

# The red wheelbarrow

Literature



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The Red Wheelbarrow by William Carlos Williams The Red Wheelbarrow is a poem composed of one sentence split to form four couplets. The poem was composed by William Carlos Williams a physician and poet and was featured in his 1923 Spring and All collection. The original publication contains the poem under the title XXII, but was later changed to The Red Wheelbarrow. The setting of this poem reflects a rainy day due to the presence of the “glazed” wheelbarrow which together with “the white” chickens indicates it a rural agricultural background. The speaker in this poem is an invisible person but within a vantage point that enables the speaker to observe the surrounding. The speaker also possesses extensive knowledge of this environment, as he is able to identify the objects seen and their importance. This essay critically analyses The Red Wheelbarrow as an essay written in the form of a poem to highlight the significance of subsistence farming to the pre-20th century success of the US as a nation (Read 46).

To understand the poem as an essay on farming, it is important that its segments are brought together to form a whole. This result in formation of a single sentence “So much depends upon a red wheelbarrow glazed with rain water beside the white chickens.” Existing relationships between different elements can be identified based on the new sentence. Firstly, what becomes evident is the dependence of “so much” to this wheelbarrow with Pagel noting this leads to “picture of a farm” (67). The importance of the wheelbarrow in this case can be attributed to its economic function within the farm setup by contributing to the livelihood of the farmer (Beach 100). As a tool used in a farm setup, the wheelbarrow offers specific advantage to the farm owner especially in making the carrying of different things within the farm easy. Therefore, the wheelbarrow contributes greatly to the success

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of everything in the farm when used to transport waste outside the farm and food products into the barn.

In Languages as poems, Haj Ross presents a specific impression created by the poem with regard to the described setting. The author notes “ the interconnectedness of the ecological web” forming the surrounding of human being (Ross 188). Based on the assertions made by Ross, the poem creates scenery one observes after a storm has passed with the wheelbarrow being symbolic of farm implements and artefacts used for earth to feed its population. The author goes further to relate the implications of the glaze of water, which is a product of the sky that provides drinking water and for the crops to grow while the chickens symbolize domestic animals tamed for food. This description of the setting indicates simplicity typical of subsistence farming. Subsistence farming is focused on agricultural practice that produces enough food for the farmer and family without necessarily resulting in surplus to cash exchange for cash (Tsakok 37).

That the poem begins with “ So much depends” then puts all the responsibility on the wheelbarrow is also an indication of the its importance for the pre-20th century success of the US as a nation. Although this is a period characterized by industrial revolution that had introduced mechanization of farms and industries, simple tools still found usefulness for the society of the time (Tsakok 37). The poem indicates the faith of the farm owner towards simple tools and equipment such as the wheelbarrow, which have the capacity to meet the needs of a small farm. The wheelbarrow can be categorized among the simplest machines used in a farm setup especially when considered in the modern era. However, subsistence farming of the time depended on such elementary tools therefore meaning civilization

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depended on them. The fact that the poet separates “ wheel” from “ elementary in the sense that civilization depends on them” also indicates the simplicity yet very important tool (Ahearn 4). The wheelbarrow is essentially made of two components which are the wheel and the trough, however, even in such simplicity; the farmer in such setup will find the equipment an indispensable component of the farm which may not accomplish its objectives if the tool that “ so much depends upon” is not present (Ross 188).

From the foregoing analysis of the poem *The Red Wheelbarrow* as an essay written in the method of a poem that makes a statement of the significance of survival farming to the pre-20th century success of the US as a nation. During this period, subsistence farming depended on simple tools and equipments in production of food for consumption of the family. Therefore, William Carlos Williams uses *The Red Wheelbarrow* to capture the reality of subsistence farming during era.

#### Works Cited

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