

**A SAMPLE OF POETIC COMMENT:  
The Lonely Street, by William Carlos Williams.**

LUISA FERNANDA RODRÍGUEZ LARA\*

**THE LONELY STREET**

School is over. It is too hot  
to walk at ease. At ease  
in light frocks they walk the streets  
to while the time away.  
They have grown tall. They hold  
pink flames in their right hands.  
In white from head to foot,  
with sidelong, idle look—  
in yellow, floating stuff,  
black sash and stockings—  
touching their avid mouths  
with pink sugar on a stick—  
like a carnation each holds in her hand—  
they mount the lonely street.

The poet is an observer. In this case Williams is watching a real scene and afterwards he expresses his perception through poetic words, in such a way that the real experience has turned out into «his view» of such a simple scene.

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\* Profesora Agregada de Bachillerato y Diplomada Universitaria en la Sección de Filología de Profesorado de E.G.B.

The general tone of the composition suggests peace and quietness, There is also something of loneliness. «The Lonely Street» is almost a pictorial perception where the descriptive elements are beautifully varnished by Williams's expression.

We are introduced to the theme of passing time by a reference to a concrete expression of time: School is over.

Some period of life has been left behind. Childhood is more or less a past stage of life. Weather is hot:... It is to hot / to walk at ease.

No subject has been introduced up till now. There is only a sort of presentation, a creation of atmosphere. And now, after a pause, Williams makes his subject stand out:... At ease / in light frocks they walk the streets.

Although we have been told that it is too hot, the subjects —plural— of the poem do not care. In fact this contrast is to achieve a clear effect: it contributes to reinforce the idea of loneliness. There is something «sweet» in the way Williams speaks about «they» wearing «light frocks». This idea of gentleness will be developed through the poem. We can guess somehow a feminine connotation, «frock» implies that these «girls» —and we use the word on purpose— are not women, but they are not children any more. Something just in the middle, between childhood and maturity is the element to be remarked. They walk to let time conclude its work: they expect to become women. We know they are near because «they have grown tall». They walk slowly, the softness of their walking being suggested by the mild sounds of words like:

#### EASE (twice), FROCKS, STREETS

and by the long and melodic «to while the time away», with clear vocalic sounds, full of gentleness. Nothing seems to be out of the context.

Immediately we are shocked at the opposition between childhood and maturity: they have grown tall; they hold / pink flames in their right hands. If we carry on reading we will know that the pink flames are «pink sugar on a stick». It is a symbol of childhood, but there is also a sort of prologue of the women to be, in the way Silliams says that. «Flames» is a word with connotations that make us think of something not revealed. It is then, almost at the end of the poem, that we find the line:

Like a carnation each holds in her hand,

referred to the pink sugar on a stick. We can not doubt that it is a clear allusion to the awakening of sex in the girls who have just left school. However, it is not expressed in a rough way. On the contrary, there are romantic allusions to a symbolic colour: WHITE.

In white from head to foot,

they are like little girls. This suggestive image speaks by itself. But Williams also makes us realize that this is only the beginning of a «lonely street», not easy to walk, as he uses the verb «mount».

As we are situated in the present we see what is going on, but we are only insinuated what will be likely to happen, as it is a natural event. In fact, nothing happens. Time passes in a very slow way. Descriptive elements such as adjectives and nouns prove the quietness of the process:

lonely street, hot, light frocks, tall, pink flames, right hands, white, sidelong/idle look, yellow/floating stuff, black sash, stockings, avid mouths, pink sugar, like a carnation.

Sexual connotations are expressed by means of «pink flames» (not red yet), there is still white; «avid mouths», in this case no explanation is necessary as the mouth is a sexual symbol itself, reinforced by the adjective «avid», compared with the pleasure of a child eating his pink sugar; and the clue: «like a carnation» - we do not think it could be a white one, but a red carnation. We know that through Spanish literature a RED CARNATION appears to be a symbol of love. We can remember that beautiful sonnet by Góngora, where the woman's lips are compared to a red carnation, or the poems by Darío and his red flowers.

Now life waits for her. We can only add the softness of some other sounds such as floating, stuff or flames. Alliteration also contributes to the melody of «The Lonely Street», a time game which moves from past through present and towards future. The poem has got thus the magic of the idea of totality and everlasting vitality.





M. Arroyo

