

Marc Chagall, Over the Town

Marc and Bella
are flying happily over Vitebsk
— they've shucked off the iron husk
of place
and like two salmon trout
've leapt high above the flood
above war revolutions pogroms
— this is a real a shining good
but if you look closely there's a lout
squatting on the mud
near the fence
— like a Brueghel peasant
he's laying a turd
at the edge of their wedding party
and it isn't hard
to know how serious his face
and his bare bum are
though many a reproduction
mars this famous painting
by omitting not just his arse
but the entire squatting lout
whose absence reminds me
how quite a few
critics of T.S. Eliot
choose
either to forgive or forget
those bits of verse
and one piece
of coldly sinister prose
that're about
his fear and hatred of all Jews

TOM PAULIN