

Wayne Dodd: On Robert Bly

Go back now twenty years later and you will still find it, lying silently in ditches beside the road, drifting noiselessly in with the snow at nightfall, standing dry and bristly in a field of weeds: the spirit of the American prairie. For that's what Bly discovered for us in *Silence in the Snowy Fields*: the spirit of the American (prairie) landscape. Nowhere a trace, not one blurring linger, of language or perception from another culture or geography (all influences of Spanish, Chinese, Latin American--and other--poets notwithstanding). Just the American land, breathing into and through Bly. And us. I would even go so far as to say, if pressed, that however much else Bly may have contributed to the ferment of American letters, this has been perhaps his most important contribution--aside from the rich offering of the poems themselves. Once we had experienced *Silence in the Snowy Fields*, the body of America was never again the same to us--never again "merely" there, never again external to our own locus of spirit, no longer obedient to even the most carefully translated commands from "English" poetry. Since *Silence*, a developing generation of new young poets has been able to take for granted the subtle and important knowledge of our geographical lives these poems provide. It has come to be a given, something which, once gained, one can never go back from. Like self-consciousness. It has become a fundamental fact of not just a way of knowing, but also a what.

But perhaps consciousness would be a more useful comparison, because it is consciousness these poems are concerned with, consciousness of the world of solitude, of darkness, of isolation, of silence: the other world--sleep, the hidden or unseen, the rest of it. That's what the silence is filled with, what it frees us for: the other half, the realm of dark knowledge, night. The fields and rural buildings here open out into this large dimension of (our) being. "We are all asleep in the outward man," Bly quotes Boehme, as an epigraph for the book, then goes on to offer poems which, taken all together, call to us, Wake up! Wake up! in (and through) the inward man. This is the persistent urge one feels in *Silence in the Snowy Fields*: the urge to spiritual perception. We sense the need to discover the other-dimensionality of being.

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