

ps.

That "our group feeling," I just thought of the last stanza of a poem of mine called "So Long" that to an extreme degree identifies with anything that is near as a person all alone reaches out:

No one can surface till far,
far on, and all that we'll have
to love may be what's near
in the cold, even then.

1050 Sunningdale
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16 Feb 78

Dear Ted,

Old Marriage and New came, with your February 13 letter, and I immediately sat down to luxurious reading. I am wholeheartedly with you in the impulse to write about what matters to you; further I think the poems in this collection gain in both directions by this impulse--I can't see that any edge is taken off the effectiveness by their springing from immediate occasions, though of course I have to judge from what the poem itself gives me. But I get the effect of immediacy, of truth, and of significance. I think in some way or another in my poems, at least the ones I care most for, I am always trying to prop some dead bird up in a tree.

Having Bly around must be great. If you have him around still when this note arrives I hope you will pledge him my continued allegiance and tell him Dorothy and I always look forward to intercepting him out this way.

About my poem "Traveling Through the Dark," my own feeling (though I'm ready for anyone to fish out their own any time) is that the speaker is alone in the car, and that when he says "our group" he is saying two things, the immediate one being just whatever is suddenly preciously there--deer, fawn, car, engine, exhaust--whatever can hurriedly be clustered together by someone feeling abruptly scarily alone. The other part of a meaning; or shade of a meaning I feel is that the speaker feels a kind of representative, suddenly, for all those others who must depend on isolated individuals carrying out their obligations even when alone--so that our group hears the wilderness listen any time we become aware of how alone we sentient beings are in a world with cliffs, rocks, death around.

Well--I hadn't tried before to spell it out for myself. By the way, I plead with Bly to keep on feeling kindly toward my poem, no matter how mistaken I am in my fumbling back toward it....

Adios--

Bill Stafford