

*Courage at Daybreak* is Helen Lawson's first book of poetry published in the Czech Republic. Why should this publication be of any particular concern? Helen Lawson is of Czech origin. She was born in Prague in 1939. In 1949, after the communist putsch, she left the country for Norway. She then lived in Britain and India and finally

settled in the USA in Connecticut. She published her two volumes of poetry, *Women As I Know Them* (1978) and *Live Me a River* (1980) with Blue Spruce Press. Published in the Czech Republic by the Fra publishing house, *Courage at Daybreak* is a selection from nine manuscript volumes. Although the book is intended primarily for Czech readers, the poems are both in English and Czech, so English-speaking readers can experience the original works. Helen Lawson does speak Czech, but she, nevertheless, opted for having a translator for this book. Jitka Henryková translated the poems with accuracy, yet with immense understanding for conveying the meaning to a non-English-speaking reader.

Helen Lawson's poems are confessions of a mature woman about her life. She tells her own life story. She reminisces about her native land for which she feels tremendous love. On her quest for freedom, she takes the readers by the hand and leads them through her troublesome exile to her final destination in the USA. During this journey, the readers experience numerous situations which may remind them of their own lives. It is not only Lawson's rich life that makes it possible, but also her mastery of personalization. She absorbs outer stimuli and translates them into her own emotions. By conveying both the situation and the emotions connected to it, Lawson makes it possible for readers to find relevant issues in their own lives and, perhaps, reevaluate them.

Lawson pays great attention to people around her—her friends and her family. It is the parental issues in particular that have the supreme place in her poetry. She incorporates the people into her self and pays tribute to them in the form of inner dialogues. Thus she manages to convey the sensitivity of a loving mother and a friend. But she is more than that. She is the listener, paradoxically not only to her characters, but also to her readers. Her poetry is also full of natural imagery and questions about and for God. Lawson, however, manages to make theological and philosophical questions relevant to everyday life. She is also very concerned about language. In her poems, Helen Lawson explores the ways of writing poetry, thus expressing immense respect for language as a unique means of making the message known and making ourselves understood.

Lawson's poetry is lyrical and contemplative. As such, its predecessors may be found among both Czech and English-writing authors of this kind. Among the Czech ones, there are Jan Neruda, Jaroslav Vrchlický, Otokar Březina, Jiří Wolker, Vladimír Hoian and Jiří Orten. The English-writing ones are William Butler Yeats, Edwin Arlington Robinson, T.S. Eliot, John Crowe Ransom, Wallace Stevens and Emily Dickinson.

Helen Lawson's poetry is a two-edged blade. At first it may seem rather amusing, describing such small pleasures in our everyday lives as taking a walk. But all of a sudden, it turns and twists, and the readers find themselves doing the crossword puzzle of life.