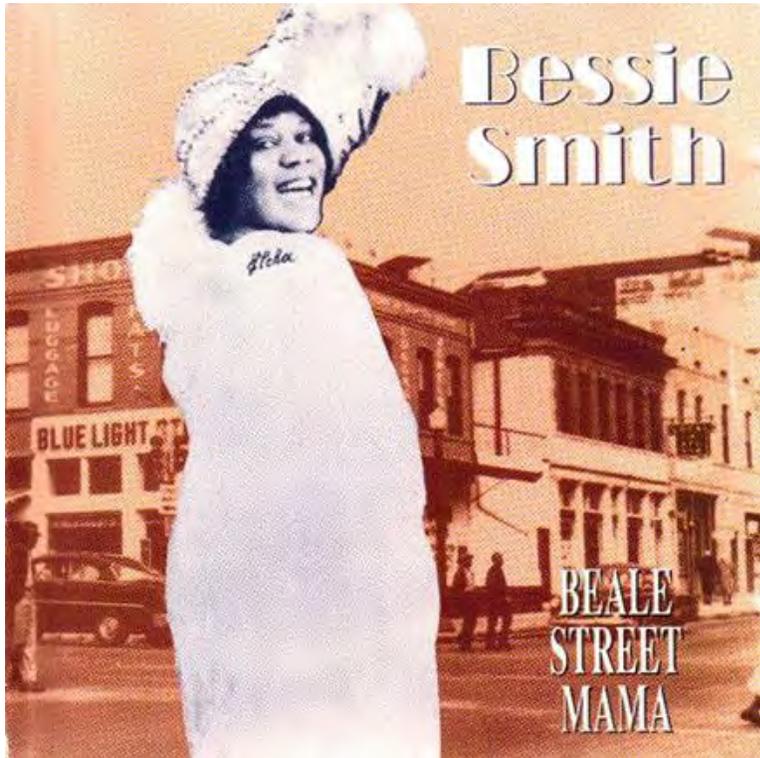




# Romancing the Foam No. 117

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Light beers are good for ball games and bike rides. Lawn mower beers go well with mowing lawns and session beers are built for drinking all night while talking with friends. Big beers are for savoring and contemplation. I have downloaded my Bessie Smith collection onto my tablet and right now I am sitting in my garden listening to her belt out **Beale Street Mama**, drinking things big, black and bold and reading Frank O'Hara. Frank O'Hara worked as a curator at the New York Museum of Modern Art and for a time was one of our country's leading poets and art personalities. Frank died – run over on the beach by a Jeep – 52 years ago today. Bessie passed 59 years ago last week and

today I am commemorating her passing and Frank's with my copy of Frank's **The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara**, Bessie Smith's music and some of my favorite big beer. What got me started on all of this was reading Frank O'Hara's poem *The Day Lady Died* last week on the anniversary of her passing. This is a poem that for some reason reaches across nearly 6 decades and grabs me by the soul. I read it at least once a year and then I go listen to Bessie Smith and read it again:

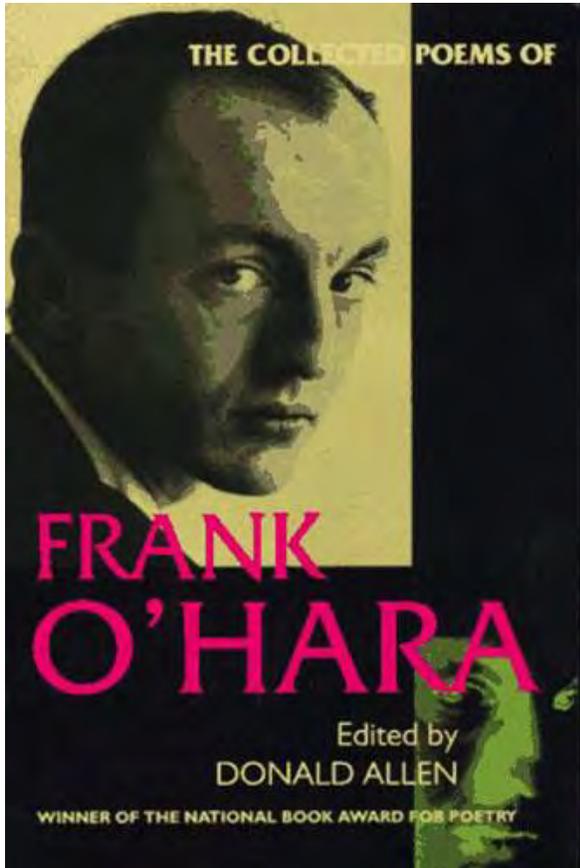
## The Day Lady Died

BY FRANK O'HARA

It is 12:20 in New York a Friday  
three days after Bastille day, yes  
it is 1959 and I go get a shoeshine  
because I will get off the 4:19 in Easthampton  
at 7:15 and then go straight to dinner  
and I don't know the people who will feed me

I walk up the muggy street beginning to sun  
and have a hamburger and a malted and buy  
an ugly NEW WORLD WRITING to see what the poets  
in Ghana are doing these days

I go on to the bank



and Miss Stillwagon (first name Linda I once heard) doesn't even look up my balance for once in her life and in the GOLDEN GRIFFIN I get a little Verlaine for Patsy with drawings by Bonnard although I do think of Hesiod, trans. Richmond Lattimore or Brendan Behan's new play or *Le Balcon* or *Les Nègres* of Genet, but I don't, I stick with Verlaine after practically going to sleep with quandariness

and for Mike I just stroll into the PARK LANE Liquor Store and ask for a bottle of Strega and then I go back where I came from to 6th Avenue and the tobacconist in the Ziegfeld Theatre and casually ask for a carton of Gauloises and a carton of Picayunes, and a NEW YORK POST with her face on it

and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT while she whispered a song along the keyboard to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing

Frank O'Hara, "The Day Lady Died" from *Lunch Poems*. Copyright © 1964 by Frank O'Hara. Reprinted with the permission of City Lights Books.

Source: *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara* (1995)

When you are in a contemplative mood, you need big, contemplative beer. Insight Brewing Gravity Well Rum Barrel Aged Imperial Stout (12.0% alcohol by volume, 75 International bittering Units) fits the bill. It is aged in Trinidadian rum barrels. I am drinking the 2016 vintage. I am savoring it slow to the music. It smells like a rich rum cake spiced with coffee with rum, spice, dark dried fruit, low levels of coffee, plum, a hint of coconut and a trace of sherry. It pours deep dark brown blanketed by 1/2" of tan foam with fair retention. A quick swirl reveals some legs. Rum cake and some sherry notes start the flavors but more mildly roasty stout flavors come forward towards the back with traces of coffee and a hint of cinnamon, vanilla and coconut. It has a sweet start but the oak kicks in near the finish as the tannins provide a drying astringency. A



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light bitter chocolate bitterness also provides some balance. The rum flavors are medium, malt flavors are medium high, sweetness is medium plus, and hop flavors and bitterness are low. The beer is thick, rich and spicy with a pleasant warming that grows on you as your drink. This is like drinking liquid rum cake. It is a little boozy and sweet, but it grows on you. Gravity Well is like a slow dance to Bessie Smith with my wife. I rate it 85.



Bessie has made it through to *Easy Come, Easy Go Blues* and I am making another read through *The Day Lady Died* and have picked as my companion a six month old bottle of Boulevard Brewing Company Bourbon Barrel Quad Barrel-Aged Ale (BBQ) (11.8% alcohol by volume, 26 International Bittering Units). Boulevard ages their Quad - The Sixth Glass - in a series of bourbon barrels and then blends together beers of different ages with some aged up to three years. They add cherries to make up for the amount of beer lost through evaporation through the wood barrel (the angel's share). Removing the cap releases smells of bourbon, vanilla, molasses, spice, dried fruit, some dark brown bread, raisins, plum, pitted fruit, and fig. It pours bright, dark dense tea brown under a 1/2" cream to light tan collar with a very fine bead and fair retention. Small bubbles slowly rise to the top in continuous streams. The flavors start with bourbon, vanilla, dark sugar, spice, pitted fruit, and dark dried fruit. The

sweetness is medium to medium high. The bitterness is medium low, the malt is medium, the yeast flavors are medium high, and the barrel flavors are medium high. There is a little oak in the finish and some drying from the oak tannins. The beer is very creamy and mousse-like. The body is medium to a little above, but it is light for the amount of flavor and alcohol in the beer. The beer produces pleasant alcohol warming but the alcohol is not hot or harsh. The beer is a perfect companion for a late July evening of contemplation. I rate this big, boozy beer 95.

I am back to the beginning the Bessie's CD listening to *Downhearted Blues* and I remember a bottle of Wicked Wort Brewing Company Wicked Wood Series # 2 Doppelbock (8.7% alcohol by volume, 28 International bittering Units) that I have sequestered in a dark corner of my refrigerator since last October. It is a Doppelbock aged in High West



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Distillery Double Rye Whiskey barrels. High West is a Salt Lake City Utah Distillery and lays claim to being the world's only ski-in gastro-distillery. High West Double Rye Whiskey is a blend of a young whiskey with a mash composed of 95% rye and 5% malt and an older whiskey with a more typical rye mash of 53% rye, 37% corn and 10% barley. They tout their Double Rye Whiskey as the spiciest rye whiskey in the world. Rich malt aromas with bread crumb and bread crust dominate the aromas but a healthy bit of rye and whiskey lurk in the background with an interesting blend of spice. I can pick out traces of anise and vanilla and possibly cinnamon and a hint of oak. It pours chestnut brown under a 1/2" cream to light tan foam cap with fair to poor retention. A malt and rye whiskey blend starts the flavors and as the beer warms they grow in complexity. While the alcohol has rye whiskey notes it is not hot or harsh. The malt bread crumb, bread crust and dark sugar flavors work well with the traces of whiskey from the barrel. There is an interesting spiciness from the rye whiskey that comes in and out of focus. The barrel contributes a hint of vanilla, traces of spice and some oak tannin on the finish that dries things out slightly and helps the hop bitterness balance the malt. The beer is clean and smooth. The body is medium full and the carbonation is medium to medium low. Eight months in the fridge have not harmed this beer. It still has the complexity and drinkability it had in October. The malt in the doppelbock is well developed, the carbonation level is just right, and the whiskey barrels add some interesting flavors. I rate this 95.

And I sit here thinking in my garden with the July sun warming my skin with and Bessie and Frank and these three big beers as the warmth of the beer spreads through my body, how appropriate are these three for what I need right now. I'll probably play Bessie one more time, give Frank another read and wait for the sun to go down.