

## *Burnout*

So sudden this mental turnaround of mine  
I, who've earned my bread  
from dealing with hard cases,  
am suddenly drained dry.

Should I report in sick?  
Should I soldier on?  
Should I take leave?

Who'd have thought I was  
some binary system,  
my responses like a computer  
ON/OFF?

It takes me by surprise.  
It makes me frightened,  
useless,  
a dried shell.  
Where should I go?

Like old bike-tyres  
the tread is worn off me.  
I didn't do wheelies  
or burning skids  
but on the long rides  
of the last two years  
and the thirty-plus before  
I didn't know the rubber  
had worn so thin.  
Are there retreads available?  
Bald tyres get put off the road  
Unsafe.



**Helen Pavlin**

## *Preparation*

That's the door  
behind which heads roll.  
She had seen former colleagues  
pale spectres  
emerge  
head in hand  
the blood somehow stanchd  
so as not to mark the office walls and carpet.

Was it to be her turn today?  
What sort of collar  
befits beheading?  
Maybe none.  
Better to leave the neck and throat  
Bare.

This day she parked the car  
just outside the door  
and cleared the dashboard  
to make a space  
for her head.

Even an automatic car  
will need to be steered  
away from the workplace.



**Helen Pavlin**