

WALLACE STEVENS

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Depression Before Spring

The cock crows
But no queen rises.

The hair of my blonde
Is dazzling,
As the spittle of cows
Threading the wind.

Ho! Ho!

But ki-ki-ri-ki
Brings no rou-cou,
No rou-cou-cou.

But no queen comes
In slipper green.

** The Emperor of Ice-Cream*

Call the roller of big cigars,
The muscular one, and bid him whip
In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.
Let the wenches dawdle in such dress
As they are used to wear, and let the boys
Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.
Let be be finale of seem.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

Take from the dresser of deal,
Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet
On which she embroidered fantails once
And spread it so as to cover her face.
If her horny feet protrude, they come
To show how cold she is, and dumb.
Let the lamp affix its beam.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

The Cuban Doctor

I went to Egypt to escape
The Indian, but the Indian struck
Out of his cloud and from his sky.

This was no worm bred in the moon,
Wriggling far down the phantom air,
And on a comfortable sofa dreamed.

The Indian struck and disappeared.
I knew my enemy was near—I,
Drowsing in summer's sleepest horn.

** Tea at the Palaz of Hoon*

Not less because in purple I descended
The western day through what you called
The loneliest air, not less was I myself.

What was the ointment sprinkled on my beard?
What were the hymns that buzzed beside my ears?
What was the sea whose tide swept through me there?

Out of my mind the golden ointment rained,
And my ears made the blowing hymns they heard.
I was myself the compass of that sea:

I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw
Or heard or felt came not but from myself;
And there I found myself more truly and more strange.

Hibiscus on the Sleeping Shores

I say now, Fernando, that on that day
The mind roamed as a moth roams,
Among the blooms beyond the open sand;

And that whatever noise the motion of the waves
Made on the sea-weeds and the covered stones
Disturbed not even the most idle ear.

Then it was that that monstered moth
Which had lain folded against the blue
And the colored purple of the lazy sea,

And which had drowsed along the bony shores,
Shut to the blather that the water made,
Rose up besprent and sought the flaming red

Dabbled with yellow pollen—red as red
As the flag above the old café—
And roamed there all the stupid afternoon.

* *Fabliau of Florida*

Barque of phosphor
On the palmy beach,

Move outward into heaven,
Into the alabasters
And night blues.

Foam and cloud are one,
Sultry moon-monsters
Are dissolving.

Fill your black hull
With white moonlight.

There will never be an end
To this droning of the surf.

The Doctor of Geneva

The doctor of Geneva stamped the sand
That lay impounding the Pacific swell,
Patted his stove-pipe hat and tugged his shawl.

Lacustrine man had never been assailed
By such long-rolling opulent cataracts,
Unless Racine or Bossuet held the like.

He did not quail. A man so used to plumb
The multifarious heavens felt no awe
Before these visible, voluble delugings,

Which yet found means to set his simmering mind
Spinning and hissing with oracular
Notations of the wild, the ruinous waste,

Until the steeples of his city clanked and sprang
In an unburgherly apocalypse.
The doctor used his handkerchief and sighed.

Another Weeping Woman

Pour the unhappiness out
From your too bitter heart,
Which grieving will not sweeten.

Poison grows in this dark.
It is in the water of tears
Its black blooms rise.

The magnificent cause of being,
The imagination, the one reality
In this imagined world

Leaves you
With him for whom no phantasy moves,
And you are pierced by a death.

VI

Rationalists, wearing square hats,
 Think, in square rooms,
 Looking at the floor,
 Looking at the ceiling.
 They confine themselves
 To right-angled triangles.
 If they tried rhomboids,
 Cones, waving lines, ellipses—
 As for example, the ellipse of the half-moon—
 Rationalists would wear sombreros.

Bantams in Pine-Woods

Chieftain Iffucan of Azcan in caftan
 Of tan with henna hackles, halt!

Damned universal cock, as if the sun
 Was blackamoor to bear your blazing tail.

Fat! Fat! Fat! Fat! I am the personal.
 Your world is you. I am my world.

You ten-foot poet among inchlings. Fat!
 Begone! An inchling bristles in these pines,

Bristles, and points their Appalachian tangs,
 And fears not portly Azcan nor his hoos.

* *Anecdote of the Jar*

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
 And round it was, upon a hill.
 It made the slovenly wilderness
 Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,
 And sprawled around, no longer wild.
 The jar was round upon the ground
 And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.
 The jar was gray and bare.
 It did not give of bird or bush,
 Like nothing else in Tennessee.

Palace of the Babies

The disbeliever walked the moonlit place,
 Outside of gates of hammered serafin,
 Observing the moon-blotches on the walls.

The yellow rocked across the still façades,
 Or else sat spinning on the pinnacles,
 While he imagined humming sounds and sleep.

The walker in the moonlight walked alone,
 And each blank window of the building balked
 His loneliness and what was in his mind:

If in a shimmering room the babies came,
 Drawn close by dreams of fledgling wing,
 It was because night nursed them in its fold.

Night nursed not him in whose dark mind
 The clambering wings of birds of black revolved,
 Making harsh torment of the solitude.

The walker in the moonlight walked alone,
 And in his heart his disbelief lay cold.
 His broad-brimmed hat came close upon his eyes.

III

The gold tree is blue.
 The singer has pulled his cloak over his head.
 The moon is in the folds of the cloak.

Anecdote of the Prince of Peacocks

In the moonlight
 I met Berserk,
 In the moonlight
 On the bushy plain.
 Oh, sharp he was
 As the sleepless!

And, "Why are you red
 In this milky blue?"
 I said.

"Why sun-colored,
 As if awake
 In the midst of sleep?"

"You that wander,"
 So he said,
 "On the bushy plain,
 Forget so soon.
 But I set my traps
 In the midst of dreams."

I knew from this
 That the blue ground
 Was full of blocks
 And blocking steel.
 I knew the dread
 Of the bushy plain,

And the beauty
 Of the moonlight
 Falling there,
 Falling
 As sleep falls
 In the innocent air.

* *A High-Toned Old Christian Woman*

Poetry is the supreme fiction, madame.
 Take the moral law and make a nave of it
 And from the nave build haunted heaven. Thus,
 The conscience is converted into palms,
 Like windy citherns hankering for hymns.
 We agree in principle. That's clear. But take
 The opposing law and make a peristyle,
 And from the peristyle project a masque
 Beyond the planets. Thus, our bawdiness,
 Unpurged by epitaph, indulged at last,
 Is equally converted into palms,
 Squiggling like saxophones. And palm for palm,
 Madame, we are where we began. Allow,
 Therefore, that in the planetary scene
 Your disaffected flagellants, well-stuffed,
 Smacking their muzzy bellies in parade,
 Proud of such novelties of the sublime,
 Such tink and tank and tunk-a-tunk-tunk,
 May, merely may, madame, whip from themselves
 A jovial hullabaloo among the spheres.
 This will make widows wince. But fictive things
 Wink as they will. Wink most when widows wince.

The Place of the Solitaires

Let the place of the solitaires
 Be a place of perpetual undulation.

Whether it be in mid-sea
 On the dark, green water-wheel,
 Or on the beaches,
 There must be no cessation
 Of motion, or of the noise of motion,
 The renewal of noise
 And manifold continuation;

✦ *The Snow Man*

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land
Full of the same wind
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

The Ordinary Women

Then from their poverty they rose,
From dry catarrhs, and to guitars
They flitted
Through the palace walls.

They flung monotony behind,
Turned from their want, and, nonchalant,
They crowded
The nocturnal halls.

The lacquered loges huddled there
Mumbled zay-zay and a-zay, a-zay.
The moonlight
Fubbed the girandoles.

And the cold dresses that they wore,
In the vapid haze of the window-bays,
Were tranquil
As they leaned and looked

From the window-sills at the alphabets,
At beta b and gamma g,
To study
The canting curlicues

Of heaven and of the heavenly script.
And there they read of marriage-bed.
Ti-lill-o!
And they read right long.

The gaunt guitarists on the strings
Rumbled a-day and a-day, a-day.
The moonlight
Rose on the beachy floors.

How explicit the coiffures became,
The diamond point, the sapphire point,
The sequins
Of the civil fans!

Insinuations of desire,
Puissant speech, alike in each,
Cried quittance
To the wickless halls.

Then from their poverty they rose,
From dry guitars, and to catarrhs
They flitted
Through the palace walls.

Exposition of the Contents of a Cab

Victoria Clementina, negress,
Took seven white dogs
To ride in a cab.

Bells of the dogs chinked.
Harness of the horses shuffled
Like brazen shells.

Oh-hé-hé! Fragrant puppets
By the green lake-pallors,
She too is flesh,

And a breech-cloth might wear,
Netted of topaz and ruby
And savage blooms;

Thridding the squawkiest jungle
In a golden sedan,
White dogs at bay.

What breech-cloth might you wear,
Except linen, embroidered
By elderly women?

★ *Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock*

The houses are haunted
By white night-gowns.
None are green,
Or purple with green rings,
Or green with yellow rings,
Or yellow with blue rings.
None of them are strange,
With socks of lace
And beaded ceintures.
People are not going

To dream of baboons and periwinkles.
Only, here and there, an old sailor,
Drunk and asleep in his boots,
Catches tigers
In red weather.

Sunday Morning

I

Complacencies of the peignoir, and late
Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,
And the green freedom of a cockatoo
Upon a rug mingle to dissipate
The holy hush of ancient sacrifice.
She dreams a little, and she feels the dark
Encroachment of that old catastrophe,
As a calm darkens among water-lights.
The pungent oranges and bright, green wings
Seem things in some procession of the dead,
Winding across wide water, without sound.
The day is like wide water, without sound,
Stilled for the passing of her dreaming feet
Over the seas, to silent Palestine,
Dominion of the blood and sepulchre.

II

Why should she give her bounty to the dead?
What is divinity if it can come
Only in silent shadows and in dreams?
Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,
In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else
In any balm or beauty of the earth,
Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?
Divinity must live within herself:
Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;
Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued
Elations when the forest blooms; gusty

Oh, but the very self of the storm
Of sun and slaves, breeding and death,
The old animal,

The senses and feeling, the very sound
And sight, and all there was of the storm,
Knows nothing more.

* *O, Florida, Venereal Soil*

A few things for themselves,
Convolvulus and coral,
Buzzards and live-moss,
Tiestas from the keys,
A few things for themselves,
Florida, venereal soil,
Disclose to the lover.

The dreadful sundry of this world,
The Cuban, Polodowsky,
The Mexican women,
The negro undertaker
Killing the time between corpses
Fishing for crayfish . . .
Virgin of boorish births,

Swiftly in the nights,
In the porches of Key West,
Behind the bougainvilleas,
After the guitar is asleep,
Lasciviously as the wind,
You come tormenting,
Insatiable,

When you might sit,
A scholar of darkness,
Sequestered over the sea,
Wearing a clear tiara

Of red and blue and red,
Sparkling, solitary, still,
In the high sea-shadow.

Donna, donna, dark,
Stooping in indigo gown
And cloudy constellations,
Conceal yourself or disclose
Fewest things to the lover—
A hand that bears a thick-leaved fruit,
A pungent bloom against your shade.

Last Looks at the Lilacs

To what good, in the alleys of the lilacs,
O caliper, do you scratch your buttocks
And tell the divine ingénue, your companion,
That this bloom is the bloom of soap
And this fragrance the fragrance of vegetal?

Do you suppose that she cares a tick,
In this hymeneal air, what it is
That marries her innocence thus,
So that her nakedness is near,
Or that she will pause at scurrilous words?

Poor buffo! Look at the lavender
And look your last and look still steadily,
And say how it comes that you see
Nothing but trash and that you no longer feel
Her body quivering in the Floréal

Toward the cool night and its fantastic star,
Prime paramour and belted paragon,
Well-booted, rugged, arrogantly male,
Patron and imager of the gold Don John,
Who will embrace her before summer comes.

★ *Farewell to Florida*

I

Go on, high ship, since now, upon the shore,
The snake has left its skin upon the floor.
Key West sank downward under massive clouds
And silvers and greens spread over the sea. The moon
Is at the mast-head and the past is dead.
Her mind will never speak to me again.
I am free. High above the mast the moon
Rides clear of her mind and the waves make a refrain
Of this: that the snake has shed its skin upon
The floor. Go on through the darkness. The waves fly back.

II

Her mind had bound me round. The palms were hot
As if I lived in ashen ground, as if
The leaves in which the wind kept up its sound
From my North of cold whistled in a sepulchral South,
Her South of pine and coral and coralline sea,
Her home, not mine, in the ever-freshened Keys,
Her days, her oceanic nights, calling
For music, for whisperings from the reefs.
How content I shall be in the North to which I sail
And to feel sure and to forget the bleaching sand . . .

III

I hated the weathery yawl from which the pools
Disclosed the sea floor and the wilderness
Of waving weeds. I hated the vivid blooms
Curled over the shadowless hut, the rust and bones,
The trees like bones and the leaves half sand, half sun.
To stand here on the deck in the dark and say
Farewell and to know that that land is forever gone
And that she will not follow in any word
Or look, nor ever again in thought, except
That I loved her once . . . Farewell. Go on, high ship.

IV

My North is leafless and lies in a wintry slime
 Both of men and clouds, a slime of men in crowds.
 The men are moving as the water moves,
 This darkened water cloven by sullen swells
 Against your sides, then shoving and slithering,
 The darkness shattered, turbulent with foam.
 To be free again, to return to the violent mind
 That is their mind, these men, and that will bind
 Me round, carry me, misty deck, carry me
 To the cold, go on, high ship, go on, plunge on.

Ghosts as Cocoons

The grass is in seed. The young birds are flying.
 Yet the house is not built, not even begun.

The vetch has turned purple. But where is the bride?
 It is easy to say to those bidden—But where,

Where, butcher, seducer, bloodman, reveller,
 Where is sun and music and highest heaven's lust,

For which more than any words cries deeper?
 This mangled, smutted semi-world hacked out

Of dirt . . . It is not possible for the moon
 To blot this with its dove-winged blendings.

She must come now. The grass is in seed and high.
 Come now. Those to be born have need

Of the bride, love being a birth, have need to see
 And to touch her, have need to say to her,

"The fly on the rose prevents us, O season
 Excelling summer, ghost of fragrance falling

On dung." Come now, pearled and pasted, bloomy-leafed,
 While the domes resound with chant involving chant.

Sailing After Lunch

It is the word *pejorative* that hurts.
 My old boat goes round on a crutch
 And doesn't get under way.
 It's the time of the year
 And the time of the day.

Perhaps it's the lunch that we had
 Or the lunch that we should have had.
 But I am, in any case,
 A most inappropriate man
 In a most unpropitious place.

Mon Dieu, hear the poet's prayer.
 The romantic should be here.
 The romantic should be there.
 It ought to be everywhere.
 But the romantic must never remain,

Mon Dieu, and must never again return.
 This heavy historical sail
 Through the mustiest blue of the lake
 In a really vertiginous boat
 Is wholly the vapidest fake. . . .

It is least what one ever sees.
 It is only the way one feels, to say
 Where my spirit is I am,
 To say the light wind worries the sail,
 To say the water is swift today,

To expunge all people and be a pupil
 Of the gorgeous wheel and so to give

Say how his heavy wings,
Spread on the sun-bronzed air,
Turned tip and tip away,
Down to the sand, the glare

Of the pine trees edging the sand,
Dropping in sovereign rings
Out of his fiery lair.
Speak of the dazzling wings.

Waving Adieu, Adieu, Adieu

That would be waving and that would be crying,
Crying and shouting and meaning farewell,
Farewell in the eyes and farewell at the centre,
Just to stand still without moving a hand.

In a world without heaven to follow, the stops
Would be endings, more poignant than partings,
 profounder,
And that would be saying farewell, repeating farewell,
Just to be there and just to behold.

To be one's singular self, to despise
The being that yielded so little, acquired
So little, too little to care, to turn
To the ever-jubilant weather, to sip

One's cup and never to say a word,
Or to sleep or just to lie there still,
Just to be there, just to be beheld,
That would be bidding farewell, be bidding farewell.

One likes to practice the thing. They practice,
Enough, for heaven. Ever-jubilant,
What is there here but weather, what spirit
Have I except it comes from the sun?

★ *The Idea of Order at Key West*

She sang beyond the genius of the sea.
The water never formed to mind or voice,
Like a body wholly body, fluttering
Its empty sleeves; and yet its mimic motion
Made constant cry, caused constantly a cry,
That was not ours although we understood,
Inhuman, of the veritable ocean.

The sea was not a mask. No more was she.
The song and water were not medleyed sound
Even if what she sang was what she heard,
Since what she sang was uttered word by word.
It may be that in all her phrases stirred
The grinding water and the gasping wind;
But it was she and not the sea we heard.

For she was the maker of the song she sang.
The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea
Was merely a place by which she walked to sing.
Whose spirit is this? we said, because we knew
It was the spirit that we sought and knew
That we should ask this often as she sang.

If it was only the dark voice of the sea
That rose, or even colored by many waves;
If it was only the outer voice of sky
And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled,
However clear, it would have been deep air,
The heaving speech of air, a summer sound
Repeated in a summer without end
And sound alone. But it was more than that,
More even than her voice, and ours, among
The meaningless plungings of water and the wind,
Theatrical distances, bronze shadows heaped
On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres
Of sky and sea.

It was her voice that made
 The sky acutest at its vanishing.
 She measured to the hour its solitude.
 She was the single artificer of the world
 In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
 Whatever self it had, became the self
 That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,
 As we beheld her striding there alone,
 Knew that there never was a world for her
 Except the one she sang and, singing, made.

Ramon Fernandez, tell me, if you know,
 Why, when the singing ended and we turned
 Toward the town, tell why the glassy lights,
 The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,
 As the night descended, tilting in the air,
 Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,
 Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,
 Arranging, deepening, enchanting night.

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
 The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
 Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
 And of ourselves and of our origins,
 In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.

The American Sublime

How does one stand
 To behold the sublime,
 To confront the mockers,
 The mickey mockers
 And plated pairs?

When General Jackson
 Posed for his statue
 He knew how one feels.
 Shall a man go barefoot
 Blinking and blank?

But how does one feel?
 One grows used to the weather,
 The landscape and that;
 And the sublime comes down
 To the spirit itself,

The spirit and space,
 The empty spirit
 In vacant space.
 What wine does one drink?
 What bread does one eat?

Mozart, 1935

Poet, be seated at the piano.
 Play the present, its hoo-hoo-hoo,
 Its shoo-shoo-shoo, its ric-a-nic,
 Its envious cachinnation.

If they throw stones upon the roof
 While you practice arpeggios,
 It is because they carry down the stairs
 A body in rags.
 Be seated at the piano.

That lucid souvenir of the past,
 The divertimento;
 That airy dream of the future,
 The unclouded concerto . . .
 The snow is falling.
 Strike the piercing chord.

Be thou the voice,
 Not you. Be thou, be thou
 The voice of angry fear,
 The voice of this besieging pain.

The Solitary Reaper / William Wordsworth (1807)

Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

No Nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands:
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings?—
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago:
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again?

Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o'er the sickle bending;—
I listened, motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill,
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.