

**Two Poems from: "Guide to the Perplexed"****III Lebanon**

One more place I cannot go  
without the prospect of a stray bullet  
or the loud blast in a crowded cafe  
where I might lie twisted  
and knowing there is no justice  
under heaven's roof, only  
sunlight and dying.

But I fantasize: a fortunate man  
imagining distant horrors  
at my desk. The radio  
reports the rising cost of luxuries,  
strange agonies in foreign lands,  
inertia governing our works and days. Why  
do I feel like prey in a chaotic hunt?

I live in a farmhouse in Nova Scotia, the old  
Acadian dykes of Grand Pre to the east  
out my window and Lebanon invisible beyond.  
These green winding barriers against the Fundy tides  
remind me of the age of faith. And promises  
broken. Cameras did not exist to document  
British troops rounding up French habitants,  
families crammed into boats or fleeing  
deep into the wilderness; there were no taped  
interviews with officials, explaining, one hundred  
years later, the need to repatriate Acadians  
to repair the dykes. Old news, trite  
as poets in the archives gleaning  
the sadness of the dead, their scattered  
seed, voices lost under sand or snow.  
As a child in school, it seemed so simple: textbooks  
mapped the fertile crossroads of the world,  
strategic ports, conflicts inescapable,  
yet far away, curious as mummy skulls.  
We were so blessed, laughing behind history's back.  
Now in the east, the night sky begins to glow.

— *Richard Lemm*

from: "Guide To The Perplexed"

**VI An Israeli Soldier Finds His Brother**

Again there is war  
and again we fight with our own shadow.  
What can I despise and kill  
but my own fears  
projected on a stranger's window.  
Yesterday there were bells  
calling my neighbors to a feast;  
now we are full and the ringing beckons  
unexpected tribes to our door  
speaking in the homeless voice of our past,  
calling on heaven.

Their men lie face down on the floor,  
bowing to the god of our guns,  
whispering revenge to the dust.  
We are to teach them silence, surrender.  
But my heart beats in their breasts,  
we suffer from the same sins.  
Strict orders from our commander  
forbid us to know the enemy  
except as a senseless  
terror bent on our destruction.  
Outside, children cry, and women  
plead in a foreign tongue, but the meaning  
obliterates creeds,  
hangs in the air like an omen.

When we herd them back to their camps  
we shut away our unknown selves.  
Hide from our unfinished birth. This man  
I stop and search, in his eyes are lamps  
that might illuminate my secret wells:  
hand-in-hand we could reach  
inside each other, touch our worth.  
On the surface, where the death-dance rules,  
we are victim, oppressor: deny  
each other's pain, and prayers  
that the Earth will hold us  
like a crown its jewels.

His papers in order, I can  
let him go. Or break him open  
tenderly, and taste the strangely familiar  
fruit of his life, and his wonder.  
Dark rooms inside me would grow brighter.  
And what if I take him home,  
call him by his real name,  
praise the Creator we both adore  
and hold him under the sky's vast dome?

Teach me your music for the Psalms,  
your vision of the far shore.  
Let us learn each other's words  
for love and water.  
We have the same tears.  
Inside us there are flocks of birds  
nesting together.  
At last, I share  
everything, everywhere is the holy land.

— *Richard Lemm*