

William Carlos Williams

- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

"Libertad! Igualdad! Fraternidad!"

You sullen pig of a man
you force me into the mud
with your stinking ash-cart!

Brother!
--if we were rich
we'd stick our chests out
and hold our heads high!

It is dreams that have destroyed us.

There is no more pride
in horses or in rein holding.
We sit hunched together brooding
our fate.

Well--
all things turn bitter in the end
whether you choose the right or
the left way
and--
dreams are not a bad thing.

William Carlos Williams

A Celebration

A middle-northern March, now as always--
gusts from the South broken against cold winds--
but from under, as if a slow hand lifted a tide,
it moves--not into April--into a second March,

the old skin of wind-clear scales dropping
upon the mold: this is the shadow projects the tree
upward causing the sun to shine in his sphere.

So we will put on our pink felt hat--new last year!
--newer this by virtue of brown eyes turning back
the seasons--and let us walk to the orchid-house,
see the flowers will take the prize tomorrow
at the Palace.

Stop here, these are our oleanders.

When they are in bloom--

You would waste words

It is clearer to me than if the pink
were on the branch. It would be a searching in
a colored cloud to reveal that which now, huskless,
shows the very reason for their being.

And these the orange-trees, in blossom--no need
to tell with this weight of perfume in the air.
If it were not so dark in this shed one could better
see the white.

It is that very perfume
has drawn the darkness down among the leaves.

Do I speak clearly enough?

It is this darkness reveals that which darkness alone
loosens and sets spinning on waxen wings--
not the touch of a finger-tip, not the motion
of a sigh. A too heavy sweetness proves
its own caretaker.

And here are the orchids!

Never having seen

such gaiety I will read these flowers for you:

This is an odd January, died--in Villon's time.

Snow, this is and this the stain of a violet

grew in that place the spring that foresaw its own doom.

And this, a certain July from Iceland:
a young woman of that place
breathed it toward the South. It took root there.
The color ran true but the plant is small.

This falling spray of snow-flakes is
a handful of dead Februaries
prayed into flower by Rafael Arevalo Martinez
of Guatemala.

Here's that old friend who
went by my side so many years: this full, fragile

head of veined lavender. Oh that April
that we first went with our stiff lusts
leaving the city behind, out to the green hill--
May, they said she was. A hand for all of us:
this branch of blue butterflies tied to this stem.

June is a yellow cup I'll not name; August
the over-heavy one. And here are--
russet and shiny, all but March. And March?
Ah, March--
Flowers are a tiresome pastime.
One has a wish to shake them from their pots
root and stem, for the sun to gnaw.

Walk out again into the cold and saunter home
to the fire. This day has blossomed long enough.
I have wiped out the red night and lit a blaze
instead which will at least warm our hands
and stir up the talk.
I think we have kept fair time.
Time is a green orchard.

William Carlos Williams

A Goodnight

Go to sleep--though of course you will not--
to tideless waves thundering slantwise against
strong embankments, rattle and swish of spray
dashed thirty feet high, caught by the lake wind,
scattered and strewn broadcast in over the steady
car rails! Sleep, sleep! Gulls' cries in a wind-gust
broken by the wind; calculating wings set above
the field of waves breaking.

Go to sleep to the lunge between foam-crests,
refuse churned in the recoil. Food! Food!
Offal! Offal! that holds them in the air, wave-white
for the one purpose, feather upon feather, the wild
chill in their eyes, the hoarseness in their voices--
sleep, sleep . . .

Gentlefooted crowds are treading out your lullaby.
Their arms nudge, they brush shoulders,
hitch this way then that, mass and surge at the crossings--
lullaby, lullaby! The wild-fowl police whistles,
the enraged roar of the traffic, machine shrieks:
it is all to put you to sleep,
to soften your limbs in relaxed postures,
and that your head slip sidewise, and your hair loosen
and fall over your eyes and over your mouth,
brushing your lips wistfully that you may dream,
sleep and dream--

A black fungus springs out about the lonely church doors--
sleep, sleep. The Night, coming down upon
the wet boulevard, would start you awake with his
message, to have in at your window. Pay no
heed to him. He storms at your sill with
cooings, with gesticulations, curses!
You will not let him in. He would keep you from sleeping.
He would have you sit under your desk lamp
brooding, pondering; he would have you
slide out the drawer, take up the ornamented dagger
and handle it. It is late, it is nineteen-nineteen--
go to sleep, his cries are a lullaby;
his jabbering is a sleep-well-my-baby; he is
a crackbrained messenger.

The maid waking you in the morning
when you are up and dressing,
the rustle of your clothes as you raise them--
it is the same tune.
At table the cold, greenish, split grapefruit, its juice
on the tongue, the clink of the spoon in
your coffee, the toast odors say it over and over.

The open street-door lets in the breath of
the morning wind from over the lake.

The bus coming to a halt grinds from its sullen brakes--
lullaby, lullaby. The crackle of a newspaper,
the movement of the troubled coat beside you--
sleep, sleep, sleep, sleep . . .

It is the sting of snow, the burning liquor of
the moonlight, the rush of rain in the gutters packed
with dead leaves: go to sleep, go to sleep.
And the night passes--and never passes--

William Carlos Williams

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.

William Carlos Williams

Approach of Winter

The half-striped trees
struck by a wind together,
bending all,
the leaves flutter drily
and refuse to let go
or driven like hail
stream bitterly out to one side
and fall
where the salvias, hard carmine--
like no leaf that ever was--
edge the bare garden.

William Carlos Williams

Après le Bain

I gotta
buy me a new
girdle.
(I'll buy
you one) O.K.
(I wish

you'd wig-
gle that way
for me,

I'd be
a happy man)
I GOTTA

wig-
gle for this.
(You pig)

William Carlos Williams

April

If you had come away with me
into another state
we had been quiet together.
But there the sun coming up
out of the nothing beyond the lake was
too low in the sky,
there was too great a pushing
against him,
too much of sumac buds, pink
in the head
with the clear gum upon them,
too many opening hearts of lilac leaves,
too many, too many swollen
limp poplar tassels on the
bare branches!
It was too strong in the air.
I had no rest against that
springtime!
The pounding of the hoofs on the
raw sods
stayed with me half through the night.
I awoke smiling but tired.

William Carlos Williams

Arrival

And yet one arrives somehow,
finds himself loosening the hooks of
her dress
in a strange bedroom--
feels the autumn
dropping its silk and linen leaves
about her ankles.
The tawdry veined body emerges
twisted upon itself
like a winter wind . . . !

William Carlos Williams

Berket and the Stars

A day on the boulevards chosen out of ten years of
student poverty! One best day out of ten good ones.
Berket in high spirits--"Ha, oranges! Let's have one!"
And he made to snatch an orange from the vender's cart.

Now so clever was the deception, so nicely timed
to the full sweep of certain wave summits,
that the rumor of the thing has come down through
three generations--which is relatively forever!

William Carlos Williams

Blizzard

Snow falls:
years of anger following
hours that float idly down --
the blizzard
drifts its weight
deeper and deeper for three days
or sixty years, eh? Then
the sun! a clutter of
yellow and blue flakes --
Hairy looking trees stand out
in long alleys
over a wild solitude.
The man turns and there --
his solitary track stretched out
upon the world.

William Carlos Williams

Blueflags

I stopped the car
to let the children down
where the streets end
in the sun
at the marsh edge
and the reeds begin
and there are small houses
facing the reeds
and the blue mist in the distance
with grapevine trellises
with grape clusters
small as strawberries
on the vines
and ditches
running springwater
that continue the gutters
with willows over them.
The reeds begin
like water at a shore
their pointed petals waving
dark green and light.
But blueflags are blossoming
in the reeds
which the children pluck
chattering in the reeds
high over their heads
which they part
with bare arms to appear
with fists of flowers
till in the air
there comes the smell
of calmus
from wet, gummy stalks.

William Carlos Williams

Complaint

They call me and I go.
It is a frozen road
past midnight, a dust
of snow caught
in the rigid wheeltracks.
The door opens.
I smile, enter and
shake off the cold.
Here is a great woman
on her side in the bed.
She is sick,
perhaps vomiting,
perhaps laboring
to give birth to
a tenth child. Joy! Joy!
Night is a room
darkened for lovers,
through the jalousies the sun
has sent one golden needle!
I pick the hair from her eyes
and watch her misery
with compassion.

William Carlos Williams

Complete Destruction

It was an icy day.
We buried the cat,
then took her box
and set fire to it
in the back yard.
Those fleas that escaped
earth and fire
died by the cold.

William Carlos Williams

Daisy

The dayseye hugging the earth
in August, ha! Spring is
gone down in purple,
weeds stand high in the corn,
the rainbeaten furrow
is clotted with sorrel
and crabgrass, the
branch is black under
the heavy mass of the leaves--
The sun is upon a
slender green stem
ribbed lengthwise.
He lies on his back--
it is a woman also--
he regards his former
majesty and
round the yellow center,
split and creviced and done into
minute flowerheads, he sends out
his twenty rays-- a little
and the wind is among them
to grow cool there!

One turns the thing over
in his hand and looks
at it from the rear: brownedged,
green and pointed scales
armor his yellow.

But turn and turn,
the crisp petals remain
brief, translucent, greenfastened,
barely touching at the edges:
blades of limpid seashell.

William Carlos Williams

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?

William Carlos Williams

Dawn

Ecstatic bird songs pound
the hollow vastness of the sky
with metallic clinkings--
beating color up into it
at a far edge,--beating it, beating it
with rising, triumphant ardor,--
stirring it into warmth,
quickening in it a spreading change,--
bursting wildly against it as
dividing the horizon, a heavy sun
lifts himself--is lifted--
bit by bit above the edge
of things,--runs free at last
out into the open--!lumbering
glorified in full release upward--
songs cease.

William Carlos Williams

Dedication for a Plot of Ground

This plot of ground
facing the waters of this inlet
is dedicated to the living presence of
Emily Dickinson Wellcome
who was born in England; married;
lost her husband and with
her five year old son
sailed for New York in a two-master;
was driven to the Azores;
ran adrift on Fire Island shoal,
met her second husband
in a Brooklyn boarding house,
went with him to Puerto Rico
bore three more children, lost
her second husband, lived hard
for eight years in St. Thomas,
Puerto Rico, San Domingo, followed
the oldest son to New York,
lost her daughter, lost her "baby,"
seized the two boys of
the oldest son by the second marriage
mothered them -- they being
motherless -- fought for them
against the other grandmother
and the aunts, brought them here
summer after summer, defended
herself here against thieves,
storms, sun, fire,
against flies, against girls
that came smelling about, against
drought, against weeds, storm-tides,
neighbors, weasels that stole her chickens,
against the weakness of her own hands,
against the growing strength of
the boys, against wind, against
the stones, against trespassers,
against rents, against her own mind.

She grubbed this earth with her own hands,
domineered over this grass plot,
blackguarded her oldest son
into buying it, lived here fifteen years,
attained a final loneliness and --

If you can bring nothing to this place
but your carcass, keep out.

William Carlos Williams

Epitaph

An old willow with hollow branches
slowly swayed his few high gright tendrils
and sang:

Love is a young green willow
shimmering at the bare wood's edge.

William Carlos Williams

First Praise

Lady of dusk-wood fastnesses,
Thou art my Lady.
I have known the crisp, splintering leaf-tread with thee on before,
White, slender through green saplings;
I have lain by thee on the brown forest floor
Beside thee, my Lady.

Lady of rivers strewn with stones,
Only thou art my Lady.
Where thousand the freshets are crowded like peasants to a fair;
Clear-skinned, wild from seclusion
They jostle white-armed down the tent-bordered thoroughfare
Praising my Lady.

William Carlos Williams

from

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.
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.
 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 throat
 to the hummingbird!
Endless wealth,
 I thought,
 held out its arms to me.
A thousand tropics
 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
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,
of 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.

William Carlos Williams

from "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower"

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.
W. D. Howells

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Listen while I talk on
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It will not be
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and yet I see clearly enough
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central to the sky
 which ranges round it.
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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.

William Carlos Williams

Great Mullen

One leaves his leaves at home
beomg a mullen and sends up a lighthouse
to peer from: I will have my way,
yellow--A mast with a lantern, ten
fifty, a hundred, smaller and smaller
as they grow more--Liar, liar, liar!
You come from her! I can smell djer-kiss
on your clothes. Ha! you come to me,
you, I am a point of dew on a grass-stem.
Why are you sending heat down on me
from your lantern?--You are cowdung, a
dead stick with the bark off. She is
squirting on us both. She has has her
hand on you!--well?--She has defiled
ME.--Your leaves are dull, thick
and hairy.--Every hair on my body will
hold you off from me. You are a
dungcake, birdlime on a fenceral.--
I love you, straight, yellow
finger of God pointing to--her!
Liar, broken weed, dungcake, you have--
I am a cricket waving his antennae
and you are high, grey and straight. Ha!

William Carlos Williams

Heel & Toe To The End

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

he floated
at 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
to and heel

heel and toe he felt
as if he had
been dancing

William Carlos Williams

Heel & Toe To The End

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William Carlos Williams

Hic Jacet

The coroner's merry little children
Have such twinkling brown eyes.
Their father is not of gay men
And their mother jocular in no wise,
Yet the coroner's merry little children
Laugh so easily.

They laugh because they prosper.
Fruit for them is upon all branches.
Lo! how they jibe at loss, for
Kind heaven fills their little paunches!
It's the coroner's merry, merry children
Who laugh so easily.

William Carlos Williams

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

William Carlos Williams

January

Again I reply to the triple winds
running chromatic fifths of derision
outside my window:

Play louder.

You will not succeed. I am
bound more to my sentences
the more you batter at me
to follow you.

And the wind,
as before, fingers perfectly
its derisive music.

William Carlos Williams

January Morning

I

I have discovered that most of
the beauties of travel are due to
the strange hours we keep to see them:

the domes of the Church of
the Paulist Fathers in Weehawken
against a smoky dawn -- the heart stirred --
are beautiful as Saint Peters
approached after years of anticipation.

II

Though the operation was postponed
I saw the tall probationers
in their tan uniforms
hurrying to breakfast!

III

-- and from basement entries
neatly coiffed, middle aged gentlemen
with orderly moustaches and
well-brushed coats

IV

-- and the sun, dipping into the avenues
streaking the tops of
the irregular red houselets,
and
the gay shadows drooping and drooping.

V

-- and a young horse with a green bed-quilt
on his withers shaking his head:
bared teeth and nozzle high in the air!

VI

--and a semicircle of dirt-colored men
about a fire bursting from an old
ash can,

VII

-- and the worn,
blue car rails (like the sky!)
gleaming among the cobbles!

VIII

-- and the rickety ferry-boat "Arden"!
What an object to be called "Arden"
among the great piers, -- on the
ever new river!
"Put me a Touchstone
at the wheel, white gulls, and we'll
follow the ghost of the Half Moon
to the North West Passage -- and through!
(at Albany!) for all that!"

IX

Exquisite brown waves -- long
circlets of silver moving over you!
enough with crumbling ice crusts among you!
The sky has come down to you,
lighter than tiny bubbles, face to
face with you!
His spirit is
a white gull with delicate pink feet
and a snowy breast for you to
hold to your lips delicately!

X

The young doctor is dancing with happiness
in the sparkling wind, alone
at the prow of the ferry! He notices
the curdy barnacles and broken ice crusts
left at the slip's base by the low tide
and thinks of summer and green
shell-crusted ledges among
the emerald eel-grass!

XI

Who knows the Palisades as I do
knows the river breaks east from them
above the city -- but they continue south
-- under the sky -- to bear a crest of
little peering houses that brighten
with dawn behind the moody
water-loving giants of Manhattan.

XII

Long yellow rushes bending
above the white snow patches;
purple and gold ribbon
of the distant wood:

what an angle
you make with each other as
you lie there in contemplation.

XIII

Work hard all your young days
and they'll find you too, some morning
staring up under
your chiffonier at its warped
bass-wood bottom and your soul --
out!
-- among the little sparrows
behind the shutter.

XIV

-- and the flapping flags are at
half-mast for the dead admiral.

XV

All this --
was for you, old woman.
I wanted to write a poem
that you would understand.
For what good is it to me
if you can't understand it?
But you got to try hard --
But --
Well, you know how
the young girls run giggling
on Park Avenue after dark
when they ought to be home in bed?
Well,
that's the way it is with me somehow.

William Carlos Williams

Landscape With The Fall Of Icarus

According to Brueghel
when Icarus fell
it was spring

a farmer was ploughing
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

William Carlos Williams

Light Hearted Author

The birches are mad with green points
the wood's edge is burning with their green,
burning, seething--No, no, no.
The birches are opening their leaves one
by one. Their delicate leaves unfold cold
and separate, one by one. Slender tassels
hang swaying from the delicate branch tips--
Oh, I cannot say it. There is no word.
Black is split at once into flowers. In
every bog and ditch, flares of
small fire, white flowers!--Agh,
the birches are mad, mad with their green.
The world is gone, torn into shreds
with this blessing. What have I left undone
that I should have undertaken?

O my brother, you redfaced, living man
ignorant, stupid whose feet are upon
this same dirt that I touch--and eat.
We are alone in this terror, alone,
face to face on this road, you and I,
wrapped by this flame!
Let the polished plows stay idle,
their gloss already on the black soil.
But that face of yours--!
Answer me. I will clutch you. I
will hug you, grip you. I will poke my face
into your face and force you to see me.
Take me in your arms, tell me the commonest
thing that is in your mind to say,
say anything. I will understand you--!
It is the madness of the birch leaves opening
cold, one by one.

My rooms will receive me. But my rooms
are no longer sweet spaces where comfort
is ready to wait on me with its crumbs.
A darkness has brushed them. The mass
of yellow tulips in the bowl is shrunken.
Every familiar object is changed and dwarfed.
I am shaken, broken against a might
that splits comfort, blows apart
my careful partitions, crushes my house
and leaves me--with shrinking heart
and startled, empty eyes--peering out
into a cold world.

In the spring I would be drunk! In the spring
I would be drunk and lie forgetting all things.
Your face! Give me your face, Yang Kue Fei!
your hands, your lips to drink!
Give me your wrists to drink--

I drag you, I am drowned in you, you
overwhelm me! Drink!
Save me! The shad bush is in the edge
of the clearing. The yards in a fury
of lilac blossoms are driving me mad with terror.
Drink and lie forgetting the world.

And coldly the birch leaves are opening one by one.
Coldly I observe them and wait for the end.
And it ends.

William Carlos Williams

Light Hearted William

Light hearted William twirled
his November moustaches
and, half dressed, looked
from the bedroom window
upon the spring weather.

Heigh-ya! sighed he gaily
leaning out to see
up and down the street
where a heavy sunlight
lay beyond some blue shadows.

Into the room he drew
his head again and laughed
to himself quietly
twirling his green moustaches.

William Carlos Williams

Love Song

I lie here thinking of you:---

the stain of love
is upon the world!
Yellow, yellow, yellow
it eats into the leaves,
smears with saffron
the horned branched the lean
heavily
against a smooth purple sky!
There is no light
only a honey-thick stain
that drips from leaf to leaf
and limb to limb
spoiling the colors
of the whole world-

you far off there under
the wine-red selvage of the west!

William Carlos Williams

March

I

Winter is long in this climate
and spring--a matter of a few days
only,--a flower or two picked
from mud or from among wet leaves
or at best against treacherous
bitterness of wind, and sky shining
teasingly, then closing in black
and sudden, with fierce jaws.

II

March,
you reminded me of
the pyramids, our pyramids--
strip of the polished stone
that used to guard them!
March,
you are like Fra Angelico
at Fiesole, painting on plaster!

March,
you are like a band of
young poets that have not learned
the blessedness of warmth
(or have forgotten it).
At any rate--
I am moved to write poetry
for the warmth there is in it
and for the loneliness--
a poem that shall have you
in it March.

III

See!
Ashur-ban-i-pal,
the archer king, on horse-back,
in blue and yellow enamel!
with drawn bow--facing lions
standing on their hind legs,
fangs bared! his shafts
bristling in their necks!

Sacred bulls--dragons
in embossed brickwork
marching--in four tiers--
along the sacred way to
Nebuchadnezzar's throne hall!
They shine in the sun,
they that have been marching--

marching under the dust of
ten thousand dirt years.

Now--
they are coming into bloom again!
See them!
marching still, bared by
the storms from my calender
--winds that blow back the sand!
winds that enfilade dirt!
winds that by strange craft
have whipt up a black army
that by pick and shovel
bare a procession to
the god, Marduk!

Natives cursing and digging
for pay unearth dragons with
upright tails and sacred bulls
alternately--
in four tiers--
lining the way to an old altar!
Natives digging at old walls--
digging me warmth--digging me sweet loneliness
high enamelled walls.

IV

My second spring--
passed in a monastery
with plaster walls--in Fiesole
on the hill above 'Florence.
My second spring--painted
a virgin--in a blue aureole
sitting on a three-legged stool,
arms crossed--
she is intently serious,
and still
watching an angel
with colored wings
half kneeling before her--
and smiling--the angel's eyes
holding the eyes of Mary
as a snake's hold a bird's.
On the ground there are flowers,
trees are in leaf.

V

But! now for the battle!
Now for murder--now for the real thing!
My third springtime is approaching!

Winds!
lean, serious as a virgin,
seeking, seeking the flowers of March.

Seeking
flowers nowhere to be found,
they twine among the bare branches
in insatiable eagerness--
they whirl up the snow
seeking under it--
they--the winds--snakelike
roar among yellow reeds
seeking flowers--flowers.

I spring among them
seeking one flower
in which to warm myself!

I deride with all the ridicule
of misery--
my own starved misery.

Counter-cutting winds
strike against me
refreshing their fury!

Come, good, cold fellows!
Have we no flowers?
Defy then with even more
desperation than ever--being
lean and frozen!

But though you are lean and frozen--
think of the blue bulls of Babylon.

Fling yourselves upon
their empty roses--
cut savagely!

But--
think of the painted monastery
at Fiesole.

William Carlos Williams

Memory of April

You say love is this, love is that:
Poplar tassels, willow tendrils
the wind and the rain comb,
tinkle and drip, tinkle and drip--
branches drifting apart. Hagh!
Love has not even visited this country.

William Carlos Williams

Metric Figure

There is a bird in the poplars!
It is the sun!
The leaves are little yellow fish
swimming in the river.
The bird skims above them,
day is on his wings.
Phoebus!
It is he that is making
the great gleam among the poplars!
It is his singing
outshines the noise
of leaves clashing in the wind.

William Carlos Williams

Nantucket

Flowers through the window
lavender and yellow

changed by white curtains –
Smell of cleanliness –

Sunshine of late afternoon –
On the glass tray

a glass pitcher, the tumbler
turned down, by which

a key is lying – And the
immaculate white bed

William Carlos Williams

On a Proposed Trip South

They tell me on the morrow I must leave
This winter eyrie for a southern flight
And truth to tell I tremble with delight
At thought of such unheralded reprieve.

E'er have I known December in a weave
Of blanched crystal, when, thrice one short night
Packed full with magic, and O blissful sight!
N'er May so warmly doth for April grieve.

To in a breath's space wish the winter through
And lo, to see it fading! Where, oh, where
Is caract could endow this princely boon?

Yet I have found it and shall shortly view
The lush high grasses, shortly see in air
Gay birds and hear the bees make heavy droon.

William Carlos Williams

Overture to a Dance of Locomotives

Men with picked voices chant the names
of cities in a huge gallery: promises
that pull through descending stairways
to a deep rumbling.

The rubbing feet
of those coming to be carried quicken a
grey pavement into soft light that rocks
to and fro, under the domed ceiling,
across and across from pale
earthcolored walls of bare limestone.

Covertly the hands of a great clock
go round and round! Were they to
move quickly and at once the whole
secret would be out and the shuffling
of all ants be done forever.

A leaning pyramid of sunlight, narrowing
out at a high window, moves by the clock:
disaccordant hands straining out from
a center: inevitable postures infinitely
repeated--
two--twofour--twoeight!
Porters in red hats run on narrow platforms.
This way ma'am!
--important not to take
the wrong train!
Lights from the concrete
ceiling hang crooked but--
Poised horizontal
on glittering parallels the dingy cylinders
packed with a warm glow--inviting entry--
pull against the hour. But brakes can
hold a fixed posture till--
The whistle!

Not twoeight. Not twofour. Two!

Gliding windows. Colored cooks sweating
in a small kitchen. Taillights--

In time: twofour!
In time: twoeight!

--rivers are tunneled: trestles
cross oozy swampland: wheels repeating
the same gesture remain relatively
stationary: rails forever parallel
return on themselves infinitely.
The dance is sure.

William Carlos Williams

Pastoral

The little sparrows
hop ingenuously
about the pavement
quarreling
with sharp voices
over those things
that interest them.
But we who are wiser
shut ourselves in
on either hand
and no one knows
whether we think good
or evil.
Meanwhile,
the old man who goes about
gathering dog-lime
walks in the gutter
without looking up
and his tread
is more majestic than
that of the Episcopal minister
approaching the pulpit
of a Sunday.
These things
astonish me beyond words.

William Carlos Williams

Peace on Earth

The Archer is wake!
The Swan is flying!
Gold against blue
An Arrow is lying.
There is hunting in heaven--
Sleep safe till tomorrow.

The Bears are abroad!
The Eagle is screaming!
Gold against blue
Their eyes are gleaming!
Sleep!
Sleep safe till tomorrow.

The Sisters lie
With their arms intertwining;
Gold against blue
Their hair is shining!
The Serpent writhes!
Orion is listening!
Gold against blue
His sword is glistening!
Sleep!
There is hunting in heaven--
Sleep safe till tomorrow.

William Carlos Williams

Play

Subtle, clever brain, wiser than I am,
by what devious means do you contrive
to remain idle? Teach me, O master.

William Carlos Williams

Poem

As the cat
climbed over
the top of

the jamcloset
first the right
forefoot

carefully
then the hind
stepped down

into the pit of
the empty
flowerpot.

William Carlos Williams

Poem (As the cat)

As the cat
climbed over
the top of

the jamcloset
first the right
forefoot

carefully
then the hind
stepped down
into the pit of
the empty
flowerpot

Anonymous submission.

William Carlos Williams

Portrait of a Lady

Your thighs are appletrees
whose blossoms touch the sky.
Which sky? The sky
where Watteau hung a lady's
slipper. Your knees
are a southern breeze -- or
a gust of snow. Agh! what
sort of man was Fragonard?
-- As if that answered
anything. -- Ah, yes. Below
the knees, since the tune
drops that way, it is
one of those white summer days,
the tall grass of your ankles
flickers upon the shore --
Which shore? --
the sand clings to my lips --
Which shore?
Agh, petals maybe. How
should I know?
Which shore? Which shore?
-- the petals from some hidden
appletree -- Which shore?
I said petals from an appletree.

William Carlos Williams

Primrose

Yellow, yellow, yellow, yellow!
It is not a color.
It is summer!
It is the wind on a willow,
the lap of waves, the shadow
under a bush, a bird, a bluebird,
three herons, a dead hawk
rotting on a pole--
Clear yellow!
It is a piece of blue paper
in the grass or a threecluster of
green walnuts swaying, children
playing croquet or one boy
fishing, a man
swinging his pink fists
as he walks--
It is ladysthumb, forget-me-nots
in the ditch, moss under
the flange of the carrail, the
wavy lines in split rock, a
great oaktree--
It is a disinclination to be
five red petals or a rose, it is
a cluster of birdsbreast flowers
on a red stem six feet high,
four open yellow petals
above sepals curled
backward into reverse spikes--
Tufts of purple grass spot the
green meadow and clouds the sky.

William Carlos Williams

Queen Anne's Lace

Her body is not so white as
anemone petals nor so smooth--nor
so remote a thing. It is a field
of the wild carrot taking
thefield by force; the grass
does not raise above it.
Here is no question of whiteness,
white as can be, with a purple mole
at the center of each flower.
Each flower is a hand's span
of her whiteness. Wherever
his hand has lain there is
a tiny purple blossom under his touch
to which the fibres of her being
stem one by one, each to its end,
until the whole field is a
white desire, empty, a single stem,
a cluster, flower by flower,
a pious wish to whiteness gone over--
or nothing.

William Carlos Williams

Romance Moderne

Tracks of rain and light linger in
the spongy greens of a nature whose
flickering mountain--bulging nearer,
ebbing back into the sun
hollowing itself away to hold a lake,--
or brown stream rising and falling at the roadside, turning about,
churning itself white, drawing
green in over it,--plunging glassy funnels
fall--

And--the other world--
the windshield a blunt barrier:
Talk to me. Sh! they would hear us.
--the backs of their heads facing us--
The stream continues its motion of
a hound running over rough ground.

Trees vanish--reappear--vanish:
detached dance of gnomes--as a talk
dodging remarks, glows and fades.
--The unseen power of words--
And now that a few of the moves
are clear the first desire is
to fling oneself out at the side into
the other dance, to other music.

Peer Gynt. Rip Van Winkle. Diana.
If I were young I would try a new alignment--
alight nimbly from the car, Good-bye!--
Childhood companions linked two and two
criss-cross: four, three, two, one.
Back into self, tentacles withdrawn.
Feel about in warm self-flesh.
Since childhood, since childhood!
Childhood is a toad in the garden, a
happy toad. All toads are happy
and belong in gardens. A toad to Diana!

Lean forward. Punch the steerman
behind the ear. Twirl the wheel!
Over the edge! Screams! Crash!
The end. I sit above my head--
a little removed--or
a thin wash of rain on the roadway
--I am never afraid when he is driving,--
interposes new direction,
rides us sidewise, unforseen
into the ditch! All threads cut!
Death! Black. The end. The very end--

I would sit separate weighing a
small red handful: the dirt of these parts,

sliding mists sheeting the alders
against the touch of fingers creeping
to mine. All stuff of the blind emotions.
But--stirred, the eye seizes
for the first time--The eye awake!--
anything, a dirt bank with green stars
of scrawny weed flattened upon it under
a weight of air--For the first time!--
or a yawning depth: Big!
Swim around in it, through it--
all directions and find
vitreous seawater stuff--
God how I love you!--or, as I say,
a plunge into the ditch. The End. I sit
examining my red handful. Balancing
--this--in and out--agh.

Love you? It's
a fire in the blood, willy-nilly!
It's the sun coming up in the morning.
Ha, but it's the grey moon too, already up
in the morning. You are slow.
Men are not friends where it concerns
a woman? Fighters. Playfellows.
White round thighs! Youth! Sighs--!
It's the fillip of novelty. It's--

Mountains. Elephants humping along
against the sky--indifferent to
light withdrawing its tattered shreds,
worn out with embraces. It's
the fillip of novelty. It's a fire in the blood.

Oh get a flannel shirt, white flannel
or pongee. You'd look so well!
I married you because I liked your nose.
I wanted you! I wanted you
in spite of all they'd say--

Rain and light, mountain and rain,
rain and river. Will you love me always?
--A car overturned and two crushed bodies
under it.--Always! Always!
And the white moon already up.
White. Clean. All the colors.
A good head, backed by the eye--awake!
backed by the emotions--blind--
River and mountain, light and rain--or
rain, rock, light, trees--divided:
rain-light counter rocks-trees or
trees counter rain-light-rocks or--

Myriads of counter processions
crossing and recrossing, regaining
the advantage, buying here, selling there
--You are sold cheap everywhere in town!--
lingering, touching fingers, withdrawing
gathering forces into blares, hummocks,
peaks and rivers--rivers meeting rock
--I wish that you were lying there dead
and I sitting here beside you.--
It's the grey moon--over and over.
It's the clay of these parts.

William Carlos Williams

Smell

Oh strong-ridged and deeply hollowed
nose of mine! what will you not be smelling?
What tactless asses we are, you and I, boney nose,
always indiscriminate, always unashamed,
and now it is the souring flowers of the bedraggled
poplars: a festering pulp on the wet earth
beneath them. With what deep thirst
we quicken our desires
to that rank odor of a passing springtime!
Can you not be decent? Can you not reserve your ardors
for something less unlovely? What girl will care
for us, do you think, if we continue in these ways?
Must you taste everything? Must you know everything?
Must you have a part in everything?

William Carlos Williams

Spring and All

By the road to the contagious hospital
under the surge of the blue
mottled clouds driven from the
northeast -- a cold wind. Beyond, the
waste of broad, muddy fields
brown with dried weeds, standing and fallen

patches of standing water
the scattering of tall trees

All along the road the reddish
purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy
stuff of bushes and small trees
with dead, brown leaves under them
leafless vines --

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
dazed spring approaches --

They enter the new world naked,
cold, uncertain of all
save that they enter. All about them
the cold, familiar wind --

Now the grass, tomorrow
the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf

One by one objects are defined --
It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf

But now the stark dignity of
entrance -- Still, the profound change
has come upon them: rooted they
grip down and begin to awaken

William Carlos Williams

The Artist

Mr T.
bareheaded
in a soiled undershirt
his hair standing out
on all sides
stood on his toes
heels together
arms gracefully
for the moment

curled above his head.
Then he whirled about
bounded
into the air
and with an entrechat
perfectly achieved
completed the figure.
My mother
taken by surprise
where she sat
in her invalid's chair
was left speechless.
Bravo! she cried at last
and clapped her hands.
The man's wife
came from the kitchen:
What goes on here? she said.
But the show was over.

William Carlos Williams

The Birds

The world begins again!
Not wholly insufflated
the blackbirds in the rain
upon the dead topbranches
of the living tree,
stuck fast to the low clouds,
note the dawn.
Their shrill cries sound
announcing appetite
and drop among the bending roses
and the dripping grass.

William Carlos Williams

The Cold Night

It is cold. The white moon
is up among her scattered stars--
like the bare thighs of
the Police Sergeant's wife--among
her five children . . .
No answer. Pale shadows lie upon
the frosted grass. One answer:
It is midnight, it is still
and it is cold . . . !
White thighs of the sky! a
new answer out of the depths of
my male belly: In April . . .
In April I shall see again--In April!
the round and perfects thighs
of the Police Sergeant's wife
perfect still after many babies.
Oya!

William Carlos Williams

The Dance

In Breughel'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 Breughel's great picture, The Kermess

William Carlos Williams

The Dark Day

A three-day-long rain from the east--
an terminable talking, talking
of no consequence--patter, patter, patter.
Hand in hand little winds
blow the thin streams aslant.
Warm. Distance cut off. Seclusion.
A few passers-by, drawn in upon themselves,
hurry from one place to another.
Winds of the white poppy! there is no escape!--
An interminable talking, talking,
talking . . . it has happened before.
Backward, backward, backward.

William Carlos Williams

The Desolate Field

Vast and grey, the sky
is a simulacrum
to all but him whose days
are vast and grey and --
In the tall, dried grasses
a goat stirs
with nozzle searching the ground.
My head is in the air
but who am I . . . ?
-- and my heart stops amazed
at the thought of love
vast and grey
yearning silently over me.

William Carlos Williams

The Disputants

Upon the table in their bowl
in violent disarray
of yellow sprays, green spikes
of leaves, red pointed petals
and curled heads of blue
and white among the litter
of the forks and crumbs and plates
the flowers remain composed.
Coolly their colloquy continues
above the coffee and loud talk
grown frail as vaudeville.

William Carlos Williams

The Gentle Man

I feel the caress of my own fingers
on my own neck as I place my collar
and think pityingly
of the kind women I have known.

William Carlos Williams

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.

William Carlos Williams

The Hunter

In the flashes and black shadows
of July
the days, locked in each other's arms,
seem still
so that squirrels and colored birds
go about at ease over
the branches and through the air.

Where will a shoulder split or
a forehead open and victory be?

Nowhere.
Both sides grow older.

And you may be sure
not one leaf will lift itself
from the ground
and become fast to a twig again.

William Carlos Williams

The Last Words of My English Grandmother

There were some dirty plates
and a glass of milk
beside her on a small table
near the rank, disheveled bed--

Wrinkled and nearly blind
she lay and snored
rousing with anger in her tones
to cry for food,

Gimme something to eat--
They're starving me--
I'm all right--I won't go
to the hospital.No, no, no

Give me something to eat!
Let me take you
to the hospital, I said
and after you are well

you can do as you please.
She smiled, Yes
you do what you please first
then I can do what I please--

Oh, oh, oh! she cried
as the ambulance men lifted
her to the stretcher--
Is this what you call

making me comfortable?
By now her mind was clear--
Oh you think you're smart
you young people,

she said, but I'll tell you
you don't know anything.
Then we started.
On the way

we passed a long row
of elms. She looked at them
awhile out of
the ambulance window and said,

What are all those
fuzzy looking things out there?
Trees?Well, I'm tired
of them and rolled her head away.

William Carlos Williams

The Late Singer

Here it is spring again
and I still a young man!
I am late at my singing.
The sparrow with the black rain on his breast
has been at his cadenzas for two weeks past:
What is it that is dragging at my heart?
The grass by the back door
is stiff with sap.
The old maples are opening
their branches of brown and yellow moth-flowers.
A moon hangs in the blue
in the early afternoons over the marshes.
I am late at my singing.

William Carlos Williams

The Lonely Street

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

William Carlos Williams

The Nightingales

My shoes as I lean
unlacing them
stand out upon
flat worsted flowers
under my feet.
Nimbly the shadows
of my fingers play
unlacing
over shoes and flowers.

William Carlos Williams

The Poor

By constantly tormenting them
with reminders of the lice in
their children's hair, the
School Physician first
brought their hatred down on him.
But by this familiarity
they grew used to him, and so,
at last,
took him for their friend and adviser.

William Carlos Williams

The Red Wheelbarrow

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

William Carlos Williams

The Spouts

In this world of
as fine a pair of breasts
as ever I saw
the fountain in
Madison Square
spouts up of water
a white tree
that dies and lives
as the rocking water
in the basin
turns from the stonerim
back upon the jet
and rising there
reflectively drops down again.

William Carlos Williams

The Spring Storm

The sky has given over
its bitterness.
Out of the dark change
all day long
rain falls and falls
as if it would never end.
Still the snow keeps
its hold on the ground.
But water, water
from a thousand runnels!
It collects swiftly,
dappled with black
cuts a way for itself
through green ice in the gutters.
Drop after drop it falls
from the withered grass-stems
of the overhanging embankment.

William Carlos Williams

The Term

A rumpled sheet
Of brown paper
About the length

And apparent bulk
Of a man was
Rolling with the

Wind slowly over
And over in
The street as

A car drove down
Upon it and
Crushed it to

The ground. Unlike
A man it rose
Again rolling

With the wind over
And over to be as
It was before.

Anonymous submission.

William Carlos Williams

The Thing

Each time it rings
I think it is for
me but it is
not for me nor for

anyone it merely
rings and we
serve it bitterly
together, they and I

William Carlos Williams

The Thinker

My wife's new pink slippers
have gay pompons.
There is not a spot or a stain
on their satin toes or their sides.
All night they lie together
under her bed's edge.
Shivering I catch sight of them
and smile, in the morning.
Later I watch them
descending the stair,
hurrying through the doors
and round the table,
moving stiffly
with a shake of their gay pompons!
And I talk to them
in my secret mind
out of pure happiness.

William Carlos Williams

The Tulip Bed

The May sun--whom
all things imitate--
that glues small leaves to
the wooden trees
shone from the sky
through bluegauze clouds
upon the ground.
Under the leafy trees
where the suburban streets
lay crossed,
with houses on each corner,
tangled shadows had begun
to join
the roadway and the lawns.
With excellent precision
the tulip bed
inside the iron fence
upreared its gaudy
yellow, white and red,
rimmed round with grass,
reposedly.

William Carlos Williams

The Uses of Poetry

I've fond anticipation of a day
O'erfilled with pure diversion presently,
For I must read a lady poesy
The while we glide by many a leafy bay,

Hid deep in rushes, where at random play
The glossy black winged May-flies, or whence flee
Hush-throated nestlings in alarm,
Whom we have idly frightened with our boat's long sway.

For, lest o'ersaddened by such woes as spring
To rural peace from our meek onward trend,
What else more fit? We'll draw the latch-string

And close the door of sense; then satiate wend,
On poesy's transforming giant wing,
To worlds afar whose fruits all anguish mend.

William Carlos Williams

The Widow's Lament in Springtime

Sorrow is my own yard
where the new grass
flames as it has flamed
often before but not
with the cold fire
that closes round me this year.
Thirtyfive years
I lived with my husband.
The plumtree is white today
with masses of flowers.
Masses of flowers
load the cherry branches
and color some bushes
yellow and some red
but the grief in my heart
is stronger than they
for though they were my joy
formerly, today I notice them
and turn away forgetting.
Today my son told me
that in the meadows,
at the edge of the heavy woods
in the distance, he saw
trees of white flowers.
I feel that I would like
to go there
and fall into those flowers
and sink into the marsh near them.

William Carlos Williams

The Young Housewife

At ten AM the young housewife
moves about in negligee behind
the wooden walls of her husband's house.
I pass solitary in my car.

Then again she comes to the curb
to call the ice-man, fish-man, and stands
shy, uncorseted, tucking in
stray ends of hair, and I compare her
to a fallen leaf.

The noiseless wheels of my car
rush with a crackling sound over
dried leaves as I bow and pass smiling.

William Carlos Williams

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

William Carlos Williams

Thursday

I have had my dream--like others--
and it has come to nothing, so that
I remain now carelessly
with feet planted on the ground
and look up at the sky--
feeling my clothes about me,
the weight of my body in my shoes,
the rim of my hat, air passing in and out
at my nose--and decide to dream no more.

William Carlos Williams

To a Friend

Well, Lizzie Anderson! seventeen men--and
the baby hard to find a father for!

What will the good Father in Heaven say
to the local judge if he do not solve this problem?
A little two-pointed smile and--pouff!--
the law is changed into a mouthful of phrases.

William Carlos Williams

To a Friend Concerning Several Ladies

You know there is not much
that I desire, a few chrysanthemums
half lying on the grass, yellow
and brown and white, the
talk of a few people, the trees,
an expanse of dried leaves perhaps
with ditches among them.

But there comes
between me and these things
a letter
or even a look--well placed,
you understand,
so that I am confused, twisted
four ways and--left flat,
unable to lift the food to
my own mouth:
Here is what they say: Come!
and come! and come! And if
I do not go I remain stale to
myself and if I go--
I have watched
the city from a distance at night
and wondered why I wrote no poem.
Come! yes,
the city is ablaze for you
and you stand and look at it.

And they are right. There is
no good in the world except out of
a woman and certain women alone
for certain. But what if
I arrive like a turtle,
with my house on my back or
a fish ogling from under water?
It will not do. I must be
steaming with love, colored
like a flamingo. For what?
To have legs and a silly head
and to smell, pah! like a flamingo
that soils its own feathers behind.
Must I go home filled
with a bad poem?
And they say:
Who can answer these things
till he has tried? Your eyes
are half closed, you are a child,
oh, a sweet one, ready to play
but I will make a man of you and
with love on his shoulder--!

And in the marshes

the crickets run
on the sunny dike's top and
make burrows there, the water
reflects the reeds and the reeds
move on their stalks and rattle drily.

William Carlos Williams

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

William Carlos Williams

To Elsie

The pure products of America
go crazy--
mountain folk from Kentucky

or the ribbed north end of
Jersey
with its isolate lakes and

valleys, its deaf-mutes, thieves
old names
and promiscuity between

devil-may-care men who have taken
to railroading
out of sheer lust of adventure--

and young slatterns, bathed
in filth
from Monday to Saturday

to be tricked out that night
with gauds
from imaginations which have no

peasant traditions to give them
character
but flutter and flaunt

sheer rags-succumbing without
emotion
save numbed terror

under some hedge of choke-cherry
or viburnum--
which they cannot express--

Unless it be that marriage
perhaps
with a dash of Indian blood

will throw up a girl so desolate
so hemmed round
with disease or murder

that she'll be rescued by an
agent--
reared by the state and

sent out at fifteen to work in
some hard-pressed
house in the suburbs--

some doctor's family, some Elsie--
voluptuous water
expressing with broken

brain the truth about us--
her great
ungainly hips and flopping breasts

addressed to cheap
jewelry
and rich young men with fine eyes

as if the earth under our feet
were
an excrement of some sky

and we degraded prisoners
destined
to hunger until we eat filth

while the imagination strains
after deer
going by fields of goldenrod in

the stifling heat of September
Somehow
it seems to destroy us

It is only in isolate flecks that
something
is given off

No one
to witness
and adjust, no one to drive the car

William Carlos Williams

To Waken An Old Lady

Old age is
a flight of small
cheeping birds
skimming
bare trees
above a snow glaze.
Gaining and failing
they are buffeted
by a dark wind --
But what?
On harsh weedstalks
the flock has rested --
the snow
is covered with broken
seed husks
and the wind tempered
with a shrill
piping of plenty.

William Carlos Williams

Tract

I will teach you my townspeople
how to perform a funeral
for you have it over a troop
of artists-
unless one should scour the world-
you have the ground sense necessary.

See! the hearse leads.
I begin with a design for a hearse.
For Christ's sake not black-
nor white either - and not polished!
Let it be whethered - like a farm wagon -
with gilt wheels (this could be
applied fresh at small expense)
or no wheels at all:
a rough dray to drag over the ground.

Knock the glass out!
My God - glass, my townspeople!
For what purpose? Is it for the dead
to look out or for us to see
the flowers or the lack of them -
or what?
To keep the rain and snow from him?
He will have a heavier rain soon:
pebbles and dirt and what not.
Let there be no glass -
and no upholstery, phew!
and no little brass rollers
and small easy wheels on the bottom -
my townspeople, what are you thinking of?
A rough plain hearse then
with gilt wheels and no top at all.
On this the coffin lies
by its own weight.

No wreathes please-
especially no hot house flowers.
Some common memento is better,
something he prized and is known by:
his old clothes - a few books perhaps -
God knows what! You realize
how we are about these things
my townspeople -
something will be found - anything
even flowers if he had come to that.
So much for the hearse.

For heaven's sake though see to the driver!
Take off the silk hat! In fact
that's no place at all for him -
up there unceremoniously

dragging our friend out to his own dignity!
Bring him down - bring him down!
Low and inconspicuous! I'd not have him ride
on the wagon at all - damn him! -
the undertaker's understrapper!
Let him hold the reins
and walk at the side
and inconspicuously too!

Then briefly as to yourselves:
Walk behind - as they do in France,
seventh class, or if you ride
Hell take curtains! Go with some show
of inconvenience; sit openly -
to the weather as to grief.
Or do you think you can shut grief in?
What - from us? We who have perhaps
nothing to lose? Share with us
share with us - it will be money
in your pockets.
Go now
I think you are ready.

William Carlos Williams

Waiting

When I am alone I am happy.
The air is cool. The sky is
flecked and splashed and wound
with color. The crimson phalloi
of the sassafras leaves
hang crowded before me
in shoals on the heavy branches.
When I reach my doorstep
I am greeted by
the happy shrieks of my children
and my heart sinks.
I am crushed.

Are not my children as dear to me
as falling leaves or
must one become stupid
to grow older?
It seems much as if Sorrow
had tripped up my heels.
Let us see, let us see!
What did I plan to say to her
when it should happen to me
as it has happened now?

William Carlos Williams

Willow Poem

It is a willow when summer is over,
a willow by the river
from which no leaf has fallen nor
bitten by the sun
turned orange or crimson.
The leaves cling and grow paler,
swing and grow paler
over the swirling waters of the river
as if loth to let go,
they are so cool, so drunk with
the swirl of the wind and of the river --
oblivious to winter,
the last to let go and fall
into the water and on the ground.

William Carlos Williams

Winter Trees

All the complicated details
of the attiring and
the disattiring are completed!
A liquid moon
moves gently among
the long branches.
Thus having prepared their buds
against a sure winter
the wise trees
stand sleeping in the cold.

William Carlos Williams

Youth and Beauty

I bought a dishmop--
having no daughter--
for they had twisted
fine ribbons of shining copper
about white twine
and made a tousled head
of it, fastened it
upon a turned ash stick
slender at the neck
straight, tall--
when tied upright
on the brass wallbracket
to be a light for me
and naked
as a girl should seem
to her father.

William Carlos Williams