



Many Circles

©2010 eNotes.com, Inc. or its Licensors. Please see [copyright information](#) at the end of this document.

Though best known for his accomplishments as a poet, Albert Goldbarth is also a prolific essayist, and in this collection he casts a wide net for his subject matter. In part, Goldbarth is concerned with the power and pain of memory, with the ways in which we recollect—and sometimes choose to recollect—particular portions of our past. For Goldbarth, the past is peopled with significant ghosts, chief among them being his father, Irving. One of the strands running through these dozen essays is Goldbarth's relation to his father and to his father's death. It is as if Goldbarth wrestles still with the irrefutable fact of his father's absence from his life, needing somehow to fit that death into his own experience of the world. Very near the surface of Goldbarth's recollection is a fury that refuses to rest or abate: fury at his father and at the fate that befell him.

Goldbarth is also interested in the historical past and in the varied confluences of people and events in time. Goldbarth is especially effective when he is tracing these long lines of incident and coincidence toward their eventual intersections. He tells wonderful, complex stories that are, in fact, the stuff of history; what his stories reveal is the way in which history is so often created by individual personalities, and the way in which history so often is the product of individual interpretation.

At heart, Goldbarth is a portraitist, creating images of these personalities—Leonardo, Madame Curie, Rodin—as they moved through their worlds, making their marks upon both their present and what would become their futures. Goldbarth is also a self-portraitist and uses these essays to imagine and to understand some of the perplexities of his own life. He surveys the geography of his emotional relationships with wives and women. He examines, too, the nature of his spiritual belief, particularly as it inheres in his family and its history. In some ways, Goldbarth finally is a singer of that faith even as it comes up hard against the cold facts of suffering and loss. Belief and understanding: is it too much to ask, wonders Goldbarth, to have a modicum of both in one short lifetime? In *Many Circles: New and Selected Essays*, Goldbarth at least has a go at grabbing a piece of both.

Copyright Notice

©2010 eNotes.com, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

For complete copyright information, please see the online version of this work:
<http://www.enotes.com/many-circles-salem>