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*Journey To Love: William Carlos Williams's Introspective Journey and His Testament to the "Other" and Sacredness in the Thisness of Life*

**Abstract:** Through analysis of nine of the 16 poems in *Journey To Love* by William Carlos Williams (1955), the author identifies how ordinary objects and natural common creatures, such as the sparrow, symbolize aspects of the human experience. In several cases, these symbols reveal challenges that the poet experiences at this time in his life. Beauty is equated to the uniqueness of each object, person, or scene through which the voice of the poet reflects acceptance, tolerance, and love for the natural world, his wife, and himself. Details about Williams's own identity conflict, his crisis with becoming permanently disabled, and his pain about the public inquiry into his allegiances as an American underscore these poems. This analysis though identifies through his use of language his own transcendence into a deeper understanding of love, which represents a Franciscan worldview.

**Keywords:** William Carlos Williams, *Journey To Love*, healing art, symbolism, identity conflict, transcendence, Franciscan worldview

"The sparrow
who comes to sit at my window
is a poetic truth
more than a natural one." – (Williams, "The Sparrow" 10-15)

In these lines from "The Sparrow," one of the 16 poems in *Journey To Love* (1955), William Carlos Williams self-identifies with this plebian creature. He invites us to contemplate how this common bird, one that is considered "the more lowly and homely of the creatures around us" (Findlay 106) embodies a poetic truth of sort— even the lowliest of creatures lives fully, even beautifully and heroically, despite dangers and setbacks. The little sparrow's life with its transgressions epitomizes for humans lessons to consider: to persist, to live ideally with pure intention and belief in the sacredness of certain objects like that unicorn in medieval and Christian lore, and most significantly, to live life close to one's natural inclinations without pretense and regrets. This insight relates to the "poetic truth" about which Williams refers.
Naturalist Mark Brazill\(^1\) identifies how this common, "boisterous little" bird in Japan delights the viewer with its "plucky cheek" while reminding us how the birds resemble humans, or vice versa, in profound ways:

Each member of every other species is, like us, the product of an unbroken line of survivors. It is so easy to overlook the commonplace, ignoring such things in our quests for something more rare and exciting, as if rarity value somehow guarantees excitement. Yet, even sparrows — symbols here [Japan] of meekness, lightness and friendliness — provide us with plenty of their own excitement, too. (par. 20)

Williams\(^2\) sees what others may fail to see as the uniqueness, sacred or divine in unlikely circumstances or objects. In his poetry, he suggests what the naturalist Brazill advises: "Whether rare or common, each species deserves our attention; each one holds some fascination in its lifestyle or adaptations to its habitat; and each has a well-earned place in its environment" (par. 19). In North America alone, at least 35 types of sparrow species exist, and globally, the *passer* thrives. Many ecological stories relate to this common bird. Rob Dunn, biologist and author, explains how people respond to the sparrow often "if not quite a sin, a kind of vulgarity from which we would rather look away [as] …. common species are, almost by definition, a bother, damaging and in their sheer numbers, ugly" ("The Story of the Most Common Bird in the World" par. 2).

In "The Sparrow," Williams tells four sparrow stories: the single bird in its daily rituals, and in its mating drama; the habits of a throng of sparrows in El Paso, "ten thousand sparrows / who had come in from / the desert / to roost," and as an effect, how they collectively terrorized humans; the singular bird stylized in a Japanese scroll painting in contrast to the final memory of a violent incident between a male and female sparrow. Through each narrative, Williams captures diversity of the species, its wide range of delightful and disturbing

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\(^1\) Mark Brazil is a naturalist and author who has written *Field Guide to the Birds of East Asia*, and *A Birdwatcher’s Guide to Japan*.

\(^2\) It is interesting to note that Williams’s grandfather, Erasmus Darwin was "an eighteenth century doctor and writer whose *The Botanic Gardens* (1791) was an elaborate two-part allegory of sylphs and gnomes" (Bremen 47).
behaviors, and more curiously, the diverse human responses to the sparrow in different cultural contexts. Through the thisness of the sparrows' biological realities, poetic truths are revealed. This little bird with its reputation for being "a very pariah amongst the feathered tribes!" (106) amuses the persona of "The Sparrow" to the point that he self-identifies with it. The bird signifies for him, the elderly poet, a certain kind of courage for himself to endure, and of hope to persist with his craft despite his own barriers. Christopher MacGowan in "Williams' Last Decade: Bridging the Impasse" identifies how Williams's poems in these latter years of publication "treat objects as a way to bring more immediacy into the dramatized engagement with the external world" (387). These objects, MacGowan notes, center on the "role of time and the battle for survival" (397) that the author experiences; through the poet's process of chronicling an object's thisness, each object/subject then becomes "transformed into … transcendent symbols" (MacGowan 398) within Williams's creative aesthetic. Through these verbal portraits, Williams captures beauty, albeit in several instances, a terrible beauty, in nature.

This collection, Journey To Love, dedicated to William Carlos Williams's wife, Flossie, was published in 1955 after he suffered debilitating effects of serious physical health issues—a heart attack and several strokes—, verbal attacks against his identity as a loyal American, a humiliating experience of having never served his appointment in 1952 as consultant to the Library of Congress due to FBI investigations into his loyalty as a citizen, and finally, the onset of a serious depression that warranted his hospitalization for eight weeks. Miriam Marty Clark in "Art and Suffering in Two Late Poems by William Carlos Williams" elaborates upon "his extended negotiation in art of the private trauma of illness" (230). She shows in two later poems that "art's emancipatory power… returns finally to the poet himself to liberate him from enslavement in a damaged body and a despairing spirit" (236). Williams, she argues, "writes through disability and against pain" (237).

In "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower" Paul Mariani also identifies Williams's beliefs about the meaning and purpose of his life as a writer—

Death was nothing so grand but merely a bastard biological fact, a final negation. What Williams was after instead was a celebration of the forces of
love and the imagination to conquer whatever the poet should have to confess.

(673)

Mariani is astute to read Williams's focus on love and the emancipatory power of the imagination in *Journey*, as he selects lines from "Asphodel" that show how the mind is what first "must be cured/short of death's/intervention" in order to secure forgiveness and to experience love (as qtd. in Mariani 673). Mariani interprets Williams's hopefulness that the "imagination itself, which might grant that forgiveness, could blossom again into a garden" (673). Poems in *Journey* serve to capture the healing power of poetry, and as Clark asserts, they "are among the fullest reckoning of art's powers against the inevitable unmaking of the body" (238).

Aside from Williams's physical ailments at this stage of his life, in November 1952, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reported existing scuttlebutt about Williams:

the House Committee on un-American Activities index on William Carlos Williams contains 50 cards, listing his association with some of the smelly outfits that have been peddling Moscow propaganda in the U.S. for 25 years.

(qtd. in Mariani 652)

Aside from these accusations against him, Williams at that time experienced the effects of a stroke with need for him to recover mobility of his fingers on his right writing hand, to regain control over his ability to speak clearly, and to see without double vision what he was typing (653). As part of his recovery, Williams realized his need to reduce his daily activities, and to rely heavily upon the assistance of his wife, Florence (Flossie). By February 1953, Williams, who had sunk into an abyss of depression about his loss of control over his life and his autonomy, was admitted to a private mental hospital, the Hillside Hospital in Floral Park, Queens (659). Mariani explains how Williams during those eight weeks at this facility felt as if "he were in Dachau or Auschwitz," that he felt like "a wounded unicorn attacked by hounds calling for his death," and he experienced "a claustrophobic sense of isolation," what he described as "a living hell" (660).
As the now elderly, permanently-disabled writer, Williams faces his own mortality, his loss of autonomy, and his own dependence on Flossie for assistance with daily activities, even with his writing. From the once prolific writer of 20 or more collections of poetry, three novels, a collection of plays, of short stories, and of essays, his autobiography, translations of other full-length works that were originally written in Spanish, and numerous publications in national and international magazines and journals, aside from his being the once very active physician in Rutherford, NJ, and the former chief of pediatrics at Passaic General Hospital (now St. Mary's), Williams suffered a traumatic reversal in his abilities and responsibilities. William Carlos Williams, M.D., claimed to have delivered at least 3000 babies, and to have served many of Paterson's working-class residents, after his heart attack and strokes, experiences ongoing assaults upon his body and soul. He now becomes the person in need of care and understanding, the person whose faith and hope need nurturance on this journey to the highest form of love—*agape*. Unselfish concern for others and universal love for strangers, nature, or God characterizes *agape*. Accompanying him on this journey is his ever-faithful wife, Flossie, who assists him with transcribing his thoughts in verse form, and advocating for him as best she can.

Williams's hospitalization in 1952 probably relates to this extreme alteration to his capacities that would precipitate his questioning of his worth, his doubts about creative capacities, and even, questions about his identity. Charles E. Scott identifies a kind of trauma of identity that I believe Williams may have experienced at this time of his life. He suffered physical losses limiting his eye-hand role in writing, and his reading and speaking capabilities presented challenges as an effect of his stroke in August. These physical disabilities combine with his public humiliation when prevented from serving in his post as the poet consulate to the Library of Congress in 1952 due to questions of his political allegiances. These incidents, I believe, cumulatively, precipitated his suffering a trauma of identity. Some traumas, Charles Scott explains as having various precipitating factors:

> [they] arise from the force of values and meanings that tell us about what happened to us, tell us that because it happened we are not who we think we are, tell us indelibly, perhaps, that we are going to die, that we are terribly
vulnerable in our lives, that we have unwittingly done an evil thing, or that we are victims. (qtd. in Golden and Bergo 117)

For the 68-year old Williams, he alludes to death in several poems in this collection, Journey To Love, but he counters any fear of the unknown, or vulnerabilities by affirming support for the ordinary person, i.e., the sparrows in existence, to identify the brutality of evil political forces, and to affirm the power of hope, forgiveness, and love while acknowledging "—not that we are not all / 'dying on our feet'" ("To a Man Dying on His Feet" 22). Oppositional forces seem to have fueled his imagination to express his beliefs even more intensely in this second volume of poetry after the questions of his allegiance to the United States. His writing during this time reflects much of his interior life and his own journey through this identity crisis toward respect for beauty in the ordinary, toward a deeper spiritual understanding of his own love, and toward his laughing at himself as one of those cavalier sparrows.

Many of these 16 poems capture his reflectiveness about debilitating effects of time, and of assaults upon the voice of a once vital doctor, a writer, who physically, mentally, and socially, experienced insufferable losses, and in his own words, a trauma of sorts. Through his shifting voices in these poems, he recoups images of nature in their raw beauty, and in details of everyday life, symbols of the ordinary that become transcendent or sacred. Even more tellingly, Williams affirms truth in his recall of images that in their "thisness," memory keeps alive. In other poems, he lists assaults against humanity, and against the environment. He chronicles, too, several social injustices. In one particular poem, he identifies the recklessness of modern civilization, how "Waste, waste! / dominates the world. / It is the bomb's work" ("Asphodel, That Greeny Flower" Book 2).

While he celebrates beauty in the ordinary, he cautions that social injustices pervade the environment:

All suppressions,
from the witchcraft trials at Salem
to the latest
book burnings
[that] are confessions
that the bomb
has entered our lives
to destroy us.
Every drill
driven into the earth
for oil enters my side also. ("Asphodel, That Greeny Flower" Book 2 65-66)

He reflects upon his vision of a world filled with beauty in its natural details, yet at risk when assaulted by various human aggressions. He journeys toward a sense of stewardship and justice through his identification with nature and wildlife, and with those who exist on the margins of society. While Williams minimally alludes to sacred texts in "The Sparrow," his choice itself of this particular bird suggests his understandings of transcendence; through his subject/object of the sparrow with its varied cultural, ecological, Biblical, literary, and mythological associations, he presents intuitive—more poetic than natural—ways of knowing about terrible beauty and the human experience. The image of the sparrow appears in Biblical stories to teach that if God will provide for even the least of His creatures, He will provide as much for humans in need. Even when the sparrow suffers, or experiences hardship, hope prevails for this creature. So too, for humans who experience sorrow, pain, and loss, it is believed that through divine providence, God cares for all creatures, great and small: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father" (The New American Bible, Matt.10.29). In yet another Bible verse, "The Lord's Eternal Love," the person is compared to a lone sparrow in the depths of despair. To the persona's lament, "I lie awake, And am like a sparrow alone on the housetop" (Psalm, 102.8), the reader is reassured by faith in divine providence.

Allusions to the sparrow exist in art forms, as well. In paintings representing a worldview of respect for the dignity and uniqueness of others, a universally-recognized Franciscan narrative with images of sparrows comes to mind. In a famous painting of St. Francis of Assisi by Giotto Di Bondone, Francis (see fig. 1), now recognized as the patron saint of the environment, preaches to the birds, the ordinary sparrows. While the imagery suggests Francis's love for creatures in the natural world, it represents, too, his care and
respect particularly for those less privileged in his society, or outcasts from that society, those who are symbolized by those pariahs, those predatory sparrows. The poetic truth of the sparrow lies in its exuberant "cheep," its survival on the edges of society, and its courage to persist. Francis is depicted as choosing to communicate with this ordinary creature, an act symbolic of his outreach to those like the lepers in need of social acceptance and physical care.

In mythology, as well, the sparrow is associated with Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, beauty, pleasure, and procreation. She also is associated with the planet Venus. With these associations to ancient Greek and Roman mythology, the sparrow is recognized as symbolizing true love and spiritual connection.

Through these divergent symbolic meanings for the sparrow, Williams projects his identity and his emotional states. Throughout "The Sparrow," in four distinct scenes, the persona reminisces on the individual and collective male mating rituals, and acknowledges "It leads as often as not / to our undoing" (11). The lone male sparrow projects an identity of bravado, swagger:

   The way he swipes his bill
   across a plank
   to clean it,
   is decisive.
   So with everything
   he does. His coppery
   eyebrows
   give him the air…... (13)
In what appears to be the fourth scene, the persona reports on what happened to one male sparrow that ultimately was decapitated and pulverized by a female sparrow. Her success came unexpectedly to her, as the persona observes, "She hung there / herself / puzzled at her success" (14). The persona laughs at the female sparrow's quizzical response to her unexpected triumph after what she has just enacted—her natural and violent response to the male sparrow's sexual overtures. The victim is described as

silent,
subdued
hanging above the city streets
until
she was through with him. (14)

This murdered sparrow though is eulogized as

an effigy of a sparrow,
a dried wafer only,
left to say
and it says it
without offense,
beautifully;
This was I,
a sparrow.
I did my best;
farewell. (15)

Echoing the lines of Hamlet to Horatio: "There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come—the readiness is all" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act V Scene 2, 140). As Hamlet justifies his beliefs to Horatio, the persona in "The Sparrow" seems to parody Hamlet's sentiment. In the poem, though, the poet seems to be laughing at his own cavalier self, and acknowledging his best efforts.
While the image of the female sparrow shows her senseless brutality, perhaps even her emasculation of that "winner" lover sparrow, that "aristocratic Unicorn," the persona leaves us with a sense that paradoxically the sparrow believes that he had lived his life as he was destined to do without regrets. The poetic truth resides in his feelings and in his courage to be true to his nature. While this poem is dedicated to the poet's father, its meaning also could relate to certain incidents in Williams's own life that occurred several years before the poem's having been written. Williams identifies with that lowly sparrow, similarly assaulted at the height of his career as a poet; he has become the shadow of that poet, of that man, who he once was. The lonely sparrow, "Practical to the end" (14) conjures an image of the now disabled and dishonored Williams whose wife, Flossie, must type for him his dictated ideas and verse (Mariani 649). Yet the poet like the heroic sparrow persists in his natural activity—pursuing his aesthetic and continuing to write despite overwhelming obstacles to his mental state, physical processes, and emotional well being.

Mariani explains that Williams asserted in 1936 that he was "No Catholic himself," yet "in the winter of '53" he moved "towards something very much like the prayer of his mother's Catholic youth" (657). While Mariani does not refer to specific prayers, in several of the poems in Journey, lines from prayers are inverted, as in "... what is not now / will never / be..."("Shadows" 37). Allusions to beauty, as understood in the Franciscan tradition, manifest themselves throughout Williams's poetry.3 Mary Beth Ingham, OSF explains how in the Franciscan tradition, "the beautiful serves as common terrain for the divine and human desires. Our love and God's love meet in the beautiful object" (28). Divine creative love, as explained by Duns Scotus, is identified in this notion of haecceitas, or thisness, a "principle of individuation," one "that makes any given thing what it is" (qtd. in Ingham 30). She further explains that haecceity is inherent in "Every existing thing [that] has its unique identity given by a loving creator" (Ingham 30). Through Williams's choice of subject and objects in many of the poems in Journey, he celebrates the beauty in the ordinary. His intense focus on natural elements reflects a deepening vitality of his interior life.

3 Paul Mariani in his keynote address at Neumann University's Honors Convocation on April 24, 2009 identified William Carlos Williams as a significant American poet who presented a Franciscan worldview that celebrates beauty in the ordinary details of everyday experience.
These poems affirm Williams's sense of who he is during the time of the McCarthy era, "the petty fury" ("The Drunk and the Sailor" 32) in American history. The poems in Journey celebrate his love in the natural world, for even as a lowly sparrow, life's beauty is revealed. In certain apocalyptic poems, "his pantheon... filled with such life-giving presences" (Mariani 671) is juxtaposed to specific challenges to peace, "The petty fury that disrupts my life" (Williams, "The Drunk and the Sailor" 32). His love for women, "Franciscan in some instances and Panlike in others" (696), as Mariani observes, fills the triadic verse form of these poems in Journey with his overall rhetorical purpose—to locate love as evidenced in forgiveness for transgressions, perseverance of hope: "What power has love but forgiveness? ("Asphodel that Greeny Flower" Book 3, 68), and transcendence. As Christopher MacGowan explains, in many of these poems from Williams's latter years, the poet's treatment of objects allows for his persistence through the "continued inclusion of such themes as the role of time and the battle for survival" (397). In the objects about which he writes, he mirrors his own sense of otherness, and his delight in the uniqueness of even the most aberrant of the Passer species.

The lone sparrow, a lone Negro woman, the lone abandoned church in the photograph, a lone man dying on his feet, as images from this collection, suggest isolation and detachment from human interaction. While each presents variations on loneliness, they earn the respect of the persona for their uniqueness. From the initial image in the collection's first poem, of a lone Negro woman clasping her newspaper-wrapped bouquet of marigolds4 "as a torch" ("A Negro Woman" 23), Williams imagines her walking through the early morning streets,5 an alternative image of Lady Liberty, "not knowing what she does" (19). Emma Lazarus's lines in her Petrarchan sonnet, "The New Colossus" are inscribed on a plaque at the Statue of Liberty: "Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, / I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" Like Lady Liberty, this lone woman portends a narrative though hers suggests one of hardship.

4 The marigold is associated with the sun—yellow and gold. It grows easily and is recognized as an ordinary flower with a pungent scent. The marigold is also called the "herb of the sun" symbolizing passion and creativity. Marigolds also symbolize cruelty, grief and jealousy.

5 In England during the 16th to 18th centuries, women who stayed out later than usual or who started their day earlier than expected, and who also sold flowers while walking the streets or loitering in certain areas were recognized as prostitutes.
This lone Negro woman represents otherness, difference, not just a woman walking the streets alone, but rather, one on her journey for some uncertain purpose, a human with a dramatic story of her own. Those orange marigolds, very short-lived with a pungent aroma that she carries as her bouquet, suggest an earthiness about this woman. This image reflects hard times through her mysterious attempts at survival, an image of one that intimates her having broken norms of social acceptability for women and propriety; the simple marigolds she holds "so early in the morning" (24) symbolize her working class. At that time, she exists in a society that discriminates. Racial injustices prevail, yet she walks freely alone at this peculiar hour. The older Williams discovers truth in such an image as the persona reminisces upon this working class woman who "walk[s] the streets" (21). Such a peak memory reveals a non-judgmental stance of this streetwalker. These flowers ambiguous in their meaning could represent her marginal role, her compromised status, perhaps even her otherness. The persona projects an identity on her, imagining how she transforms into "an ambassador/from another world"6 (14-15), his Demeter or Kora, inspiration for his imagination. This Negro woman walking freely alone in the streets in a society that at that time denied her social equality inspires the poet to persevere through his own uncertain path now as the "other," a disabled poet, a retired physician, a human now struggling to regain his autonomy, to reclaim his hold over the American idiom in his verse, and to foreground his ongoing voice and craft as a poet—"At our age the imagination / across the sorry facts/ lifts us/ to make roses / stand before thorns" ("The Ivy Crown" 66-70).

Williams uses such flowers as marigolds, ivy, briars, locusts, daffodils, and others in many of his poems to convey symbols for the human experience mixed with his complex emotions and memories. Brian Bremen in "The Language of Flowers" explains how Williams's use of flowers in his earlier poetry allows the poem "to act as a 'grammar of translation'"(83). Through applying one of Williams's lifetime friend's language theory, Bremen shows how Kenneth Burke's theory of language influences Williams in his craft to make meaning through use of symbol. Language as "a form of symbolic action" allows for "the construction of identity," as Bremen explains (64). Ideas are communicated through the reading of signs and

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6 Marigolds symbolize memory of the dead. Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) is a holiday celebrated in Mexico and throughout the world on November 1 and 2. On these days, celebrants honor friends and family who have died.
symbols that by association reveal deeper insight beyond the nature of that object into that of
the human experience. Those marigolds, for example, in "A Lone Negro Woman," by their
nature and associations draw the reader into the subtext of the poem, and allow one to see
how Williams empathizes with the streetwalker, and recognizes her circumstances. In his use
of language we associate phrases from Emma Lazarus's poem "The New Colossus" with her
image, and project a narrative about her struggles for survival, equality, and social
acceptance. Williams, too, projects his own identity as "other" through this poem, a pariah
who persists on the margins of recognition, and now as a poet thrives by a thread with the
able assistance of Flossie.

Again in "Shadows" Williams identifies how mysterious details from everyday
existence stir the imagination and awaken the poet to creative expression. The starkness of
life and death, perhaps the reality of his own immanent mortality, jolt the poet into a deeper
realization of his own interior life:

The sun will come up
    each morning
    and sink again.
So that we experience
    violently
    every day
two worlds
    one of which we have with the
    rose in bloom
    and one,
by far the greater,
    with the past,
    the world of memory,

7 While Williams is named Consultant in Poetry in 1952, he never served. He is preceded in this honor by
others: Joseph Auslander (1937-1941); Allen Tate (1943-1944); Robert Penn Warren (1944-1945);
Louise Bogan (1945-1946); Karl Shapiro (1946-1947); Robert Lowell (1947 – 948); Leonie Adams (1948-
1949); Elizabeth Bishop (1949-1950); Conrad Aiken (1950-1952).
the silly world of history,
the world
of the imagination. ("Shadows" 39)

While beauty is found in the "rose in bloom," the flower that symbolizes romantic love, memory nurtures his imagination. For Williams, memories become the material that sparks his creative impulse.

The poet, now more conscious of his own mortality, and having experienced impaired vision, relies heavily upon that interior eye:

… the little
central hole
of the eye itself
into which
we dare not stare too hard
or we are lost. ("Shadows" 39-40)

In that instant of retrospection, in the memory of trivial details, the imagination is awakened, and "the scent of the rose, / startles us anew" (40). It is in the interior life of the poet that truth is discovered: "Memory / is liver than sight" (37).

Kenneth Burke describes Williams's project as a "benignly nosological approach" (par. 10) of an objectivist poet who also served as a physician. While Burke raises questions about Williams's rhetorical purpose to identify details and their beauty, he juxtaposes this "benignly nosological" approach to that of the theologian who alternatively might "have driven to find [life] good" (par. 10). Williams's many poems "by the very accuracy of their description, testify to his delight in scattered, improvised bits of beauty…" (par. 10). Burke sees Williams's details as "portraits of personalities," and his eye for details "(like a laying on of hands), by disguised rituals that are improvised constantly, anew, inordinates us into the human nature of things" (14). Williams's eye for details, such as his image of a lone Negro woman with a bouquet of newspaper-wrapped marigolds walking the streets early in the morning reveals her working class status with the connotation of her sexuality that the marigolds hint at. Burke associates
Williams's choice of ordinary details in the everyday experience of people as significant. This focus on beauty in the ordinary presents a recognized Franciscan worldview: "Whatever the gestures of *haecceitas* (the sense of an object in its sheer thisness), with Williams, lyric utterance is essentially a flash of drama, a fragment of narrative, a bit of personal history mirrored as well in talk of a thing as in talk of a person" (Burke par. 17).

Many of these 16 poems in *Journey to Love* reflect Williams's interiority as husband, son, and poet, "This was I, / a sparrow. / I did my best; / farewell" ("The Sparrow" 15). The sacredness in the ordinary, in the thisness of those images of life that he witnessed, in the thisness of his own life is revealed. Williams identifies with that lone sparrow, both an ordinary or common bird that in the Judeo-Christian tradition symbolizes the hope for God's care, concern, and forgiveness. While Williams excludes theological references, the sparrow holds great significance showing God's care and concern for even the perceived less beautiful birds.

In "The Language of Flowers," Brian A. Bremen describes Williams's project with language in his earlier poetry—*Spring and All* (1923) and *The Descent of Winter* (1920). In his use of details, such as flowers, trees, leaves, birds, and other natural details, Williams with the eye of a medical practitioner understands the human experience through "analogous relationships that holds in tension both identity and difference" (Bremen 45). Williams's dramatic technique, he explains, is pragmatic, homeopathic and allopathic—practical in forms of healing (44). Images from nature "become both cognitive and psychological models that embody Williams's notions of an empathic imagination" (45). As a botanist, Williams gives his "language of flowers" the power of "identity" and "identification" in his poetry (45).

"The Ivy Crown" the second poem in the collection seems to be about the nature of love across a lifetime, such as in the relationship between Williams and his wife, Flossie:

But we are older,
    I to love
    and you to be loved,
    we have,
    no matter how,
    by our wills survived
to keep
the jeweled prize
always
at our finger tips. (7)

That "jeweled prize" not only relates to their love, but also, to the poems that even with his debilitating illnesses and public humiliation, he/they continue to write and share with the world. Flossie, through these latter years, served as Williams's advocate, his personal assistant, and his loving wife. Aside from this testament to his enduring love for Flossie, earlier lines in the poem, especially its first line—"The whole process is a lie" (4), could also be referring to the political process of selecting a poet laureate at this time. This line hints at the scandal of Williams's having been investigated by the House Un-American Activities committee as part of the process of serving as poet consultant at the Library of Congress. Just as the poet laureate in England wore the ivy crown as a tribute to his or her esteem and contribution to the art form, this ivy crown, denied to Williams, suggests that its recipient might break from its "confinement" anyway. The persona adds,

Just as the nature of briars
is to tear flesh,
I have proceeded
through them.
Keep
the briars out,
they say.
You cannot live
and keep free of
briars. (6)

In this poem, Williams argues for poetry that includes such "briars," details that might injure, sharpen one's awareness about our humanity, yet be censored. The "jeweled prize" about which he and his love celebrate might be those inspiring everyday images and ordinary
words, and those memories that spark the imagination, taking form in these poems. Williams's wounded identity, his identification now with "the other" is revealed repeatedly in these poems when "Daffodil time / is past" ("The Ivy Crown 4). Indeed, in "The Pink Locust" the persona explains the moral responsibility he feels as a poet:

    The poet
    cannot slight himself
    without slighting
    his poem —
    which would be
    ridiculous.
    Life offers
    No greater reward.
And so,
    like this flower,
    I persist—
    for what there may be in it.
    I am not,
    I know,
    in the galaxy of poets
    a rose
    but who, among the rest,
    will deny me
    my place. (26)

In this poem, Williams, while seeming to ask a question, "Who will deny me my place among the rest?" in fact, locates his pervasive place, as that pink locust, whose poems attempt to capture the spoken cadences of American idiom, and whose subjects celebrate beauty in the

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8 This flower if not cared for will grow exponentially. Its weed-like characteristics can be contained if proper care and concern for the flower is maintained. Its color pink, often is associated with spiritual insight. Pink also is associated with the feminine.
commonplace, and in truth. Despite Williams's having been appointed as the Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress, but his not having served due to investigations by the FBI, he persists in writing, often in the persona, "we." The blended "I" and "we" persona resolutely proclaims, "... It is, / as I say, / a flower / incredibly resilient / under attack!" (25).

Several intense poems integrate the personal pronoun, "I," and the collective "we," showing Williams's relationship to another person or allegiance to a larger community. He acknowledges—his disabilities, his limitations as a poet, his life as a husband, his life as the poet, or "the other," that poet who abides by some sort of feminine principle, the "pink locust." When the persona shifts to "we," he poses the collective voice of humanity. In "View by Color Photography on a Commercial Calendar" the persona, an "I" and a "we" celebrates beauty in images of "the church of Vice-Morcate / in the Canton Ticino" located in the area of Southern Switzerland and Northern Italy near lakes Lugano and Maggiore. Yet into this beautiful reflection, one line breaks the contemplation of a peaceful beauty by introducing the notion of anger as beauty—"the beauty of holiness / the beauty of a man's anger" (8). While the conflict is left unstated, Williams captures effects of a fallout. In this photograph on the calendar, the persona contemplates a range of beauty in nature—"The beauty of holiness" in an image of "a little stone church" that now seems abandoned. In the stillness of this image of the abandoned church that is surrounded by the splendor of nature—a mountain, a lake, and an apple tree in blossom, the persona meditates: "...Something / has come to an end here, / it has been accomplished" (9). With this revelation, the persona proclaims a resolution: "Peace / after the event / comes from their contemplation, / a great peace" (8-9). In the absence of human presence, this meditation on the "church of Vice-Morcate / in the Canton Ticino" invites reflection, as we wonder about what has been enacted in this place, and as an effect, what could have been accomplished if the lifeblood of this church, or for that matter, any church, seems to have been drained from it. A drama of displacement is suggested in this visual. Perhaps the commercialism of contemporary city life lures mountain residents and the parishioners from their mountain haven to conveniences of town squares. This church symbolizes a beautiful structure from the past now deserted that no longer fulfills its original purpose.

In yet another poem, "The Lady Speaks," the female persona's language, "my husband and I," reflects on male-female relationships. She hopes that in a furious storm she
and her husband can stick it out together, as "so solidly had our house been built" (29). Their house symbolizes the haven of their relationship. In the language of the contemporary Catholic mass, those in the congregation pray, "Lord, I am not worthy for you to enter under my roof, but say only the word and my soul shall be healed." Again the visual image of a home's structure symbolizes the interiority of a person. While this ritual's language differed during Williams's lifetime, the contemporary use of language attempts to show unity with God during the communion prayer. In the context of the poem, through their "house" that was "solidly... built," unity with one's lifetime partner is affirmed. The persona in the poem wishes this image of safety to withstand "the final fury," or as the reader might understand the wish, "till death do us part." The male poet creates in this poem a persona of the wife who embodies her fidelity, fortitude and agape, or the highest form of love.

Through select poems in this collection, such as "The Lady Speaks," Williams professes his love for his lifelong partner, Flossie. The nature of their love provides a foundation to endure life's tribulations, life's furies. Bernard Duffey identifies such poetry in Williams's later collections as epitomizing "love, light, and imagination now known as incarnate and a grace creating an island in darkness upon which life and poetry persist" (107). Duffey interprets these latter poems by Williams, the older, more uncertain male, as encapsulating "the human incarnation of abstract power" (107). His poetry in its symbolic use of language that provides visual images of common objects and subjects reflects his identity, and a firm belief that beauty abounds in ordinary details of life.

"The Sparrow" which is dedicated to his father provides a narrative about the lowly creature. Images within the poem portray the lone sparrow as a "poetic truth" with its movements responding to its needs in springtime—lusty "he carries on / unaffectedly / his amours." His "cheep" surpasses the sounds of the irritating crow. The persona breaks from this vignette about the lone sparrow's song to another story about "ten thousand sparrows" that terrorized men in El Paso. In the final two narratives, two diverse stories emerge. One story shows serenity and the sparrow in a Japanese scroll painting. In the other, the persona describes one lone male sparrow, whose "decisive" performance in lovemaking leads him to his brutal undoing by a "female of his species" who seemed even more "puzzled at her success" in having beheaded her paramour. While the persona "laughed heartily" at this natural occurrence, of what others might deem as a brutal defeat, the "effigy of a sparrow" is
left to say
and it says it
without offense,
beautifully;
This was I,
a sparrow.
I did my best;
farewell. (15)

In this poem, Williams identifies his poetic truth of his poetry— that the poems reveal more of the persona's emotional states, values and beliefs. Through the thisness of details, the poet elevates the ordinary to the unique, to the transcendent and to the sacred.

Throughout Journey to Love, Williams reveals his values that affirm beliefs about the goodness in life with its emphasis on beauty and love, despite loss, grief, and social injustices. With grace and dignity in ordinary details, Williams identifies "the beauty of holiness" (Paterson Book 2) even in broken places. In his role as a physician, witnessing the birth of over 3000 humans, Williams affirms the beauty of nascence—

They enter the new world naked,
cold, uncertain of all
save that they enter. All about them
the cold unfamiliar wind…
But now the stark dignity of
entrance…. (Spring and All ["By the Road to the Contagious Hospital"])

Williams asserts how during this struggle to be born, "they [we] grip down and begin to awaken" (Spring and All ["By the Road to the Contagious Hospital"]). Through this birthing process, he chronicles our first encounters with life as beautiful struggles just entering into this new world. In poems in Journey written during the last decade of his life, Williams
reminisces about life and death, struggles both in nature and for humans. Kenneth Burke concludes that Williams's aesthetic project has been much like that of the theologian—to "have driven to find it [life] good" (par. 10) despite its disappointments and setbacks. Such a project, one that resulted in Williams's own greater insight into his own identity, relates well to a transformative journey by the poet himself. Ingham describes how such journeys that link the material experience with spiritual insights can be initiated: "An experience of beauty begins an inward journey of self-discovery and discovery of the divine within" (Ingham 34).

Through William Carlos Williams's lifetime project of creative expression, especially of his writing poetry, he chronicles his own inward journey to love as chronicled in Journey. Poet Kenneth Rexroth recognizes, too, Williams's Franciscan perspective, as found even in his earlier poems. The subjects of his poetry reveal beauty in the other, the ordinary, the everyday. In Rexroth's poem, "A Letter to William Carlos Williams," he identifies this Franciscan worldview of this modern American poet:

Remember years ago, when
I told you you were the first
Great Franciscan poet since
The Middle Ages. (Stanza 2 lines 1-4)

As the poem progresses, Rexroth in the fifth stanza describes a futuristic scene with a mother telling her child about the Williams River that once upon a time was known as the Passaic River:

And she will say to her children,
"Isn't it beautiful? It
Is named after a man who
Walked here once when it was called
The Passaic, and was filthy
With the poisonous excrements
Of sick men and factories.
He was a great man. He knew
It was beautiful then, although
Nobody else did, back there
In the Dark Ages. And the
Beautiful river he saw
Still flows in his veins, as it
Does in ours, and flows in our eyes,
And flows in time, and makes us
Part of it, and part of him.
That, children, is what is called
A sacramental relationship.
And that is what a poet
Is, children, one who creates
Sacramental relationships
That last always. (Rexroth, "A Letter to William Carlos Williams" Stanza 5 lines 12 - 33)
Through Williams's numerous symbols, his Franciscan worldview and sacramental imagination are revealed, each that celebrates this "stark dignity" of beauty buried like "jeweled prizes" in the ordinary experiences of our daily existence.
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