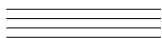


T H I S R E P U B L I C



S U S A N B A R B A

Deep winter. The closed doors that stayed shut
in summer now ajar, in the half-dark
blue, pink, white, pink shirtsleeves blooming.
The bulbs I forced have lost their scent,
yellowing into a tall old age, tall and unobtrusive,
and more palmlike than paperwhite.

A paperwhite without its perfume is like the intellect,
straining upward, knotty, gnarled, stewing in coffee-
colored waters, its leaves – if one can call them that – akimbo,
sometimes forcibly staked so as not to fall over,
staked through the heart of the plant, which is the bulb,
from which spring's fresh fetid smell once sprang.

Laundry dried, folded and hung.
The baby baptized before its six-month birthday.
Last night the first snow,
the season defined now.

Always the concupiscent edging out the intellect,
and the irascible saying it should be so.