

THE GREAT FIGURE

Among the rain
and lights
I saw the figure 5
in gold
on a red
firetruck
moving

tense
unheeded
to gong clangs
siren howls
and wheels rumbling
through the dark city.

The Red Wheel Barrow

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

DANSE RUSSE

If I when my wife is sleeping
and the baby and Kathleen
are sleeping
and the sun is a flame-white disc
in silken mists
above shining trees,—
if I in my north room
dance naked, grotesquely
before my mirror
waving my shirt round my head
and singing softly to myself:
“I am lonely, lonely.
I was born to be lonely,
I am best so!”
If I admire my arms, my face,
my shoulders, flanks, buttocks
against the yellow drawn shades,—

Who shall say I am not
the happy genius of my household?

THE TREES

The trees—being trees
thrash and scream
guffaw and curse—
wholly abandoned
damning the race of men—

Christ, the bastards
haven't even sense enough
to stay out in the rain—

Wha ha ha ha

Wheeeeeee
clacka tacka tacka
tacka tacka
wha ha ha ha ha
ha ha ha

knocking knees, buds
bursting from each pore
even the trunk's self
putting out leafheads—

Loose desire!
we naked cry to you—
“Do what you please.”

You cannot!

—ghosts
sapped of strength

wailing at the gate
heartbreak at the bridgehead
desire
dead in the heart

haw haw haw haw
—and memory broken

wheeeeeee

There were never satyrs
never maenads
never eagle-headed gods—
These were men
from whose hands sprung
love
bursting the wood—

Trees their companions

—a cold wind winterlong
in the hollows of our flesh
icy with pleasure—

no part of us untouched

THE SEA-ELEPHANT

Trundled from
the strangeness of the sea—
a kind of
heaven—

Ladies and Gentlemen!
the greatest
sea-monster ever exhibited
alive

the gigantic
sea-elephant! O wallow
of flesh where
are

there fish enough for
that
appetite stupidity
cannot lessen?

Sick
of April's smallness
the little
leaves—

Flesh has lief of you
enormous sea—
Speak!
Blouaugh! (feed

me) my
flesh is riven—
fish after fish into his maw
unswallowing

to let them glide down
gulching back
half spittle half
brine

the
troubled eyes—torn
from the sea.
(In

a practical voice) They
ought
to put it back where
it came from.

Gape.
Strange head—
told by old sailors—
rising

bearded
to the surface—and
the only
sense out of them

is that woman's
Yes
it's wonderful but they
ought to

put it
back into the sea where
it came from.

Blouaugh!

Swing—ride
walk
on wires—toss balls
stoop and

contort yourselves—
But I
am love. I am
from the sea—

Blouaugh!
there is no crime save
the too-heavy
body

the sea
held playfully—comes
to the surface
the water

boiling
about the head the cows
scattering
fish dripping from

the bounty

of ... and Spring
they say
Spring is icummen in—

THIS IS JUST TO SAY

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

TO A POOR OLD WOMAN

munching a plum on
the street a paper bag
of them in her hand

They taste good to her
They taste good
to her. They taste
good to her

You can see it by
the way she gives herself
to the one half
sucked out in her hand

Comforted
a solace of ripe plums
seeming to fill the air
They taste good to her

A SORT OF A SONG

Let the snake wait under
his weed
and the writing
be of words, slow and quick, sharp
to strike, quiet to wait,
sleepless.

—through metaphor to reconcile
the people and the stones.
Compose. (No ideas
but in things) Invent!
Saxifrage is my flower that splits
the rocks.

THE DANCE

In Brueghel's great picture, The Kermess,
the dancers go round, they go round and
around, the squeal and the blare and the
tweedle of bagpipes, a bugle and fiddles
tipping their bellies (round as the thick-
sided glasses whose wash they impound)

their hips and their bellies off balance
to turn them. Kicking and rolling about
the Fair Grounds, swinging their butts, those
shanks must be sound to bear up under such
rollicking measures, prance as they dance
in Brueghel's great picture, The Kermess.

THE CENTENARIAN

I don't think we shall
any of us live as long as
has she, we haven't the
steady mind and strong heart—

*Wush a deen a daddy O
There's whiskey in the jar!*

I wish you could have seen
her yesterday
with her red cheeks and
snow-white hair

so cheerful and contented—
she was a picture—

We sang hymns for her.

She couldn't join us but
when we had done she raised
her hands and clapped them
softly together.

Then when I brought her
her whiskey and water I said
to her as we always do—

*Wush a deen a daddy O
There's whiskey in the jar!*

She couldn't say the first
part but she managed to
repeat at the end—

There's whiskey in the jar!

Excerpt from “Paterson” Book Two 1948

Walking—

look down (from a ledge) into this grassy
den
 (somewhat removed from the traffic)
 above whose brows
a moon! where she lies sweating at his side:

 She stirs, distraught,
against him—wounded (drunk), moves
against him (a lump) desiring,
against him, bored .

flagrantly bored and sleeping, a
beer bottle still grasped spear-like
in his hand .

while the small, sleepless boys, who
have climbed the columnar rocks
overhanging the pair (where they lie
overt upon the grass, besieged—

careless in their narrow cell under
the crowd’s feet) stare down,
 from history!
at them, puzzled and in the sexless
light (of childhood) bored equally,
go charging off .

 There where
the movement throbs openly
and you can hear the Evangelist shouting!

 —moving nearer
she—lean as a goat—leans
her lean belly to the man’s backside
toying with the clips of his
suspenders .

—to which he adds his useless voice:
until there moves in his sleep
a music that is whole, unequivocal (in
his sleep, sweating in his sleep—laboring
against sleep, agasp!)
 —and does not waken.

Sees, alive (asleep)
 —the fall’s roar entering

his sleep (to be fulfilled)
 reborn
in his sleep—scattered over the mountain
severally .

—by which he woos her, severally.

And the amnesic crowd (the scattered),
called about — strains
to catch the movement of one voice .

hears,
Pleasure! Pleasure!

—feels,
half dismayed, the afternoon of complex
voices its own—
and is relieved
(relived)

A cop is directing traffic
across the main road up
a little wooded slope toward
the conveniences:

oaks, choke-cherry,
dogwoods, white and green, iron-wood :
humped roots matted into the shallow soil
—mostly gone: rock out-croppings
polished by the feet of the picnickers:
sweetbarked sassafras .

leaning from the rancid grease:
deformity—
—to be deciphered (a horn, a trumpet!)
an elucidation by multiplicity,
a corrosion, a parasitic curd, a clarion
for belief, to be good dogs :

NO DOGS ALLOWED AT LARGE IN THIS PARK

ASPHODEL, THAT GREENY FLOWER

BOOK I

Of asphodel, that greeny flower,
 like a buttercup
 upon its branching stem—
save that it's green and wooden—
 I come, my sweet,
 to sing to you.
We lived long together
 a life filled,
 if you will,
with flowers. So that
 I was cheered
 when I came first to know
that there were flowers also
 in hell.
 Today
I'm filled with the fading memory of those flowers
 that we both loved,
 even to this poor
colorless thing—
 I saw it
 when I was a child—
little prized among the living
 but the dead see,
 asking among themselves:
What do I remember
 that was shaped
 as this thing is shaped?
while our eyes fill
 with tears.
 Of love, abiding love
it will be telling
 though too weak a wash of crimson
 colors it
to make it wholly credible.

There is something
 something urgent
I have to say to you
 and you alone
 but it must wait
while I drink in
 the joy of your approach,
 perhaps for the last time.
And so
 with fear in my heart
 I drag it out
and keep on talking
 for I dare not stop.
 Listen while I talk on
against time.
 It will not be
 for long.
I have forgot
 and yet I see clearly enough
 something
central to the sky
 which ranges round it.
 An odor
springs from it!
 A sweetest odor!
 Honeysuckle! And now
there comes the buzzing of a bee!
 and a whole flood
 of sister memories!
Only give me time,
 time to recall them
 before I shall speak out.
Give me time,
 time.

