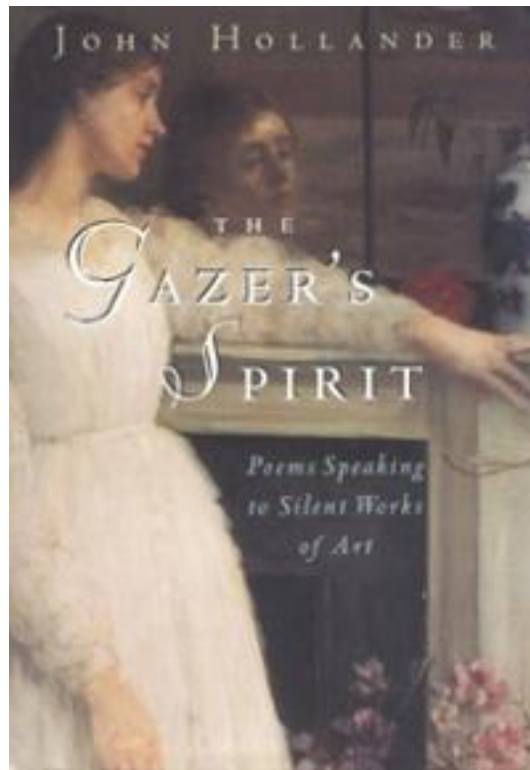


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The Gazer's Spirit: Visual Art and Poetry



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The Gazer's Spirit Poems Speaking to the Silent Works of Art

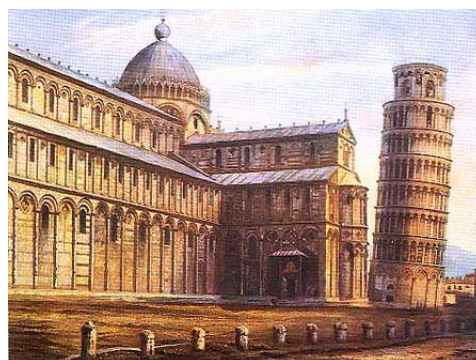
"...The gap between word and image has been the subject of a good deal of contemporary theoretical exploration. It is indeed easy to consider how, for the talky poem, the mute image manifests is otherness, its figurative condition as object of desire, its vivid latency, given another sort of expressive power by having the breath of verbal life blown into it, and so forth. The viewer's gaze which embraces a particular work can long for further consummation—to possess a represented object, whether person or thing, to enter into an interior scene or a landscape. On the other hand, language can long for a further extension of its frail descriptive grasp of fully realized visual representation." Hollander, John. *The Gazer's Spirit: Poems Speaking to Silent Works of Art*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1995. 6-7. Print.

Pisa's Leaning Tower by Herman Melville

The Tower in tiers of architraves,
Fair circle over cirque,
A trunk of rounded colonades,
The maker's master-work,
Impends with all its pillared tribes,
And, poising them, debates:
It thinks to plunge — but hesitates;
Shrinks back — yet fain would slide;
Withholds itself — itself would urge;
Hovering, shivering on the verge,
A would-be suicide!

Upon seeing the tower, Melville wrote "Campanile* like pine poised just ere snapping. You wait to hear crash." * A bell tower

How does Melville's impression manifest itself in the poem?



Similarities between Verbal and Visual Arts (Eichler,) <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/creative-communication-frames-discovering-10.html?tab=4#tabs>

Author's Word Choice	Artist's Brushstrokes, Color, and Medium Selected
Author's Point of View	Artist's Perspective
Author's Purpose	Artist's Purpose
Author's Main Idea	Artist's Subject
Author's Setting—Time, Place	Artist's Period, Time, Place

Before the 20th century, Western art was largely representational (meaning viewers are able to make out shapes, figures, and forms in a work). Abstract expressionist art, such as Jackson Pollock's "Number One," is non-representational, meaning viewers generate interpretations not through recognizable objects, but through the structure of the work's internal form. How does this painting, as a text, speak to you? In other words, what messages or arguments do you find in this style of painting? What do you determine to be Pollock's purpose? Give specific examples from the work. (Hint: Ask yourself what makes this STYLE of painting so vastly different from earlier representational art. What is literally happening with the paint on the canvas? What various choices does Pollock make? How might this technique challenge viewers' assumptions about art?)



Number 1 by Jackson Pollock (1948)

Nancy Sullivan

No name but a number.
Trickles and valleys of paint
Devise this maze
Into a game of Monopoly
Without any bank. Into
A linoleum on the floor
In a dream. Into
Murals inside of the mind.
No similes here. Nothing
But paint. Such purity
Taxes the poem that speaks
Still of something in a place
Or at a time.
How to realize his question
Let alone his answer?

<https://eng101activitygallery.wordpress.com/2012/08/26/175/>

How does Sullivan interpret Pollock's painting in her ekphrastic poem? What unique or unusual signifiers does she use to give representation to Pollock's non-representational text? How does Sullivan's final question challenge both Pollock's purpose (as you determined in your first response) and the audience's interpretation of that message? In other words, how does Sullivan challenge you to re-evaluate your own interpretation of Pollock's work?

Designed by Mike Sanders



'The Starry Night' by Anne Sexton

*That does not keep me from having a terrible need of — shall I
say the word — religion. Then I go out at night to paint the
stars. —Vincent Van Gogh in a letter to his brother*

The town does not exist
except where one black-haired tree slips
up like a drowned woman into the hot sky.
The town is silent. The night boils with eleven stars.
Oh starry starry night! This is how
I want to die.

It moves. They are all alive.
Even the moon bulges in its orange irons
to push children, like a god, from its eye.
The old unseen serpent swallows up the stars.
Oh starry starry night! This is how
I want to die:

into that rushing beast of the night,
sucked up by that great dragon, to split
from my life with no flag,
no belly,
no cry.

What is the contrast of the town and
the sky in the first stanza? What does
the use of "hot sky" and "boils"
suggest?

Why give the moon 'god' like attributes?

What does the imagery "the old unseen
serpent" suggest?

What does "no flag" suggest?

"Vincent"

Starry, starry night
Paint your palette blue and gray
Look out on a summer's day
With eyes that know the darkness in my soul

Shadows on the hills
Sketch the trees and the daffodils
Catch the breeze and the winter chills
In colors on the snowy linen land

Now, I understand, what you tried to say to me
And how you suffered for your sanity
And how you tried to set them free
They would not listen, they did not know how
Perhaps they'll listen now

Starry, starry night
Flaming flowers that brightly blaze
Swirling clouds in violet haze
Reflect in Vincent's eyes of china blue

Colors changing hue
Morning fields of amber grain
Weathered faces lined in pain
Are soothed beneath the artist's loving hand

Now, I understand, what you tried to say to me
And how you suffered for your sanity
And how you tried to set them free
They would not listen, they did not know how
Perhaps they'll listen now

For they could not love you
But still your love was true
And when no hope was left inside
On that starry, starry night

You took your life as lovers often do
But I could have told you, Vincent
This world was never meant for one
As beautiful as you

Starry, starry night
Portraits hung in empty halls
Frame less heads on nameless walls
With eyes that watch the world and can't forget

Like the strangers that you've met
The ragged men in ragged clothes
The silver thorn of bloody rose
Lie crushed and broken on the virgin snow

Now, I think I know what you tried to say to me
And how you suffered for your sanity
And how you tried to set them free
They would not listen, they're not listening still
Perhaps they never will

Musee des Beaux Arts W. H. Auden

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

In Breughel'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.

Landscape with the Fall of Icarus

William Carlos Williams

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



Facing It

Yusef Komunyakaa
(1988)

My black face fades,
hiding inside the black granite.
I said I wouldn't,
dammit: No tears.
I'm stone. I'm flesh.
My clouded reflection eyes me
like a bird of prey, the profile of night
slanted against morning. I turn
this way--the stone lets me go.
I turn that way--I'm inside
the Vietnam Veterans Memorial
again, depending on the light
to make a difference.
I go down the 58,022 names,
half-expecting to find
my own in letters like smoke.
I touch the name Andrew Johnson;
I see the booby trap's white flash.
Names shimmer on a woman's blouse
but when she walks away
the names stay on the wall.
Brushstrokes flash, a red bird's
wings cutting across my stare.
The sky. A plane in the sky.
A white vet's image floats
closer to me, then his pale eyes
look through mine. I'm a window.
He's lost his right arm
inside the stone. In the black mirror
a woman's trying to erase names:
No, she's brushing a boy's hair

"Reflection on the Vietnam War Memorial"

Jeffrey Harrison (1987)

Here is, the back porch of the dead.
You can see them milling around in there,
screened in by their own names,
looking at us in the same
vague and serious way we look at them.

An underground house, a roof of grass --
one version of the underworld. It's all
we know of death, a world
like our own (but darker, blurred).
inhabited by beings like ourselves.



1994 Poems: "To Helen" (Edgar Allan Poe) and "Helen" (H.D.) Prompt: The following two poems are about Helen of Troy. Renowned in the ancient world for her beauty, Helen was the wife of Menelaus, a Greek King. She was carried off to Troy by the Trojan prince Paris, and her abduction was the immediate cause of the Trojan War. Read the two poems carefully. Considering such elements as speaker, diction, imagery, form, and tone, write a well-organized essay in which you contrast the speakers' views of Helen.

2000 Poems: Siren passage from the *Odyssey* (Homer) / "Siren Song" (Margaret Atwood) Prompt: The story of Odysseus' encounter with the Sirens and their enchanting but deadly song appears in Greek epic poetry in Homer's *Odyssey*. An English translation of the episode is reprinted in the left column below. Margaret Atwood's poem in the right column is a modern commentary on the classical story. Read both texts carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare the portrayals of the Sirens. Your analysis should include discussion of tone, point of view, and whatever poetic devices (diction, imagery, etc.) seem most appropriate.

2001 Poems: "London, 1802" (William Wordsworth) / "Douglass" (Paul Laurence Dunbar) Prompt: In each of the following poems, the speaker responds to the conditions of a particular place and time--

England in 1802 in the first poem, the United States about 100 years later in the second. Read each poem carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare and contrast the two poems and analyze the relationship between them.

The location of the name you're looking for
can be looked up in a book whose resemblance
to a phone book seems to claim
some contact can be made
through the simple act of finding a name.

As we touch the name the stone absorbs our grief.
It takes us in -- we see ourselves inside it.
And yet we feel it as a wall
and realize the dead are all
just names now, the separation final.

The Vietnam Wall Alberto Rios

I
Have seen it
And I like it: The magic,
The way like cutting onions
It brings water out of nowhere.
Invisible from one side, a scar
Into the skin of the ground
From the other, a black winding
Appendix line.
 A dig.
 An archaeologist can explain.
The walk is slow at first
Easy, a little black marble wall
Of a dollhouse,
A smoothness, a shine
The boys in the street want to give.
One name. And then more
Names, long lines, lines of names until
They are the shape of the U.N. building
Taller than I am: I have walked
Into a grave.
And everything I expect has been taken away, like that, quick:
 The names are not alphabetized.
 They are in the order of dying.
 An alphabet of – somewhere – screaming.
I start to walk out. I almost leave
But stop to look up names of friends,
My own name. There is somebody
Severiano Rios.
Little kids do not make the same noise
 Here, junior high school boys don't run
 Or hold each other in headlocks.
 No rules, something just persists

2003 Poem: "ΕΡΩΣ" (Robert Bridges) / "Eros" (Anne Stevenson) Prompt: The following poems are both concerned with Eros, the god of love in Greek mythology. Read the poem carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare and contrast the two concepts of Eros and analyze the techniques used to create them.

2004 Poem: "We Grow Accustomed to the Dark" (Emily Dickinson) / "Acquainted with the Night" (Robert Frost) Prompt: The poems below are concerned with darkness and night. Read each poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, compare and contrast the poems, analyzing the significance of dark or night in each.

In your essay, consider elements such as point of view, imagery, and structure.

2005 Poem: "The Chimney Sweeper" (two poems of same name by William Blake) Prompt: The poems below, published in 1789 and 1794, were written by William Blake in response to the condition of chimney sweeps. Usually small children, sweeps were forced inside chimneys to clean their interiors. Read the two poems carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, compare and contrast the two poems, taking into consideration the poetic techniques Blake uses in each.

2005B Poem: "Five A.M." (William Stafford) / "Five Flights Up" (Elizabeth Bishop) Prompt: Carefully read the two poems below. Then in a well-organized essay compare the speakers' reflections on their early morning surroundings and analyze the techniques the poets use to communicate the speakers' different states of mind.

2007 Poems: "A Barred Owl" (Richard Wilbur) and "The History Teacher" (Billy Collins) Prompt: In the following two poems, adults provide explanations for children. Read the poems carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare and contrast the two poems, analyzing how each poet uses literary devices to make his point.

Like pinching on St. Patrick's Day
Every year for no green.

No one knows why.

Flowers are forced

Into the cracks

Between sections.

Men have cried

At this wall.

I have

Seen them.

"Before the Mirror"

John Updike (1996)

How many of us still remember
when Picasso's "Girl Before a Mirror" hung
at the turning of the stairs in the preexpansion
Museum of Modern Art?

Millions of us, probably, but we form
a dwindling population. Garish
and brush-slashed and yet as balanced
as a cardboard Queen in a deck of giant cards,
the painting proclaimed, "Enter here
and abandon preconception." She bounced
the erotic balls of herself back and forth
between reflection and reality.

Now I discover, in the recent retrospective
at the establishment,
that the vivid painting dates
from March of 1932,
the very month which I first saw light,
squinting nostalgia for the womb.
I bend closer, inspecting. The blacks,
the stripy cyanide greens are still uncracked,
I note with satisfaction; the cherry reds
and lemon yellows full of childish juice.
No sag, no wrinkle. Fresh as paint. Back then
they knew how, I reflect, to lay it on.

2008 Poems: "When I Have Fears" (John Keats) and
"Mezzo Cammin" (Henry W.

Longfellow) Prompt: In the two poems below, Keats
and Longfellow reflect on similar concerns. Read the
poems carefully. Then write an essay in which you
compare and contrast the two poems, analyzing the
poetic techniques each writer uses to explore his
particular situation.

2008B Poems: "Hawk Roosting" (Ted Hughes) and
"Golden Retrievals" (Mark Doty) Prompt: The
following two poems present animal-eye views of the
world. Read each poem carefully. Then write an essay
in which you analyze the techniques used in the
poems to characterize the speakers and convey
differing views of the world.

2010B Poems: "To Sir John Lade, on His Coming of
Age" (Samuel Johnson) and "When I Was One-and-
Twenty" (A. E. Housman) Prompt: Each of the two
poems below is concerned with a young man at the
age of twenty-one, traditionally the age of adulthood.
Read the two poems carefully. Then write a well-
organized essay in which you compare and contrast
the poems, analyzing the poetic techniques, such as
point of view and tone, that each writer uses to make
his point about coming of age.



"Nude Descending a Staircase"

X. J. Kennedy (1961)

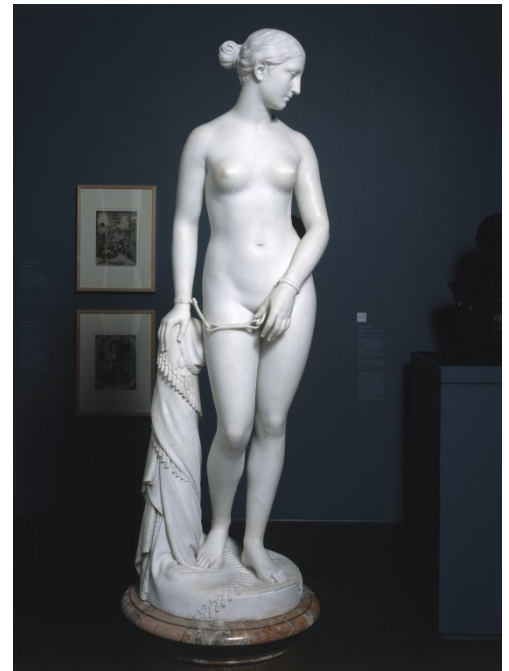
Toe upon toe, a snowing flesh,
A gold of lemon, root and rind,
She sifts in sunlight down the stairs
With nothing on. Nor on her mind.
We spy beneath the banister
A constant thresh of thigh on thigh--
Her lips imprint the swinging air
That parts to let her parts go by.
One-woman waterfall, she wears
Her slow descent like a long cape
And pausing, on the final stair
Collects her motions into shape.



"Hiram Powers' Greek Slave"

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1886)

They say Ideal Beauty cannot enter
The house of anguish. On the threshold stands
An alien image with enshackled hands,
Called the Greek Slave! as if the artist meant her
(That passionless perfection which he lent her
Shadowed not darkened where the sill expands)
To so confront man's crimes in different lands
With man's ideal sense. Pierce to the center,
Art's fiery finger! and break up ere long
The serfdom of this world! appeal, fair stone,
From God's pure heights of beauty against man's wrong!
Catch up in the divine face, not alone
East griefs but west, and strike and shame the strong,
By thunders of white silence, overthrown.



As you read ***The Red Studio*** on the next page, consider the following: The speaker's attitude/tone? How do you know? Does it change? What literary elements are in the poem? Compare/Contrast the painting and the poem. How do they both create a similar effect? How has the poet interpreted the painting? Does it change your perspective of the artwork? How? How has the painting influenced your interpretation of the poem?

Matisse: "The Red Studio"

W. D. Snodgrass

There is no one here.
But the objects: they are real. It is not
As if he had stepped out or moved away;
There is no other room and no
Returning. Your foot or finger would pass
Through, as into unreflecting water
Red with clay, or into fire.
Still, the objects: they are real. It is
As if he had stood
Still in the bare center of this floor,
His mind turned in in concentrated fury,
Till he sank
Like a great beast sinking into sands
Slowly, and did not look up.
His own room drank him.
What else could generate this
Terra cotta raging through the floor and walls,
Through chests, chairs, the table and the clock,
Till all environments of living are
Transformed to energy--
Crude, definitive and gay.
And so gave birth to objects that are real.
How slowly they took shape, his children, here, Grew solid and remain:
The crayons; these statues; the clear brandy bowl;
The ashtray where a girl sleeps, curling among flowers;
This flask of tall glass, green, where a vine begins
Whose bines circle the other girl brown as a cypress knee.
Then, pictures, emerging on the walls:
Bathers; a landscape; a still life with a vase;
To the left, a golden blonde, lain in magentas with flowers scattering like stars;
Opposite, top right, these terra cotta women, living, in their world of living's colors;
Between, but yearning toward them, the sailor on his red cafe chair, dark blue, self-absorbed.
These stay, exact,
Within the belly of these walls that burn,
That must hum like the domed electric web
Within which, at the carnival, small cars bump and turn,
Toward which, for strength, they reach their iron hands:
Like the heavens' walls of flame that the old magi could see;
Or those ethereal clouds of energy
From which all constellations form,
Within whose love they turn.
They stand here real and ultimate.
But there is no one here.



The presence of a gazer commenting upon, describing, or reflecting upon what he or she sees, frames a moment of experience and raises the question of what that speaker is doing there, standing before the image.... Acknowledging one creative process, that of painting, then, subtly calls forth another, that of writing.
<http://engl210-locascio.wikispaces.umb.edu/file/view/The+Ekphrastic+Poem-Kolosov.pdf>

William Carlos Williams

The Dance

- 1 In Brueghel's great picture, The Kermess,
- 2 the dancers go round, they go round and
- 3 around, the squeal and the blare and the
- 4 tweedle of bagpipes, a bugle and fiddles
- 5 tipping their bellies (round as the thick-
- 6 sided glasses whose wash they impound)
- 7 their hips and their bellies off balance
- 8 to turn them. Kicking and rolling
- 9 about the Fair Grounds, swinging their butts, those
- 10 shanks must be sound to bear up under such
- 11 rollicking measures, prance as they dance
- 12 in Brueghel's great picture, The Kermess.



How does the repetition in the poem reflect the subject of the poem?

How does word choice reflect the emphasis on movement? Mark specific examples.

How do the "run-on lines" add to the rhythmic movement in the poem?

It has been said that this poem is "...a work of language remaking visual art." In a brief essay explain the connection between the poem and the painting.

In Goya's Greatest Scenes We Seem to See ...

By Lawrence Ferlinghetti

In Goya's greatest scenes we seem to see

the people of the world
exactly at the moment when

they first attained the title of

'suffering humanity' 5

They writhe upon the page

in a veritable rage

of adversity



Heaped up
 groaning with babies and bayonets 10
 under cement skies
in an abstract landscape of blasted trees
 bent statues bats wings and beaks
 slippery gibbets
 cadavers and carnivorous cocks 15
and all the final hollering monsters
 of the
 'imagination of disaster'
they are so bloody real
 it is as if they really still existed 20
And they do



 Only the landscape is changed
They still are ranged along the roads
 plagued by legionnaires
 false windmills and demented roosters 25
They are the same people
 only further from home
on freeways fifty lanes wide
 on a concrete continent
 spaced with bland billboards 30
illustrating imbecile illusions of happiness
The scene shows fewer tumbrils
 but more strung-out citizens
 in painted cars
 and they have strange license plates 35
and engines
 that devour America

In the poem "In Goya's Greatest Scenes" Ferlinghetti has in fact drawn details not only from the two pictures that instantly come to mind, the famous large-scale painting "The Execution of the Defenders of Madrid. El Tres de Mayo" and the etching "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters", but from a large number of works by Goya, his etchings and paintings. Falling into the category of *depictive ekphrasis*, the poem refers to unspecified "scenes" painted, drawn or etched by the great Spanish artist, scenes unified by the twin theme of monstrosity and the cruelty of war, thus evoking strongly Goya's series of etchings titled "The Disasters of War".

However, it also alludes to two famous modernist ekphrastic poems - Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Williams's "The Dance". The intertextual link between Ferlinghetti's poem and Williams's "The Dance" is suggested by the opening line: "In Goya's Greatest Scenes", which echoes the initial words of Williams's poem: "In Breughel's great picture, The Kermess". But Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" looms in the background of Ferlinghetti's poem as well, since Ferlinghetti's "suffering humanity" clearly harks back to "suffering" and "its human position" in Auden's poem. Furthermore, both poems refer to disaster, either the individual disaster of Icarus: "how everything turns away / Quite leisurely from the disaster", in Auden's text, or the metonymically presented disasters of war and the direct reference to Goya's "imagination of disaster" in the poem by Ferlinghetti.

https://www.academia.edu/5133919/Studniarz_Ekphrasis_in_Ferlinghettis_In_Goyas_Greatest_Scenes

The Parable of the Blind

William Carlos Williams

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



The introductory line acknowledges the presence of the poet.
Why?

William Carlos Williams has stated the following: "In poetry,
we have gradually discovered, the line and the sense, the
didactic, expository sense, have nothing to do with one
another. It is extremely important to realize this distinction,
between what the poem says and what it means, in the
understanding of modern verse—or any verse. The meaning
is the total poem, it is not directly dependent on what the
poem says." How does that relate to this poem?

The poem contains radically trimmed lines that can only be
grasped as a member of the whole train of words, the totality.
How does that relate to the painting?

"The Great Figure"

William Carlos Williams (1920)

Among the rain
and lights
I saw the figure 5
in gold
on a red
firetruck
moving
tense
unheeded
to gong clangs
siren howls
and wheels rumbling
through the dark city

. *Note: in this case, the poem inspired the painting,
not the other way round.



Some thoughts from experts:

"In this painting Bruegel is still linked to a medieval tradition which considers the life of man in terms of his dependence upon the cycle of the year." --From Wolfgang Stechow, *Bruegel*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1969.

The painting is part of a series of twelve paintings Brueghel made to represent the twelve months of the year, called *The Twelve Months*, or the "*periods of the year*". Only 5 panels exist today. The bird's-eye view represents the Renaissance humanist practice of placing humans at the center of the universe, but observing them from a distance, allowing the viewer to philosophically contemplate human lives, but Brueghel seems to also invite the viewer into the painting, drawing him or her into his lively landscape.



"The winter scene is the most famous of all the Months and the best example of these landscapes' universal character. Snow-covered landscapes occur in Flemish books of hours from the 15th century, but there white is used simply as an attribute of winter. Here all the colours are the purest expression of cold; white, icy grey, grayish-green, brownish-black. Writers have described often enough how the impression of cold is repeated in every beautifully observed detail: the muffled hunters trudging silently home, the freezing dogs, the dark forms of the branches and the black ravens amid all the whiteness." --From Alexander Wied, *Bruegel*. Anthony Lloyd. Danbury, CT: Master Works Press, 1984.

"A clearly enunciated diagonal movement, marked by dogs and hunters, and trees, starts from the lower left-hand corner and continues, less definitely but none the less surely, by the road, the row of small trees, and the church far across the valley to the jutting crags of the hills. This movement is countered by an opposing diagonal from the lower right, marked by the edge of the snow-covered hill and repeated again and again in details." --From, Helen Gardner *Art through the Ages*

"The composition moves from left to right, following a diagonal that starts from the group of hunters and their pack of hounds, is reaffirmed by a line of trees and a bird in flight, and is supported by other lines between a roof and the river, a bush, and the mountain. . . . This work presents a synthesis between the infinity of the world the eye embraces -- as winter embraces nature -- and the scale of people in their everyday surroundings" --From Philippe and Françoise Roberts-Jones, *Pieter Bruegel*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002

The following six poems are all descriptions of Brueghel's *Winter Scene*. Choose two of the poems to compare and contrast the poetic techniques each writer uses to make his/her point.

Brueghel's Winter	Winter Landscape
<p>Walter de la Mare</p> <p>Jagg'd mountain peaks and skies ice-green Wall in the wild, cold scene below. Churches, farms, bare copse, the sea In freezing quiet of winter show; Where ink-black shapes on fields in flood Curling, skating, and sliding go. To left, a gabled tavern; a blaze; Peasants; a watching child; and lo, Muffled, mute--beneath naked trees In sharp perspective set a-row-- Trudge huntsmen, sinister spears aslant, Dogs snuffling behind them in the snow; And arrowlike, lean, athwart the air Swoops into space a crow.</p> <p>But flame, nor ice, nor piercing rock, Nor silence, as of a frozen sea, Nor that slant inward infinite line Of signboard, bird, and hill, and tree, Give more than subtle hint of him Who squandered here life's mystery.</p>	<p>John Berryman</p> <p>The three men coming down the winter hill In brown, with tall poles and a pack of hounds At heel, through the arrangement of the trees, Past the five figures at the burning straw, Returning cold and silent to their town,</p> <p>Returning to the drifted snow, the rink Lively with children, to the older men, The long companions they can never reach, The blue light, men with ladders, by the church The sledge and shadow in the twilit street,</p> <p>Are not aware that in the sandy time To come, the evil waste of history Outstretched, they will be seen upon the brow Of that same hill: when all their company Will have been irrecoverably lost,</p> <p>These men, this particular three in brown Witnessed by birds will keep the scene and say By their configuration with the trees, The small bridge, the red houses and the fire, What place, what time, what morning occasion</p> <p>Sent them into the wood, a pack of hounds At heel and the tall poles upon their shoulders, Thence to return as now we see them and Ankle-deep in snow down the winter hill Descend, while three birds watch and the fourth flies.</p>

Hunters in the Snow: Brueghel

Joseph Langland

Quail and rabbit hunters with tawny hounds,
Shadowless, out of late afternoon
Trudge toward the neutral evening of indeterminate form
Done with their blood-annunciated day
Public dogs and all the passionless mongrels
Through deep snow
Trail their deliberate masters
Descending from the upper village home in lowering light.
Sooty lamps
Glow in the stone-carved kitchens.

This is the fabulous hour of shape and form
When Flemish children are gray-black-olive
And green-dark-brown
Scattered and skating informal figures
On the mill ice pond.
Moving in stillness
A hunched dame struggles with her bundled sticks,
Letting her evening's comfort cudgel her
While she, like jug or wheel, like a wagon cart
Walked by lazy oxen along the old snowlanes,
Creeps and crunches down the dusky street.
High in the fire-red dooryard
Half unhitched the sign of the Inn
Hangs in wind
Tipped to the pitch of the roof.
Near it anonymous parents and peasant girl,
Living like proverbs carved in the alehouse walls,
Gather the country evening into their arms
And lean to the glowing flames.

Now in the dimming distance fades
The other village; across the valley
Imperturbable Flemish cliffs and crags
Vaguely advance, close in, loom
Lost in nearness. Now
The night-black raven perched in branching boughs
Opens its early wing and slipping out
Above the gray-green valley
Weaves a net of slumber over the snow-capped homes.

And now the church, and then the walls and roofs
Of all the little houses are become
Close kin to shadow with small lantern eyes.
And now the bird of evening
With shadows streaming down from its gliding wings
Circles the neighboring hills
Of Hertogenbosch, Brabant.

Darkness stalks the hunters,
Slowly sliding down,
Falling in beating rings and soft diagonals.
Lodged in the vague vast valley the village sleeps.



The Hunter in the Snow

William Carlos Williams (1962)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Brueghel's Winter

Rutger Kopland - Translated from the Dutch by
James Brockway

Winter by Brueghel, the hill with hunters
and dogs, at their feet the valley with the
village.

Almost home, but their dead-tired attitudes,
their steps
in the snow—a return, but almost as
slow as arrest. At their feet the depths
grow and grow, become wider and further,
until the landscape vanishes into a landscape
that must be there, is there but only

as a longing is there.

Ahead of them a jet-black bird dives down. Is
it mockery
of this labored attempt to return to the life
down there: the children skating on the pond,
the farms with women waiting and cattle?

An arrow underway, and it laughs at its target

Brueghel's Snow

Anne Stevenson – (c. 1955 – 1995)

Here in the snow:
three hunters with dogs and pikes
trekking over a hill,
into and out of those famous footprints -
famous and still.

What did they catch?
They have little to show
on their bowed backs.
Unlike the delicate skaters below,
these are grim, they look ill.

In the village, it's zero.
Bent shapes in black clouts,
raw faces aglow
in the firelight, burning the wind
for warmth, or their hunger's kill.

What happens next?
In the unpainted picture?
The hunters arrive, pull
off their caked boots, curse the weather
slump down over stoups. . .

Who's painting them now?
What has survived to unbandage
my eyes as I trudge through this snow,
with my dog and stick,
four hundred winters ago?