



Leaping Poetry: An Idea with Poems and Translations

Robert Bly (Editor)

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Part poetry anthology, part critical treatise, Leaping Poetry is a major statement by one of American's most distinguished poets. Bly's thesis is that great works of art contain leaps within themselves: 'A poet who is leaping makes a jump from an object soaked in unconscious substance to an object or idea soaked in conscious psychic substance.' The greatest works of art carry the richest associations between the conscious and unconscious, and Bly notes with pleasure the resurgence of abundant leaping in modern poetry.

Leaping Poetry: An Idea with Poems and Translations Details

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Richard says

Robert Bly, before, after, but not during his Iron John phase has been one of my favorite poets. First contact was with *The Tooth Mother Naked at Last*, a great poem out of the Vietnam War period. A harrowing poem. His own writing has gotten simpler with time, and he should have much more recognition than he does. I see there's a film coming out - that will help a little. Equally adept as a translator, his work with Nobel Laureate Tomas Tranströmer is sublime. A copy of *Friends, You Drank Some Darkness* should be on everyone's shelf.

Leaping Poetry is a study in writing metaphor. The current crop of American poets seem to have left metaphor behind - they should take a refresher. This would be an excellent place to start.

Alison says

You can read this book in one sitting, and after reading it you won't be able to read a one-page poem in one sitting ever again! Okay, that's not exactly true, but it does help me think about why I like certain poetry and even poetic prose.

Rauan says

crazy bull-headed and brilliant

Celia says

This is really just "an idea," more poetry collection than a study. Though I liked the concept of the leap, I thought Bly's explanation of it was limited, and I was turned off by the many typos in the Spanish poems.

Adam says

"In ancient times, in the 'time of inspiration,' the poet flew from one world to another, 'riding on dragons'. . . They dragged behind them long tails of dragonsmoke. . . . This dragonsmoke means that a leap has taken place in the poem. In many ancient works of art we notice a long floating leap at the center of a work. That leap can be described as a leap from the conscious to the unconscious and back again, a leap from the known part of the mind to the unknown part and back to the known."

So begins Robert Bly's short (all the better reason to re-read it often!) but endlessly fascinating aesthetic manifesto for surreal poetry. Here Bly both lays out his wonderful idea about "leaping" poetry and pays homage to the modern masters of this method, largely Spanish and Latin American poets such as Neruda,

Lorca and Vallejo. Other concepts crucial to Bly's leaping-poetry idea are those of Wild Association and the hierarchy of "three brains" involved in a complex relationship within the human mind.

This book is likely to transform not only your view of poetry, but of any art.

Jon Stout says

This is one book that I didn't understand at all, and yet I enjoyed. Robert Bly argues that the best poetry makes leaps from one unconscious idea to another, and from unconscious to conscious, by means of association. I believe him, and yet when I read the many poems he uses as examples, I have no idea where the leaps are. I see gaps and strange juxtapositions, but I don't see the connections. Maybe that proves that the leaps are unconscious.

I like the way that Bly throws out speculative ideas with great authority, as though he, as a poet, can see things that other people can't. I can hear his laconic voice when he makes his pronouncements. For example, he takes the germ of an idea from a scientific source, and says that there are really three brains: the reptilian brain, the mammalian brain, and the spiritual brain, and then he goes on to identify their work in different poems.

Bly has the courage to conceive of things in entirely new ways, as a poet, and who cares if they are intellectually or scientifically sound? That will come later. What's important is to see things as though for the very first time.

John says

This was my introduction, many years ago now, to looking at poetry in a different way. It feels a bit dated now, but so do I, most days.

Nicola says

A wonderful, bite-size (as in edible and, yes, sound-worthy/quote-worthy) book. I found Bly's basic premise that poetry is a product of both the unconscious and conscious mind very provocative. It made me re-see some of my favorite poets and my own work.

Though it's true that the translations are uneven and Bly makes unqualified pronouncements at times, I loved the international range of this collection and the flash and teeth of Bly's opinionated wit.

It's also wonderful to trace the inception of Spanish surrealism (among other surrealisms) into American poetry; you can see how much influence this strain will have on later poets (post-New York School: whom Bly calls "hoppers" (versus "leapers")): Mark Strand, Charles Simic (Serbian-American, okay), James Tate, to name a few.

Mejix says

I loooooove Bly but sometimes these grand generalizations in his essays are a bit much.

I'm all for leaping but this type of excessive imagery in poetry... most of the times it just feels so gratuitous.

Shannon says

Interesting ideas. I'm still trying to understand them fully.

Jsavett1 says

I read this in two hours. Robert Bly is a master poet and an expert provocateur. He's also a little kooky in a wonderful way. This book is his short but important manifesto about our estrangement from imagination and the parts of our brains which honor and seek myth. He believes this estrangement is due to Christianity's ethical and theological system and that the effect is much to our detriment. It was inspiring reading. The poems by Lorca and Vallejo and Bly's own essays make a compelling case that the poetics of Leaping---while not the only valuable or quality form of poetry---amount to nothing less than a celebration of our deepest selves, our New Brains (read the book to understand) and a revolution against the anesthetizing effects of Judeo-Christian/European linear culture.

I say Bly is a kook a bit because in the section on the different parts of the brain, he uses a maximum of certain language with a minimum of scientific support. This if course, may be part of his point. But it felt like reading those old anatomy books of the 15th and 16th centuries while shaking one's head and saying, oh silly them.....leeches! Now we know that the best way to fight cancer is poisoning yourself with chemicals and radiation!

In any case, this book is a must. I immediately ordered Garcia Lorca's Complete Poems.

LemontreeLime says

Bly's words are equal parts cryptic and methodical as he discusses his topic of what makes poetry really live. The best have a quality of 'leaping' from subject to subject in ways that make sense not logically but something deeper. The poems included are very good. But exhausting. At least i was exhausted. I thought about it later and said to myself, those damn poems are like a nightmare on speed, like a funhouse ride at the surrealist theme park, and now i'm tired after reading them.

Kayla Asher says

D:

this makes no sense! everything i thought i knew about poetry has been blown up in my face.

Lisa Folkmire says

Definitely dug 80% of Bly's theories.

Laura says

This book has a lot of wonderful ideas I have never thought of before, or at least not in detail. How rapid and leaping associations make poems powerful. Surrealism, of course, is the embodiment of this technique. But how does one achieve the leaps?

Writing and erasing some of the links is of course a very basic way to achieve some sort of leaping thoughts, but not enough. What Bly states about the Spaniards of the 20th century - wild associations, emotion cascading in words on the page - and what Federico Garcia Lorca says about "the Duende" seems to be the key. Intense emotion and adrenaline help the brain reach a more "spiritual" plane, where associations occur like explosions in mine fields. To write as if we only have one poem left to write before we die, and to use that poem to amaze and stun the world we will leave behind. To keep building up that energy so the new "last" poem is better than the one before, never any less.

Sometimes poetry in the English language suffers periods of struggle to mimic what the Spanish poets of the 20th century accomplished; and there is something that doesn't quite transfer to English when these surreal poems are translated. Bly discusses many different issues with logic leaps and translations, using a variety of poems from different languages to demonstrate the effects of "leaping poetry". Leaping Poetry is a fascinating study on "logic leaps" and translation, I highly recommend it.
