

therefore, we should momentarily break away from our discussion on *Quick, Henry, the Flit* in order to consider another example of American commercial poetry, William Carlos Williams' *The Red Wheelbarrow*.

While some would fallaciously argue that Williams' poem is simply an example of painterly still-life presented in words instead of images, and others have found within the poem a metaphor for poetry itself, with the titular wheelbarrow standing for the skeletal form of poetry in general, neither interpretation really provides the best possible reading of the poem. Instead, what we clearly have in *The Red Wheelbarrow* is an excellent example of cunning use of product placement within a handful of lines. From Williams' opening line, "So much depends," the language of advertising is clear; this is no mere poem, but a cleverly constructed commercial for Kimberly-Clark's *Depend* brand of adult undergarments. Williams plays with his reader's expectations, framing his opening lines with awkward syntax, preferring the more vernacular tone of "so much" to the grammatically-correct "so many," clearly showcasing himself as a populist poet able to write in the common tongue of everyday speech. The deliberately pedestrian language also serves another purpose, signaling the reader that ordinary expectations of time and sequence of events have been discarded within the poem's sparse frame. Although some scholars have complained that the poem's publication predates the open marketing of *Depend* undergarments, and therefore creates a sense of anachronism, I would once again point those complainers to Mr. Roth's assertion that the music of rock group Van Halen clearly influenced not only all music that followed it chronologically, but all that came before.<sup>23</sup> Clearly, the standard immature view of the so-called one-way march of time is only a minor and temporary setback best left ignored for the time being, particularly due to the probability that any corporation or commercial entity worth its salt would indisputably understand the value of preemptive marketing.

Next, Williams takes that very box of incontinence products, and places it within an imaginable, visible plane, placing it "upon / a red wheel / barrow." Here, the wheelbarrow is clearly symbolic, and the doppelganger effect between the iconic garden implement's ability to move earth, soil, and fertilizer can only

connect to the uncontrollable movement of the poet's own bowels. What the poet is masking is his own fear of the disastrous and embarrassing consequences of incontinence, a sentiment which is clearly expressed in the poem's closing lines, which we will explore shortly.

The third couplet of the poem introduces a new element in contrast to the subtle scatology of the first and second couplets. Here we have the enigmatic "glazed with rain / water." Williams' choice of the word "glazed" at this juncture is a clear give-away of the poet's motives. Had he chosen the word "sprinkled" or "misted," we would not have as clear a symbol of urine as we do; instead, he chooses "glazed," invoking the inevitable image of a sopping wet diaper. This element, combined with the image of rain crystallizes the fear of the poet. Any but the densest readers can see here that the "character" or "speaker" of the poem (and in no way suggesting Williams himself) is clearly a man at odds with the control of his own bodily functions. The voice of the poem is, as Freud would deduce, trapped in the juvenile "anal" stage of development, a stage which he shows no promise of ever progressing beyond.

What, then of the closing lines of the poem, "beside the white / chickens?" After all, it seems, on the surface, anticlimactic and untrue for the poem to end with an image suggesting rural domesticity, but Williams is far more subtle than that. Clearly, "beside" is another doppelganger, standing in for the word "backside." Completing this thought is the image of the chicken, long held to be a symbol and substitute for fear in western culture. It is by the use of this image of fear, fear of soiling oneself, fear of embarrassment, and fear of discovery that can only be remedied by the produce, namely the *Depend* undergarments mentioned in the poem's opening lines. Unlike more traditional advertising approaches, Williams throws away the standard of introducing the problem first and concluding with the solution. *The Red Wheelbarrow* throws conventional wisdom on its head by reversing this expected order to a grand and memorable effect. Few who read Williams' most famous work can ever be left unmoved by its brutal honesty and bodily humanity.

Keeping this in mind, we can now return to Geisel's *Quick, Henry, the Flit* with a better understanding of the world around us