

Walking with John Brehm, William Carlos Williams, & Robert Frost's Horse

(For Ingrid Bruck)

“beauty is

a defiance of authority :”

— From Paterson - William Carlos Williams

LARFP participant and jam genius Ingrid Bruck tipped me off to an article in Tricycle Magazine about how poetry, like meditation, can disrupt habitual mind patterns. See: <https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/poetry-meditation/>

There is wisdom in this article and I have included huge hunks of it below (with various interruptions) for an exercise you may care to do once, or every other day, or every day for a week. Keep in mind that any writing of yours that comes from this exercise is part of the context of your life poem. Like everything else in life, if you do not directly claim your own cosmology, the dominant culture will fill that in for you and by the time you figure that out, it may be too late to change it to something that more clearly represents your best self. A life poem can be your statement as to what your life, your cosmology, your concerns, challenges and great gleanings, ultimately are.

And where the article's author broke down a famous Robert Frost poem, I was reminded of William Carlos Williams' musings on walking from HIS serial poem *Paterson*. (Extra credit, read that book.) So I inserted some relevant passages.

From the Tricycle article:

Choose a place to walk—preferably in nature, though this meditation can also be done in a town or city—someplace you feel safe enough so that you don't have to feel too self-conscious about stopping and looking at things. Before you begin to walk, simply stand and feel how your feet make contact with the ground. Shift your weight from side to side, one foot to the other, and feel how your whole skeletal structure adjusts to this movement.

...



Walking —

Thickets gather about groups of squat sand-pine,
all but from bare rock • •

—a scattering of man-high cedars (sharp cones),
antlered sumac. •

—roots, for the most part, writhing
upon the surface
(so close are we to ruin every
day!)
searching the punk-dry rot

Walking —

The body is tilted slightly forward from the basic standing
position and the weight thrown on the ball of the foot,
while the other thigh is lifted and the leg and opposite arm
are swung forward (fig. 6b). Various muscles, aided” ...

Walking —

he leaves the path, finds hard going
across-field, stubble and matted brambles
seeming a pasture—but no pasture
—old furrows, to say labor sweated or
had sweated here

spent. a flame,

The file-sharp grass ...

Walking —

across the old swale—a dry wave in the ground
tho' marked still by the line of Indian alders



- • they (the Indians) would weave
in and out, unseen, among them along the stream
- come out whooping between the log
house and men working the field, cut them
off! they having left their arms in the block-
house, and—without defense—carry them away
into captivity. One old man •

Forget it! for God's sake, Cut
out that stuff" ...

Walking —

he rejoins the path and sees, on a treeless
knoll—the red path choking it—
a stone wall, a sort of circular
redoubt against the sky, barren and
unoccupied. Mount. Why not?

A chipmunk,
with tail erect, scampers among the stones.

(Thus the mind grows, up flinty pinnacles)

but as he leans, in his stride,
at sight of a flint arrow-head
(it is not)
—there

in the distance, to the north, appear
to him the chronic hills

Well, so they are.

(Back to Tricycle)



Bring your attention to the flow of your breathing and notice whatever body sensations are present.

Begin to walk at a slow but not funereal pace, about half as fast as you usually walk. Meditation teacher [Tara Brach](#) says, "If I walk half as fast, I notice twice as much." Simply walk and look. Let your eye be drawn where it will, but hold an intention to notice the things you typically overlook, things that have a neutral feeling tone, that don't call forth any strong feeling, positive or negative: the intricacies of the bark and roots of trees, the qualities of dirt and rocks, shadows cast by bushes and ferns, spider webs lit by sunlight; or, if you're in a city or town, the lettering on street signs, bolts on fire hydrants, twigs on the sidewalk, etc.

As you walk, feel when something draws your attention, when something seems to call to you or feels especially vivid. When that happens, let yourself go toward that thing and stop. Give it your full attention. Simply notice what's there in as much detail as possible without adding any conceptual overlay. Don't ascribe meaning to what you see and don't tell a story about it: just look. Bring a quality of warmth and friendliness to your looking. Feel as though what you're looking at is aware of your gaze and appreciates the attention, as if it might be saying, "Ah, how wonderful to be noticed! No one ever really sees me the way you are seeing me."

Notice the physical features of the object but see also if you can sense any energetic quality emanating from it. Notice the quality of the relationship you're having with it, how it feels to hold it in your awareness. Stay with the object as long as you're able to keep noticing and appreciating it. When you're ready to resume your walk, bow to your new friend (inwardly or outwardly) and thank it for being there.

(Note with a few words in your pocket journal some specifics about the things and, if there was an inner feeling, note that, but keep it short and move on. Back to Tricycle:)

Begin walking again and repeat this process when the next thing calls out to you. Do this as long as it holds your interest. Notice the effect this practice has on you. Perhaps a deeper sense of connection with the "ordinary" things of the world will arise, or a sense of calm

affection, or the spaciousness, appreciation, and gratitude that comes from freely giving your attention to things typically overlooked. You may also notice the difference between walking and looking and stopping and looking, and between those moments of bright attention and our habitual way of being lost in thoughts.

Again, note with a few words in your pocket journal some specifics about the things and any inner feelings, memories, associations. There may be a quality of the light. Try to describe it without using simile, or if you must use simile, may it be strikingly original, non-linear or even disturbing.

If writing outside in your pocket journal is possible and feels right, sit to write a poem incorporating any notes that have special resonance for you. You could start with something from WCW, maybe even the opening epigraph from Dr. Williams:

“beauty is
a defiance of authority :”

As always, may your abstractions be earned, try to go to a deeper place than rhetoric, abstraction and generalities. If you can consciously incorporate material that illustrates your own (current) personal mythology, that’s excellent. It will likely come up whether you intend to include it or not. If you get stuck, here is a great place to pull a card or two at random, via divination, from your Personal Universe Deck. If you have not yet created such a deck, you can always use the Jack Kerouac “alluvial” technique, by going up a line or two in the poem you are composing, or even up to the beginning of the poem and reading again what you just wrote. Do this until you are reminded of something that entered your mind, but you did not incorporate.



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