

from *Spring and All*
Chapter XIX*

I realize that the chapters are rather quick in their sequence and that nothing much is contained in any one of them but no one should be surprised at this today.

THE TRADITIONALIST OF PLAGIARISM

It is spring. That is to say, it is approaching THE BEGINNING.

In that huge and microscopic career of time, as it were a wild horse racing in an illimitable pampa under the stars, describing immense and microscopic circles with his hoofs on the solid turf, running without a stop for the millionth part of a second until he is aged and worn to a heap of skin, bones and ragged hoofs—In that majestic progress of life, that gives the exact impression of Phidias' frieze, the men and beasts of which, though they seem of the rigidity of marble are not so but move, with blinding rapidity, though we do not have the time to notice it, their legs advancing a millionth part of an inch every fifty thousand years—In that progress of life which seems stillness itself in the mass of its movements—at last SPRING is approaching.

In that colossal surge toward the finite and the capable life has now arrived for the second time at that exact moment when in the ages past the destruction of the species *Homo sapiens* occurred.

Now at last that process of miraculous verisimilitude, that great copying which evolution has followed, repeating move for move every move that it made in the past—is approaching the end.

Suddenly it is at an end. THE WORLD IS NEW .

I

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

II

Pink confused with white
flowers and flowers reversed
take and spill the shaded flame
darting it back
into the lamp's horn

petals aslant in whorls
petal lays its glow upon petal
round flamegreen throats

petals radiant with transpiercing light
contending
 above

the leaves
reaching up their modes green
from the pot's rim

and there, wholly dark, the pot
gay with rough moss

A terrific confusion has taken place. No man know whiter to burn. There is nothing!
Emptiness stares us once more in the face. Whither? To what end? Each asks the other. Has life

dovetame winds—
stars of tinsel
from the great end of a cornucopia
of glass

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The inevitable flux of the seeing eye toward measuring itself by the world it inhabits can only result in himself crushing humiliation unless the individual raise to some approximate co-extension with the universe. This is possible by aid of the imagination. Only through the agency of this force can a man feel himself moved largely with sympathetic pulses at work—

A world of the imagination which fails to release the sense in accordance with its major requisite—the sympathies, the intelligence in its selective world, fails at elucidation, the alleviation which is—

In the composition, the artist does exactly what every eye must do with life, fix the particular with the universality of his own personality—Taught by the largeness of his imagination to feel every form which he sees moving within himself, he must prove the truth of this by expression.

The contraction which is felt.

All this being anterior to technique, that can have only a sequent value; but since all that appears to the senses on a work of art does so through

the imagination of the external as well as internal means of expression
the essential nature of technique or transcription.

fixation by

Only when this position is reached can life proper be said to begin since only then can a value be affixed to the forms and activities of which it consists.

Only then can the sense of frustration which ends. All composition defeated.

Only through the imagination is the advance of intelligence possible, to keep beside growing understanding.

Complete lack of imagination would be the same at the cost of intelligence, complete.

Even the most robust constitution has its limits, though the Roman feast with its reliance upon regurgitation is prolonged it shows an active ingenuity, yet the powers of a man are so pitifully small, with the ocean to swallow—that at the end of the feast nothing would be left but suicide.

That or the imagination which in this case takes the form of humor, is known in that form—the release from physical necessity. Having eaten to the full we must acknowledge our

insufficiency since we have not annihilated all food nor even the quantity of a good sized steer. However we have annihilated all eating: quite plainly we have no more appetite. This is to say that the imagination has removed us from the banal necessity of bursting ourselves—by acknowledging a new situation. We must acknowledge that the ocean we would sink is too vast—but at the same time we realize that extension in our case is not confined to the intestine only. The stomach is full, the ocean no fuller, both have the same quantity of fullness. In that, then, one is equal to the other. Having eaten, the man has released his mind.

THIS catalogue might be increased to larger proportions without stimulating the sense.

In works of the imagination that which is taken for great good sense, so that it seems as if an accurate precept were discovered, is in reality not so, but vigor and accuracy of the imagination alone. In work such as Shakespeare's—

This leads to the discovery that has been made toady—old catalogues aside—full of meat—

“the divine illusion has about it that inaccuracy which reveals that which I mean.”

There is only “illusion” in art where ignorance of the bystander confuses imagination and its works with cruder processes. Truly men feel an enlargement before great or good work, an expansion but this not, as so many believe today a “lie,” a stupefaction, a kind of mesmerism, a thing to block out “life,” bitter to the individual, by a “vision of beauty.” It is a work of the imagination. It gives the feeling of completion by revealing the oneness of experience; it rouses rather than stupefies the intelligence by demonstrating the importance of personality, by showing the individual, depressed before it, that his life is valuable—when completed by the imagination. And then only. Such work elucidates—

Such a realization shows us the falseness of attempting to “copy” nature. The thing is equally silly when we try to “make” pictures—

But such a picture as that of Juan Gris, though I have not seen it in color, is important as marking more clearly than any I have seen what the modern trend is: the attempt is being made to separate things of imagination from life, and obviously, but using the forms common to experience so as not to frighten the onlooker away but to invite him,

The rose is obsolete
but each petal ends in
an edge, the double facet
cementing the grooved
columns of air—The edge
cuts without cutting
meets—nothing—renews
itself in metal or porcelain—=

whither? It ends—

But if it ends
the start is begun
so that to engage roses
becomes a geometry—

Sharper, neater, more cutting
figure in majolica—
the broken plate
glazed with a rose

Somewhere the sense
makes copper roses
steel roses—

The rose carried weight of love
but love is at an end—of roses

It is at the edge of the
petal that love waits

Crisp, worked to defeat
laboredness—fragile
plucked, moist, half-raised
cold, precise, touching

What

The place between the petal's
edge and the

From the petal's edge a line starts
that being of steel
infinitely fine, infinitely
rigid penetrates
the Milky Way
without contact—lifting
from it—neither hanging
nor pushing—

The fragility of the flower
unbruised
penetrates space

VIII

The sunlight in a
yellow plaque upon the
varnished floor

is full of a song
inflated to
fifty pounds pressure

at the faucet of
June that rings
the triangle of the air

pulling at the
anemones in
Persephone's cow pasture—

When from among
the steel rocks leaps
J. P. M.

who enjoyed
extraordinary privileges
among virginity

to solve the core
of whirling flywheels
by cutting

the Gordian knot
with a Veronese or
perhaps a Rubeens—

whose cars are about
the finest on
the market today—

And so it comes
to motor cars—
which is the son

leaving off the g
of sunlight and grass—
Impossible

to say, impossible
to underestimate—
wind, earthquakes in

Manchuria, a
partridge
from dry leaves

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XVIII

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 guads
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 to car

or better: prose has to do with the fact of an emotion; poetry has to do with the dynamization of emotion into a separate form. This is the force of imagination.

prose: statement of facts concerning emotions, intellectual states, data of all sorts—technical expositions, jargon, of all sorts—fictional and other—

poetry: new form dealt with as a reality in itself.

The form of prose is the accuracy of its subject matter—how best to expose the multiform phases of its material

the form of poetry is related to the movements of the imagination revealed in words—or whatever it may be—

the cleavage is complete

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XXII

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

(from *Spring and All*, 1923)