



CRITICISM

VOLUME

185

Poetry Criticism

*Criticism of the Works
of the Most Significant and Widely
Studied Poets of World Literature*

Volume 185

Lawrence J. Trudeau
Editor

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Poetry Criticism

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Preface

Poetry Criticism (PC) presents significant criticism of the world's greatest poets and provides supplementary biographical and bibliographical material to guide the interested reader to a greater understanding of the genre and its creators. This series was developed in response to suggestions from librarians serving high school, college, and public library patrons, who had noted a considerable number of requests for critical material on poems and poets. Although major poets and literary movements are covered in such Gale Literary Criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC), *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC), *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC), *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800* (LC), and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism* (CMLC), librarians perceived the need for a series devoted solely to poets and poetry.

Scope of the Series

PC is designed to serve as an introduction to major poets of all eras and nationalities. Since these authors have inspired a great deal of relevant critical material, PC is necessarily selective, and the editors have chosen the most important published criticism to aid readers and students in their research.

Approximately three to six authors, works, or topics are included in each volume. An author's first entry in the series generally presents a historical survey of the critical response to the author's work; subsequent entries will focus upon contemporary criticism about the author or criticism of an important poem, group of poems, or book. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from critics who do not write in English whose criticism has been translated. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Gale's Literary Criticism Series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a PC volume.

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises poetry collections, book-length poems, and theoretical works by the author about poetry. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. In the case of authors who do not write in English, an English translation of the title is provided as an aid to the reader; the translation is either a published translated title or a free translation provided by the compiler of the entry. In the case of such authors whose works have been translated into English, the **Principal English Translations** focuses primarily on twentieth-century translations, selecting those works most commonly considered the best by critics.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. All individual titles of poems, poetry collections, and theoretical works about poetry by the

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- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Citations conform to recommendations set forth in the Modern Language Association of America's *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (2009).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** describing each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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Glen, Heather. "Blake's Criticism of Moral Thinking in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*." *Interpreting Blake*. Ed. Michael Phillips. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978. 32-69. Rpt. in *Poetry Criticism*. Ed. Michelle Lee. Vol. 63. Detroit: Gale, 2005. 34-51. Print.

The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a bibliography set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

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Glen, Heather. "Blake's Criticism of Moral Thinking in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*." In *Interpreting Blake*, edited by Michael Phillips. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978. 32-69. Rpt. in *Poetry Criticism*. Edited by Michelle Lee. Vol. 63. Detroit: Gale, 2005. 34-51. Print.

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Allen Grossman

1932-2014

(Full name Allen Richard Grossman) American poet and critic.

INTRODUCTION

Allen Grossman's work is rooted in his Jewish cultural heritage and his investigation of poetry's potential to reflect and make sense of human experience. Deeply influenced by the modernist poetry of William Butler Yeats, Hart Crane, and Wallace Stevens, he eschewed the literary movements and conventions of his time, writing densely layered, oracular poems modeled on the Romantic tradition of lyric poetry. Grossman examined that genre in such renowned critical studies as *The Sighted Singer* (1992). Among his central concerns was the preservation of personal and historical lineage, and he sought to emphasize the connections between history and individuals in his poems by juxtaposing his experiences with references to the Bible, classical mythology, and the Western literary canon. While Grossman's work has not gained a general audience, it has received praise from critics and academics for its scholarly depth, visionary quality, and thoughtful engagement with loss and catastrophe.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Grossman was born on 7 January 1932 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. His father, Louis Grossman, owned a car dealership and his mother, Beatrice Berman Grossman, had at one time managed a lending library. Grossman was raised in a Reform Jewish home, and his creative ambitions were encouraged from an early age. He has described being deeply affected by the experience of impotently witnessing, from the American Midwest, the extermination of European Jews by Adolf Hitler. As noted by Norman Finkelstein (2004), Grossman stated that he was left with "a sense of the self as obliterated, surviving only by accident." He spent many summers on farms in Gibbon, Minnesota, while his parents vacationed abroad, and these experiences informed the portrayal of rural and pastoral life in his work. After graduating from high school, he attended Harvard University, where he became deeply interested in the Bible, the classics of Western literature, and Latin and Greek—later describing Vergil and Caed-

mon as early influences. While at Harvard, Grossman studied with Archibald MacLeish and began publishing poems. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1955 with a bachelor's degree in English, followed two years later by a master's degree in English from the same university. During this time, Grossman married Meryl Mann, with whom he had two sons. In 1961, he covered the expenses for his first poetry collection, *A Harlot's Hire*, which includes some material written when he was a teenager. A second collection, *The Recluse and Other Poems*, followed in 1965.

In 1960, Grossman earned a doctorate from Brandeis University, where he stayed on as a professor until 1991. His first marriage ended in divorce, and in 1964 he married the novelist and short-story writer Judith Spink, with whom he had three children. Grossman's doctoral dissertation became the foundation of his first full-length work of literary criticism, *Poetic Knowledge in the Early Yeats* (1969), which examines the development of Yeats's style and narrative approach. While writing poetry and teaching, Grossman also published critical and theoretical essays on the work of such writers as John Milton and Walt Whitman.

The collections *The Woman on the Bridge over the Chicago River* (1979) and *Of the Great House* (1982) helped establish Grossman's reputation as a major American poet. He collaborated with his former Brandeis student Mark Halliday, who became a poet in his own right, on a series of dialogs about his theory of poetry. This work was published in 1981 under the title *Against Our Vanishing*. In 1991, Grossman left Brandeis for Johns Hopkins University, where he became the Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities. His retrospective collection *The Ether Dome and Other Poems* (1991) was nominated for a National Book Critics Circle Award in 1992. Grossman retired from Johns Hopkins in 2005. He died on 27 June 2014 from complications of Alzheimer's disease. His many honors include three Pushcart Prizes (1975, 1987, and 1990), a Guggenheim Fellowship (1982), a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts (1985), a MacArthur Foundation Award (1989), the Bassine Citation of the Academy of American Poets (1990), and the prestigious Bollingen Prize for Poetry (2009).

MAJOR WORKS

A Harlot's Hire is Grossman's most overt engagement with Jewish culture. Inspired in part by childhood memories of hearing about the Holocaust and the nuclear threat posed by the Cold War, the poems in the collection invoke Hebrew Scripture and the canon of secular Western literature as a means of coming to terms with the essential fragility of human existence. Grossman's emphasis on thematic duality—in this case, annihilation versus permanence, the spiritual versus the secular—became central to his poetic approach. According to Marty Cohen (1994; see Further Reading), he went on to explore dichotomies of “body/mind, flesh/spirit, reality/imagination, husband/wife, son/parent, Louis/Beatrice, prose/poetry, fact/fiction, moon/sun, and Minneapolis/ Poland.”

The Woman on the Bridge over the Chicago River provides an example of Grossman's maturing lyric style. In the title poem, a crying woman on a bridge in the snow becomes an emblem of universal suffering on whose behalf the poet must speak. “The Department” is ostensibly an elegy for a colleague killed in an automobile accident, an incident which prompts Grossman to meditate on death and immortality. *Of the Great House*, considered Grossman's first masterwork, expands on many of the themes and formal aspects of *The Woman on the Bridge over the Chicago River*. The long title poem is an attempt to represent the inner workings of the poet's mind as it engages the Muse in order to compose a successful poem. In *Of the Great House*, Grossman names his own parents, especially his mother, as the progenitors of both life and poetics, and he details the perpetual struggle to create a perfect poem from the imperfect materials of the world.

The Bright Nails Scattered on the Ground (1986) explores the question of how to continue writing poetry in the face of personal and historical tragedy. The poem that addresses this issue most directly is “Eurydice; or, The Third Reich of Dreams,” written in a dialogic form of alternating verse stanzas and prose epistles. The discussion concerns the transformative power of poetry and its ability to fend off mortality and human cruelty by setting them against ideas of truth and beauty. *The Philosopher's Window and Other Poems* (1995) is an allegorical cycle in which age explains itself to youth. The work begins with a pastoral elegy and ends with the reveries of an old man awaiting death. In Grossman's final book of poetry, *Descartes' Loneliness* (2007), he uses the framework of René Descartes's philosophy to explore the differences between poetry and science. The collection also examines the theme of family history and its impact on the self. Chief among Grossman's nonpoetic works is *The Sighted Singer*, which includes his previously published conver-

sations with Halliday as well as “Summa Lyrica,” a series of commentaries on lyric poetry.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

As a poet writing outside the conventions of his time, Grossman's work remained, in the words of J. D. McClatchy (1986), “boldly unfashionable.” Similarly, Cohen described Grossman as “a writer of anachronistic ambitions” and “a poet of the old-fashioned vocation.” Roger Gilbert (2004) suggested that whereas most poets of his generation rejected the lyric, meditative, and ecstatic modulations of the high modernist style, “seeking instead some version of speech or plain style, Grossman from the start of his career embraced them with almost embarrassing intensity.”

Scholars have often cited Yeats's influence on Grossman's work. William Doreski (1993) described Grossman's poems as “Yeatsian in scope.” Other critics held that Grossman merely used Yeats's style as a starting point for his own. Stacy Pies (2004) claimed that “unlike Yeats, who created symbols by dissociating the images from their historical sources,” Grossman was concerned with “producing symbols, and at the same time making explicit their means of production.”

Critics have identified one of Grossman's central concerns as the exploration of the role of the poet. Daniel Tobin (1996) asserted that in Grossman's view, the poet is “one who would convey a communal voice and not just the speech of an individual.” According to Finkelstein (2004), Grossman resolutely maintained “the prophetic imagination's transformative power, even in the face of the very worst historical circumstances.”

Grossman's work is commonly described as transcendent because it seeks to elevate the poet, the poem, and the reader. Pies explained that for Grossman, “the poem itself is a kind of voyage for the reader, and symbols seem to offer a way to integrate the things of this world into a larger context, one that opens onto an unknown, in this case, a transcendent unity.” Tobin described Grossman's approach as two-fold, simultaneously rooted in daily human existence and in a timeless spiritual longing such that “the validity of the poet's work must rest on the reality of transcendence and not just the idea of transcendence.” Gilbert agreed, citing Grossman's “twin emphasis on the transcendental autonomy of poetic utterance and its absolute subservience to the demands of other lives.”

Jonathan Kolstad

Academic Advisor: Marc Malandra,
Biola University

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Poetry

A Harlot's Hire. Cambridge: Walker-de Berry, 1961. Print.

The Recluse and Other Poems. Cambridge: Pym-Randall, 1965. Print.

And the Dew Lay All Night upon My Branch: Poems. Lexington: Aleph, 1973. Print.

**The Woman on the Bridge over the Chicago River*. New York: New Directions, 1979. Print.

Of the Great House: A Book of Poems. New York: New Directions, 1982. Print.

†*The Bright Nails Scattered on the Ground: Love Poems*. New York: New Directions, 1986. Print.

‡*The Ether Dome and Other Poems: New and Selected (1979-1991)*. New York: New Directions, 1991. Print.

The Philosopher's Window and Other Poems. New York: New Directions, 1995. Print.

How to Do Things with Tears. New York: New Directions, 2001. Print.

Sweet Youth: Poems by a Young Man and an Old Man, Old and New 1953-2001. New York: New Directions, 2002. Print.

Descartes' Loneliness. New York: New Directions, 2007. Print.

Other Major Works

Poetic Knowledge in the Early Yeats: A Study of The Wind among the Reeds. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1969. Print. (Criticism)

Against Our Vanishing: Winter Conversations with Allen Grossman on the Theory and Practice of Poetry. Interviews by Mark Halliday. Ed Halliday. Boston: Rowan Tree, 1981. Rev. and expanded ed. *The Sighted Singer: Two Works on Poetry for Readers and Writers*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992. Print. (Criticism and interviews)

"Summa Lyrica: A Primer of the Commonplaces in Speculative Poetics." *Western Humanities Review* 44.1 (1990): 5-138. Print. (Criticism)

§*The Long Schoolroom: Lessons in the Bitter Logic of the Poetic Principle*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1997. Print. (Criticism)

True-Love: Essays on Poetry and Valuing. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2009. Print. (Criticism)

*Includes the poem "The Department."

†Includes the poem "Eurydice; or, The Third Reich of Dreams."

‡Includes the sequence of poems titled "Poland of Death."

§Includes the essay "The Poetics of Union in Whitman and Lincoln: An Inquiry toward the Relationship of Art and Policy."

CRITICISM

Allen Grossman and Mark Halliday (interview date 1981)

SOURCE: Grossman, Allen. "A Conversation with Allen Grossman concerning 'Of the Great House.'" Interview by Mark Halliday. *Ploughshares* 7.2 (1981): 24-33. Print.

[In the following interview, Grossman discusses the function of difficulty in his poetry, offering a detailed explanation of the long title work in *Of the Great House*. He suggests that complex poems are intended "to exact of the reader that severe and intelligent activity which is involved in the construction of the meaning of things."]

[Halliday]: I hope that one thing we can talk about today is the difficulty of poems and the kinds of value that can be derived from poems that are or are not quickly accessible to a reader.

[Grossman]: The unconscious has, until it has found its cultural significance, no countenance. The enormous personal need, which I have expressed as a cultural need in our previous conversations, arises in me from the passionate impulse both to acquire a countenance for myself and for others to confer a countenance. . . . The effort of my poetry is to find a countenance for the formless and unmanifest unconscious being who has a destiny in countenance and must write that destiny, for a destiny is only the one story that makes sense of a self. Difficulty in my poetry is like that broken countenance that has so much to say about a reality that is so profoundly complex, energetic, and troubling that the face is deformed and grows unrecognizable as a human face.

And yet the energy in your poetry, you're saying, presses toward the recognizability of a face—the creation of personhood that will be, once it is achieved, understandable to others.

The origin of difficulty in poetry lies very largely in the problem of perceiving a self and a world which has not yet become an interpreter of itself. The difficult poem delegates some part of its construction to the reader as the interpreter. The function of difficult poems is to exact of the reader that severe and intelligent activity which is involved in the construction of the meaning of things. The mechanical character of many difficult poems arises from the fact that they require of the reader the re-construction of a world that is already eccentrically devised to be discovered in its structure by the poet, who has devoted himself to mystic or other extraneous ideologies. The merit, if there is any, in the kind of difficult poem that I have written is that it requires of the reader that he engage with the poet in precisely that cultural activity that is involved in the acknowledgement of a person. I have been quite careful, despite the peculiarity, especially the theological peculiarity, of my learning, not to seed into the poem the potentiality of the construction of a world that is already ideologically pre-formed.

In other words, there is no secret code lying behind your poems. There is no other notebook on your desk that contains the key to all these images, if only we could get hold of it.

No, you're absolutely right. There is no such code. The code lies in the reader's capacity for love and in the history of love, which in its deficits and its graces I am attempting to make sense of in my poetry. . . . Mark, often when you use the word "difficulty," you are referring to those features of my poetry which are impersonal in character. I think you are describing your sense of a kind of discourse which is not specifically referenced to the private circumstances of an individual self, and you are disabled in your response by an inability to identify in the ordinary way with the speaker. . . . **"Of the Great House"** speaks on a scale which does promise a more general description of the world than is ordinarily available in Postmodern and post-Confessional poetry. . . .

The making of poems always involves a conciliation of the competing claims of accessibility, on the one hand, and truth, on the other. . . . Every poem must be lovable. It must be capable of an amiability which makes reading worthwhile. But it is my ambition to open my throat, and by doing so, to open your eyes as a reader, to bring you to recognitions that are not merely the repetition of previous recognitions. . . . The poems that are read today in public and published in the press have almost universally withdrawn from the habit of making claims upon readers. Our audiences have been conciliated to the point where they are no longer instructed. Poets, because they so profoundly

seek social honor, have ceased to engage in the risky business of instructing. Poetry that pleases by immediate recognitions, but does not instruct by the setting of hard tasks, seems to me a poetry that is treasonous with respect to its own authority.

As a teacher you spend a lot of time helping students gain access to poems. Do you agree that as a poet it is also good to help your readers come to terms with your poems?

Poems always come adorned with explanations. There is no perfect reader of a poem, and I would insist that only in conversations of this sort, in which persons are obligated to one another and conscious of the purposes of one another, is explanation truly significant.

Then let me ask you to help me with the long poem "Of the Great House" by giving me an overview of it in terms of its five sections, because it is a poem which, even when I am feeling at home on one page of it, I find hard to hold in my mind as a whole.

The totality which this poem should offer its reader is the continuity and integration of the voice in which it is spoken; for it is at the level of voice that the cognitive success of the speaker in a poem is registered. The integration of a poem has as its particular form of manifest truth the personhood of the speaker who proposes to speak it.

But in terms of my understanding of the poem before us, and apart from the voice that speaks it, this poem undertakes to establish a process of understanding marked by five stages, in which process the speaker exhausts his obligation to unworkable tasks and phantasmal truths, and penetrates to the actual state of the world in which his renewed life can become possible in a way different from the way in which it has been conducted before.

In that case, this poem can be seen as a thorough working out of the process which is only imaged in your shorter poem "The Thrush Relinquished."

Yes. This poem attempts to fulfill the promises for discovery that my earlier poems make.

"Of the Great House" begins with an address to the poets. Its first words are a four-fold invocation of the great imperative, let: "Let let let let be." This succession of imperatives constitutes the establishment of permission with respect to a reality that does not know the mind of the speaker, and a summoning of the intention of the speaker toward the construction of a human, and therefore intelligible, world. The opening of the poem, addressed to the poets, distinguishes

the sighted singer—the singer who both confronts the unconscious obligations of his being and also knows them—distinguishes the sighted singer, in a passionate, laboring house, from the blind singers, content to mediate an unconscious world without obligation to the integrations at the level of consciousness, which seem to me the only prize of poetic making.

The poem establishes a continuing metaphor: the great house. This house, as the poem makes plain, is mind, but as mind it is also the world. It contains the whole of the life of the speaker: the Night Room, with the stars above; the Day Room, where the life of the earth is conducted; the Winter Room, which is the realm of confrontation with the unconscious, both as personal and as collective past; and that strange and beautiful place, the Summer Kitchen, a death room, set apart, where the ideal condition of a life which has obtained consciousness comes to rest and to be inscribed, a point where life and death are indistinguishable one from another. The voice of the poet is drawn through the length of this poem by the urgency of an inquiry, an inquiry that is equivalent to life itself, the search for the only thing that is, which must be sought in all the regions and rooms of the great house of mind and world.

The poem then proceeds, in the third section of the first part, to assert that we must all recapitulate our personal origins and enter into and include our mother and father. This has been a peculiarly urgent Postmodern obligation, because our Modern predecessors were incapable, under the over-riding burden of universal reference, of bringing the immanent life of the separated individual into the realm of their poems. Louis and Beatrice are my parents. The speaker in the poem finds himself afflicted with an anxiety with respect to continuity at the point of the imagined death of his mother, in whose mind are all of the predecessors, doomed to be extinguished at the extinction of her consciousness, and in whose mind also is the life of the speaker, who must escape from her consciousness lest he perish with it. This is a speaker who must be *born* in order to be free from the fate of the parent. At the end of this poem, the speaker, in a catastrophe of thunder and lightning, registers his birth and the beginning of his new Word.

The second section of the poem, called “The Dream of Rescue,” as I understand it, tries to imagine a succoring of the mother. It offers an extended metaphor involving warships in danger of sinking, a picture of the plight of female figures who are in danger of drowning in speechlessness.

Yes. It is a metaphor, but it is also an action. My most precious intention for poems is to invest them with the urgency and disclosure of something *done*. This poem

is also, as you say—this Part Two of “Of the Great House”—a picture, one of the many pictures which slowly, in the course of the five parts of this poem, become dissolved as a consequence of the cognitive penetration of their relationship to the will of the person who speaks this poem. The speaker finds a self undertaking a task commanded him by the central grief of all being, which for him is the mother’s grief, the grief which he imagines her to have experienced at the violation of his birth. . . .

The process of this section tends toward the discovery that the task of recuperation or rescue defined by this grieving sentiment is impossible to perform and undesirable to complete. It is this task which has burdened the style of this speaker, and it is toward the cleansing of this style that the poem tends. The extinction of the obligation to this task will constitute the *integration without solution* of the problem set by the grieving mother. At the end of this section of the poem, the speaker discovers the truth—namely, that this is a picture—and the further truth, as yet by no means a secure or sufficient truth—namely that it stands before him, this picture, in the place of (that is to say, instead of, and at the same time, as the only manifestation of) what he knows.

The third part of “Of the Great House,” called “The Throat of the Hourglass,” takes up the problem of men and boys, and by implication, the problem of the father. Its central metaphoric reference is to the pastoral world of the shepherd boy, who sings his song against the background of the sound of the universal grasses—the endlessly attested mortality of all persons. The speaker discovers this hero, whose language is like the life-sustaining organ of the body, the heart, and confesses his affinities both to the “stony wind” and the “watry fire.” In doing so, he declares the business of poetry as in my poems I understand it. That business is to make apparent beneath the beautiful and cruel life that appears the life that does not appear, namely, the life that persons make for themselves in the world, which has as its sign the loved body, neither me nor you, but ourselves in our being with one another under the vast sanction of the starlight, the eye that knows us. “The Throat of the Hourglass” ends with sentiment directed toward the Other invested as the great wandering reference, the pilgrimage pronoun, you.

The fourth section of the poem, “At the Shore,” as I understand it, shows by metaphors the vocational taking on of responsibility by the new poet imagined in the previous section, the poet who can speak the new language, the new heart-like language, and shows also in the wonderful

metaphor of the baking of a new loaf of bread an image of the shape of such a new poem in this new speech.

This bread is the Sabbath bread, the Sabbath announced at the beginning as signifying the end of human making, the making of a world of relationship responsive to the desires of the person. This section presents to Louis, my father, an image of the conduct of the father that I imagine, the old man who practices the ceremonies of the intelligibility of the world habitually and therefore with the more gracious outcome, putting the cup of offering into the hands of the divinity herself. The making of bread is, indeed, the making of a world from which violence is not absent but in which the destructive processes of culture, the mill, are administered *on behalf* of the community of persons rather than against it. The central passage of the section ends with the striking of the differences of all the parts of being into one lovely skin, as the strings of the great harp are struck into one handsome melody.

The fifth part of the poem, called **"The Only Thing That Is,"** is an epiphanic moment. In it the life of mind is characterized as a *danse macabre* in which no human hand holds a human hand except when it acknowledges the interposition of a dead hand; but the relation of the living and dead is here not one of mutual erasure, but rather, in the ceremony of a dance, imaged. A storm now begins: the thunder of memory, which I've written about before in a poem called **"The Field, Her Pleasure."** In that thunder the great pain of the mother is heard and then lost; the unfinishable task of rescue is announced, in the sirens which accompany the storm, and then forgotten. The world is begun again with a new "Let be" and the speaker is born in the birth storm, which has overwhelmed and changed his consciousness in the way growth, rather than transformation, establishes change.

At the end of the poem, the previous facts of consciousness slowly cease to burden the vision of the speaker. The facts of consciousness which are here extinguished are not truthless facts.

They are facts which disappear not because they are abolished, but because they are taken in and become part of the speaker.

They are neither tasks finished nor are they tasks ignored. At the end of the poem, the house is destroyed and the world becomes the place of the life of the speaker, who vows at the end through dance, which is a kind of flowering in the night of a world, to enter once again and under new auspices into the tasks to which fully human action obligates the soul. As the first words of the poem echo the beginning of the Hebrew Bible, "Let be," so the last words

of the poem are the last words of the same book: "And go up" toward the Jerusalem of the life which cannot be escaped and can now finally be entered as a sighted singer.

Thus it is a profoundly hopeful poem. The person imaged at the end of the poem is newly enabled and can go forth into the world toward new actions and be able to write in a new way.

That is my hope.

I know you have said it is a farther ambition of your work to become the poet for a nation, but that this nation is not a nation that appears in the world today.

What can that nation be? I have earlier in these conversations expressed sadness at the inability of my mind to grasp the fundamental affinities, the nationhood, of my personhood. The historical nation, America, is disqualified, as is any nation state, as a principle of advocacy. Ethnicity, and Judaism is an ethnicity, is also merely another violent phantasm, out of scale with human life, which drives us against one another in conflicts so dangerous as to be unimaginable as a desirable state of affairs. The poet, it seems to me, speaks for a nation, just as he speaks not the idiolect of a separate individual, but the dialect of a collectivity. At the same time, the speaker must possess membership in that nation, and the effort to equivocate the difficulties of obtaining membership, either through learning or acts of the hopeful will, and to ignore the historical inevitability of conflict between nations—between immortalities—is not poetically productive, nor is it safe. As witness to this, I call attention to the proliferation of Jewish poetry and, indeed, parochially sponsored poetry of all sorts, and the tendency of even our most powerful poets to disqualify the resistance of things by projecting vast and forgiving universes, such as we find in Ammons's marvelous skepticisms and Merrill's fantasy eschatologies. . . .

It seems that this problem of defining, locating this speculative nation—which is not America and which is not the Jews, which is not any collectivity we can now give a name to—places you as a poet in search of an audience and raises the question, which we have touched upon before: to whom are your poems addressed? What body of readers can you hope for who will benefit from the poetry?

My poems are addressed to some state of the persons around me other than that which they currently find themselves in. My poems should be addressed, are intended to be addressed not to the present powers, but to the future