

THE CRUCIBLE

POEMS

(1995-1996)

J.A. MCLEAN

The A.J. Poems (6)

Some were written after the passing of my father, Allan James McLean (d. 1995)

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A.J. McLean

It was the day of the vernal equinox.
A spring sun had begun to warm central Canada.
Most of the snow was gone, but scanty ribs of ice clung
in relief here and there to the still brown land,
hardened ways soon to disappear.

You sat on the side steps,
your back resting on the aluminium door,
your benevolent face, fuller then,
enjoying some friendly beams.
Rarely did I see you sit in the sun.

It was a lesson in patience.
The previous autumn you bought
an old American Motors Ambassador sedan,
to drive to the cottage on the Crow River.
Parked in a field adjacent to our place,
--we were the last house then on Joannis Street--
it had lain derelict all winter, snowbound.

Now the hood was open to catch the sun.
You had run an extension cord,
and set a lamp beside the motor,
bulb exposed, and covered the engine block
with a folded blanket.
I urged you to call the garage,
the simpler, quicker way.
Came the gentle no,
followed by the sure affirmation
the car would go.

All morning and afternoon you waited,
while the spring sun beat down.
At times, you checked the position of the lamp
and made a few adjustments.

I see you yet, as you slide behind the wheel,
steady yourself with your left hand,
as you lower yourself into the driver's seat,
knuckles turned down, thumb up,
in that characteristic way of yours,
the look of cautious optimism
and thoughtfulness on your face.
The experiment in patience is about to be tested.
You place the key in the ignition,
the motor turns and hums to life.

You were often vindicated in the small things of life.
But to those who use a sliding scale,
the same power that sustains the starry skies above,
and the stately earth below,
bends to assist in its courses
the smallest doings of men.

At times it seemed you worked within the *Tao*,
it pleased to grant the wishes of one so simple,
yet so princely.

The Man Who Rose Early

The man in the black greatcoat
etched out against the pale ashen grey
of the dawn, heads west to work.
He halts. In one motion pivots,
waves, turns, resumes his stride.
He repeats the gesture a few steps on.

A mother and child at the kitchen window sill,
blow kisses and return the wave.

The man in the dark greatcoat
thus rose early for 40 years
in the grey dawn,
while we slept on.
He who won the affection of all,
never spoke of his own pain.

Aunt Vi called him "the prince",
and at 10 to 4 in the afternoon,
she would wash her face, comb her hair,
smile at him when he came home,
and serve him tea.

Winter mornings, I would hear you shuffling
in the kitchen at 5:15 a.m.,
the odd rattle of dishes in the sink.
You always left your paper napkin on the table.
Was it a silent protest?
Half asleep, I would hear the tires of your car
whirl with fury as you inched up Korol Avenue

on those mornings after an ice storm.

Somehow you never got enmeshed in our devices,
the traumas of us all. Somehow you escaped all that
with your detachment, knowing they would pass.

When you finally retired, I couldn't believe
you didn't work anymore,
No work anymore.

Allan James McLean (1913-1995)

Knowing you were,
even as you lay at death's door,
contesting with the Mighty Angel
who had summoned you.
In that last, momentary struggle, agitated,
moaning with the pangs of death and birth,
loathe to release the one who called you
darling till the last breath;
a love that many envied and few have seen.

You even died as you had lived,
with the "right stuff", graced by a dignity
that magnified your presence,
attractive in its simplicity,
never imposing or seeking the actor's lime-light,
the one who craved neither approbation nor affection.
We sought to rest our hearts in you,
as weaker vessels anchor down
in the depths of the tranquil sea.

The homecare workers all fell in love with you.
They mourned your passing as their own fathers,
one sorry soul bereaved now twice in recent days.

Miracles were told in transit.
The accidental tourist fleeing churches
for ten years or more, who abhorred funerals,
came straightway off the street,
and told who you had changed her life in mere days.
And now you helped her over hurdles, even in your passing.
"The church", she said, "was flooded with so much

joy and love when I came in."
"Allan", spoken in her own tough-tender way,
"was always in my face." ---
as much as a wheel chair invalid could be.

The once stern provincial judge stood trembling
as a leaf in the remembrance of your love.
The haughty canon learnt a lesson in divinity that day.
The eulogy's strain was relieved by the odd
yet welcome laughter that had made your moments raucous,
your expression fairly impish with the fun.
Tears and sniffles melted in the sunshine memories:
schooled in the Great Depression,
a tough kid from the north end of Weston became
father to his family, a gentle man and courteous,
athlete *extraordinaire*, linksman, lacrosseman.
You were the commoner who became a prince.

When the pipes droned out "Scottish Tranquillity",
in the spirit of "Virtue Mine Honour",
for all the McLeans of Mull and Duart,
my inner eye caught a vision of you dancing
before your casket; hands and feet, rising, falling,
beating out the rhythm of the chant, keeping time.
For time in your world can now be truly kept,
while it flies away here, water through our fingers.
I saw you in that moment as I had never seen you,
and the view did not seem strange.
Scarce a man I saw you as you danced,
but a gangly, capped youth, newly welcomed, born free,
growing fast in other realms.

All of it cannot be told.
To try would be impiety.

For words much multiplied can never span the breadth
of such a life, draw a picture, paint a scene
of such a soul's rare mystery, simple purity.
Gone my captain, true believer, steadfast, stalwart, loyal,
Bahá'í in God's name.

It was raining as we lowered your coffin into place.
After prayers I hurried back to steal a rose
as the others left, but missed the lot.
I garnered instead a white carnation from among the spray.

In the judicious luxury of limousine appointments,
I sat resting and reflecting as we drove away,
gazing back at the grave site,
embellished by the perfume bouquets.

Two faithful pilgrims still lingered by the grave to pray.
How insignificant it seemed, the humble mound of earth
that marked your final resting-place,
disproportionately small to the mighty mountain of your life.

I raised the flower to my face,
hoping to relive again the final fragrance that was you,
when I was startled by the sudden sense
of shower-droplets falling to my palm;
a thimble-full of water, trapped seconds ago
in the folds of a wrinkled carnation.

The drops trickled down a sea of generosity,
the living water in my hand,
a mercy from a loving presence,
strong symbol of a life beyond.

When Fathers Angels Do Become

When I placed the burial ring on your finger,
I spoke to you as one still alive,
in this privilege of the last sacred act,
new-found wisdom in last rites now become real.
Uncanny-like, it was natural so to speak to you then,
in the antechamber of the funeral home:
"Dad, look, your hands are pale and cold,
your fingers stiff."
The large, fine hands I had so loved,
that browned with freckles in the summer sun,
lay inert, and waxy-white.

I straightened your fingers,
and positioned the ring.
Too big for the little finger.
It rested finally in position,
third finger left hand.
I did not dare unveil your face,
in that last moment spent by your side.
The cotton sheet donated by the nurses
became your burial shroud.
No plastic for our Dad.
While Mary Lou attentively,
so lovingly, washed your body,
the whole ward became suspended
in the observance of an only daughter's
last great right.

The red ink-spots on your chest
that caused my wonder all those years ago,
when as a child I watched you shaving,
peeked out from a part in the burial sheet.
So early seen. Now, the last thing seen.
Your body still looked alive.
No trace yet of creeping death

on the surface of your skin.
The athlete's barrel chest
I had so often bear-hugged, clamped to me,
and sometimes stayed to watch whose rise and fall
when you were lost in slumber deep,
seemed only to be sleeping.

But tonight I dreamed a dream of you.
No father of mine did I see then,
up or over in the land "of there",
so tender, strong, loving, kind,
in the human ways of earth.

I saw you in the vision as God's knight,
your black mesh leggings wrought
in lightest, strongest coats of mail,
the tunic a Roman legionary's,
the shaft and spearhead at your side,
pointing an awesome length heavenward
as you stood on guard.

Keeping watch, sentinel on high,
at attention, on command, waiting,
mighty warrior, one of the angelic host,
fierce defender of all that is holy, sacred.

Are you my father still, my father?
Is Allan James McLean still your name?
Are fathers still fathers in heavenly realms,
if mighty guardian angels they now be?
So unlike the father whom I knew,
yet like him much, transposed in many ways.
Do I dare believe, in this surprise sunrise
of the plain truth's fair, first dawn,
then even as you guard the throne,
you are now protecting me?

Legacy

I carried these things home from your funeral,
after the sorting was done, and the emptying of closets,
the going-through of drawers,
each one taking away some thing once yours:

A few stripped dress shirts,
predominantly blue,
and one labelled "Fireside",
an elegant sportswear plaid of dark tones
brightened by white checkers,
a cotton nightshirt used for lounging.

Four small, smooth stones in sombre swirling tones
of brown and green and grey,
from a time when you were doing some collecting;
a tie-pin of the greatest name,
and silver cuff-links,
stored in a small, bright metal box.

A few photos of your beloved self,
one of you laughing uproariously
as you ate from a bowl of dessert.

Artillery gunner lieutenant Allan J. McLean's
World War Two officer's cap:
"Ubique Quo Fas Et Gloria Ducunt",
reads the crest.
Yes, Glory led you on, away from us.
My head used to swim in that hat
when I tried it on during childhood explorations

of the attic.

Now it fits, but it is still too big for me.

Your Remington electric shaver
with the micro-screen head,
a bottle of Aqua Velva after shave.

Two McLean clan ties:
the dark green hunting tartan
of the McLeans of Duart,
with smaller black rectangles
enclosed within, each square crossed
with two neat, white lines,
and the dark navy one,
spotted with the silver towers.

Some socks and belts,
a pair of charcoal jogging pants,
too large for me.

A t-shirt I gave you last summer
bearing a large, red "Canada"
emblazoned across the chest.
I didn't realise it would come back to me
so soon, with one more summer about to bloom.

These mementos of your world,
relics grown precious by a dear association,
the concrete things I have left to remember you by.

Brief, Noble Life

The face grew pale with pain,
fewer trips along the garden path,
no little sojourns in the morning sun.
The wheel chair became the pivotal point
from which you surveyed your world:
the matches on T.V., the daily round of meals,
a book or two, a song,
friends graciously received,
the long hours broken, brightened,
by intimate speaking with an old companion.
Once in a long while, a restaurant outing.

The understatement always there
when I asked about the pain
of bone on bone, derelict knees,
and hips consumed.
I sense now the wisdom
in your playing down, the de-dramatisation.

The magnanimity stretched out the years
beyond bearing. To old age, immobility,
you acquiesced and to the dull, nagging companion
ever-boring in on your racked joints.
With the same winsome wit, easy laughter
you settled in to slow motion,
as when you strode along
strong and free as younger men.
But did they know the manly charm,
your staid simplicity, heart of gold?

At last even you grew weary
of your stalwart soldier,
fatigued and worn by the long campaign,
the barrage of the pounding shells.
The signs we read too well in moments after--
the favourite dessert left untouched,
the ritual of the daily bath neglected,
your repeated solicitude,
the anxious caring.
You slept curled up on your bed.

So you took your leave great soul,
and let her go, the darling of your youth,
destined long ago to wed.

How can such a noble life pass by
so brief,
and all the goodness gone,
the gentle, winning voice now still,
the mild, princely face erased
from our lingering, indecisive present?

Father. What I would not give
to have you live, one moment more,
to hear the fixed, familiar voice
speak to me again among the stars.

The Man May Go

The man may go, the woman stays.
This tells the story of our days.
Fidelity is woman's name, mercy is her crown.
Reconciliation's ways her fame,
the paths of peace her sweet renown.

But, this, all too often won
through throttled rage and bitter, salty tears
and sacrifice to turn a heart to stone.
Uncertainties to haunt long, lonely nights,
forbode delight to swiftly-passing years.

The man may go. But if he does,
let it be so when all was tried,
and every nerve was strained,
with no uncounted cost to spare.

Then love and dignity will be preserved,
and honours's remnants not despised,
that joy return and one's lost self regain.

Year of Waiting

Justification lumbers up
when the will finally
breaks like a wheel.

Voluntas abates, then dies
at breaking-point,
but poignant feelings persist,
still vivid memories surprise you.
I have set up another altar,
a holy corner on this new hearth.
The relics are the same,
now somewhat rearranged:
the fragrance of oil of cloves,
scattered petals, deepest purple,
ruby red in a lattice box enclosed,
aromatic, strips of darkest brown;
a brass banker's lamp with shade of
vitreous green, a globe and pen set,
holy pictures, photographs,
sundry sacred objects,
seen within the kaleidoscope of time,
through the rite of passage,
along the horizon of story.
But you are not there.

The long, hard years of warring ways
all but forgotten,
conflictual conversations grown dumb,
the clanging minds that never learned
to ring out the happy bells of peace

across two cultures, now silent.
I watched you grow old in a day.

The fruitage of long years subsides.
Now, the sweetness of your pilgrim soul remains.
But the older, sadder, wiser
talk of deflected tears, culpability displaced.
Those who really know watch from a distance.

But at this still point I have found,
on Ground Zero of the absolute,
in this deep, rich silence,
I roam among the hills and valleys
of my new world and console a fresh wound,
just scarring over.

I ask myself: "Do I still love you?"
Can I still call you dearest
for all the things you were--you are?

I hesitate. Can I say "Yes"?
And how? And how?

Do Not Be Defeated

Do not be defeated by your idle dreams.
They may seduce your heart,
but cannot claim your soul.
That belongs to God alone.

Restless heart that never mends,
the world is not just what it seems.
So put your idle dreams away,
your storybook upon a shelf,
and when you take it down another day,
find them there again,
so various, so bright, so new¹
and ever-lovely,
or vanished as the morning dew.

¹. Readers will recognize here an echo of a line from Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach*: "Ah, love, let us be true/To one another! for the world, which seems/To lie before us like a land of dreams/So various, so beautiful, so new/Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light/Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain/..."

The People Walking On The Street

The people walking on the street
go this way, that.
Up and down they move along,
pursue discrete, unknown ends,
souless bodies in a slow-motion dream.

They come toward and make a mask,
show a mysterious face.
Pass by, go on. They move away.
We look back clinging to the outline.

The people walking on the street
are the symbols of desire,
moving in and out of weary lives,
sometimes animate, breath ecstasy and fire,
turn their backs, move on.

Words

To him precise tools.

To me traps for fools.

No Sex

She asked me if I could live
without sex for a year.
I wondered how I would cope
with my own solitude.

Vincent

Look and see the way gray-blue clouds
roll high above the fields of southern France.
Then as now, in old *Provence*, the ancient cypress
reaches up to ardent summer skies
from roots below the copper-coloured wheat.

In these rare moments of sublime intensity,
I think of how your tortured soul
found brief healing in the vibratory strokes
that exploded on your canvas at *Midi*,
respite from the pain that assuaged itself
in fiery concentration upon a four-square
canvas of your world.

For what they despisingly call madness
can never be betrayed by the *artiste*,
the gifted soul, the sensitive who bears
the imagined horrors of his own anguish
and drowns himself in the sacrificial sea
of beauty's dream.

Artificer

"An artifice is a carefully and delicately prepared contrivance for doing indirectly what one could not well do directly" (Funk and Wagnalls *Desk Standard Dictionary*, 1925)

He clings,
rings,
sings
rhapsodies,

anything

builds up
magnificent obsessions

anything

but unchain himself,
set himself free.

Changling

Summer will fly by
into summer again.
From moment to moment
I am changing.
Yesterday's sorrows dissolve
in today's joys,
past illusions are melted away
by the duties of the moment,
what must be done.

There are still two selves,
sometimes three,
two/three must become one,
multiple identities to be reduced
a little lower,
passion's flame to be stilled,
imagining's cloud of unknowing
to vaporize.

I rejoice in the child again,
embrace the joy of morning,
muse on the ease of the passing day,
speak the quiet, lovely prayers at evening
from out of the depths of my being.

Some days the heart seduced,
stays into the valley of high romance,
tries to climb walls.
Billy-goat-like, I butt my head,

surrender gracefully,
return home.

At night I lay me down
with a thankful heart.
Sleep is a quiet rejoicing.
I thank God for past sorrows,
His mercy.

For I am being born again.
I become new.

My Spirit Is Set Free

(for Catherine)

My spirit is set free,
I know not how,
by desperate striving
in the sweat of tortured prayer,
by wise counsel entreated
of good friends
themselves afflicted,
once removed.

By supplication is the mind released
unto holy ones in realms above,
earnestly implored to pour down
on a needy soul
grace abounding, heavenly love...
set free by tenderest mysteries
I can no wise declare,
deprived of vaguest inkling
why pen and heart now do forswear
the rosy, once-thought noble dreams
that only yesterday did feed a hungry heart,
the tear-filled schemes to which I lately clung
with all the fierce determination of mortal combat.

So this evening, friend, do I awake
to a calmer, placid view.
I arise with new resolve,
the fetid vapours in my head dissolved,
with eyes anew and easy breath,
with clearer vision,
by self possessed.

Is The Dream True?

"But is the dream true?" he asked,

"And the love too? I want to know."

"Only", I replied, "if they set you free.

Otherwise, believe them to be a lie."

Will No One Come

Will no one come
sit by my bed,
and crowd about
my fettered head,
speak the words
to set me free,
sing a song
of joy and glee?

Purgatory Revisited

Vapour patch ahead,
appears the white fog,
the vision is clear,
nothing is odd.
the white light be heaven,
might even be hell,
the cloud of unknowing
is a safe place to dwell.

Go blind in the day,
be saved on the way,
quench heart's desire,
set no vein on fire,
the sign in the window
says "no lust for hire".

Delay journey's end,
unfix destination,
settle sweet dreams
in suspended animation.
let the mind run on hold,
hot blood run cold,
destiny unfold,
in slow anticipation.

Write, then, no script,
recount any story,
tell not the how,
thirst for the glory.
live in the now,
your soul be sanguine,
be no slave to sin,
find strength within.

Comparison in the Mean

How can an *Ave* compare
to *Alláh'u'Abhá*?

When has a *gloria* surpassed
a *Ya Bahá*?

What may late autumn show
of a summer's day?

Who will hold a candle
to the midmorn sun's bright ray?

(after the visit of Rúhíyyih Khanúm
to the Pierrefonds Bahá'í Institute,
November 5, 1995)

Love's Discipline

So we shall be in love with love,
and love again every passing thing,
until we learn love's discipline,
to stay, to loose, and then to bind
what Love Himself finds pleasing.

Voyage

A stretching, not a breaking,
a relinquishing, not a taking,
a voyage to a farther shore,
a backward glance to the one
who fades from view.

A larger compass than the needle's fix,
a sight sublime the soul transfix.
Apollo's light gives vision birth,
rarefied air, moist scent of earth.

Dichotomy, dilemma, paradox, polarity,
oppression, liberation, exploration, insularity.
World of mortality, body blows and pain,
promise of deliverance once we're home once again.

Moon Thoughts in Late August

If this cannot be,
if it does not come to pass,
then something else will be.

If she is not there,
will not come,
some one else will be.

He will come.

She will come.

It must be.

And if God gives you a gift,
accept it with singing.

If He takes it away,
then still chant His praise--
if you can.

Release the hold on what has been,
but can no longer be.

Grasp not the improbable,
the impossible copula.

Leave all to God.

Trust all to Him.

Release you from yourself,
and all that you desire,
and He shall bear you and gift aloft,
in a chariot of fire.

Stout Soldier

Stout soldier,
I yearned to travel,
see the world,
set out to sea,
sail my own vessel,
flying free.

So I made off, when not far gone,
the line pulled tight.
I'm still attached to land
I see. Must weigh anchor,
lift my burden,
bear with me.

I'm not quite fit to go abroad,
to sail away.
I'll have to leave my moorings yet.
Can't release myself from here.
I'll beg my captain cut me loose,
set me free.
He is kind. He will agree.

October 11, 1996

Unpoem For Christmas

It's evening and you're feeling.
Christmas is in view brought to you
by the splashy, muted images of a brochure from BMG music.
"Music...The Perfect Holiday Gift", reads the sound choice.
Jazzin' up the holidays with the Oscar Peterson trio
 and suave Bing's Christmas Classics--
Have yourself a merry little Xmas, little drummer boy,
let it snow, o holy night, other perennials,
mellow Mel Tormé's Christmas songs.

Coming soon are snow flakes and frosty moonbeams,
night-lit winter landscapes, holiday presents under the tree.
You recline on the throw covering the white divan.
Even the motif announces Christmas.
There are friendly northern polar bears
lounging happily on Arctic wastes.
Nearer the fringes, polite penguins
stand up straight to greet you,
dazzling eastern stars pinpoint a black sky,
all woven with unknown fibers.

You drink your tea and dunk a biscuit.
Another seasonal memory of England,
of Grandma and Grandpa Halsted,
Ecclesridge estate, great aunt Vi and uncle Stewart,
uncle Fred the pianist, Sheffield and the village of

Woodhouse, the pawnbroker's shop,
and the orphanage on Totley Lane.

Other recumbent states of love as vapour trails
float through the open halls of a quiet mind.

You're musing but you won't write them down.
Don't want to make the thoughts permanent.
(As if they could be).
You know they are just passing by.

October 20, 1996

Birth of the Bab

Songs of Peace

I will sing to you
the songs of peace,
from deep within your breast,
to where the tumult swells,
mid panic, fast with fear,
where raging war is waged,
and self does battle self.
There I will dwell,
and proclaim the anthem,
unfurl the signal flag.

Centered on your coat of arms,
I read inscribed:

content
surrender
stillness
quiet
peace
rest
renunciation
holy joy
acquiesce

There where the insistent voice
of self falls still,
lantern in hand,
will I come stealing,
rescue you from shrouds of darkness,
shell-shocked, reeling.

At early watch, at first awakening,
enfold you in my robe of love,
embrace you with my heart's desire,
and kiss you with the kiss of peace,
put out the flame of love's mad fire.

Houdini

Shackled,

he unshackled.

Hooked,

he unhooked.

Sunken in frigid waters,

he broke through the icy surface.

Encased in glass,

he smashed his way out.

Prisoner,

he would never be,

this skilful artisan of escape.

Let fate and we ourselves

make Houdinis of us all.

O lovely, lovely

O lovely, lovely
as I watch the seasons flow,
lovely, lovely,
that the maple leaf should glow
an incandescent yellow now,
but days ago was gorgeous green,
should fall in autumn,
carpet grassy stretches
with a thousand copper curls
for dresses.

It's lovely that the arching elm,
half barren now, shall raise aloft
still, fallen snow on naked branches
wrapped in sleep
while underneath
children survey to the sky
with upturned faces,
as they stand fast
knee-deep in drift.

O lovely, lovely
that it should be,
the changing of the seasons,
wherewith we grow to wisdom,
beauty or to death,
to new beginnings or to rest,
initiate a spirit-quest that leads
we know not where.

O let heaven know, lovely, lovely it is so.

Gems

The amber crystal, trust.
The deep blue gem, content.
Hold them to the sun.
When your heart is being rent,
and solace there is none.
Seek the blue gem of content,
when your face is in the dust.
Find there the amber crystal,
trust.

Iron John

You parted the clouds
till I saw a patch of blue.
You made a hole in the sky,
gave me a glimpse of heaven
to try.

Pitiless,
you thrust me body and soul
into the furnace roar.
You stilled the flame as before
with my elements about to melt fervent heat.

Your wish became command
to fashion me anew,
blow by blow,
iron upon iron,
on the anvil of renunciation,
you bent my rebel will to thine,
working transformation.

In a score of strokes,
the hammer deftly struck
my soul, forming, shaping, making.
swiftly,
you wrought the metal round
an iron-John creating.

When you finally rested,
I emerged a newly fashioned man,
according to the plan,
luminous with your light,
but wrestling still with angels,
striving through the night.

Blossoming Career

I'll take this space for my race,
this blossoming ground I'll claim
for my career.²

Swift to my life's work,
honourable achievement,
I move forward in action,
headlong, unimpeded.

With love unconditioned,
grateful liege to my King,
troubadour and Sufi,
of freedom I sing.

². In medieval times, the career meant the ground for a race or the knight's charge in a tournament or battle.

The Aeolian³ Harp

There is an angel wing
sweeping the sky,
an angel's robe
and angel's hair
trailing by.

Look!
The aeolian harp
is set on high,
untouched by any hand
of spirit or of man.

Though no one's there
to ply the strings,
by and by,
a breeze will stir
and murmuring,
alone, they will intone
a hymn of praise,
give thanks,
song celestial raise.

³. In classical mythology, Aeolus was the god of the winds.

Happy

Happy as I am,

I am.

O so happy.

Happy. Happy

Happy.

I am happy,

as I am.

I am.

Happy as I am.

The Stars Fell

The stars fell on Adrianople
as he went forth from his house
that night.

With a stroke of his *mishkin qalam*⁴
they did fall.
Bahá extinguished all their light.
Fell into lightest stardust
where his blessed feet had trod,
fell into slightest stardust,
sprinkled on the Land of Nod.⁵

All creation stood still, awed,
that holy night,
the brightly shining stars
took flight.

O Bahá'u'lláh!
My Lord! My King!
I am weary. I am flawed.
Let me be that stardust
thy blessed feet might trod.

⁴. Persian for "musk-scented pen".

⁵. *Nod*. (Heb.=wandering, exile). The Land of Nod is reputed by some to lie in Iran between the cities of Bushir and Bassorah on the northeast shore of the Persian Gulf. It lay "east of Eden" and was the place of the forced exile of Cain after the murder of Abel. (Gen. 4:16). Here, I mean it as an ironic symbol of a fallen clergy, banished by the very Lord for whose coming they had prayed.

Some Loves

Some loves last a day,
others just an hour,
a few shall last forever,
as fair, eternal flower.

Some loves fail, then worsen,
and some loves just wax cold,
some loves grow to bursting,
and some loves just grow old.

Now,
I aspire to be loving,
at least, I hope I am.
A lady told me once I was,
a very loving man.

But I did hurt her
just the same,
and drove myself forlorn,
so put my sweetheart
in a rage,
till our lovely love
was torn.

Now I'm a wiser,
chastened man,
and seek a love that's true,
for love both rent
then broke me,

but made my heart anew.

I see the future very bright,
in 10 I'll be 3 score.
I still reserve a loving heart,
but I'm not sure what for.

At night,
I fall on bended knee,
pray the God whom I adore,
succour sorry, ailing friends,
receive them at my door.
I cheer the aging, old and frail,
spy the child in their eyes,
but love still looms a mystery,
I cannot as yet surmise.

In these, my passing golden years,
I strive for peace,
and flee from strife,
but love still looms a mystery;
that mystery word is "wife".

What face will love reveal to me,
in coming days and years?
Will passion's flame still burn me,
let me vanquish haunting fears?

Will I still seek two minds that meet
in noble thoughts, exchanges rare,
or better find two souls aligned
than seek a face that's fair?

Answers to vexed questions,
come with learning how to trust.
Find acceptance, then contentment,
if found straying, readjust.

Smile as days and years roll by,
with guidance from above.
O heaven's best, beauty blessed,
teach me perfect love.

Revelation

I hear, o yes
I seem to hear
a sudden music breaking,
 a clarion burst,
a clear, cold bell
this winter's dawn awaking.

Say--
What comes for you?
What comes for me
on tremulous air,
its portent in the making?

Life's tenderest joys,
their mystery recreating;
the brightest eyes,
their clearest vision shaping.

And love that's whole,
so very whole,
for you, for me,
ah, much sweet love,
for the asking and the taking!

By The Garden Wall

I saw myself beside the garden wall,
waiting for the Beloved,
standing quietly, waiting.
I was not anticipating,
 only being,
only waiting
 His arrival.

Beloved! I said. It is I.
Long have I awaited you.
Now that I have found myself,
I have found you.
Now that I become myself,
you have come to me.

Just Because

Beloved!

Take time to grieve,
to understand.

Count your time in years,
the long, patient span.

Count a time, a time,
and a half a time.

You will crack the code
to set free your aching mind.
The endless struggles,
storms, the fears and tears,
now deciphered, despair,
were but birth-pangs
to a breakthrough, a gateway
to you know not where.

Look! The new born child
nursing at the breast.

Once you swam through seaweed,
barely afloat, alive,
sinking on tired, sagging limbs.
Now, this fine spring day,
you have broken free into
open water--ocean water.
A white sand beach bids rest,
heaven blessed.

Why can't we return my love

and be now what we were then?
Why? Why not hug you to my breast
as I did then and kiss your open palm
and call you best.

Before you passed my way,
I never knew such bliss existed.

Oh, but we killed it in excess.
Just because. Just because.

Night of Coherence

1 Masá'il.

This fatèd night

I lay me down by Lethe's

opulent stream to think,

stooped to taste

oblivion's drink

where two worlds meet.

Night of coherence

whose messengers of peace

descended on my soul

mid-way through the third watch

unpacked my story.

Resolution

See how the Beloved brings
all things resolution,
dissolves each conundrum
in solution.

Ah! But pray any way
for the light,
while light fades,
to fathom secret wisdoms,
universe enigmas.

How we are all connected
in our plight,
the falling leaf's embrace
by bosom night
is felt.

Scan the storied pages
of fleet time.
Sure comfort you will find,
your wounds to bind,
your scars to mend,
and new joy come tomorrow.

And love still...
Ah me, Yes.
Still boundless love
awaits!

The Thief

Let not friend, neither foe
enter your dwelling
upon your request
to filch from you vestments of peace.

To none is right given
to enter your closet,
your warm, friendly garments to fleece.

For by so robbing you,
she proves not a friend,
he no true lover.

The self is at fault,
in one more disguise,
the self and no other.

Fear not the fugitive,
pallid with rage,
who coerces a friendship,
with fear.

The desperate soul
who will murder for love,
let him not near.

For by self is this done,
by self and no other.
Of true self discerning,
prove then a lover.

Solo Violin

The man stands before
the picture-window glass
on the 27th floor,
facing west,
overseeing the Pacific.

Playing solo,
he wrings consolation
from his violin.
Angels watch, aware,
suspended in the air,
listening.

There are no curtains
on the large, expansive glass.
White-shirted, tieless,
he stands and plays.
The melody's unheard.

Out to westward,
a fierce winter storm
howls and hurls
above the Pacific,
thrashes the waves.

There is a bare essential
about the scene, something
denuded.
A silent tune, a man above,

alone, a Peter Quince at the piano,⁶
blending into subdued tones--
whites, off-whites, grays.

"Beauty is momentary in the mind--
The fitful tracing of a portal;
But in the flesh it is immortal".

He reflects about being,
--just being; about waiting, transiting,
marking time, working magnificent patience,
watching without desire, no intent,
being open, finding consolation.

Finding, gracefully accepting
the subtle strength there is in solitude,
understanding that some things must be,
that it is just like that sometimes.

⁶. A reference to the title of Wallace Stevens' poem "Peter Quince at the Clavier" (1923). The quotation below is from the same poem.

On Corbeil Street(1)

The cars, almost silent, blotted out by snow-packed streets,
whoosh past on Corbeil Street, moving north,
heading south to the bend in the road.
Just beyond the patio doors, beyond the balcony,
beyond the lightly dusted, denuded limbs of the maple tree,
passers-by trudge along the thoroughfare,
fortified by flung-round scarves and heavy hats,
bracing boots and manly mittens for winter outings.

The universe is friendly on this gray December day,
in this moment-to-moment transmutation of consciousness.
Last night you grappled with old issues you thought were settled.
More gray days in your child-like innocence you thought were over.
You wiped away hot tears, imagination's picture-gallery
creating images in spite of you. Where do they come from
these still living, photo flash-backs?
They are fresh yet. But I'll find consolation as I watch
the hands of time on grandfather's clock.

No. Tears and longings cannot prevail
over conscience and Lady Wisdom.
Tears cannot dissuade the steadfast Will of God.
That love, so tender and profound, yet heart-wrenching,
was and can no longer be. Now you are learning what it is.
The is-ness of that love, its copula is such a mystery,
for love reveals too many and sundry faces,
a kaleidoscope of paradoxes, of jumbled images,
contending sensitivities.

What it all was, what it all meant, means,

is now inside you, formulating, soul-food assimilating,
becoming an intrinsic part of your own being,
fragments of your very pith and heart,
cherished in that world within.

Ah! Take care just where and when, with whom you may let one enter there.
The impregnable castles of human vulnerability
are quickly breached by love's mighty armies.
Soon they will lay in ruins.

It's all about love, is it not, after all?
Toujours l'amour. Is there anything else really.
But love cannot prevail against space-time,
when it comes crashing accidentally. The injuries are serious.
Or when it falls as a shooting star,
a single chapter that cannot be re-written or improved,
a one-act play in which you coveted the leading role
and vied to have, but failed,
for you were merely playing a part.
In the theatre of life there are none.

And where do I stand now?
Well, for all their pain, I've learned to trust these tears.
I trust too this o so pure love,
yet reflect just the same that a child's love, though pure,
cannot stand the rigours of love's discipline.
I learn to trust even now, even more,
the lamp of lady wisdom that burns her golden globe inside me,
the multiple voices that say let it be. Accept. Trust all to God.

Yes, God does what He wills. That He wills to do He does.
And when we pray with all our hearts, with the very fibres
of our being, even then, do we think we shall set

the course of love, love's destiny, fixed by Love Himself?
The of where, the of how, the of why that prayer might fly
throughout the universe, to touch the throne of God,
the of whom it shall mark, the souls it might join together,
then tear apart to be "sustained by Him alone",
on their appointed courses, so that One Great Will might fulfil
its purpose? Do we think sincerity might rule the Will of God?

We pray for what we will. Yet blind as we may be in all our loving,
we cannot say before, cannot understand the broad sweep,
the larger plan, cannot discern the arc of destiny,
the rod of deliverance, cannot yet completely fathom
while we are in transition, the greater what-shall-be,
the bounties that await, the purer love that's being born.

Ah Beloved! See, this broken heart's begun to heal,
this deepest wound will soon reveal an honest scar,
bearing love's comely face. L.O.V.E. And love, its only name.
And I, purified by love's fiery blast,
can still rejoice that Thou hast chosen to have me slain,
while I sing in my chains like the sea.⁷

⁷. This is a slight turn of the last line in Dylan Thomas's ecstatic poem "Fern Hill". The last two lines read: Time held me green and dying/Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

Viking Ship

I know I must be healing
when I find joy upon awaking
and the voices I hear after sleep
presage goodly things, hopeful omens,

After Breakfast

(To Pierre and Ros)

My friends come to breakfast
from tropic isles, desert places.
Perfumed flowers scent their bodies
with lavender, rose and sweet violet,
carnation, jasmine, mimosa.
They wear silken threads woven in Cathay,
sit as royal orientals gracing the table.
In quietude we eat and drink
the fruits of earth, distillations,
nectars various.

We teach one the other
through the repast,
tutor our spirits.
We are the birth-mothers
who deliver the child,
midwives in mid-age,
who cradle the newborn with fondest pride,
watching her nurse at the breast,
set one another well on the way,
saying "Yea", saying "Nay",
speaking, striving with old fears,
overcoming, raining down the pearls
of copious tears.

Ah friends! We will remember when.
We shall see then what we dimly view now.

Deliverance

Down through the dust-filled years,
freshly wounded, salty tears,
gainsay mobility,
death of genteel civility.
All through the watching
and the waiting,
the marking time,
the hoping and the praying,
making rhyme.

Exploring points to westward,
casting east a backward glance,
grasping at acceptance's chance
believing,
half-believing in happenstance.

Scanning the black and starless night,
peering through the bars to see,
the first dull streaks of morning light,
if one warm ray might fall on me.

Seeking peace in silence,
then riding through the fray,
rent in two at break-point,
my sorry self to slay,
falling headlong bottom through,
lived to see worst fears come true.

And yet... Be still. I hear
the sound of rising mirth,
sense the swell of hope,
the hour of deliverance, a
present birth!

Coming Days

O

I am thankful
for these coming days,
when my heart to fresher fields
will stray.

The birds which first entranced
my ear,
long years ago,
will still fill my soul
with trills as clear.

The soul who lives
for naught but love,
is ever-guided from above.
No sin of mind and flesh be found,
To keep the lover earthward bound.

However dark and drear the past,
love's beam of light
new joys will cast.

And hope's fair promise
for the breaking day,
assures fulfilment
along the way.

The spell of sickness, sadness broken,
despair's foul lie will ne'er be spoken.

And hours pleasant, cavalier,
will while away,
with one so dear.
Now up! About!
Make new beginnings.
Prepare the heart,
its richest winnings.

The bride's within her chamber.
The wedding feast awaits.
The pilgrim's path winds on,
beckons to an unknown place.

True Love

Let me know the purest love,
O God of light,
not tortured love,
nor love confused,
conflicted love, love abstruse.
For all these dreaded things,
locked in a tournament of fears,
the ego struggling to stay alive;
although they may captivate
 the soul a time,
its happiness dismay,
and precious powers waste,
--are not true love.

Flee them as you would
the serpent's bite,
the scorpion's second sting.

True love leads to peace,
leaves insatiate passion far behind,
leads to clarity of mind,
sounds a ringing of the Buddha's bell,
shuns scholar's paradox,
conundrum and delusion.
True love shows by kindly light
the way. So follow. Follow,
for "all her paths are peace."⁸
Follow the nightingale's note

⁸. This proverb of Solomon was written of wisdom: "Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace".
(Proverbs 3:17)

to harmony,
where stability reigns in the midst,
away from the jangle of war,
and contention's mean kiss.

Follow to family feeling,
to joy appealing.
Follow to bliss.

Ascent

Once

I rose to touch the Face of God
with you.

Now, I sit and think: was ours a celestial voyage
in Ezekiel's chariot of fire,
or raw passion's flow of blood,
mere warm desire?

Icarus-like,

I singed my wings
soaring breathless by the Sun.

Came crashing down
to the murky pit
of a dark Aegean Sea.

Then

I fell headlong down into the liquid hell
of love's illusion.

There

I drowned in helpless will,
deep in the still, live pictures
of automatic memory
moving freely before my eyes,
tormented by thought's surmise
of a once-great-love-gone wrong.

Now

love's embryo,
I struggle to ascend,

to be born anew,
to rise above desire,
escape flesh's consuming fire,
ascend to rarer air.

Yet what is love
in this world of dust,
but a white lotus
aspiring to heaven
yet rooted in the mire?

Love's a teacher harder than hell,
who guards her bleak mysteries all too well,
a shy, comely mistress, loathe all to tell.

O celestial fire!
heavenly light!
Name my name again,
o noble soul conspire.

Egyptian princess of salvation--
place me in thy little craft,
below these reedy banks on Nile's flow,
amid the water and clay,
where once she sat, a woodland nymph,
a moment sad, then swam away.

O Queen of Love,
Empress of my soul above.
Let this love not have been in vain.
Launch me into life again.

Súfi Zen

It's fine just to be,
to find a small,
distinct pleasure
in the morning,
to muse on the mundane,
thankful for the norm.

Just fine to be free
of the memory of you,
a return exile to
a stronger self.
Haunted by your ghost
down nights, down days,
I'm glad to see it laid
to rest.

With my magic wand
I seized your image
from the sky,
and like Prospero,
mixed your spirit well
into the elements of earth,
confined your remembrance
to a burial box of ancient jade.

Quiet delight is found
in Sunday morning,
in the being of it,
in the peace-pervading,
in the just-being-there,

in the *Da Sein*, in *disponibilité*,
in the way the slanting light
filters through the apartment air,
illuminating what possessions
I've borrowed for a while there:
the sleepy books in hospitable cases,
revealing the manly grain of wood,
still looking fresh from the carpenter's shop,
the captain's ticking naval clock,
the misty English ivy, the dry *Dracaena*,
my old banker's lamp.

One white rose towers above
the discrete blue hearts, half-moons,
melons, pearls, scattered petals,
falling leaves on the alabaster China vase.

It's hard to get a fix on love.
She's a harlot with a thousand faces,
a very persistent thief,
she'll do you in with many disgraces.
She keeps selling you the moon as silk.
One day you wake to the smarting sun,
to find you're broke.
You look down at your half-naked body
to discover you're barely clad
in filthy rags.

But what gift compares to blessedness?
You're growing wise to palatial lies,
to the part-time lover
who only lived in your eyes.

Good to be sober,

good to be sane,
quit of sweet extasy,
swimming round in the brain,
good to find yourself again.
Let all little children dance in the rain.

Yes, the semblance to truth
is there only because we wish it,
clinging to our fears,
getting what we want
because we would rather have than be.

We children of the half-light
are an old Irish washer woman,
wringing the dirty water out of our clothes,
so we may wear garments of any old thing,
rather than go naked or grow old.
Bare existence is too much to bear.

I See Now

I see now,
there is no strength in me.
I survive by His doing.
If I come through,
it is by His grace.

There is nothing doing.
No coming, going
wondering, struggling.
Ego's gone to sleep.
Peace there is,
as it is,
all that there is,
and still.

Me, myself and I,
the tripartite being
of the one manifold.
Gone are the spies
from the underworld.

I don't *need* you really.
Instead I offer being,
a travel plan, a package deal
to share my completeness.
Would you like a companion
for a while?

We will dance by the light
of the moon, the moon.
We will dance by the light
of the moon.

The Fish

Once you skewered me like a fish.
I writhed upon your pointed spear,
out of my element, a stranger to myself,
dissolved in pain.

By the miracle of a passing hand,
I escaped the dart and fell again
into the water.

I rested for a time on the sandy bottom
among friendly, undulating weeds,
the salty sea a balm for sore wounds.

One morning I awoke,
as sound as a seed.
The sunlight streamed down
to where I lay
in the shelter of the bay.

Bearing nothing but an honest scar,
the sweating nightmares,
the fever dream forgotten,
I swam away.

Remember

"He who binds to himself a joy, does the winged life destroy; but he who kisses the joy as it flies, lives in eternity's sunrise." William Blake.⁹

For is memory not to remember,
the bell-like voice to be heard,
the strong loving word to be spoken,
the lesson of wisdom unlearned?
Recall the fond image with gladness,
the lilting voice laughing with glee,
listen again to the soft flowing words,
for such was meant to be.

For that which once was
is ever to be,
and that which you hide
not to know,
that which was past
is present again,
if truly you wish it so.

Sorrow's thick veil
you shall soon cast aside.
Know you are born to be free.
Your birthright shall make claim
its lot of content,
if from bonds of attachment
you will flee.

So simply remember with loving,
as you kiss your old joys on the wing,
and fresh joys shall press in
to nest in your heart
as swallows that herald the spring.

⁹. From Blake's Notebooks and is titled "Several Answered Questions". Quoted in *The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations* by Robert Andrews. New York, Columbia University Press, 1993. (487 pages)

Star Gazer

Follow them to glory,
the myriad, the odd,
observe the age-old passages,
the stony path they've trod.
See the shining faces,
the galaxies of stars,
that numberless look down
on us, still caring from afar.

Sense the vibrant, tender hearts
who often stole your tears,
 the shooting stars
who burnt their lives away,
to throw the torch of eternal life
into a cold and darkened day.

Praise the valiant pilgrims
who journeyed uphill all the way,
timeless truths to uphold,
the earthly fortunes gladly spent
in search of celestial gold.

But I love most the blessed souls,
who know the lures that love does hold,
its subtle snares, deceptive frauds,
but passed beyond them just the same
to become true lovers of God.