THE PROSE POEM:
AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

Volume 6 | 1997

The Body

Gabriela Mistral

© Providence College

The author(s) permits users to copy, distribute, display, and perform this work under the following conditions: (1) the original author(s) must be given proper attribution; (2) this work may not be used for commercial purposes; (3) the users may not alter, transform, or build upon this work; (4) users must make the license terms of this work clearly known for any reuse or distribution of this work. Upon request, as holder of this work's copyright, the author(s) may waive any or all of these conditions.

The Prose Poem: An International Journal is produced by
The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress)
for the Providence College Digital Commons.
http://digitalcommons.providence.edu/prosepoems/

Gabriela Mistral

THE BODY

What would the body of Saint Francis be like? They say it was so delicate that it might have disappeared in the wind. It cast very little shadow: one's shadow is like pride in earthly possessions, like the shadow of a tree painting the grass, or the shadow of a woman who passes through a fountain and is instantly drenched. The humble one hardly casts a shadow.

He was small in stature. Just like a whitecap crossing the water, he traveled and sensed the presence that watched over his body.

His arms were light, so light. He did not feel them at his sides when they dropped. His head was like the small stamen inside a flower.

He walked gracefully: his legs passed lightly over the grass without trampling it, and his chest was narrow, although wide for love (love is the essence and not water which requires great vessels!) And his shoulders ... they were narrowed by humility; they made one think of a very small cross, one smaller than the other.

His sides were burned to a slenderness. The flesh of youth had vanished, along with its sins.

Perhaps his small body crackled, just as dry cactuses crackle with heat.

Human happiness is something like pregnancy; he did not want it. Pain is another thicket of conquests, and he fled from it. His heavenly pleasure and sustenance was the love of animals. He tended to see the world as a place as light as a flower. And he, resting within his own boundaries, did not want to weigh more than a nectar-seeking bee.

Who sings better in the valleys when the wind passes? Those with fat ears say it is the river that shatters goblets in the gravel; others say it is a woman who refines a cry in her fleshy throat.

But the best cry comes from the small, empty vehicle, where there are no inner organs for the voice to be hindered, and this small car, guided through the valleys, is you, little Francis, the one who has hardly made his mark on the world. You are like a small, slim shadow.

Translated from the Spanish
by **Maria Jacketti**