

Poetry

CRITICISM

VOLUME

39

Poetry Criticism

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

Volume 39

David Galens
Project Editor



THOMSON
—★—
GALE



Poetry Criticism, Vol. 39

Project Editor

David Galens

Editorial

Jenny Cromie, Kathy D. Darrow, Lisa Gellert,
Madeline S. Harris, Allison Marion, Ellen
McGeagh, Ron Morelli

Permissions

Debra Freitas, Margaret Chamberlain

Imaging and Multimedia

Robert Duncan, Lezlie Light, Dan Newell, Kelly
A. Quin, Luke Rademacher

Product Design

Michael Logusz

Composition and Electronic Capture

Gary Leach

Manufacturing

Stacy L. Melson

© 2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of
The Gale Group, Inc., a division of
Thomson Learning, Inc.

Gale and Design™ and Thomson Learning™
are trademarks used herein under license.

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc.
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535
Or you can visit our internet site at
<http://www.gale.com>

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No part of this work covered by the copyright
herein may be reproduced or used in any
form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or
mechanical, including photocopying,
recording, taping, Web distribution, or
information storage retrieval
systems—without the written permission of
the publisher.

This publication is a creative work fully
protected by all applicable copyright laws, as
well as by misappropriation, trade secret,
unfair competition, and other applicable laws.
The authors and editors of this work have
added value to the underlying factual mate-
rial herein through one or more of the fol-
lowing: unique and original selection,
coordination, expression, arrangement, and
classification of the information.

For permission to use material from the
product, submit your request via the Web at
<http://www.gale-edit.com/permissions>, or you
may download our Permissions Request form
and submit your request by fax or mail to:

Permissions Department

The Gale Group, Inc.
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535
Permissions Hotline:
248-699-8006 or 800-877-4253, ext. 8006
Fax 248-699-8074 or 800-762-4058

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate
all copyright notices, the acknowledgments
constitute an extension of the copyright
notice.

While every effort has been made to secure
permission to reprint material and to ensure
the reliability of the information presented in
this publication, the Gale Group neither
guarantees the accuracy of the data
contained herein nor assumes any
responsibility for errors, omissions or
discrepancies. Gale accepts no payment for
listing; and inclusion in the publication of any
organization, agency, institution, publication,
service, or individual does not imply
endorsement of the editors or publisher.
Errors brought to the attention of the
publisher and verified to the satisfaction of
the publisher will be corrected in future
editions.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 76-46132

ISBN 0-7876-5965-7
ISSN 0091-3421

Printed in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Poetry Criticism

Guide to Gale Literary Criticism Series

For criticism on	Consult these Gale series
Authors now living or who died after December 31, 1999	<i>CONTEMPORARY LITERARY CRITICISM (CLC)</i>
Authors who died between 1900 and 1999	<i>TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERARY CRITICISM (TCLC)</i>
Authors who died between 1800 and 1899	<i>NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE CRITICISM (NCLC)</i>
Authors who died between 1400 and 1799	<i>LITERATURE CRITICISM FROM 1400 TO 1800 (LC)</i> <i>SHAKESPEAREAN CRITICISM (SC)</i>
Authors who died before 1400	<i>CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL LITERATURE CRITICISM (CMLC)</i>
Authors of books for children and young adults	<i>CHILDREN'S LITERATURE REVIEW (CLR)</i>
Dramatists	<i>DRAMA CRITICISM (DC)</i>
Poets	<i>POETRY CRITICISM (PC)</i>
Short story writers	<i>SHORT STORY CRITICISM (SSC)</i>
Black writers of the past two hundred years	<i>BLACK LITERATURE CRITICISM (BLC)</i> <i>BLACK LITERATURE CRITICISM SUPPLEMENT (BLCS)</i>
Hispanic writers of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries	<i>HISPANIC LITERATURE CRITICISM (HLC)</i> <i>HISPANIC LITERATURE CRITICISM SUPPLEMENT (HLCS)</i>
Native North American writers and orators of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries	<i>NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN LITERATURE (NNAL)</i>
Major authors from the Renaissance to the present	<i>WORLD LITERATURE CRITICISM, 1500 TO THE PRESENT (WLC)</i> <i>WORLD LITERATURE CRITICISM SUPPLEMENT (WLCS)</i>

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. 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), PC offers more focused attention on poetry than is possible in the broader, survey-oriented entries on writers in these Gale series. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the generous excerpts and supplementary material provided by PC supply them with the vital information needed to write a term paper on poetic technique, to examine a poet's most prominent themes, or to lead a poetry discussion group.

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. Each author entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to that author's work. 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 foreign critics in translation. 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.

Organization of the Book

Each PC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by the title of the work and its date of publication.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- 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 and book-length poems. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. For foreign authors, the editors have provided original foreign-language publication information and have selected what are considered the best and most complete English-language editions of their works.
- 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 and poetry collections by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given

at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.

- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- 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.

Cumulative Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by the Gale Group, including *PC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Nationality Index** lists all authors featured in *PC* by nationality, followed by the number of the *PC* volume in which their entry appears.

A **Cumulative Title Index** lists in alphabetical order all individual poems, book-length poems, and collection titles contained in the *PC* series. Titles of poetry collections and separately published poems are printed in italics, while titles of individual poems are printed in roman type with quotation marks. Each title is followed by the author's last name and corresponding volume and page numbers where commentary on the work is located. English-language translations of original foreign-language titles are cross-referenced to the foreign titles so that all references to discussion of a work are combined in one listing.

Citing Poetry Criticism

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume in the Literary Criticism Series may use the following general format to footnote reprinted criticism. The first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books.

Sylvia Kasey Marks, "A Brief Glance at George Eliot's *The Spanish Gypsy*," *Victorian Poetry* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1983), 184-90; reprinted in *Poetry Criticism*, vol. 20, ed. Ellen McGeagh (Detroit: The Gale Group), 128-31.

Linden Peach, "Man, Nature and Wordsworth: American Versions," *British Influence on the Birth of American Literature*, (Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), 29-57; reprinted in *Poetry Criticism*, vol. 20, ed. Ellen McGeagh (Detroit: The Gale Group), 37-40.

Suggestions are Welcome

Readers who wish to suggest new features, topics, or authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions or comments are cordially invited to call, write, or fax the Managing Editor:

Managing Editor, Literary Criticism Series
The Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535
1-800-347-4253 (GALE)
Fax: 248-699-8054

Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank the copyright holders of the excerpted criticism included in this volume and the permissions managers of many book and magazine publishing companies for assisting us in securing reproduction rights. We are also grateful to the staffs of the Detroit Public Library, the Library of Congress, the University of Detroit Mercy Library, Wayne State University Purdy/Kresge Library Complex, and the University of Michigan Libraries for making their resources available to us. Following is a list of the copyright holders who have granted us permission to reproduce material in this volume of *PC*. Every effort has been made to trace copyright, but if omissions have been made, please let us know.

COPYRIGHTED EXCERPTS IN *PC*, VOLUME 39, WERE REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING PERIODICALS:

American Poetry Review, v. 18, 1989 for "The Politics of Contemporary Chilean Poetry," by Ricardo Guitierrez-Mouat. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*Carleton Miscellany*, v. 18, 1979-80. Copyright © 1979-80 by Carleton College. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.—*Chicago Review*, v. 19, 1967. Reproduced by permission.—*Christian Scholar*, v. 46, Winter, 1963. Reproduced by permission.—*Contemporary Review*, v. 278, 2001. Reproduced by permission.—*English Studies*, v. xlv, 1963. Copyright © 1963, Swets & Zeitlinger. Reproduced by permission.—*English Studies in Canada*, v. ii, 1976 for "'Kubla Khan' and the Critics: Romantic Madness as Poetic Theme and Critical Response," by Richard Hoffpauir. Copyright © Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English 1976. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—*Explicator*, v. 40, Summer, 1982. Copyright © 1982, by Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation. Reproduced with permission of the Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation, published by Hel-dref Publications, 1319 18th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-1802.—*Georgia Review*, v. 32, 1978, review of "This Body Is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood," by Charles Molesworth; v. 34, 1980 for a review of *This Tree Will Be Here For A Thousand Years*, by Peter Stitt; v. 40, 1986 for a review of *Selected Poems* by Robert Bly, by Peter Stitt. Copyright © 1978, 1980, 1986 by the University of Georgia. All reproduced by permission of the author.—*Hudson Review*, v. xxi, 1968. Copyright © 1968 by The Hudson Review, Inc. Reproduced by permission.—*Iowa Review*, v. 3, 1972 for "Robert Bly Alive in Darkness," by Anthony Libby. Copyright © 1972 by The University of Iowa. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*Latin American Literary Review*, v. 3, 1975; v. 18, 1990. Both reproduced by permission.—*MLN*, v. 96, 1981. Reproduced by permission.—*Modern Poetry Studies*, v. 4, 1973. Copyright © 1973 by Media Study, Inc. Reproduced by permission.—*The Nation* (New York), v. 215, 1972; v. 229, 1979. Copyright © 1972, 1979, The Nation magazine/The Nation Company, Inc. Both reproduced by permission.—*Ohio Review*, v. 15, 1973; v. 19, 1978. Copyright © 1973, 1978 by the Editors of *The Ohio Review*. Both reproduced by permission.—*Parnassus*, v. 7, 1978 for "This Book Is Made of Turkey Soup and Star Music," by J. Philip Dacey. Copyright © 1978 Poetry in Review Foundation, NY. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*Parnassus: Poetry in Review*, v. 10, 1982. Copyright © 1982 Poetry in Review Foundation, NY. Reproduced by permission.—*Partisan Review*, v. 44, 1977. Copyright © 1977 by *Partisan Review*. Reproduced by permission.—*PMLA*, v. 89, 1974. Copyright © 1974 by the Modern Language Association of America. Reproduced by permission of the Modern Language Association of America.—*Publishers Weekly*, v. 246, 1999; v. 248, 2001. Copyright 1999, 2001 by Reed Publishing USA. Reproduced from *Publishers Weekly*, published by the Bowker Magazine Group of Cahners Publishing Co., a division of Reed Publishing USA, by permission.—*Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, v. 29, 1975. Reproduced by permission.—*Saturday Review of Literature*, v. xxxi, 1948. Copyright © 1948 *Saturday Review Magazine*. Reproduced by permission of *The Saturday Review*.—*Sophia*, v. 20, 1990. Reproduced by permission.—*Shenandoah*, v. 18, 1966 for "A Talk with Nicanor Parra," by Miller Williams. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—*South Atlantic Quarterly*, v. 57, 1959; v. 88, 1989. Copyright © 1959, 1989 by Duke University Press, Durham, NC. Reproduced by permission.—*Studies in Romanticism*, v. vi, 1966. Copyright © 1966 by the Trustees of Boston University. Reproduced by permission.—*The Texas Quarterly*, v. 19. Copyright © University of Texas at Austin. Reproduced by permission.—*TLS: Times Literary Supplement*, n. 5093, 2000. Copyright © The Times Supplements Limited 2000. Reproduced from *The Times Literary Supplement* by permission.—*Western American Literature*, v. 17, 1982. Reproduced by permission.

COPYRIGHTED EXCERPTS IN *PC*, VOLUME 39, WERE REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING BOOKS:

Beer, John. From *Coleridge's Imagination: Essays In Memory of Pete Laver*. Edited by Richard Gravil, Lucy Newlyn and Nicholas Roe. Cambridge University Press, 1985. Copyright © Cambridge University Press 1985. Reproduced by permis-

sion of the publisher and the author.—Brotherston, Gordon. From *Latin American Poetry: Origins and Presence*. Cambridge University Press, 1975. Copyright © Cambridge University Press 1975. Reproduced with permission of Cambridge University Press and the author.—Burke, Kenneth. From *Modern Critical Views: Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Edited by Harold Bloom. Chelsea House Publishers, 1986. Reproduced by permission of the Kenneth Burke Literary Trust.—Casey, Beth. From *A House of Gathering Poets on May Sarton's Poetry*. Edited and with an introduction by Marilyn Kallet. The University of Tennessee Press, 1993. Reproduced by permission.—Coale, Samuel. From *Frost: Centennial Essays*. Edited by the Committee on the Frost Centennial of the University of Southern Mississippi. Copyright © by the University Press of Mississippi. Reproduced by permission.—Davis, William V. From *Understanding Robert Bly*. University of South Carolina Press, 1988. Copyright © by University of South Carolina Press, 1988. Reproduced by permission.—Drake, William. From *That Great Sanity: Critical Essays on May Sarton*. Edited by Susan Swartzlander and Marilyn R. Mumford. The University of Michigan, 1992. Reproduced by permission.—Eddy, Darlene Mathis. From *May Sarton: Woman and Poet*. Edited by Constance Hunting. National Poetry Foundation, Inc., 1982. Copyright © 1982 by The National Poetry Foundation. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Gerber, Philip L. From *Robert Frost*, (Revised Edition). Twayne Publishers, 1982. First Edition Copyright © 1966 by Twayne Publishers, Inc. Revised Edition Copyright © 1982 by G. K. Hall & Co. Reproduced by permission.—Gray, Richard. From *American Poetry of the Twentieth Century*. Longman Group UK Limited, 1990. Reproduced by permission.—Greiner, Donald J. From *Critical Essays on Robert Frost*. G. K. Hall & Co., 1982. Copyright © 1982 by Philip L. Gerber. Reproduced by permission.—Greiner, Donald J. From *Frost: Centennial Essays*. Edited by the Committee on the Frost Centennial of the University of Southern Mississippi. Copyright © by the University Press of Mississippi. Reproduced by permission.—Grossman, Edith. From *The Antipoetry of Nicanor Parra*. New York University Press, 1975. Copyright © 1975 New York University Press. Reproduced by permission.—Harris, Victoria. From *Of Solitude and Silence*. Edited by Richard Jones and Kate Daniels. Beacon Press, 1981. Copyright © 1981 by Poetry East. Reproduced by permission of Beacon Press, Boston.—Hochman, Jhan. From *Poetry for Students*. Gale, 1997. Reproduced by permission.—Hunting, Constance. From *May Sarton: Woman and Poet*. Edited by Constance Hunting. National Poetry Foundation, Inc., 1982. Copyright © 1982 by The National Poetry Foundation. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Kalaidjian, Walter. From *Critical Essays on Robert Bly*. G. K. Hall & Co. / New York, 1989. Copyright © 1992 by William V. Davis. Reproduced by permission.—Kilcup, Karen L. From *Robert Frost and Feminine Literary Tradition*. University of Michigan Press, 1998. Copyright © by the University of Michigan 1998. Reproduced by permission.—Mandel, Charlotte. From *A House of Gathering Poets on May Sarton's Poetry*. Edited and with an introduction by Marilyn Kallet. The University of Tennessee Press, 1993. Reproduced by permission.—Meyers, Jeffrey. From *Robert Frost: A Biography*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996. Copyright © 1996 by Jeffrey Meyers. Reproduced by permission of Houghton Mifflin Company.—Nelson, Howard. From *Robert Bly: An Introduction To The Poetry*. Columbia University Press, 1984. Copyright © 1984 Columbia University Press. Reproduced by permission.—Pobo, Kenneth G. From *A House of Gathering Poets on May Sarton's Poetry*. Edited and with an introduction by Marilyn Kallet. The University of Tennessee Press, 1993. Reproduced by permission.—Rotella, Guy. From *On Frost: The Best From American Literature*. Edited by Edwin H. Cady and Louis J. Budd. Duke University Press, 1991. Copyright © 1991, Duke University Press. Reproduced by permission.—Sibley, Agnes. From *May Sarton*. Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972. Copyright © 1972 by Twayne Publishers, Inc. Reproduced by permission.—Skarmeta, Antonia. From *Latin American Writers, Vol. III*. Edited by Carlos A. Sole and Maria Isabel Abreu. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1989. Reproduced by permission.—Sugg, Richard P. From *Robert Bly*. Twayne Publishers, 1986. Copyright © 1986 by G. K. Hall & Co. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Thompson, Lawrence. From *Robert Frost: The Years of Triumph, 1915-1938*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970. Copyright © 1970 by Lawrence Thompson. Copyright © 1970 by The Estate of Robert Frost. Reproduced by permission of Henry Holt and Company, LLC.—Van Hooft, Karen S. From *Theory and Practice of Feminist Literary Criticism*. Bilingual Press, 1982. Copyright © 1982 by Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Zavatsky, Bill. From *Of Solitude and Silence*. Edited by Richard Jones and Kate Daniels. Beacon Press, 1981. Copyright © 1981 Poetry East. Reproduced by permission of Beacon Press, Boston.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND ILLUSTRATIONS APPEARING IN PC, VOLUME 39, WERE RECEIVED FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES:

Bly, Robert, photograph. Chris Felver. Reproduced by permission. —Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, photograph. The Library of Congress.—Parra, Nicanor, photograph by Miriam Berkley. Copyright © Miriam Berkley. Reproduced by permission.—Sarton, May, photograph. Copyright © Nancy Crampton. Reproduced by permission.—Frost, Robert, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board

The members of the Gale Group Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board—reference librarians and subject specialists from public, academic, and school library systems—represent a cross-section of our customer base and offer a variety of informed perspectives on both the presentation and content of our literature criticism products. Advisory board members assess and define such quality issues as the relevance, currency, and usefulness of the author coverage, critical content, and literary topics included in our series; evaluate the layout, presentation, and general quality of our printed volumes; provide feedback on the criteria used for selecting authors and topics covered in our series; provide suggestions for potential enhancements to our series; identify any gaps in our coverage of authors or literary topics, recommending authors or topics for inclusion; analyze the appropriateness of our content and presentation for various user audiences, such as high school students, undergraduates, graduate students, librarians, and educators; and offer feedback on any proposed changes/enhancements to our series. We wish to thank the following advisors for their advice throughout the year.

Dr. Toby Burrows
Principal Librarian
The Scholars' Centre
University of Western Australia Library

David M. Durant
Joyner Library
East Carolina University

Steven R. Harris
English Literature Librarian
University of Tennessee

Mary Jane Marden
Literature and General Reference Librarian
St. Petersburg Jr. College

Mark Schumacher
Jackson Library
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments ix

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xi

Robert Bly 1926-	1
<i>American poet, translator, critic, essayist, and nonfiction writer</i>	
Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1772-1834	118
<i>English poet, playwright, and essayist</i>	
<i>Entry devoted to "Kubla Khan"</i>	
Robert Frost 1874-1963	228
<i>American poet, essayist, and critic</i>	
<i>Entry devoted to "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"</i>	
Nicanor Parra 1914-	259
<i>Chilean poet, mathematician, and physicist</i>	
May Sarton 1912-1995	316
<i>Belgian-born American poet, novelist, memoirist, autobiographer,</i>	
<i>children's author, screenwriter, and playwright</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 373

PC Cumulative Nationality Index 461

PC-39 Title Index 465

Robert Bly

1926-

(Full name Robert Elwood Bly) American poet, translator, critic, essayist, and nonfiction writer.

INTRODUCTION

A charismatic literary impresario and social critic, Robert Bly is among the most prominent and influential American poets of the postwar generation. During the 1960s, he emerged as a leading proponent of “deep imagism,” a school of poetry distinguished by its preoccupation with surrealism, Jungian archetypes, and the elemental description of the natural world and visionary emotional states. His first two collections of poetry, *Silence in the Snowy Fields* (1962) and *The Light Around the Body* (1967), an award-winning volume of antiwar poetry, established Bly as a major contemporary poet and passionate spokesperson for the healing powers of literature and myth. A popular guest on public television and at writing workshops, poetry readings, and men’s gatherings, Bly is credited with rejuvenating public interest in poetry and the imaginative arts in late twentieth-century America. A prolific author of literary criticism, translations, anthologies, and numerous collections of acclaimed poetry, Bly published his best-selling book about male initiation *Iron John* in 1990, catapulting him to the forefront of the men’s movement. His 1996 dissertation on America culture, *The Sibling Society*, also appealed to a broad mainstream audience.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Born in rural Madison, Minnesota, Bly was raised on a nearby farm operated by his father. After graduating from high school, he served in the U.S. Navy from 1944 to 1946. Discharged at the conclusion of World War II, he attended St. Olaf College in Minnesota for a year, and then transferred to Harvard University, where he earned a B.A. in English literature in 1950. While at Harvard, Bly served as editor of the *Harvard Advocate*, the campus literary magazine in which he published his first essays and poetry. After leaving Harvard, Bly lived and wrote in an isolated Minnesota cabin before relocating to New York City. There he worked menial jobs while concentrating on his writing and self-education in philosophy and foreign languages. He subsequently pursued graduate studies at the University of Iowa, earning an M.A. in creative writing in 1956. Bly married writer Carol McLean in 1955. The following year, he received a Fulbright grant to travel to Norway, his ancestral homeland, where he studied and translated Scandinavian poetry. Returning to the United States in



1957, he settled on a Minnesota farm and founded *The Fifties*, a literary magazine devoted to poetry and translation that rejected the formalism associated with T. S. Eliot and Allen Tate. The magazine was renamed *The Sixties* and *The Seventies* in the ensuing decades. With the publication of his first volume of poetry, *Silence in the Snowy Fields* (1962), Bly received growing critical recognition. His second volume of poetry, *The Light Around the Body* (1967), won a National Book Award in 1968, one of many accolades his works garnered in this period. During the late 1960s, Bly became increasingly active in political and social causes. In 1966 he helped organize American Writers Against the Vietnam War, a protest group that conducted poetry “read-ins” on college campuses across the country. While living in Minnesota, Bly maintained a steady output of poetry over the next two decades, including the volumes *Sleepers Joining Hands* (1973), *This Tree Will Be Here for a Thousand Years* (1979), *The Man in the Black Coat Turns* (1981), and *Loving a Woman in Two Worlds* (1987). He also published translations of the poetry that influenced his

own work, notably that of Rainer Maria Rilke, Antonio Machado, Pablo Neruda, and the fifteenth-century Indian mystic Kabir. Bly divorced his first wife in 1979 and married Jungian analyst Ruth Counsell the following year. During the 1980s, Bly became interested in the psychological and spiritual rehabilitation of men, culminating in the 1990 publication of *Iron John*, the appearance of its companion videotape *A Gathering of Men* (1990), and a PBS interview that established him as a leading figure of the men's movement.

MAJOR WORKS

Bly's "deep image" poetry is largely concerned with unconscious awareness, spiritual revelation, and solitary communion with the natural world. Reacting against the intellectualized academic verse of the 1950s, particularly in its emphasis on technical virtuosity and artifice, Bly sought to infuse contemporary American poetry with emotionalism and spontaneity achieved through free association and nonrational subjectivity. The "country poems" of Bly's first volume, *Silence in the Snowy Fields*, introduce the pastoral Midwest landscapes, surreal imagery, and direct, personal idiom of his subsequent work. As does much of his writing, many of these poems feature a moment of awestruck clarity in which the speaker revels in private harmony with the world. One of his best-known poems from this volume, "Driving Toward the Lac Qui Parle River," relates the speaker's euphoric connectedness to the weathered Minnesota countryside while returning home at dusk. *The Light Around the Body*, a much different collection, marks Bly's attempts to merge the personal and public in his art, resulting in a new didacticism that became a prominent feature of his work. In these overtly political poems, Bly adopts a polemic tone to condemn U.S. foreign policy and military involvement in Vietnam. Poems such as "Listening to President Kennedy Lie About the Cuban Invasion" and "Hatred of Men with Black Hair" express Bly's psychic despair over betrayals of conscious associated with American imperialism and the degradation of war. His next major volume of poetry, *Sleepers Joining Hands*, also contains powerful references to the Vietnam War, notably in "The Teeth Mother Naked at Last." Informed by his study of Jungian psychology, many of these poems express Bly's disdain for masculine elements of the subconscious associated with aggression, morality, and analytic reasoning. In "I Came Out of the Mother Naked," an essay from this volume, Bly extols the virtues of the Great Mother culture that preceded patriarchal ascendancy in the ancient world. With *This Tree Will Be Here for a Thousand Years* Bly revisits the bucolic settings and visionary transformations of *Silence in the Snowy Fields*. Focusing on the duality of consciousness, these poems embody Bly's effort to unite the inner and outer realms of experience, often resulting in a melancholy realization of emptiness and loss. In *The Man in the Black Coat Turns*, which includes several prose-poems, Bly turned his attention to father-son relationships, the primal bonds of parentage, and male sorrow, reflecting a return to

masculine awareness and Bly's need to reconcile with his own alcoholic father. *Loving a Woman in Two Worlds* explores themes of love, intimacy, and the possibility of cosmic union in human relationships. Typical of his poetry, the meditative imagery of stars, water, trees, farms, and wildlife suggests a profound, hidden knowledge in all things. In the prose volume *Iron John*, an interpretive study of the Brothers Grimm fairy tale of the same title, Bly presents his ideas about masculinity and the importance of folk tradition, mentoring, and ritual initiation for the healthy socialization of men. Drawing broadly upon insights from mythology, psychology, social science, and poetry, Bly contends that the modern "soft-male" is afflicted with self-destructive grief, anger, and passivity stemming from a lack of guidance from older men. Bly expands upon similar themes in *The Sibling Society*, a sociological treatise in which he links the decline of American culture, education, and civil discourse with a state of perpetual adolescence fostered by youth-oriented cultural values that encourage immediate gratification, self-centeredness, and disposable relationships. As in *Iron John*, Bly stresses the significance of intergenerational mentoring and underscores his message with wide-ranging anecdotes from myth, folklore, and psychology.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Bly is widely recognized as a gifted poet, provocative social commentator, and captivating public speaker whose advocacy of spiritual introspection and creativity is responsible for a resurgence of popular interest in contemporary poetry. As a poet, he has been compared to Ezra Pound for his broad literary influence, and as a promoter and interpreter of world mythology, to Joseph Campbell. Though most acknowledge Bly's considerable intelligence and remarkable ability to convey the excitement of poetic expression to a general audience, critical evaluation of his own poetry has been mixed. While many praise the meditative simplicity, luminous imagery, and colloquial voice of Bly's verse, others find fault in his tendency toward sentimentality, banality, and empty exhortation. Most regard *Silence in the Snowy Fields* and *The Light Around the Body* as his most significant works, though he has also received critical approval for *The Man in the Black Coat Turns*, *Loving a Woman in Two Worlds*, and his *Selected Poems* (1986), which includes several new compositions and prefatory remarks. Attention to Bly's later poetic collections has generally been overshadowed by the enormous success of *Iron John*, which won him a mass readership and celebrity as a leading spokesman of the men's movement in America with its perceptive analysis of sexual identity and the demoralization of men in post-industrial society. Bly's subsequent nonfiction study, *The Sibling Society*, was likewise popularly praised. Nevertheless, several of Bly's slighter poetic collections, notably his *Morning Poems* (1997), have elicited the admiration of literary critics, who laud the reserved wisdom and insight of Bly's small-scale verse.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Poetry

The Lion's Tail and Eyes: Poems Written Out of Laziness and Silence [with William Duffy and James Wright] 1962
Silence in the Snowy Fields 1962
The Sea and the Honeycomb 1966
The Light Around the Body 1967
Ducks 1968
The Morning Glory: Another Thing That Will Never Be My Friend 1969
The Teeth Mother Naked at Last 1971
Water Under the Earth 1972
The Dead Seal Near McClure's Beach 1973
Jumping Out of Bed 1973
Sleepers Joining Hands 1973
Point Reyes Poems 1974
Old Man Rubbing His Eyes 1975
The Loon 1977
This Body Is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood 1977
This Tree Will Be Here for a Thousand Years 1979
The Man in the Black Coat Turns 1981
Selected Poems 1986
Loving a Woman in Two Worlds 1987
The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart: Poems for Men [editor; with James Hillman and Michael Meade] 1992
What Have I Ever Lost by Dying?: Collected Prose Poems 1992
Morning Poems 1997
Eating the Honey of Words: New and Selected Poems 1999
Snowbanks North of the House 1999
The Night Abraham Called to the Stars 2001

Other Major Works

A Broadsheet against the New York Times Book Review (essays) 1961
 *"Being a Lutheran Boy-God in Minnesota" (essays) 1976
Talking All Morning (interviews) 1980
The Eight Stages of Translation (nonfiction) 1983
Iron John: A Book about Men (nonfiction) 1990
The Sibling Society (nonfiction) 1996

*Published in *Growing Up in Minnesota: Ten Writers Remember Their Childhoods*.

CRITICISM

Ralph J. Mills Jr. (review date 1963)

SOURCE: Mills, Ralph, J., Jr. "Four Voices in Recent American Poetry." *Christian Scholar* 46, no. 4 (winter 1963): 324-45.

[In the following excerpted review of *Silence in the Snowy Fields*, Mills comments on the aim and style of Bly's poetry, seeing the work as a collection of purified and "concentrated understatement" allied to the world of nature rather than that of ideas.]

A volume of poems by Robert Bly has long been awaited, and *Silence in the Snowy Fields* proves that the waiting has not gone unrewarded. Mr. Bly, both as an editor of his journal *The Sixties* (formerly *The Fifties*) and as a practicing poet, has made a great effort to lead contemporary American verse away from its current tendencies and preoccupations; he wishes to introduce fresh influences into it. If I understand correctly what I have seen of his editorial and critical views, he aims at a purification of poetry, a cleansing of all the elements which get into poems and do not, as he thinks, belong there. The elements to be rid of are intellectual, ideological, social, and cultural. Like Denise Levertov and Robert Creeley, he keeps his work close to his individual experience and remote from the world of ideas. Mr. Bly writes rather brief poems as a rule, informal, and with a marked emphasis on the contemplative observer-narrator, who is the poet himself and not some imagined speaker. His approach is made plain in the first of his poems, "Three Kinds of Pleasure":

I

*Sometimes, riding in a car, in Wisconsin
 Or Illinois, you notice those dark telephone poles
 One by one lift themselves out of the fence line
 And slowly leap on the gray sky—
 And past them, the snowy fields.*

II

*The darkness drifts down like snow on the picked
 cornfields
 In Wisconsin: and on these black trees
 Scattered, one by one,
 Through the winter fields—
 We see stiff weeds and brownish stubble,
 And white snow left now only in the wheeltracks of
 the combine.*

III

*It is a pleasure, also, to be driving
 Toward Chicago, near dark,
 And see the lights in the barns.
 The bare trees more dignified than ever,
 Like a fierce man on his deathbed,
 And the ditches along the road half full of a
 private snow.*

The movement of these poems is always slow, with a scrupulous attention to accuracy of detail. Yet the purpose of such accuracy seems to me less that of a devotion to realistic principles than a desire to create what the poet conceives as the full image—an image which is brimming with unspoken feelings that are awakened in the reader through its mediation. It is, then, a poetry of concentrated

understatement. The imagery, purged of intellectual or ideological reference, bears the weight of the experience presented, while the experience itself emerges from the poet's own circumstance. Thus the substance of a poem mirrors the poet's mind in contemplation, his inwardness if you will, or is a perception of and meditation on nature enlarged by simile and association. The latter is easily comprehended once we know that Mr. Bly lives on a farm in Minnesota, and that his poetic experience originates in this somewhat isolated rural life. "The fundamental world of poetry is the inward world," he says in some notes about his work. "We approach it through solitude." We become conscious of that condition of solitude behind each of the poems; and not only solitude, but a certain kind of silence which surrounds the poetry and undoubtedly derives from the author's attitude toward the world he watches with such careful regard. "There is no beginning to silence and no end: it seems to have its origins in the time when everything was still pure Being," writes the Swiss philosopher Max Picard. "It is like uncreated, everlasting Being." That description would fit Robert Bly's poetic landscape, which is not characterized by a complete lack of sound but is permeated by a profound silence from which particular sounds come forth with a clarity and resonance that invests them with singular value. "After Working" is a fine illustration of this relationship between silence and sound in what the poet perceives:

I

*After many strange thoughts,
Thoughts of distant harbors, and new life,
I came in and found the moonlight lying in the room.*

II

*Outside it covers the trees like pure sound,
The sound of tower bells, or of water moving under
the ice,
The sound of the deaf hearing through the bones of
their heads.*

III

*We know the road; as the moonlight
Lifts everything, so in a night like this
The road goes on ahead, it is all clear.*

The environment in which Mr. Bly lives and which fills his poetry is one selected for artistic as well as personal reasons, or so it must appear. Though the Minnesota farmland was apparently the place where he grew up, he obviously made a definite choice, a meaningful one with regard to his work, in returning there. Certainly something very positive may be said for freedom from and independence of literary circles, of the cumbersome load of college teaching and lecturing which comprises the daily routine for so many poets these days. But beyond that one can detect a connection between Mr. Bly's intentions as a poet and his geographical location. In "After Working"—and this might be said of the majority of poems in his book—we see him using those surroundings, his experi-

ence of a particular locale, as the means of realizing a poetry of suggestive images, a poetry which sustains its kinship with the things of earth, nature and the seasons, but firmly rejects any framework of ideas. Mr. Bly has insisted that we should read our Spanish, German and Italian contemporaries to learn this view of poetic art and to witness it in practice; and he has felt strongly enough about this matter to publish many translations—of Montale, Trakl, Jimenez, Vallejo, Neruda, Rilke, and others—in his journal and through his press, and so support his contentions. Of course, a writer like Pablo Neruda has been notoriously mixed up in political affairs for a good number of years. I have no notion of Mr. Bly's political opinions, nor do I think he is much concerned with Neruda's. What he discovers in that Chilean poet can best be exemplified through a short passage from Neruda's essay "Toward an Impure Poetry" (which is, I imagine, in essential agreement with Robert Penn Warren's more complicated defense of poetic impurity):

It is well, at certain hours of the day and night, to look closely at the world of objects at rest. Wheels that have crossed long, dusty distances with their mineral and vegetable burdens, sacks from the coalbins, barrels and baskets, handles and hafts for the carpenter's tool chest. From them flow the contacts of man with the earth, like a text for all harassed lyricists. The used surfaces of things, the wear that the hands give to things, the air, tragic at times, pathetic at others, of such things—all lend a curious attractiveness to the reality of the world that should not be underprized.²

This paragraph by Neruda reads, in its own fashion, like a comment on Mr. Bly's poetic aims, on the quality of his observation and reflection. And one cannot doubt that what Mr. Bly is doing consists in just this attentiveness to the residual life in things and to the accumulated human history which the imagination searches out there. But another important element ought to be mentioned in these poems, and that is the mind of the poet himself. We are usually aware of the presence of this mind as the contemplative consciousness through which the world appears and, in addition, as the agent of association and analogy whereby words and images are made to carry emotional weight.

Mr. Bly also offers us poems that initiate with his feelings, his personal moods and moral outlook, and move outward to interpret the world and things in it through them. He remarks that the poetry he writes is about the present rather than the past, and thus it becomes involved with both nature and the unconscious, which exist in the present. We have already spoken briefly of the place nature occupies in his work. The unconscious is disclosed in the poet's reliance on dream and the fluid associations of the mind, especially in the sort of poem which begins with his private feelings. The kind of order we see in one of these poems reflects the motions of the poet's mind in a state of dream and meditation mixed. The poem "Unrest" will serve to introduce this side of Mr. Bly's art and also his pointed moral sense:

*A strange unrest hovers over the nation:
This is the last dance, the wild tossing of Morgan's
seas,
The division of spoils. A lassitude
Enters into the diamonds of the body.
In high school the explosion begins, the child is partly
killed,
When the fight is over, and the land and the sea ruined,
Two shapes inside us rise, and move away.*

*But the baboon whistles on the shores of death—
Climbing and falling, tossing nuts and stones,
He gambols by the tree
Whose branches hold the expanses of cold,
The planets whirling and the black sun,
The cries of insects, and the tiny slaves
In the prisons of bark:
Charlemagne, we are approaching your islands!*

*We are returning now to the snowy trees,
And the depth of the darkness buried in snow, through
which you rode all night
With stiff hands; now the darkness is falling
In which we sleep and awake—a darkness in which
Thieves shudder, and the insane have a hunger for
snow,
In which bankers dream of being buried by black
stones,
And businessmen fall on their knees in the dungeons
of sleep.*

The entire poem retains the particular characteristics of the author's thought, the shifting streams of memory and intuition, but these images command, as we continue reading, an increasing objectiveness so that the final effect is one of apocalyptic vision or prophecy. Such a poem, however, does not owe allegiance to any specific system of ideas or institutionalized belief; its criticism of values is implied through imagery, not by abstract or logical formulation. Robert Bly, like Anne Sexton, Dilys Laing, and Robert Hayden, looks to his individual perceptions as the basis for moral attitudes and judgments of worth. Poets of the generation of Pound and Yeats could still think of a comprehensive body of thought which their writing might support. But our world has changed so rapidly in forty years that the poet today, hemmed in on all sides by so many hostile developments, finds it inconceivable to entertain the larger assertions of his predecessors. Yet the reduced sphere of the poet has not lessened his intensity, in fact it may have magnified that because poetry has been brought so close to the flesh and bone and spirit of its makers. Within that circle which is the poet's own existence and the home of his imagination the art of poetry arrives at the honesty of vision that is its essence and includes craft as well. . . .

Notes

1. Max Picard: *The World of Silence*, translated by Stanley Godman, Chicago, Henry Regnery, 1961, p. 1.
2. From *Selected Poems of Pablo Neruda*, edited and translated by Ben Belitt, New York, Grove Press, 1961, p. 39.

David Ray (review date 1963)

SOURCE: Ray, David. Review of *Silence in the Snowy Fields*, by Robert Bly. *Epoch* 12, no. 3 (winter 1963): 186-88.

[In the following review of *Silence in the Snowy Fields*, Ray views Bly's poetry as a laconic, intense, and opinionated one that contrasts with the dominant mode of confessional verse and challenges readers' notions of reality.]

Robert Bly is one of the leading figures today in a revolt against rhetoric—a rebellion that is a taking up of the Imagist revolution betrayed, a reassertion of much of the good sense Pound brought to poetry—but also a movement which has in it much that is perfectly new. The new is found in a pure form in the work of Robert Bly [in *Silence in the Snowy Fields*] and of his friend James Wright; it is not an easy aesthetic to describe; it can be found only in a response to their poems. And yet the key might lie in Bly's admiration for the quality of silence in the work of another poet. "The poems of Georg Trakl have a magnificent silence in them," Bly wrote. "It is very rare that he himself talks—for the most part he allows the images to speak for him. Most of the images, anyway, are images of silent things." Bly admires the renunciation of any rhetoric; and for this reason his own work may perplex readers accustomed to argument in poetry—accustomed, for that matter, to any old orthodoxy in poetry. Such readers have been bridled by their erudition to a capacity to read only the enshrined poem.

There has been a light snow.
Dark car tracks move in out of the darkness.
I stare at the train window marked with soft dust.
I have awakened at Missoula, Montana, utterly happy.

My first reaction to this poem was rather stock; it was too slight to work me into a puzzling, responding mood. And yet a singing took itself up somewhere in the small words and invaded my mind with their frail lyric, and the lyric began to seem important. Clearly the source of the excitement was not built into the stripped poem as powder is built into a firecracker. Bly had been up to something new, something different from the old tricks. His is a poetry, I decided at last, that returns the reader to its subjects, a poetry of excitement primarily about a certain kind of life and vision to which the poem directs attention rather than stealing attention from that experience. Hence, this work is profoundly dependent upon the nature of reality—it reflects a choice of subjects and a judgment on them as experiences. Although all poets take into themselves parts of the exterior world and put them back in what is, to say the least, a rearrangement, Bly is committed more totally than most poets to their subjects for two reasons. The choice of his images, the excitements, the celebrant realities, is a mannered or narrowed one; and the intensity of that choice is such that it is opinionated—it expresses a judgment about what life and poetry should be. If, then, the poet should be one who rejoices at solitude, nature, the sullen beauty of the provinces and of our history, then as advocate

of that vision he is not and cannot be the poet who celebrates sickness, glamorizes Miltown, smog and hypochondria. For Bly—and in this respect he is a visionary—the words of poems are real—they *are* expressways or ditches, cornrows or streetlamps, bathtubs or mailboxes; a poem is a chosen world.

Bly's critical judgments (and as public man of letters he inevitably exposes them) on another kind of poetry cannot be dispassionate—he cannot discuss another writer's work as mere "writing;" another imagistic and rhetorical world seduces the reader to a different kind of experience than that his world celebrates. And since much of this poetry is devoted to pain, self-examination, apologies for inadequacies, a glamorizing and preoccupation with death, the confession of obscure guilts, a reluctance to feel without thinking, it represents to him a blast against poetry as a function of sanity and health in a world like his own.

For this reason—and because poets today are inevitably articulate as critics—it would not be surprising if the two poles represented by Bly and Wright at one end and, let us say, Randall Jarrell and Anne Sexton at the other, were to flare into a war—providing some distraction from the shop-worn Academic-Beat U.N. debates. While the Bly canon is a poetry of epiphany, celebrant of names, landscapes—a poetry of images either outside the self or celebrating the self's capacity to respond to that impersonal world, the Sexton poem works from the tortured self, the poet out of touch rather than at home, the poet analyzing the incapacity to celebrate life rather than exploding in celebrations of feeling as a repeated benefit of experience.

This is not to say that Bly writes no poems of darker tone. His responses to American history, to the tragedies of our economic and political country, is powerful. His earlier poems on the ascension of J. P. Morgan, with Morgan dominating the gutted land with the twisted tin of Shell signs, were as fine as any recent poems that have tried to describe the sadness of our provincial landscape—and the reason for that color and grime. Bly was fascinated in these poems about the Robber Barons, and I am not only sorry that he left them out of this book, but hope that in the future he will publish a series of poems dedicated to this darker vision. It lingers in "**Driving Through Ohio**," printed in this volume.

I

We slept that night in Delaware, Ohio:
A magnificent and sleepy country,
Oak country, sheep country, sod country.
We slept in a huge white tourist home
With *National Geographics* on the table.

II

North of Columbus there is a sort of torpid joy:
The slow and muddy river,
The white barns leaning into the ground,
Cottonwoods with their trunks painted white,
And houses with small observatories on top,

As if Ohio were the widow's coast, looking over
The dangerous Atlantic.

III

Now we drive north past the white cemeteries
So rich in the morning air!
All morning I have felt the sense of death;
I am full of love, and love this torpid land.
Some day I will go back, and inhabit again
The sleepy ground where Harding was born.

Robert Bly's work is strange, and confronting it challenges one's impressions not only about the nature of art, but of reality itself.

Norman Friedman (review date 1967)

SOURCE: Friedman, Norman. "The Wesleyan Poets—III: The Experimental Poets." *Chicago Review* 19, no. 2 (1967): 52-73.

[In the following excerpted review, Friedman compares Bly's *Silence in the Snowy Fields* with the work of contemporary, experimental poets and observes the energetic, restless nature of Bly's verse while lamenting it as "too taut" and "too enclosed."]

Silence in the Snowy Fields (1962) is characterized by sharp images, abrupt juxtapositions, loose rhythms, and natural diction. These poems are spoken by a man who is quizzically observant, deeply responsive, and restless and dissatisfied. Techniques and style, therefore, embody poetic vision. Curiously, we are in a world very much like Dickey's—that of the Middle West—and imagery of horses, moonlight, and water predominates, but nothing can be further from Dickey's diffuse wooliness than Bly's concentrated clarity. The influence of Williams appears once again, but it is more real here than in Combs. And yet there are similes in Bly, and more than an echo here and there of the complex richness of Dylan Thomas. Take, for example, "**Waking from Sleep**," which I quote entire:

Inside the veins there are navies setting forth,
Tiny explosions at the water lines,
And seagulls weaving in the wind of the salty blood.
It is the morning. The country has slept the whole
winter.
Window seats were covered with fur skins, the yard
was full
Of stiff dogs, and hands that clumsily held heavy
books.
Now we wake, and rise from bed, and eat breakfast!—
Shouts rise from the harbor of the blood,
Mist, and masts rising, the knock of wooden tackle in
the sunlight.
Now we sing, and do tiny dances on the kitchen floor.
Our whole body is like a harbor at dawn;
We know that our master has left us for the day.

The poem begins with suggestions of Thomas, and ends with suggestions of Williams, but the whole is entirely Bly's, with its characteristically understated yet fully realized energy.