

## KATHARYN HOWD MACHAN

### *WASHING THE RICH MAN'S PORCH*

Because it's muddy.  
 Because rain fell.  
 Because he had all the mulch scraped up  
 and hauled out of the Garden.

Because we wore shoes when we  
 wrote there, because his wife  
 gave us permission to stay dry  
 if rain began to fall.

Because it's his Garden now, he  
 bought it, the cottage, too.  
 Because he had a new porch  
 built on, right where a bright  
 red blossoming tree had grown  
 for years in memory of the woman  
 who killed herself right there  
 in the Garden, spilling blood to earth.

Because he decrees all things must be  
 perfect, tidy, in order, clean.

Because too much calcium has spoiled the soil,  
 pumped up from coral, making cement  
 where roots and vines once drank clear  
 water sprayed daily from a long hose.

Because he pays a man  
 every day to rake  
 every fallen leaf away.

Because we made a mess,  
 we poets and chroniclers,  
 helping each other  
 up out of the rain.

Because I led the workshop,  
 grateful he let me  
 be again in the Garden  
 where for sixteen years  
 I've shared the green vision  
 of the woman who turned it  
 from junk lot and garbage heap:  
 forty years of strong sane struggle.

Because he and I are both fifty-nine  
 and I am a woman, a poet, a teacher  
 without a savings account.

Because when I was sixteen  
 I cleaned people's toilets.  
 I know how to wield  
 a wet mop, a stiff brush.