

# **Poems in WordPerfect: L - P**

**by**

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Poetry Collection  
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## Land with no ocean

Like a rose - with no motion  
rocking the slender stem,  
there lies a land with no ocean  
bathing its jagged hem.

Within that land a city  
where once my dream  
soared high with love. No pity  
damaged the fragile seam

of the young body,  
which my soul  
so proudly wore.

The far land was my cradle,  
the rose my heart's emblem,  
the city my dream's stable,  
my soul's proud mast, not end.

## A late January day

Winter is slowly dying  
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 invades their limbs,  
the roof leaks, or power failure  
makes them freeze.

Late November  
For Frederick Morgan

After reading the lines  
of a poet who knew  
pure delight  
in long cherished moments,  
I shut my eyes, sore  
from the foggy air  
surrounding me  
on a bleak Monday  
before Thanksgiving.

Something weighs heavy,  
as if the inner lining  
of a worn coat  
had been replaced with lead.  
I dread to look ahead  
at more striving.

## Late October

Yes, I give thanks:  
for the breath  
suspended in nothing,  
the minute droplets  
of air above the dunes  
hemming a desert,  
far from the sea -

and for the light  
which switches itself on  
to stream in yellow ribbons  
between autumn leaves  
on mornings blessed  
with sunshine.

## The toy chest

Years strip lovers  
of feathers -  
bald patches,  
most jigsaw pieces lost,  
the toy chest  
housing a hill,  
a cluster of trees,  
a path, a kiss  
suspended in a bird  
above a trickling stream,  
the loved body once  
filling the horizon  
reduced to a contour -  
a stick man bending  
over a long gone table,  
the vanished husband,  
the last lover  
assembling himself  
with electric speed,  
while a cracked record  
tilts the abandoned  
turntable.

## Latest birth

Blind, it shovels  
itself out of the tight  
darkness. Something  
warm pushes it upwards,  
the swollen seed it has grown  
into since the latest dying.  
Dumb, elemental, silent despite  
muffled noises around its core.  
A changed world awaits it.  
Freed of the earth crust,  
rid of its stem,  
the dandelion seed  
prepares to sail.

## The Old World

Coming from the Old World,  
I make new things last,  
mending a cheap curtain  
out of existence -  
as a simple pleasure.

Maybe God is pagan,  
other than we think.  
Decked in vine garlands,  
not a crown of thorns,  
he frowns at our denial.

Perhaps the hardest trial  
for some of us is joy -  
snatched at as victory.



## Leaning on a substitute

She teaches to begin each day  
with giving thanks for five things -  
then to listen, listen, spilling love  
into every need, and into the self,  
so prone to complaining.

With her near, the twenty years ahead  
shed the threat they before contained,  
the doubt, the expectation of pain,  
for she's conquered these decades,  
mastering them like a trooper.

Despite mal-functioning hearing aids,  
and due to her child-like faith,  
at eighty-eight she knows  
physical hurdles, but no regret.

Like a hummingbird sucking  
each moment's nectar,  
she's the belle of every ball -  
role model, substitute mother.

## Leaving Connecticut

History ladders ahead heaped with corpses,  
dry-eyed mourners, and here we are  
in our little cluster,  
at the tip of an iceberg  
which burns blue volcano.  
Margaret calls California her home,  
the land of redwoods, earthquakes,  
movie stars, crime.

I shall cook vegetarian for her  
before she arrives from camping,  
and we'll lunch at the crumbling  
picnic table in the garden.  
By the afternoon, she'll be gone,  
heading west in her white truck.  
After a stormy year, God willing,  
we'll touch base face to face  
somewhere - perhaps this town.

## Lingering behind

Thank you that my soul lives  
behind the mirrors  
of my failings and that you've  
imparted your spirit  
to the divas, the leaves  
welcoming me in the grove.  
Thank you for odd creatures!  
Each carries your essence.  
I'm learning to honor you  
in spiders and other insects,  
bacteria, viruses, dangerous  
substances which I cannot  
dominate. As my eyes begin  
to fail, I am learning  
to understand that the senses  
turn into traps, keeping me  
away from the destination.  
I'm grateful that my perception  
appears to be migrating,  
though at a snail's pace,  
deeper into the center  
of my being.

## Long-term

She's gone  
for three weeks  
to an island where  
people speak Spanish  
She'll come back  
in time to go with us to Mexico  
Soon after, she'll work  
in Central America  
for two months  
Her job is AIDS

She's carried the HIV  
in her body  
sixteen years  
Like cancer  
a long-term pregnancy  
She's not on any cocktail  
Smokes heavily

## Looking for a topic

Threading through the past day and night,  
I see knots in a faint pattern emerging.  
During that time I find no work of art,  
no turn of events or of energy.

My granddaughter again tells me I am old.  
Surveying recent days, I must agree  
that I fit among the ranks of the ancients.  
At seventy - that I'll become this year -  
I feel a steady slide not deserving a mention.

## Los Angeles

Within the space of days,  
a cosmology of faces,  
voices, limbs, destinies,  
and circumstances  
entangled - left behind,  
but more awaiting  
above the rainbow.

The tired hand tossing  
the dice, the swollen feet  
of the migrant stumble,  
numb. She's not expecting  
more than water and stale bread,  
and gasps, surprised  
at Fortune  
spinning her wheel.

## Lost continent

Reading about  
the infidelities  
of William Carlos Williams  
helps me to understand  
why you kept straying -  
not my husband  
not even professing  
love, except twice,  
when I made you  
say the words.  
Then, they burned  
like golden fleece  
before the barge  
we sailed.

## Luminous

Two teachers walk in the field,  
in the raised hand of one  
a monstrance, in the other's  
a chalice, filled with water  
that penetrates the bedrock  
of craving.

Ready for lessons,  
I let my fists go limp,  
abandoning the death  
rattle in the throat  
of expectation.  
Like Jesus, I've learned  
how little lies in man -  
yet sure that Fate  
has resurrected  
both teachers,  
in the unpredictable  
whirling of cosmic particles.



## Mad sailor

Do not let regret rule over the day,  
stranding it like a ship in the years past,  
when three furies flapped around the mast -  
inexperience, fear, and delusion - like a dead albatross  
weighing around the neck of the lost woman.

She planned to sail far as once did Marco Polo.  
Alas, big storms came. Her fellow sailors died.  
Infected by the plague and weakened by despair,  
by fog and thirst blinded, for death she prayed,  
but life was rooted fiercely in her body.

Now, rescued from the sea, in her insanity  
she views existence as dangerous and shoddy.

## Magnets

The witches beckon. Their skinny fingers  
gleam white bone under the shriveled skin.  
They smirk behind the many-layered masks  
which they slide, flip, as mere packs of cards,  
covering skulls, eye sockets' yellow fire.

Then there are angels posing as white knights  
with glistening armor, oceans  
humming like planets in their calm gaze.  
They, too, stand within reach  
with outstretched arms, strong magnets,  
which pull me through the day.

## Making an effort

See if you still can  
arrange some words  
and have them sound  
profound . Silly,

you're no hillbilly.  
You can dress and cook  
a reasonable dish.

Today demands  
its due. Do it  
for the good  
of all concerned

or what your  
tired brain  
deems valuable  
to the world,

itchy-eyed, achy.

## Man on a Saturday morning

He'll scoop them out  
into the heavy rain  
and load them in the van -  
the little boy, his wife  
and all her luggage,  
finally the mother-in-law,  
who'll mind the child  
while he discusses  
the house with the builders -

all of it a dream  
through which they rush  
like a train on the tracks -  
a trip he finds full of bumps  
and interruptions.

At the end of the day,  
he and his small son  
will begin housekeeping,  
mother-in-law gone,  
wife heading for Europe.

Always, he remains,  
a foundation -  
muscular shoulders,  
arms bracing the load,  
feet steady  
in worn loafers.

## Maria

It's reappearing  
on the level of mine -  
a face - which I can lift  
or lower like a bookmark,  
a flowering stick -  
the glowing face of a friend,  
a banner, sign.

Its warmth is spreading,  
as if from a row of old gas lamps,  
a procession of swinging oregano lanterns,  
fluttering,  
blue butterflies,  
rose petals showering  
a miracle of answered prayer.

The face that used to  
fold its shutters  
like a house sheltering  
before a hurricane  
has thrown its windows wide open  
and hangs sun-drenched.

## Masterpieces

The timeless words  
of William Butler Yeats  
rhyme like a bird trilling  
at the outbreak of dawn,  
in the hush of dusk.

Over a hundred years have slipped by  
since "The Lake of Innisfree,"  
"When You Are Old," "Adam's Curse,"  
and "The Folly of Being Comforted"  
were penned, yet the poet talks with me  
this morning face-to-face in my study,  
vigorous, omnipresent.

I hope his poems are read deep in space,  
whisked away from Earth on the UFOs,  
for that is how I,  
as a member of the human race,  
would wish to be remembered.

## Matzo ball soup at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D. C.

After seeing the exhibit  
Daniel's Story: Remember the Children,  
I went to  
the Museum Restaurant.

Comfortably seated,  
after a few spoonfuls,  
my throat contracted.  
I fought the gagging,  
not wanting to spoil  
the hushed visitors' meal  
by vomiting into my soup bowl.  
Knowing I wouldn't make it  
to the restroom,  
I repeatedly swallowed  
and swore never again  
to indulge in  
matzo ball soup.

The sick sensation began to wear off  
as I read the museum leaflets.  
Could it be, I thought,  
that the Daniel's Story exhibit  
had caused the violent nausea,  
as my gut remembered,  
those years and,  
among the more than a million  
of children who had perished,  
all the gassed Jewish children  
I used to know?

## Meeting old friends in their native land

After a while, they nod,  
crones themselves,  
cursing defunct glands,  
the prescribed female hormones  
which, the doctors insist,  
prevent the brittle bones  
from becoming air,  
so that the patient remains ambulatory.  
But is the process worth the side effects?

They remember a green-eyed Scarlett  
O'Hara, not the grotesque round  
woman, who struggles ahead, puffing,  
like a tank, requiring an overhaul.



## Meeting Yeats

Again I turn to Yeats' last poems  
and ponder his Ben Bulbin,  
under which Yeats for seventy years  
rests in a grave that merely bears  
his admonition: Cast a cold eye  
on life, on death. Horseman, pass by!

Many have visited the site,  
while I just saw the two towers  
where he hid to write and think -  
a horseman who rode through the bowers,  
words his meat and words his drink.

I was eight when the great poet  
in his country finally died.  
I knew nothing of Ireland,  
though I saw the world explode

when before the outbreak of war  
Hitler invaded my country.  
I did not know any English,  
Yeats' chariot and Yeats' language.

But I believe that Yeats I'll meet  
under Ben Bulbin, transported  
into a section of vast heaven  
where poets of all nations sing.

## Midgets and vultures

There are many topics too tricky to treat  
in poems, mine at least.

The mind shrinks from troublesome  
subjects. At the bottom of the glass  
frowns poison - yet that poison  
might prove cleansing. The potion drunk,  
what would issue from the throat but groans -  
bedpan verses, filled with impotence and fury.

Were they there always - for suddenly they lurk  
in the mind's twisted paths and around street corners.  
Like midgets or vultures they posture, whirl past  
the aspect of me that wishes to ignore them.  
In disguise perhaps they offer me a feast  
in the quicksand retreat where my roots are sinking.  
Will they drag me to hell, to devour there my thinking,  
tearing pretense away to bare bone, lasting peace?

## Old age

What else does she need but to rest,  
surrounded by friends who care,  
phone, bother to visit,  
as old age piles its clumsy layers on  
her frail balding head,  
sore legs that chaperon  
the small twisted body  
around the confining apartment?

How she longs again to attend the noon church service  
for which she boarded the bus before the main door.  
but the doctor forbids this pleasure,  
keeping her long weeks home-bound,  
ordering total leisure,

and insisting  
on a series of strong antibiotics  
that foul her appetite  
and make her bowels sick.  
The aide and the visiting nurse tend her oozing leg ulcer.  
She can still breathe,  
pray, muster a smile.

## Misfit

This morning's poems did not turn me on,  
though they were written by a lawyer  
and talked intelligently, one describing  
Belgrade and one ancient Rome.

Too many interruptions, early in the day.  
Adjusting to an eager attitude  
when help is requested.

Flee, grumpy monster!

The answer may lie in ignoring the phone -  
but then the machine persists.  
I prefer the human voice silenced on a page.  
In the midst of do-gooders, I stand selfish.

## Missing a friend

Soon we shall see you in the nursing home,  
a fair exchange for your lonesome apartment,  
except for the broken hip and the problem,  
whose test, diagnosis were prevented by the fall.

The nurses will stay pleasant, doctor also,  
the physical therapists you'll regard as friends.  
Such lavish attention, not experienced ever,  
you'll bless as gifts from God's good hands.

Your children will visit, grandchildren, neighbors  
who can still drive. Others will send cards,  
mentioning recovery, courage. Yet some wish  
You'd not left; some of us wish you were near.

## Moods and choices

Yesterday I made certain choices.  
Today a friend made several.  
Do I regret what I rejected?  
Will the friend bemoan his no?

On the platform given to us  
we like to stretch out our will,  
desiring order, mastery.

With hormones, the moods fluctuate,  
while we strive not to be victims  
of genes, of chance, or of fate,  
curious, driven, set to reach  
a form of divinity.

## Morgan's first spring

Arms thrown wide open,  
a three-month-old  
rests in a ring pillow,  
her day bed.

Sleep has dragged her into  
the deep where she circles  
between reeds, where dragonfly larvae  
are silently about to burst open.

It is March, the late pregnancy month  
for sheep, cows. But not just the young  
are fast growing in mothers' bellies;  
Morgan is sprouting, too. The whole  
hemisphere is contracting in birth pains,  
strumming spring's strings, ignoring  
foxes, vultures, and other predators,  
while the aging stars are watching.

## Morning after the Labor Day Weekend

Unwillingness to re-enter  
the rat-race  
may spring  
from a wish to live  
forever,  
or at least until  
the assault of  
Alzheimer's.

In France last summer  
a psychic predicted  
a different harvest:  
I'm to become a centenarian,  
due to keeping fit.

Why not believe  
that days shall grow  
abundant apples, nights  
sprout buds, blossom, fruits  
of leisure and pleasure?



## Mundane

Glad for the contact  
with a rock,  
which has endured  
a millennium  
and will remain  
well past the present  
generation of man.

Waiting, while sitting  
on the bolder,  
for a forester to vanish,  
so that she could pee  
behind a tree.

This is a non-poetic poem,  
merely words describing  
a moment  
in the day of a woman.

## Music for our time

..."Aesthetics, Ethics and Ethos"...

In the hushed room of the Hartford Conservatory,  
during the Studio of Electronic Music  
Composers Forum Series, asking what is beauty,  
according to the speaker, composer-conductor  
Tibor Puztai, is not sufficient.

One ought to ask, Why? But surely, art fills  
the footsteps of the Creator on the sands of time.  
Music sounds in the raindrops, which fall from His eyes  
as he gazes at the pain, the striving of His children,  
pausing in the sun's rays while He surveys  
yet unborn galaxies. The moon's violins hum  
while the arms of the great being hold the earth,  
His breath playing a misty sonata, which we, His servants,  
gather in leaky pots and baskets, shaping the pearls  
into folk songs or oratorios, briefly forgetting our plight,  
the ever-present mystery of the Why, in an affirming,  
Why not - make music, why not play - for that,  
as the tenor Peter Harvey remarked, quoting Tchaikovsky  
about his listening to Mozart - is doing good.

## My home, castle

Thunder. Then, the patter  
of rain whose small tongue  
licks the vinyl siding,  
the old roof holding till  
next summer against leaks.  
It costs me a fortune  
to keep up this umbrella,  
the rooms, pipes, spouts  
of the vast igloo  
set in a prairie  
on which I also spend money,  
shaping it into  
a suburban yard.

Upstairs, the tenants clank,  
scattering the garbage,  
luring roaches,  
threats,  
reproaches  
ignored.

## Myopic vision

I pick up a pen  
instead of a prayer  
because it's once more  
time to scribble words.

The yellow iris blooms  
before the kitchen window.  
Early June - another year  
has slipped into history.

A dandelion seed floats  
before the opaque window.  
A rhododendron splashes  
red blobs in a mist.

The poem is the contact lens  
I place on one eye each morning,  
reducing the blur before me.

## Mystic, Connecticut

Let not one sad word  
stumble over the lips  
of the August day  
flying over the lawn,  
the hushed bushes  
like a young eagle!

Breathless with wonder  
let us ride and walk  
through the once  
Indian country,  
the smoke  
of camp fires  
visiting our lungs,  
and the offspring  
of the deer they hunted  
our observer!

Let satisfied drums  
sing in the turning  
of the tides desiring  
a sandy shore!

## Nature's ways

Waiting for comfort  
on an early morning,  
with cornflakes and coffee  
worming their way  
through the digestive tract,  
the supposed storage tank  
of anger, joy, sadness,  
little sprouts in me  
except a prickly numbness,

which makes me envision  
a sturdy cactus  
in a desert,  
absorbing heat, rain,  
or a brutal wind's lashing,  
without a mind's  
tendency to suffer.

Its thorns display  
inherent exuberance,  
its sporadic blossom  
not an answer to prayer,  
a miracle chiseled  
by an angel's breath.

## Naughty Mickey

Sometimes  
Mickey is icky,  
and playing with him  
is not a blast.  
When he is angry  
he hits and kicks,  
bites. Then I cry  
and think  
us being friends  
will not last.

## Necessary losses

I've been led  
to the stillness  
of the grove  
for a season  
to be given  
a respite,  
to brace myself for  
a loss,

which will storm in  
in disguise,  
hiding  
overflowing baskets  
of gifts  
unforeseen  
and undeserved.



## Neighbors

She has unfolded her wings  
and gambles with poems  
as she used to do with men.  
After all, editors are human.

Like slugs, we used to lie  
dormant, barely sucking on earth's  
moisture, squinting eyes  
blind to daylight,  
all the years consisting of winters.

Then one day, despite surrounding  
briar, she stepped out of her coffin,  
even before the Prince kissed her.  
Often she calls me across the plains,  
no longer afraid of  
the dry summer  
blooms,  
trusting  
my barely-crawling.

## Never suspecting

Some sons are missing  
during wars, or else death  
through illness or accidents  
claims them.

While I taught  
at a community college,  
a sixteen-year-old boy  
disappeared.

Best student in the class,  
a hard-working, single parent,  
the mother prayed night and day,  
comforted daily by her minister,  
whose congregation prayed.  
We'd talk after each class.  
According to the mother,  
the boy was an A-scholar,  
gentle, not disturbed.

Drugs  
did not seem  
a possibility.  
Crime?  
My student claimed  
her boy lacked nothing.  
Except a father,  
I believed.

Three months later,  
the police still had the boy  
classified as missing.  
Then a school mate found him  
living with an old man -  
as his lover.

## New routine

Finally started -  
but, oh, so easily interrupted  
by the body, mind weary  
from lack of sleep.  
The night too steamy,  
plus other evidence  
of how minuscule  
the human will  
in combat with giants:  
Time and Weather.

New game  
For Philippa

When I am dead,  
will there blossom again  
the mind's shunting between  
two streams - one of dreams,  
the other of a mist  
that hovers with the dragonfly  
upon the flowing waters -

or will I lie in bardo  
like a stone, body dissolved,  
while eternity's floating  
rocks me weightless  
in planetary storms?

When I am dead,  
will I skip back and forth  
to haunt the earth  
of those who still know me?

Will I turn saint  
and extend a blessing hand,  
bringing the prayers of dear ones  
to God's feet in crowded baskets?

With these two rivers  
I've already been flooded.

When I'm dead,  
I'll most likely be led  
to a new game.

## New habit

Asserting oneself, not being a doormat,  
refusing a request of a strong-willed friend,  
who wants to nap instead of our set date -  
surely, she can nap round noon or indeed all day!

But then again, I do not really know  
her schedule and sleeping habits.  
Putting self first constricts  
one accustomed to give in to others' will.

Forgive me, friend. In our power struggle  
your giving in may signal my defeat.

## News from Northern California

My daughter is expecting -  
does not know how,  
after years  
of steady protection,  
"An immaculate conception,"  
she says, laughing,  
to distract herself  
from morning sickness.

After some hours  
of joyful pirouettes  
and money splurged  
immediately  
on unisex baby clothes,  
I begin to mourn  
the couple's  
chiseled plans -  
to work in Europe  
or in the Third World  
once my daughter  
completes her Master's -  
reckoning they have  
plenty of time.  
He works six months in the year  
and she part-time.

I hear August  
is to host  
the wedding  
on top of their hill,  
which mosquitoes  
do not climb.  
She'll be six months  
pregnant,  
in white.

## Night at the movies

Seeking distraction from trouble  
tied like a handkerchief  
at four corners, she drove  
to a nearby college to see  
an Indian movie, The Bandit Queen.

Seated, she checked her drenched  
raincoat, then all other damp  
pockets, for her missing keys.

In all the twenty years  
of attending the Cinestudio  
movies, she has not done  
such a thing!

The security guards  
courteously struggled  
with the power locks,  
attempting to reach  
the keys inside the car,

while her umbrella  
leaked heavy tears  
on her chest  
and shoulders,  
the two armed helpers  
also getting soaked,  
until finally,  
the locks gave in.

The car can now be entered  
through the passenger door  
and needs to be brought  
to the dealer for repair.

The moral: if you try  
to run away from trouble,  
be careful not to lock yourself  
out in the rain.

## Nina in the twenty-first century

She must be nearing ninety.  
For the last two months,  
she's lived in Manchester,  
babysitting a cat of her sick  
daughter, letting him  
in and out. Occasionally,  
she'd see the mailman.

Tomorrow, the daughter will return,  
the doctor allowing her to work part-time.  
The mother worries this will set her back.

In two days, she'll herself move  
back to her Hartford apartment,  
full of framed photographs  
of herself, the matriarch  
surrounded by her vast,  
widely scattered family.



## No-man's land

In Kosovo, families mourn  
their murdered members, burned homes,  
and the mined ground near the border  
that earlier offered to lead to  
freer misery.

Desolate, they regret that they kept  
postponing: one more night in their beds  
till a daughter gave birth, waiting for peace  
to sprint into the darkness like a giant  
flashlight. The delay brought them  
to face machine guns, barking like foxes,  
while the American-led NATO forces  
rain bombs on the Serbs, as well as them.

## No telephone

Having contacted a few of his old friends,  
wishing to meet, chat, reestablish  
what bound him to them, a trembling thread,  
stretching forward, hopefully, too, back,

He finds himself alone, without the telephone.  
Steps need to be taken for its repair or the purchase  
of a new one. He feels as if his tongue  
had been cut out, mouth swollen, filled with words.

A week ago, he sent the letters, young  
with the renewal each spring brings.  
He saw before him fresh possibilities -  
friendship, warmth, activities.

Seven days later, isolated again,  
aware of his emotional strangulation,  
he gazes ahead, a skeptical old man,  
at his need and his friends' silence.

## No time

A friend called, talked,  
talked. Now there's no  
time to write. But I read  
a prose poem from a book  
purchased – understand some  
words, or rather, images.  
A goldfinch shouts as it  
bathes in the fountain -  
full of lust or was he  
born a Hitler? If the tap  
leaked, it would go drip-drip.  
November 7, 1995  
one month to the day since  
you turned sixty-eight,  
it may have been towards you  
I kept driving in the dream  
over potholes and highways  
in need of repair, not consulting  
a map, for many hours.

Where you lie at present,  
masked medics, tubes and  
sterile instruments surround you  
in a steel light, while your chest  
is being probed, the pathways  
round your heart invaded.

The arteriogram may signal  
the need for an angioplasty,  
or may end in prolonged  
medicated rest.

You left me behind long ago,  
yet I feel the tips of  
our fingers touching,  
like rain drops tapping  
on a house that has aged.

Now I see why

Before the day's tasks start clutching at my skirt,  
clinging like toddlers to my thighs,  
insisting to be picked up, I fly back in time  
to my sad mother swooning with love  
and gnawing fear of losing her husband.

Now I see why she was so distant, always elsewhere in mind,  
anxious, no doubt, about the tiny office at the other end of town  
where my father ruled the roost with his young secretary!  
There were people coming and going outside and walking in,  
but during so many tight, intimate, long years,  
Father and the other woman enjoyed trysts,  
during which new babies could have been conceived.

The affair remained hush-hushed,  
from me at least, who, until recently knew nothing  
about a bastard brother who had died.  
It was him my father mourned at my birth,  
angry that I dared to slip into the world, a girl.

## Oblivion's spaces

Yeats knew that death is never a man's end,  
that the soul, mind and flesh shout, reassembled,  
as they cruise upwards on the gyres. In old age  
he stood ready to start it all again -  
the dizzy climb of the roller coaster and the pain.

But I am not. No, I want to rest  
from the mad battleground of growth and the senses.  
I wish to explore the long forgotten land  
where the soul can soar free through oblivion's spaces,  
enter far galaxies, stay sheltered by her God.

I want to recover the long-lost innocence  
before whispers of fear slid past the ears' membrane,  
forgive all torturers, cast remorse from the self,  
wipe sins from the slate, forget the lame  
efforts to snare love from the forbidden tree.

October 1, 1996

I walk to the trees,  
the familiar bolder,  
quietly waiting.

My heartbeat belongs to the air  
on this first day of October  
and to the duck couple paddling,  
flipping triangular pink feet  
towards the rushing stream  
on a normally calm pool  
devoid of swimming creatures.

The abandon is complete.

## Offended friend

So what if a friend is angry  
What matters is you feel better  
the hepatitis shot area less swollen  
your head no longer tossing  
in anxiety's barge So what Another  
friend lost on life's battlefield  
But have you learned the lesson

Blame the pendulum Next time  
stop it midway between daring  
and - call it a pit - so dark  
a mistake Don't flagellate  
The child skipped too high  
near your heart

## Old friends meeting

Your body of an adolescent girl,  
untouched by pregnancy, welcomed me.  
It was the first thing I noticed,  
that familiar you. Across the veranda  
where we sat, my myopic eyes believed  
your face smooth like a sheet  
drying contentedly in a garden.  
Same hair, naturally fluffy.  
Was it colored? It did not occur to me  
to check, for these were minor matters.

We conversed as friends. I heard  
that our paths may again be converging,  
as your husband and you plan  
to buy the house that we'd rented  
thirty-one years ago, when the children  
were small and I had a husband.  
How our riches fall differently!  
When we embraced, your face hang baggy.  
Yet you wore the jacket I passed on  
to you years ago, when I was slim.



## Old people

Weariness seeps into the body  
of the aged, their bones sighing like  
masts with detaching sails, the wind sent  
to carry them over the open sea,  
away from the earth's laboratory.

Old people sail away  
many times every day,  
appearing to be dozing,  
while they are gathering  
the will to swing away  
from pain and creaking bones  
On death's wing.

## Old woman living alone

Tired of thinking since the early dawn,  
of many bones aching, of searching in vain  
for a glad topic bypassing the pain,  
Her mind longs for deep sleep as a desirable ally,  
while the bones cling, perched, brittle stones above the valley  
where the grave gapes, more visible each day  
as the train chugs away, nearing the final station.

The art is to enjoy, forget the destination -  
not easy at the age four scores and ten,  
surrounded by four walls, forgotten, with no friend.

## On waking from a nap

See if I can still  
shape words on a page  
Two palms gathering water  
from a small shallow cup  
Under the surface  
a distorted face  
The coffin's lid from within  
lifting up slowly  
past selves  
joining hands in a ring

## On an island

You remember that it's your birthday  
as you wake up on the narrow creaky bed  
in a room without a lizard. The walls  
are bare, except for the crucifix  
above your head. Already, the air  
is stifling hot and humid. You get up  
to open my birthday card, while away  
in the USA I think that, yes, you  
were born at 4 a.m., conveniently,  
after a relatively gentle labor.  
I feel sad that more and more  
you travel far from me,  
pray that your work will be successful,  
that no new sickness takes root  
in your body, that you'll safely return  
somewhat changed and glad.

## On display

I will carry my imperfect body  
like a toy boat on a shoulder,  
then launch it on the choppy ocean  
on a string.

The child will be proud  
to watch her ship sail  
in the waves -  
until she tires  
of the spectacle.

On the shore, my body will bask  
all its many imperfections  
in the sun,  
while the child busies herself  
with sand castles.

## On writing five poems per week

Being prolific  
is like being promiscuous -  
no great virtues  
in it.  
It does not necessarily  
equal  
being a pro.

Robert Shapiro  
in an interview  
with Gary Pacernick  
confessed that,  
as you get older,  
the enjoyment  
in creating  
lessens.

On your birthday  
For Joan

I wish you some good years  
with the man you love  
and within yourself -  
in the mind's corners  
filled with night watchers -

and I wish your heart  
to open like a black-eyed  
Susan towards me.

What can I say -  
in an auction's bidding,  
you, willing to pay  
a higher price,  
walked away with someone  
I used to claim as mine -  
foolishly - for even slaves  
must be bought at first.

Health and happiness  
will be yours today,  
that at least is certain.

## Out of Intensive Care

Removed from mundane duties,  
he cherishes conversations  
with dear ones, and each step  
to the bathroom, no longer  
supervised by a nurse.

A week ago, the pain  
circled his chest and arm  
like thunder rather than  
the proverbial lightning.  
The next day he landed  
in Coronary Care.

He chuckles at being alive  
after surgery, but doesn't tell  
that the angiogram wasn't fun.  
After the enforced seven days of rest,  
the hospital air makes him sluggish.

Everyone urges him  
to quit his job,  
but retirement looks like hell  
to a soldier  
accustomed to salute  
an inner general  
ordering, Action!



## Places where I go and no longer belong

Shrunk, overgrown with moss,  
changed while waiting for me,  
the boulder, planted in dead leaves,  
with mosquitoes circling!  
After three years, August again  
leans towards autumn. Sunlight fills  
green blankets spread above in trees.

While cicadas hum with distant traffic,  
I return to a friendly path to find  
a self which craves deeper solitude.  
This used to be the place where I wrote poems.

A bushy-tailed creature scuttles away  
as I rise to greet it. A truck sidles close  
to clear away diseased hemlock.  
In the parched West fires rage uncontrolled.  
I feel an accomplishment writing down these verses.

## Place to go

Some days there's nowhere to go  
among the accusing fingers and  
the disapproving eyes, and not a penny  
can be found. Books lie abandoned,  
while papers that need to be filed collect dust.

On such days, heaven turns  
into a fata morgana  
of timeless solitude.

Please get well

Return! Don't plunge from the mountaintop,  
the resilient oak of spirit,  
into senility's bog!

Whisked to hospital,  
you are tested, pumped with medication.  
Cooperate! Fight against

the weariness  
that holds you captive,  
shrinking, with each day frailer,

in an apartment  
where books and prayer  
had sustained you for years.

Even music no longer can.  
I see you glittering again -  
not yet in heaven

but with us who love you  
still here on earth.

## Street children killed in Brazil

Already I am forgetting them,  
the last of Brazil's street children  
killed by the militia -  
that the Hartford Courant mentioned.

I was stunned by the headline, the account,  
the picture: eight to twelve-year-old boys  
with emotionless faces, huddling round  
a make-shift cross wound with white daisies,  
a thin thirteen-year old seven month pregnant,  
in tight jeans, frowning as if puzzled  
past the camera ,a newsman's arm steadying the cross,  
and a grim-faced bearded fellow  
in front of the sun-drenched church  
on whose steps the six boys were  
massacred while sleeping, the seventh  
having been mowed down in front of  
the Fine Arts Museum, the eighth in hospital,  
merely grazed by the bullets.

I'm forgetting them, even while  
staring at the second grim photo  
of one victim:  
his dark limbs jumbled as if boneless,  
the rags covering him steeped in blood  
which flows from his head over the sidewalk,  
his little friend's face old with anger, fear.  
The other two young squatters appear to be praying.

This time, the chief of Rio's police  
condemned the brutality of the act.  
Two token officers were arrested.  
This time, Brazil's president  
issued a protest and assigned  
an investigation of Rio's banking district massacre.

But according to the Hartford Courant's report,  
this half year 320 have been killed  
in Rio alone; during the previous three years  
4,600 street children  
had been massacred in Brazil!

During those years, how much money had I  
spent on clothes which have since  
hung useless in my closet?  
Already I'm forgetting Brazil's street  
children. Nor I have helped  
the victims of the Midwest flood.

While I sit writing this poem,  
millions of Brazil's street children  
are selling their bodies,  
sniffing glue, pilfering, plaguing  
the shopkeepers who in turn  
hire death squads to murder them.

## Poets do not need a shrink

Again, again, again,  
picking up a pen -  
it's like going to the bathroom.

Sitting on the toilet bowl  
of the soul, waiting  
for something formulated  
that will ease the plight,  
make one light -

can a person go further,  
push harder?

## While pondering the possibility of reincarnation

The senses create powerful new worlds.  
Pay attention as you listen, as the noon heat  
hovers on the backs of the homey cicadas!  
Have faith in all invisible growth,  
the guides' fluted fingertips, friends' handshake,  
the earth-shuttering dance of a wave, however tiny,  
on the panting lake. Appreciate the bare branch,  
the withering fern, as vital to the cosmic flurry  
as the perky pine needles, the jogging Ph.D.

The girl in the wheelchair, sharing her lunch  
with the ducks, may have chosen her handicap  
before birth, also planning not being fit  
to bear children. A thirty-something man  
follows her in his wheel chair on the bumpy slope.  
Lagging behind on muscular arms another man,  
about fifty. He rides with his wife,  
both looking mentally retarded, stranded  
on their wheels in the prickly heat,  
without a nurse or guard. The mosquitoes  
feast on us, as I pass them.

## Preferences

For M.B.

I can see why you like  
Billy Collins's poems,  
and why he leaves me cold -  
for even when he depicts  
The Temptation of Saint Anthony,  
Bosch strides out of the canvas  
unruffled. I simply can't  
find enough misery  
in Collins' lines to feed  
my Slavic temperament,  
which demands more torment,  
moribidity, vodka.  
to ease the poems down and  
fill gaping crevices.

Unfamiliar with such thirst,  
you walk with Collins  
in a tidy garden,  
chuckling:  
he sports  
your humor.  
Like you, gentle,  
he observes, presents  
an argument, listens,  
then declares  
a resolution,  
bypassing the ugly,  
merely alluding to pain.



## Preparing

The arrogant hum of the fan  
The air conditioner's off  
thawing out

Despite the humid heat  
silence is desired

after lifting prayers  
like boulders  
against the sky

a large box without sound  
to lie in

Move  
Sleepwalkers dance

Life without armrests  
questions

preparing  
for the stations

in the spaces  
between stars

## Prostrate

Listen to the cricket's song,  
the stillness of the pines,  
their coarse bark reflecting  
the sun's blank stare,  
indifferent to the stir  
of one limited human.

Ponder nature's ways,  
splendor, then let go  
the task and imitate  
the prostrate stance  
of vegetation, consciousness  
left on the conveyer belt  
of others, hazardous to health  
and rarely bringing peace.

## Provide, provide

Yesterday I spoke with a woman  
who believes the end  
the prophets foretold  
is at hand –  
the world in collapse, fire, floods,  
spread everywhere.

Her husband, too, forever watches  
the TV relaying doom events.

But I think of my small grandson  
and my two daughters' babes  
still being carried in the bellies -  
and cry to God to keep them safe.

The clock is wound, its steady ticking  
veiling the contours of our days,  
fragile blooms that sway, fleeting,  
like the flesh for which we pray.

## Puerto Fino

The body will shed its weight  
and the hair will fly free  
in the sea breeze as she travels  
the coast of Florida  
or scales the slopes  
of Italy's Puerto Fino.

Buried will rot the nun's  
bandages  
bloody with shame,  
the curse of ancient blaming  
having fled her veins.

The scarred flesh will rollick at last  
in a lagoon's lapping waves,  
salty with pleasure in the sun  
which needn't lower its gaze.