



## POSUDEK OPONENTKY DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE

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Studijní obor: **Anglická a americká literatura**

Název práce: **Imagism and Visuality in William Carlos Williams's Poems**

Autorka práce: **Bc. Tereza Markytánová**

Vedoucí diplomové práce: **doc. PhDr. Mariana Machová, Ph.D.**

Oponentka diplomové práce: **Einat Adar, M.A., Ph.D.**

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### Quality of Research

1) Please rate the following statements about the thesis on a scale of 1 (insufficient) to 3 (excellent)

1. The topic of the thesis is suitable for the scope and well defined: 2
2. Sets clear goals or questions for research: 3
3. Delivers significant research findings: 2
4. Demonstrates conceptual clarity and accuracy: 3
5. Demonstrates a good understanding of the literary work(s) discussed: 3
6. Demonstrates a good understanding of the critical field: 3
7. Engages with sufficient scholarship in a meaningful way: 3
8. Shows independent thinking and originality: 3

2) Comment briefly on the quality of the research presented in the thesis:

The research presented in this thesis meets the level expected of a diploma thesis, engaging with ample secondary sources and applying effectively the theory and methodology selected for the thesis. I particularly appreciated the conceptual clarity and critical skills that the author brings to her readings.

The scope of the thesis, however, seems to have been a little too ambitious as it sought to embrace all of Williams's writing career, and as a result its conclusions seem to be a little shallow in comparison with the detailed readings of the poems. Moreover, as I will explain below, the choice of closed reading was not fully suitable for dealing with intermedial poems such as *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems*.

### Quality of Writing

1) Please rate the following statements about the thesis on a scale of 1 (insufficient) to 3 (excellent)

1. Has a clear and suitable structure: 3
2. Employs appropriate register and academic style: 3
3. Uses correct and relevant terminology: 3
4. Adheres to academic thesis guidelines, format and MLA style guide: 2
5. Written in correct and fluent English (both grammar and vocabulary): 3
6. Carefully edited with few typos or mistakes: 2

2) Comment briefly on the quality of the writing presented in the thesis:

Overall, the level of writing is quite high, although there are a few mistakes that should have been eliminated with more careful editing, especially with word order (for example "To this feeling... helps also the fact" on p.58). I must commend the author for mastering



the definite/ indefinite articles and English sentence structure which many Czech speakers struggle with.

In terms of MLA style, the author does not follow the rules for the in-page citations for multiple works by the same author which makes them confusing. In one case on p. 45 and 51 a text by Halter is cited as "Visual Arts", a term contained in the titles of both of his works cited in the bibliography which makes it impossible to identify.

### **Overall Review and Assessment**

(short description of the thesis and its findings, what has been achieved, and areas for improvement)

This thesis aims to explore the ways in which the American poet William Carlos Williams works with visual elements in his poetry. The thesis begins by charting the importance of visuality in Williams' oeuvre and then offers close readings of the visual expression in three types of poems – ekphrastic poems, semi-ekphrastic (associated with paintings but not a description of a particular work), and non-ekphrastic poems which rely on significant visual effects, including two of Williams's most famous poems – "The red wheelbarrow" and "This is just to say".

The thesis finds that throughout his writing career, the visual aspect occupies an important place in Williams's poetry, whether he is describing a particular image or not. The visual effects can be categorised into the visual form of the poem, visual description as the theme of the poems, and word choice that evokes visual images.

As already mentioned, the strengths of the thesis include a clear structure and fluent writing, strong conceptual analysis, and rich readings of the particular poems. The author is attentive to the particular details of each poem and provides clear insight into some of the ambiguities they contain, while also tracing the means by which Williams carefully interweaves form, meaning and language.

However, the author had the misfortune of getting an opponent who is highly interested in visual aspects in modernist literature and also in Brueghel's paintings and their cultural importance in the history of art, which made me seriously question two choices in terms of the scope and methodology

of the thesis, as they seem to detract from its potential interest.

The first is dealing with the totality of Williams's work, from the early writing to his last collection. The poems interpreted in the thesis could be roughly described as corresponding to the late writing (ekphrastic), and earlier writing (semi-ekphrastic and non-ekphrastic), thus making the thesis go in a reverse-chronological order, a decision that is not discussed or explained. Taken together, the interpretations raise questions about Williams's development as a writer, as it is clear that there are major differences in style between the periods and also between the imagistic poems of the 1920s and the later ones. It would of course be impossible to treat his aesthetic development in any depth in an M.A. thesis that is focused on a different issues, which leads the author to concentrate on the continuities which are not particularly original and could be found in any description of Williams's style. Specifically, I found the final sub-chapter 3.3 to be much weaker than the others, as it was mostly repeating what has already been described with regards to previous poems.

The other issue is the choice of the methodology of close reading which does not seem quite suitable for discussing ekphrastic poems built on an extra-textual connection to another work of art. On p. 18 the author writes that it is "crucial" for the poem to "function independently of the source" without any justification of this position, and although the following readings do address the paintings occasionally, they mostly focus on the poem and no scholarship about the paintings they describe has been used. Given Williams's thorough knowledge of art this seems quite unjustified and leads to doubtful interpretations stemming from a misunderstanding of the painting. For example, with



regards to the poem "The Parable of the Blind", the author interprets the lines "no seeing man / is represented" as surprising, "as if anyone would expect to find one in the parable of the blind." (p. 27). However, the painting shows the regression in the physical condition of the people it depicts and the series of figures has often been seen as representing a tumble in slow-motion. Thus one would logically posit a seeing man at the beginning of the series which seems to me what Williams is alluding to. The absence of the initial state of sight precludes any alternative to the fall of the blind men in the painting which makes the poem present a bleak view of human fate.

A similar misunderstanding occurs with regards to the stanza "they prance or go openly / toward the wood's / edges" in the poem "The Wedding Dance in the Open Air" which according to the author "evoke darkness" that creates an ominous "premonition" (p.41). What is being completely missed here is the dancers are going to the woods to find privacy for more intimate dealings which would explain why it is remarkable that they "go openly" and highlight the promiscuity which the painting portrays. Country dancing was frowned upon by the church at the time the painting was created which would raise the need for being "Disciplined" in the opening line of the poem which is just ignored in this thesis.

To reiterate, the thesis sets to answer a particular question which is properly researched and answered in the work and such this thesis achieves a level of research and writing that meet the expectations from an M.A. thesis that deserves the grade of excellent (výborně). At the same time, if the student will decide to pursue this project, I would recommend to devote closer attention to particular collections and pursue at least the explicit extra-textual references in the poems to generate richer and more accurate readings.

### Questions for Defence

(please provide two questions for the student to answer during their defence)

1. Do you see a change in the way W.C. Williams employs visual means in his poetry from the early imagistic poems to the late poetry in *Paterson* and *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems*?
2. You mention several times in the thesis the presence of the authorial figure as a spectator in the poems, it would be interesting to hear more about the role of the artist-viewer (voyeur?) in these works.

### Práci doporučuji k obhajobě.

Navrhovaná klasifikace: **výborně**

27. 5. 2023

Datum

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Podpis

\* Numerical assessments are provided as a guideline for recommending the final grade following an indicative scale:

over 38 "výborně"

32-38 "velmi dobře"

28-32 "dobře"

below 28 points the work is in danger of failing.

The final grade will be determined by the committee following the thesis defence.