

Pictures From Brueghel and Other Poems

William Carlos Williams



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Pictures from Brueghel

and other poems by

William Carlos Williams

including

The Desert Music & Journey to Love

London

MacGibbon & Kee

1963

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THE DESERT MUSIC AND OTHER POEMS

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JOURNEY TO LOVE

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Pictures from Brueghel

“ . . . the form of a man’s rattle may be in accordance with instructions received in the dream by which he obtained his power.”

Frances Densmore

The Study of Indian Music

Pictures from Brueghel

I SELF-PORTRAIT

In a red winter hat blue
eyes smiling
just the head and shoulders

crowded on the canvas
arms folded one
big ear the right showing

the face slightly tilted
a heavy wool coat
with broad buttons

gathered at the neck reveals
a bulbous nose
but the eyes red-rimmed

from over-use he must have
driven them hard
but the delicate wrists

show him to have been a
man unused to
manual labor unshaved his

blond beard half trimmed
no time for any-
thing but his painting

II LANDSCAPE WITH THE FALL OF ICARUS

According to Brueghel
when Icarus fell
it was spring

a farmer was ploughing

summer was plunging
his field
the whole pageantry

of the year was
awake tingling
near

the edge of the sea
concerned
with itself

sweating in the sun
that melted
the wings' wax

unsignificantly
off the coast
there was

a splash quite unnoticed
this was
Icarus drowning

III THE HUNTERS IN THE SNOW

The over-all picture is winter
icy mountains
in the background the return

from the hunt it is toward evening
from the left
sturdy hunters lead in

their pack the inn-sign
hanging from a
broken hinge is a stag a crucifix

between his antlers the cold
inn yard is
deserted but for a huge bonfire

that flares wind-driven tended by
women who cluster
about it to the right beyond

the hill is a pattern of skaters
Brueghel the painter
concerned with it all has chosen

a winter-struck bush for his
foreground to
complete the picture . . .

IV THE ADORATION OF THE KINGS

From the Nativity
which I have already celebrated
the Babe in its Mother's arms

the Wise Men in their stolen
splendor
and Joseph and the soldiery

attendant
with their incredulous faces
make a scene copied we'll say

from the Italian masters
but with a difference
the mastery

of the painting
and the mind the resourceful mind
that governed the whole

the alert mind dissatisfied with
what it is asked to
and cannot do

accented the story and painted

it in the brilliant
colors of the chronicler

the downcast eyes of the Virgin
as a work of art
for profound worship

V PEASANT WEDDING

Pour the wine bridegroom
where before you the
bride is enthroned her hair

loose at her temples a head
of ripe wheat is on
the wall beside her the

guests seated at long tables
the bagpipers are ready
there is a hound under

the table the bearded Mayor
is present women in their
starched headgear are

gabbing all but the bride
hands folded in her
lap is awkwardly silent simple

dishes are being served
clabber and what not
from a trestle made of an

unhinged barn door by two
helpers one in a red
coat a spoon in his hatband

VI HAYMAKING

The living quality of
the man's mind
stands out

and its covert assertions
for art, art, art!
painting

that the Renaissance
tried to absorb
but

it remained a wheat field
over which the
wind played

men with scythes tumbling
the wheat in
rows

the gleaners already busy
it was his own—
magpies

the patient horses no one
could take that
from him

VII THE CORN HARVEST

Summer!
the painting is organized
about a young

reaper enjoying his
noonday rest
completely

relaxed
from his morning labors

sprawled

in fact sleeping
unbuttoned
on his back

the women
have brought him his lunch
perhaps

a spot of wine
they gather gossiping
under a tree

whose shade
carelessly
he does not share the

resting
center of
their workaday world

VIII THE WEDDING DANCE IN THE OPEN AIR

Disciplined by the artist
to go round
& round

in holiday gear
a riotously gay rabble of
peasants and their

ample-bottomed doxies
fills
the market square

featured by the women in
their starched
white headgear

they prance or go openly
toward the wood's
edges

round and around in
rough shoes and
farm breeches

mouths agape
Oya!
kicking up their heels

IX THE PARABLE OF THE BLIND

This horrible but superb painting
the parable of the blind
without a red

in the composition shows a group
of beggars leading
each other diagonally downward

across the canvas
from one side
to stumble finally into a bog

where the picture
and the composition ends back
of which no seeing man

is represented the unshaven
features of the des-
titute with their few

pitiful possessions a basin
to wash in a peasant
cottage is seen and a church spire

the faces are raised
as toward the light

there is no detail extraneous

to the composition one
follows the others stick in
hand triumphant to disaster

X CHILDREN'S GAMES

I

This is a schoolyard
crowded
with children

of all ages near a village
on a small stream
meandering by

where some boys
are swimming
bare-ass

or climbing a tree in leaf
everything
is motion

elder women are looking
after the small
fry

a play wedding a
christening
nearby one leans

hollering
into
an empty hogshead

II

Little girls
whirling their skirts about
until they stand out flat

tops pinwheels
to run in the wind with
or a toy in 3 tiers to spin

with a piece
of twine to make it go
blindman's-buff follow the

leader stilts
high and low tipcat jacks
bowls hanging by the knees

standing on your head
run the gauntlet
a dozen on their backs

feet together kicking
through which a boy must pass
roll the hoop or a

construction
made of bricks
some mason has abandoned

III

The desperate toys
of children
their

imagination equilibrium
and rocks
which are to be

found
everywhere
and games to drag

the other down
blindfold
to make use of

a swinging
weight
with which

at random
to bash in the
heads about

them
Brueghel saw it all
and with his grim

humor faithfully
recorded
it

Exercise

Maybe it's his wife
the car is an official car
belonging

to a petty police officer
I think
but her get-up

was far from official
for that time
of day

Song

beauty is a shell
from the sea
where she rules triumphant
till love has had its way with her

scallops and
lion's paws
sculptured to the
tune of retreating waves

undying accents
repeated till
the ear and the eye lie
down together in the same bed

The Woodthrush

fortunate man it is not too late
the woodthrush
flies into my garden

before the snow
he looks at me silent without
moving

his dappled breast reflecting
tragic winter
thoughts my love my own

The Polar Bear

his coat resembles the snow
deep snow
the male snow
which attacks and kills

silently as it falls muffling
the world
to sleep that
the interrupted quiet return

to lie down with us
its arms
about our necks
murderously a little while

The Loving Dexterity

The flower
 fallen
she saw it

 where
it lay
 a pink petal

intact
 deftly
placed it

 on
its stem
 again

The Chrysanthemum

how shall we tell
the bright petals
from the sun in the
sky concentrically

crowding the branch
save that it yields
in its modesty
to that splendor?

3 Stances

I: ELAINE

poised for the leap she
is not yet ready for
—save in her eyes

her bare toes
starting over the clipt
lawn where she may

not go emphasize summer
and the curl
of her blonde hair

the tentative smile
for the adult plans laid
to trap her

calves beginning to flex
wrists
set for the getaway

II: ERICA

the melody line is
everything

in this composition

when I first witnessed
your head
and held it

admiringly between
my fingers
I bowed

my approval
at the Scandinavian
name they'd

given you Erica after
your father's
forebears

the rest remains a
mystery
your snub nose spinning

on the bridge of it
points the way
inward

III: EMILY

your long legs
built
to carry high

the small head
your
grandfather

knows
if he knows
anything

gives
the dance as
your genius

the cleft in
your
chin's curl

permitting
may it
carry you far

Suzy

I

women your age have decided
wars and the beat
of poems your grandfather

is a poet and loves you
pay attention
to your lessons an inkling

of what beauty means to
a girl your age
may dawn soon upon you

II

life is a flower when it
opens you will
look trembling into it unsure

of what the traditional
mirror may reveal
between hope and despair while

a timorous old man

doubtfully half
turns away his foolish head

III

a bunch of violets clutched
in your idle
hand gives him a place

beside you which he cherishes
his back turned
from you casually appearing

not to look he yearns after
you protectively
hopelessly wanting nothing

I

when you shall arrive
as deep
as you will need go

to catch the blackfish
the hook
has been featly baited

by the art you have
and
you do catch them

II

with what thoroughness
you know
seize that glistening

body translated
to

that language you
will understand gut
clean
roast garnish and

III

serve to yourself who
better
eat and enjoy

however you
divide
and share

that blackfish heft
and shine
is your own

Fragment

as for him who
finds fault
may silliness

and sorrow
overtake him
when you wrote

you did not
know
the power of

your words

To a Woodpecker

December bird in the bare tree
your harsh cry sounds
reminding me

of death we celebrated by lamen-
tations crying out
in the old

days wails of anguish shrieking
wakes curses that the
gods

had been so niggardly sweet
nightingale of the
winter

woods hang out the snow as if
it were gay
curtains

Song

I'd rather read an account
of a hidden
Carolina swamp where

the white heron breeds
protected from
the hunters reached only across

half-sunken logs a place
difficult of access the females
building their nests

in the stifling heat the males
in their mating splendor
than to witness

her broad pelvis
making her awkward at the
getaway . . .

but I have forgot beauty
that is no more than a sop
when our time

is spent and infirmities
bring us to
eat out of the same bowl!

The Children

Once in a while
we'd find a patch
of yellow violets

not many
but blue big blue
ones in

the cemetery woods
we'd pick
bunches of them

there was a family
named Foltette
a big family

with lots of children's graves
so we'd take

bunches of violets
and place one
on each headstone

The Painting

Starting from black or
finishing
with it

her defeat stands
a delicate
lock

of blonde hair dictated
by the
Sorbonne

this was her last
clear
act

a portrait of a
child
to which

she was indifferent
beautifully
drawn

then she married and
moved to
another country

The Stone Crock

In my hand I hold
a postcard
addressed to me
by a lady

Stoneware crock
salt-glazed
a dandelion embossed
dark blue

She selected it
for me to
admire casually
in passing

she was a Jewess
intimate of
a man I
admired

We often met in
her studio
and talked
of him

he loved the early
art of this
country
blue stoneware

stamped on the
bulge of it
Albany reminding me
of him

Now he is dead how
gentle he
was and
persistent

He Has Beaten about the Bush Long Enough

What a team
Flossie, Mary, a chemistry prof
and I

make to confront
the
slowly hardening

brain
of an academician
The most

that can be said
for it
is

that it has the crystal-
line pattern
of

new ice on
a country
pool

Iris

a burst of iris so that
come down for
breakfast

we searched through the
rooms for
that

sweetest odor and at
first could not
find its

source then a blue as
of the sea
struck

startling us from among
those trumpeting
petals

Song

you are forever April
to me
the eternally unready

forsythia a blonde
straight-
legged girl

whom I myself
ignorant
as I was taught

to read the poems
my arms
about your neck

we clung together
peril-
ously

more than a young
girl
should know

a burst of frost
nipped
yellow flowers

in the spring
of
the year

The Dance

When the snow falls the flakes
spin upon the long axis
that concerns them most intimately
two and two to make a dance

the mind dances with itself,
taking you by the hand,
your lover follows
there are always two,

yourself and the other,
the point of your shoe setting the pace,
if you break away and run
the dance is over

Breathlessly you will take
another partner
better or worse who will keep
at your side, at your stops

whirls and glides until he too
leaves off
on his way down as if
there were another direction

gayer, more carefree
spinning face to face but always down
with each other secure
only in each other's arms

But only the dance is sure!
make it your own.
Who can tell
what is to come of it?

in the woods of your
own nature whatever
twig interposes, and bare twigs

have an actuality of their own

this flurry of the storm
that holds us,
plays with us and discards us
dancing, dancing as may be credible.

Jersey Lyric

view of winter trees
before
one tree

in the foreground
where
by fresh-fallen

snow
lie 6 woodchunks ready
for the fire

To the Ghost of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

To celebrate your brief life
as you lived it grimly
under attack as it happens
to any common soldier
black or white
surrounded by the heavy scent
of orange blossoms solitary
in your low-lying farm among the young trees

Wise and gentle-voiced
old colored women
attended you among the reeds
and polonia
with its blobs of purple
flowers your pup smelling of
skunk beside your grove-men
lovesick maids and
one friend of the same sex
who knew how to handle a boat in a swamp

Your quick trips to your
New York publisher
beating your brains out
over the composition
under the trees to the tune
of a bull got loose
gathering the fruit and
preparing new fields to be put under the plough

You lived nerves drawn
tense beside dogtooth violets
bougainvillaea swaying
rushes and yellow jasmine
that smells so sweet
young and desperate
as you were taking chances
sometimes that you should be
thrown from the saddle
and get your neck broke
as it must have happened and it did in the end

To Be Recited to Flossie on Her Birthday

Let him who may
among the continuing lines
seek out

that tortured constancy
affirms
where I persist

let me say
across cross purposes
that the flower bloomed

struggling to assert itself
simply under
the conflicting lights

you will believe me
a rose
to the end of time

Metric Figure

gotta hold your nose
with the appropriate gesture
smiling

back of
the garbage truck
as the complex

city passes
to the confession
or psychiatric couch or booth

The Intelligent Sheepman and the New Cars

I'd like to
pull
the back out

and use
one of them
to take

my "girls"
to
the fairs in

The Italian Garden

When she married years ago
her romantic ideas dominated
the builders

nightingale and hermit thrush
then the garden
fell into disuse.

Now her son has taken up her
old ideas formally
shut out

by high walls from the sheep run.
It is a scene from Comus
transported

to upper New York State. I remember
it already ruined
in

early May the trees crowded
with orioles chickadees
robins

brown-thrashers cardinals
in their scarlet

coats

vocal at dawn among pools
reft of their
lilies

and rarer plants flowers
given instead to
mallows

pampas-grass and cattails by
drought and winter
winds

where now hummingbirds touch
without touching.
Moss-covered

benches fallen apart among
sunken gardens
where

The Faerie Queene was read to
strains from
Campion

and the scent of wild strawberries
mingled with that
of eglantine

and verbena. Courtesy has revived
with visitors who
have

begun to stroll the paths
as in the quattrocento
covertly.

Maybe it will drive them to
be more civil
love

more jocosely (a good word) as
we presume they did
in that famous

garden where Boccaccio and
his friends hid
themselves

from the plague and rude manners
in the woods
of that garden

as we would similarly today
to escape the plague
of

our cars which cannot
penetrate
hers.

Poem

The rose fades
and is renewed again
by its seed, naturally
but where

save in the poem
shall it go
to suffer no diminution
of its splendor

A Formal Design

This fleur-de-lis
at a fence rail
where a unicorn is

confined it is a tapestry
deftly woven
a milleflor

design the fleur-de-lis
with its yellow
petals edges

a fruiting tree formally
enough in
this climate

a pomegranate to which
a princely
collar round his

arching neck the beast
is lightly
tethered

Bird

Bird with outstretched
wings poised
inviolate unreaching

yet reaching
your image this November
planes

to a stop
miraculously fixed in my
arresting eyes

The Gossips

Blocking the sidewalk so
we had to go round
3 carefully coiffured
and perfumed old men
fresh from the barbers
a cartoon by Daumier
reflecting the times were
discussing with a foreign
accent one cupping his
ears not to miss a
syllable the news from
Russia on a view of
the reverse surface of
the moon . . .

Exercise No. 2

The metal smokestack
of my neighbor's chimney
greet me among the new leaves

it is a small house
adjacent to my bigger one
I have come in 3 years

to know much of her
an old lady as I am an old man
we greet each other

across the hedge
my wife gives her flowers
we have never visited each other

The World Contracted to a Recognizable Image

at the small end of an illness
there was a picture
probably Japanese
which filled my eye

an idiotic picture
except it was all I recognized
the wall lived for me in that picture
I clung to it as to a fly

The Fruit

Waking
I was eating pears!
she said

I sat beside her on the bed
thinking
of Picasso

a portrait of
a sensitive young boy
gathered

into himself
Waking
I was eating pears!

she said
when separate jointly
we embraced

Short Poem

You slapped my face
oh but so gently
I smiled
at the caress

Poem

on getting a card
long delayed
from a poet whom I love
but

with whom I differ
touching
the modern poetic
technique

I was much moved
to hear
from him if
as yet he does not

concede the point
nor is he
indeed conscious of it
no matter

his style
has other outstanding
virtues
which delight me

To Flossie

who showed me
 a bunch of garden roses
she was keeping
 on ice

against an appointment
 with friends
for supper
 day after tomorrow

aren't they beautiful
 you can't
smell them
 because they're so cold

but aren't they
 in wax
paper for the
 moment beautiful

Portrait of a Woman at Her Bath

it is a satisfaction
a joy
to have one of those
in the house

when she takes a bath
she unclothes
herself she is no
Venus

I laugh at her
an Inca
shivering at the well
the sun is

glad of a fellow to
marvel at
the birds and the flowers
look in

***Some Simple Measures in the American
Idiom and the Variable Foot***

I: EXERCISE IN TIMING

Oh
the sumac died
it's
the first time
I
noticed it

II: HISTOLOGY

There is
the
microscopic
anatomy

of
the whale
this is
reassuring

III: PERPETUUM MOBILE

To all the girls
of all ages
who walk up and down on

the streets of this town
silent or gabbing
putting

their feet down
one before the other
one two

one two they
pause sometimes before
a store window and

reform the line
from here
to China everywhere

back and
forth and back and forth
and back and forth

IV: THE BLUE JAY

It crouched
just before the take-off

caught
in the cinematograph—

in motion
of the mind wings

just set to spread a
flash a

blue curse
a memory of you

my friend
shrieked at me

—serving art
as usual

V: THE EXISTENTIALIST'S WIFE

I used to follow
the seasons
in this semi-northern

climate
and the warblers
that come

in May knew
the parula from
the myrtle

when I found it
dead on
the lawn there is

no season but
the one
for me now

VI: A SALAD FOR THE SOUL

My pleasant soul
we may not be destined to
survive our guts
let's celebrate

what we eject
sometimes
with greatest fervor
I hear it

also from the ladies' room
what ho!
the source
of all delicious salads

VII: CHLOE

The calves of
the young girls legs
when they are well made

knees
lithely built
in their summer clothes

show them
predisposed toward flight
or the dance

the magenta flower
of the
moth-mullen balanced

idly
tilting her weight
from one foot

to the other
shifting
to avoid looking at me

on my way to
mail a letter
smiling to a friend

VIII: THE COCKTAIL PARTY

A young woman
on whose belly I have never
slept though others

have
met today
at a cocktail party

not drunk
but by love
ignoring the others

we looked in
each other's eyes
eyes alert to

what we were saying
eyes blinded
breathless by that alone

IX: THE STOLEN PEONIES

What I got out of women
was difficult
to assess Flossie

not you
you lived with me
many years you remember

that year
we had the magnificent
stand of peonies

how happy we were
with them
but one night

they were stolen
we shared the
loss together thinking

of nothing else for
a whole day
nothing could have

brought us closer
we had been
married ten years

***The High Bridge above the
Tagus River at Toledo***

A young man, alone, on the high bridge over the Tagus which
was too narrow to allow the sheep driven by the lean,
enormous dogs whose hind legs worked slowly on cogs
to pass easily . . .
(he didn't speak the language)

Pressed against the parapet either side by the crowding sheep,
the relentless pressure of the dogs communicated
itself to him also
above the waters in the gorge below.

They were hounds to him rather than sheep dogs because of
their size and savage appearance, dog tired from the day's
work.

The stiff jerking movement of the hind legs, the hanging
heads at the shepherd's heels, slowly followed the excited
and crowding sheep.

The whole flock, the shepherd and the dogs, were covered
with dust as if they had been all day long on the road. The
pace of the sheep, slow in the mass,
governed the man and the dogs. They were approaching the
city at nightfall, the long journey completed.

In old age they walk in the old man's dreams and still walk
in his dreams, peacefully continuing in his verse
forever.

15 Years Later

on seeing my own play
Many Loves
on the stage for the first time

I recall
many a passage
of the original con-

versations with my
patients, especially the
women, myself

the interlocutor
laying myself bare for them
all there

in the play but who will
take the trouble
to evaluate

the serious aspects of
the case? One
of the actors by

dint of learning the lines
by heart
has come to me

his face aglow openmouthed
a light in his eyes
Nothing more

The Title

—as in Gauguin's *The Loss of Virginity*—
how inessential it is to the composition:

the nude body, unattended save by a watchful
hound, forepaw against the naked breast,

there she lies on her back in an open field,
limbs quietly assembled—yet how by its

very unrelatedness it enhances the impact
and emotional dignity of the whole . . .

Mounted as an Amazon

She rides her hips as
it were a horse
such women

tickle me a pat answer
to philosophy
or high heels would

put them on their
cans if fol-
lowed up most women

are more pliant
come of
a far different race

The Snow Begins

A rain of bombs, well placed,
is no less lovely
but this comes gently over all

all crevices are covered
the stalks of
fallen flowers vanish before

this benefice all the garden's
wounds are healed
white, white, white as death

fallen which dignifies it as
no violence ever can
gently and silently in the night.

Calypsos

I

Well God is
love
so love me

God
is love so
love me God

is
love so love
me well

II

Love the sun
comes
up in

the morning
and
in

the evening
zippy zappy
it goes

III

We watched
a red rooster
with

two hens
back
of the museum

at
St. Croix
flap his

wings
zippy zappy
and crow

An Exercise

Sick as I am
confused in the head
I mean I have

endured this April
so far
visiting friends

returning home
late at night
I saw

a huge Negro
a dirty collar
about his

enormous neck
appeared to be
choking

him
I did not know
whether or not

he saw me though
he was sitting
directly

before me how
shall we
escape this modern

age
and learn
to breathe again

Three Nahuatl Poems

One by one I proclaim your songs:
I bind them on, gold crabs, as if they were anklets:
like emeralds I gather them.
Clothe yourself in them: they are your riches.
Bathe in feathers of the quetzal,
your treasury of birds' plumes, black and yellow,
the red feathers of the macaw
beat your drums about the world:
deck yourself out in them: they are your riches.

Where am I to go, whither?
The road's there, the road to Two-Gods.
Well, who checks men here,
here where all lack a body,
at the bottom of the sky?
Or, maybe, it is only on Earth
that we lose the body?
Cleaned out, rid of it completely,
His House: there remains none on this earth!
Who is it that said:
Where find them? our friends no longer exist!

Will he return will Prince Cuautli ever return?
Will Ayocuan, the one who drove an arrow into the sky?
Shall these two yet gladden you?
Events don't recur: we vanish once only.
Hence the cause of my weeping:
Prince Ayocuan, warrior chief
governed us harshly.
His pride waxed more, he grew haughty
here among men.
But his time is finished . . .

he can no longer come to bow down before Father and
Mother. . . .
This is the reason for my weeping:
He has fled to the place where all lack a body.

Sonnet in Search of an Author

Nude bodies like peeled logs
sometimes give off a sweetest
odor, man and woman

under the trees in full excess
matching the cushion of

aromatic pine-drift fallen
threaded with trailing woodbine
a sonnet might be made of it

Might be made of it! odor of excess
odor of pine needles, odor of
peeled logs, odor of no odor
other than trailing woodbine that

has no odor, odor of a nude woman
sometimes, odor of a man.

The Gift

As the wise men of old brought gifts
 guided by a star
 to the humble birthplace

of the god of love,
 the devils
 as an old print shows
retreated in confusion.

 What could a baby know
 of gold ornaments
or frankincense and myrrh,
 of priestly robes
 and devout genuflections?

But the imagination
 knows all stories
 before they are told
and knows the truth of this one

past all defection

The rich gifts
so unsuitable for a child
though devoutly preferred,
stood for all that love can bring.

The men were old
how could they know
of a mother's needs
or a child's
appetite?

But as they kneeled
the child was fed.

They saw it
and
gave praise!

A miracle
had taken place,
hard gold to love,
a mother's milk!
before
their wondering eyes.

The ass brayed
the cattle lowed.
It was their nature.

All men by their nature give praise.
It is all
they can do.

The very devils
by their flight give praise.
What is death,
beside this?

Nothing. The wise men

came with gifts
and bowed down
to worship
this perfection.

The Turtle

(For My Grandson)

Not because of his eyes,
the eyes of a bird,
but because he is beaked,
birdlike, to do an injury,
has the turtle attracted you.
He is your only pet.

When we are together
you talk of nothing else
ascribing all sorts
of murderous motives
to his least action.
You ask me
to write a poem,
should I have poems to write,
about a turtle.

The turtle lives in the mud
but is not mud-like,
you can tell it by his eyes
which are clear.

When he shall escape
his present confinement
he will stride about the world
destroying all
with his sharp beak.

Whatever opposes him
in the streets of the city
shall go down.

Cars will be overturned.
And upon his back
shall ride,

to his conquests,
my Lord,
you!

You shall be master!
In the beginning
there was a great tortoise
who supported the world.
Upon him
all ultimately
rests.

Without him
nothing will stand.
He is all wise
and can outrun the hare.
In the night
his eyes carry him
to unknown places.
He is your friend.

Sappho, Be Comforted

There is only one love
let it be a sparrow
to hold between the breasts
 greet us daily with its small cries

what does it matter?
I, we'll say, love a woman
but truth to tell
 I love myself more. Sappho loves

the music of her own
songs which men seldom
mean to her, a lovely girl
 of whom she is desperately fond:

This is myself though
my hateful mirror
shows every day my big nose.
 Men are indifferent to me, my sweet

but I would not trade
my skill in composition for
all, a second choice, you
 present for my passionate caresses.

To My Friend Ezra Pound

or he were a Jew or a
Welshman
I hope they do give you the Nobel Prize
it would serve you right
—in perpetuity
with such a name

If I were a dog
I'd sit down on a cold pavement
in the rain
to wait for a friend (and so would you)
if it so pleased me
even if it were January or Zukofsky

Your English
is not specific enough
As a writer of poems
you show yourself to be inept not to say
usurious

Tapiola

He is no more dead than Finland herself is dead under the blows of the mass-man who threatened to destroy her until she felled her forests about his head, ensnaring him. But, children, you underestimated the power in your own song, *Finlandia!* It holds you up but no more so than has he I celebrate who had heard the icy wind in his ears and defied it lovingly with a smile. The power of music, of composition, the placing of sounds together, edge against edge, Musorgski the half-mad Russian had it and Dostoevski who knew the soul. In such style whistled the winds grateful to be tamed, we say, by a man. Whee-wow! You stayed up half the night in your attic room under the eaves, composing secretly, setting it down, period after period, as the wind whistled. Lightning flashed! The roof creaked about your ears threatening to give way! But you had a composition to finish that could not wait. The storm entered your mind where all good things are secured, written down, for love's sake and to defy the devil of emptiness. The children are decked out in ribbons, bunting and with flags in their hands to celebrate your birthday! They parade to music! a joyous occasion. Sibelius has been born and continues to live in all our minds, all of us, forever. . . .

Poem

The plastic surgeon who has
concerned himself
with the repair of the mole

on my ear could not be
more pointedly
employed

let all men confess it
Gauguin or Van Gogh
were intimates

who fell out finally
and parted going
to the ends of the earth

to be apart, wild men
one of them cut
his ear off with a pair of shears

which made him none the less
a surpassing genius
this happened

yesterday forgive him
he was mad
and who among us has retained

his sanity or balance
in the course the
events have taken since those days

Heel & Toe to the End

Gagarin says, in ecstasy,
he could have
gone on forever

he floated
ate and sang
and when he emerged from that

one hundred eight minutes off
the surface of
the earth he was smiling

Then he returned
to take his place
among the rest of us

from all that division and
subtraction a measure
toe and heel

heel and toe he felt
as if he had
been dancing

The Rewaking

Sooner or later
we must come to the end
of striving

to re-establish
the image the image of
the rose

but not yet
you say extending the
time indefinitely

by
your love until a whole
spring

rekindle
the violet to the very
lady's-slipper

and so by
your love the very sun
itself is revived

from desire .

Love without shadows stirs now
beginning to awaken
as night
advances.

The descent
made up of despairs
and without accomplishment
realizes a new awakening:
which is a reversal
of despair.

For what we cannot accomplish, what
is denied to love,
what we have lost in the anticipation—
a descent follows,
endless and indestructible .

To Daphne and Virginia

The smell of the heat is boxwood
when rousing us
a movement of the air
stirs our thoughts
that had no life in them
to a life, a life in which
two women agonize:
to live and to breathe is no less.
Two young women.

The box odor
is the odor of that of which
partaking separately,
each to herself
I partake also
. . . separately.

Be patient that I address you in a poem,
there is no other
fit medium.

The mind
lives there. It is uncertain,
can trick us and leave us
agonized. But for resources
what can equal it?
There is nothing. We
should be lost
without its wings to
fly off upon.

The mind is the cause of our distresses
but of it we can build anew.
Oh something more than
it flies off to:
a woman's world,
of crossed sticks, stopping
thought. A new world
is only a new mind.
And the mind and the poem
are all apiece.
Two young women
to be snared,
odor of box,
to bind and hold them
for the mind's labors.

All women are fated similarly
facing men
and there is always
another, such as I,
who loves them,
loves all women, but
finds himself, touching them,
like other men,
often confused.

I have two sons,
the husbands of these women,
who live also
in a world of love,
apart.

Shall this odor of box in
the heat
not also touch them
fronting a world of women
from which they are
debarred
by the very scents which draw them on
against easy access?

In our family we stammer unless,
half mad,
we come to speech at last

And I am not
a young man.
My love encumbers me.
It is a love
less than
a young man's love but,
like this box odor
more penetrant, infinitely
more penetrant,
in that sense not to be resisted.

There is, in the hard
give and take
of a man's life with
a woman
a thing which is not the stress itself
but beyond
and above
that,
something that wants to rise
and shake itself
free. We are not chickadees
on a bare limb
with a worm in the mouth.
The worm is in our brains
and concerns them
and not food for our
offspring, wants to disrupt

our thought
and throw it
to the newspapers
or anywhere.

There is, in short,
a counter stress,
born of the sexual shock,
which survives it
consonant with the moon,
to keep its own mind.

There is, of course,
more.

Women
are not alone
in that. At least
while this healing odor is abroad
one can write a poem.

Staying here in the country
on an old farm
we eat our breakfasts
on a balcony under an elm.
The shrubs below us
are neglected. And
there, penned in,
or he would eat the garden,
lives a pet goose who
tilts his head
sidewise
and looks up at us,
a very quiet old fellow
who writes no poems.
Fine mornings we sit there
while birds
come and go.
A pair of robins
is building a nest .
for the second time
this season. Men
against their reason
speak of love, sometimes,
when they are old. It is
all they can do .
or watch a heavy goose
who waddles, slopping
noisily in the mud of
his pool.

The Orchestra

The precise counterpart
of a cacophony of bird calls
lifting the sun almighty
into his sphere: wood-winds
clarinet and violins
sound a prolonged A!
Ah! the sun, the sun! is about to rise

and shed his beams
as he has always done
upon us all,
drudges and those
who live at ease,
women and men,
upon the old,
upon children and the sick
who are about to die and are indeed
dead in their beds,
to whom his light
is forever lost. The cello
raises his bass note
manfully in the treble din:
Ah, ah and ah!
together, unattuned
seeking a common tone.
Love is that common tone
shall raise his fiery head
and sound his note.

The purpose of an orchestra
is to organize those sounds
and hold them
to an assembled order .
in spite of the
“wrong note.” Well, shall we
think or listen? Is there a sound addressed
not wholly to the ear?
We half close
our eyes. We do not
hear it through our eyes.
It is not
a flute note either, it is the relation
of a flute note
to a drum. I am wide
awake. The mind
is listening. The ear
is alerted. But the ear
in a half-reluctant mood
stretches

. and yawns.

And so the banked violins
in three tiers
enliven the scene,
pizzicato. For a short
memory or to
make the listener listen
the theme is repeated
stressing a variant:
it is a principle of music
to repeat the theme. Repeat
and repeat again,
as the pace mounts. The
theme is difficult .
but no more difficult
than the facts to be
resolved. Repeat
and repeat the theme
and all it develops to be
until thought is dissolved
in tears.
Our dreams
have been assaulted
by a memory that will not
sleep. The
French horns
interpose
. their voices:
I love you. My heart
is innocent. And this
the first day of the world!

Say to them:
“Man has survived hitherto because he was too ignorant
to know how to realize his wishes. Now that he can realize
them, he must either change them or perish.”

Now is the time .
in spite of the “wrong note”
I love you. My heart is

innocent.

And this the first
(and last) day of the world

The birds twitter now anew
but a design
surmounts their twittering.

It is a design of a man
that makes them twitter.
It is a design.

For Eleanor and Bill Monahan

Mother of God! Our Lady!
the heart
is an unruly Master:
Forgive us our sins
as we
forgive
those who have sinned against
us.
We submit ourselves
to Your rule
as the flowers in May
submit themselves to
Your Holy rule—against
that impossible springtime
when men
shall be the flowers
spread at your feet.

As far as spring is
from winter
so are we
from you now. We have not come
easily
to your environs
but painfully
across sands
that have scored our

feet. That which we have suffered
was for us
to suffer. Now,
in the winter of the year,
the birds who know how
to escape suffering
by flight
are gone. Man alone
is that creature who
cannot escape suffering
by flight .

I do not come to you
save that I confess
to being
half man and half
woman. I have seen the ivy
cling
to a piece of crumbled
wall so that
you cannot tell
by which either
stands: this is to say
if she to whom I cling
is loosened both
of us go down.

Mother of God
I have seen you stoop
to a merest flower
and raise it
and press it to your cheek.
I could have called out
joyfully
but you were too far off.
You are a woman and
it was
a woman's gesture.

You have no lovers now
in the bare skies

to bring you flowers,
to whisper to you
under a hedge
howbeit
you are young
and fit to be loved.
I declare it boldly
with my heart
in my teeth
and my knees knocking
together. Yet I declare
it, and by God's word
it is no lie. Make us
humble and obedient to His rule.

There are men
who as they live
fling caution to the
wind and women praise them
and love them for it.
Cruel as the claws of
a cat . . .

The moon which
they have vulgarized recently
is still
your planet
as it was Dian's before
you. What
do they think they will attain
by their ships
that death has not
already given
them? Their ships
should be directed
inward upon . . . But I
am an old man. I
have had enough.

The female principle of the world
is my appeal

in the extremity
to which I have come.
O clemens! O pia! O dolcis!
Maria!

To a Dog Injured in the Street

It is myself,
not the poor beast lying there
yelping with pain
that brings me to myself with a start—
as at the explosion
of a bomb, a bomb that has laid
all the world waste.
I can do nothing
but sing about it
and so I am assuaged
from my pain.

A drowsy numbness drowns my sense
as if of hemlock
I had drunk. I think
of the poetry
of René Char
and all he must have seen
and suffered
that has brought him
to speak only of
sedgy rivers,
of daffodils and tulips
whose roots they water,
even to the free-flowing river
that laves the rootlets
of those sweet-scented flowers
that people the
milky
way .

I remember Norma
our English setter of my childhood

her silky ears
and expressive eyes.
She had a litter
of pups one night
in our pantry and I kicked
one of them
thinking, in my alarm,
that they
were biting her breasts
to destroy her.

I remember also
a dead rabbit
lying harmlessly
on the outspread palm
of a hunter's hand.
As I stood by
watching
he took a hunting knife
and with a laugh
thrust it
up into the animal's private parts.
I almost fainted.

Why should I think of that now?
The cries of a dying dog
are to be blotted out
as best I can.

René Char
you are a poet who believes
in the power of beauty
to right all wrongs.

I believe it also.
With invention and courage
we shall surpass
the pitiful dumb beasts,
let all men believe it,
as you have taught me also
to believe it.

The Yellow Flower

What shall I say, because talk I must?
That I have found a cure
for the sick?
I have found no cure
for the sick .
but this crooked flower
which only to look upon
all men
are cured. This
is that flower
for which all men
sing secretly their hymns
of praise. This
is that sacred
flower!

Can this be so?
A flower so crooked
and obscure? It is
a mustard flower
and not a mustard flower,
a single spray
topping the deformed stem
of fleshy leaves
in this freezing weather
under glass.

An ungainly flower and
an unnatural one,
in this climate; what
can be the reason
that it has picked me out
to hold me, openmouthed,
rooted before this window
in the cold,
my will
drained from me
so that I have only eyes
for these yellow

the tortured bodies
of
the slaves themselves
and
the tortured body of my flower
which is not a mustard flower at all
but some unrecognized
and unearthly flower
for me to naturalize
and acclimate
and choose it for my own.

The Host

According to their need,
this tall Negro evangelist
(at a table separate from the
rest of his party);
these two young Irish nuns
(to be described subsequently);
and this white-haired Anglican
have come witlessly
to partake of the host
laid for them (and for me)
by the tired waitresses.

It is all
(since eat we must)
made sacred by our common need.
The evangelist's assistants
are most open in their praise
though covert
as would be seemly
in such a public
place. The nuns
are all black, a side view.
The cleric,
his head bowed to reveal
his unruly poll
dines alone.

My eyes are restless.
The evangelists eat well,
fried oysters and what not
at this railway restaurant. The Sisters
are soon satisfied. One
on leaving,
looking straight before her under steadfast brows,
reveals
blue eyes. I myself
have brown eyes
and a milder mouth.

There is nothing to eat,
seek it where you will,
but of the body of the Lord.
The blessed plants
and the sea, yield it
to the imagination
intact. And by that force
it becomes real,
bitterly
to the poor animals
who suffer and die
that we may live.

The well-fed evangels,
the narrow-lipped and bright-eyed nuns,
the tall,
white-haired Anglican,
proclaim it by their appetites
as do I also,
chomping with my worn-out teeth:
the Lord is my shepherd
I shall not want.

No matter how well they are fed,
how daintily
they put the food to their lips,
it is all
according to the imagination!
Only the imagination

paint his green and distorted saints
and live
lean.

It is what in life drives us
to praise music
and the old
or sit by a friend
in his last hours.

All that which makes the pear ripen
or the poet's line
come true!

Invention is the heart of it.

Without the quirks
and oddnesses of invention
the paralytic is confirmed
in his paralysis,
it is from a northern
and half-savage country
where the religion
is hate.

There
the citizens are imprisoned.
The rose
may not be worshipped
or the poet look to it
for benefit.

In the night a
storm of gale proportions came
up.
No one was there to envisage
a field of daisies!
There were bellowings
and roarings
from a child's book
of fairy tales,
the rumble
of a distant bombing

of a distant coming
—or of a bee!
Shame on our poets,
they have caught the prevalent fever:
impressed
by the “laboratory,”
they have forgot
the flower!
which goes beyond all
laboratories!
They have quit the job
of invention. The
imagination has fallen asleep
in a poppy-cup.

The Mental Hospital Garden

It is far to Assisi,
but not too far:
Over this garden,
brooding over this garden,
there is a kindly spirit,
brother to the poor
and who is poorer than he
who is in love
when birds are nesting
in the spring of the year?
They came
to eat from his hand
who had nothing,
and yet
from his plenty
he fed them all.
All mankind
grew to be his debtors,
a simple story.
Love is in season.

At such a time,
hyacinth time
:..

the hospital garden,
 the time
 of the coral-flowered
 and early salmon-pink
 clusters, it is
 the time also of
 abandoned birds' nests
 before
 the sparrows start
 to tear them apart

 against the advent of that bounty
 from which
 they will build anew.

All about them
 on the lawns
 the young couples
 embrace .
 as in a tale
 by Boccaccio.

They are careless
 under license of the disease
 which has restricted them
 to these grounds.

 St. Francis forgive them
 and all lovers

whoever they may be.

 They have seen
 a great light, it
 springs from their own bawdy foreheads.

 The light
 is sequestered there
 by these enclosing walls.

 They are divided
 from their fellows.

It is a bounty
 from a last year's bird's nest.

 St. Francis,
 who befriended the wild birds,
 by their aid

by men and,
those who
have nothing
and live
by the Holy light of love
that rules,
blocking despair,
over this garden.
Time passes.
The pace has slackened
But with the falling off
of the pace
the scene has altered.
The lovers raise their heads,
at that which has come over them.
It is summer now.
The broad sun
shines!
Blinded by the light
they walk bewildered,
seeking
between the leaves
for a vantage
from which to view
the advancing season.
They are incredulous
of their own cure
and half minded
to escape
into the dark again.
The scene
indeed has changed.
By St. Francis
the whole scene
has changed.
They glimpse
a surrounding sky
and the whole countryside.
Filled with terror
they seek
a familiar flower
at which to warm themselves

at which to warm themselves,
but the whole field
accosts them.

They hide their eyes
ashamed
before that bounty,
peering through their fingers
timidly.

The saint is watching,
his eyes filled with pity.

The year is still young
but not so young
as they
who face the fears
with which
they are confronted.

Reawakened
after love's first folly
they resemble children
roused from a long sleep.

Summer is here,
right enough.

The saint
has tactfully withdrawn.
One
emboldened,
parting the leaves before her,
stands in the full sunlight,
alone
shading her eyes
as her heart
beats wildly
and her mind
drinks up
the full meaning
of it
all!

your flute notes. After Pan
you shall bear away second prize.
And if he
take the goat
with the horns,
the she-goat
is yours: but if
he choose the she-goat,
the kid will fall
to your lot.
And the flesh of the kid
is dainty
before they begin milking them.

GOATHERD

Your song is sweeter,
shepherd,
than the music
of the water as it plashes
from the high face
of yonder rock!
If the Muses
choose the young ewe
you shall receive
a stall-fed lamb
as your reward,
but if
they prefer the lamb
you
shall have the ewe for
second prize.

THYRSIS

Will you not, goatherd,
in the Nymph's name
take your place on this
sloping knoll

among the tamarisks
and pipe for me
while I tend my sheep.

GOATHERD

No, shepherd,
nothing doing;
it's not for us
to be heard during the noon hush.
We dread Pan,
who for a fact
is stretched out somewhere,
dog tired from the chase;
his mood is bitter,
anger ready at his nostrils.
But, Thyrsis,
since you are good at
singing of *The Afflictions of Daphnis*,
and have most deeply
meditated the pastoral mode,
come here,
let us sit down,
under this elm
facing Priapus and the fountain fairies,
here where the shepherds come
to try themselves out
by the oak trees.
Ah! may you sing
as you sang that day
facing Chromis out of Libya,
I will let you milk, yes,
three times over,
a goat that is the mother of twins
and even when
she has sucked her kids
her milk fills
two pails. I will give besides,
new made, a two-eared bowl
of ivy-wood,

rubbed with beeswax
that smacks still
of the knife of the carver.
Round its upper edges
winds the ivy, ivy
flecked with yellow flowers
and about it
is twisted
a tendril joyful with the saffron fruit.
Within,
is limned a girl,
as fair a thing as the gods have made,
dressed in a sweeping
gown.
Her hair
is confined by a snood.
Beside her
two fair-haired youths
with alternate speech
are contending
but her heart is
untouched.
Now,
she glances at one,
smiling,
and now, lightly
she flings the other a thought,
while their eyes,
by reason of love's
long vigils, are heavy
but their labors
all in vain.
In addition
there is fashioned there
an ancient fisherman
and a rock,
a rugged rock,
on which
with might and main
the old man poises a great net
for the cast

as one who puts his whole heart into it.

One would say

that he was fishing

with the full strength of his limbs

so big do his muscles stand out

about the neck.

Gray-haired though he be,

he has the strength

of a young man.

Now, separated

from the sea-broken old man

by a narrow interval

is a vineyard,

heavy

with fire-red clusters,

and on a rude wall

sits a small boy

guarding them.

Round him

two she-foxes are skulking.

One

goes the length of the vine-rows

to eat the grapes

while the other

brings all her cunning to bear,

by what has been set down,

vowing

she will never quit the lad

until

she leaves him bare

and breakfastless.

But the boy

is plaiting a pretty

cage of locust stalks and asphodel,

fitting in the reeds

and cares less for his scrip

and the vines

than he takes delight

in his plaiting.

All about the cup

is draped the mild acanthus

a miracle of varied work

a miracle of varied work,
 a thing for you to marvel at.
 I paid
 a Caledonian ferryman
 a goat and a great white
 cream-cheese
 for the bowl.
 It is still virgin to me,
 its lip has never touched mine.
 To gain my desire,
 I would gladly
 give this cup
 if you, my friend,
 will sing for me
 that delightful song.
 I hold nothing back.
 Begin, my friend,
 for you cannot,
 you may be sure,
 take your song,
 which drives all things out of mind,
 with you to the other world.

The Desert Music

—the dance begins: to end about a form
 propped motionless—on the bridge
 between Juárez and El Paso—unrecognizable
 in the semi-dark

Wait!

The others waited while you inspected it,
 on the very walk itself .

Is it alive?

—neither a head,
 legs nor arms!

It isn't a sack of rags someone
has abandoned here . . . torpid against
the flange of the supporting girder . . . ?

an inhuman shapelessness,
knees hugged tight up into the belly

Egg-shaped!

What a place to sleep!
on the International Boundary. Where else,
interjurisdictional, not to be disturbed?

How shall we get said what must be said?

Only the poem.

Only the counted poem, to an exact measure:
to imitate, not to copy nature, not
to copy nature

NOT, prostrate, to copy nature

but a dance! to dance
two and two with him—
sequestered there asleep,
right end up!

A music
supersedes his composure, hallooing to us
across a great distance . . .

wakens the dance
who blows upon his benumbed fingers!

Only the poem
only the made poem, to get said what must
be said, not to copy nature, sticks
in our throats . . .

The law? The law gives us nothing
but a corpse, wrapped in a dirty mantle.

The law is based on murder and confinement,
long delayed,
but this, following the insensate music,
is based on the dance:

an agony of self-realization
bound into a whole
by that which surrounds us .

I cannot escape

I cannot vomit it up

Only the poem!

Only the made poem, the verb calls it
into being.

—it looks too small for a man.
A woman. Or a very shriveled old man.
Maybe dead. They probably inspect the place
and will cart it away later .

Heave it into the river.
A good thing.

Leaving California to return east, the fertile desert,
(were it to get water)
surrounded us, a music of survival, subdued, distant, half
heard; we were engulfed
by it as in the early evening, seeing the wind lift
and drive the sand, we
passed Yuma. All night long, heading for El Paso to
meet our friend,
we slept fitfully. Thinking of Paris, I waked to the tick
of the rails. The
jagged desert .

—to tell
what subsequently I saw and what heard

my nature) beside nature

—to place myself (in

—to imitate
nature (for to copy nature would be a
shameful thing)

I lay myself down:
The Old Market's a good place to begin:
Let's cut through here—

tequila's only
a nickel a slug in these side streets.
Keep out though. Oh, it's all right at
this time of day but I saw H. terribly
beaten up in one of those joints. He
asked for it. I thought he was going to
be killed. I do
my drinking on the main drag .

That's the bull ring
Oh, said Floss, after she got used to the
change of light .

What color! Isn't it
wonderful!

—paper flowers (*para los santos*)
baked red-clay utensils, daubed
with blue, silverware,
dried peppers, onions, print goods, children's
clothing . the place deserted all but
for a few Indians squatted in the
booths, unnoticing (don't you think it)
as though they slept there .

There's a second tier. Do you
want to go up?

What makes Texans so tall?
We saw a woman this morning in a mink cape
six feet if she was an inch. What a woman!

probably a Broadway figure.

—tell you what else we saw: about a million
sparrows screaming their heads off
in the trees of that small park where
the buses stop, sanctuary,
I suppose,
from the wind driving the sand in that way
about the city .

Texas rain they call it

—and those two alligators in the fountain .

There were four

I saw only two

They were looking
right at you all the time .

Penny please! Give me penny please, mister.

Don't give them anything.

. instinctively
one has already drawn one's naked
wrist away from those obscene fingers
as in the mind a vague apprehension speaks
and the music rouses .

Let's get in here.
a music! cut off as
the bar door closes behind us.

We've got
another half hour.

—returned to the street,
the pressure moves from booth to booth along
the curb. Opposite, no less insistent
the better stages are wide open. Come in

the better stores are wide open. Come in
and look around. You don't have to buy: hats,
riding boots, blankets .

Look at the way,
slung from her neck with a shawl, that young
Indian woman carries her baby!

—a stream of Spanish,
as she brushes by, intense, wide-
eyed in eager talk with her boy husband

—three half-grown girls, one of them eating a
pomegranate. Laughing.

and the serious tourist,
man and wife, middle-aged, middle-western,
their arms loaded with loot, whispering
together—still looking for bargains .

and the aniline
red and green candy at the little booth
tended by the old Indian woman.

Do you suppose anyone actually
buys—and eats the stuff?

My feet are beginning to ache me.

We still got a few minutes.
Let's try here. They had the mayor
up last month for taking \$3000 a week from
the whorehouses of the city. Not much left
for the girls. There's a show on.

Only a few tables
occupied. A conventional orchestra—this
place livens up later—playing the usual local
jing-a-jing—a boy and girl team, she
confidential with someone
off stage. Laughing: just finishing the act.

So we drink until the next turn . . . a strip tease

so we drink until the next turn—a strip tease.

Do you mean it? Wow! Look at her.

You'd have to be
pretty drunk to get any kick out of that.
She's no Mexican. Some worn-out trouper from
the States. Look at those breasts .

There is a fascination
seeing her shake
the beaded sequins from
a string about her hips

She gyrates but it's
not what you think,
one does not laugh
to watch her belly.

One is moved but not
at the dull show. The
guitarist yawns. She
cannot even sing. She

has about her painted
hardihood a screen
of pretty doves which
flutter their wings.

Her cold eyes perfunc-
torily moan but do not
smile. Yet they bill
and coo by grace of
a certain candor. She

is heavy on her feet.
That's good. She
bends forward leaning
on the table of the
balding man sitting
upright, alone, so that
everything hangs for-

everything hangs for-
ward.

What the hell
are you grinning
to yourself about? Not
at *her*?

The music!
I like her. She fits

the music .

Why don't these Indians get over this nauseating
prattle about their souls and their loves and sing
us something else for a change?

This place is rank
with it. She
at least knows she's
part of another tune,
knows her customers,
has the same
opinion of them as I
have. That gives her
one up . one up
following the lying
music .

There is another music. The bright-colored candy
of her nakedness lifts her unexpectedly
to partake of its tune .

the virgin of her mind . Andromeda of those rocks,
greens and reds those unearthly
she becomes unaccountably virtuous . in her mockery of virtue
way pretends it . though she in no

Let's get out of this.

In the street it hit

me in the face as we started to walk again. Or
 am I merely playing the poet? Do I merely invent
 it out of whole cloth? I thought .

What in the form of an old whore in
 a cheap Mexican joint in Juárez, her bare
 can wagging crazily can be
 so refreshing to me, raise to my ear
 so sweet a tune, built of such slime?

Here we are. They'll be along any minute.
 The bar is at the right of the entrance,
 a few tables opposite which you have to pass
 to get to the dining room, beyond.

A foursome, two oversize Americans, no
 longer young, got up as cowboys,
 hats and all, are drunk and carrying on
 with their gals, drunk also,

especially one inciting her man, the
 biggest, *Yip ee!* to dance in
 the narrow space, oblivious to everything
 —she is insatiable and he is trying

stumblingly to keep up with her.
 Give it the gun, pardner! *Yip ee!* We
 pushed by them to our table, seven
 of us. Seated about the room

were quiet family groups, some with
 children, eating. Rather a better
 class than you notice
 on the streets. So here we are. You

can see through into the kitchen
 where one of the cooks, his shirt sleeves
 rolled up, an apron over
 the well-pressed pants of a street

suit, black hair neatly parted

sun, black hair neatly parted,
a tall
good-looking man, is working
absorbed, before a chopping block

Old fashioned all around?

So this is William
Carlos Williams, the poet .

Floss and I had half consumed
our quartered hearts of lettuce before
we noticed the others hadn't touched theirs .
You seem quite normal. Can you tell me? Why
does one want to write a poem?

Because it's there to be written.

Oh. A matter of inspiration then?

Of necessity.

Oh. But what sets it off?

I am that he whose brains
are scattered
aimlessly

—and so,

the hour done, the quail eaten, we were on
our way back to El Paso.

Good night. Good
night and thank you . No. Thank you. We're
going to walk .

—and so, on the naked wrist, we feel again
those insistent fingers .

Penny please, mister.

Penny please. Give me penny.

Here! now go away.

—but the music, the music has reawakened
as we leave the busier parts of the street
and come again to the bridge in the semi-dark,
pay our fee and begin again to cross .
seeing the lights along the mountain back of El
Paso and pause to watch the boys calling out
to us to throw more coins to them standing
in the shallow water . so that's
where the incentive lay, with the annoyance
of those surprising fingers.

So you're a poet?
a good thing to be got rid of—half drunk,
a free dinner under your belt, even though you
get typhoid—and to have met people you
can at least talk to .

relief from that changeless, endless
inescapable and insistent music .

What else, Latins, do you yourselves
seek but relief!
with the expressionless ding dong you dish up
to us of your souls and your loves, which
we swallow. Spaniards! (though these are mostly
Indians who chase the white bastards
through the streets on their Independence Day
and try to kill them) .

What's that?

Oh, come on.

But what's THAT?

the music! the
music! as when Casals struck
and held a deep cello tone
and I am speechless

and I am speechless .

There it sat

in the projecting angle of the bridge flange
as I stood aghast and looked at it—
in the half-light: shapeless or rather returned
to its original shape, armless, legless,
headless, packed like the pit of a fruit into
that obscure corner—or
a fish to swim against the stream—or
a child in the womb prepared to imitate life,
warding its life against
a birth of awful promise. The music
guards it, a mucus, a film that surrounds it,
a benumbing ink that stains the
sea of our minds—to hold us off—shed
of a shape close as it can get to no shape,
a music! a protecting music .

I *am* a poet! I

am. I am. I am a poet, I reaffirmed, ashamed

Now the music volleys through as in
a lonely moment I hear it. Now it is all
about me. The dance! The verb detaches itself
seeking to become articulate .

And I could not help thinking
of the wonders of the brain that
hears that music and of our
skill sometimes to record it.

Journey to Love

(1955)

For My Wife

the way. I love you
or I do not live
at all.

Daffodil time
is past. This is
summer, summer!
the heart says,
and not even the full of it.
No doubts
are permitted—
though they will come
and may
before our time
overwhelm us.
We are only mortal
but being mortal
can defy our fate.
We may
by an outside chance
even win! We do not
look to see
jonquils and violets
come again
but there are,
still,
the roses!

Romance has no part in it.
The business of love is
cruelty *which*,
by our wills,
we transform
to live together.

It has its seasons,
for and against,
whatever the heart
fumbles in the dark
to assert
toward the end of May.

Just as the nature of briars
is to tear flesh

is to tear flesh,
I have proceeded
through them.
Keep
the briars out,
they say.
You cannot live
and keep free of
briars.
Children pick flowers.
Let them.
Though having them
in hand
they have no further use for them
but leave them crumpled
at the curb's edge.
At our age the imagination
across the sorry facts
lifts us
to make roses
stand before thorns.
Sure
love is cruel
and selfish
and totally obtuse—
at least, blinded by the light,
young love is.
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.
We will it so
and so it is
past all accident

**View by Color Photography
on a Commercial Calendar**

The church of Vice-Morcate
in the Canton Ticino
with its apple blossoms
is beautiful
as anything I have ever seen
in or out of
Switzerland.
The beauty of holiness
the beauty of a man's anger
reflecting his sex
or a woman's either,
mountainous,
or a little stone church
from a height
or
close to the camera
the apple tree in blossom
or the far lake
below
in the distance—
are equal
as they are unsurpassed.
Peace
after the event
comes from their contemplation,
a great peace.
The sky is cut off,
there is no horizon
just the mountainside
bordered by water
on which tiny waves
without passion
unconcerned
cover the invisible fish.
And who but we are concerned

with the beauty of apple blossoms
and a small church
on a promontory,
an ancient church—
by the look of its masonry—
abandoned
by a calm lake
in the mountains
where the sun shines
of a springtime
afternoon. Something
has come to an end here,
it has been accomplished.

The Sparrow

(To My Father)

This sparrow
who comes to sit at my window
is a poetic truth
more than a natural one.
His voice,
his movements,
his habits—
how he loves to
flutter his wings
in the dust—
all attest it;
granted, he does it
to rid himself of lice
but the relief he feels
makes him
cry out lustily—
which is a trait
more related to music
than otherwise.
Wherever he finds himself
in early spring,
on back streets

or beside palaces,
he carries on
unaffectedly
his amours.
It begins in the egg,
his sex genders it:
What is more pretentiously
useless
or about which
we more pride ourselves?
It leads as often as not
to our undoing.
The cockerel, the crow
with their challenging voices
cannot surpass
the insistence
of his cheep!
Once
at El Paso
toward evening,
I saw—and heard!—
ten thousand sparrows
who had come in from
the desert
to roost. They filled the trees
of a small park. Men fled
(with ears ringing!)
from their droppings,
leaving the premises
to the alligators
who inhabit
the fountain. His image
is familiar
as that of the aristocratic
unicorn, a pity
there are not more oats eaten
nowadays
to make living easier
for him.
At that,
his small size.

keen eyes,
serviceable beak
and general truculence
assure his survival—
to say nothing
of his innumerable
brood.
Even the Japanese
know him
and have painted him
sympathetically,
with profound insight
into his minor
characteristics.
Nothing even remotely
subtle
about his lovemaking.
He crouches
before the female,
drags his wings,
waltzing,
throws back his head
and simply—
yells! The din
is terrific.
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
of being always
a winner—and yet
I saw once,
the female of his species
clinging determinedly
to the edge of
a water pipe,
catch him

to hold him by his crown-feathers
silent, subdued,
hanging above the city streets
until she was through with him.
What was the use of that?
herself, *She* hung there
puzzled at her success.
Practical to the end, I laughed heartily.
it is the poem of his existence
that triumphed finally;
flattened to the pavement, a wisp of feathers
wings spread symmetrically
as if in flight,
the head gone, the black escutcheon of the breast
undecipherable,
an effigy of a sparrow, a dried wafer only,
left to say
and it says it without offense,
beautifully;
This was I, a sparrow.
farewell. I did my best;

The King!

Nell Gwyn,
it says in the dictionary,
actress
and mistress of Charles the Second:
what a lot
of pious rot there is
surrounding
that
simple statement.
She waked in the morning,
bathed in
the King's bountiful
water
which enveloped her
completely and,
magically,
with the grit, took away
all her sins.
It was the King's body
which was served;
the King's boards which
in the evening
she capably trod;
she fed
the King's poor
and when she died,
left them some slight moneys
under certain
conditions.

Happy the woman
whose husband makes her
the "King's whore."
All this you will find
in the dictionary
where it has been
preserved forever—
since it is beautiful
and true.

The Lady Speaks

A storm raged among the live oaks
while my husband and I
sat in the semi-dark
listening!
We watched from the windows,
the lights off,
saw the moss
whipped upright
by the wind's force.
Two candles we had lit
side by side
before us
so solidly had our house been built
kept their tall flames
unmoved.
May it be so
when a storm sends the moss
whipping
back and forth
upright
above my head
like flames in the final
fury.

Tribute to the Painters

Satyrs dance!
all the deformities take wing
centaurs
leading to the rout of the vocables
in the writings
of Gertrude
Stein—but
you cannot be
an artist
by mere ineptitude .
The dream
is in pursuit!

is in pursuit:

The neat figures of
Paul Klee
fill the canvas
but that
is not the work
of a child .
The cure began, perhaps,
with the abstractions
of Arabic art
Dürer
with his *Melancholy*
was ware of it—
the shattered masonry. Leonardo
saw it,
the obsession,
and ridiculed it
in *La Gioconda*.
Bosch's
congeries of tortured souls and devils
who prey on them
fish
swallowing
their own entrails
Freud
Picasso
Juan Gris.
The letter from a friend
saying:
For the last
three nights
I have slept like a baby
without
liquor or dope of any sort!
We know
that a stasis
from a chrysalis
has stretched its wings—
like a bull
or the Minotaur
or Beethoven

of DEEMOVEN
in the scherzo
of his 9th Symphony
stomped
his heavy feet .
I saw love
mounted naked on a horse
on a swan
the back of a fish
the bloodthirsty conger eel
and laughed
recalling the Jew
in the pit
among his fellows
when the indifferent chap
with the machine gun
was spraying the heap.
He
had not yet been hit
but smiled
comforting his companions.
Dreams possess me
and the dance
of my thoughts
involving animals
the blameless beasts
and there came to me
just now
the knowledge of
the tyranny of the image
and how
men
in their designs
have learned
to shatter it
whatever it may be,
that the trouble
in their minds
shall be quieted,
put to bed
again

To a Man Dying on His Feet

—not that we are not all
 “dying on our feet”
 but the look you give me
and to which I bow,
 is more immediate.
 It is keenly alert,
suspicious of me—
 as of all that are living—and
 apologetic.
Your jaw
 wears the stubble
 of a haggard beard,
a dirty beard,
 which resembles
 the snow through which
your long legs
 are conducting you.
 Whither? Where are you going?
This would be a fine day
 to go on a journey.
 Say to Florida
where at this season
 all go
 nowadays.
There grows the hibiscus,
 the star jasmine
 and more than I can tell
but the odors
 from what I know
 must be alluring.
Come with me there!
 you look like a good guy,
 come this evening.
The plane leaves at 6:30
 or have you another
 appointment?

resembling a pink sweet-pea,
you cannot help
but admire it
until its habits
become known.
Are we not most of us
like that? It would be
too much
if the public
prided among the minutiae
of our private affairs.
Not
that we have anything to hide
but could *they*
stand it? Of course
the world would be gratified
to find out
what fools we have made of ourselves.
The question is,
would they
be generous with us—
as we have been
with others? It is,
as I say,
a flower
incredibly resilient
under attack!
Neglect it
and it will grow into a tree.
I wish I could *so* think of myself
and of what
is to become of me.
The poet himself,
what does he think of himself
facing his world?
It will not do to say,
as he is inclined to say:
Not much. The poem
would be in *that* betrayed.
He might as well answer—
“a rose is a rose

and that is that.”

for
a woman does not want to seem repulsive,
unless .
to gain for herself .
she be hungry,
hungry!
as would be a man
and all hunger is repulsive
and puts on
an ugly face.
Their heads are not made as a man's,
an ornament
in itself. They have
other charms—
needless
to enumerate. Under
their ornate coiffures
lurks a specter,
coiling snakes
doubling for tresses .

A woman's brains
which can be keen
are condemned,
like a poet's,
to what deceptions she can muster
to lead men
to their ruin.
But look more deeply
into her maneuvers,
and puzzle as we will about them
they may mean
anything .

Address:

To a look in my son's eyes—
I hope he did not see
that I was looking—
that I have seen

often enough
in the mirror,
a male look
approaching despair—
there is a female look
to match it
no need to speak of that:
Perhaps
it was only a dreamy look
not an unhappy one
but absent
from the world—
such as plagued the eyes
of Bobby Burns
in his youth and threw him
into the arms
of women—
in which he could
forget himself,
not defiantly,
but with full acceptance
of his lot
as a man . . .
His Jean forgave him
and took him to her heart
time after time
when he would be
too drunk
with Scotch
or the love of other women
to notice
what he was doing.
What was he intent upon
but to drown out
that look? What
does it portend?
A war
will not erase it
nor a bank account,
estlin,
amounting to 9 figures.

sforzando

from that stubble beard
would have distinguished
an operatic tenor.
But me—
the shock of it—
my heart leaped in my chest
so that I saw red
wanted
to strangle the guy .
The fury of love
is no less.

A Smiling Dane

The Danish native
before the Christian era
whose body
features intact
with a rope
also intact
round the neck
found recently
in a peat bog
is dead.
Are you surprised?
You should be.
The diggers
who discovered him
expected more.
Frightened
they quit the place
thinking
his ghost might walk.
The cast of his features
shows him
to be
a man of intelligence.
It did him no good.

What his eyes saw
cannot be more
than the male
and female
of it—
if as much.
His stomach
its contents examined
shows him
before he died
to have had
a meal
consisting of local grains
swallowed whole
which he probably enjoyed
though he did not
much as we do
chew them.
And what if
the image of his frightened executioners
is not recorded?
Do we not know
their features
as if
it had occurred
today?
We can still see in his smile
their grimaces.

Shadows

I

Shadows cast by the street light
under the stars,
the head is tilted back,
the long shadow of the legs
presumes a world
taken for granted
on which the cricket trills.
The hollows of the eyes

the hollows of his eyes
are unpeopled.
Right and left
climb the ladders of night
as dawn races
to put out the stars.
That
is the poetic figure
but we know
better: what is not now
will never
be. Sleep secure,
the little dog in the snapshot
keeps his shrewd eyes
pared. Memory
is liver than sight.
A man
looking out,
seeing the shadows—
it is himself
that can be painlessly amputated
by a mere shifting
of the stars.
A comfort so easily not to be
and to be at once one
with every man.
The night blossoms
with a thousand shadows
so long
as there are stars,
street lights
or a moon and
who shall say
by their shadows
which is different
from the other
fat or lean.

Ripped from the concept of our lives
and from all concept
somehow, and plainly,
the sun will come up
each morning
and sink again.
So that we experience
violently
every day
two worlds
one of which we share with the
rose in bloom
and one,
by far the greater,
with the past,
the world of memory,
the silly world of history,
the world
of the imagination.
Which leaves only the beasts and trees,
crystals
with their refractive
surfaces
and rotting things
to stir our wonder.
Save for the little
central hole
of the eye itself
into which
we dare not stare too hard
or we are lost.
The instant
trivial as it is
is all we have
unless—unless
things the imagination feeds upon,
the scent of the rose,
startle us anew.

WHILE I TALK 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.

When I was a boy

I kept a book

to which, from time

to time,

I added pressed flowers

until, after a time,

I had a good collection.

The asphodel,

forebodingly,

among them.

I bring you,

reawakened,

a memory of those flowers

a memory of these flowers.

They were sweet
when I pressed them
and retained
something of their sweetness
a long time.

It is a curious odor,
a moral odor,
that brings me
near to you.

The color
was the first to go.
There had come to me
a challenge,
your dear self,

mortal as I was,
the lily's boat
to the hummingbird!

Endless wealth,
I thought,
held out its arms to me.

A thousand topics
in an apple blossom.
The generous earth itself
gave us lief.

The whole world
became my garden!

But the sea
which no one tends
is also a garden
when the sun strikes it
and the waves
are wakened.

I have seen it
and so have you
when it puts all flowers
to shame.

Too, there are the starfish
stiffened by the sun
and other sea wrack
and weeds. We knew that
along with the rest of it

along with the rest of it
for we were born by the sea,
knew its rose hedges
to the very water's brink.

There the pink mallow grows
and in their season
strawberries

and there, later,
we went to gather
the wild plum.

I cannot say
that I have gone to hell
for your love

but often
found myself there
in your pursuit.

I do not like it
and wanted to be
in heaven. Hear me out.

Do not turn away.

I have learned much in my life
from books
and out of them
about love.

Death
is not the end of it.

There is a hierarchy
which can be attained,
I think,
in its service.

Its guerdon
is a fairy flower;
a cat of twenty lives.

If no one came to try it
the world
would be the loser.

It has been
for you and me
as one who watches a storm
come in over the water.

We have stood
from year to year
before the spectacle of our lives
with joined hands.
The storm unfolds.
Lightning
plays about the edges of the clouds.
The sky to the north
is placid,
blue in the afterglow
as the storm piles up.
It is a flower
that will soon reach
the apex of its bloom.
We danced,
in our minds,
and read a book together.
You remember?
It was a serious book.
And so books
entered our lives.
The sea! The sea!
Always
when I think of the sea
there comes to mind
the *Iliad*
and Helen's public fault
that bred it.
Were it not for that
there would have been
no poem but the world
if we had remembered,
those crimson petals
spilled among the stones,
would have called it simply
murder.
The sexual orchid that bloomed then
sending so many
disinterested
men to their graves
has left its memory

to a race of fools
or heroes
if silence is a virtue.
The sea alone
with its multiplicity
holds any hope.
The storm
has proven abortive
but we remain
after the thoughts it roused
to
re-cement our lives.
It is the mind
the mind
that must be cured
short of death's
intervention,
and the will becomes again
a garden. The poem
is complex and the place made
in our lives
for the poem.
Silence can be complex too,
but you do not get far
with silence.
Begin again.
It is like Homer's
catalogue of ships:
it fills up the time.
I speak in figures,
well enough, the dresses
you wear are figures also,
we could not meet
otherwise. When I speak
of flowers
it is to recall
that at one time
we were young.
All women are not Helen,
I know that,
but have Helen in their hearts.

My sweet,
you have it also, therefore
I love you
and could not love you otherwise.
Imagine you saw
a field made up of women
all silver-white.
What should you do
but love them?
The storm bursts
or fades! it is not
the end of the world.
Love is something else,
or so I thought it,
a garden which expands,
though I knew you as a woman
and never thought otherwise,
until the whole sea
has been taken up
and all its gardens.
It was the love of love,
the love that swallows up all else,
a grateful love,
a love of nature, of people,
animals,
a love engendering
gentleness and goodness
that moved me
and *that* I saw in you.
I should have known
though I did not,
that the lily-of-the-valley
is a flower makes many ill
who whiff it.
We had our children,
rivals in the general onslaught.
I put them aside
though I cared for them
as well as any man
could care for his children
according to my lights.

You understand

I had to meet you
after the event
and have still to meet you.

Love
to which you too shall bow
along with me—
a flower
a weakest flower

shall be our trust
and not because
we are too feeble

to do otherwise
but because
at the height of my power

I risked what I had to do,
therefore to prove
that we love each other

while my very bones sweated
that I could not cry to you
in the act.

Of asphodel, that greeny flower,
I come, my sweet,
to sing to you!

My heart rouses
thinking to bring you news
of something

that concerns you
and concerns many men. Look at
what passes for the new.

You will not find it there but in
despised poems.
It is difficult

to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack

of what is found there.
Hear me out
for I too am concerned

and every man
who wants to die at peace in his bed

besides.⁴

BOOK II

Approaching death,
as we think, the death of love,
no distinction
any more suffices to differentiate
the particulars
of place and condition
with which we have been long
familiar.
All appears
as if seen
wavering through water.
We start awake with a cry
of recognition
but soon the outlines
become again vague.
If we are to understand our time,
we must find the key to it,
not in the eighteenth
and nineteenth centuries,
but in earlier, wilder
and darker epochs . . .
So to know, what I have to know
about my own death,
if it be real,
I have to take it apart.
What does your generation think
of Cézanne?
I asked a young artist.
The abstractions of Hindu painting,
he replied,
is all at the moment which interests me.
He liked my poem
about the parts
of a broken bottle,
lying green in the cinders
of a hospital courtyard.
There was also, to his mind,
the one on gav wallnæner

which he had heard about
but not read.

I was grateful to him
for his interest.

Do you remember
how at Interlaken
we were waiting, four days,
to see the Jungfrau
but rain had fallen steadily.

Then
just before train time
on a tip from one of the waitresses
we rushed

to the Gipfel Platz
and there it was!
in the distance
covered with new-fallen snow.

When I was at Granada,
I remember,
in the overpowering heat
climbing a treeless hill
overlooking the Alhambra.

At my appearance at the summit
two small boys
who had been playing
there
made themselves scarce.

Starting to come down
by a new path
I at once found myself surrounded
by gypsy women

who came up to me,
I could speak little Spanish,
and directed me,
guided by a young girl,
on my way.

These were the pinnacles.
The deaths I suffered
began in the heads
about me, my eyes
were too keen

not to see through
the world's niggardliness.
I accepted it
as my fate.
The wealthy
I defied
or not so much they,
for they have their uses,
as they who take their cues from them.
I lived
to breathe above the stench
not knowing how I in my own person
would be overcome
finally. I was lost
failing the poem.
But if I have come from the sea
it is not to be
wholly
fascinated by the glint of waves.
The free interchange
of light over their surface
which I have compared
to a garden
should not deceive us
or prove
too difficult a figure.
The poem
if it reflects the sea
reflects only
its dance
upon that profound depth
where
it seems to triumph.
The bomb puts an end
to all that.
I am reminded
that the bomb
also
is a flower
dedicated
howbeit

to our destruction.

The mere picture
of the exploding bomb
fascinates us
so that we cannot wait
to prostrate ourselves
before it. We do not believe
that love
can so wreck our lives.

The end
will come
in its time.

Meanwhile
we are sick to death
of the bomb
and its childlike
insistence.

Death is no answer,
no answer—
to a blind old man
whose bones
have the movement
of the sea,
a sexless old man
for whom it is a sea
of which his verses
are made up.

There is no power
so great as love
which is a sea,
which is a garden—
as enduring
as the verses
of that blind old man
destined
to live forever.

Few men believe that
nor in the games of children.
They believe rather
in the bomb
and shall die by

the bomb.
Compare Darwin's voyage of the *Beagle*,
a voyage of discovery if there ever was one,
to the death
incommunicado
in the electric chair
of the Rosenbergs.
It is the mark of the times
that though we condemn
what they stood for
we admire their fortitude.
But Darwin
opened our eyes
to the gardens of the world,
as they closed them.
Or take that other voyage
which promised so much
but due to the world's avarice
breeding hatred
through fear,
ended so disastrously;
a voyage
with which I myself am so deeply concerned,
that of the *Pinta*,
the *Niña*
and the *Santa María*.
How the world opened its eyes!
It was a flower
upon which April
had descended from the skies!
How bitter
a disappointment!
In all,
this led mainly
to the deaths I have suffered.
For there had been kindled
more minds
than that of the discoverers
and set dancing
to a measure,
a new measure!

Soon lost.
The measure itself
has been lost
and we suffer for it.
We come to our deaths
in silence.
The bomb speaks.
All suppressions,
from the witchcraft trials at Salem
to the latest
book burnings
are confessions
that the bomb
has entered our lives
to destroy us.
Every drill
driven into the earth
for oil enters my side
also.
Waste, waste!
dominates the world.
It is the bomb's work.
What else was the fire
at the Jockey Club in Buenos Aires
(*malos aires*, we should say)
when with Perón's connivance
the hoodlums destroyed,
along with the books
the priceless Goyas
that hung there?
You know how we treasured
the few paintings
we still cling to
especially the one
by the dead
Charlie Demuth.
With your smiles
and other trivia of the sort
my secret life
has been made up,
some babv's life

comes in.
So may it be
with the spring of love's year
also
if we can but find
the secret word
to transform it.
It is ridiculous
what airs we put on
to seem profound
while our hearts
gasp dying
for want of love.
Having your love
I was rich.
Thinking to have lost it
I am tortured
and cannot rest.
I do not come to you
abjectly
with confessions of my faults,
I have confessed,
all of them.
In the name of love
I come proudly
as to an equal
to be forgiven.
Let me, for I know
you take it hard,
with good reason,
give the steps
if it may be
by which you shall mount,
again to think well
of me.
The statue
of Colleoni's horse
with the thickset little man
on top
in armor
presenting a naked sword
comes persistently

comes persistently
to my mind.
And with him
the horse rampant
roused by the mare in
the Venus and Adonis.
These are pictures
of crude force.
Once at night
waiting at a station
with a friend
a fast freight
thundered through
kicking up the dust.
My friend,
a distinguished artist,
turned with me
to protect his eyes:
That's what we'd all like to be, Bill,
he said. I smiled
knowing how deeply
he meant it. I saw another man
yesterday
in the subway.
I was on my way uptown
to a meeting.
He kept looking at me
and I at him:
He had a worn knobbed stick
between his knees
suitable
to keep off dogs,
a man of perhaps forty.
He wore a beard
parted in the middle,
a black beard,
and a hat,
a brown felt hat
lighter than
his skin. His eyes,
which were intelligent,
were wide open

but evasive, mild.

I was frankly curious
and looked at him
closely. He was slight of build
but robust enough
had on
a double-breasted black coat
and a vest
which showed at the neck
the edge of a heavy and very dirty
undershirt.
His trousers
were striped
and a lively
reddish brown. His shoes
which were good
if somewhat worn
had been recently polished.
His brown socks
were about his ankles.
In his breast pocket
he carried
a gold fountain pen
and a mechanical
pencil. For some reason
which I could not fathom
I was unable
to keep my eyes off him.
A worn leather zipper case
bulging with its contents
lay between his ankles
on the floor.
Then I remembered:
When my father was a young man—
it came to me
from an old photograph—
he wore such a beard.
This man
reminds me of my father.
I am looking
into my father's

face! Some surface
of some advertising sign
is acting
as a reflector. It is
my own.
But at once
the car grinds to a halt.
Speak to him,
I cried. He
will know the secret.
He was gone
and I did nothing about it.
With him
went all men
and all women too
were in his loins.
Fanciful or not
it seemed to me
a flower
whose savor had been lost.
It was a flower
some exotic orchid
that Herman Melville had admired
in the
Hawaiian jungle.
Or the lilacs
of men who left their marks,
by torchlight,
rituals of the hunt,
on the walls
of prehistoric
caves in the Pyrenees—
what draftsmen they were—
bison and deer.
Their women
had big buttocks.
But what
draftsmen they were!
By my father's beard,
what draftsmen.
And so, by chance,

how should it be otherwise?
from what came to me
in a subway train
I build a picture
of all men.
It is winter
and there
waiting for you to care for them
are your plants.
Poor things! you say
as you compassionately
pour at their roots
the reviving water.
Lean-cheeked
I say to myself
kindness moves her
shall she not be kind
also to me? At this
courage possessed me finally
to go on.
Sweet, creep into my arms!
I spoke hurriedly
in the spell
of some wry impulse
when I boasted
that there was
any pride left in me.
Do not believe it.
Unless
in a special way,
a way I shrink to speak of
I am proud. After that manner
I call on you
as I do on myself the same
to forgive all women
who have offended you.
It is the artist's failing
to seek and to yield
such forgiveness.
It will cure us both.
Let us

or all works of the imagination,
interchangeable?
Which proves
that love
rules them all, for then
you will be my queen,
my queen of love
forever more.

CODA

Inseparable from the fire
its light
takes precedence over it.
Then follows
what we have dreaded—
but it can never
overcome what has gone before.
In the huge gap
between the flash
and the thunderstroke
spring has come in
or a deep snow fallen.
Call it old age.
In that stretch
we have lived to see
a colt kick up his heels.
Do not hasten
laugh and play
in an eternity
the heat will not overtake the light.
That's sure.
That gelds the bomb,
permitting
that the mind contain it.
This is that interval,
that sweetest interval,
when love will blossom,
come early, come late
and give itself to the lover.
Only the imagination is real!
I have declared it

time without end.
If a man die
it is because death
has first
possessed his imagination.
But if he refuse death—
no greater evil
can befall him
unless it be the death of love
meet him
in full career.
Then indeed
for him
the light has gone out.
But love and the imagination
are of a piece,
swift as the light
to avoid destruction.
So we come to watch time's flight
as we might watch
summer lightning
or fireflies, secure,
by grace of the imagination,
safe in its care.
For if
the light itself
has escaped,
the whole edifice opposed to it
goes down.
Light, the imagination
and love,
in our age,
by natural law,
which we worship,
maintain
all of a piece
their dominance.
So let us love
confident as is the light
in its struggle with darkness
that there is as much to say

and more
for the one side
and that not the darker
which John Donne
for instance
among many men
presents to us.
In the controversy
touching the younger
and the older Tolstoi,
Villon, St. Anthony, Kung,
Rimbaud, Buddha
and Abraham Lincoln
the palm goes
always to the light;
Who most shall advance the light—
call it what you may!
The light
for all time shall outspeed
the thunder crack.
Medieval pageantry
is human and we enjoy
the rumor of it
as in our world we enjoy
the reading of Chaucer,
likewise
a priest's raiment
(or that of a savage chieftain).
It is all
a celebration of the light.
All the pomp and ceremony
of weddings,
"Sweet Thames, run softly
till I end
my song,"—
are of an equal sort.
For our wedding, too,
the light was wakened
and shone. The light!
the light stood before us
waiting!

I thought the world
stood still.
At the altar
so intent was I
before my vows,
so moved by your presence
a girl so pale
and ready to faint
that I pitied
and wanted to protect you.
As I think of it now,
after a lifetime,
it is as if
a sweet-scented flower
were poised
and for me did open.
Asphodel
has no odor
save to the imagination
but it too
celebrates the light.
It is late
but an odor
as from our wedding
has revived for me
and begun again to penetrate
into all crevices
of my world.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

A cover has been created for this ebook. The picture which Williams used as the inspiration for the first poem is the one appearing on the cover created for this ebook. The poem is titled 'Self Portrait'. The intriguing thing is that not only is the person in the painting not Brueghel, it is widely believed to have not been painted by Brueghel.

[The end of *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* by William Carlos Williams]