas he filled with words. The intensification is clear in the way Williams describes the young reaper. At first, we learn that he is "enjoying his / noonday rest" (4-5), then he adds "completely // relaxed" (6-7) and continues with "sprawled" (9) and opens the fourth stanza with "in fact sleeping" (10) as if he was almost correcting himself in order to find the most concrete expression possible. The remaining lines in the stanza, that read "unbuttoned / on his back" (11-12), are just little details added on top of it to paint the complete picture. And truly, in his language progression from abstract to concrete, from general to specific, Williams imitated the act of painting, for that is exactly how the painter works, even with the nice little touch of the last details that were missing to complete the picture.

After making sure the character of the sleeping reaper was painted to the tiniest details, Williams moves forward in his sketching of the scene. The slumberer is hardly the only

person in the painting, therefore Williams invites in his poem also "the women" (13). However, their appearance is still conditioned by the presence of the sleeping man since their role is only that they "have brought him his lunch" (14). The following "perhaps" (15) is yet another instance of ambiguous reference questioning either the previous line or the following one, which reads "a spot of wine" (16). It is interesting that in two cases, Williams deliberately places these double referring constituents at the end of a stanza, which makes it at the first sight being an instance of an anaphoric reference, but it actually helps to connect the stanzas together, so that the poem flows very naturally.

The sixth stanza opens with "a spot of wine" (16), where the word spot can be understood not only as expressing the quantity of wine, but also as cleverly referring to the painting, where the wine in such huge and complex composition is truly painted almost only as a tiny spot. Starting with the last line of this stanza, we are already getting back to the framing topic of nature, or more precisely, the tree, under whose shade the people have gathered. However, here again, Williams does not forget to ensure the reader that nature accepts the people just "carelessly" (20) and their work or, even more, their existence is none of its concerns.

As shown in the closer analysis, in "The Corn Harvest", Williams works with visuality a bit differently than in the two previous poems. There is again significant importance of the layout of the poem, which, although it is in free verse, shows a certain level of regularity in terms of line length. As usual, we can also find here references to the painting, however, except for the actual mention of the painting in the second line, these references seem to be rather vague. That is probably because, in this ekphrastic poem, Williams decided to focus closer on just one section of the painting instead of observing it in its full range, although he framed it in the natural landscape just like in the painting. The fundamental element here is the precise use of every single word of the poem, which paints the scene in vivid colours and details. Significant is also the role of cross-references within the poem, thanks to which it can be almost claimed that "[t]he overall design of the poem emerges from the words' reaction and readjustment to one another" (Baker 163).

3.1.4 The Wedding Dance in the Open Air

Painting 4 Pieter Brueghel the Elder - The Wedding Dance in the Open Air

THE WEDDING DANCE IN THE OPEN AIR

Disciplined by the artist

to go round

& round

in holiday gear

a riotously gay rabble of

peasants and their

ample-bottomed doxies

fills

the market square

featured by the women in

their starched

white headgear

they prance or go openly

toward the wood's

edges

round and around in

rough shoes and

farm breeches

mouths agape

Oya !

kicking up their heels

The last analysed poem reflecting on Brueghel's Renaissance painting is known under the same name as the picture itself, that is, "The Wedding Dance in the Open Air". As one would already expect, there is no strict rhyme pattern and this time not even any clear regularity in terms of the layout. However, it is possible to find here several half-rhymed endings such as "- 'gear', 'their', 'square', 'headgear'; and 'edges', 'breeches', 'heels'" which, as Baker points out, "make an aural pattern that evolves as the steps in a dance" and thus the words used by Williams to poetically refer about the depicted dance metaphorically "perform a verbal dance of their own" (163). Apart from that, the poem is divided into seven stanzas with three run-on lines in each stanza with almost no punctuation in between. There is not even any punctuation mark in the last line, even though the poem starts with a capital letter. The only exception is the penultimate line, which, in fact, is a full exclamatory sentence as it starts with a capital letter and ends with an exclamation mark preceded by a non-grammatical excess space, although it reads only "Oya !" (20).

The first stanza reads: "Disciplined by the artist / to go round / & round" (1-3), which points straight out to Brueghel and thus emphasises that the poem is a piece of ekphrastic art. At the same time, it also predetermines the shape of the whole poem, which, as already suggested above, does feel as if there was a certain rhythm that suggests the rhythmic steps of a dance that goes round and around. Therefore the "artist" in the first line can

refer to Brueghel just as well as to Williams himself, who truly makes his words full of imagination spin just as much as Brueghel did with his brush and shapes painted. Thus, visuality comes into play immediately, as the reader perceives the movement through their visual imagination.

In the second and third stanza, Williams presents us with vivid (and to some extent also quite explicit) description that progressively escalates and adds details to the image evoked. We learn that the "peasants and their // ample-bottomed doxies" (6-7), who together fill "the market square" (9), are in "a riotously gay rabble […]" (5) dressed "in a holiday gear" (4), which is a very specific detailed description. In the fourth stanza, Williams goes even a bit further into the visuality and presents us not only with an explicit colour expression "white" but also adds the texture of the fabric as he describes "[…] the women in / their starched / white headgear" (10-12). The bright white colour is here in great contrast with the following "[…] wood's / edges" (14-15), which evoke darkness (and in the painting, they are, in fact, painted in dark shades to frame the scene), and toward which "they prance or go openly" (13). Thus, there is great tension and contrast between some kind of premonition or anticipated darkness and the great, joyous dance and celebration of the wedding.

The way Williams works with details in this poem is fundamentally important. He almost jumps along the canvas from one detail to another as if his eyes were also part of the lively swirl of the country dance. This precise work of his brings the ekphrastic poem closer to the painting without it being just a plain description of a visual art artefact. By the thorough choice of words, he creates the same atmosphere Brueghel put into the painting, that is of commotion, joy and merrymaking. However, visuality is not the only sense-related aspect Williams decided to bring into this poem. There is also a clear instance of sound patterning that can be found throughout the whole poem. Its most clear instance is in the sixth stanza, where there is significant use of the letter r, which results in an almost onomatopoetic sound quality of the phoneme /r/. The lines which read "round and around in / rough shoes and / farm breeches" (19-21), then acoustically evoke the rhythmic sound of the music as well as the grumble of such mass of people combined with their boisterous movement. Furthermore, the expression on line 19 "round and around in" is an almost exact repetition of lines 2 and 5 "to go round / & round", which intensifies the sense of circularity since towards the end of the poem, we are suddenly getting back to the beginning. Taking into consideration also the painting, or the source

art, it becomes clear where Williams came to the idea of creating an impression of "roundness", for the composition of the painting appears as if it consisted of a number of circular assemblies of the people dancing. There is also a distinct use of the so-called vignette, or in other words the use of darker shades towards the corners of the composition, or as Williams identified it "toward the wood's / edges" (14-15), which helps to bring the main focus to the centre of the composition and thus results also in contributing to the effect of roundness of the picture.

The already discussed penultimate line "Oya !" (20) is essential not only for bearing the only sign of punctuation in the poem but it is also an instance of a moment when Williams steps into the painting and "offers his enthusiastic support for Brueghel's scene". Scott compares him to "an avid spectator at a popular sport, endorsing represented action rather than eliciting it". Thus, he understands the exclamation "Oya !" (20) as coming not from the dancers depicted in the painting, but from Williams himself, who got "caught up in the whirl of circling peasants" (Scott 71). And there is no doubt that what makes Williams's ekphrastic poems so unique is exactly this (although sometimes quite cautious) personal participation of the poet and empathy with either subjects of the painting/poem, the painter, or both.

There is no doubt that in "The Wedding Dance in the Open Air", the "articulation of vision is achieved principally by aural rather than typographic effects" (Baker 164). Williams chose a painting with a very full, complex, and even almost chaotic composition, which truly is just like a dance of such a great mass of people – it is easy to get lost in it. In his painting, Brueghel freezes the motion, stops the dance for a minute, to create a static picture. Williams takes this picture, and by thoroughly used language, bit by bit, he makes the dancers move again to "to go round / & round" (2-3). He uses repetition as well as onomatopoeia in order to connect the verbal, visual, and acoustic elements and create a multi-sensory experience of a dance. The only thing missing is the actual movement, which, however, is simulated by the overall effect of roundness that Williams carefully implemented into the poem.

3.2 Quasi-ekphrastic poems

In this category, we can find two poems, "Classic Scene" and "The Great Figure", which at first sight both pertain to the category of ekphrastic poems. However, they could not be included there because of the following reasons.

The first analysed poem, "Classic Scene", is in the public domain generally believed to refer to the painting *Classic Landscape* by Charles Sheeler. However, there was not found any reliable academic source proving that the poem truly refers concretely to this picture. There are, of course, certain arguments supporting the supposed ekphrastic connection between the painting and the poem, such as the similarity in their titles, the style of the poem that is clearly inspired by Sheeler's, or even the fact that Williams was a good friend of Sheeler, and as such, it is very probable that he would dedicate his poem to Sheeler's work, which he admired. There is no doubt that Williams, who had great respect for his friend's art, was inspired by Sheeler's paintings. However, Sheeler was an author of many industrial sceneries of similar style. Therefore, it is quite problematic to claim that the *Classic Landscape* must be the one and only source that inspired William's poem since the setting of the poem does not exactly correspond with the scenery painted in the picture, at least not as accurately as it is for example in the previously analysed poems inspired by Brueghel's paintings. In any case, the "Classic Scene" is deeply visual, and if connected with the *Classic Landscape*, it can be easily perceived as an ekphrastic or at least quasi-ekphrastic poem.

Regarding the second quasi-ekphrastic poem, "The Great Figure", the situation is quite different. The painting it relates to is clearly and without any doubt Charles Demuth's *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold*. The ekphrastic process, however, is what puts the poem into this "between-category", for this is an instance of the so-called reversed ekphrasis. It means that poem was, in fact, the source art, which later gave birth to the painting (target art) by Charles Demuth, who was another of Williams's friends among painters. By writing "The Great Figure", Williams did not intend to compose an ekphrastic poem, which must be considered in the reading. Nevertheless, since the painting that is so closely connected with the poem already exists, it would impoverish the analysis not to include the painting as well, though its specificness must be considered in the reading of the poem.

3.2.1 Classic Scene

Painting 5 Charles Sheeler - Classic Landscape

CLASSIC SCENE

A power-house

in the shape of

a red brick chair

90 feet high

on the seat of which

sit the figures

of two metal

stacks—aluminum—

commanding an area

of squalid shacks

side by side—

from one of which

buff smoke

streams while under

a grey sky

the other remains

passive today—

With the poem "Classic Scene", we are stepping away from Brueghel's Renaissance sceneries to move much closer towards the age of art that Williams was indeed an active part of. The poem was published in 1937, six years after Charles Sheeler made his *Classic Landscape*, a painting that is made essentially in the style of American Modernism, or even Precionism. It is believed to be the painting that inspired Williams to create this ekphrastic poem. However, it is possible that the inspiration was a bit broader, that is, from several Sheeler's paintings or, in general, his artistic style, since the correspondence between the poem and the painting is rather abstract. In any case, the source art is considerably younger than in the case of the previously analysed poems, yet the poem itself is some 15 years older in date comparing to the *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* that were published in 1952.

Charles Sheeler, with whom Williams first met in 1923, even though it is very probable he knew some of his paintings even before their first encounter, was not only Williams's contemporary but also a close friend of his. After all, they shared the same artistic groups and circles in the turbulent Modernist New York. Charles Sheeler was a painter and photographer who "was among the first who turned the contemporary urban and technological world in a spirit of appreciation" (Halter, Visual Arts 168), which was, of course, very close to Williams, who himself was in search of not only the new but also the inherently local, which in New York meant urban. Furthermore, they both shared a great interest in simple still-life compositions. Sheeler photographed and painted many of such pictures, while Williams used his precise word choice with strong visual connotations to create a similar effect in his poems. And what is more, Sheeler often

mixed the media of photography, drawing and painting just like Williams attempted to do in his ekphrastic poems, where the line between visual art and poetry is breached.

There is no doubt that Williams valued Sheeler not only as a friend but also as an artist. He made that clear in his short essay written as an introduction for a publication of Sheeler's work in 1939, in which he expresses "his conviction that the painter and photographer was among the few American artists who had achieved and exemplary fusion of the concrete and the abstract, the local and the universal" (Halter, Visual Arts 168). In fact, Williams acknowledged mostly the exact qualities for which he himself is mostly valued by the critics, that is: "the bewildering directness of his vision, without blur, through the fantastic overlay with which our lives so vastly are concerned, 'the real,' as we say, contrasted with the artist's 'fabrications'" (Introduction CS 231). After all, they had a lot in common as they were both young modernists influenced by the artistic as well as the overall social development that was happening around them by that time.

The landscape depicted in the painting *Classic Landscape*, is probably relatively far away from what one would imagine under such title. However, for Charles Sheeler, it is a certain "Classic Scene", as Williams called his poem, since it is rather a typical instance of his work. Regarding the landscape, there is, in fact, not a single piece of "land" nor nature at all (except for the sky polluted by the smoke coming from a factory). Instead of the green meadows, mountain streams, and perhaps a wild deer in the distance that one could expect when looking at a classic landscape, we get an urban scenery of industrialization, where nothing is alive except for the steel machines propelling the factory. The colours of the landscape, which Williams depicted well in the poem, are in tones of "red brick" (3), "metal" (7), "aluminium" (8), "buff smoke" (13), and "grey sky" (15), thus instead of a full palette, we can find here mostly different shades of dull colours.

In comparison to the previously analysed Brueghel's inspired ekphrastic poems, which were all written in a three-lined stanza pattern, the "Classic Scene" gives an impression of higher density. It consists of four four-lined stanzas with additional monostich at the end of the poem. The geometry and exactness of the poem are clear from the precisely organised layout with symmetrical line lengths even before approaching the content of the poem. If we take a look at each stanza separately, we will notice that each of them follows its own design. The first stanza creates an almost flawless square, the second one has a pair of lateral lines longer while the inner ones are shorter and of same length, the

third stanza does not seem to follow any regular pattern, while the fourth one alternates the line length regularly. The last line stands separately on its own, just like the smokestack that towers above everything in the painting. Furthermore, the last stanza is also prolonged by the use of an em dash, which can visually evoke the smoke coming out of the smokestack. Nevertheless, when all the stanzas are put together, they create a single working unity, just like the factory in the painting that consists of several different buildings that are, however, all connected to achieve the purpose of its existence. It is as if Williams decided to industrialize his poem as much as Sheeler did with his painting. The result is a masterly crafted machine, where everything is right in its place and takes its own little part in the working machinery.

That we have appeared in the middle of a Precisionist landscape, for which it is typical that the "key characteristics are the stripping away of ornament, a preoccupation with the angular qualities of modern structures, and a cool, detached manner" (Rawlinson 48), is obvious from the first line that reads nothing less industrial than "[a] power-house" (1), which perfectly fits into the Precisionist interest in "American modernity and the machine age" (Rawlinson 48). As usually, Williams opens the poem with a capital letter as if he was opening a sentence, which, however, is never closed, in this case perhaps not even finished, as the last line of the poem ends with a dash as if there was still something remaining to be said. The rest of the first stanza then serves for further specification of the powerhouse introduced in the first line. Thus, we learn that it is "in a shape of / a red brick chair" (2-3), which in itself is quite a unique association, and the picture becomes even more odd if we imagine this chair-shaped powerhouse to be "90 feet high" (4).

The second stanza is where Williams digresses greatly from Sheeler's *Classic Landscape*, for we cannot find this exact scenery in this painting. Yet, this does not by any means affect the level of visuality he works with in the poem. Not only does he emphasize the picture of a chair, which was sketched out in the first stanza, as he mentions "the seat" (5) of it, but by stating that there "sit the figures" (6), he also adds something as if almost human into the inherently industrial scenery, which of course creates great contrast and tension in the poem. However, this human touch, for in the end it had to be a human hand that created first the factory and then the painting of the factory, remains only symbolical. As soon as in the two following lines, we learn the figures are actually "of two metal / stacks—aluminum—" (7-8). The word aluminum is interesting here for two reasons. Firstly, it proves how Williams systematically proceeds from the abstract (shape, matter)

to the most concrete (specific material, its colour) to give the reader as specific details as possible. The second reason it may engage the reader's attention is the fact that Williams used the word aluminum instead of the commonly used aluminium. This may be easily explained just by a change in discourse, for it is true the version "aluminum" is older, and by the time Williams wrote the poem, it was definitely in use more frequently than nowadays. On the other hand, if we acknowledge there is a certain level of markedness in the word, after all, poets rarely use their words without thorough consideration, we may understand the word as yet another way of bringing the element of local in poetry, for which Williams is very well known, since the use of "aluminum" instead of "aluminium" is typical mostly for the region of North America.

The following lines bring into the poem an almost surprisingly negative tinge. First, there is line 9, in which we learn that the metal stacks are "commanding an area" (9), which in itself brings up predominantly negative connotations. It is in great contrast with how the in sharp detail described industrial factory with all the machinery inside was described as a giant metal chair. It almost evoked a picture of a throne on which the kings, the superior ones, sit, which then looks like a celebration of industrialisation and the American modernity. Nevertheless, when read next to such words as "commanding" and "area", which are very expressive in evoking alarming associations regarding military and war, there is a sudden change in the tone of the poem. It suddenly starts to sound almost half-ironic instead of exalting. And if this was not enough, Williams provides us with the picture "of squalid shacks / side by side—" (10-11), which simply cannot be understood otherwise than being openly negative. When reading that there are streams of "buff smoke" (13) coming "from one of [them]" (12), it is hard to resist the image based on the military connotations, that is, of a village ruined by war above which those who sit upon the great metal throne command. In any case the contrast between the "squalid shacks" (10) and the chair "90 feet high" (4) is enormous.

In the last four-lined stanza, for the very last stanza is, in fact, just one line, the "buff smoke" (13) is contrasted with the inactivity of the other smokestack, which "remains // passive today—", so the "grey sky" (15) is still visible instead of being hidden behind a cloud of smoke. This shows the power of the plant while at the same time emphasises the fact that the power is yet to be known in its full potential since only one of the smokestacks is active. That can be read in two ways, either metaphorically as a vision of the future saying that there is still a great potential to be revealed and used by the great people of

America, or just people in general, if you wish. Or, we can decide to read it in the second, less metaphorical and less positive way, that is by means of environmental reading, which probably was not intended by Williams, yet, is very relevant nowadays. The increase in the plant's power, and, consequently, the pollution, could easily lead almost to an existential threat.

In any case, it can be stated that the poem is very modern and progressive, even though Williams's attitude towards the modernity represented by industry is, in this poem, at least problematic. Williams works impressively with his poetic style, which is in this poem very close to Precisionistic aesthetics, the same which Sheeler worked with in his paintings, and which is fundamentally closely connected with industrial topics. In the spirit of Precisionism, the painting is sharp, clear, and profoundly industrial, just like the ekphrastic poem inspired by it. The geometry of Sheeler's buildings is clearly reflected in Williams's stanzas that stand lined next to each other like the smokestacks of a precisely constructed factory for producing functionally designed poems. After all, in the introduction of his 1944 poetry collection *The Wedge*, Williams proclaimed that "a poem is a small (or large) machine made of words" (Introduction TW 256), and it is true that his poems do work like perfectly crafted machines. And as a careful engineer, Williams thoroughly chooses each and every component of his machine to make it work exactly as he intended to. Therefore, he is very specific with his descriptions. He gives us the exact height of the powerhouse, the colours, and materials, even the stanzas are made into geometric objects, which all well corresponds with Sheeler's way of painting. The machine in result, is flawlessly functional, sharp, direct, and stripped of any unnecessary ornament, there is simply no component missing, and none is redundant.

3.2.2 The Great Figure

Painting 6 Charles Demuth - I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold

THE GREAT FIGURE

Among the rain

and lights

I saw the figure 5

in gold

on a red

fire truck

moving

tense

unheeded

to gong clangs

siren howls

and wheels rumbling

through the dark city

(Collected Poems Volume I: 1909-1939, 174)

The second and last quasi-ekphrastic poem is "The Great Figure". It was published as the last poem of Williams's 1921 poetry collection called *Sour Grapes*. In this case, the poem is closely connected with Charles Demuth's *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold* from 1928, by which Demuth paid homage to Williams. In fact, the title of the painting is the third and fourth stanza of the poem. However, from the years of creation of these works of art, it is already clear that what classifies the poem in the category of "quasi-ekphrastic" ones is the process of creation, which in is in reverse to ekphrasis. As already mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, this is an instance of the so-called reversed ekphrasis. It means that the literary text is not a result of the process of ekphrasis, but it is, in fact, the source art that inspired the creation of an object in the target art, in our case, the visual art. Therefore, it is clear that when writing the poem, Williams could not by any means be affected by the painting as it simply did not even exist until seven years after the publication of his poem. However, since the painting is a visual interpretation of what Williams wrote made by his close friend Charles Demuth, and since in nowadays context, both these pieces of art are inseparable, I have decided to include the painting in this analysis as well.

In any case, Williams was influenced by Demuth, if not in this particular poem, then in his life and literary career for sure. Charles Demuth was not only an artist, but also a significant figure in Williams's life since he was one of his closest lifelong friends. They met during their student years and, together with other artists of their generation, shared the same vision of the local American Modernism. In fact, they had in common even the writing since Demuth, even though he is known mostly for his paintings, was himself an aspiring writer and poet. However, it was not only Demuth who paid tribute to his friend but also the other way around, for Williams dedicated his 1923 collection *Spring and All* to Demuth and probably even used one of his watercolours as an inspiration for "The Pot of Flowers", the second poem in the book (Halter, Visual Arts 84).

In his biography, Williams even has an entire chapter dedicated to Demuth, where he also mentions the painting: "[Demuth] always called me Carlos and once painted a "literary" picture around my name and a poem I had written "The Great Figure" (the figure 5 on the side of a fire truck in wild transit through the New York Streets)" (Autobiography 152). The fact that Williams called *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold* a "literary" picture is extremely important. It proves that he understood it as a concrete visualisation of his poem, and without implying that art is fully transferable in its forms (after all, he still used quotation

marks for the word "literary"), he acknowledged this reversed ekphrastic painting as being a valid interpretation of his own visuality that he put into the poem. Another important detail we learn from this quotation from Williams's autobiography is, next to the story that explains the poem's origin, also the fact that Demuth always called his friend by his middle name. That is significant for the interpretation of the painting, which is in fact truly "literary" in a sense that there are words to be read in the composition. There, next to the "No. 5", we can read also "Carlo" with the S hidden, or "W.C.W." clearly referring to Williams as well, "C.D." being Demuth's own initials, "ART Co", and "BILL". As we can see, Williams was completely right when he stated that the picture was painted around his name. Moreover, being painted in the 1920's when "advertising increased explosively", it can be even claimed that with all the textual aspects, bright colours, and sharp objects, the "painting deliberately recalls an advertising poster" (Schwarz 27). The product advertised being probably Williams himself.

Even without looking at the date of the poem's publication, it is obvious that it was written in Williams's early career when the influence of Imagism was most evident. Firstly, we are dealing with a completely ordinary situation, that is, Williams spotting a fire truck speeding on the road on his way to a friend. This encounter is perceived as an artistic impulse and made into a poem. Secondly, instead of a poem divided into stanzas, which was the rule for all of the so far analysed poems, here we get all 13 lines at once with constant enjambment. The poem read at once without any stop feels like one quick impression, which perfectly corresponds with the rushed pace of the "fire truck" (6). The swiftness is supported also by the fact that all of the lines are very short, most of them of one- or two-word length. Therefore, even the eye movement of the reader must be quick as he follows the lines. However, it does not seem that Williams followed any kind of pattern or visually motivated design of the layout. In this case, it is more probable that the visual appearance of the poem was subordinate to the line length and word choice.

Lacking any punctuation throughout the poem and having the lines so short gives almost a feeling of a juxtaposition of different images that together create one sharp distorted Cubist painting. Instead of giving us a clear topic at the very beginning, Williams starts with vague "[a]mong the rain / and lights" (1-2). This sketches out the atmosphere of the poem very well and is certainly visually evoking, but on the other hand, it does not help with locating the setting of the poem at all. The following line, as mentioned above, gave name to Demuth's painting, and it is no wonder that he chose this line particularly since

"I saw the figure 5" (3) is probably the most important line of the poem. Firstly, this line brings a subject into the poem, and when reading "I", we can finally imagine something concrete, that is, someone who stands in the middle of the "rain" and "lights". However, they remain only a plain figure whom we do not get to know any closer throughout the poem. And naturally, where there is a subject, there is also an object, and thus we meet the fire truck, although so far only as a synecdoche of "the figure 5", the only thing visible as the vehicle passes by. Williams tried to bring the poem as close to a realistic experience as possible since it is often true that before we can realise the complex picture of an object moving at high speed in front of us, it is only the details that are recognisable and must be put together for full comprehension. Thus, he supplies us with the details. We get the "gold" (4) colour of the figure five, the "red" (5) of the "fire truck" (6), the "gong clangs" (10), "siren howls" (11), and "wheels rumbling" (12) in the "dark city" (13).

After such enumeration, it may be claimed that "[t]he poem is a rapid succession of visual images—frames—giving a sense of the cacophony of urban sound, the pell-mell urgency of urban movement, and the commotion and indecipherability of urban events" (Schwarz 23). However, it is important to realise that the juxtaposition in the poem is not just some random list of things but carefully considered and picked fragments whose semantic meanings and accumulated connotations are much richer than it may seem. The order in which Williams presents us the fragments is random at all. In fact, it is fundamentally important. As Tom Lavazzi observes, "[t]he poem begins in near soundlessness, with a visual image rising out of a vaguely expressionistic background, like a film in which image and sound are slightly out of sync" (182). Williams truly starts by painting a visual picture, although quite abstract, then he adds the movement as if an animated picture was suddenly turned into motion, and finishes with sound. It is, therefore, much more than visuality that the author integrated into his poem. Similarly, as we saw in the analysis of the ekphrastic Brueghel inspired "The Wedding Dance in the Open Air", Williams managed to fill the static text with kinetic energy and movement.

Even though our main focus is on the visual part of the poem, the strong sound aspect is in this poem extremely important as well. Not only does Williams progressively describe the chaotic din of the moment as he writes about the "siren howls / and wheels rumbling" (11-12), but he also uses a clear instance of onomatopoeia as there is a certain sound quality to be heard in the "gong clangs" (10). What is even more interesting is that he stresses that all this rumbling and clanging happens "unheeded" (9). This lack of notice

is then, of course, in great contrast to the din described in the following lines as well as to the subject "I", who is present already since the third line and through whose eyes we are looking at the scene. It is indeed possible that the "unheeded" was meant except for the "I", but in any case, it lessens the importance of the subject as it is as if the "I" was suddenly not included anymore. In any case, the answer to the sound-related question of how such fuss could remain unnoticed lies in the visual-related aspects of the poem. It is suggested in the first and last lines, which as frame the poem and stress out that the scene occurred "[a]mong the rain" (1) and in "[…] the dark city" (13).

To sum up, there is an undeniably strong role of visuality in this poem, conditioned probably by the fundamental influence of Imagism in whose ways Williams created his works in the 1920s. It must be admitted that one can hardly imagine a more accurate visual representation of this poem than the one Demuth painted in 1928. In his perspective of the number five, he perfectly depicted the sense of the movement, as well as the overall fragmental form of the poem in which only certain particles arise in sharp shapes from otherwise abstract canvas. Only some details are picked to be named from the otherwise atmospheric description. Williams achieves the strong visual effect by combining the abstract with the concrete (which strengthens the visual appearance of the concrete), by using exact and distinct words for description of the selected details, and nonetheless by using descriptions that either denotatively or connotatively evoke images (such as colour terms, "dark city", "lights", or "rain"). As usually, by providing such little details, he manages to paint the picture fully so that the reader is not left with a feeling of any blank spots in the canvas.

3.3 Non-ekphrastic poems

The following analysed poems were included mainly in order to illustrate that visuality is a significant feature of Williams's poems regardless of their immediate connection to visual art. Although most of his poems are, in fact, non-ekphrastic poems, only few of them were selected for the following analysis, since the strategies used to achieve the "visual effect" of a poem are supposedly similar to those that were already discussed in the analysis of the ekphrastic poems. After all, as already pointed out, even the ekphrastic poems are stand-alone works of art that are not dependent on their source art, the paintings, and were analysed as such. The key task for this part of the analysis is, therefore, to observe and analyse possible similarities and differences between the strategies used for evoking visuality in ekphrastic and non-ekphrastic poems.

In contrast to the ekphrastic poems inspired by Brueghel's paintings, the following non-ekphrastic poems were written earlier in Williams's career, mostly when Modernism was still on its rise, which is also well reflected in the poems. The analysed poems are: poem "XXII" from the 1923 collection *Spring and All*, nowadays known as "The Red Wheelbarrow", "This Is Just to Say" from 1934, and a bit later poem "The Yellow Chimney" from the 1944 collection *The Wedge*.

3.3.1 The Red Wheelbarrow

THE RED WHEELBARROW

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

(Collected Poems Volume I: 1909-1939, 224)

To begin with, it should be acknowledged that "The Red Wheelbarrow" is one of Williams's most famous poems, or at least it definitely belongs among the most discussed ones, for its meaning is only vaguely hinted and does not reveal itself easily. Luckily, the purpose of this thesis is not to find the meaning, which seems almost as an impossible task to do because of its strong metaphorical quality. Our focus will be on exploring the influence of Imagism and the ways that Williams used in order to achieve strong visual effect of the poem.

This poem is an example of what is typical for Williams. That is narrow focus on some ordinary thing or a scene he is familiar with, and subsequent transformation of it into a poetic expression by taking it from its ordinary experience. After all, a wheelbarrow is a simple object that probably would not catch the attention of many of us. Apart from that, it is also inherently local, and "[f]or Williams, attention to the local sometimes meant a focus on the scene of writing, and an inventory of the objects on his desk. Like words themselves, the instruments of a writer's life can be distanced from his intentions and seen as things" (Costello 60). In the same manner, the wheelbarrow in the poem suddenly

becomes a *thing*, not a practical instrument, but a main subject of the poem. That, however, does not impede the discussion about the purpose of the wheelbarrow in the poem. In fact, Williams almost forces the reader to ask what is it that depends on the wheelbarrow. Yet, that is a question to which we will probably never find an answer, except for the obvious, that at least the poem fully depends on it. Yet, apart from that, Williams typically does not give us any explanation, and thus, once again, the reader is invited to play a game of connotations and metaphors that reveal themselves from the author's exact visual descriptions.

As already hinted in the chapter concerning *opsis*, the visual quality of the poem starts immediately with its specific pattern layout that resembles a wheelbarrow in its shape, which makes the poem almost surprisingly regular. In each of the four two-lined stanzas, the first and longer line consists of three words, these are, figuratively, the handles of a wheelbarrow. The second and shorter line, which always consists only of a single two-syllable word, represents the rest of the instrument, its body/wheel. However, it must be acknowledged that such "visual reading" of the poem, that is, of its layout, would, in this case, be impossible without the actual reading. It is the reading that gives the layout its meaning, for the shape of the wheelbarrow is not distinct enough to speak on its own. In other words, it would be probably hard for the reader to notice any similarity between the shape of the stanzas and a wheelbarrow if they would not know that the poem is about a wheelbarrow. On the other hand, although Williams himself did not originally intend it, nowadays, we have the wheelbarrow even in the name of the poem. Therefore, the reader's perception works simultaneously on several levels – they are reading the words "wheelbarrow", which evokes the mental image of a wheelbarrow, and at the same time, they are invited to notice that the text, which speaks about a wheelbarrow, is itself also in a shape of a wheelbarrow.

Regarding the rhythm of the poem, it follows the same rules of constant enjambment and lacking punctuation that we already know from the previously discussed poems. It flows smoothly without any interruption. Interestingly enough, there is no capital letter to be found in the poem, not even at the very beginning of the first line, which was a rule for all the so far discussed poems. What is also quite unique is the fact that Williams goes even further with cutting the lines and separates even such constituents as "depends / upon" (1-2), rain / water" (5-6) or "white / chickens" (7-8), which both semantically and grammatically clearly belong together. On top of it, he breaks even the word

"wheelbarrow", which is formerly used as a single word in the title, into two separate words on lines 3 and 4. What this constant breakage does is that "one is also aware of words qua words because in some cases they first denote one thing and then, when we move on to the next line, something else. Thus "a red wheel" becomes "a red wheel / barrow," and "rain" becomes "rain / water"" (Halter, CC 47). However, it must be admitted that even though Williams separates them, it is always within one stanza through which they still remain connected. Metaphorically, this can be again compared to the wheelbarrow, which, although consisting of two different parts (the body and the wheel), is still one functional unit just like the stanza and figuratively just like a poem in its whole as well.

This poem's picturesque expressivity is so intense that even though it is not an ekphrastic one, it gives an impression of a motionless scenery, as if Williams himself painted a picture or took a photo of it and then decided to describe what he sees by a poem. To this feeling of a colourful photo focused on the wheelbarrow helps also the fact that this time Williams is also almost surprisingly generous in terms of providing us with either specific colour terms, such are the contrasting "red" (3) and "white" (7), or at least their very intense suggestions as are for example the "chickens" (8) that immediately evoke bright yellow colour. Even the expression that the wheelbarrow is "glazed with rain / water" (5-6) can be understood as visually expressive. If we decide to go a bit deeper, the simple mention or rain is in its core visual, as it is well known that water (especially if it glazes some surface) intensifies the colours.

Additionally, the constant enjambment, which makes the eyes stop very often and thus slower the reading, also corresponds well with the scene that also lacks any kind of action and supports the overall impression of looking at a photograph that freezes the world at a certain time. Of course, it must be admitted that the action is to some extent at least suggested here. The rain evokes certain motion, although not active anymore since it refers to the past instead of the present of the composition. Furthermore, the wheelbarrow is surely there to be used for work, not just as a decoration for a rural composition, just like the chickens are probably not posing there steadily for a potential photographer nor for the writer to sketch them properly.

To conclude, it can be claimed that in his relatively experimental poem "The Red Wheelbarrow", William uses similar features and strategies as we could observe in the

majority of his ekphrastic poems. In its design, we can find irregular metre and free verse on one hand but regular stanzas on the other. There are frequent line breaks with constant enjambment, as well as close focus on particular details that are often quite difficult to connect with each other at first, which seems almost as a juxtaposition. It is, indeed, almost as if the poem was also referring to a picture, although in this case, it could probably be rather just a mental image instead of a painting. A significant difference that can be found here is the fact that the poem omits any kind of subject, which we had in all of the ekphrastic poems either explicitly by referring to "the artist" or at least figuratively by mentioning the painting, which inevitably evokes the presence of the observer. Concerning the quasi-ekphrastic poems that are in their formation closer to the non-ekphrastic ones, there is an unspecified subject of "I" in "The Great Figure" and a lack of subject in the "Classic Scene".

3.3.2 This Is Just to Say

<center>THIS IS JUST TO SAY</center>

<center>

I have eaten

the plums

that were in

the icebox

and which

you were probably

saving

for breakfast

Forgive me

they were delicious

so sweet

and so cold

</center>

<center>(Collected Poems Volume I: 1909 – 1939, 372)</center>

The 1934 poem "This is just to say" is another example taken from Williams's most popular works. In general, it is also one of the most famous imagist poems. Just like in most of his other poems, it is clear from the beginning that "[i]n the modernist dialectic of ideas and things Williams Carlos Williams clearly weighted his energies toward things" (Costello 48), which makes the poem appear as being very simple, yet it is, in fact, a very complex work of art. Thanks to its invitingly simple language and form, which makes it seem accessible to anyone, it became not only probably the most famous poem by Williams but also the most parodied and remade one.

Its structure follows what is typical of Williams, that is, no regularity in terms of rhythm, metre or rhymes combined within regular stanzas of four-line length. The poem's flow is as usually given by lack of any kind of punctuation together with enjambment that breaks

the lines after one, two, or at max three words. However, the lack of punctuation does not stop Williams from using capital letters, this time at the beginning of the first and quite unusually also the third stanza, which to some extent breaks the otherwise uninterrupted flow of words. The poem is written as if it was a short note from the author to someone else (probably his wife Flossie), which puts the reader already into a position of an observer of the author's everyday life experience. The language used is very typical of Williams in the sense that the words are carefully picked to create the desired effect with almost the least words possible.

However, it differs from most of the discussed ekphrastic poems about Brueghel's pictures quite significantly. Although the visuality here is indeed very strong, it seems to work differently since we are presented with a developing scene full of emotions and different kinds of changing pictures instead of just one stable one. Therefore, thanks to its inherent sense of action and movement, it is closer to a short movie than a static scenery of a painting. However, it must be admitted that Williams, as we saw for example in "The Wedding Dance in the Open Air", managed quite impressively to incorporate the movement even into the ekphrastic poem. The cinematic effect evokes a feeling as if we could almost see the author taking the plums from the icebox late at night, eating them, "sweet" (11) and "delicious" (12), and then writing his more or less guilty note to his wife, who had been saving the plums (probably even for both of them) to have them for breakfast.

Williams makes sure to give us a very bright picture of the plums, the main object around which the poem is built, by describing them as "delicious / so sweet / and so cold" (10-12). From the description, it is clear that the plums are at their ripest, which indirectly gives us time specification as it must be high summer for the plums to be ripe. This image of summer is then contrasted with the coldness of the plums and the icebox they were taken from. The form of the poem that strongly resembles a simple note together with the icebox, the act of eating "breakfast" (8), and of course the food represented by plums, locates the poem undoubtedly into a kitchen setting. And such definition of the time (summer) and space (kitchen) naturally makes it easier for the imagination to work unbounded.

On the other hand, deriving such a clear picture from the poem was possible only after accepting the interpretation in which the poem is understood as a note, which is a

condition at least problematic as it allows only one interpretation of a poem that could be possibly interpreted in several different ways. If we take for example the pronouns "I" and "you", it seems to be obvious when reading the poem as a note, where "I" must be the author and "you" the addressee of the note, probably his wife, girlfriend, or a friend. Yet, when accepting the impossibility of one clear interpretation, several others suddenly open. Thus, both "I" and "you" could in different readings easily refer to the reader, not to mention that the act of eating plums could be just a witty metaphor opening countless interpretations.

The poem "This is Just to Say" is a proof that Williams excellently and intentionally works with ambiguities and multiple possible readings that are naturally also reflected in the images evoked by the poem. Unlike in the ekphrastic poems, where it would require a very creative reader to get a different reading of the poem, here the multiplicity of meanings, and consequently the multiplicity of imagery, is substantially given. The second reason why in case we cannot talk about a single clear picture evoked as we could in the ekphrastic poems as well as for example in "The Red Wheelbarrow", is that "This is just to say" is by no means a poem of still life as it might appear. In fact, as already mentioned, there is a certain motion quality of the poem. Therefore, the comparison to a movie is probably the closest as there is a sort of narrative structure to be found and just like in a movie, the images containing frames are constantly changing. To sum up, the text seems to be "light-hearted, even comic, but [it] is much more than it seems: a celebration of the physical life, rendered with stringent economy but with a high degree of essential 'vividness'" (Doyle 55).

3.3.3 The Yellow Chimney

THE YELLOW CHIMNEY

There is a plume
of fleshpale
smoke upon the blue

sky. The silver
rings that
strap the yellow

brick stack at
wide intervals shine
in this amber

light—not
of the sun not of
the pale sun but

his born brother
the
declining season

(The Collected Later Poems of William Carlos Williams 52)

The last analysed poem, "The Yellow Chimney", comes from the 1944 collection *The Wedge* and depicts the visual aspects of an urban landscape. Surprisingly enough, this poem seems to be in many ways very close to the poems inspired by Brueghel's paintings. This could, among other reasons, be caused by the fact that he wrote it later in his life than the previously discussed non-ekphrastic poems, which is naturally also reflected in the form and overall impression of the poem. Furthermore, the similarity with the ekphrastic poems is noticeable even before the actual reading, as it lies also in its form.

Firstly, this five-stanza poem is divided into tercets and so are all the ekphrastic poems referring to Brueghel's pictures that were analysed above. Secondly, it follows the same design also regarding the line-length patterns as there are three of them (shortest middle line, longest middle line, and fourth stanza with the first line shortest and the remaining two lines of the same length). All of these can also be found in the ekphrastic poems. And lastly, the overall conception of the poem is also close to what we saw in the ekphrastic poems, that is, distinctive selective description of a scene with focus on selected details. In fact, it would be very easy to imagine that this poem also refers to a certain painting as its source art, or at least it must be acknowledged that it would not take much effort to reproduce a painting based just on what Williams describes in "The Yellow Chimney", for the emphasis he puts on the visual aspects of it is immense.

On the other hand, what ties this short imagist poem with the other analysed non-ekphrastic poems is Williams's ability to capture the beauty of something so common in our everyday life that we would not even notice that if it was not for the poem. Williams was an author who achieved "the freedom to register the 'common occurrence' that the eyes or ears witnessed without obliging him to tie it to familiar frameworks and explanations" (Baker 15). Thus, by using vivid imagery, out of such an ordinary thing as a chimney, Williams creates an *object* of his poem. He paints a picture of the yellow chimney that stands tall against the skyline of the city as if it was nothing less but a significant monument of the industrial city and its people. Its dominance and importance in the city are emphasised especially by the fact that it is the only element that represents something human in the poem. In fact, apart from the chimney (and the smoke that is associated with it), the theme of the poem is almost surprisingly natural as we are presented with the sky, the sun, and the change of seasons.

The first stanza that sets the scene opens with nonreferential "There is" (1), which already prepares the reader for his role of an active listener of the speaker's description, which is exactly what he gets in the following lines. Williams starts by describing "a plume / of fleshpale / smoke" (1-3), which is not only a very specific description in terms of its visuality but also very unique as the compound "fleshpale" is far from usual. As a matter of fact, although both "flesh" and "pale" are clear in their meanings, when put together into a compound, one must actually carefully think about the meaning of it, which was probably Williams's intention since it leads the reader to observe the poem more closely. Furthermore, the term "fleshpale" was undoubtedly used as referring to colour, probably

light or even of lacking intensity, which consequently makes the reader focus from the beginning on the visuality and imagery evoked by the poem.

As we continue with reading, the imagery only intensifies, which happens almost proportionally to the increasing number of colour-referring terms Williams incorporated in the poem. The fleshpale smoke is soon contrasted with "the blue / sky" (3-4), where the urban meets the natural. The contrast between these two is emphasised also by the fact that the urban is depicted merely vertically as it is represented by the tall chimney and alternatively also by the smoke, while the natural element represented by the sky lies in horizontal dimensions. To bring more geometry and colours into the poem, which already starts to resemble a piece of Precisionist painting, Williams continues with "The silver / rings that / strap the yellow" (4-6). Apart from the enjambment at the end of the second stanza, for the attributive adjective "yellow" actually refers to the "brick stack" (7) on the upcoming seventh line, it is also the beginning of the stanza that catches the reader's eye, because there, at the first line of the second stanza that reads "sky. The silver" (4) can be found the only instance of punctuation in the whole poem except for a dash on line 10. Such finiteness at the beginning of the poem of course attracts the reader's attention and raises a lot of questions regarding its meaning, or, for example the reason why Williams did not finish the second sentence of the poem also with another punctuation mark, which however, remain mainly unanswered.

That Williams uses visual language is generally clear from his style, but the number of colour evoking terms in this poem is almost surprising. It starts with the already discussed compound "fleshpale", followed by "smoke", "blue", "silver", "yellow", "brick", "amber", "light", "pale", and these are only the distinctive examples, there are other instances that help to complete the atmosphere, although they are not specifically referring to colour. The result of such specific language then simply cannot be anything else than what Marshall W. Stearns states, when he observes that "the poet has successfully stressed the color-content of the poem" (39). And truth be said, by such word choice Williams basically gives the reader no other option than to perceive the poem also on the visual level.

The third stanza continues to develop the light atmosphere illuminated by the sun that has been established in the previous two stanzas, while the fourth one brings an upsetting twist into the so far calm scene. Here we learn that the "light" is "—not / of the sun not

of / the pale sun" (10-12), where there is important repetition of the negative as well as the word "pale", which was already used in the compound "fleshpale" and thus emphasises the paleness of the picture. However, this paleness is soon in great contrast with the sun's "born brother / the / declining season" (13-15). The combination of the twice repeated negative "not" together with "declining season" brings into the otherwise pleasant atmosphere poem something disrupting, as if the decline was not referring only to the season or if the season was a metaphor for much more than just a period of a year. Furthermore, the importance of the declining season is stressed out also by the fact that the article "the" (14), which precedes the "declining season" (15), stands on the fourth line completely on its own, which is rather untypical and draws the attention of the reader, which results in emphasis on what follows.

To sum up, "The Yellow Chimney" is a poem that proves that Williams intentionally and thoroughly works with visuality on both levels of form and content and "[t]hough he does not radically alter the page, he does put his language in a new relationship to its space" (Sayre 7), which is evident from the way he uses constant enjambement even on unusual places even though he did not design this poem into a specific shape. Regarding the content part, it was shown that "The Yellow Chimney", although a non-ekphrastic poem, share several qualities with the above discussed ekphrastic poems inspired by Brueghel's paintings, which results in complex imagery and a great level of visuality that is completely fundamental for the poem. In fact, the number of colour-referring terms used in this poem is much higher than what we can find in any of the ekphrastic poems analysed in this thesis. The industrial setting of the poem is so static that it once again gives an impression as if Williams had created this poem as a response to a photo or an image, even if only a mental one, for the only movement that disrupts the otherwise motionless composition, is the smoke coming from the chimney together with the motion suggesting decline.

Conclusion

Based on the conducted analysis that involved a total number of nine poems divided into three categories (ekphrastic, quasi-ekphrastic, and non-ekphrastic), it is evident that even though it is impossible to pinpoint the exact "source" of the visuality in his poems, it is clear that Williams works with visuality on three basic levels. These levels of form, theme, and language of the poem are naturally closely connected. It can be claimed that there is a certain influence and inspiration by the visual arts to be found on all these three levels of the poems. In result, this means that the rich imagery, which was, of course, expected to be one of the key parts of the ekphrastic and quasi-ekphrastic poems since these are closely related to the works of visual art, goes far beyond the borders of just these two categories. In fact, once the method of close reading focusing on the visuality and imagery was applied on the remaining category of the non-ekphrastic poems, it is evident that the poems evince similar traits regarding their visuality.

As for the language used in the poems, which is crucial also for delivering the theme, it appears to be used almost in a minimalistic way. Williams uses mostly simple ordinary words, of which the majority (if not all, in the case of nouns) is open to evoke visual experience. Their picturesque is also supported by the use of concrete nouns, focus on details, and especially by vernacular language, which is closer to the reader and thus easier to understand and to imagine what exactly was described in the poem. However, it must be acknowledged that this directness of language that is stripped of any unnecessary ornaments does not mean that the poems themselves are plain and easy to understand. After all, they are full of contrasts and ambiguities, and their meaning is still a subject of discussion for many a scholar.

In the analysed poems, Williams stayed true to what he famously proclaimed in Paterson: "no ideas but in things" (Book 1, The Delineaments of the Giants, 17). Therefore, any description of emotions, feelings, or inner motives is very rare to be found. Instead, the reader is presented with different objects put next to each other, which often gives an impression of juxtaposition. But in fact, it is a fully connected net, where each and every element that appears in the poem was thoughtfully picked and used for a reason. This sense of juxtaposition of different objects happens more in the non-ekphrastic poems, where Williams provides the reader with many vivid details placed one next to another without having the source art, the painting, as an instrument of coherence. This coherence

of the ekphrastic poems is for the reader established even without being in contact with the painting, since in most of the ekphrastic poems, Williams himself refers to the painting or the painter. Thus, the reader knows well that the fragments they are presented with are, in fact, just parts of a coherent canvas. This is, of course, something that the reader lacks in case of the non-ekphrastic poems, despite the fact that even these poems feel as if Williams created them as selective descriptions of images he saw, even if they were only visualised in his mind.

Lastly, the poems are visually expressive also in terms of their form, their visual pattern. The short poems are divided into stanzas of (usually) a regular number of lines, which in several cases also showed certain regularity of line length. However, they are almost always irregular in terms of rhyme scheme as well as metre. Important, and absolutely typical for Williams, is also constant enjambment and lack of punctuation, which significantly contributes to bringing attention to the visual pattern of the poem.

All in all, William Carlos Williams managed to articulate vision almost playfully in his compact poems, whether they are ekphrastic or not. In order to create a complex picture, he employs different poetic strategies that help him bring the imagery into the poem on formal, thematic, and language level. His attention to detail and thoughtful work with both form and langue truly make his poems work as if they were "machine[s] made of words" (Introduction TW 256) that are programmed to paint beautiful, although sometimes distorted, pictures.

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