II.

Readings

"The Paltry Nude Starts on a Spring Voyage" (CP, p. 5)

The nude is an emblematic figure of spring. There is a comparison between spring, in the first part of the poem, and a similar figure representing summer, in the latter part. Thus spring is "paltry," especially early spring, spring at the start of her voyage, as compared with the fullness of summer described later on. She, early spring, is without pomp—she is not imagined, like Botticelli’s Venus, with a shell, but rather embarks on “the first-found weed”; nor is she imposing like an archaic deity, but silent, insubstantial. She, as we with the sparsity of spring, is discontent with her own paltriness: she desires the pomp of “purple stuff” (cloth), and is impatient with the staleness of winter (“salty harbors” as opposed to the excitement of the high sea—“bellowing,” and “high interiors” with its suggestion of being enclosed by the sea and by high waves). The goddess of spring, she dominates everything (“touches the clouds”) as she runs her seasonal course. But this is still meager compared to the fullness of summer, the nude of “a later day,” who is “goldener,” a center of pomp. The season is the servant of fate, and summer in particular is a servant who follows spring inexorably, tidying up its “scurry” (“scurry” in Collected Poems is a misprint) and comparatively wilder, lighter motion, making it “spick.”

* The readings follow the order of Collected Poems and Opus Posthumous