

# THE PAINTED BRIC QUARTERLY

vol.1/  
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# THE PAINTED BRIDE QUARTERLY

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summer '74/100

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Cover design by Gerry Givnish

*JOHN TAGLIABUE*

five poems  
suggested by Persian manuscripts and prints

1

Four Persian angels  
four pages of music

2

The golden rattle for the god  
has little suns for everyone

3

Leaving a lot of small tangerines  
the Persian Prince said  
orange poems for you

4

The Persian patriarch's beard  
 (as he was writing with a beautiful script, O he kept writing)  
 grew longer and longer like snow flakes falling  
 a cascade of delicate music  
 in Green loveliest Green  
 and folks and neighbors and all sorts of characters  
 used it when no one was looking  
 (there was no proof of this in the Police Books or Law Books)  
 as a knotty ladder, they held conversations  
 as they climbed (sometimes, when they felt like it)  
 he all the time wrote and the seasons and moons  
 and angels of flowers that spoke to him were  
 more than satisfied it just had to be  
 and that is why Persian Civilization  
 is what I dreamingly admire

Prince in a Persian Landscape

Making music                      making prayers  
 the cypress tree held its breath at attention,  
 dreams began to search for new dreamers who  
 when attending and awakened began to dance  
 with flowers in their hands

John Tagliabue

three poems  
not far from Florence

1

Olives will be Olives

A small ladder left overnight in an olive tree  
the top between the branches,  
for an angel to climb?  
for a farmer to find tomorrow?

2

A group of words before they're seen  
a crew of young rabbits in the dark

3

Antella Scene

between pond and haystack

Very large male duck, waddling, sometimes wading,  
colorful as Deruta ware or as a Kabuki Actor,  
his female duck by a curving road by the blissful small farm  
is in the weeds,  
he wanders toward her like a general or millionaire, with his  
beak taps her on the back  
and both begin a ceremonial motion of the neck and head  
perhaps meant to assert presence,  
fear and authority,  
durable life, beauty, certainly is presented by the two, hundreds  
of olive trees on hills nearby  
are peaceful

John Tagliabue

6



When I see an empty white page  
I feel as an aviator must when he sees a clear sky and he wants  
to fly in it  
or as a child who wakes up, has a good breakfast, looks out the  
window and sees that  
for the first time this year  
the hill and field are covered with snow, and so he goes out  
to sleigh ride on it  
Your purity too much more vital than an empty  
page much more complicated than  
beautiful songs written in the old days  
in honor of the Virgin makes me feel  
fine Better than Medieval Better than  
Modern There's such a thing as pure poetry  
and it makes anything that the heart calls Sunday

John Tagliabue

TRANSYLVANIA

1

The Buddha from Ajanta  
will spit  
a lotus bullet from his mouth

Soon  
For I am sitting in a posture  
No yogi ever taught  
Would teach, called "Death's Confusion"

This is not my season  
Philadelphia faces East  
But the wind comes from the  
Great Pig-Breeding Plains  
Through stone-tongued towns  
To close me in  
Windows shuttered  
Lips muffled  
I am the babe in swaddling clothes  
Gone wrong

2

Symbols desert me  
Sparrows chatter  
The peace of walls well-maintained  
    Allows me  
To spell this fragment out  
    Through the watercourses  
    And floodgates of heart and head  
A seepage to nourish a dry body

3

And is that hope  
    Glittering on the waves  
    Of the inland sea?

I will wait for night  
    To see if deer come down to drink

4

Nataraja, Cosmic Dancer, catch me  
Eyes of frost ignite me  
Spew your breath  
The stones will split for dandelions

Phyllis Middlebrooks

PORTRAIT

A

Brown eyes

gray hair

Brown vest

topaz ring      gold band

&

Silver cigarette smoke

Instructional film      cool grays

Gray jacket      gray shirt

& Brown earth

brown eyes brown vest brown slacks

(Rembrandt tones      &)      faded photographs

B

"Its eyes were as big as saucers"

The steadfast tin soldier struck the tinderbox  
discovered an enormous dog,  
(its eyes were big as saucers)  
on the treasure, gold & silver

I see my father  
I see your brown vest gray shirt  
gold ring & silver cigarette

I lost the battle  
Steadfast fought again  
Bang bang my father's dead

You were  
        gray hair brown eyes  
Somebody else

I carefully removed my weapons which  
        had been a family heirloom  
        handed down to me by my same  
        father  
Removed them from my heart  
        where they had lodged  
  staunchly  
And threw them away  
Even though they were old

        And won the war  
Over your living body, Mr Brown & Gray

You didn't know this  
But you might have expected it, a private man  
Keeping mum about yourself  
Letting my student fantasies flourish  
Beneath your fatherly assertiveness & flint-quick  
        brilliances

Later, my eyes felt big as saucers  
From curiosity & the dim sparking light  
Studying your browns & grays

Wondering about your Rembrandt shadowy past

Are you the portrait film you said  
        that I should do?

I aim my camera at you  
Shoot  
A heavy falling snow on rich brown loam

Phyllis Middlebrooks

GERARD MALANGA

SCREAMING ROOM

*for Diane*

I rush headlong towards something—  
towards this snowfall of sleep  
towards a darkness divided by shadows

I walk towards this one tree that is shining with thousands of eyes!  
I look into this tree  
I look for a name for myself  
I look for a sign  
I see the body waking, a body of whirlwinds  
I see hundreds of shipwrecks  
I see flowers frozen with silence  
I don't want to see my face flash before everyone's eyes  
at the instant of their being told of my death  
I see my life  
I see winter, the season of women, the house, and the shadow  
I see doors, closed and hidden and maturing in darkness  
I see moonlight  
my isolation increases

it is too late to sleep  
already the pre-dawn is waking

I can hear my heart beating  
I hear the close breathing beside me  
I feel the nightsweat

the body spreadeagled  
the body hieroglyphed  
the body squaring the circle

the darkness is beginning again  
the darkness comes out of hiding  
and the seven days of the week  
    now number one

Scorpio is no longer to blame

there is this death of grime beneath fingernails, torn carpets—  
there is this scent of fucking—  
a semen that dies of the cold  
on the cheek  
on the breast  
on the shoulder

another day disappears into the body  
not knowing which room it is in  
not knowing which room it will dream in tonight

#### DREAM

once I held my hands stretched out in the rain  
once I held my breath under water  
I can hear the water carried along the roof gutter  
    the water that pours down the drainspout  
now the water pours down the throat  
now I hold my hands to my face  
I have finally reached that part of the brain  
    where nothing's simple,  
where there's no turning back  
    where everything's changing—

that part of the brain  
that can bend metal  
cause or prevent change  
see into the future

that same part of the brain  
that cuts people off in the middle—

but a fog's coming in

Suddenly the eyes go to sleep separately  
And that's not all!  
A voice begins screaming

its echo comes back petrified  
because it takes in the pain

the you inside me appears once again  
the you begins speaking  
Suddenly two voices begin speaking at once!

Your dream gets up out of bed and walks to the blank wall  
your dream gets out of hand!

You write words on the wall  
You smear them with your left hand  
You draw two windows side by side around the smeared words  
You look through them

You see yourself simultaneously  
you see yourself dreaming  
you see these uprooted shadows, these sled voices  
You see yourself in the dream of you waking

the body disappears where it slept

Suddenly you are seven years old!

Now I inhabit myself  
now I am two voices  
now the darkness comes early  
now the optic nerve fades  
now I am joyful



At dawn snow blows over the field  
the snowy owl is poised for flight once again  
—its eyes bloodshot with fiery traces,  
    its wings flinching  
I fall asleep  
snow covers each footstep that never stops walking

now	now
one	the other

taking its time  
until time stops

snow covers the darkness with more darkness  
each fallen leaf is a voice  
each fallen leaf is a stone  
each footstep is possessed of direction

Right now the wind is howling around this coffee shop  
these dead cigarettes singing

There are no similes, there is only experience

Gerard Malanga  
*from Possessing The Secret*

WHEREVER

Wherever I go  
love fattens me Memory  
eats off me I am  
a bone gnawed raw One wide eye

Sheila Cobb

## THE FLOWER GARDEN

What has happened here?

After months of lust,  
summer flops on her wicker chair  
in her floral dress. Globes of sweat  
roll down her breasts  
The big sun  
swaggers in his overalls

Marigolds lift their skinny arms  
Wisteria grabs  
the fence's edge, and under leaves, mulch  
moans and steams  
Rose and aster  
lean, but cannot touch  
Zinnias talk with painted lips  
The big sun patrols

Wiggling in the deep earth,  
toads and moles  
nudge the bulbs  
Summer yawns and sleeps  
From the dark of the woods  
towards the garden,  
a deer begins its delicate walk

Sheila Cobb

AUDRE LORDE

TO DESI AS JOE AS SMOKY THE LOVER OF 115TH STREET

Who are you  
that your name comes  
broken by the speeding cars along the East Side Drive  
tumbling out of the concrete wall flowers  
as I pass  
Desi as Joe as Smoky the Lover of 115th Street?

There was nothing furtive about the swirls  
of neon-bright magenta  
prancing off your fingertips  
like ideal selves  
is the dream you  
valued more  
because you glanced over your shoulder  
as you wrote  
the first letter  
undecided  
its flourish  
shaped like a question mark?

But there was nothing at all  
to see over your shoulder  
except my eyes in a passing tide of cars  
wondering  
if you wrote under a culvert  
so the approaching storm around us  
would not wash you away

There was nothing at all  
furtive  
about your magenta scrawling  
but I saw the bright sweat  
running off your childhood's face  
as you glanced behind you  
choosing that wall beneath a bridge  
where so many others had written  
before  
that the colours merged into  
one sunlit mosaic  
face without name  
decorating a highway  
on the very edge of Manhattan.

Audre Lorde

MY FIFTH TRIP TO WASHINGTON ENDED  
IN NORTHEAST DELAWARE

Halfway between the rain and Washington  
as we stopped stuck in the middle of Delaware and a deluge  
At least she said  
as the muddy waters rose covering our good intentions  
At least she said  
as we sat stranded neither dry nor high enough  
somewhere over a creek very busy becoming a river  
somewhere in northeast Delaware  
At least she said  
as we waited for the engine  
to tug us back to where we had started from  
and my son complained he could have had more fun  
wrapped up in an envelope  
At least she said  
as the flooded out tracks receded and the waters rose around us  
and the children fussed and fretted but were really  
very brave about it  
and the windows started to leak in on our shoes  
and the gum and the games and the New York Times  
and the chocolate bars and the toilet paper  
all ran out  
as the frozen fruit juice melted  
and the mayonnaise in the tuna fish went sour  
At least she said  
as the rain kept falling down  
and we couldn't get through to Washington  
as we slumped  
damp and disappointed in our rumbled up convictions  
At least she said  
The Indians aren't attacking

Audre Lorde

NIGHT LIFE

*for Ed Cox*

The lives we lead at night  
you are on the streets of my  
city, and I am asleep In  
my dream you are talking  
to an old man, white beard  
You call him Fritz You  
call him Walt It does not  
matter what you call him,  
he is just an old man

You and he have made the same  
choices Now you think there's  
something you should know You  
want him to tell you, but he  
will not speak You are both walking  
down Spruce Street, and you are alone

You are in denim You are  
in therapy, too You learn  
what you mean when you talk  
out loud Sometimes you learn  
in your sleep In strange cities,  
we discover the way we can be  
We learn that we have always  
been talking to ourselves. People  
lead their lives all the time

*Tim Dlugos*

*BARTOLO CATTAFI:*  
*translations by Ruth Feldman*  
*and Brian Swann*

CANCER

July sixth five in the morning  
the steam-tram headed for Messina  
spewed from its funnel  
smoke sparks and a long whistle,  
newborn I turned my head  
toward that first greeting of life.  
I belong to a breed  
that needs omens.  
It grieves me I can't  
shake my right hand with my right  
kiss on my own cheeks  
when once a year  
the moon's aquatic son  
who carries my fate sealed  
in the pentagon of his breastplate  
runs beside me trotting at dawn



## SMOKERS

With the monopoly on wartime leaves  
our days  
got off to a bad start  
Squatting the country  
spitting on the ground  
as in Steinbeck's novels  
we smoked dry leaves  
of trees and herbs  
wrapped in newspaper.  
When the Americans arrived  
we turned the bitter pages  
we blew real tobacco smoke  
over tangled shreds  
turned expert  
we seasoned our entire lives with the molasses  
of Prince Albert and Camels

## EEL

The sisters killed  
the delicious consanguineous flesh eaten  
only one saved from your own  
cannibal mouth  
rich in enigmas  
of tortuous vertebrae  
as though for a tribute already paid  
you come from a casbah of ferocity  
and snap up pollen  
microorganisms of the pond  
stretched in the shade of your curtain  
*or gliding lazily*  
*with the rippling flanks of a Queen of Sheba*

Bartolo Cattafi  
*from L'Aria Secca del Fuoco*  
translations by Ruth Feldman and Brian Swann

SLOATSBURG BROCHURE

the leaves drift along  
in flotilla formation  
on the water beneath us  
maple oak beech  
whisking by like the  
Spanish Armada  
the Normandy  
invasion fleet  
swirling  
tangled like  
Greeks and  
Trojans  
and we:  
sitting above  
on the ramshackle  
wood bridge like gods  
tipping the scales  
with rusty nails and  
getting some sun.

Stephen Burke

SATURDAY MATINEE EPITAPH

“when I die  
I’m not going to  
look—”  
she  
says it as if  
she were putting  
a stamp on a  
postcard to death  
who will  
come to her at the  
creepiest  
part of the  
movie and  
touch her  
on the shoulder  
like  
an usher to tell her  
to get her feet  
off the seat in  
front  
of her.

Stephen Burke

my comrades

this one teaches  
and that one lives with his mother  
and that one is supported by a red-faced alcoholic  
with the brain of a gnat  
this one takes speed and has been supported by  
the same woman for 14 years  
that one writes a hack novel every ten days  
but at least pays his own rent  
this one goes from place to place  
sleeping on couches, drinking and making his  
spiel  
this one prints his own books on a duplicating  
machine  
that one lives in an abandoned shower room  
in a Hollywood hotel and steals record albums  
this one seems to know how to get grant after grant,  
his life is a filling-out of forms  
this one is simply rich and lives in the most artistic  
places while knocking on the most artistic doors  
that one once had breakfast with William Carlos  
Williams  
and this one teaches  
and that one teaches  
and this one puts out textbooks on how to do it  
and speaks in a cruel and dominating voice

they are everywhere.  
everybody is a writer  
and almost every writer is a poet  
poets poets poets poets poets poets  
poets poets poets poets poets poets  
I've met too many of them

the next time the phone rings  
it will be a poet  
the next person at the door  
will be a poet  
this one teaches  
and that one lives with his mother  
and that one is writing the life story of  
Ezra Pound  
oh, brothers, we are the sickest and the  
lowest of the breed

Charles Bukowski

warts

I remember my grandmother best  
because of all her warts  
she was 80 and the warts were  
very large  
I couldn't help staring at her  
warts  
she came to Los Angeles every Sunday  
by bus and streetcar from Pasadena  
her conversation was always the same  
"I am going to bury all of you "  
"you're not going to bury me,"  
my father would say  
"you're not going to bury me,"  
my mother would say  
then we'd sit down to a Sunday  
dinner  
after she left my mother would say,  
"I think it's terrible the way she talks  
about burying everybody."  
but I rather liked it  
her sitting there  
covered with warts  
and threatening to bury us  
all  
and when she ate her dinner  
I'd watch the food going into her mouth  
and I'd look at her  
warts  
I'd imagine her going to the bathroom  
and wiping her behind  
and thinking,  
I am going to bury everybody

the fact that she didn't  
was even rather sad to  
me  
one Sunday she simply wasn't  
there, and it was a  
much duller Sunday  
somebody else was going to have to  
bury us  
the food hardly tasted  
as well

Charles Bukowski

ANOTHER FRIDAY, ANOTHER BAR

Nero's burned down last night  
while we were fiddling  
At 6 a m I looked out my balcony  
saw a fire engine by the bakery  
and no traffic on this center city street  
clogged with fresh wet snow and police  
Once I had my picture taken  
near Nero's I wore a bright  
red dress tight under my bust  
and sat under their sign  
of a nipple-tilted silhouette labeled  
Sexy Dancing Girls We Cater  
Open Til 4 A M  
when I didn't even dance  
I hung the photo near my kitchen  
and don't really mind making you  
all those midnight breakfasts

This morning fire trucks camped  
on every corner for blocks  
Traffic was stopped  
I had to step over hoses everywhere  
The snow was ruined and I remembered  
my dream of fire the night I missed you  
The same charred smell in midwinter  
The same lead sky The same closed throat  
The same unwillingness to cry  
even when I see a city paralyzed



Sometimes when I went to Nero's  
after work  
people would forget me  
if I was quiet  
while they laughed and talked  
When I got thirsty  
I had to serve myself  
Two Bloody Marys at a time  
toying with the straw  
pouring the juice from one glass to the next  
sucking the ice and thinking of something else

Nineteen at a college fraternity party  
I could drink seven beers almost  
without breathing I ended up in Teddy Schvimmer's  
room He had a flag  
of Israel and a sword on the wall but  
I couldn't get past  
the buttons on his  
shirt When drunk my handwriting  
resembles Daisy Ann Cohen who never kissed anyone  
her entire three years in school  
because she feared she'd forgotten  
how But here I am years later another  
Friday another bar Please save me  
from this new Irishman who looks Greek  
speaks with a New York accent  
and teaches English at a girls school  
in Glassboro New Jersey

Maralyn Lois Polak

## WILD STRAWBERRIES

once my father planted strawberries  
in little mounds  
winters he would hide them  
under a blanket of hay sometimes  
snow buried the strawberry hills  
and in the spring  
he would feed them  
horse manure

playing farmers my parents  
would pick strawberries before the birds  
pricked them with their beaks  
a few could not be saved  
the others however found their way  
into a pressure cooker  
where they were steamed into jam and preserved  
under esso paraffin  
poured to seal the jelly glasses  
like a layer of concrete

I dreamed I was covered my whole body a huge  
strawberry birthmark  
which changed into a black cotton dress  
covered with hundreds of little red  
strawberries  
looking good enough to eat sour  
cream or not

and you had this horrible  
allergy to strawberries  
second only to seafood or cats  
you broke out in little hives  
shaped like berries  
red all over your body  
and I loved you for your  
strawberry sickness

Maralyn Lois Polak

ORGASM

*for John*

1

There are no chains  
in my sexlife  
there are no bounds  
there is only  
meditation and  
ecstasy in  
a proper yoga  
style

2

COME FIRES HOLY UNTO THIS WORLD  
WOULD THAT ALL FIRING BE SO LOVING

3

We bruise each other w/ our whispers

4

He has an ego like a jolly green  
giant with a hard-on

5

Hunger attended

6

Bumbercome

7

I stand naked  
with my words in your mouth

8

Depantsed in 4 3 seconds

9

A cock ring party

10

Why do you look at me so  
Do you want to taste me? Or feel my buns?  
Or want me to dig into you like a jack  
Hammer? I would love to take down  
those red, white & blue  
stript pants and make you see  
the stars that are so apparently absent  
from them

11

ODE TO DAISY MAE

Ma askt if id hurd about Daisy Mae,  
How Big Bert drove her mad,  
Wuldnt keep his hands off 'er  
Wuldnt do nothin but chase her  
thru the haystack,  
Drove her mad, prod her  
til she went mad,  
Plumb crazy  
from all that heat  
from all that teasing and laying her,  
Plumb crazy

12

*for Bob Plantz*

"If you take us  
to the party  
we can wear  
our fuck-me dresses  
and make over  
you "

He ponders before he goes  
to the party Already  
he has been confronted with  
"bring a date "  
before he has interned  
his job

Take the man you want to take  
Let the women find their own "fuck-me's "

13

Half Poem

68 is lonesome  
34 1/2 is nowhere  
69 is one position  
There are many

This poem is 1/2  
of a position  
be  
side you  
waiting to be read

That to be read is the other  
half  
which I do not know  
and only you can  
be beside me  
there when I come  
to you  
    when you come  
to me,  
to poetry,  
to be

Paul Mariah

## AN HOMAGE TO GERTRUDE STEIN

I.

A gem  
Rose out of my heart

Ida knows  
    (ho falls  
Cowboy boots  
All over my feet

The trek to Calgary  
To catch the morsels  
Of meat  
Coming in for Rode  
O Days  
We spend together  
Lying anguished  
Over rocks  
Letting

Sun break  
Our bodies

We feel sun  
Bursts  
Inside us, drops

We allot each other  
Slipping  
Through our new skins

Aur a dawns  
    or  
On us en  
Snarled inside  
In sun) town up  
Side down

The head of a man  
 The head ahead of a man  
 The head of a man ahead  
 The head of a man ahead of a man  
 The man ahead of a head of a man  
 The man a head of a head  
 The man of a head  
 Ahead of a man a head  
 A head of a man ahead  
 A man of the head  
 A head of the man  
 A man of the head ahead  
 A man of the head a head  
 Ahead of ahead  
 Ahead of a head

The manhead of a man  
 The manhead of a man ahead  
 The manhead of a man a head  
 The head of a manhead  
 The head ahead of a manhead  
 The head of a man ahead of a manhead  
 The head of a man ahead of a man  
 The man ahead of a manhead  
 The man ahead of a headman of a man  
 The man a head of a headman  
 The headman ahead of a man  
 The headman of a man ahead  
 The headman of a man a head  
 The headman of a manhead ahead  
 Ahead of a manhead a head  
 A head of a manhead ahead  
 A manhead of the head  
 A head of the manhead  
 A man of the headman ahead  
 A man of the headman a head  
 The head man of a man  
 The head ahead of a manhead  
 The headman ahead of a man  
 The manhead ahead of a headman of a man  
 (head in fin)

III

Just a rose  
A just rose  
A garland for Gertrude  
Enters the rose  
Primrose

*Prim rose early one morning*  
Prim rose green early one morning  
Prim rose kelly green early one morning  
A gem rose prim kelly green early one morning  
Prim rose kelly green early one morning green kelly rose prim  
Prim rose green early one morning green rose prim  
Prim rose early one morning rose prim

Prim early one morning prim  
Rose early one morning rose

The sun greets us with garlands such as this  
A just rose, a rose just, just a rose, just rose a

Tabla

Knows

Through the garden softly

The prim rose rose early one morning

Paul Mariah



KEEPING WARM IN SANTA FE

Walk on the sunny side of the street,  
Don't be ashamed to wear a jacket,  
Remember  
The sky isn't cold blue but just clear

Open your veins to the sun,  
When you start feeling better, send pictures  
To your friends in the east  
So they can see how healthy you are

When you get tired of walking,  
Stop and sit on a bench in the park or  
Lean against an adobe wall,  
Close your eyes and let the sun caress

When you are hungry, find a  
Cafe where you can eat  
Beans and green chilies—they  
Have more flavor than the red ones  
Eat until you start sweating and your head clears

If you live in a basement and it's cold  
At night, light the gas heater,  
Tell everybody to gather around the heater so they can  
get  
warm

Before going to bed,  
Take a good look at  
The lights from the moon and stars,  
Don't forget them,  
They'll warm your dreams

In the morning if you're still cold  
Jump out of bed and make hot chocolate  
With cinnamon and whipped cream on top  
because that's a Mexican idea  
And if you're still not warm yet,  
Slide back into bed and make love easily

Mary McGinnis

RITUAL BANQUETS

1

The Chinese banquet begins and ends  
With soup the first course  
Sweet and sour soup  
I savor its contradictions  
The last course is bubbling  
Hot soup over live coals  
Emblems of the Four Seasons are  
Painted on the porcelain bowls

2

At the Kwakiutl winter ceremony  
A woman disappears in fire  
She is resurrected when her  
Bones are thrown into the ashes  
Sulfur powder escapes from the roof  
The night air swallows the sparks  
Red and orange-turquoise before  
They drown in snowbanks

3

The poet from New York is  
Amazed at the gossip we  
Tell each other at a party  
"I like all of you," he says  
Touching my hair, later exclaiming  
On the length of Monte's lashes  
Long as Spanish saffron  
We drink champagne tinged red

4

The Seven Campaigns of General Wu  
Contains at least eight ingredients  
Peking duck takes 36 hours to prepare  
There are many ways to prepare duck,  
Angel hair, ritual drama, Spanish eyelashes  
Our eyes rimmed with broken sleep,  
After several attempts we have  
Crossed the Islands of the Immortals

R Daniel Evans

from THE SECRET LIFE OF MARY X

1

when mary gets up in the morning  
she don't know what to think

usually her hair stands up like rats' feet  
and she can't spit out what's bothering her

sometimes she remembers being well thought of somewhere  
but now she's obscure as georgia caruthers

it's a tramp's life, she'll tell you, without so much as  
a coffeepot, no place to dunk your doughnuts

2

when mary eats  
it's never enough

the sauce runs down her chin  
the noodles are doomed

but even three bowls of pasta  
can't make her belch

o for a little tenderloin  
she cries

the tears pouring out like salt

3

mary's lonesome again  
no one to call long-distance

i wish my mother would  
talk to me, she thinks,  
but she's so dead  
and prune-faced about it,  
i guess i'll talk to myself

but it's been days  
since she's seen a paper

and there's no weather  
at all outside her window

4

lately mary thinks she's  
shrinking

and she's shorter than  
most people to begin with

she could wear a tall hat  
with a feather in it

but high-heeled shoes  
made her arches fall

it's all right to be  
small i tell her

but i can't make  
the midgets dance with her

5

though she has never heard of rousseau  
mary runs through the jungle  
wearing only a leopard skin

something is hot on her trail  
and tarzan is too pooped to save her

whatever it is, its face is missing  
but its eye gleams like a pilot light

get me out of here she pleads  
shinnying up a banana tree

6

when mary writes poems  
the keys jam  
pencils crack in her hand

i should 'a gone to school  
she thinks—they can  
teach you stuff like this

she can sit there  
till her eyes turn red

but the building's  
condemned

an angel wouldn't  
land on that roof

7

mary had a child once  
a tiny boy  
with hair like a baby duck

though he smelled bad  
he had her nose

he cooed like a pigeon  
in the laundry basket

but finally he ate so much  
she couldn't keep him

and now he lives in new jersey

8

nobody knows her like i do  
and i don't know her at all

oh, once or twice we  
talked behind the hedgerow

and i offered to buy her a coffeepot

but you know how she is

i think i frightened her a little  
with my superior airs  
and my talk about kisses

and what could she do with me  
after all

how would you like to be  
immortal i asked her on tuesday

but she didn't know what that was  
and she was having none of it

how would you like your doughnuts hung up in public she said

Sharon Barba



FOR PABLO NERUDA

I was looking  
    for a woman

who was also  
    a poet

when I stumbled  
    against your thighs

white and eloquent

yet solid as the knots of trees  
sturdy as  
    the heft of your songs

You suggested I  
    take my socks off  
like a man,

poetry beginning  
    and ending  
in the feet

the roots  
    or chains  
around the ankles

poetry beginning and ending

with the bare earth  
    the white hills

with the calves of a man  
    the thighs of a woman

the big legs of the poet

Sharon Barba







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