**First Muse**

Julia Alvarez

When I heard the famous poet Pronounce

"One can only write poems in the tongue

in which one first said *Mother*,” I was stunned'

Lately arrived in English, I slipped down

into my seat and fought back tears, thinking

of all those notebooks filled with bogus poems

I'd have to burn, thinking maybe there was

a little loophole, maybe just maybe

Mami had sung me lullabies she'd learned

from wives stationed at the embassy,

thinking maybe she'd left the radio on

beside my crib tuned to the BBC

or Voice of America, maybe her friend

from boarding school had sent a talking doll

who spoke in English? Maybe I could be

the one exception to this writing rule?

For months I suffered from bad writer's-block'

which I envisioned, not as a blank page,

but as a literary border guard

turning me back to Spanish on each line'

I gave up writing, watched lots of TV,

and you, know how it happens that advice

comes from unlikely quarters? She came on'

sassy, olive-skinned, hula-hooping her hips'

a basket of bananas on her head,

her lilting accent so full of feeling

it seemed the way the heart would speak English

if it could speak' I touched the screen and sang

my own heart out with my new muse, I am

Chiquita Banana and l'm here to say …