

Poems in WordPerfect: A

by

Helena Jungová Lawson ¹

¹ Helen Lawson
80 Wethersfield Avenue
Hartford, CT 06114, USA
helenajlawson@aol.com

Poetry Collection
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A beach

What mighty hand has cast me on this island
where my arms stretch towards the swaying trees,
where silence sings with blue and purple birds
and each day blossoms with the benefits
of being surrounded by benevolent waves?

Desolate, drowning in a lagoon of longing,
I plumbed the depth of excruciating thirst,
my tongue barred from the sea's abundance,
while Neptune with his minions
frowned at my tears, isolating me
from the rapture bestowed on his tail-forked maids.

For long all this had been my seaweed home.
I called the prison love, the loneliness, need.
They held me clinging to their slimy chains.
Neither alive nor dead, I floated in the limbo,
until the firm hands of an angel found me,
lifted me out, and flung me on this beach.

It has been months, and soon will be some years
since I first, dazed, soaked in the bleaching sun
I feared as foreign, then merely endured as a station
of the cross I had to bear for past transgressions.
Indeed, it may be that Golgotha does beckon
beyond the nearby hill, but I no longer care,
for with each new day, to peace I awaken.

About to be vinyl-sided

The house
is my flesh.
That's why I hesitate,
why I feel nervous.
Fifteen minutes, and
the surgeon will
begin to scrape
the peeling cells,
having taken out
the storm windows.
Soon after, I shall
be plastered
with new paint.
The doors, I'm told,
are now the wrong color.

Next week, my whole
surface will be
face-lifted,
into a smoother,
life-long grin.

I've said yes
to this drastic operation.
My friends don't
think it an aberration.
So why this fear
of failure, of invasion?

I'd rather stay the same,
sagging and peeling.

Abraham and Mary

Abraham and Mary, nineteenth century -
he a young Kentucky bumpkin, she an aristocrat -
a moving tale of love, history interfering,
sickness, death, madness - portrait of resilience,
devotion - to the Union, conscience, children, spouse.

Do they rest, not remembering, or are they steadily
growing to further height and depth of spirit,
their remaining son Robert having joined them long ago?

The Civil War - its fearsome slaughter, yet the Declaration
of Independence with its Amendment stands, the African American
soldiers having contributed to the final freeing of the slaves
in combat, by bravery. The Blacks stand, in their sanctity.

To Mary, no monument has been built -
she's remembered for obsessive shopping,
her way of coping with a distracted husband,
the bloodshed and too many dear ones dead.

A brief dance with Fancy

Before Survival
and his henchmen
fetch and drag me away
from fond roaming
in a world of words,
I allow Fancy,
the only sister left,
to whirl me - in a polka,
or any free movement
spurred by her mirth.

Our whirls form
a necklace of pearls,
which glitters
as we stir the air.
Toddler words trot
around us like penguins.
We usher them gently,
laughing,
like young lambs,
into a pen.

A brief trip back in time

Merciful sleep
that allows me
to slip into the pocket
of the past
and be warmed,
rocked as it moves
like a kangaroo baby
next to mother's belly!

Each night, several dreams
carry me, whistling
a lullaby to the cold
days I spend venturing out
of my hollow, avoiding
icy ground, men.

Last night,
I felt connected
to my mother and father,
though alone
in a rented room
in native Prague!
They were no further
than now – dissolved,
except in my cells, love.

A way to pray

The road to mental rest
leads to meditation -
and, I hear, there is a way to pray:
first, adoration, followed
by thanksgiving. Intercession
comes next, on behalf of others.
Specific requests are permitted,
no need dutifully to mutter,
Your will be done. Confession
provides the second highest rang
on the ladder. There, sins hang,
naked, like snakes.
Petition ought to be reached last,
the begging for oneself.

Adapting

A vacuum cleaner rumbles along the corridor,
soon to cough loud before my home -
that is what I try to call the apartment,
nostalgically remembering a postcard
of an Irish cottage surrounded by rolling moors.

For many years the scene stared back
at me from a book case, a silly dream,
considering who I had become.

An adaptation, though, may be created
in a country or landscape
where bears or mountain lions
do not bare their teeth on the porch.

Already, an escape from the city
is being concocted, while
planning a month's stay in Europe.

Adjusting II

Poison ivy
blotching calves
and ankles -
another reality
of nature
guarding itself
from invaders.

In response,
the woman
drapes herself
in thick garb,

as she, less naïve,
pants after beauty
in tall grass

A dove song

The day begins
on the first spring day
with a song
poured on sunlit grass
till now clamped
by frost and snow.

Is it the sound of a dove,
or a renegade owl?
Like the ear imperfect,
the mind ponders the world,
blurred by grieving.

A flight

She has turned her back
on the wall covered
with brocade hangings,
thrown open the window
to lap the remaining
late summer heat,
pierced with cricket sounds.

Far from a beach,
she presses her heels
into the wet sand,
sits down in a good dress
in the waves and allows
the sea to caress her,
leaving behind
a row of rotting crosses,
letting regrets float away,
distant as seagull cries.

After the drought

The distress of crusted leaves
longing for rain long gone,
they rustle tender
swaying wild in the wind
like intoxicated women
caressing Bacchus,

while I sail the Indian Ocean
on a dreamy yat,
and make love under wide-eyed stars
with a God-fetched husband,

who helps me till the land
and fill the palace I own
on every continent
with trusted servants,
who are instructed to throw
baskets of food
to the homeless

till they too grow roses
in tribute
to Heaven and Earth.

After watching a Public Television program

We are not reptiles on the Galapagos Islands,
merely driven by the instinct of self-preservation.
Though some of us pounce at our newborns,
to cripple or devour them -
though some of us, as a result, know fear
as soon as our birth eyes are open
and for the remainder of life react
to any confrontation with flight -
we are more than the Galapagos Islands
snakes and monster iguanas -
by having developed a consciousness.
That is why we say Stop to fright,
while begging God
to rescue us from ourselves.

A fugitive

She walks along the edge
of a blade of cliffs
where underneath soars
the perpetual ocean.
The sound of falling pebbles
that fray her straying feet
reminds her of her lot -
the waiting precipice
which will accept her
as final payment
and grind her indifferently
in its graying teeth.

The foaming breakers
and the screams of gulls,
together with the wind
which sweeps back her hair,
have already shaped her
into almost air -
almost a cry,
a brittle salty wave.

The village people
eye her from afar,
crossing themselves.
They no longer lure her
back to a bed,
or newly baked bread,
and the angels
zooming around her head
ignore her

Aged neighbors

As new planets are discovered,
fifty-five in mere five years,
we realize the world is not
what we always have believed -
ordered in firm, tidy packets,
galaxies and hemispheres.
Now even one asteroid
may be - surprise - planet named,
while suns and bodies we thought fixed,
wonder in erratic courses.

What we learn from aged neighbors
as time whizzes swiftly by
is to laugh at love's lost labors,
smile with every distressed cry,
grateful for each passing minute,
as the life span's lullaby
rocks the child we always are
till our eyes skip and, Aah -
through rainbow horizons,
young, we gallop, free.

Age of discretion

See - Robert Frost died the same year
as J. F. Kennedy - 1963, almost forty
years ago. How different would be the US
history, had not Kennedy been murdered!

In forty years, will my memory
be wrapped gently around certain shoulders,
my children older than I now, grandchildren
bearing the joy-burden of parents?

At what age does one realize this life's brevity?

Aging

The rhododendrons and the pines
cluster as thick walls
between the house and the town,

the sky with its
thinning eiderdown
and the feathery snow --
falling, falling,
like my days
diminishing,
a snow flake, a drop of rain.

My body is a pillow
steadily emptying
its substance.

Aging time

After a snow storm
sunshine, soft morning padding
of polar bear paws on frozen branches.

The woman needs do nothing
after a night of coughing
except gaze through lace curtains,

nurse her chest with camomile tea,
think of her grandchildren,
while time slides soundless

through her solitude,
and cuddly cars rest
before the apartment building.

Agoraphobia

She feels not brave but full of apprehension.
On most days she chooses not to venture out,
for she'd encounter neighbors, she'd have to chat
and bear the secret glance of judgment they don't mention.

For weeks she remains secluded in her rooms,
where she putters, restless, from bed to recliner,
smoking, then fanning the forbidden air out
of the window, mixing it with perfume.

Late at night she creeps out to pick up her mail,
to free the box of junk, not to arouse suspicion.
The children don't write, old friends have given up.
Fridays, she faces the lad on the grocery mission.

Aids in Africa

I'd rather read any other article -
A New Time Out for Parents, or about
addiction to hamburgers, osteoporosis -
than the pages of Time Magazine
describing the horrors of AIDS in Africa.
So I view the photographs first -
of a small girl who sulkily stares
into the camera, while her paralyzed mother,
for whom the child cares, hides her face,
ashamed of being ostracized by the community.

The sufferers resemble concentration camp
victims. Orphaned street boys huddle
on a messy street corner, their faces old,
hardened beyond pain. The statistics sound
like an unknown language - 17 million dead
since the late 1970s, 250,000 dying of AIDS
each year in South Africa. Botswana, Swaziland,
Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Zambia, Namibia -
of the 36 million of adults and children
in the world living with HIV/AIDS
in the year 2000, more than 70% were
in sub-Saharan Africa. 3.8 million
Africans were newly infected last year.

I stare at the map of the continent
I have never visited. My mind cannot
grasp the overwhelming numbers.
The case histories, however - I feel
some of the injustice and pain of,
for instance, Laetitia, who is 51,
and of her brother, also sick with AIDS.
Furious that Laetitia can no longer work
and support her and her son, the mother
walled off her daughter with plywood
in a room without windows, with a flimsy
door opening into the ally - through which
Laetitia peddles beer, cigarettes and candy
from a shopping cart in her room,
when people are brave enough to stop
by her door. With the pennies she earns,
she feeds herself and her four children.
Local youths invade her room, call her witch
and beat her. Her own kids don't like

to help her any more, don't bring her food
when she can't get up. If she ventures out,
tough boys snatch her purse, children taunt her,
but it's her mother's rejection that Laetitia mourns.
She knows her mother will not bury her, that she
will not care for her children when she is gone.

From my soft chair in Connecticut, USA,
I ponder this situation, feeling numb.
Is God dead to allow such suffering -
blaming God for what I haven't done,
the help I could have given. I turn
to the photograph of a Malawi nurse,
Catherine Phiri, 38, who tested positive
in 1990, after her husband died
of the disease. Jobless and forced
by relatives to move from one town
to another, she chose to break the silence
about AIDS, crippling Africa. Now,
the Malawi government supports her work,
because many of its own members have died
of AIDS. I read about other local volunteers
fighting the shame, ignorance and sexual taboo.

Akashik records

People who do not write poems -
where flutter the days
they shed,
calendar leaves,
before disappearing?

Scattered memories,
piles of photos
unlikely to be placed
in albums,
flowers
tenderly planted,
houses built,
tunes written,
lies, murders committed,
babies delivered,
poems, art,

days, nights spent
in childhood,
as adults,
single, espoused, widowed,
tremble, recorded,
in their web-like holograms,
stretched through time.

A late January day

Winter is dying slowly
on its knees deep in snow,
crying sleet tears,
icing roads and sidewalks
with treacherous slime.

Some of us must brave
the uninviting surface,
scrape the stubborn
windshield, then grip
the steering wheel in terror,
while the car slithers
on its fumbling wheels.

Only those huddling indoors
are dispensing blessings,
feeling like monarchs,
until cabin fever enters their limbs,
the roof leaks, or power failure
makes them freeze.

Alive

Remembering my way back
in a French city (Paris?)
uphill, a miracle in itself.
Vivid the scene in the bank:
the female tellers appalled
to overhear their boss
asking a wealthy client
to introduce me to "someone"
from his set, a man aged..?
"Fifty-eight to sixty-six,"
I suggest. The client nods,
after checking me out.
Once he exits, the teller
on the left protests.
Can't I see? They are young,
pretty! And this is their land!
I mutter, "You're right,"
standing my ground.

Scene two: an ornamental park
before a hotel. Among the flowers,
a boy rampaging -
murdering the birds -
his doting parents
supervising the killing.
A clerk, I think, rushes out
to prevent further carnage.
With a mangled sparrow in hand,
he turns to the crowd, unsure
what steps ought to be taken.
"Tell the management," I say.
Our eyes meet.

As we walk side-by-side,
my body turns electric.
"You are the first man
in three years, who's made me
feel this way," I announce boldly.
He smiles. "You're so huge!"
I cry, noticing his height.
"Et vous si petite!" We embrace,
though this is not easy.
After a while, my stretched toes
ache. I sing "Sur le Pont d'Avignon."

He joins in. It is the Seine
we stand beside, shaded,
in late evening.
"Are you married?" I ask.
He shrugs phlegmatically,
in a Gallic fashion.
"Si ceci continue..."
he says. "Quoi? Ceci?"
I ask, incredulous.
"Si." I doubt he is serious.
Could he be? Leave his wife
for me? (So glad he likes me.)
But, oh, the glorious
(defunct, I'd believed),
drums in the clitoris,
strings in the vulval lips
vibrating, pulsing!

Allotted space

I survey the face of one
who's spent his years
as I'd have dreamed mine,
publishing
his first book of verse
at age twenty-five, living
many years in foreign countries,
his books printed
steadily in the USA.
The face on the cover
of his latest collection,
has young eyes of a man
in his seventies, with thick
white hair - the man I'd have
wished to be.
Not jealousy, sadness
ushers me into the next moment,
also gladness that I'm allowed
to feast on his profound poetry.
I look at my place and find
comfort in the thought
that slugs, worms, who live
their allotted time underground,
in darkness, invisible to critics
and publishers, may lie as near
the heart of the creator
as great W.S. Merwin.

Almost Easter

The day is fully mine. It's almost noon.
I slept late, exercised and had a breakfast.
To no one I need talk, not even on the phone,
not even to the clerks, if I venture out shopping.

This is a freedom to taste, to breathe in and touch,
while relaxing sweetly into life's sediment.
Most philosophers practiced that much,
though not the saints, or the majority of men.

I'll enjoy the drip-drip from my life's tank.
The reservoir is large, as is the sea.
Today is mine. I glory in me!
It's spring, almost Easter.

A Mass - On a Sunday morning

For Ann Korec

A mole, blind, I was told,
a Helen Keller with eyes closed,
a mass of flesh,
with a grate in mouth,

a scrape in stomach,
a flutter, a patter,
in the heart,

a skin itch, a teeth clasp,
a chest heave, a nose sniff,
a tongue grope, a hair pull,
a palm dry, an earful,

a bladder knock, anus press,
a throat knot, a bowel bubble,
a nail twist, a scalp scratch,
an eye stick, forehead twitch,

muscle spasm, nerve pinch

A melting

To wake up changed
after disturbing dreams
and find a February thaw -
rain puddles, commitments
lined up like resentful soldiers -
a Friday, Hartford, Connecticut,
year two thousand, USA.
What was loved yesterday
refuses to be pleasing.

A mother's steady wish

The doctor in the dream seemed surprised
at the force with which I replied
to his suggestion that Margaret be placed
in a Special Ed class because she could not
write before starting kindergarten.

"In my day," I said, "the child learned
to write at school, from the teacher,"
but then I remembered that times have changed
and that this was America.

"When we moved here from Britain,
the children were placed ahead one grade,"
I explained to the doctor, and he smirked.

"My middle daughter could not cope socially,
so she was kept back a year,
something she's never forgiven us for,"
I said, realizing what humiliation
my bright daughter underwent.

How vividly the four of them were with me -
The two oldest daughters outside, playing,
but M. at my side, so small, a blond fringe
framing her sweet face, and their brother -
still a tall thin lad whom I sternly ordered
to clean in the dream the mess from spilled
hot chocolate - quarter of a century later!

Thrust into a life not of their choosing,
it seems they all had to bring themselves
up somehow. Oh, I cooked their meals,
did the laundry, cleaned the house,
and transported them to lessons,
but my mind was elsewhere,
like my own mother's used to be,
swinging on a tree out of reach
like a mythical bird, moving further and further,
mocking, though I too went to school full-time,
earning mainly A's and two degrees in five years.

Now we're bearing the effects of the culture shocks,
settling in different continents but not for long,
the children's father frequently gone,
then surfacing, then busy.

A turning away from desire

I curl like a snail
into a cocoon, escaping
into a dormant state,
hibernating until a door opens.

I numb myself to agitation,
shunning appointments
and the telephone ringing,
blank, the slate wiped clear,

the pile of poems remaining,
scattered seeds.

Andulka, at ninety-one

Likely, she'll be there and I here
One day. She'll look down or stand
by my side. I will or will not feel her
watching my movements or touching my hand.

I'll remember her slow years of waning,
how, gradually, I called less often,
how repetitious our talk became,
as we grumbled about failing health,

pollution, crimes, misguided president.
How more and more and less and less she seemed
a mother, our native Czech resounding
fake in the telephone pressed to the ear.

Another day

Respite from summer heat,
a bird's soft chirping,
and the mind open -
not far, but somewhat
stretched. There is a
longing, a hesitant waiting,
a languid question, for
what's never fetched.

Flowers wait, insects,
humid earth, air,
waves on lakes, rivers.

It's merely morning, nature's
awakening - opening,
filling, fainting, to start
again, being.

Another night of little sleep

My head feels full
of yesterday's events -
slithering on ice, sanding
the driveway, then the news
of the Los Angeles earthquake,
and a long message from my aunt
who survived it.

My daughter's surely wearier
than I, in hospital, hooked up
to a drip of pitocin,
to induce labor.

It used to be the baby's father
who was kept waiting
outside the birthing room!
Instead, I'm pacing,
in a suburb of Hartford,
where my first grandchild
will be born.

Answered prayer

One of your inscrutable faces
has turned to me with a smile
and filled my outstretched
apron with fine pickings.
I knew that the maze of your orchard
would lead me to a giving tree,
that finally your severe countenance
would crack in a stream
teaming with trout.
Your branches rock me
with hope as mother's arms
consoling an infant.

Anticipating Mexico

We leave on Friday,
spending a short night
in Atlanta. Next week,
we'll sit in different chairs.
Hopefully, the Dengue will
not get us, a global family.
Was it a past life we lived
yesterday by the pool,
while you remained calm
in your bedroom, packing
everyone's luggage?
Now you are in the air,
on the way to England, then
Berlin, Germany. Your sister's
flying from the Dominican
Republic at present, will
eat your little daughter's tummy
to make her laugh.
Your niece will leave pets and
daddy in California.
She'll be ushered to San Miguel
Saturday evening, but will
by the next day, with your son,
claim the ground. Hopefully,
the baby will not howl through
the nights while teething.
We'll celebrate a birthday.
Your youngest sister
and I will talk books.
Each day, we'll trot to
the language school and back,
eat, then enjoy a brief siesta.

An underworld of sounds

Reading in the corridors
of one on the verge
of madness, the poet
chisels at the silver ore
of images packed tight.
Words split in a flawless
syntax, yet lapsing,
with no padding between
leaps. Tiger growls.
Pungent smell of the
victim. Splattered blood.
Scars of imagination.

Anxiety, which I hope my grandchild will not inherit

Lately, more drama
searing through the seams
of our cluster
has produced surgeries,
and now my oldest daughter
has to be induced -
all for the sake of future babies!

Will that make the labor harder?
Opinions vary.
I'll try not to fret,
distract myself with comedies
on TV, as I did last night,
though that resulted in a restless sleep
slashed by two nightmares:
my youngest, floating,
face-down in a bath,
then my new car stolen,
leaving me a victim
in a strange city.

A place to manage

A fan spins its humid song,
muffled by the ceiling.
Upstairs, a doctor
from Delhi, still asleep.
In a week, she'll pack
her saris and fly back to India.

This place serves as a cheap hotel
to foreign professionals.
As its landlady, I somewhat share
in their many-hued splendor.
Adjustable, the house shrinks,
expands, satisfying the need of many -
like my body, which I also
rarely call my home.

A prayer

Open the window of your grace
to a rainbow
that will arch
above the newborn child
like a protecting shield!
Sharpen our senses!
Attune them to the melody
of the stars,
where you play the organ
in majestic silence!
Instill us with the patience
of the snail
which does not rag
against its sticky progress
through the maze
of twigs and leaves,
clinging to surfaces
it perceives as safe!
Inspire us with the daring
of spiders, so that we would
fly on the thread
of faith, attached
to one of your fingers.

April 30

Reaching - always reaching
for that something, anything
on the outside of self.
Distraction from inner drowning.
Serrated edge of a door that
pretends to hold fear.
Peace - Knowledge surfacing,
safe twin gods to follow.
Something lapping. Back.
Forward. Time? Its tide?
A strong, invisible substance
pressing against earlobes.
Mute faces. Words. Sounds.
"Of course" ending in an "Oh."
The awe of recognition.
Newly planted annuals
a child is taught to venerate.

April

Direct my eyes from darkness
to the crystal light
dancing its hue in many-colored peaks,
sunbeams entwined
with daisies, daffodils
when the tired crocus
withers,
receding once more
to its origin.

Fill me with sap
seeking its way through
splendid green channels
about to burst open,
and in my throat mix the red
of tulips with loud verdant trumpets!

Who, or whatever you are,
do swing me high above old sorrow!
Inject me with spring's benevolent drug,
shaken by your hands
in Earth's test tube!

A rat

How ironic! We meet
at a supermarket
on Friday the 13th!
The past jumps
from under the aisle
like a rat, then lies
at our feet limp,
a smelly dishrag,
stained by trysts,
lunches and dinners
I cooked,
the wrenching pain.

"Do you still go to school?"
I ask, making small talk.
Then I blurt out:
"Do you still see him?"
"Not much. We talk on the phone
occasionally. He started with
singles dating and
has found somebody."
"He always has somebody,"
I mutter. She blushes,
remembering, though
we are no longer rivals.
"And do you still live
in your beautiful house?"
she says. "Yes." She is
slim, pretty, much younger.
Yet he's abandoned her
as I thought he would,
as he'll leave the new
somebody. Hey, sister!
We were mere links
in a chain, his food,
our leftovers disposed of
in the drain full of
discarded women!

A relict in Pablo Neruda's shed

On Isla Negra,
she leans in a corner,
a large, beautiful woman,
a statue, rusty leavers
enlarging her wooden breasts.
Other parts animate her -
eyes that pour light and darkness
into her head, mouth in which
a swollen tongue brings
sluggish licks of moisture
to two hollow steps, the lips.
A bee drones in her throat
and nasal passages. She's been
lifted out of a turbulent ocean,
creaking and rotting, left
encased, forgotten
by a poet.

A riddle

The tunnel stretches
between land and sea,
strengthened by doors
stamped with vicious locks,
all of them secured
against hands or shoulders,
the angry foot
which might kick them open,
the peepholes barred
against spying eyes.

Into the tunnel
fall seasons like leaves,
one after the other
dripping in dry flowers.
The road holds no traffic,
only hollow air.
Shunted from the other
by miles of deranged genes,
at each of the tunnel's
numb mouth
squats an aging sibling -

a brother and sister,
whose thin silver hair
like a weeping willow
falls over the body,
sinking into the ground
and shrouding each
as a web the spider -

while the mute voices
curl into snakes
in estranged throats,
stinging the bronchi
and the lungs
with a crazed desire -

to shout
above echoing graves
forgiving areas
of vast sadness.

Articulate commander

Marianne Moore's verse
on a drizzly morning
spreads over the page
in disciplined drops,
the insightful words'
regiment marching
without apparent emotion.

No frills of sentimentality
cloud the precise art.
Other poets are humbled
by her lines.

At home only with each other

They confronted me this morning,
but, despite Ms. Jekyll's accomplished
introduction, I soon recognized
the hour after waking
as Ms. Hyde's territory, her action.

How flaccid their limbs,
their yin-yang flowing!

More or less, the daylight
draws out Ms. Jekyll's gentle
pastels in pleasing curves.
The canvas of Ms. Hyde
is blood-stained, dipped in
night's charcoal, her thick
unpredictable oils plastered with
phantasmic collages.
At her best, Ms. Jekyll
paints like Rembrand.

A stage

This evening
hands will roll out
before me a shabby carpet
where I must enact my part
before polite strangers,
contorting face with a smile,
the brain signaling an alert
while my body, soul cry halt.

At home only with each other II

Both confronted me this morning.
But, despite Ms. Jekyll's accomplished
introduction, I soon recognized
the hour after waking as Ms. Hyde's
territory, claimed for her action.

How flaccid their limbs,
their yin-yang flowing!

More or less, the daylight
does draw out Ms. Jekyll's pleasing
pastels, gentle watercolors.
The canvases of Ms. Hyde are blood-
stained, dipped in night's charcoal
oils, plastered with phantasmic collages.
Ms. Jekyll at her best manifests a Rembrandt.

They seem so dated, exiled,
out-of-place in Connecticut, USA.

A trial

Once more she has visited me in a dream,
my mother, the timid, perfect woman,
who'd spent her life smoothing differences,
never stirring a feather, except in my bonnet.

I was at home somewhere. My children were sleeping.
A man who killed himself by hanging in 1981
was our guest. My mother had gone out -
for a walk or an errand, and I was left alone
with the man I loved in a hushed room
where the children kept sleeping.

At 6 P.M. I switched on two separate radios.
The anchors kept skipping beats, their words muffling.
My two wristwatches also registered out of sync.
On a wall I noticed a third watch, heart-shaped,
which looked like a toy, yet kept the right time.
As my lover had no watch, I gave the cute thing to him.

The room went dark and still no sign of Mother.
Where had she gone? I felt mildly frantic.
Before I set out to look for her, I checked the children,
who became mere breathing bundles, faceless, sleeping.

Outside, I searched the streets where all the stores were closed.
But as I was undressing to go to bed, my mother walked in -
to explain the commotion which I had been ignoring downstairs.
The police were there. She had been arrested.
"And now," she said, "they want to interrogate you."

One of the men was sprawling on the sofa, sewing.
The other policeman eyed me, tall, fierce, rigid
and questioned me about Mother,
while keeping from me her crime.

My account of her life-long virtues
made him smirk.
"We've lived in many countries," I argued.
"Not once was there a trouble."
To contradict me, he pulled out of mother's old bag
a drawing of a child's face, done in crayons.
The child's mouth was open.
"It's smiling," I said, pointing.
She said it was hungry," the policeman grunted.

I was shocked. "It was she who must have been hungry,"
I insisted. "She left home at five; It's midnight."
But the policeman continued staring hostile, unrelenting.

Why am I disturbed? The dream portrays my ongoing conflict,
though Mother has been dead forty-four long years -
my good mother, the saint - while I remain double:
the fierce, condemning policeman,
and, defending her, a faceless, doting daughter.

Attempting to forget the shootings at Columbine High School

On the table rest three bilingual
volumes of your poems, Pablo Neruda,
collector of used objects,
lamerter of lost friends,
serenader of women,
worshipper of democracy,
sand, Pacific Ocean!

Today's world spreads
smaller, more cruel,
just two-and-a-half
decades since you died.
Do you know that soon
we'll celebrate
the millennium?

You may have decided
never again to visit
your native Chile,
or Madrid, Paris, Isla Negra
where you wrote before
death led you elsewhere.

Let me drink the rich wine
of your words! Strengthen me
on your robust wisdom
so that I may watch a white
dove fly over Columbine,
near Denver, Colorado,
where children murdered
children in large numbers!

A turning

Within each turning, a tuning of the senses.
Coffee tastes sharper; the vacuum cleaner thunders
like first crocuses.

Within each giving up trembles a new grasping,
While aching from strain and weary of much rest,
And in each silence the mind expands while fasting.

A two-days-old, in the waves sound

He doses, deep within himself,
the tiny cot, Daddy's strong arms,
or next to his mother's large comforting breast.

Two days ago,
he was wrenched
out of a narrow pelvis.

Skilled hands will today
circumcise him -
more puzzling pain
for his novice nerves -
which he'll dash against
the cliffs of protest
like an enraged seagull.

Bach and Mozart
will continue to bathe
the hospital room
with sound,

while the tide of voices,
some of which he may
already recognize,
will strike
his ear drums.

August wedding

The familiar steep incline
of the hill gives you
to each other, under the August
sky's wide canopy.
You exchange vows,
the twelve years
spent side by side
rolling like distant thunder,
ripe love apples on a branch.
A little child listens,
swimming in its sea.

Having lived in the wilderness,
you know the summer paradise
is only one face of nature.
The ground you transform
grows food and flowers,
teaching you early,
making you grow wise.

Eager for more learning,
you dive into marriage,
nailing its script
of forgiveness, laughter,
among the stars.

Safe there, it will pour
on the acres you own,
though often at the last hour,
much needed rain,
then again welcome
warm sunshine.

Autumn burial

Over a meadow
the wind will lift
the poems I've written,
thousands of them -
after a stranger
pours them out of boxes.

The wind will scatter
the verses with efficient fingers,
in the way it disposes of
dead leaves.

Away

They meet on an island
for the funeral
Two women
in their thirties
The wind whips
their short hair

As the priest talks
over the open grave
they both remember
the years
they planned to spend
like Gertrude
and Alice
waiting for the moon
far from Puritan America
then one burying the other
whoever
went first

The family and friends
weep near the closed casket
August sun strums
a summer serenade

A bee's spring song

For Ian, Morgan, Karuna and Genna

In each beehive we dwell
we harbor some honey.
Then we die or find a place
to satisfy our thirst.
We sip the dew on a daffodil,
then pat our small tummy.

From flower to flower we flit,
buzzing a cheery song.
The sun's our father,
the rain's the mummy,
The wind our wings -
isn't that funny?

Above the blue planet

The soul clings to the bark
of the divine like a crazed
squirrel, digging its claws
into substance.

The soul floats dazed
without this contact
with the material
the Most High
placed
on a blue planet
in one
of countless galaxies.