

LAWRENCE JOSEPH

## DONALD HALL'S OLD AND NEW POEMS

### I

In 1978, when he was fifty, Donald Hall published his seventh book of poems, *Kicking the Leaves*, to widespread acclaim. Hall's reputation as a critic, anthologist, editor, literary journalist (and, arguably, one of our leading persons of letters) was by then already established. Almost suddenly Hall was talked about as a poet. The publication of his next book, *The Happy Man*, eight years later, more than enhanced Hall's reputation. At fifty-eight, Hall not only was writing poems as well as he ever had, but was writing, some claimed, as well as anyone in his generation. *The Happy Man* (which received The Lenore Marshall/*Nation* Prize) served as a prelude for *The One Day*, published two years later, on Hall's sixtieth birthday. In *The Washington Post Book World*, David Lehman unequivocally declared the book "major work." Widely, often extravagantly, praised, *The One Day* received the 1988 National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry.

Last year Ticknor & Fields—in a beautifully-designed edition—published Hall's *Old and New Poems*. *Old and New Poems* isn't a "new and selected poems." In fact, Hall doesn't present his "old" poems by the books in which they appeared; instead, he divides the poems into nine time periods, the "old" poems beginning "1947–1953" and ending "1979–1986," the twenty-two "new" poems (which have the force of a book) designated "1987–1990." The poems from *The One Day* are excluded. In a Note, Hall acknowledges that he has altered many of the "old" poems; he is among those poets (Yeats, Moore, and Lowell are others) who sometimes (and sometimes extensively) revise earlier published work. Clearly, in *Old and New Poems*, Hall presents the "old" work in the context of the "new," so that the reader sees the poems as part of a work continuously in progress.