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 ha

Wheeeeee
cracka 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

wheeeeee

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 icumen 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
toing 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 :
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.