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On Reading Poems: Visual & Verbal Icons in William Carlos Williams' «Landscape With The Fall Of Icarus»

Abstract

Williams' admiration for Brueghel's landscape is coded in structural and stylistic correspondences between the poem and the painting. Structures in the poem have effects analogous to the use of devices of color, line, foregrounding in the painting. The poem, like the painting, presents a «neutral» scene but subtly insures the reader's involvement. Further, Williams draws a visual statement so that graphic features suggest a global image isomorphic with the motif of descent. Features of the poem, such as line and clause length, syntactic construction, semantic coherence, are discussed as factors that contribute to rapid glancing and increase readability. A study of readers shows their sensitivity to graphic features including the poem's shape, and corroborates the importance of stylistic features.

Keywords

Puerto Rican literature, American Poetry/ literature, Brueghel, poetry, painting, landscape, visual icons, verbal icons, comparison

**ON READING POEMS:
VISUAL & VERBAL ICONS
IN WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS'
«LANDSCAPE WITH THE FALL OF ICARUS»**

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Williams' poems are not obviously shaped as are concrete poems, yet readers are likely to receive the impression that they are deliberately formed for visual effect. «Landscape With the Fall of Icarus» is such a poem—there seems to be an isomorphism between the poem's visual and verbal icons, as well as structural correspondence to the Brueghel painting. I will first explain how I believe Williams carved the shape of this poem with careful attention to graphic design and verbal structure, and then discuss reader strategies for perceiving and responding to the poem.

Williams, known to us primarily as a poet, was very much involved in the visual arts. His mother had been an artist, and Williams even remarks: «I had a strong inclination all my life to be a painter. Under different circumstances I would rather have been a painter than to bother with these goddamn words. I never actually thought of myself as a poet but I knew I had to be an artist in some way.»¹ In the *Selected Essays* he explained: «had it not been that it was easier to transport a manuscript than a wet canvas, the balance might have been tilted the other way.»² Williams sometimes wrote poems that were still life renditions of visual art works—a photograph by Stieglitz, or paintings by his close friends Charles Sheeler and Charles Demuth. In a critical work on Williams, John Malcolm Brinnin describes the influence of new painters, quoting Williams: «Whether the Armory Show in painting did it or whether that also was no more than a facet—the poetic line, the way the im-

age was to lie on the page was our immediate concern.»³ Brinnin points to the poet's involvement in a small movement called Objectivism, following notions of Gertrude Stein. He cites Williams' important remark: «the poem, like every other form or art, is an object, an object that in itself formally presents its case and its meaning by the very form it assumes.»⁴

Nowhere is Williams' interest in the fine arts so clear as in the sequence of poems called «Pictures from Brueghel.»⁵ Williams records details from Brueghel's paintings in ways that reflect their visual importance. Avoiding embellishment, Williams, nevertheless, through the structure of the poems comments upon Brueghel's vision. The landscapes appealed to him as scenes of human activity which frequently reveal an ironical view of vanity or suffering. Brueghel's paintings stood as models for the poet, who in his later work turned away from objects to human concerns, and mastered «the technique of making subjective comment without didacticism.»⁶

In «Landscape With the Fall of Icarus,» the second poem in the volume, Williams created a work modeled on the visual techniques of the painting. That Williams admires Brueghel's vision is clear from the stylistic isomorphism between poem and painting. I would like to substantiate these comments with an analysis of correspondent structures within the poem and the painting.⁷

The landscape, attributed to Peter Brueghel the Elder, is the only painting by Brueghel with a mythological subject; the source is generally believed to be the Ovid account (*Metamorphoses* VIII). Despite its title, the painting appears to give little attention to Icarus. Brueghel chose the moment of drowning; only Icarus' legs and the fingers of his right hand are visible above the surface of the water, and these are tiny details within the large and busy landscape. They might be missed by the viewer if not for the title and the painterly devices that combine to call attention to Icarus.

The sun is not high (as one might expect from the myth) but low on the horizon and it casts a luminous glow over the landscape.⁸ The left and right corners of the painting are quite dark yet each contains a lighted object. The smaller object on the left is barely discernible, the head of an aged man lying in the bushes, neither distinctly dead nor alive. The point of contrast on the right is the legs striking the surface of the water. Icarus, then, is a bright point in a dark corner, but it is significantly the bottom right hand corner of the painting, the point of greatest weight, where the eye naturally settles (given our tendency to be right-eyed, right-handed,



Landscape With The Fall of Icarus. Reproduced with permission of the Musées Royaux. Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels.

right-footed). Brueghel uses color and line to insure the eye's movement toward the point. In the center of the landscape there is a large figure, the youthful plowman, wearing a bright red shirt. In a direct diagonal line from the plowman to the right corner is another but smaller bright red spot, the hair of a fisherman. It appears unnaturally red for hair and would seem to have been selected precisely to draw the eye towards the legs of Icarus located just above but off the coast. A small promontory juts out from the shore to the left of Icarus, pointing as it were to the legs. This jutting land and the fisherman's hair are equally distant from the legs, so that the three points form a triangle, with each point illumined (the legs white, white sheep at the shore, the fisherman's white shirt), further insuring attention to the right corner. The inscription, «Landscape With The Fall Of Icarus,» also functions to direct the viewer to the presence of Icarus.

As in many of Brueghel's landscapes, the entire scene is dominated by diagonal movement from left to right and downward to the lower right hand corner. In this particular painting the shoreline marks the division into triangles. The diagonal does not serve to create a view into vast distances, as it does, for example, in *The Hunters in the Snow*. Instead of dividing the scene into foreground and background, Brueghel juxtaposes the activity on land to the activity on sea, side by side, as if to invite comparison. Critics have suggested that Brueghel's juxtaposition creates «a tension between the two triangular areas, the terms of a debate in which the viewer must participate.»⁹

Looking at the details in the painting, one finds the symbols of life and death that are almost always found in ironical juxtaposition in Brueghel's landscapes. In contrast to the aged man on the far left and Icarus on the far right, both approaching death, all other humans (and animals) are engaged in life activities, fishing, herding, ploughing, sailing ships. The plough cleaves the earth as the legs cleave the surface of the water. Unlike the mythical account, there is no sign that Icarus' fall has been observed. Both of the large human figures, the plowman and the shepherd behind him, are facing left and thus away from Icarus. The fisherman's head is lowered toward his rod and the water. The six humans on the boat are involved in their own activities, not one is looking at Icarus. Even the sheep and dog turn away or earthward, and the bird perched on a branch above the fisherman is in profile. No animate life in the painting faces either Icarus or the viewer of the painting. All life is turned away from the tragedy.

Brueghel selects some features of the myth and ignores others to suit his particular effect. The scene is filled with irony; yet interpretation is left open. Understandably, critical commentary on the view of nature and man in this painting has been divergent. Brueghel has given us what appears to be a deliberately ambiguous statement. Whether we see in it a moralizing view of man and nature as harmonious (with Icarus as divergent) or read the painting as a statement about an indifferent world depends on the aesthetic importance we choose to give its structural elements.

II 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
near

the edge of the sea
concerned
with itself

sweating in the sun
that melted
the wings' wax

insignificantly
off the coast
there was
a splash quite unnoticed
this was
Icarus drowning

William Carlos Williams, PICTURES FROM BREUGHEL
AND OTHER POEMS. Copyright ©1962 by William Carlos
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Williams gives the painting an interpretation that recognizes, rather, the indifference of man and nature, probably giving major significance to the effect of the diagonal structure in the landscape.¹⁶ His own composition, also a combination of verbal and visual signs, strives to recreate the ambiguity of the Brueghel canvas, while still expressing a degree of interpretive weighting toward the terrible recognition of indifference.

Williams' poem is thus a subtle comment upon the Brueghel landscape, an attempt to achieve equivalence with the painter's mode of statement. His objective, and therefore his technique, is quite different from that of W. H. Auden. In «Musée des Beaux Arts,» Auden openly admires the ability of the «Old Masters» to understand human suffering, how it occurs «Anyhow in a corner.» Auden directly states those judgements he finds implicit in the painting:

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

Williams, on the other hand, through linguistic and typographical devices, strives for equivalence to the affects rendered by Brueghel in paint on canvas. His manipulation of deictics, selection of syntactic structures, especially subordination, his parallelisms, even his choice of deviant items, serve as analogical devices. An object «unsignificantly/off the coast» is foregrounded to the reader's attention by the concatenation of linguistic signals.

The title that Williams takes from Brueghel is important as it establishes a structure actualized through the poem. As Riffaterre has pointed out «the beginning and the end are not that just by virtue of their position, but because of a formal, semantic, and semiotic relationship between the opening and the closing words»;it is fitting that the title should contain the «rule of the game.»¹⁷ Syntactically «the fall of Icarus» is ranked below «Landscape,» being

the subordinate element of an endocentric construction with «Landscape» as the head noun. «With» specifies inclusion and coincidence, and as one reader (in a study I will later refer to) noted, it may also suggest comparison. Syntactical subordination contributes to the pretense of insignificance. The very act of naming the fall in the title, however, renders the fall worthy of attention and therefore suggests its importance. It is the topic of the poem, although it nowhere occurs as a syntactic subject. A title may «serve as an anchor point in memory around which the incoming textual material will be organized.»¹² In this poem, such anchoring is reinforced by the first stanza and sentence, which reiterate relationships of the title. The fall is subordinated, as an adverbial clause «when Icarus fell,» sandwiched in, so to speak. But again, its very inclusion and repetition render the subordination a device of irony. Williams tells us that the ironic juxtaposition is «According to Brueghel.» The rest of the poem, punctuation lacking, may be regarded as embedded within this opening phrase and first line, as if what follows were a simple reproduction of the canvas, rather than Williams' deliberate selection of features.

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. Syntactic structures contribute to a tone of reportorial neutrality. Even the closing sentence, «this was/ Icarus drowning,» because of its surface resemblance to the earlier, apparent parallel constructions, «it was spring» and «there was a splash,» takes on their neutrality. The final sentence, in its underlying structure, *Icarus was drowning*, is actually parallel to the sentences of stanzas 2-5, beginning with «a farmer was ploughing.» Either by its surface or underlying structure, then, the final sentence is linked to all previous sentences, which contributes to its closing force.

In like manner, the word «drowning» is a final token of the morphological patterning that pervades the poem. Beginning with the opening line, we find «According,» «ploughing,» «tingling,» «sweating.» Even «spring» and «wings'» could be considered pseudo-gerunds. Concluding the series, «drowning» surprises us with its serious consequence. Williams' gerunds are iconic representations of the graphic landscape; Icarus is perpetually dying as the earth is being perpetually renewed. The expansive sentences in stanzas 2-5 characterize the life sustaining activities of the painting. Icarus, his fall and his drowning, are stark beside and within a busy

landscape. They are past, yet Brueghel—and Williams— chose to freeze the action into the ongoing present.

Williams' use of deictic, or orientational features has the effect of establishing the distance of Icarus' tragedy from the lives of others in the landscape. Personal pronouns are kept to «it,» «itself,» and even the single instance of «his» refers to the indefinite antecedent «a farmer.» Persons in the landscape are neutral, they are only part of a «pageantry...near//the edge of the sea/ concerned/ with itself.» Icarus' drowning occurs over there, «off the coast.» It is interesting that Williams after the introductory stanza, follows the left to right orientation of the painting, perhaps recreating his own sequential viewing. Unlike Auden, who alludes to the disaster in almost every line, he wants the reader to focus finally on the contrasting figure in the painting, «Icarus drowning.» Williams' choice of «this» for the final deictic functions to bring the drowning suddenly close to us, converting «a splash quite unnoticed» to «this was Icarus drowning.» Had he wished to maintain the distant perspective of the pageantry, I believe Williams would have selected 'that was.'

The landscape is neutral with respect to Icarus, the reader a lone observer (painter and writer notwithstanding) whose attention to the event is manipulated by structural devices. Despite the neutral tone, one takes from the poem, as from the painting, an impression of human insensitivity, if not irresponsibility. Williams uses a similar juxtapositioning of items in the landscape to invite comparison and evaluation. Williams calls it a spring landscape, but that season is not unambiguously signalled in the painting. There are no new-born lambs, the trees are full, and in Europe ploughing in the autumn is common. Still, he has read the symbols correctly—that the ploughing and the fullness of the landscape contrast with the fall and death. In such a peopled scene is it possible that no one notices that fall? The answer is yes, it is possible, if the people are totally preoccupied with themselves. It is surely not coincidental that the word «concerned,» which introduces into the poem features of volition and judgement, occurs alone as the center of the poem (line 11).

Concluding the sentence, stanza 5 contains a syntactic pivot. The suns looks both ways. It establishes a connection between the pageantry, «sweating in the sun,» and the boy: «sun/ that melted/ the wings' wax.» Each of the following stanzas has a similarly functioning pivotal item. In stanza 6, «unsignificantly» may be read ambiguously as an adverbial modifying the final clause of the

previous stanza, or as an introductory comment. Is it remarking on the melting of the wax, or on the location of the splash, or the importance of the splash? It is certainly foregrounded, by its very ambiguity, by its positioning as a single word on the stanza initial line, by its length, being a word of six syllables in a poem composed of otherwise one, two, or three syllable words, and by its deviant form of negative prefix—«un» rather than «in.» Like «concerned» (another word foregrounded by its positioning) it suggests human involvement. By its meaning and its form—the negative prefix «un»—it is further connected to the pivotal adverbial in the final stanza: «quite unnoticed.» Since negatives indicate that something might have been the case, is a possibility at the very least, by their very inclusion these adverbials raise crucial questions.¹³ To whom was it not significant, by whom was it not noticed? That Williams intended us to think about these inherent questions is indicated by the prominence he gave to the two adverbials typographically. «Unsignificantly» is the longest word; «quite unnoticed» occurs in the longest line in the poem. Parallel form urges us to link the two in our minds. Given its self-concern, the pageantry does not notice and, therefore does not assign significance to the tragedy of Icarus drowning.

But the event is foregrounded for the reader by all of the devices pointed to above. *This* was Icarus drowning. When Williams uses the demonstrative pronoun to switch at the very end of the poem to the reader's perspective, bringing the event close up front, he draws a distinction between the reader and the pageantry. It is analogous to the distinction that Brueghel creates between the viewer and the persons in the landscape. The ploughman and the shepherd are in profile (as is the partridge), as for the fisherman, we see the back of his head, tilted downward as he tends his rod. No one faces Icarus or the viewer. Brueghel's use of profile and avoidance of the frontal view seem to have a symbolic function, to prevent the viewer from making an identification with the figures in the landscape. Meyer Shapiro says of the use of the profile in paintings that it is «like the grammatical form of the third person, the impersonal 'he' or 'she'..while the face turned outwards is credited with intentness, a latent or potential glance directed to the observer, and corresponds to the role of 'I' in speech, with its complementary 'you.'» He explains that «the profile face is detached from the viewer and belongs with the body in action (or in an intransitive state) in a space shared with other profiles on the surface of the image.»¹⁴ Like the painting it emulates, the poem urges the

reader to take notice and to consider the fall of Icarus, not to identify with «the pageantry.»

Numerous structural and stylistic analogues suggest that Williams wanted the reading of the poem to open up to the reader the same possibilities as does the painting. He may have understood that the perceiving of poems and paintings is not as different as was earlier believed. It is now widely held that the processing of language involves both temporal and spatial pattern recognition, just as the viewing of a painting involves complex eye movements, successive glances being integrated over time. The spatial medium is experienced through a sequential, temporal process much akin to reading a poetic text.¹³ In both instances there is glancing and eye movement influenced by the visual elements of design of the object perceived. The two systems do not symbolize in radically different ways. In both systems, design involves learned features and conventions. Consider Brueghel's use of the rectangular frame, Williams' maintaining a left-justified margin.

The Icarus poem was designed to emphasize graphic features, to encourage its reading as a landscape. Looking at the printed page as a whole, the reader receives a global impression and will very likely perceive a vertical image. In grasping the overall image we are not necessarily aware of the abstract details that provide cues. The relatively short lines group into seven visually similar triadic stanzas that may be interpreted as a linked series forming a vertical. According to Hellerstein, «The direction of lines on the page can evoke primordial archetypes, gestures or attitudes: the vertical as descent or ascent....»¹⁴ In reading the poem, the mind's eye progresses rapidly down the page, in a plummeting movement sympathetic with the gravitational pull on Icarus, whose fall is signalled by the semantic text: «Fall» in the title, «fell» in the first stanza, and finally «drowning.» Verbal cues in the poem stir our visual memory, calling forth features of a generally shared visual code, resulting in our recognition of an isomorphism between global image and semantic motif.

Various features of the poem's construction combine to influence the pace of reading as steady and rapid, rather than slow. Some of the devices are obvious, as for instance, the complete lack of punctuation. A downward movement is encouraged by the progression within stanzas from a relatively long first line to shorter second and third lines. Syntactic enjambments, both within and more importantly between stanzas, ensure a steady pace across potential pause markers. The only strong pauses occur in stanza one where

markers of syntactic units coincide with line endings. Stanza one is also an exception with respect to Williams' avoidance of capital letters—three occur within the first stanza, but not another until the concluding line. The poem would seem to begin slowly and then proceed more rapidly to the fall and drowning. Reading pace is also affected by letter type. Lowercase texts are more legible because of the variety of «word shapes that ascending and descending lowercase letters create compared to the regular, rectangular outlines of block capitals.» In lowercase letters the preponderance of distinctive features occur in the tops of letters, so that «the reader's eyes move along a line between the middle and the top of the line of print.»¹⁷ It is interesting that in the poem the last word and last letter are heavily determined in the lower section of the line, «drowning,» thus pulling eye movements downward for the closure.

Relatively short lines increase the tempo and ease of reading for several reasons (even the longest lines in Williams' poem seem short compared, for instance, with Auden's much longer lines which have an overall horizontal effect). Short lines increase relatively the presence of white area, which in turn influences reading ease. Research reported by Gibson and Levin has shown that «beginnings and ends of words are especially salient»; they are less susceptible to blurring in rapid glancing than is the middle of a word «because they have a white space rather than a letter on one side of them.»¹⁸ Short lines increase the salience of beginnings and ends. Beginnings of words, especially, provide important information for word identification. Inflectional endings, such as the «ing» progressive, are processed separately and are therefore also important in reading ease for the role they play in word identification.

Brevity of lines enhances rapid glancing. As Gibson and Levin explain, «During a fixation pause, a reader has an area, not a point, of clear vision. This area of clear vision extends over seven to ten letter spaces. Movement or brightness contrast in the periphery can be detected.» It is not altogether clear, but appears to be the case that peripheral vision is a factor in «the decision about where to move the eye during the next saccade, that is, to decide where the next fixation point will occur.»¹⁹ Readers can pick up letter information ten or eleven characters left and right of the fixation point. The reader has control, then, of about twenty letter spaces during each fixation pause. Williams' lines are designed to require one, or at most two fixations. Stanza initial lines vary from 15, 19, 21, 22, and 24 letter spaces (including spaces between words), with 15 and 19 occurring twice. Perhaps only the initial line of the concluding

stanza requires two fixations: «a splash quite unnoticed» and, thereby, signals Williams' intention that the reader take note of the event. Second lines of stanzas vary with 4, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15 and 19 letter spaces. If we take letter spaces to reflect the visual density of text, we can find a pattern in the total spaces utilized in stanzas (by combining counts for the three lines in each): 50, 50, 33, 39, 44, 37, 47. Visually, the greatest density occurs in the first two stanzas, with a relatively high number of letter spaces again in the last stanza. In addition to the lines requiring no more than one or two fixations, the white space on either side would encourage rapid shifting to the next line. In some stanzas successive lines are so short as to suggest that a single fixation may include the two lines: «concerned/ with itself;» «that melted/ the wings' wax.»

The text itself, by its structure, can increase or reduce readability. Studies have shown that «Pauses in reading are responsive to the difficulty of the text...so fixation pause time does not simply involve the pick up of a text, but also thinking it.»²⁰ The poem contains many of those short high frequency words that are instantly processed—it, to, a, of, the—and, as noted above, few multi-syllabic words.²¹ Syntactic structure can affect reading speed. Left embedded sentences, in which modifiers interrupt the subject and predicate (as is characteristic of Henry James' style) get longer pauses (length of time fixations) than do right embedded sentences. Right embedded texts are easier to read, indeed, are read faster.²² There are no left embedded structures in the poem, all modifiers are right branching and thus contribute to forward movement in the reading. Williams' repetitive use of the verbal *be* (another high frequency vocabulary item), either as the main verb or as tense marker in the verb phrase, also contributes to ease of reading. The second pattern with its gerunds seems to imitate the equative function of the copula, the verbal activity serving to define or characterize its subject noun phrase.

At the clausal level, structures in the poem progress by right branching and demonstrate what E.D. Hirsch, Jr. calls the principle of linearity: «So long as the reader can process what he reads without having to circle back and reread an earlier part of the text, then the writing is linear.»²³ As he explains, forward movement depends largely on the closure of word groups and their semantic integration. Closure occurs when a group is understood, its meaning stored (apparently in non-linguistic form) and integrated. This closure proceeds rapidly when words are constructed in stable groups of no more than five or seven items, corresponding to the

limits of short term memory. Hirsch stresses the importance of the clause, «the minimal unit that has semantic determinacy.»²⁴ It is clause length, rather than sentence length, that is most relevant to readability. Most clausal units in the poem form groups of three, five, or six items, and do not tax short term memory. Of course, grammatical structure can increase or decrease readability. Williams' tendency in this poem is to construct sentences as progressions of clear groupings of words, small substructures (rather than complex hierarchical relations). The first five lines of the poem illustrate these substructures. Their stability is increased by the presence of markers such as pronouns, relatives, and connections between clauses.

Contextual constraints, by reducing uncertainty, encourage semantic integration of clausal units. Hirsch stresses the importance of what he calls thematic tags, «explicit verbal representation of many implicit meanings.»²⁵ «Fall,» «spring,» are such tags occurring early in the poem. They provide the reader with expectations about the text as a whole, and serve as anchor points for integrating subsequent items linked with the contrast and irony of death in a flourishing landscape. There are, however, structures that resist easy integration. I have observed several groups of undergraduate and graduate students hesitate over the «whole pageantry of the year,» a metaphor clarified by successive predicates, each increasing the assignment of human characteristics. The «pageantry» seems not to get fully integrated until the reader comes to terms with «concerned with itself.» Some readers who fail to take note of «pageantry,» must later pause to find the referent for «itself.» These two units are by far the points of greatest difficulty for readers. While I think the poem was deliberately designed to permit reading at a steady and rather rapid rate, I think these are intentional 'bumps.' It is surely not coincidental that at the very center of the poem, with «concerned,» Williams introduces another thematic tag. The language of the poem shifts from largely concrete terms to abstract structures. There is a high intercorrelation between concreteness and lack of prefix. When Williams shifts focus he uses abstract terms marked with prefixes, first «concerned,» then «unsignificantly,» and «unnoticed.» «Concerned with itself» serves as an anchor for «unsignificantly off the coast,» and «a splash quite unnoticed,» linking up with them to suggest something about the role of relevance in human perception.

Moving through the poem, a reader acts on verbal and visual

features, synthesizing them, and using them as a basis for revising expectations of what will follow. The overall text strategy maximizes two types of learning activities that Gibson and Levin describe: 1) classifying or semantic grouping, and 2) inference from textual assertions.²⁶ Beginning with the title, the poem is a series of declarative statements asserting category relations. The openness of the text, the relative visual isolation of lines, allows the reader to explore paradigmatic relationships. One can easily scan the poem for members of a «spring» paradigm: «ploughing,» «sweating,» «awake»; or for members of a «Fall» paradigm: «fell,» «splash,» «drowning.» On the other hand, the terms linked to «concerned,» «unsignificantly,» and «unnoticed,» encourage the reader to draw inferences about the interaction between these paradigms.

The poem is structured in a manner that enhances its readability and encourages learning activity. Just how rapidly one actually moves through the poem, whether one detours and begins over, what relations one perceives, inferences one draws, will depend on a number of individually determined factors, such as general reading skill, the strength of the reader's biases or guessing tendencies developed with literary experience, and, of course, contingencies of personal response and external aspects of the reading situation.

How readers actually process texts, or would respond to this particular poem, is very much an empirical matter. Many of the assumptions made in the preceding discussion are subject to corroboration: that the poem is structured so as to foreground certain elements, some items being structurally more prominent; that the ironic juxtaposition of death in a busy landscape is central to the poem's message; that subjective judgement is conveyed regarding the lack of human response in the landscape; that the vertical visual image functions as a sign, not just an incidental design feature; that the shape is suited to the poem.

With this in mind, I set out to study other readers' responses. Questioning even more generally what significance we ought to give to graphic aspects of poems—do they affect our understanding, do we think they do—I set up an experiment in which readers were provided with six graphically variant versions of the Icarus poem. This study, called Reader Response II, was conducted with 91 undergraduates at Northeastern University in the spring of 1974.²⁷ The sample, drawn from freshmen completing an introductory literature course, was a heterogenous group representing males and females about equally, as well as a number of fields of study in the

liberal arts, sciences, and engineering. Readers had up to one hour to respond.

Each reader was given a questionnaire, and the six versions (on six separate pages) distributed in random order. The versions, which I will refer to as VL, VR, VC and HL, HR, HC, vary as to overall global image (vertical/horizontal), justification (left margin/right margin), and letter type (lowercase/uppercase). For the three horizontal versions each stanza of the original poem was converted to a single line. VL represented the original poem. The other five are shown below:

II 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 near
 the edge of the sea concerned with itself
 sweating in the sun that melted the wings' wax
 insignificantly off the coast there was
 a splash quite unnoticed this was Icarus drowning

II 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 NEAR
 THE EDGE OF THE SEA CONCERNED 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

II 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 near
 the edge of the sea concerned 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

II 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
 near

the edge of the sea
 concerned
 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

II 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
NEAR

THE EDGE OF THE SEA
CONCERNED
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 questionnaire contained the following directions, with space provided for response:

- (1) would you judge the texts that follow to be the same

poem? explain your response:

(2) order the texts according to your preferences, using number 1 for your first choice, and indicate the numbers on the texts. Hereafter you may refer to them by number.

(3) do you find any of the typesettings pleasing? explain:

(4) do you find any of the typesettings displeasing? explain:

(5) in the text that you assigned number 1, underline the words or phrases that you believe most clearly express the meaning of the poem:

Additional comments would be welcome:

The questionnaire was designed to gather objective indications of internal and subjective processes. The questions yielded data that can be tallied and studied for patterns of agreement between readers, as well as longer and more complex verbal responses that complement the numerical data. Although question (5) does not specifically ask for an interpretation, readers volunteered interpretations in the additional comments section, or on the reverse side of the questionnaire.

To avoid biasing the responses, questions did not identify specific graphic features. Question (1) elicited response regarding the general importance of graphic variation. Most readers judged the texts to be the same poem despite variation:

TABLE 1
QUESTION (1) RESULTS

YES	NO	YES & NO
68	14	9

Comments from readers in each category exposed their reasoning. Positive responses usually expressed the opinion that since words (or text) were the same, meaning remained constant. A typical response was: «Yes, the words and interpretations were the same.» Not all «yes» responses were as definite: «Yes. But, I think the typesetting and arrangement is very important to the stress and emphasis on the words in general. This can cause a different interpretation in many poems.» Negative responses gave more importance to visual features: «No. Even though the words are the same they differ in the way they would be read. The variations of outline change the rhythm of the lines, puts emphasis on different words

and changes the character of the story.» And another: «No. Meter and line length, formation are integral parts of a poem. They make the poem what it is as much as words do.» Those who answered «yes & no» reflected reasoning of both categories. Overall, more readers considered verbal text to be the primary, defining characteristic, but readers acknowledged the role of graphic features in their perception of poems, and as an influence on meaning.

Questions (2), (3) and (4) elicited further responses regarding graphic features and preferences of shape, justification, and type size. One would expect the rating assigned by a respondent in question (2) to be reflected in the response to (3) and (4), and, indeed, that is the case. Readers showed a good deal of consistency of answers to the three questions.²⁸ The symmetrical nature of the responses to question (2) indicates that readers were considering the variable features. Representative preference patterns show consistency in judging features: VL, VC, VR, HL, HC, HR; HL, HC, HR, VL, VC, VR; HL, VL, HR, VR, HC, VC; VR, VC, VL, HR, HC, HL; HL, VL, HC, VC, HR, VR; VL, VC, HL, HC, VR, HR. Frequencies for the rankings assigned by readers to the six versions in question (2) are as follows:

TABLE 2
QUESTION (2) RESULTS

RANK	VL	VR	VC	HL	HR	HC
1	24	24	15	13	5	10
2	29	6	25	8	14	10
3	12	25	14	16	13	11
4	14	7	14	21	19	17
5	8	7	13	19	24	19
6	4	22	10	14	16	24

Twenty-four persons ranked VL as 1, four persons ranked it as 6; while ten persons ranked HC as 1, twenty-four persons ranked it as 6. It is somewhat easier to see the gradation of preferences by converting the rank frequencies to overall averages for each textual version. For the conversion to averages, ranks 1, 2, 3 were treated as positive numbers, +5, +3, and +1; while ranks 4, 5, 6 were negatives -1, -3, -5.

TABLE 3
QUESTION (2) RANKS CONVERTED TO AVERAGES

	VL	VC	VR	HL	HR	HC
average	1.77	.67	.27	-47	-1.	-1.13

One can see a general preference for verticality over horizontality for the poem. This is corroborated by the responses to questions (3) and (4). The data are combined for these questions:

TABLE 4
QUESTION (3) & (4) RESULTS

	VL	VR	VC	HL	HR	HC
(3) pleasing	33	33	26	20	18	15
(4) displeasing	10	19	22	20	26	43

Using a rough conversion of +1 and -1 for pleasing as opposed to displeasing frequencies, we can see again a general preference for the vertical versions:

TABLE 5
STRENGTH OF PLEASING/DISPLEASING RESULTS

VL	VR	VC	HL	HR	HC
+23	+14	+4	0	-8	-28

The numerical data for the three questions suggest a very strong preference for the original poem (VL), and a very strong negative response to the HC version combining horizontality with uppercase letters. It does not define as clearly preferences for justification and type independent of the vertical/horizontal variable (see n. 28). The explanations readers gave for questions (3) and (4) provide fascinating material about the way readers make connections between form and meaning. Statistical data allow us to point to consensus, but the explanations reflect the great variation

that is characteristic of human response.

Let me begin with comments about justification. Many readers commented on right margin justification in question (4), finding it displeasing for a number of reasons: «HR, VR. You have to search for the beginning of the line. This makes it hard to read»; «VR since it appears to be backwards, has the effect of unsettling the reader. He finds himself mentally attempting to move the lines to the left where they customarily appear.» Readers who disliked the right justification considered left justification conventional practice and showed resistance to new forms. But other readers marked in question (3) that they found right justification pleasing: «VR, because it was something new, it was easy to determine if words rhymed. The focus of attention is on the end of each stanza»; «VR. The poem doesn't seem to be all crowded together and the right hand margin being straight instead of the left one gives a different look and refreshing change to the ordinary look of a poem.»

There were many reactions to the uppercase versions. While few readers found them pleasing, there were some: «HC. The sentences are in a nice flowing form, giving you a main idea about the poem. The letters all being capitalized give you the notion that all lines were meant to be as important as the next»; «VC, capitals—catches your attention more quickly.» Most responses were in question (4) and were strongly negative. Readers found the uppercase letters inappropriate: «HC, it reminds me of a death notice you would find in a file in a police station»; «VC, HC. The poems with all capital letters. They tend to be bold without feeling»; «VC, HC all capitals looked like some sort of office memo»; «VC, HC. Using all capital letters—they are all the same size—it appears that all the words are of equal value. I don't think they are. It is necessary that certain words stand out, and in these two poems, they don't.» Respondents acknowledged that the uppercase letters were distracting, were dense and more difficult to read: «HC. The letters are so large and close together that it is somewhat difficult to read.» The combination of features in HC drew the most attention in response to question (4): «HC. It's not really displeasing. In fact it's rather funny—a poem in paragraph form with all capital letters in bold print—it looks as if it should read 'NOTICE' at the top of the paper.»

A group of negative responses singled out the horizontality feature, identifying it with prose and paragraph format: «(4) All the ones typed as paragraphs make the poem more difficult to feel as a poem. It eliminates the needed pauses»; «HR, HC, HL, words

bunch together, don't get lyric sense out of it, meaning hidden in long lines»; «It's difficult to look at and try to understand a poem when it's all compacted»; «HR, HC, HL. The way the poems are set up gives it a sense of being a story. All stories I have ever read are written this way and a poem should not.» However, reasoning similarly, one reader seemed to prefer the format: «(3) HR, poem sounds better in paragraph form. It sounds more like a small parable when in paragraph form.»

Readers are responsive to formal graphic features, and their comments show a good deal of awareness of poetic convention. For instance: «(3) The ones I numbered 1 and 2, HL, VL, are the most common way I have seen poems to be written, starting with a set margin on the left and using capitals when appropriate.»

Many readers expressed preference in question (3) for the vertical versions, finding them easier to read and sensing that the vertical format was compatible with the meaning of the poem. On verticality and reading, representative comments were: «easier to read words on shorter lines, easier to find the start of lines»; «VC, VL, VR can judge sentences. Can see the meaning clearer (words not run together)»; «The poem is already broken into easily readable phrases»; «VL the poem that flows the best. It takes each topic first spring, the farmer, etc. and uses it for one verse. This makes the poem more readable and understandable»; «Yes, I find typesettings VL and VC pleasing because they are easier to read and the forms allowed me to comprehend more of the poem during the first reading»; «VL. Easy to follow. You like to 'size' up a poem before reading it. If the stanzas are arranged instead of just one stanza, then it is easier to comprehend.» Other comments focused on the poeticity of the vertical versions, and even specifically mentioned compatibility of form and meaning: «Yes, VC, VL, VR. Because the lines are short and many stanzas are used. It looks more pleasing to the eye»; «VR, VC, VL. They have a sense of unity. They are written the way I think a poem should be written»; «VL. The easiest to read in a poetic way»; «VL, VC. Stanzas seem to give effect of presenting a still scene, making distant, unnoticed splash of Icarus more effective»; «VR...since it looks like a poem and its line arrangements capture the feeling of 'falling' discussed in the poem.»

The poem is a combined visual and verbal work—readers are conscious of and respond to both aspects. Judging from their responses to questions (1)-(4), they believe graphic features, such as global image and line length, have an effect on their processing of

the poem.

Furthermore, they seemed to agree that «the poem itself is not hard»; no one claimed to have had difficulty. Here are some interpretations readers offered in the additional comments section:

«the poem seems to be a contrast between the beauty of the land and the season, and the relative ugliness and ‘un-significance’ of Icarus drowning.»

«Essentially it means, while poor Icarus was drowning, the rest of the world went on quite happily without him.»

«I think everyone was too busy with himself to notice Icarus drowning.»

«It shows the insignificance of one man’s death to this world. Icarus’ father, though grieved, continued on just as life does.»

«I remember the story of Icarus. The poem compares like is said in the title the ‘Landscape with the Fall of Icarus’.»

«This poem seems to be just straight facts. He (author) has made it more symbolic and more interesting.»

Readers caught the ironic juxtaposition of Icarus drowning within a busy, indifferent landscape, and understood that Williams was aiming at a symbolic statement beyond the neutrality of his tone. They even saw the poem as reflective of the structure established in the title.

In the responses to question (5), readers showed considerable agreement about which words in the poem most clearly express the meaning. That they discriminated between words is indicated by the variation in frequencies for words, ranging from 11-72, and the relatively low per person rates. Out of a possible range of 0-56 (the total number of words in the poem), the median response was 18 underlinings, the mean 19.5.

I believe the pattern of the underlinings reflects the structural importance and prominence of words, and can help us to understand the process by which readers arrive at meaning. Although the underlinings were assigned just after reading, I think they reflect

the importance of words during reading. Recall studies have indicated that readers tend to decide at once what is important, so that «essentially the same results» are found after «15 minutes, 7 days, 21 days.»²⁹ One respondent, who underlined the first and second lines of stanza 1, and the first and last lines of stanza 2, the first lines of stanza 4, 5, and 6, and the first and last lines of stanza 7, used the additional comments section to explain their structural importance: «these phrases are the longest, the first in each stanza, and some of them begin with capital letters. For these reasons, they are emphasized more than other lines, I think purposely, and convey the message of the poem—especially the word ‘unsignificantly.’»

According to Brueghel
 when Icarus fell
 it was spring

a farmer was ploughing
 his field
 the whole pageantry

of the year was
 awake tingling
 near

the edge of the sea
 concerned
 with itself

sweating in the sun
 that melted
 the wings' wax

unsignificantly
 off the coast
 there was

a splash quite unnoticed
 this was
 Icarus drowning

That other readers are responding with the same thoughtfulness and to structural cues, can be seen in the reproduction of the poem with frequencies above words in Figure 1. It is also clear that most readers underlined entire lines or phrases rather than isolated words. This clustering of underlinings explains why function words like «to,» «of,» «in,» get higher frequencies than would be expected, but lower scores than bounding nominals. For instance, while readers considered the entire line important, some respondents discriminated by underlining «splash» and «unnoticed» rather than the whole sequence «a splash quite unnoticed.» Similarly for frequency patterns for words within «the edge of the sea» and «sweating in the sun.» Also pointing to differentiation on the part of readers, is the assignment of variant frequencies to tokens of words which occur more than once in the poem. Readers underlined words with respect to their meaning and function in context.

Scanning Figure 1 for high frequencies, we find «Icarus fell» and «spring» the outstanding items in stanza 1. Despite its being subordinated, «Icarus fell» is considered to be important. This suggests that the title, indeed, directs the reader's attention. I would myself have expected higher frequencies in the first line, and it may be the case that other, perhaps more sophisticated readers would see Williams' tribute as more important. In stanza 2, «whole pageantry» is relatively high, perhaps because of its metaphoric representation of the peopled scene. «awake tingling» in stanza 3 characterizes its condition. In stanza 4, «sea» is the outstanding item, anticipating the drowning, within a high word group: «edge of the sea/concerned with itself.» The high frequencies here may suggest that the stanza is important as it introduces with the word «concerned» the notion of human consciousness and will. «sweating» and «sun,» and «melted,» «wings' wax» are relatively important within stanza 5, but for an outstanding frequency we move on to stanza 6. «unsignificantly» is the item of importance in that stanza of only 6 words—it is the longest word in the shortest stanza. The seventh stanza has frequencies ranging from 44-72. «splash» receives the highest frequency in the poem, 72, perhaps because it is the only action that locates a specific instant in time.

My interpretive remarks are, of course, speculative. Still, there are undeniable patterns in the responses. Supporting the general stylistic claim of opening and closing markedness for poems, the data shows readers making this judgement of relative importance for Williams' poem. A ranking of words by their frequencies in

Table 6 reveals a group that we may call the most salient. Ranks 1-6 are all drawn from stanza 7; ranks 7-13 are drawn from stanzas 1 and 7, but for the word «sea» from stanza 4. Thus, of the top 13 ranks, all but one word are drawn from the initial and final stanzas of the poem.

TABLE 6
WORDS IN RANK ORDER
1-27

splash	1	sweating	14
drowning	2	edge	15
unnoticed	3	the (st. 4)	16.5
Icarus (st. 7)	4	sun	16.5
quite	5	concerned	18.5
a (st. 7)	6	wings'	18.5
spring	7	it	22.5
unsignificantly	8.5	was (st. 1)	22.5
was (st. 7)	8.5	pageantry	22.5
fell	11	of (st. 4)	22.5
sea	11	melted	22.5
this	11	wax	22.5
Icarus (st. 1)	13	with	26.5
		itself	26.5

A frequency profile of the poem, Figure 2, shows visually the opening and closing markedness. We see, especially, the salience of the closure, where Williams provides a strong resolution, as the fall introduced in the title and stanza 1 is completed in the «splash» and «drowning» of the final stanza.

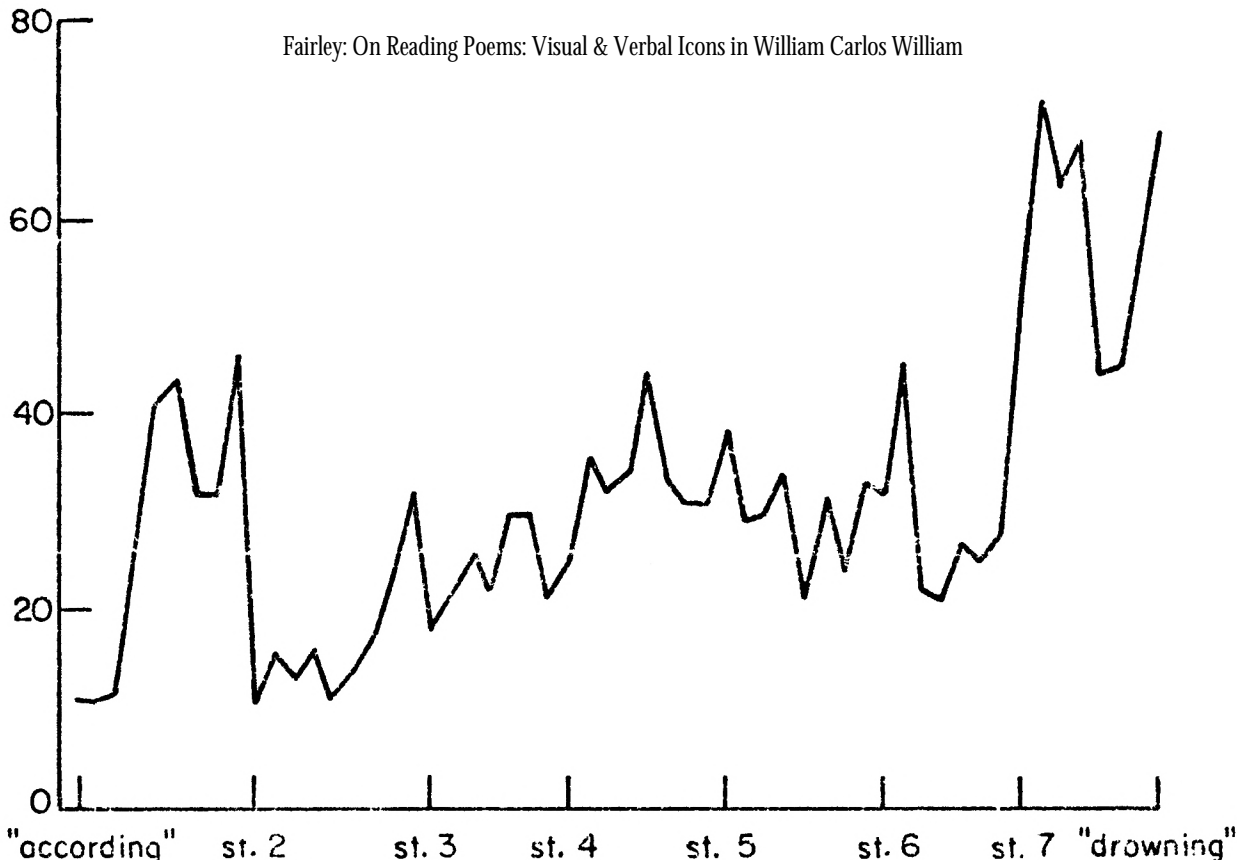


Figure 2 Frequency profile for individual words.

Readers are sensitive to structure; their responses in studies such as this one help to corroborate observations made through stylistic analysis. Their responses show considerable agreement, providing evidence of a community of readers sharing protocols, while documenting as well the variation that characterizes human behavior.

NOTES

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1. *I Wanted To Write A Poem* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. 29.
2. *Selected Essays* (New York: Random House), p. xiv.
3. *William Carlos Williams* (Minn.: Univ. of Minn. Press), p. 18.
4. Brinnin, p. 30. For other accounts of Williams' interest in the visual arts, see James E. Breslin, «William Carlos Williams and Charles Demuth: Cross-fertilization in the Arts,» *Journal of Modern Literature*, 6 (1977), 248-263; Bram Dijkstra, *The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech: Cubism, Stieglitz and the Early Poetry of W.C. Williams* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969).
5. «Landscape With The Fall Of Icarus,» of the poems from «Pictures from Brueghel,» first appeared in *The Hudson Review*, 13 (1960), pp. 11-12. The Auden poem which I cite for purposes of comparison is an earlier composition, copyright 1940, included in *The Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957* (New York: Random House, 1966).
6. Linda Welshimer Wagner, *The Poems of William Carlos Williams* (Middletown: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1963), p. 17. See also Jerome Mazzaro, *William Carlos Williams, The Later Poems* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1973), and Reed Whittemore, *William Carlos Williams, Poet from Jersey* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975) for information about this period in Williams' writing.
7. For a discussion of the two versions of this titled but unsigned and undated

painting, refer to Fritz Grossmann, *Bruegel: The Paintings* (London: Phaidon, 1966), and Wolfgang Stechow, *Pieter Brueghel, The Elder* (New York: Abrahms, 1969).

Mazzaro (1973), p. 160, cites Mrs. Williams as having said that her husband based his poems on the Brueghel reproductions in Thomas Craven's *A Treasury of Art Masterpieces from the Renaissance to the Present Day* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1939). Since the poems were written in the mid fifties following a 1952 stroke (see Whittemore, 1975) at a time when Williams did not get around much, it would seem reasonable that it was from a book that Williams received his impressions. It is unlikely he would have travelled to Brussels (Craven reproduces the Brussels version of the painting). Also the version of the landscape in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, includes the figure of Daedalus hovering in the sky, which Williams makes no mention of.

8. Art critics have noted the unusual quality of the light radiating from the horizon, and Brueghel's departure from Ovid with respect to other important details. See Arthur H. Klein, *Peter Brueghel the Elder, Artist of Abundance* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), and G. Glück, «Peter Brueghel the Elder and Classical Antiquity,» *Art Quarterly*, 6 (1943), 167-87. Glück remarks that the farmer, fisherman and shepherd do not take the same interest as in the myth, that Icarus is entirely unnoticed, that Brueghel «stresses the mentioned subordinate details and almost tries to hide the principal import of the mythological tale,» p. 174.

9. Anthony J. Lewis, «Man in Nature: Peter Brueghel and Shakespeare,» *Art Journal*, 32 (1973), 407.

10. Contemporary critics have tended to take this position. In addition to Glück (1943), and Lewis (1973), see Keith Roberts, *Brueghel* (London: Phaidon, 1971). Craven (1939), whom Williams was likely reading, says of this landscape «It is the greatest conception of indifference in painting,» p. 102.

11. Michael Riffaterre, «The Poetic Functions of Intertextual Humor,» *Romanic Review*, 65 (1974), 286.

12. Ely Kozminsky, «Altering Comprehension: The Effect of Biasing Titles on Text Comprehension,» *Memory & Cognition*, 5 (1977), 482.

13. For discussion of negatives and their positive correlates, refer to George L. Dillon, *Language Processing and the Reading of Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1978), p. 142. Wolfgang Iser also comments on negatives, that «The various types of negation invoke familiar or determinate elements only to cancel them out. What is cancelled; however, remains in view, and thus brings about modifications in the reader's attitude toward what is familiar or determinate—in other words, he is guided to adopt a position *in relation to the text*» [*The Act of Reading* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1978)], p. 169.

14. *Words and Pictures* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), pp. 38-39.

15. Refer to Julian Hochberg, «The Representation of Things and People,» p. 92, in Gombrich, Hochberg, and Black, *Art, Perception and Reality* (Baltimore: Johns

Hopkins, 1972). For the discussion of visual perception see also Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1954), and *Toward a Psychology of Art* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1966); and E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1960).

16. Nina S. Hellerstein, «Paul Claudel and Guillaume Apollinaire as Visual Poets: *Ideogrammes occidentaux and Calligrammes*,» *Visible Language*, 11 (1977), 255. See also Roman Jakobson «On The Verbal Art of William Blake and Other Poet-Painters,» *Linguistic Inquiry*, 1 (1970), 3-23; and Georges H.F. Longree «The Rhetoric of A Picture-Poem,» *Poetics and The Theory Of Literature*, (1976), pp. 63-84.

For a discussion of the notion of «similarity» and problems of identity see Thomas A. Sebeok, «Iconicity,» *Modern Language Notes*, 91 (1976), 1427-56. Of particular interest to the present analysis is Sebeok's discussion of Max Wertheimer's work on visual perception and «the tendency of like parts to band together» (p. 1436). Anton Ehrenzweig in *The Hidden Order of Art* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1967), p. 16 describes the perception of a global image as a «mysterious syncretistic grasp of the total shape.» He considers it to be freer and more flexible than analytic vision, and defends syncretistic vision against claims that it is «empty of precise detail» (p. 19). Ehrenzweig explains that «It impresses us as empty, vague and generalized only because the narrowly focused surface consciousness cannot grasp its wider more comprehensive structure.» (p. 20).

Critics have noted Williams' propensity for shaping poems isomorphic with semantic content. Linda Wagner (1963, p. 74) discusses a poem entitled «Iris,» explaining that «Its orderly stanza arrangement provides balance. Line enjambment is intensified by the absence of punctuation—the eye moves so rapidly from line to line following the run-on sentence pattern that the impression is one of wholeness, in shape and in time. Reaction to the poem is consequently visual.» Cary Nelson describes Williams' «The Lesson,» a five stanza vertical poem about a hydrangea, as «a single, columnar thrust to the last stanza» in *The Incarnate Word: Literature as Verbal Space* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1973), pp. 188-89. Nelson discusses several poems by Williams; in each iconicity is perceived differently, due to the semantic associations established between form and content.

David M. Wyatt deals with another of Williams' poems about a landscape by Brueghel, *The Hunters in the Snow*. In his essay, «Completing the Picture: Williams, Berryman, and 'Spatial Form',» *Colby Library Quarterly*, 13 (1977), 246-62, Wyatt discusses the temporal nature of perception of both plastic and verbal arts, and compares the two poets' works based on the painting.

17. Eleanor Gibson and Harry Levin, *The Psychology of Reading* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1975), pp. 169-70.

18. Gibson and Levin, p. 197.

19. Gibson and Levin, pp. 356-57.

20. Gibson and Levin, p. 354.

21. The rank list of vocabulary items provided by Henry Kučera and W. Nelson Francis (*Computational Analysis of Present-Day American English* [Providence: Brown Univ. Press, 1967]), p. 5, begins with the following items in order of highest frequency of occurrence: OF, AND, TO, A, IN, THAT, IS, WAS, HE, FOR, IT, WITH, AS, HIS, ON, BE, THE. Vocabulary items like PAGEENTRY, SPLASH, UNNOTICED have very low frequencies.
22. Gibson and Levin, pp. 369-75.
23. *The Philosophy of Composition* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 136.
24. Hirsch, p. 109.
25. Hirsch, p. 124.
26. Gibson and Levin, p. 434.
27. Reader Response II repeated an underlining procedure I developed in Reader Response I, a study of two groups of undergraduates, using as text a poem by E.E. Cummings. The underlining results for Reader Response I and II are compared in the conclusion of «Experimental Approaches To Language In Literature: Reader Responses to Poems,» *Style*, 13 (1979), 335-64. Since the texts are lyric poems of similar length and organization around a basic polarity, with comparable closure patterns, it was not surprising that results of the studies were quite similar with respect to the assignment of underlinings and per person responses. R.R.I, which studied additionally points of difficulty and thematic interpretation, includes a more extensive discussion of methodology and results.
28. This consistency can be observed on the questionnaires themselves. In addition, Spearman rank correlation was used to test the association between average ranks [question (2)] and percent pleasing [questions (3) + (4)]. Significant association was found with p less than .01. Reference for the test was Mood, Graybill, and Boes, *Introduction to the Theory of Statistics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1963). Analysis of variance with known variance was used to test for preferences across features. Results showed 1) verticality preferred to horizontality, p less than .005; 2) left justification preferred to right justification, p greater than .10; and 3) lowercase preferred to uppercase, p greater than .10. Only 1) is significant, and it is very significant. Reference for this test was K.A. Brownlee, *Statistical Theory and Methodology In Science and Engineering* (New York: Wiley, 1965). I am grateful to Samuel Gutmann, of the Department of Mathematics, Northeastern University, for his assistance with these tests.
29. Gibson and Levin, P. 399.