

HANDS

This morning lying late in bed
(I'm old, I indulge myself)
I glimpsed with other eyes
My time-travelled hands
And a parade of ghostly images,
Scratched stills from an ancient film,
Floated through my mind

Here are my brother's hands: strong and robust
But with strangely fragile skin,
Fingers long and muscular, mimicking his body
Like a twig echoes a branch:
His nails blunt – no half-moon decoration here;
Sturdy middle-aged hands that will never grow old.

And here are my sister's hands: hands I coveted
With tapering fingers and shell-like nails,
But no half-moons, and that irritatingly thin skin:
She was seventy when she died
But her hands were still so elegant!

When my mother was old her hands were her last vanity,
Pampered, polished, adorned with rings,
The half-moons flaunted:
How could such hands have begotten mine or my brother's?
Perhaps we were adopted?

At eighty my father still had practical engineer's hands,
Strong fingers – no half- moons,
But covered with the fragile, blotched skin
And the prominent meandering veins
That I now see before me: My hands!

How I envied my husband's hands;
Narrow, long fingered, with arching half-moons
And strong white skin;
Hands to die for, hands that didn't age,
Hands my children inherited:

But now it is autumn and outside my window
Dying leaves fall to the ground.