



JOHN CIARDI

JOHN CIARDI (1916–1986). *American poet, essayist, translator, lexicographer, teacher, and lecturer. Ciardi wrote and edited several dozen books, including splendid poetry for both adults and children (Selected Poems for adults; I Met a Man and Fast and Slow for children). His was the standard translation of Dante's Divine Comedy. For many years he was the poetry editor and a columnist and essayist for the Saturday Review. For nineteen years, he also served as director of the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference in Vermont, which continues as a vital center for American letters.*

WASHING YOUR FEET

Washing your feet is hard when you get fat.
* * *
In lither times the act was unstrained and pleasurable.
* * *
You spread the toes for signs of athlete's foot.
* * *
You used creams, and rubbing alcohol, and you powdered.
* * *
You bent over, all in order, and did everything.
* * *
Mary Magdalene made a prayer meeting of it.
* * *
She, of course, was washing not her feet but God's.
* * *
Degas painted ladies washing their own feet.
* * *
Somehow they also seem to be washing God's feet.
* * *
To touch any body anywhere should be ritual.
* * *
To touch one's own body anywhere should be ritual.
* * *
Fat makes the ritual wheezy and a bit ridiculous.
* * *
Ritual and its idea should breathe easy.
* * *
They are memorial, meditative, immortal.
* * *
Toenails keep growing after one is dead.
* * *
Washing my feet, I think of immortal toenails.
* * *
What are they doing on these ten crimped polyps?
* * *

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I reach to wash them and begin to wheeze.

I wish I could paint like Degas or believe like Mary.

It is sad to be naked and to lack talent.

It is sad to be fat and to have dirty feet.

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ON
DOCTORING

STORIES, POEMS, ESSAYS

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