Letter to the Editor
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Dear Editor,

I agree almost completely with Jason Guriel's assessment that "what our era is lacking" is a focus on the, in Camille Paglia's words, "'production of the powerful, distinctive, self-contained poem'" ["Not Just Poetry," October 2008]. Such - dare we call them "great"? poems are being written today, of course, but an increased focus on the book, the project, and/or process does tend to override the centrality of the single poem.

That being said, I disagree almost completely with Guriel's assessment of the poems injorie Graham's Sea Change. Guriel claims "there are no poems," that is, distinct poems, in Graham's latest book. His reasoning for this claim seems to be, in large part, formal: put off by Graham's use of a combination of Whitmanesque long lines and Williamsesque short ones, he states that "the ambition to create individually realized poems has been washed away by [this] tidal form."

Graham refers to the poems in Sea Change as "exploded haikus." However exploded they may be, the poems often retain their commitment to making vital, dramatic, surprising turns. Though they do not look like poems by Coleridge, Keats, or Frost, particular poems in Sea Change in fact turn, enacting movements of mind, in ways similar to the descriptive-meditative "Frost at Midnight," the dialectical "Ode to a Nightingale," and the ironic "The Most of It." And their endings clearly attempt to (and sometimes, as in "Futures" and "Undated Lullaby," perhaps do) achieve the shockingly singular kind of arrivals one finds in these great poems.

The fault for this oversight is not all Guriel's. Though the turn is everywhere in poetry, it has never received the kind of sustained critical attention that it deserves. However, we - poets, critics, and readers - must pay more attention to turns, so that we might see more clearly what is lacking from so many weak poems, and what is essential in what moves us.

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