



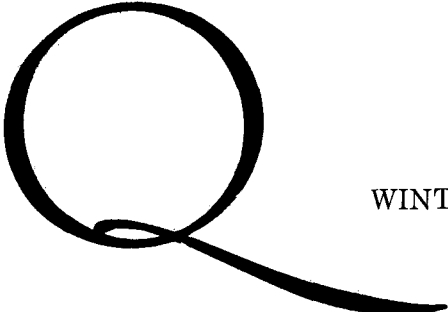
**PAINTED BRIDE QUARTERLY**

**NUMBER 21**

**WINTER 1984**

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# P B Q

The Painted Bride Quarterly  
230 Vine Street  
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*The Painted Bride Quarterly* accepts essays, reviews, short fiction, poetry and visual art. Reviews should not exceed 3000 words, prose should not exceed 5000 words, poetry is limited to 6 poems, and visual art should be submitted on 35mm slides or 8" x 10" black and white glossy photographs (limit 6 slides or photos). Include a short biographical resume with phone number. Include stamped, self-addressed envelope. *PBQ* assumes no responsibility for submissions received without adequate return postage, packaging or proper identification labels. *PBQ* especially welcomes the work of younger writers and artists.

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THE NEW LOVE POEM

The new love poem  
is known for its honesty.  
The new love poem says  
I don't love you.

The new love poem  
remembers the old love poem  
in which a woman's body  
was compared to the entire world.  
The new love poem tries not to feel  
superior to the old love poem.

The new love poem can live  
on a steady diet  
of bitter fruit. The new love poem  
thinks sweets  
are for children.

When the new love poem sleeps  
it dreams  
of getting old,  
of shrivelling to a chrysalis,  
of something with wings  
and color so loud it talks  
emerging  
to thrill someone who doesn't know any better  
and who doesn't want to.

PITFALLS OF THE LADY POET

I knocked the handle of the big knife  
so it spun on the cutting board.  
“Is that a threat?” he asked.  
The real threat stays in my head  
where lips pulled back I grip it  
in my teeth blade away from tongue  
and at night steal into his bedroom  
looking for the fragile places—the belly,  
the hollow in the chest—only  
to be stopped by a back’s long shield,  
the blade of silence in a shoulder.  
And so I return to my own room where  
I cut away soft spots  
like bruises on a peach.  
Soon, I’ll be lean as any man.

LEAVING

I want to rock my house,  
house that I'm leaving.

It is human to me—  
a child—a child of the war  
like so many 20th Century children.  
Child of the war, the second world war,  
but its walls are plaster  
not board like the houses they build now.  
Real plaster, with a foundation of gray stone.

When I saw the lawyer for the first time  
last July, when I came home I tried  
figuring on the calculator  
how many times Joe and I made love.

We had made love all over this house.  
On the living room floor,  
dining room chair, kitchen chair,  
though it wasn't easy to get him to  
make love anywhere else but bed.

Once I wanted to make love in Hoffman Park  
by Darby Creek  
but he wouldn't.

It had to be in this house.

This house, with the walls we painted  
tangerine and midnight blue  
this house I'm leaving  
this house I'm leaving remembering the time  
we painted the midnight blue and the physical  
activity turned me on and we stopped painting  
to make love and the old couch was so comfortable  
the new one is not should have never given the  
old one to the Salvation Army changes so many changes  
over the years so much has changed except the stone  
foundation the plaster walls that are like our ancestors  
they are our base and our strength and I'm leaving it  
for another base another strength and it will be  
okay but I have to cry first I have to cry first cry  
over all these deaths including the death of what  
could never be born between us.



WHAT IS MISSING

How many mornings  
we wake up  
and things are not there,  
books we'd been reading,  
glasses we drank from,  
even pictures  
missing from the walls?

At night you closed your eyes  
to the cold, our bodies  
touching their entire length.  
In sleep it happens,

that we might roll apart,  
but our arms reached  
across that.

Light comes earlier  
to the country. You are up  
before I wake—what  
is gone this time, Love?

NIGHT BEFORE MOVING

The eaves were like wings in the walls.  
Upturned chairs and crates encircled me.  
In my room a series of small panes  
pressed out towards the back yard.  
You could see through the curtains.  
Fields: rocks where I'd picked out  
flakes of mica with my fingernails.  
Among those piled leaves, my snake  
had slipped from my hands.  
When I closed my eyes, my brother  
still rested in a room beneath me,  
laid in a white box.  
The yew bushes were so overgrown  
they covered all his windows.  
In the dark, I listened to my breath.

NEW JERSEY TURNPIKE NIGHT

Tonight you are afraid to stop your car.  
It's the coldest night of the year.  
You carry a schedule in your head  
and the suitable vitamins.  
You glance quickly side to side.  
Faces meet you from behind their glass  
you swerve into another lane of traffic  
and tell yourself it was the wind.  
You realize you are breathless.

You are very glad the car is moving  
the air is meeting the windshield  
and the heater is blowing over the radio.  
In fifteen minutes you will be in a friend's  
living room not knowing what to say  
and stamping your feet and smiling  
and taking your gloves off.  
The room will be warm.  
You will begin to feel erotic.

Hot chocolate unravels your legs in bed.  
Tea pumps your heart in the morning.  
You are always sipping a liquid drug  
and finding yourself in an office  
with your foot tapping or a bedroom  
with your eyelids dropping  
and you sense a great distance.  
In the summer the drug is water.  
Water and sluggishness by the fan.  
Water at the ocean and the blinding  
headache under the sunglasses  
the bodies moving in their suits  
almost naked.

You are thinking you will not stop your car  
and will go south until there is spongy  
moss on the trees and tremendous thirst.  
A new fear seizes you.  
It's a donut shop where you finally stop

for coffee and a vitamin.  
It is the coldest weather of the year.  
Everyone is heavily clothed  
and looking furtive over their cups.  
You wrap your hand around the hot cup  
and sip looking through the window  
at the highway.

You feel very much a part of your country.  
You want to travel and once you get  
to the warm room you are aiming for  
perhaps the uneasiness will be worthwhile.  
You think about the entire continent  
braced under the force of weather.  
It is the coldest night of the year.  
You are shaking inside with excitement.  
Your schedule will soon collapse against your will.  
It is only a matter of time.

THINGS I CAN'T REMEMBER

I sleepwalk through my rooms and stare at my blue suit.  
I go to the chair and put on my running shorts.  
I am going to run down the hall to the water but I must shut  
the bedroom door; company might come. They will then have to  
knock before entering and I will have time to arrange my body so  
as to not appear raw or obscene.

The streetlight creates a tableau. Tableaux are flat expanses  
of evenly washed color, shadow, or concepts where anything  
might happen, generally to symbolic purpose. Symbolic purpose  
is of great import in epics—it is a shortcut. Perhaps this  
has to do with sentimentality and a loose slavering jaw; the  
pillow is wet with saliva, who knows? It is only certain that  
the tableau is outside the window and I am now awake standing  
in my bedroom with running shorts and I have meant to do  
some work.

I am confused and cannot remember the night, but I remember  
my name which has meaning in a language I never learned.  
I cannot duplicate the sound. Once I was caught by a sensation  
but I cannot remember the face. The features and expression  
have been memorized and take the place of dreams which I cannot  
remember. I walk but I do not speak.

I can remember an open car window and a song and a hand meeting  
the wind. The hand broke the wind while the song became part  
of it and stayed in my head. I have never sung underwater but I  
am certain it was the same without drowning. I remember the  
sense of the road, that American saga rolling on like the famous  
American muddy river where we can stand and shut our mouths  
or cross.

I don't remember the night or the face or the content of the  
speech. Words rush over me and I respond to their residue.  
You respond to your impression of my response to the residue  
and we are amiable and our hands at some point may slap  
against each other. In this way we are aware of our presences  
and the sounds we make.

I can't remember the words or the passion. Flying birds in a dark sky or a formal discussion at the glass table are allegories we may use. There is a pause in the conversation though the birds continue on their own dumb way and I hold these devices of comparison and look out the window at the tableau.

This was to be about dreams, time, and memory with its ploys but definitions have overtaken themselves and created a pleasant get-together and a burgeoning popular lyric. We are hoping for release. Connections have been bad and the season a blue one.

AIRPLANE HAIKU

Flying with my son  
makes me look out the window  
all over again.

THE FRANKFORD EL

Though it saddens me and causes great shame  
to walk beneath the Frankford El,  
I do it often now, as I did ten years ago.

And I am still an easy mark  
for pigeons roosting in the bolted crevices  
of the structure, squat as the wives

of new Russian merchants, blocking doorways  
to fruit stands or hoagie shops, although they,  
of course, are not a cause of my shame.

I remember when I first entered the canopy  
of the El structure, not caring  
about the subway train, here above ground and always

moving on. I sat, that first day, on the concrete  
stoop of the Fidelity Bank  
and spread notebooks and sacred texts

around me. I was writing a saga  
called *Fishtown*, a piece that lacked,  
unlike the El, the spiritual underpinning

capable of supporting and transporting  
the living. It was then the pea-green slime  
dropped on my head. In my innocence

I suspected not the doves, but the sloppy,  
scaffolded painters, coating the girders  
that straddled Kensington Avenue. And I was outraged

that no one paid attention  
when either nature or the working class  
dumped on me. Although I have since



learned the difference between pigeon shit and paint,  
there is always something new from the same vatic source  
waiting to defeat us when we feel most sure.

Like Mrs. Sophia, the cardreader, rocking  
behind her picture window, or the parading  
school girls from Frankford High

or Little Flower—named for the more delicate  
Teresa, so meek and humble, whose ecstasy  
never came; not from heaven, not from me.

THE BRICK

*For David & Barbara Clewell*

Each morning in the gray margin  
between sleep and rising, I find myself  
on Pershing Avenue, St. Louis, examining bricks  
in buildings, looking for the one I brushed  
with my mitten in 1956. How will I know it  
when I find it? A shade goes up in one window.  
This is where the man in the undershirt lived.  
Someone shakes a coffee can and turns a faucet:  
the water gushes out, ice-cold.  
Why do I want this brick? What does a brick,  
red or otherwise, have to tell anyone  
about how to live a life? It's a crazy  
as crying for the bear you didn't get  
when you were three, those little hands  
hopefully touching the nose,  
maybe they even named it. "Fuzzy."  
So what could I name a brick? Hard.  
What Buildings Are Made Of.  
And why would one brick that I brushed  
while on a walk with my father and mother  
become a shrine? Later we rode a bus.  
My father carried a bag from a drugstore.  
I stared hard at the faces of shops  
to see what they looked like in the dark.  
And things went on that way for decades,  
doors opening, buzzers going off,  
someone saying "We're almost there."

So. This has something to do with why  
I stare at certain buildings in any city.  
I don't know where the mittens went,  
they had a cord to keep them together.  
I'm sure my parents could drive down  
Pershing Avenue tomorrow without weeping.  
But it's different for me. It's the Snagged Edge,  
the Center of Memory, the Place Where I Get Off  
And On.

FEBRUARY

Speak, air answers.  
Words move out  
into the auditorium of air.  
What comes back: two oversize robins  
foraging under mesquite,  
a man flashes a devastating smile.

How is it, such commerce  
with the world?  
We are used to cash registers,  
pocketbooks, a predictable sphere.  
How is it words shift and swell  
disappearing up the chute of wind  
while one little one lingers  
on the tip of the ear?

Listen hard, we hear.  
Listen to what has no name.  
Then speak to the main thing  
that listens.

ARABIC COFFEE

It was never too strong for us:  
make it blacker, Daddy,  
thick in the bottom,  
tell again how the years will gather  
in small white cups,  
how luck lives in a spot of grounds.

Leaning over the stove, he let it  
boil to the top, and down again.  
Two times. No sugar in his pot.  
And the place where men and women  
break off from one another  
was not present in that room.  
The hundred disappointments,  
fire swallowing olive-wood beads  
at the warehouse, and the dreams  
tucked like pocket handkerchiefs  
into each day, took their places  
on the table, near the half-empty  
dish of corn. And none was  
more important than the others,  
and all were guests. When  
he carried the tray into the room,  
high and balanced in his hands,  
it was an offering to all of them,  
stay, be seated, follow the talk  
wherever it goes. The coffee was  
the center of the flower.  
Like clothes on a line saying  
*you will live long enough to wear me,*  
a motion of faith. There is this,  
and there is more.

TO MAMA LIZZIE

no humming today sweet lizzie.  
no familiar tunes of old, to pace  
my step. no sweet song breeze to meet  
the beat of my journey?  
but when the morning comes, i will  
pack my sack on my back, wrap my head  
up tight and start to walking  
dropping my seeds from this here old heart,  
my sack. dropping them in the rich  
black earth, patting softly as i step.

the seeds will grow bushy, as the hair  
on my head, and as short as the winter's  
days growing long through spring.

maybe then mama lizzie will hum  
once more for me, sweet scent of my  
mama birthing,  
will bring me back again.

THE WOODCUT

For days  
I touch the block of pine wood—  
pressing its hard edge  
                  against my forehead—  
  
uncertain for days  
          while it rains  
I walk through wet pine needles—  
water-softened pine cones  
                  flatten under my feet—  
  
I follow the crooked  
                  wrenched roots—  
past torn clumps of moss,  
blue-grey feathers, white wisps of cat fur—  
and everywhere the sticky leaves,  
yellow leaves  
          like the sliced skin of frogs  
cover fallen logs, cover a squirrel's skull—  
  
For days I touch  
                  the block of pine wood—  
pressing its hard edge  
                  between my breasts—  
  
then, remembering your hardness  
I cut the first quick stroke  
                  sharp in the wood—

THE PEACOCK

His loud sharp call  
seems to come from nowhere—  
then, a flash of turquoise  
in the pipal tree—  
the slender neck arched away from you  
as he descends,  
and as he darts away, a glimpse  
of the very end of his tail...

I was told  
that you have to sit in the verandah  
and read a book—  
preferably one of your favorites—  
with great concentration.  
The moment you begin to live  
inside the book  
a blue shadow will fall over you—  
the wind will change direction,  
the steady hum of bees  
in the bushes nearby  
will stop—  
the cat will awaken and stretch—  
something has broken your attention—  
and if you look up in time  
you might see the peacock  
turning away as he gathers in his tail  
to shut those dark glowing eyes,  
violet fringed with golden amber—  
it is the tail that has to blink  
for eyes that are always open—

THE WRITER

The best story  
is the one you can't write—  
                  you won't write—  
it's something that can only live  
                  in your heart—  
not on paper—

Paper is dry, flat—  
where is the soil  
for the roots—and how do I lift out  
entire trees—a whole forest  
from the earth of the spirit  
and transplant it on paper  
without disturbing the birds?

And what about the mountain  
on which this forest grows—  
the waterfalls  
          making rivers—  
rivers with throngs of trees  
elbowing each other aside  
to have a look  
at the fish—

beneath the fish  
          there are clouds—  
here the sky ripples,  
the river thunders—  
how would things move on paper?

Now watch           the way  
                  the tigers walking  
          shreds the paper.



TO *ISSEI*, THE FIRST GENERATION

I watch the ending of a generation.  
*Issei* meant "first" in Japanese:  
They came by boat to America  
In hope of finding a new life to live.  
The farmlands in Japan could not contain them.

Life here was hard, bitter,  
Like the roots that they had to pull:  
They clutched this soil, the only one they had,  
Even when the Government sent them off to camps,  
Where dust and sand blew through barrack cracks...

They left their mark:  
The ink is drying,  
Curls drawn in one breath  
In swirling times of frenzy.  
Is it true that what we do is fade?...

By the muddy river we climbed up the mountain,  
And as we climbed higher, we could see farther,  
We climbed the terrace, step by step,  
The path was hard but the view worth it,  
The grey mountains ah the grey mountains...

Kobayashi-san, do you remember?  
Yamashita-san, do you remember?  
Kawabata-san, do you remember?

This is for you, *Issei*, first generation,  
Written this first day of September, in Philadelphia,  
By my own hand.

SOMETIMES THE NAME IS JUST A SMALL SHADING, A SHADOW,

A whisper, not even a true sound, just a little dot sometimes, or a strange cry, like when you wake in a foreign city and you hear two cats in sex or anger, or sometimes I begin as a stone and before I know it I am eaten into by light or sadness, and I find myself turning into a bonfire around which people are dancing, and then I am in a railroad station, and here is where people say hello or goodbye, and now I am only a telephone booth, and someone is trying to get through, an international phonecall perhaps, and outside tanks are moving through the streets, and planes are tearing away at the sound barrier, and sometimes I no longer understand or know my own mother-tongue, and the words shift and prance and pirhouette through me in exotic costumes and guerilla uniforms, and I let them pass, just let them pass, and I wonder about names and meanings, about feelings and sounds, about coverings and the smell of secrets, about boasts and swears and revelations, about boats pulling out of ports and boats never coming home.

SECRETS

*secrets can be  
so small and yet  
play, they play  
with my head, and I  
protect them, guard  
against any harm coming  
to them, wrap them in at night.  
Telling, something I'm not  
telling, some terrible  
pleasure, the word, say it,  
telling, some terrible  
telling, something I'm not  
to them, wrap them in at night  
against any harm coming.  
Protect them. Guard  
with my head. And I  
play, they play,  
so small and yet  
secrets can be*

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE IN SPAIN, 1981

*"You dragged me to the light as boys drag out  
A rabbit when they have dug its hole away."*

Yeats

They emerge in bright afternoon on a balcony in Madrid.  
He waits. Leans against the balustrade as if he were  
alone, blowing smoke out of a hotel window.  
While she, twenty stories up to loneliness, raises  
to her throat, a gesture naked as a bullock's eye,  
reaches from the half-light of the doorway  
to call him back from the common crush of day:  
more death than darkness, this hail of sunlight.

Her paisley robe in the late Spanish afternoon  
spills its colors against the doorway  
like some dying thing above the traffic.  
He turns. Reaches for her.  
And beneath the silk there is an imperceptible  
buckling, the way a bull brought out from darkness  
sways before the crowd.

2.

Below, in the Puerto del Sol, an American sits in the sun  
writing postcards to a man in Philadelphia.  
Behind her on a building, black swastikas  
sparkle in the sunbeads of the fountain,  
spread their twisted legs and dance  
like sequined cripples in a show.

Messerschmitts screwed into the memory of these walls.

She chews on the end of her pen  
struggling for the words: to say Love

in the midst of Goya's madness  
that hangs in Madrid like an abcess in a black frame.  
Soldiers pass her in pairs, cradle  
machine guns to their chests like dolls.  
She closes her eyes.

The woman on the balcony watches. Raises  
her fingers to her lips as if to call  
then turns away. The man has gone inside.  
On Sunday she will go with him to the bull ring  
wearing a big hat to shade her from the light.  
It will make little difference.

3.  
From the cool sanity of its stall, the labyrinth  
walkways, dark as the tunnels of its brain,  
the bull bursts into the bedlam of light  
and sways before the crowd. Is it necessary  
to speak of the wooing? The courting of the cape  
before the invitation to shame?  
The cutting of the neck muscle to bow the proud head.  
The wreath of the bandeleras,  
the veil of blood.  
Until dizzy with veronicas and the peculiar smell  
that rises from the hot sand, the scent  
of its own line, the bull sees the matador  
studded with sequins.  
The two legs a colossus of bright stability:

a pillar of light to follow forty years across a desert  
or into the red sea of its own heart  
split down the middle of its blood.

He goes down at last, slow and heavy on the knees:  
a final offering fallen mute.

The matador turns his back, waves to the crowd  
like a man on a balcony. Behind him,  
the bull dribbles out its red confession  
from the dark love-knot in the chest.

4.

Overhead, airplanes shriek across the sky  
leaving their bright trails. As if a finger moved,  
wrote something, and left it on a wall.

SHUT UP

They're always saying stupid  
stupid. Stupid. Why  
don't you shut up those  
hypocrites O I hate.

Take a shower in a dump  
hotel and right across  
the wall they're banging  
stop that stupid singing  
stupid.

I get up before dawn  
and out the window down  
the pipe to the alley  
creep to the back among  
the clutter bring my voice  
way up like a girl's or cat's  
they all scream hey  
shut up! shut up!

Up at my father's farm  
where the partridges sing  
with their wings pigs  
sing with twisted tails cows  
with heavy eyes the last  
elm with its Dutch blight  
I only want to sing  
they stop me stupid shut up.

At my mother's lying-in  
I couldn't quite touch  
her I sang like a baby  
laughing I put my  
tears on her singing  
my father was on fire.

They always watch  
I only wanted to  
sing I am, and will be,  
stupid as the daylight  
I will shut up  
if I can only sing.  
The voices of the worst  
of them are singing  
*shut up shut up* they sing.



THE CAFFLICK EFFICK

the delfonics  
never came off  
as being catholic

and i sought refuge  
from them protestants  
behind smokey robinson's complexion.

i wanted to be david ruffin.  
i wanted to sing my girl.  
i wanted to sing hello young lovers  
but i was little eddie kendricks  
all six feet ten inches of me.

to this day  
kim weston still makes me wet the bed

and mary wells  
she will always be my most nearest,  
nastiest, sneakiest cousin i've never met.

we were shamed out there doing the 81.  
it was even more pentecostal when no one was looking.

in 1965  
mascara and diana ross  
went hand in hand with blue bangs and smiling devils.

the sinfulness was  
the black marvellettes  
could only be the baptist women  
on your father's side of the family.

the ones you vaguely remember cussing in public.

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