



This Great Unknowing: Last Poems

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Few poets have possessed so great a gift or so great a body of work—when she died at 74, she had been a published poet for more than half a century. The poems themselves shine with the artistry of a writer at the height of her powers.

This Great Unknowing: Last Poems Details

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Author : Denise Levertov

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From Reader Review This Great Unknowing: Last Poems for online ebook

Bill Keefe says

I have read and reread and, yes, read again this wonderful book of poems, seeing much, learning more.
Highly recommend

Larry Smith says

Larry Smith This book coming in the last years of Denise Levertov's life is a real treasure. Her work and life are one here in poems of deep yet clear meaning and texture. No one I can think of writes such smooth vivid lines in a flowing yet reflective style. I guess I would call these deeply reflective poems that do not speak more than what is there and how it is help in some quiet significance by the poet. Poem after poem rings true in the stillness of meditation...He last poem "Awake" his her listening "I found the vine leaves/ speaking among themselves in abundant/ whispers."

Sarah says

The most essential book of poetry I own.

Fergus says

My friend Allan got me started in my post-retirement penchant for modern poetry.

He was my dorm roommate in our Freshman year at the university we chose to attend. And our high school marks had been high enough to attend many of the good ones.

I had wanted to study English lit in Toronto, because Northrop Frye, Robertson Davies and Marshall McLuhan were all at that English Department. But that was the very best option, and, scholastically, I wasn't!

I was always an unscholarly second best. But Allan was a good, popular student with great marks. I guess his family couldn't afford Toronto.

So Allan and I studied English together here, at the good but small-town university we came to love.

He raved about modern poetry, particularly Pound. And it was his emailed comments to me nearly 40 years later that told me I needed to branch out in my reading of it!

And when I discovered Levertov's later works soon after, I shared my bargain finds with him.

Denise Levertov - better known to us in our university years as an outspoken opponent of the Vietnam War,

later turned her sights inward - and upward, to the Almighty, converting late in life.

Her late poetry was made up primarily of meditative, sharp-eyed, finely-cut diamonds of pure poetry. Her early death took us all by surprise.

God bless you, Ms Levertov, and may He rest you in His Peace.

And you too, Allan, old friend.

You both gave this world so very much in your too-short lives, and always faced the truth with unequivocal bravery.

And Allan, I'm glad I was able to show you this amazing work before you left us.

We didn't talk at any length of the various later volumes of her poetry that I was able to send you before your final hospitalization - as the wintry weather set in, in 2017.

But your silent waiting for the end told me, the day I said goodbye, that you probably understood her better than I ever could.

For this, too, was to be Ms Levertov's final book.

It was her own private view of an approaching Finality that she was moving toward, in her tentative, gentle manner, in the magical turns of her verse, as if knowing already what awesome answers it would give her now-simplified soul to all her questioning - the evocative questioning that informs the internal verbal fibre of all her late poetry!

But her miraculous way with a perfected poetic language and meter proves we can find in it one of the rarest literary lights of twentieth century American poetry.

Christina "6 word reviewer" Lake says

Pockets of exquisiteness, like "Ancient Stairway."

Ancient stairway

Footsteps like water hollow
the broad curves of stone
ascending, descending
century by century.
Who can say if the last
to climb these stairs
will be journeying
downward or upward?

Andrea says

I bought this book because it has one of my favorite poems that I use for teaching the shape and internal logic of poetry, "A Clearing," which is also just a fantastic poem that my students resonate with:

What lies at the end of enticing
country driveways, curving
off among trees? Often only
a car graveyard, a house-trailer,
a trashy bungalow. But this one,
for once, brings you
through the shade of its green tunnel
to a paradise of cedars,
of lawns mown but not too closely,
of iris, moss, fern, rivers of stone rounded
by sea or stream,
of a wooden unassertive large-windowed house.
The big trees enclose
an expanse of sky, trees and sky
together protect the clearing.
One is sheltered here
from the assaultive world
as if escaped from it, and yet
once arrived, is given (oneself
and others being a part of that world)
a generous welcome.
It's paradise
as a paradigm for how
to live on earth,
how to be private and open
quiet and richly eloquent.
Everything man-made here
was truly made by the hands
of those who live here, of those
who live with what they have made.
It took time, and is growing still
because it's alive.
It is paradise, and paradise
is a kind of poem; it has
a poem's characteristics:
inspiration; starting with the given;
unexpected harmonies; revelations.
It's rare among
the worlds one finds
at the end of enticing driveways.

But I didn't even notice that the book included the tag "Last Poems," until I read the afterward by the editors about how these were her last poems, and about Levertov's writing process, and how they knew these were finished poems.

This book is filled with so much great poetry, so much of it focused on the outside world, but also looking deep within, and looking toward God. There are many poems about a mountain, that appears to be a mountain she saw often, out her front door. In one great poem of personification, "Noblesse Oblige," she writes of the mountain:

. . . this ceremonious
baring of snowy breast as if
its arms were thrown wide, is not
an attempt at intimacy.

And then she continues with a delightful observation of small daisies opening, "Each one a form of laughter." And straight from that frivolity, ends with:

The mountain graciously continues
its measured self-disclosure.

Abbi Dion says

I could read this book a thousand times. Beautiful.
It looked at me, I looked
back, delight
filled me as if
I, not the flower,
were a flower and were brimful of rain.
And there was endlessness.
Perhaps through a lifetime what I've desired
has always been to return
to that endless giving and receiving, the wholeness
of that attention,
that one-in-a-lifetime
secret communion.

Denise Levertov, from "First Love"

Peycho Kanev says

PATIENCE

What patience a landscape has, like an old horse,
head down in its field.
Grey days,
air and fine rain cling, become one, hovering till at last,
languidly, rain relinquishes that embrace, consents
to fall. What patience a hill, a plain,
a band of woodland holding still, have, and the slow falling
of grey rain... Is it blind faith? Is it
merely a way to deeply rest? Is the horse
only resigned, or has it
some desirable knowledge, an enclosed meadow
quite other than its sodden field,
which patience is the key to? Has it already,
within itself, entered that sunwarmed shelter?

THE POODLE PALACE

I never pass the Poodle Palace
with its barber pole in the shape
of a striped beribboned bone and the sign:
Specializing in Large and Matted Dogs,
without remembering the bitter wonder
of the taxi-driver from somewhere in India
who asked me,
'What is that, Poodle Palace?
What does it mean?'-and when I told him,
laughed, and for blocks,
laughed intermittently, a laughter
dry as fissured earth,
angry and sharp as the ineradicable
knowledge of chronic famine,
of human lives given to destitution
from birth to death. A laugh
in which the stench of ordure
simmered, round which a fog of flies
hovered, a laugh laughed to himself,
whether in despair or hatred, and not
as a form of address: he was indifferent
to whether I heard it or not.

SWIFT MONTH

The spirit of each day passes, head down
under the wind, arms folded.
Ambiguous brothers of those envisioned
'daughters of Time,' proffering neither
gifts nor scorn, their hands
grip elbows, hidden in wide sleeves
of shadow-colored caftans. Day after day
and none lagging, the pace of their stride
not hurried, yet swift, too swift.

metaphor says

Memory demands so much,
it wants every fiber
told and retold.
It gives and gives
but for a price, making you
risk drudgery, lapse
into document, treacheries
of glaring noon and a slow march.
Leaf never before
seen or envisioned, flying spider

of rose-red autumn, playing
a lone current of undecided wind,
lift me with you, take me
off this ground of memory that clings
to my feet like thick clay,
exacting gratitude for gifts and gifts.
Take me flying before
you vanish, leaf, before
I have time to remember you,
intent instead on being
in the midst of that flight,
of those unforeseeable words.

Jim says

Denise Levertov (1923-1997) was one of the finest American poets of the 20th Century.

Leslie says

Perhaps 3½ stars. I really liked a few poems in this posthumous collection and didn't dislike any of them. However, most of the poems didn't make any strong emotional connection with me. I'm curious now to see how some of her earlier work strikes me.

Dianne says

Read it. "A Clearing" on p. 54 captures the spirit of where I live. "Once Only" on p. 46 is a hard lesson for me about the 'once only' things in our lives.

Nathan says

Really wonderful and beautifully composed nature poems and musings on spiritual matters. Some of these really blew me away, such as "From Below", but the large majority of these, while very enjoyable did not leave me with a strong reaction.

Stephen Lake says

Some absolute gems amidst a collection of final unpublished poems, organized chronologically.

Carol Peters says

a volume composed by editors after her death, poems of mixed quality, the best are great

<http://carolpeters2013.blogspot.com/2...>
