

**POEMS FROM A MISTY ISLAND**

**(Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, 1997-1999)**

**J.A. MCLEAN**

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## Homecoming

I have settled  
on this mountain crest,  
not far from land,  
near a wintry sea.

My silent companion,  
the grey day,  
sends down bounteous rain.

Higher than the mountain peak,  
expectant guests, the droplets fall,  
doubly blessed.

I've long kept watch for them,  
vigiled through long nights,  
eyes fixed skyward, straining,  
waiting daystar's radiant dawn.

I have travelled far  
to reach this place,  
where land, sea and sky embrace.

A northern saga being told,  
of shipwrecks, mutinies, trials,  
gentle faces, sage and mild.

In my Viking ship I sailed away  
to a western isle, fleeing self,  
the other, faithless and faithful lover.

Till I came to this rain forest,  
chastened, made meek,  
praising content, plenitude, peace.

## Belonging

Night owl. Howls coyote.  
Wind song. Desert sand.  
The droplet. Vast blue ocean.  
Sun spot. Burning brand.

Fishes swim in oceans.  
Leaves dress spreading trees.  
Jasmine breathes white perfume.  
Honey comes from bees.

Bodies long for soul-flesh.  
Meat to marry bone.  
Our house still stands divided.  
The earth is not our home.

Man stands lone and lonely.  
Woman lives apart.  
Children keep the sick bed.  
The door is not ajar.

Adam's child.  
Soul of Eve.  
Our genesis is one.  
Cease slaughter,  
senseless violence,  
the age of peace is come.

## Non Imperator

Dishonour the experience  
anchored in illusion,  
unchain yourself from castle walls,  
Refrain from engraving the stolen imprint  
onto the soft wax of the hasty heart.

*Non imperator.*

Falling shadows,  
the widow's black veil,  
high-handed puffed-up clouds  
spell vain immortality.

Cast away, sail away,  
soar speechless, spaceless,  
unbind in words  
the vain discourse,  
the careless whisper  
of what is not mine.

## Hymn to the Mother Goddess

On this dew-dappled drowsy dawn  
done dreary, doubly-dropping devotedly  
on bended knee, deliberately descending  
into this distant desert of delightsome duration,  
falling down, deeply down the arc of descent,  
directing a decisive ear to the distinct words  
destined to be heard from thy dismay-dispelling  
delicate mouth.

Deliciously dreaming in prayer,  
drawn by the dazzling sun  
driving chariot over the horizon,  
dazed by sun-dappled dewdrops,  
drizzling fire-drops from the sky,  
fallen on my delighted eye,  
determined by my spirit drama  
that neither destiny nor death,  
devil nor deep dark sea  
declaim dominion over me.

Remembering Donne,  
I, distracted, delivered daily of dark dungeons  
in the mind, dismissing dubious dragons,  
discover the darling of my doubled-faced soul.  
She breathes, she lives, she loves in me.

## Axel Fay: The Open Road

There once was a man who wrecked his life,  
fled a desolate home, a mystery wife.  
With children grown, he stands alone.

Now he ciphers secrets  
whispered on the open road.  
Delightful tunes entrance his ear.  
He motors west, free-wheeling,  
reborn to feeling, retreats from fear.

He goes  
up the Bruce to Tobermory,  
greeted swooping swallows  
on the way,  
speeds on past the clean and tidy rows  
of freshly mown hay,  
flies by shady brooks and scented nooks  
that shimmer in the heat of day,  
savours whitefish freshly caught along  
the shores of crystal Georgian Bay.

With the passing miles  
he settles in, centering,  
finds equipoise, contemplates,  
takes transitions in time,  
commences ceaseless "mental fight",  
turns turnstiles, life styles,  
listens for artesian voices  
welling up from fathoms deep,  
where fishes sleep;  
repeats the greatest name,  
lights a holy candle to his breast and brain,  
to solve the problem of redundant pain.

To declare life's quiet mysteries:

to struggle or surrender,  
keep peace, break peace, loudly complain,  
with why the roads that loved ones take,  
that lovers make must needs be twain.

He knows that he will love again,  
for love *is* ever, always, with him to whom  
all things declare the Face of Love Himself,  
beyond every shook form of love,  
out of sight of love's every cast and hue  
and shifting face, love out of Love.

But love is only true when spoken  
by ancient, cryptic tongues,  
in the glossolalia of hidden wisdom  
and traced in script by sacred hands.  
On mss of purest parchment.  
O subtle love! O trickster love!  
The fool's gold that moves the grasping hand,  
strikes the gleaming eye,  
sees Love Himself concealed in the flash.  
Love is only love when we are god-like,  
dying gods.

The man gazes on the vast expanse of evening sky,  
as he moves on, ever drawing closer to his goal.  
The fading pink and orange hues, the blessed isles  
float in the ethereal sea above the great Manitoulin.

True on true as love is,  
true love of true,  
as heartache is on heartache,  
and joy heaped on joy,  
as true as clouds piled high  
as caravan camels in the sky,  
in this late afternoon of a rare July.

## **The Monkey Tree**

One day I passed a monkey tree  
but saw no monkey looking at me.  
I passed again the other day.  
The monkey looked the other way.

Today I passed the monkey tree.  
There sat the monkey looking at me.  
I could not pass another way.  
In his I saw my face today.

## Places in the Heart

I know that I shall find you  
when you come stealing to uncover  
all the secret, mystic places in my heart,  
when at last you stand before me  
a living, beautiful presence,  
one of the angelic beings who just appears  
out of the Spirit, from that world I have seen  
so many times in the shadow land of clear vision  
fallen into for a moment just before sleep,  
the realm of God and odd inhabited by all the real,  
ideal loves of our lost life who lie in wait  
to rise up and lovingly greet us —  
there, just there, on the surface of the heart.

## Meditation in October

Last October I did see  
the orange berries  
on the arbutus tree,  
bright as sunspots,  
way up high,  
round and red  
as round can be,  
reddish and round  
as red can be.

The birds flew in  
and ate their fill,  
in wild assemblage  
flocking there,  
a jabbering company,  
tempestuous, rare,  
invading the tree,  
in the open air.

Another fall has come along.  
But where are the birds?  
Have they come? Are they gone?  
The path I've traced  
scarce bears a name,  
my passing steps are all the same.

No eye turns again  
to the miniature suns,  
the frozen fireballs one by one.

No squawking birds this year  
in throng, these passing days,  
twelve months along.

**Angels Assembling  
(for Carolyn and Roberta)**

Angels assembling,  
ingathering at the stricken hour,  
unfurling protective wings,  
now in a huddle of love,  
about to do combat.

On a quick beating heart,  
sits a swift silver bird,  
a silver bird proudly displayed,  
on a heart fiercely loyal,  
loyal yet savage,  
loving yet keenly afraid.

At this chosen hour,  
shall love and her mercies  
bear witness against the small man.  
In the High Court of Justice,  
shall they plead their cases,  
and make known their causes,  
in the court of the seated Fair Man.

All the people shall be witness,  
they all will be judges,  
shall judge with discernment,  
shall render just judgement,  
till justice floods over the land.

They will all sit in judgement,  
till justice be over,  
and injustice gone from the land.

## Prayer

Our life is but these little breaths we take.

We steal a glance and strain at far-off things.

We murmur strangely as we pass,

and utter sounds inaudible to most.

Our name's a falling letter on the air,

our fame, a tiny moment torn from glory.

O God! Accept these broken fragments

of our hearts. With outstretched hands

we offer them to you.

Forgive the wrongs by passion driven,

for we were blind,

the things undone, the unforgiven.

Cover us, we pray, with all-protecting wings

and make us one great heart,

to nest sweet thoughts of you.

Accept us, Father, we do pray,

into Thy kingdom, O God, we pray!

## **Artistic Impressions From the Republic of Tea**

This present space encloses a chequered, tiled decor. Paces away, over the divide, monochrome brown carpets dust travellers' feet. Book shelves, floor to ceiling, bound all sides. Above your head, through discrete openings in hidden speakers, a Vivaldi violin plays rapid measures, while a Starbucks cocoa coffee burns your lips through a cool, moist daub of filigreed whipped cream.

The chair legs opposite angle slightly forward off the floor, as if leaning to engage you in conversation, then veer straight up to be spanned by three arched, gently moulded ribs that help ease your back into a comfortable seat. The flat, green composite table tops concur with all angles and the upward motion of the dark stained chairs in an unstated desire to make conversation. Passers by come and sit, converse, read. Some stare, then go. I exchange a word with a stranger opposite to make a victory of friendship. A truce is declared. She moves on with a smile while I reciprocate and sit still, detached and content with the valiant effort to break down strange barriers.

Meanwhile, the French Horn makes the muted flourish of a trill. The lone violin has become a section now. Above the refrain, a silvery flute floats a melody on air and plays a vaporous counter-tune. A genteel classicism comes to life on the moment where disparate worlds converge — the Bach and Vivaldi renditions of the discrete, orchestral chamber of the Old World are piped into the smart, fresh-faced youth and swagger of the giant American Mall. Culture survives, with a touch of class, here in this mega book mart.

In south west Arizona, the desert is splashed with burnt orange and sunny yellows and the giant specter of stark, blood stone monuments loom over Sedona, another wonder of the world. Doorways out of the Wild West and flower boxes paint pictures in Santa Fe. The American Mall becomes the O.K. Corral where tall tanned Texans in cowboy hats and pointed boots (minus the spurs) saunter by. The graven image of the tattoo parlour's electric needle and the accessories to bondage bear witness to the fascination of the weirdly demonic and the open confession of self hurt and the muffled cry that's too proud to say "Help me! I'm dying!" Trucker caps announce the passing of macho men and rednecks. Each bears another logo in an endless variety mechanistically cut out from one banal form. Beer bellies mark the spectator sportsman in a conspicuous way and distinct speech is marred and slurred by the vulgar and the vacuous.

You linger long in the shops and in these brief, stolen hours study the myriad gemstones under glass countertops. Star gazer, you conjure up the metaphysics of crystals, the colour spectrum and the healing properties of liquid minerals turned to stone. The rocks quarried in the desert near, the rose pink stones and white crystal spurs, smoothed and shaped, mounted by skillful, patient hands send out undulating waves of translucent colours that still burn bright with the undying heat of the sun buried at their heart, the living light that glows at the center of our universe.

I cast a glance on the blue and white virginal beads strung by a Navaho woman's calloused hand. I see the dark, copper brown chiseled face, the furrowed brow as she works, her head inclined down to watch the fingers work the beads. This vision of her face makes the one lone spirit bond between her handiwork and me. She wonders as she works where her beads will go, whose fingers will find and feel them, whose eyes will guess and wonder who she is, who will forge the link back to her, to this common touch lost in space, this recovered moment in time.

But now I stray back to a musical world, to Ravel's *Pavan to a Dead Child*, to oboes and strings in an oriental key. The music sways in lush harmonies. For a moment, we are carried away but return summarily to the lost, sleeping princess. Tears are shed. Hearts break. But she awakes to rejoicing and life begins again in an eternal springtime.

But to what has her life's breath stirred this year in 1999? She has wakened to a precarious passing, a dying order, to decay and final collapse, to unsuspected dangers. What will she do now? Will she let the world go by and live her life, love herself and others, secure her comforts for a brief moment and then die again? Or will she sacrifice her own nobility and throw herself into the Great Sea of Being to pass away and be absorbed and disappear among the waves so that others might live?

Where to? What next in this age of anxiety, to the ever-constant refrain of failing health and broken relationships?

Just be still. Flow in the moment. Be carried by this great process. The *Tao* will carry you, too, as it has carried unnumbered souls to that invisible celestial army while it raised the din of battle out there in the desert wastes, the light of whose eternal dawning is even now breaking on the edge of the world. Yes, you too will be borne along by that broad and gently flowing river, the holy Jordan that blesses vessels richly laden with commerce, that bears up leviathan swimmers, the same river that washes the gentle, weary bather in the early morning sun, that conveys the white birch bark canoe to the happiest of hunting grounds.

## **The World is Seduction**

(Holy Trinity Monastery,  
St. David, Arizona)

The world is seduction  
the dear brothers say,  
shifty and shady,  
will lead you astray.  
She glimmers and glows,  
but still fades away.

Where to, my friendly?  
the pretty ones say.  
Winks what languid eye,  
moves what shapely breast,  
what comely thigh?

Heaven knows best,  
the dear brothers say.  
Kindle Love's raging fire,  
within your cold breast,  
lest desire be gained,  
and you're put to the test.

Then yield yourself up  
to very great things,  
that your joy be full  
and your glad heart sing.

## I am in Love With Ghosts

I am in love with ghosts,  
to make it right, to yet repair  
what I cannot ever mend —  
to love again,  
even though my loving did not secure  
the golden ring of peace,  
or harmony's sweet silver cup.  
We broke the laurel bough  
on which we stood.

Though some sweet loved ones  
still remain, still others loved  
most dear and deep are gone,  
live now in other worlds,  
live out other days unknown to me,  
in unseen spaces,  
by once familiar places.

Though love had died,  
love in newer forms abides.  
In this abiding love,  
I love them all.  
Those whom I once loved,  
I love still but unsurmised,  
though love's great galleon  
foundered on a rocky reef  
in seas whipped to a rage,  
then unnavigable, broke hard ashore.

For now, I shall follow the Destiny  
I have forged out of the molten iron  
of my own sufferance,  
and kiss the Kismet that Love Himself  
might deign yet to grant  
and trace a path for me.

Perhaps, in days distant, yet oh so near,  
when we are gathered once for all  
to our faithful fathers to rejoice,  
there in that desert land where daylight  
still burns bright by night,  
and rarest air is pure,  
shall we find again  
the things we once enjoyed — destroyed:

the purity, the innocence,  
the easy game,  
the heart's delight and hand's caress,  
the shared passion of two  
beating hearts and meeting minds,  
love's tenderness,  
the laughter of our children,  
the joy of the glad in heart,  
a heart unknown even to itself,  
as we glide wingless side by side,  
and fly past the fruitful orchards  
planted by our own hands,  
and journey on, in peace,  
through sacred silent space.

## When Order Dies

I write a friend,  
say she is special,  
gifted, loved.

The power fades,  
the e-mail message flickers,  
then dies.

A metaphor for a dying order.

Words left unspoken,  
unfinished symphonies,  
speeches broken, speakers mute,  
halting mouths reduced to silence,  
dry voices whisper rumours of life  
in the dark, unheard by stone deaf ears.

Others lift up voices in rejoicing,  
sing a new dawn,  
their only greeting is indifference,  
anonymity testifies of nothingness  
through transparent lips that move  
silently, syllables and sounds  
without meaning.

Cold hands languish for a loving touch,  
sick bodies untended live out loneliness  
in a lonely place.

We are lost in this rolling fog of mystery,  
frantic in the densest of veils.

As the world rages on,  
sick unto death,  
winds of despair fan  
majestic flames, consume  
its own house, reducing to ashes  
the broken and the beautiful.

## Late Island Winter

It frees,  
the bough  
in the breeze.

At wetland vespers,  
coastland fir trees  
point fingers down,  
laud the lowly earth,  
while lofty limbs  
are raised in prayer.

On tender tree tops  
a once mute green,  
long since silenced  
by a vast grey sky,  
manages a whisper  
of the coming sun.

## Captain Clock Work

My dwelling place a ship at sea,  
a moving vessel marooned on dry land,  
land-locked, dry docked, rock bound,  
whose seasoned hull is worn well  
with the salt of ocean waters,  
years of ports of call,  
and carpeted with green mosses,  
her main rig out of cedar,  
towering firs.

A lonely deck is haunted by a mournful wind,  
announcing stormy seas. Once passed,  
then sail into serener days of calm delights  
and white, wide, moon-lit nights.

Straight along the galley,  
but three steps below,  
awaits the captain's chair,  
state of dark mahogany,  
burnished brass, felt green,  
a lifeless rocker sits in-between,  
a stool, a plate, a mug,  
a warm and friendly jug.

Who enters here a loving guest,  
and unattended as we quest,  
I'll spin and steer good fortune's wheel,  
but all the while may yet chance  
tempestuous waves, a rocky shore,

serve you tea the shade that you adore,  
ensconce you in a reading chair,  
and there to learn, if you so dare,  
no life story but your own.

Some say alchemist,  
strange attractor,  
I'll transmute your life  
into a fond awakening  
sounded by the tick tock  
of a never ceaseless clock.

And you, fair rider of the storm,  
will give my life a second chance,  
a turn again, another grasping of the ring,  
a draft of passing bold,  
repeat the taste of amber, fine and mellow  
on my tongue, burn my heart's numbing cold  
to a warming ember.

When leave is done  
and you weigh anchor,  
I return again to myself and me,  
and find once more the jewel of solitude  
within my shadow self.

Substantial self,  
long yet will I still live to see,  
nothing but your soul, your face,  
your special beauty in my space,  
the deathless image of your grace.

## **You Changed the Chair**

You changed the chair  
by sitting in it.  
Before, it was an awkward,  
clumsy oaf that hurt my back,  
though creamy white,  
one of my preferred colours.

But then you sat in it,  
and curled up like an old,  
familiar cat, an habitué  
of the cushion,  
lifted your legs beneath you,  
settled and exclaimed:  
"What a perfect reading chair!"

Now I sit in it differently,  
this large, cosy chair by  
the patio doors with the view  
out from Vesuvius to the forests  
on the hillside of Channel Ridge,  
and beyond them the wetlands  
of northern British Columbia.

Not like changing clothes  
this changing of the mind.

## **We Are Tired Children**

We are tired children,  
waiting at a window,  
watching double rainbows  
    in the sky,  
awake our sagging spirits,  
lift our gladdened eyes,  
to phosphorescent archers  
    in the sun.

Tell me, o my father,  
tell me, o my mother,  
tell me, then, my daughter,  
from where, since when,  
has sprung this sadness,  
ebbs and flows the numbing grief  
persistent pain beyond belief,  
once day's begun.

## Take Two

I smile to see the summer sky,  
so why should I be blue?  
I fix the pile of clouds on high,  
majestic, royal view.

Between your pains,  
the sunny hours,  
the welcome stay of bliss,  
respite from toil,  
among the flowers,  
and joy's sweet sidelong kiss.

Take both. Take two.  
For everything is twain.  
There'll always be  
for bones and skin,  
the pleasure and the pain

He rules by law of contraries.  
The ease relieves the strain.  
He orders all by opposites,  
the loss first, then the gain.

The blessed souls, the happy ones,  
know neither one each name.  
Tragedy or comedy,  
to them it's all the same.

## HE

Who stirred the wind,  
and moved the breath  
that bends the trees,  
caressed the leaf  
that trembles in the breeze.

What was the Hand  
that lit the lamp  
and fanned the flame?

The Hand that moves,  
the Force who gives,  
That creates life,  
and All that lives.

HE.

## **Impressions of a Home Place**

I return from a quick visit  
to the art gallery  
through an unlocked door.  
The warm, dry rooms inside,  
away from the humid air,  
the smell of Chinese incense  
from this morning's slow burn  
greet me, the warm, moist vapours  
from my last shower, still friendly,  
hang in the air.

I have found a niche, a place here,  
find pleasures in the smallest things,  
reading "This England,"  
the dying cultural values I've inherited,  
mightily, valiantly, vainly resisting  
the onslaught of the "One Europe."  
Old soldiers, heroes, heroines, writers,  
patriots, St. George himself.  
The Union Jack will soon enough just fade away.  
Europe's flag will fly above the village green.

In among my books, my writings,  
side-stepping a piece of furniture  
in a small space, one cosy armchair,  
a slide-rocker, nursing a sore back,  
I find my own space.

I belong here and now,  
in this skin, in this head,  
this body with its history,  
its bruises, traumas, slips and sleights.  
We fall out with those we love,  
but find them again. Go on.  
Reconcile. Ask ourselves,  
what was it all for?

Be integral to self.  
Care little for all else.  
Love them but let them go.  
Readjust to self,  
and to rare moments of leisure,  
not without a grateful heart,  
nor torn by war,  
not refugees, not victims of senseless violence,  
of those who look human, who seem human,  
who wear clean shirts and underpants,  
who are presentable, talk smart,  
but who will rape and beat you senseless,  
burn and maim and desecrate your body,  
and walk away, then go to work tomorrow,  
just another day,  
not racked with pain, not yet at least,  
facing our last fading hours  
on this wide, wide earth,  
in the agonies of death  
to win salvation.

Yes, we have been thrown here,  
into this situation, *geworfen*, a rather violent birth.  
Our inheritance is time, the present moment,  
the staying power, the consciousness of ever-present life.  
What shall we do with it now that we are here?  
I know. That much I know.

Travelling on, seeking, finding,  
awaking from the half emergent dream,  
wondering, waiting, living breathlessly  
in anticipation, until you come along  
and change my life.  
Till I appear, change yours.

We are the world  
and the world shall never be the same.

## The Face of Time

Your face became the face of time,  
the face of a clock.

Some silvery strands did stray  
across your silent face,  
obscuring passing hours.

I looked at your face,  
so ancient, strange face of time,  
and with my fingers made  
a slight adjustment,  
placing the fading silver strands  
behind your ear, in place,  
on the face that was no face  
but the face of a clock.

I walk in the land of mystery.  
I walk in no man's land.  
But wonder. Did I somehow  
with a loving touch,  
adjust the cosmic clock,  
the time machine,  
add minutes to your stay on earth?

## On One Calm April Evening

On one calm April evening  
as I looked out,  
I talked to God,  
and saw a jagged edge,  
a rip along His torn cloth  
on treetops far away,  
high above the channel's ridge.

The giant firs appeared there  
to my weary, solaced eye,  
as delicate as lace-work  
against the blue-grey sky,  
fine etchings on the still life  
of a glass horizon.

Massive cedar arms  
in miniature displayed,  
reaching up, turned down,  
like forlorn, displaced bonsai  
leaning westward to Pacific,  
longing for the Orient,  
their point of origin  
and highest aspiration.

I, too, long for Asia,  
my true point of adoration,  
and the sheltering branch  
that gave me life,  
gave all things life,  
and hope to sentient beings,  
spotting them with joy.

There to remain  
in a state called grace,  
unknown to passion,  
principle or pain,  
peace-filled, satisfied,  
counted among the blest,  
safe in a heavenly nest,  
content at journey's end,  
with no more world to see.

## **Borders. No Borders**

Beloved!

Have you ever noticed  
there is an outline  
to your body?

It has a definition,  
is not boundless,  
shapeless,  
but has a form to be.

Borders make my island,  
confine this heart of mine  
— still beating —  
surround these lungs  
— still breathing —  
these floating marrow-bones,  
and servile organs fix.

The Master asked:  
Can you just by thinking  
change your stature,  
break your traces,  
escape love's bondage,  
erase your pain?

Flee the protean zoophytes  
    inside you,  
join the ether that  
    invades you,  
really choose to die?

    When  
flesh is no flesh,  
when bones are bleached  
    and dry,

when fresh, flesh skin  
has slipped away,  
will no more barriers be.

    Only when  
the One Great Law's fulfilled  
    in  
    Love as is.....  
    Love as is.....  
Will paradise there be,  
    for you,  
    for her and him,  
    for us and them,  
    for me.

## The Call

I agonize — then call.

The tumult in the breast

is stilled.

I call to hear the woman's voice

that resonates more deeply

than the thrill.

I call instead — inspite —

though my heart a storm cloud be.

I call to break a promised day

of sweet calm, grace and clarity.

## **Time Said St. Augustine**

"...we can reasonably say that there was another time when this time was not, but the merest simpleton could not say that there was a time when there was no time."

*(The City of God, Book, XII, 15&16)*

I looked outside but instead of time  
saw creation reflected in my window pane,  
white cloud and blue sky and trees waving in the breeze  
— always and forever, forever and always —  
precisely the same.

## **Marcus Aurelius Said**

Marcus Aurelius said:

"...the rational soul ...reflects that posterity  
will see nothing new and that our ancestors  
saw nothing that we have not seen."

Oh Pshah!

They never saw `Abdu'l-Bahá.

## **I Looked Up and Laughed**

I read that the philosopher said:

"The conception of time as a cycle  
of recurrence excludes the emergence  
of novelty in the world."

I paused from reading, lifted my eyes  
to the view outside,  
the slope of Mt. Vesuvius,  
the giant slabs of moss-coloured rock  
strewn on the earth's breast,  
watched the moving darts, the tempestuous play  
of sun and shadow, heard the rushing wind rustling  
the aspiring firs reaching heavenward....  
and laughed out loud,  
then laughed again.

## Dr. Aesthetics

The bow tie is conspicuous,  
the domed head largely bald.  
He wears tweed, is professorial  
as he removes his glasses judiciously.

The blue eyes rise like full moons  
as they turn to the screen,  
as he lectures on *objects d'art*.

Now really *see*  
the soft sweep of the bird's stone wing,  
the undulating torso of the studio nude,  
the detached perfection of the Greek column.  
Now come the parade of the Great Masters,  
the rise and fall of schools in the history of art,  
like the crests and rolls of successive waves,  
the continual, shifting rearrangement  
in a kaleidoscope of forms.

He might have been a head librarian, a college dean,  
ensconced in the muted tones of an office hidden,  
enjoying anonymity and a comfortable benefice.

Instead, he sings a hymn to intellectual beauty,  
and carefully embroiders the point and counter-point  
of the fine arts,  
de-scribes the multitudinous jots of design.

By skill, by artifice  
he commands a vantage point  
that seems to surpass even the artist,  
as he unfolds his wings and soars  
on the ethers of the gods of Olympus.

## Prague Spring in Early June

There was a moment when  
I met you there,  
at Mukina's place  
on that hot afternoon  
in early June.

You had come to meet me  
on that first encounter,  
and I was coming alongside the house  
with a watering can in my hand,  
having let the drooping flowers drink.  
You were coming up the steps  
when our eyes met.

It was a moment of pure being,  
before the return to old ways,  
the struggle with rebel patterns,  
when hoped bloomed briefly.  
A Prague Spring sprang in early June.  
Life seemed ripe again,  
and sang her old sweet song.

I seemed to sense you then  
as you were, as you are still perhaps,  
*sans parfum*, the real scent of you,  
in a moment waiting to be born;

a trace of life lived more intensely,  
the taste of fruit on the vine,  
the savour of heady wine.  
There must be more, your body said.  
Your entire being said that day:  
"More of life. It is time. I want to live."

My eyes strayed down the shapely legs,  
to catch sight of red-painted nails,  
the colour carefully applied,  
the feet elegantly bound by  
the thinning black straps  
of your well-worn Birkenstocks.

But the monster of desire lay fast asleep that day.  
I met you as the clock struck one of the there-and-then,  
the ticking clock of the-I-remember-when,  
and saw an uncanny image of myself:  
a form still fit in mid-life, girlish airs,  
a slim, blue-eyed woman,  
a cross of Irish Celt and Anglo-Saxon,  
a touch familiar.

Both of one blood and bones,  
born out an ancient matrix,  
well-woven, worn with age:  
sister, family, friend, kinswoman?  
Could lover be?

I cherish and remember well  
the crystal moment of pure being,  
when love was not confused,  
    made no demand,  
did not murder to dissect,  
before the mulling over began,  
the sorting out of warnings  
from the fears, the haunting dreams,  
the forebodings in the gut,  
the guidance sought,  
the gnawing sense of fate  
as the last light faded  
from the mountain top.

Could we but *live* that little space,  
as we slip through the hourglass waist,  
when animation does suspend,  
in that precise instant of encounter  
as eye met eye in the pride of life,  
when we shared a glint of glory,  
and hope bid promise take a vow,  
the moment of pure being,  
the song of joy,  
when love is purified....

## Emptying the Ashes

Then,  
as ashes fell, an epiphany was raised,  
astonished as I watched,  
wrapt in my repeating gaze,  
as on command a passing breeze  
sprang from out a plenum void,  
below the massive rock,  
to catch the mandrake dust  
in one swift sure motion,  
and lift the ash-grey specks  
upward in the air.

Turning my head, standing upright,  
I veered around to watch the dusty train,  
the diffuse cloud glide along  
the contours of the land,  
to rise above the slope of Mt. Vesuvius  
into the still bright blue island sky.

It was extasy and epiphany,  
sweet surprise, divine delight,  
was poetry-in-motion,  
a one act mystery play,  
an artist's living scene and moving sketch,  
creation *ex nihilo* rising into life,  
then dissipating to a little death.

But as the cloud of my unknowing rose,  
the angle of my vision shifted.

An unlocked door revealed this scene:

I saw there, rising in the air,  
the unnumbered souls of generations  
not yet counted, borne by the softest breath  
of some strange Mighty Wind,  
that unrestrained faintly stirs the traces  
of earth's smallest things

— and —

lifts them up to disappear,  
beyond the sight and ken of men,  
to become all things again.

## **The Cure For Death By Lightning<sup>1</sup>**

I took the cure by taking a thunderbolt.

The lightening twisted my body,  
riveting me to the ground.

I sparked and smouldered,  
then died.

Now in the open field again,  
when skies begin to darken,  
as thunder clouds assemble,  
where forked tongues of yellow light  
like stinging serpents strike the earth,  
fearing for life and limb,  
I run for safety.

You can die twice, he said,  
don't need that much energy.

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<sup>1</sup>. This title is borrowed from the title of the novel by Gail Anderson-Dargatz.

## Lost and Found

It will be you and no other,  
logic and logos reconciled  
in the mind of the errant lover.

Ended  
the half-finished conversations,  
waking from broken dreams,  
all the things that go wrong,  
gone wrong,  
world-not-what-it-seems.

Ended how? Ended why?

With a turn,  
by a glance,  
riddles dissolving  
in sequence and pattern,  
none come by chance.

Loving, just loving,  
yours to discover,  
seeking and finding  
just you and no other.