

Wellspring: Poetry for the Journey

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A weekly poetry resource
from St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Richmond, Virginia



The Moon

After writing poems all day,
I go off to see the moon in the pines.
Far in the woods I sit down against a pine.
The moon has her porches turned to face the light,
But the deep part of her house is in the darkness.

Robert Bly¹

Reflections

In the author's note included in Robert Bly's acclaimed 1962 collection of poems *Silence in the Snowy Fields*, he writes: "I am interested in the connection between poetry and simplicity... the fundamental world of poetry is an inward world. We approach it through solitude."

Bly, along with poets Galway Kinnell, James Wright, and others, became practitioners of what was known, mid-century, as the Deep Image movement, the thrust of which relied on concrete imagery alone, imagery without commentary. The essential tenet of Deep Image poetry is that the image itself makes the experience and thereby generates a meaning. "The Moon" is an example of this particular kind of image-dependent poem, one without narration or description. All we have is a moon; so where do we go from here?

Where in the world do we go from here?

Tonight, as I write, the waning crescent of a moon is as the poem describes: its face, one third of that mysterious, far-away thing, is as bright and clear as if a porch light shone on it. But the "deep part" is in darkness. And all along my street tonight the deep parts of the houses—and perhaps the deepest parts of us—are in darkness, too.

The doors are shut, the windows barely lamp-lit, and one streetlight flickers to life. I have found a great comfort in knowing my neighbors are home, that though we are apart, we are close by, near enough to see if not to touch. For now, in our private darknesses and in our solitude, the deep parts of us are coming to grips with a new and lonelier normal. Even the

¹ "The Moon" by Robert Bly from *Eating the Honey of Words*, HarperCollins Publishers, 1999.

moon will get darker, its illumination smaller and smaller until there is only darkness in the sky where once that bright face shone.

I give thanks tonight for all my neighbors, near and far and I give thanks for the sky that blankets us all at once. May this darkness and your solitude be sanctuary more than wilderness and may this poem reach you in morning's brightness.

Just as the new moon, invisible to us, marks a beginning again, so our darkness might awaken us to something new also. We are neighbors, nevertheless, and though the crescent wanes, the moon itself is always there. Wherever you are, look up, look up: the deepest part may be in darkness, but we are together somehow, sharing sky as we live, as we always have.

✧ About the Poet

Robert Bly (b. 1926) won the 1968 National Book Award for Poetry for his collection *The Light Around the Body* and he is the author of over thirty books of poems. Poet, editor, and translator, he has had a transformative effect on the shape of contemporary American arts and letters. In his travels to Norway—on a 1956 Fulbright Grant to translate Norwegian poetry into English—he found the work of a number of major poets whose writing was, at the time, barely known in the United States. It is in large part to Bly's gifts as a translator that the poems of Pablo Neruda, Cesar Vallejo, Rumi, Hafez, and Kabir are now widely available to modern readers in English. Now 93 years old, Bly lives on a farm in western Minnesota with his wife and children.



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