

# **SOME POEMS IN LATTER DAYS**

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**2022**

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## Foreword

The first poem in this collection recalls meeting Dominick Browne, Lord Mereworth, in London. As near as I can recall, that meeting took place in 2009. That meeting happened already 13 years ago, when I was 64 years old. (At this writing, I am now in my 78<sup>th</sup> year). These poems typically follow a pattern that appeared in my verse years ago. Here are descriptive poems, poems arising from incidents in everyday life, eulogies to friends who have passed on, and others still living, a great variety of “metaphysical” poems inspired by the spiritual quest, and the many faces of love—to name some of the more prominent themes.

Most of my poems have a reflective, often passive quality—but by no means uniformly—simply because my poetry is written in a state of deep reflection, when I attempt to capture in words the intensification of an experience that is rendered by a poem. While the experience itself may be singularly inspiring, capturing the experience in verse becomes an expression of the experience itself. This thought may sound like a truism, but it means, in other words, that poetry becomes, in Marshall McLuhan’s phrase, not only the medium but also the message. Without the poem, there can be no experience that can be more widely shared with others. These experiences can of course be rendered in prose, but the poem captures an economy of intense experience that cannot as easily be rendered in prose.

I have written other volumes of poetry that do not yet appear at my website [www.jack-mclean.com](http://www.jack-mclean.com). Hopefully, I can manage, despite the vicissitudes dealt to the mind and body in one’s senior years, to post these poems with the much appreciated help of my friend and electronic wizard, Jonah Winters.

J.A. McLean, Ottawa, December 8, 2022

**Dominick Browne Lord Mereworth**  
(Remembering our visit in London)

Dominick is a cool dude,  
a prince of a man  
who is never rude.

He dresses for dinner,  
and wears his tie to look his best,  
Bahá'u'lláh's man among the noblesse.

He calls the thing just as he means,  
spot on with teaching,  
but never with preaching.

Lord and commoner all at once,  
just the sort of man  
you would invite to lunch.

He and I are bosom pals,  
closest chums by association,  
one of the finest Bahá'ís in all the nation.

Dominick and I are friends for life,  
in perfect harmony *sans* trace of strife,  
a fountain of friendship ever flowing,  
in a heart of love that is ever glowing.

## **After the Snowstorm 2019**

The squirrels, those rats with tails,  
run along the powerlines,  
among the cypress trees,  
leap from branch to snowy branch,  
as if it's a summer's day.

## Snowstorm 2019

It could be a giant snowman  
resting on his side,  
or a reclining Buddha  
lying on my patio,  
the frosty hills and valleys of Switzerland.

The Buddha's silent voice  
seems to whisper:  
'Ah rest weary traveller.  
Here is peace for the thorn  
in your side.  
Look in wonder how my Hand  
has covered the land!'

## **Fake Flowers**

I've given in to fake flowers.  
At age 73 I've excused myself  
in a concession to convenience.

The form, the colour are there,  
but there is no fragrance.

They are never thirsty.  
But how can they be flowers  
if I dust them, rinse them  
every few months?

Jim Desson approached  
to inhale their perfume.  
Sorry Jim to have deceived you,  
your innocent expectation dashed.

But how can they be flowers?  
There is no fragrance....



## August Stillness

Stillness in the soul,  
not in the shade, is outside now,  
in the dying days of August,  
before the patchwork quilt  
of Autumn's changing colours,  
is slowly stitched upon these ancient hills.

Supreme stillness is hushed overall,  
in an even—ing, a level—ing,  
like the calm of Indian Summer  
returning in late October, hot not burning,  
when the wine-press that yields the drunken  
sweet liqueur, purple teardrops that gather  
the fruit of summer, looks back on its glory days,  
basks in its warmth.

Now all things are weighed  
in the balance, but not found wanting,  
measured out, scaled in equal proportions,  
peace dispensed despite...

Peace that will out,  
peace imposed by an unseen Hand  
or no hand, the Hand of Spirit or,  
the hand of the intrinsic condition.

The red cardinal's song  
penetrates the air,  
my eyes solaced as he flies,  
from branch to branch  
on the honey locust tree,  
the whistle high and human-like  
in tonic tones of strident clarity.

Whistle like a bird to call him,  
whistle like a bird to say:  
“I can speak like you little redbird.”

This stillness in and out,  
a tiny miracle that saves  
from chaos and destruction,  
the stench of pervasive sickness and death,  
our daily bread on this sorry planet,  
erased from memory in a golden moment  
as we cup to our lips a global goblet,  
that works the bliss of forgetfulness,  
if only for this passing hour...

## Phyllis in the Present Tense

(Dr. Phyllis Perrakis, d. March 10, 2018)

She leads us through forests, flowers,  
by paths and streams, imagines us  
as shining leaves on one great tree,  
bound each to each,  
as is root to trunk,  
as bud to bloom.

She knows that in these forests, flowers,  
paths and streams, we find ourselves reflected,  
as in the more perfect mirror of our forms and faces,  
entranced by the glancing beauty,  
the grace, the symmetry, the majestic circle  
in this whirling, cosmic dance, danced by dancers  
in trailing robes of purple, musical arrangement,  
but not just yet *la symphonie magnifique*  
because we can't quite hear the music.

We watch with her through long years of patience,  
the desire of her heart denied, when on a sudden sunrise,  
her countenance radiates again, the key turns in the lock,  
she escapes the room that held her close,  
the easy laughter bubbles up again.

We watch with her a half-a-time,  
when troubles come she works magnificent patience,  
complaining never, her soul borne up on the ascending wings  
of prayer by those who love her,  
the whispered entreaties to make her whole again.

And between times and before times,  
the scholar's ink flows, scripting *belles lettres*,  
with sound and sense that seeks to fathom  
the obdurate mystery of a broken humanity,  
the crooked and the straight of the wily human heart.

She knows that it can be healed  
with just the power of a magic Word,  
when mankind's shattered soul will yield to Love Herself  
and let hungry mouths be fed on cakes of mercy.

We follow close behind her,  
the weary hearts that long to follow,  
she, honoured on this pilgrimage,  
to reach the sacred precincts, the holy of holies,  
while others still tread a stony path.

These dark hours will be dispelled by the eternal sun,  
splendid in the glory of its spreading rays,  
that will light the path leading to her own,  
where she will sing a song celestial.

## The World is a Remembering and Forgetting

The world is a remembering and forgetting,  
or, when learning the most difficult of things:  
living in the Golden of Now.

If regret marks losses, the past brings nostalgia  
in its wake, like furrowed ground that yields  
dry rocks and stinging nettles,  
under the ploughman's cutting edge  
as he passes on his way.

Or, the world is aglow with sweet content  
to read again the silver script of bygone chapters writ,  
when we forget the plenteous pain  
that stalks us in its need to feed.  
That body we do well to starve!

Joy is man's lot, his birthright.  
The hidden world beyond,  
the ether of the higher realms,  
bestows joy only, the Master says.  
Its happy beams come down and through,  
if our crystal glass be pure and true.

Sorrow, sadness, shadow never enter  
this hallowèd ground.  
These strangers have no right to pass,  
no watchword can they speak,  
no sentinel confuse,  
nor power to persuade,  
no more than one lone warrior penetrates  
the castle wall, frenzied swordsman  
though he be, to strike wild blows

at empty air; no more than the blind  
hold a flickering flame to the fiery sun.

The joy we seek lies in what *we are*,  
inscribed within the finest strands  
of soul and sinew, as close as blood,  
bone and beating heart within  
our breast, in our breath,  
our very being.

These laurels can be worn a crown,  
but only in odd hours of our passing days.

In ages even, in time out of time,  
when every day is Spring,  
we drink at the fountain of eternal youth.

## The Part the Whole

We collect memories  
not mere, but many,  
necessary fragments to make  
us smile, recoil, regret, embrace,  
while the bird of time is on the wing,  
collect then recollect.

Time flies said the Romans,  
*--tempus fugit--*,  
but it was said so long ago.

Birds had wings as they do now,  
but no airplanes, missiles, laser beams,  
speed of light did not measure time,  
the bird not so swift as one of these.

A *seigneur* must recollect  
all these fragments in long, slow hours,  
both savory and sweet,  
*--and the sour, the life of:*  
where we've been, what done, left undone,  
who we've loved, thought we loved.

This life has almost spent the part,  
but then the whole to come,  
when awakening to the brightest dream,  
the past regrets shall be no more.

In the there of nowhere and everywhere,  
only awake to the Bliss of Forever,  
the Golden of Now,  
Glorious Reunion of all Souls,  
renounce the part, embrace the Whole.

## The McLeans of Duart and Elsewhere

(meditation on a dual-identity)

Gillean means “Servant of St. John.”

Gillean of the Battle-Axe, ancestor of the clan,  
was borne by his *máthair* late in the Middle-Ages.  
He became the overman.

No royal named me Knight of the Thistle,  
but I did grow down on my cheek,  
before the beardie came; nor was I made  
Laird of the Western Isles.  
This McLean of Mull had no pull!

Colonel Sir Fitzroy Maclean,  
26<sup>th</sup> chief of the clan,  
with the fortune he made,  
restored Duart Castle in 1912,  
for centuries long left to degrade,  
there on the rock where eagles fly,  
high in the sky, over the isle of Mull.

But I will settle for Bahá’í,  
if that title I may claim.  
One who bears the Greatest Name,  
cares not for blood or fame.

Now that the fortress is returned to the clan,  
our great chief Lachlan has called us home,  
from wherever on earth we may roam.

I’d be happy to greet and shake his hand.  
Wouldn’t it be lovely if they piped me in?



I'll come the once in regalia full,  
all for the showing, robed in splendour,  
bagpipes wailing, heart with pride swelling,  
love never failing.

Shall I wear the tartan red  
or more fitting the hunting green?

On those two colours I'm very keen.  
One Persian Herald once wore the green,  
while the Persian Prince donned red,  
the colour of blood, love, sacrifice and death.

While "Virtue Mine Honour,"  
the old standby, is a noble estate,  
most honourable and high,  
I'll stake my soul on the name BAHA'I.

## **The Consolations of Aging**

Growing old is not the best,  
Many things I could do with less,  
But one thing friends I must confess,  
Mornings I do like having not to dress.

## Life After Life

The blind priestess who doesn't like my religion asked:

"So what will you do in the next life?"

"Do?" I replied.

"Whatever the Lord of the worlds commands, I should think."

"But what will He command *you* to do?" she asked again.

"I only know that doing it will be my joy," said I in reply.

"Will there be *doing* there?" I asked the priestess.

Doing is done in space-time here. No time-space there.

Silence spoke in empty words, eloquent testimony from a psycho-ceramic.

"Teach, learn, study, praise, pray, save souls, dance in extasy,  
walk on clouds, ascend or descend on a sliver thread or a golden ray,  
gaze on crimson flowers, created by wounds of blood,  
watch them vibrate to an inner music,  
contemplate liquid sapphire, drain the bottomless wine-cup,  
recount the pilgrimage to the Persian Prince,  
commune with loved ones once lost in Never Never Land,  
the Land of Everywhere and Nowhere,  
there where all mourning shall cease."

"There, priestess, I will be writing no clincher lines.

No clincher lines are there, no last words.

Perpetual being only."

I said to the priestess now inflamed:

"I don't care about your tired, old story.

I only want to be with you if love can save your soul."

**Nine Tercets: Naw Ruz 176**  
(home because of illness)

A little flaw is often near  
to make the day a little drear  
and mar our magic moment

Shadows with the sunlight fall  
as yellow warblers trill their call  
black crows intrude with rakish caw

A lowly worm will creep and crawl  
along the earth 'neath soaring birds.  
A tiny man looks up in awe.

Does gentle rain from snow-white clouds  
to wash parched land descend?  
blacker billows pile high Adam's ale to send.

What broken heart can heal again  
from its sore wound  
were nothing there to mend?

We pause to find a way to see  
why our world when we are here  
be sliding-scale from dark to clear?

Nights are tinged with soft moonglow  
days are spent with friend and foe  
to augment our joy, it must be so.

Perfection's bliss cannot obtain  
if in this life we strive to gain  
to pilgrims all, their joy, their pain.

Days fly by. Then build the world anew.  
In that green garden, claim flowers fair  
of seeds once sown. To strive is not in vain.

## Toronto Then

What did it mean then  
to turn that corner  
down the hill  
to the right up Saskatoon  
wheel on by suburban homes  
the tree-lined streets  
turning green and tender  
this coming spring?

I watch the spot  
here from this corner  
now a café  
where I sip my tea  
survey it all again.

It meant the eager heart  
was coming home  
to the fair haven,  
place of rest and safety  
overlooking the ravine  
the creek flowing gently below  
where love's fond embrace  
would wrap you in its arms  
and say:

“Stay! You are home.  
Here you belong.  
You are ours. We are yours  
forever and a day.”

These places in the heart remain  
the true landscapes, skylscapes

seascapes, escapes,  
where you first tasted  
ease, prosperity, success  
the first great revelation,  
joy of spiritual discovery  
true joy on true joy.

It meant caring  
sharing the passion  
watching our numbers grow  
increase our communion  
in the days of our youth  
when troubles never came  
and sorrows were not nigh.

The days of our lives that followed  
burnished the callow youth  
in the baptism of fire,  
manhood burned to ashes  
all that was to leave us pensive.

Did we but know then  
the day of discovery  
was to rebuild Jerusalem  
stone on stone  
in our precious present moments  
could we but realize the weight of it all  
the chance to build the world anew.

## **Night Sounds in Lambasa, Fiji**

(For the friends in Evin Prison)

Three in the morning.

I lie awake listening to the howling dogs.  
Half-wild, they roam the side streets daylong,  
neither fearing nor threatening you, giving space,  
trotting by to find the next morsel left in the trash.

Once, on a hot afternoon, a pack watched me coming.  
Numbers made them brave. They stood their ground, menacing,  
fixed their gaze on me.  
I stooped and pick up two jagged stones, ready for a fight.  
Turning tail, they bolted with fright.  
They have known the sting of the stone on their flesh.

I turn on my mattress, wait for the barking frenzy to subside.  
The dog nearest seems to be standing below my window.  
There is a pause, a welcome momentary silence.  
Then, in the distance, another call and a bark.  
The howling starts again.  
On and on it goes for most of the night.  
Sleep comes in fits and starts.

The roosters join the fray.  
Aye karumba! It's one flew over the cuckoo's nest.  
Mad sounds everywhere—howling dogs,  
cocks crowing. All we need is the braying donkey  
to make the cacophony complete.  
I smile a little smile.

Before I slept, I listened to the mad shouts  
of the Pentecostal minister down the road,

reviving his congregation, and the incessant gospel choir,  
rocking on to the beat of the thumping heavy bass,  
then soothing, comforting, praising with Hallelulyahs,  
not just Sunday but every day till doomsday,  
the sound carried by double-decker speakers  
invading the neighbourhood with mega decibels,  
morning, afternoon and far into night.

Soon the tropical birds will sound the first note of morning.  
The muezzin will call the faithful to prayer at 5 a.m.

Even at this hour, cars rumble by on Ritova Street,  
kicking up dust, crunching stones, pinging tires with the tension.

I think of the Yaran in Evin prison,  
their silence, isolation, such things as I dare not contemplate.  
I fix my mind on them, join them in their prayers,  
in this world wide web of supplication,  
join my thoughts to theirs,  
to that love that no injustice can ever defeat,  
to that sustaining Spirit that will penetrate the thick walls of Evin.

In the darkness of night without sleep,  
breathing the dust, I remember them,  
sleeping here on the floor,  
bearing the strange noises in the night.

What pale discomfort can compare to their sacrifice,  
what small endurance can pay tribute to such nobility?



## **Meditation on Time and Grace in Latter Days**

This suspense of time is grace.  
The momentary hush of din that hurts our ears  
we greet with a grateful heart at rest,  
despite our knowing that motion is perpetual.

The mighty machine of time breaks its silence  
lurches to life again, gigantic wheels turning  
gears grinding, cogs revolve precisely in the tick-tock  
of a mechanical clock.

The giant cyclopes wakes to its own hunger  
seeking to devour its harvest of souls.

The bell tolls, its appointed hour sounds.  
Another loved one disappears beyond the veil,  
while our failing numbers leaves us stranded  
on this rocky beach, drenched by raging waves  
awaiting the beckoning call, the hour none puts back.  
The stalking fowler casts his net, traps a blithe unwary bird,  
its singing muted by a sudden silence.  
Who will be the last of friends to outlive all the rest?

These shattered fragments of our lives  
the blissful moments framed in the picture gallery  
frozen once in time, the myriad thoughtful faces  
know not how Love Herself raised up such a throng,  
a multitude of singers singing Love's exalted song.

Scholars, poets, music-makers, dancers, workers  
strive to leave a tiny trace of their life of days.  
Will we remember their shining faces?

In Kullu Shay when the many are restored to the One  
we will live again, gathered on the farthest shore  
when all earth's thirsty droplets—creeks, streams,  
torrents, running rivers will regain the Seven Seas.

There, east of Eden, myriad names we shall be,  
pure mirrors in the sun, when being and doing are one  
and there are no tomorrows to leave our deeds undone.

**A Man Named John**  
(John Rager, *Miraris Amicum*)

He walked the path of sorrow,  
He's known the path of love,  
Told the truth to sway the hearts,  
His mandate from above.

Now one more chapter's finally writ,  
The sign posts are all clear,  
An open road is beckoning him,  
Though loving hearts are near.

Our pioneer has made a plan,  
For north of Montreal,  
With Josh and Min, the grands are in,  
He's venturing his all.

For little ones to show the way,  
To make the world anew,  
In golden years to play his part,  
The workers are so few!

Ruefully we watch him part,  
To fulfill his noble plan,  
Knights, teachers, soldiers, heroes,  
Building Glory's caravan.

Prayers sustain him on his way,  
For brightest days ahead,  
With sheaves aplenty, harvest in,  
The banquet table spread.

**Udo in Signs and Tokens**  
(1926-2019)  
(Scholar, lawyer, music lover)

*Du lieber Doktor...*

You came to me in a dream,  
hidden nonetheless,  
but you were there,  
active sense of humour yet.

I spotted a pencil on the ground  
picked it up,  
then laughing out loud,  
held it high for all the world  
to see.

It was just a stub,  
the mere length of a thumb,  
but still as sharp  
as the very first word  
on a blank page,  
eraser still intact.

How much writing did you do  
over all your long days  
to wear that *Bleistift* away!

Then you handed me a bow.

You still hidden,  
behind many mysteries,  
concealed by a veil,  
just out of sight,  
until the appointed time.

It was an ancient wooden bow,  
well-worn, chestnut brown,  
had seen many battles.

I held it in my hands,  
that scarred, familiar bow,  
marked by wars aplenty,  
asked how many pounds of test.

You didn't answer.  
No need for word,  
your silence eloquent.

That bow had seen jousts,  
tournaments and contests,  
been passed down  
to many hands,  
back way back to primeval time.

This life's a roaring daylong battle,  
the fate of countless generations,  
fighting their way through the din.

Your message in signs and tokens.

Phaidon! Take thy bow!  
Waste your life in labour,  
do battle while smiling away,  
laughing away these passing days.

## **Meditation on an Egyptian Alabaster Vase**

Our love is a like an Egyptian alabaster vase sitting on an end table. Beautifully translucent, it reflects the light in all its purity. I watch it from a distance absorb the light, warm, silent, lovely and still. But I am like Wilbur's son, the child at the window pane, weeping as he watches the melting snowman, the child's heart so full of love and terror. I fear the vase might fall and break, for I know it to be fragile. Redressing myself, I remember to trust. I call to mind the words of St. John, the beloved disciple, that "perfect love casts out fear, for fear is torment." Anchored to her cell, Mother Julian of Norwich knew the human heart. She wrote that love and dread are partners. She knew...knew all too well that we fear the loss of that which we love, fear the terrible deprivation. To love is to have an open heart. To have an open heart is to be vulnerable. To be vulnerable is to know pain. But O Lord, to have an open heart is to wrestle with an angel. To wrestle with an angel will make you strong enough to conquer haunting demons, scatter lingering specters in the mind, finally dispel the illusion of evil, the curse that became a blessing, blessed to enter the magic realm of serenity and peace.

## **Bank and Hopewell**

I am thinking of Bank and Hopewell  
in the dead of winter.

It was summer.  
I was waiting for you  
on the corner.

You did not love me then.

It is still summer.  
It will always be summer with you.

## Hidden Treasure

God said He was a hidden treasure  
who wanted to be known.

You were a hidden treasure  
waiting to be known.

A precious gem lies buried  
in the earth.

It ignores its own value,  
but I discovered you before the gold rush.



## Why Now?

This love seven decades on.

One answer or many?

So little time left to us...

O but live well in the Golden of Now  
and there will be eternity.

Listen to these wedding bells  
ringing out in the belfry of love,  
over the land of heart's desire,  
in the country of mystery,  
the silver bells that sound  
the song announcing  
the fountain of eternal youth.

## **They Do Not Know**

They do not know,  
cannot know what we share.

Vaunting would be vain  
so I refrain.

A love so holy, so profane,  
all of it placed at Glory's feet.

Friends will discover this love  
when the final words are spoken.

## The Village Nuptials

A small band of revelers  
gathers down the village hill  
on the bank of the river.

The ancient dwellings  
nestled above, look down,  
lend a round of comfort  
to the celebration.

Prayers are said, hymns are sung,  
but no black-robed priest presides.

As young lovers exchange  
rings and solemn vows,  
a celebrant steps forward.

One lady, dignified in middle-years,  
beaming a radiant smile,  
steps near man and wife.

No need for words.  
There in the sacred silence,  
raising her right arm,  
she points to the rising sun.

## When the Rains of September

When the rains of September beat at your door  
Indian summer still promises more.

When the winds of October begin to blow  
they herald the coming of winter snow.

While time yet remains in fields shorn of hay  
harvest the crop lest the little lambs stray.

Ere frosty November leaves you forlorn  
stay thy small grief, yes, lay it away  
and smile in the sun of the autumn morn.

## I am a Seeker Seeking Seekers

I am a seeker seeking seekers in cafés  
while Kaffee Klatschers read cell phones  
laptop computers, tablets in the electronics  
of sublime communication.

I am in the here of now, gone moments later  
sitting among indistinct human voices  
that utter snippets of nothing.  
Yet for all my disdain I hear *vox populi vox dei*.

But in the land of there will that ceaseless  
burning search for other souls be there,  
there *sans* body and the searching mind  
that depends upon the brain?

Will there still be the hide-and-go-seek  
of seeking other souls to stay their search  
tell them they need hunger and thirst no more?

Or will seekers still be found from every land  
among every bud and flower  
with each refrain of enchanting music  
in the glance of the fair stranger's face  
when eyes first meet in the loving look  
of the companions of the Ancient of Days?

## Covid-19 Moment Easy

To sit in the early morning  
spinning quiet hours  
with a cup and a book  
taste on the tongue.

Reading a pretty poem  
to think on the greats—  
mighty men and wondrous women  
is to know a peace serene,  
a pleasure almost still....

Alone yet standing  
with the chosen one by your side,  
the one, the only one you've ever loved  
in that one and only way.

For—  
resting with a cup and book  
in the small hours of the darkened dawn  
as misty rain descends like holy revelation,  
silent at the statue of a plaster saint.

The liquid veil that drops  
from moist grey skies,  
when the idle talk of women and men  
and commerce sexual does not find me.

Neither—  
the doubts, the mind perplexed  
by the paradox of relations,  
the circles, setbacks, quarrels,  
questions, wonderments.

All these things set aside  
by the cup, the book,  
the taste on the tongue,  
and the falling rain  
just beyond my window pane.

Wrapt in slumber  
with the portrait and pen,  
just now, blest  
by the book, the cup,  
as the heart finds rest.

## **The Wedding in St. Patrick's Church** (to N.H.T.)

Niels stood up to read that day,  
the prayer in the Roman Church,  
under the broad white ceiling  
of its canopy dome,  
while in the alcoves the painted saints  
staid, ensconced, smiled their plaster smiles  
of mild beatitude.

An experience rare, not of sight  
but of sound, the tell-tale sign  
of perception transformed,  
declared by the sound of his voice.

This man courteous, self-effaced,  
almost diffident, read the holy verses  
one by one. Each line articulated spirit,  
each word a word of power.

Authority marked the inflections  
of that voice speaking from the pulpit,  
accents to awaken, to make alert,  
a very singular thing being born  
in the alchemical elixir,  
the honey that sweetens,  
balm to assuage the wound.

Niels reads and the words ring out!

The sounds are steel bullets that explode  
in your heart. Niels is the new man,  
priest beyond priest, tower of strength,



index of God's humanity,  
divinity that we all are.

What I heard that day—  
the lion's roar,  
warrior engaged in mighty battle,  
while we the timid creatures  
shied away in the thicket,  
fell silent with the thunder,  
listened with ears amazed.

## In Sleep's Shadows

Why am I as sad  
To turn my steps to bed,  
Instead of being glad  
To rest my weary head?

What shadows lie beneath  
The gloom I cannot see,  
Why do I halt and pause  
From labour's tasks to flee?

Why do nocturne regrets  
Mar daylight's happy hours,  
Wary to embrace the rest  
In Morphe's leafy bowers?

The question beckons on  
This mystery to disclose,  
Do these shades of night  
Foretell my last repose?

## Fragments on the Wing

Bleeding hearts last but a day.  
July has flown; they've had their say.

The Bobolink, its tumbling tune of glee,  
feisty Red Winged Blackbird perched on a reed,  
plump breasted Killdeer with its plaintive cry  
have all passed by.

“Kill deer! Kill deer! Kill deer!” the plover says.  
“My little ones are near. Kill me instead!”

A lad I listened then  
with heart astir, alert,  
quivering with the quiet joy  
of innocence's naïve child.

It was a spot sublime  
by Martin's grove, under spreading trees,  
in expansive summer fields that had no end.

They were not mine those precincts pastoral,  
but unknowing I did walk and stop,  
watched and waited, then passed them by.

The law of compensation now applies  
to these three score years and ten.

I'm past my prime,  
but returns are not diminished:  
They are as they once were,  
stored up in treasuries on high,  
richer far to taste than

the doubter's pie-in-sky  
when we die.

We travel down the road  
that has no bend.  
The sacred shrine's in sight  
at journey's end.

Golden days are past.  
The gold my hands once held  
is not the gold of now.

I mourn them not today.  
The future's bright and blessed.

## Kafka Sitting on a Cloud

A pall has settled on the land.  
Ancient voices out of time,  
whispered oracles tell of  
plague, pestilence, vengeance, visitation,  
voices speaking out of the passing wind.

When India was Vedic,  
the she-wolf suckling the twins,  
when Greece was seeding colonies,  
On the eve of destruction  
Hosea foretold the fall of Samaria:  
“Because you have sown the wind,  
you shall reap the whirlwind,” he cried.

Kafka sitting on a cloud laughs,  
then smiles gently. “I told you so.  
I showed you it would happen.”

In the 1930’s a little child warned  
of a “strangely disordered world.”  
The one we have inherited is the same one  
we have made.

As I drive by the Experimental Farm  
the land looks strong.  
Patchwork colours in fields of  
barley, corn, oats and wheat shimmer  
in the August sun.

Babes-in-arms, adolescents, children, cyclists,  
women, men, the healthy aged stroll down the lanes,  
walking freely in the open air...

**MASKED!**

Heaven’s gone wrong.  
Earth sings a mournful song.

## How We Die

Some die electrocuted,  
others poisoned, still others  
shot in the back,  
or leave us by degrees.

A few walk through the Fall,  
as mellow as Autumn days.  
Their hearts have accepted  
what cannot be put back.

I think of the gentle crowd  
of witnessed gone before me,  
just beyond the veil.

I yearn for their presence,  
that joyous reunion...

## Arabica

I saw you in a coffee cup  
on a tiny point of light,  
there on the horizon  
where the Arabica  
mellowed in milk,  
meets the fired clay.

Shining steadfast  
as the Star of Bethlehem.  
guiding the Magi  
to the Saviour's birth.

They learned Zoroaster's light  
visioned in the heavens,  
followed the star East to West,  
to where He lay,  
the One born King of the Jews.

My tiny point of light became  
a shining star, for where you are  
"as above so below,"  
Hermes knew it long ago.

## **Moira's Promise**

The Three Fates are weaving their tapestry now.

Moira holds the thread of life.

Our lot has been drawn.

She's all dolled up, grinning at us:

"Here," she says. "Take this golden goblet.

Once you've drained this bitter cup,

a gracious god will show his comely face.

Mankind's long return to grace

cannot be purchased in the market place."



## No Bird Song This November 9<sup>th</sup>

A cardinal in a cypress tree  
blood orange as a sunset  
autumn harvest to dispel ennui.

No haunting strain  
did charm the air.  
I heard no tune,  
no song to sing.  
The bird escaped  
on the flit of a wing.

I looked again  
perhaps to find  
some Holy Presence  
lingering there.

I fixed my gaze  
but there was none,  
the cherished vision  
all undone.

The sight the sound  
did not align,  
the bird itself  
my only sign.

## The Short of It

I seek  
no clever conversation  
quick-silver presence yes  
like liquid Chinese bronze  
or porcelain  
singularly staid  
light in the eyes  
smiles 'n chuckles  
deep devotion  
a prayer or two  
time to while away  
sleepy hours with you.

There ain't no more.  
But this will be enough  
    my dears  
to still a querulous heart  
and calm its fears.

## **The Passing of JD**

The choice is mine.  
What shall I say?  
“I’m so sad Jim  
you’re not still here.  
Your passing by was  
but a day.”

Or better yet  
to hear it said:  
“I’m so glad Jim  
you passed our way.”

## Just like a Child

You were talking  
on the phone  
your back turned  
when I opened  
the kitchen cupboard door  
quickly unscrewed the lid  
plunged my finger into  
the almond butter (twice)  
furtively put it in my mouth  
hoping that you wouldn't glance  
my way and catch me in the act.

Served me right  
that three oily drops splashed  
on the front  
of my hunter green sweater  
those drops my punishment  
for horrors known and unknown.

I didn't tell. I couldn't...

## Snowflakes and Gardens

Once there wasn't  
now there is  
a silent snowfall  
mystery coming down.

Tell me if you can  
how many snowflakes  
are falling  
down down down  
down from the clouds  
of heaven.

We are snowflakes too  
each a different design.  
How many are we?  
Compute the possibilities.

The multi-billions are we  
drifting along in the air  
of planet earth  
blowing where we will.

With snowflakes we can make  
snow babies, snow men, snow women  
sparkling white as light,  
snow people that will melt  
in the spring sunshine.

If we make haste  
we can build a world  
snow white, designs so bright  
reflecting light as to make  
the world aglow.

Snow flakes warm to touch  
resist the sun's hot rays  
till springtime comes  
and summer births  
around our earth  
the paradise to be.

## Happy New Year 2021

What would it be  
at the end of the year  
not to remember  
those who are dear?

A word just might reach them  
this word from afar  
to bless them and keep them  
as safe as the stars.

All through the year  
that lies just ahead  
may your hearts know the peace  
that quells fear and dread.

With a surplus of love  
and an excess of joy  
I send New Year's greetings  
for your hearts to enjoy.

## A Poem is a Metaphysical Thing

The squirrels are always moving  
in the trees. They are not still for long.  
The birds forage for easy food  
at my feeder, then rest in the cedar trees  
along the back fence.

The scene calls up “the emperor of ice cream.”

What does it mean to be  
the emperor of ice cream?  
To have nothing really?  
To be a rich business man?  
To get the super-duper cone  
you wanted daddy to buy you  
at the country fair?  
Maybe he was at a carnival.

When language can be so ambiguous,  
there you have a poem,  
or when “seem” and “cream” rhyme,  
otherwise the lines make poetic philosophy,  
because Plato philosophized in verse.

When intellect and imagination,  
the mistress of us all, embraces the mind  
in the supreme seduction,  
words become birds: then you have a poem.

Or you have poetic metaphysics  
because your name is Wallace Stevens,  
and your poems are Zen koans,  
when the imagination betrays  
its intellectual lover, even when



you try with all your might  
to give her just what she wants.

A poem is a step into the infinite,  
but it is never quite there,  
never really anywhere,  
no closer than when it started,  
never just anything,  
even when it seems finished, perfect,  
and everyone applauds.

No, a poem is a metaphysical thing,  
a verbal architect that builds the Brooklyn bridge,  
or erects a building to scrape the sky,  
composes a baroque symphony,  
sculpts in stone like Rodin,  
only to see it evaporate  
when you're no longer looking.

Then it's gone, when the words  
dry up on the page and you stare  
at the blank white screen  
when the electronic pulse  
beats its drum no more.  
No more heart beats.

It is quite the thing,  
the line that is never finished,  
leaving us with a paradox,  
blissful but unsatisfied,  
till we keep striving again and again,  
like the carnival man who barks out loud:  
"Step right this way folks!"  
"Everybody's a winner. Only a dollar a toss!"

Just like the emperor of ice cream.

## The Valley of Content

Brightly coloured things that ring,  
crystal waters murmur melodies  
as they sing.

The spring in the step  
that was not there yesterday,  
silver bells pealing zeal.

The return to wonder  
and the things of youth,  
pause in the learning  
hard lessons of truth.

Lady Wisdom beckons  
in her light, veiled attire;  
she directs me to the moon.

In the silent vision  
from the time of when,  
she raises her right arm,  
points an urgent finger heavenward.

I hear her say  
--yet wordless is her mouth--  
“To the moon!”  
“I direct you to the moon!”

## The Last Vestiges of Winter

March 25<sup>th</sup>.

Vague rumblings in the sky  
before midnight.

Distracted, I barely notice,  
soon forgetting.

At past twelve.  
I stand at the window.

In the light  
of the outside lamp  
a gentle downpour  
casts a lustrous sheen  
on rebel patches of snow,  
remnant fingers of ice,  
clinging to the breast  
of the still frozen land.

I open the window a crack,  
lower the blind,  
draw the curtains,  
reflect in the still  
of the night  
on the din of the day.

Perhaps this falling rain  
is mercy from heaven,  
a cipher to wash away  
these icicles in the heart,  
cold slivers of resentment  
echoes of the soul's past pain.

A cipher from Sancta Sophia  
to forgive, forget, begin again,  
let this copious rain melt  
the cryptic crystals that exile us  
to never-never-land.

Bountiful flood to melt  
the last vestiges  
of a discordant winter.

To bind each to each  
and so dispel  
our common grief,  
to water the lilies  
in the valley,  
that bloom again in spring.

## Covid Dialog with Self in a Day in the Life

“It belongs to the city,” I said  
to her, but did I say it in a dream  
or in the other altered reality?

My frail blue forget-me-nots  
will soon be pushing their way up  
in my garden patch behind the patio,  
but the earth is so poor.  
I really should add some black topsoil.

Now why did she have to go and say that?  
I thought we were only friends.  
Complications...What is she thinking?  
I am almost 76 years old!  
But Covid times are desperate times!

And why doesn't he learn to be gentler  
after all these years?  
Why does everything have to be so hard?  
Does it always have to be a confrontation,  
contradiction or a lesson? It seems  
some people cannot engage without conflict.

I'm heading for the hills!  
Covid is already hunkering us down.  
Why should I hunker myself down even more?

Old Laura Davis in Toronto  
did say it was “time to go into the picture”  
at the end of her days.  
It seems there is a movement  
toward the center as we age—

to the central core, the virginal point  
that is the soul.

Yes, the soul is the pure point,  
the God within. It is the supreme mystery  
where only sacred words are spoken.

My inflamed, neuropathic lobster feet!  
I never get a break except when I sleep!  
But I force myself to walk.

Those newly translated prayers of 'Abdu'l-Baha  
are magnificent, encouraging, uplifting.  
He must have foreseen this dire affliction.

I am tired of fighting the little birdies.  
They can just make their nest  
in the rafters above the patio.  
Let nature take its course.  
Besides, I shouldn't be climbing a step-ladder  
anymore to hang my clothes on the lines up there.  
Let them have their space and do their natural thing.  
Mother Nature has willed it so.  
I find small moments of content to see them  
flitting back-and-forth with little bits of grass  
in the beaks to build their nest.  
If they finish their task, soon the tiny birds  
will be chirping in the nest above my head,  
another generation of avian creatures  
starting on its journey.  
But then there will be the sweeping up  
and cleaning the bird droppings. Ha!

Fareed Zakaria is a brilliant mind.  
He has such a comprehensive grasp  
of global affairs.  
Fundamentally he's an optimist.  
He still believes in the American Dream.  
It's amusing that he still calls himself  
"an immigrant." He is accepted as a 100 percent  
American by other Americans.  
But his is a nice touch of humble, self-deprecation.  
I wonder if he has any relationship with his Islamic origins?  
He says that Covid will foster human ingenuity,  
the digital economy will make some richer,  
others poorer. I think he's right had it not been  
for Covid, the terrible injustice of police killings  
with impunity and Black Lives Matter  
would never have exploded onto the world stage,  
even though it has been simmering for years.

Oh here comes a dark-eyed Junco flying in  
to capture a white seed at my bird feeder.  
Its tiny claws grasp the mesh, then it pecks  
through the screen. It takes only moments  
and it flies off to rest in the cedar trees  
along the back fence.

Well I'm behind the time.  
Enough musing.  
Rushing off now to another task.

I hear Carl Sandburg's voice  
in *The People, Yes*:  
"Where to? What next?"

## The Rescue

Hope fades fast  
within her breast,  
the long slow hours  
of anxious waiting,  
heart still pounding,  
breath abating.

The ladder's raised,  
the man above  
extends his arms,  
her loss turns into gain,  
a look, a leap, a gentle cry  
and kitty's home again!



## Father Before the Mirror

Today father I am remembering  
the way you combed your hair.  
Not that you had much hair on top;  
a thin brown slick of it on your crown.

You stood before the mirror,  
after taking a determined stance,  
facing yourself squarely,  
planting your feet,  
as if performing a ritual.

You cleared your throat.  
Then you passed your small  
black pocket comb through your hair  
a few times, and it was done.

And I, your adoring child,  
stood below, gazing up at you,  
the tall, strong man in front of  
the medicine cabinet.

So late on in my years now,  
I am wondering why today  
I am remembering you, father,  
combing your hair...

## Truth Be Told

I do not cling to passing life,  
It rather clings to me.  
No praise of this life do I give,  
As long as I'm not free.

The Supreme Servant clearly said,  
This body's just a cage,  
And the soul a little bird,  
I will never disavow Abha's holy sage.

Yes, it's true I still regale,  
In a social game or two,  
Especially chatting face-to-face,  
With Jim, Heather and Lou.

At this golden glow in time,  
I yield all woe and sin,  
These sorrows soon forgotten,  
When we become as kin.

Although you may be weary,  
By long, slow hours tried,  
As the creeping years wear on,  
Life offers still this prize.

Kiss the joy when you may find it,  
In large crowds or apart,  
The bliss that warms your cockles,  
Is found from heart-to-heart.

**Brent John Duchesne**  
(1952-2022)

From an early age,  
such a love of cars—  
anything mechanical  
to see the work of gear on gear,  
how cog fits into cog,  
to make classic cars  
shine again,  
like the body of a bathing beauty.

The love of one  
whose beating heart  
has a passion  
for the joy of living,  
despite the heavy losses  
that could not hold him back.

Speed and thrills:  
hot rods, classic cars,  
drag-racing down the street  
with buddy Dennis Gagnon.

Later on the discovery of cycling  
and fat-biking on winter trails.

But even cars he sometimes  
left behind to track the beauties  
of Larose Forest with Roland and Sue.

His height the measure of his heart,  
a giant of a man who spread  
joy and laughter to children,

babes-in-arms, adults in shopping malls,  
grocery line-ups, to colleagues,  
friends and family.

The essence of love to Sylvie,  
so tender and fun-loving,  
with the odd raunchy joke  
to make her smile.

But some of us knew somehow  
that Brent was more than  
these oh-so-human-things.

For in that bear-like chest,  
those sheltering arms  
that hugged her close,  
like the limbs of a stately tree,  
a nobility of soul,  
kindness that could not refuse  
service to a friend  
even at the cost of life.

And perhaps a hidden longing  
to travel in a beauty classic car  
at the speed of light.

## The Parting (for Sylvie)

The tears on your cheeks  
Were as liquid jewels,  
diamonds melted  
on the weeping face  
made holy now by grief,  
a face as pure and snowy white  
as camphor.

My arms reached out  
to comfort you,  
arms among many.

But we stood alone,  
quite alone,  
in the gathering crowd,  
alone, though legions  
were assembled there.

Time ceased,  
empty words gone mute  
in such a scared space.

We remained two souls  
united as one heart,  
dissolved in the searing flame  
of a loss unlike all others.

Silent you were,  
as it should be.  
Others spoke for you  
that day.

But at the graveside,  
above the hollowed earth,  
you stood and spoke  
with dignity and grace,  
words simple, strong and true,  
to say the gift of love still means  
love, despite the Mighty Hand  
that spirited him away.

And on your lips,  
a Magic Name was heard,  
to plant a seed,  
and let it bloom,  
in other hearts,  
that life may live  
and vanquish death.

**Phoebe Anne Lemmon**  
(1928-2019)

Let it be said  
she loved soapy water,  
yes, doing dishes after lunch or supper.

Standing at the sink,  
she would wash and ponder,  
if not engaged in conversation.

And in one room, a quiet corner,  
a shrine where she might pray  
mornings, find strength  
for the coming day.

Crowned Queen of the Harvest,  
every Fall, sharing the throne  
with her King William, the stately two,  
sitting near the great black cauldrons  
of boiling corn.

She loved and served in a house  
on the hill, where a welcome guest  
might wander back to the roaring stream  
that fell below and feel the dashing spray.

She was for us a strong pillar,  
a safe haven for wandering barks  
the voyageurs who went astray.

She knew the way.

It was the way of love and reason,  
the path long tried and true,  
conforming to the wisdom of the Law.

Loving wife and mother, teacher,  
she had known losses,  
but patience was her name,  
her home a lighthouse for one neighbor  
across the way who found illumination  
in the brightly beams she cast.

Slowly she walked with dignity and grace,  
her piety still showed a laughing face,  
a merry heart, a warm embrace.

Transmuted now by the divine Elixir  
to become her soul's most golden aspiration,  
every heart's desire won at last.



## Awakening

Vapors trailing visions  
from nocturnal worlds  
dispel the stygian gloom.

The upraised Flag of Peace  
waves high above  
green acres of the mind,  
stills discordant voices  
once heard at McLean house;  
now an Appomattox of carols  
upraised, hosannas, anthems of praise.

The sun signals break-of-day.  
Spirit guides flesh and blood  
the weary soul in molded clay.

Palettes of light splash colors  
reflect 'the bright glass of the heart,'  
while peace pervades all round  
echoes silently, bereft of sound.