

The Trivial Sublime in William Carlos Williams's Poetry

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Abstract

William Carlos Williams's poetry is known for the vividness of its imagery and the minimalism of its form. But what Williams achieves within just a few lines is nothing short of magic. The intimate bond he makes with his seemingly insignificant surrounding world gives an air of sublimity to his poems. The sense of indefinable awe that pervades Williams's poetry, however, does not stem from a grand and boundless source. Williams finds an almost transcendent aura in the most familiar, mundane, and homely moments of everyday life. This quality of finding the extraordinary in the ordinary has been called the 'trivial sublime.' Drawing on theories of the sublime, as well as those of romantic transcendentalism and the genre of haiku, this paper attempts to examine the modality of such sublimity in the poetry of Williams. Such theories will include Edmund Burke's and Immanuel Kant's notions of sublime as well as the theoretical issues proposed by Williams himself.

Keywords: William Carlos Williams, the (trivial) sublime, romantic transcendentalism, haiku, modernist poetry

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