

## The Red Wheelbarrow

So much depends

upon

a red wheel

barrow

glazed with rain

water

beside the white

chickens

( Williams Carlos Williams)

Syntactically this poem is made up of a single complex sentence comprising a main clause and a relative clause ("so much depends upon a red wheelbarrow....beside the white chicken") and a reduced relative clause ("which is ) glazed with rain water"). We can further split the main clause into "so much depends upon a red wheel barrow." And "the red wheel barrow is ) beside the white chickens." This analysis would make the sentence compound complex.) The proposition juxtaposing the wheelbarrow and the chickens is presented as the main clause , and a brief description of a wheel barrow is then given in a truncated relative clause , thus deliberately according it a lesser status. There are two parallel noun phrases ( construction : determiner+ adjective +noun), " a red wheel barrow " and " the white chickens" referring to the elements juxtaposed. The two other noun phrases in the poem are " so much " and "rain water" with a simple structure corresponding to their less prominent role. We can notice that there are three prepositional phrases , " upon a red wheel barrow," " with rain water," and " beside the white chickens." In fact it is interesting to note that the structurally marginal ( at least most of the time) prepositional phrase seems to pervade the whole poem if we exclude the two verbs " depends" and " glazed".

Incidentally the poem begins with an indefinite phrase " so much" and each of the succeeding pairs of lines has a very specific description. The red wheel barrow , which also occurs in the title, is given additional prominence by the relative clause, as opposed to the white chickens. This means, a lifeless mechanical object has a greater importance in our society than a plurality of animate beings?

Grammatically, we note that the poem is in the present tense attesting to the historic validity of the statement, and also we can note two interesting contrasts, one between " a red wheel barrow" and the " white chickens" and the other between the singular and plural numbers in the

headwords in these parallel phrases. Moreover, the title has the definite article which is reduced to an indefinite one in the text. That is, while the wheel barrow is undoubtedly the central image, for purposes of contrast with the any wheel barrow would do. And one wheel barrow is good enough to be pitted against a multitude of chicks.

Lexically, perhaps the contrasting colours red and white form a set and also form a syntactic couple by appearing in equivalent positions. Also, the possible associations of red with blood, danger, etc, may be contrasted with purity, cleanliness, simplicity, etc. which are associated with white. "Glazed" is somewhat unusual in conjunction with rain water, because water just drenches something and does not normally glaze. Hence our attention is drawn to the condition / appearance of the otherwise drab wheelbarrow, which may have acquired some "life" of its own from the rain water.

The first word "so" receives a secondary stress, and it would appear that "much" receives loudest stress of all. Thus an indefinite phrase is given great prominence because of the colloquial rhythm of the poem, to balance that of the red wheelbarrow and the white chickens.

We can account for the genuine appeal and power of the poem. The power of the poem consists in suggesting a universal message of contrast and stillness, life and death, etc. It may also imply the Irony of modern existence which has to come terms with the effects of the industrial revolution.

We ought to remember that we are more interested in "naked images" and fathom the "guts shadows". We can see that a basically strange idea has been squeezed into a single sentence of enormous energy resulting in what we can described as a "rhetorical miracle".

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Note:

Dear Students

Stylistic analysis of the *text* eliminates standard critical judgements readily available elsewhere because through the analysis we can see what is going on for ourselves and watch the network of syntactic, lexical and phonological patterns unfolding before our very eyes. We can boldly form our own conclusions and interpret the poem / literary text on the basis of the analytical data before us.

In the process of analysis and synthesis, of disintegration and reintegration, our linguistic as well as literary experience gets vastly enriched, and literary texts no longer appear to be handled only by those with a superior intellect.