

George S. Lensing and Ronald Moran: On Robert Bly

The landscape of the poems of the second volume shifts from the snowy cornfields of Madison, Minnesota, to the councils of state in Washington, and the lethargic state of peaceful communion with nature is converted to a melancholy and occasionally petulant exposure of an immoral government. The temperate poem becomes baldly topical; irony issues as a more potent weapon. The specific controversy which underlies *The Light Around the Body* is America's involvement in the Vietnam War, an issue seen in conjunction with the racism and poverty throughout the society. In this context, even the volume's title assumes a certain irony. The use of personifications also changes from the first to the second volume: from "Tiny birds are singing / In the secluded prairies / And in the deep valleys of the hand" ("Taking the Hands") to "Chrysanthemums crying out on the borders of death" ("Smothered by the World").

From *Four Poets and the Emotive Imagination: Robert Bly, James Wright, Louis Simpson, and William Stafford*. Copyright © 1976 by Louisiana State University Press.

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Excerpted Criticism ^[1]

Author:

George S. Lensing ^[2]

Ronald Moran ^[3]

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