1984

Robert Bly and the Twofold Consciousness

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ROBERT BLY AND

THE TWOFOLD CONSCIOUSNESS

BY

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A thesis submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree Master of Arts
Major in English

South Dakota State University
1984

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This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Arts, and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this thesis does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

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Chapter 1

Robert Bly: Fine Imagist Poet or Fuzzy Headed Romantic?

"How beautiful to walk out at midnight in the moonlight/ dreaming of animals." It is samplings of Robert Bly's poetry such as these which have prompted Eliot Weinberger to wonder, "What kind of windbag and language slob would write such a line?"[1] But there are also such fine and startling images as "The bare trees more dignified than ever" or "lamplight that falls on all fours in the grass," which Ian Hamilton admires.[2] Hayden Carruth has encapsulated the view of many of Bly's readers, who regard him as one of the most annoying and exciting poets of the 1960's and 1970's:

> Robert Bly is a poet I don't believe and never have. He explains in the preface to his new book, This Tree Will Be Here for a Thousand Years, that he is aware of two consciousnesses, his own and those of the 'inanimate' things around him: pebbles, moons, dry grass. For my part, this is Swedenborgian nonsense, very dangerous. It saps our minds as it saps the beauty of the natural world. Bly writes against my grain, yet in some poems he catches me, and I am not off my guard. Sometimes it is good, better than good, to guard oneself and still be caught.[3]

Paul Ramsey has seen him as a political crank who invents "wantonly cruel lies" in the process of charging the government with "cruelty and lies."[4] William Heyen believes he is a Romantic in the Yeats strain, his

Silence in the Snowy Fields comparable to "a cluster of gnats." This converts Heyen unwillingly to praise of Bly's poems: "It will be impossible for me to discuss my change of mind rationally, but I've come to believe that my reservations about Bly were only nigglings, that measuring the accomplishment of his work against petty objections is something like dismissing Moby Dick because Melville loses track of his point of view. Bly is free from the inhibitions of critical dictates many of us have regarded as truths."[5]

These are not the voices of critics talking in their usual calm, confident tones about the tenor of an author's work. Who is the poet Robert Bly who so influenced a generation of readers among which he was widely read and whose work has been the source of so much vexation and praise by critics and readers alike?

He is a 58 year old Madison, Minnesota, farmer's son. Bly was the second son--his brother James was one and a half years older. Their mother, Alice Aws Bly, worked at the court house in Madison for many years, and the Bly children were cared for by Marie Schmidt. In addition, a hired farm hand named Art Nelson lived with the Blys for nine years. Bly described his father, Jacob, as a man who was both a reader and a farmer. Later it was Robert who became the reader of books and his brother James who became

the farmer.

Bly has written very little about his family life, mentioning descriptions of farm work and mentioning his father only once: "He had a gift for deep feeling. Other men bobbed like corks around his silence, and his swift decisions; that did not bring him more company, but it did help carry the burdens higher up the mountain. His heart beat very fast, and he felt himself tied to this earth. At church, he kept his arms crossed over his chest."[6] Bly tells the story of his father's successful efforts to obtain the release of one of his hired hands who had been sent to jail on trumped up charges as a result of a misunderstanding with a local waitress. Looking back on this incident Bly observes, "I learned then that the indignation of the solitary man is the stone pin that connects this world to the next. I learned so much from that story!... one moral example will do for a lifetime."[7] Deborah Baker has suggested that Bly both strongly identified with his father and maintained an objective pose. It also may be that Bly's political activities and his refusal to withdraw into a poet's stereotypical seclusion were largely the influence of his father.[8]

Bly's attitudes toward his mother are more difficult to uncover. He did write several essays on the mother image symbolized in literature and mythology. Bly makes

neutral references to his mother in an essay entitled, "Being a Lutheran Boy-god in Minnesota":

> As I understand the idea, boys towards whom the mother directs a good deal of energy, either warm or cold, tend to become boy-gods. They are boys, and yet they feel somehow eternal, out of the stream of life, they float above it. My mother was and is a good mother, without envy or malice, affectionate, excitable, living with simplicity and energy--one of the servants of life. This embodied itself in a sense that I was 'special' and so in a general lack of feeling for others. If someone were suffering, or in a rage, I would feel myself pull away, into some safe area, where I did not 'descend' to those emotions, and get tangled in them, but neither did I help the person at all.[9]

Bly and his brother attended a one-room school. This school would have closed down had not Jacob Bly objected, and sometimes the two boys were the only students in attendance. Bly began keeping a diary in the sixth grade: "Jan 25--neither James nor I went to school today on account of blizzard, I practiced my music lesson in granma's room on Clara's piano. Got my magnifying glass from Post Toasties."[10] Bly has observed that farming was more important in Madison than schooling during the years that he was growing up. His own observations of the cashiers and clerks who stopped out at the farms to check on the bank's grain may explain his later decision not to become an "academic": "How we pitied these creatures! Getting out of the car with a white shirt and necktie, stepping over the stubble like a cat so as not to get too

much chaff on his black oxfords...what a poor model of a human being!...how ignoble! How sordid and ignoble! What ignobility!" Even while he idealized farm life Bly recounts that he often took to his bed in the summer in order to read books.[11]

After graduating from high school, Bly enlisted in the Navy, where it was determined that his mathematical abilities would qualify him to work in the field of radar technology. He began taking math courses at Wright Junior College in Chicago, but he contracted rheumatic fever and was sent to recover in Palm Beach, Florida, for six months. He continued the studies in California and Chicago, but the war ended before he was shipped out.

In the Navy Bly met two literary enthusiasts, Izy Einsenstein and Warren Ramshaw. Of these two men Bly has observed, "I doubt I would have ever become a writer if I hadn't gone into the Navy and met Izy, who wrote poetry, and Warren, who knew about books and lived with books." Bly met Izy in Chicago, where they were young recruits in the math program: "We didn't know what the hell was going on and we didn't care, and we both considered ourselves literary even at the time." When Bly heard Izy describe the Chicago slums as a "running sore" on the city's body, he became convinced of the power of poetic imagery. Even before Bly became ill, he and Izy had planned to fail the math course by answering all multiple choice tests by

repeating the firing order of a Model T's four cyclinders.

Bly had met Warren Ramshaw, a displaced Chicagoan, when he was in Florida. Ramshaw introduced him to The Razor's Edge by Somerset Maugham, and they developed a book-loving camaraderie.[12]

Bly spent a year at St. Olaf's, in Minnesota. He found the studies lacking in intensity, and described the place as "dead spiritually."[13] Deborah Baker has suggested that an atmosphere of "maddening Midwest cheerfulness" was what Bly was really trying to escape when he exited from this Midwest college. Bly claims that the aloofness he felt in his earlier life was in part brought on by the "Sunday-school cheerfulness" of the Norwegian-American farm community, with no one ever being visibly depressed or suicidal. Of this superficial cheerfulness Bly has observed, "How high I was all through High School! What a terrible longing I had to come down."[14]

Bly transferred to Harvard, where he received his B.A. magna cum laude in 1950. It was here that he initially contacted the aspiring poet community--John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, and Donald Hall, the last of whom has remained close to Bly both as a friend and as a critic of Bly's work. During his senior year Bly was editor of the Harvard Advocate, to which he contributed many poems, fiction, and reviews.[15]

While at Harvard, Bly wrote in the traditional forms of English poetry, observing both meter and rhyme. His criticism was already beginning to reveal his suspicion of the contemporary poets. By 1949 Bly was citing the mistakes of the "Old Auden group." He was also suspicious of what he termed the "unsure" form of William Carlos Williams and he criticized Kenneth Rexroth's attempt to found the "New Romanticism" movement in English poetry. Rexroth was exploring alternatives to the British tradition evident in American verse through his translations of French, Japanese, and Chinese poetry. Bly's criticism of Rexroth's interpretive editing and viewpoints remarkably parallels the criticism Bly would receive six years later in relation to his own political poetry. Thus, in neither his early poetry nor his criticism did Bly show an interest in the trends he would later present in his own magazine.[16]

After leaving Harvard in 1950, Bly moved to New York City for three years of solitudinal living he termed his "literary apprenticeship."[17] In a recent interview Bly described the psychological "wound" that sent him to New York in his early twenties: "I was wounded by something which I interpreted in the attitude or remarks of my father [relating to the discomfort of being an educated man like the bank clerks and cashiers who used to come out to the farm]....I am saying that a young man cannot

join the community until he has dealt with that wound. And what I did, the intelligent thing that I did, was to go alone with my wound for three years in New York. And it is exactly like an animal that goes into a cave and licks its wounds." At this point Bly had decided not to go back to the university environment.[18] However, a year after he left New York, Bly enrolled at Iowa State University, where he received his M.A. in Creative Writing. That same year, 1955, Bly married Carol McLean, with whom[19] he was to have four children--Biddy, Mary, Micah, and Noah.

Bly has openly criticized contemporary creative writing programs similar to the one he was enrolled in at Iowa: "The workshops take away some of the solitary pain of the poet, typical of the wild animal writer, by having someone there to encourage you." Once again the poems contained in Bly's M.A. thesis did not foreshadow his later poetry and philosophies. In fact, they contradicted it. The language of many of the poems is archaic, and it is all written in standard iambic pentameter.[20]

One poem, however, entitled "Where We Must Look for Help," describes the conflicts he had been feeling which led to his desire to be alone in New York. Bly later admitted that this particular poem was actually written in New York, and it is the only one to be included in his first published volume, Silence in the Snowy Fields:

The dove returns; it found no resting place:
It was in flight all night above the shaken
seas;
Beneath the ark eaves
The dove shall magnify the tiger's bed;
Give the dove peace.
The split-tail swallows leave the sill at dawn,
At dusk, blue swallows shall return.
On the third day the crow shall fly;
The crow, the crow, the spider-colored crow,
The crow shall find new mud to walk upon.[21]

In 1956 Bly won a two-year Fulbright study grant to Norway, the home of his ancestors, where he began translating Norwegian literature. Bly did not know the Norwegian language, and later admitted that he accepted the Fulbright so that he could look up his relatives. He went to Norway three months early to learn Norwegian and made a great find at this time in the discovery of South American poet Pablo Neruda, Swedish poet Gunnar Ekelof, and German poet Georg Trakl, whose poems were to profoundly affect his own poetry and criticism. In fact, they stimulated him to publish translations by providing him the evidence that American writing was "isolationist."

Bly returned from Norway in 1958, and he and his wife, Carol, settled on the family farm in Madison. Bly allowed his brother to work his land, and that year Bly, together with William Duffy, founded the famous Fifties Press and Fifties Magazine. During this significant phase which continued on through the Seventies, they attempted to present contemporary European and Latin American poetry

in translation. They also published the works of James Wright, Donald Hall, Louis Simpson, and Bly himself. These poets, along with Bly, are those who acknowledge the influence of Lorca, Neruda, Trakl, and Breton, who sought the "deep image," which is central to Bly's poetry and will be inspected later on.[22]

Deborah Baker has noted that Bly was now engaged in farming of a different sort: he would be digging up some of the rocks which had accumulated in the American poetry field since the war, using the Fifties Press as his plow.

The official pronouncement of the magazine, which was to be renamed The Sixties, The Seventies, and now The Eighties, was as follows: "The editors of this magazine think that most of the poetry published in America today is old fashioned." Bly was involved in all aspects of producing the magazine from selecting pieces to include, to writing, translating, and designing. The format of the magazine was kept very simple. Many of the articles poked fun at the poets and literary critics.[23] For example, Bly bestowed an award called "The Order of the Blue Toad" on Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks for their Understanding Poetry. Bly claimed that the humility demonstrated by these editors was really a mask behind which they hid, a sign of their acceptance of all the "cliched

tenets" of the time. The actual award consisted of a picture of a toad, sporting A. E. Housman's moustache; it was turning a meter machine with its left foot and correcting term papers with its right. The banner flying above its head read: "The Ghosts of Criticism Past," and the banner at its feet read: "Vote for Calvin Coolidge."

Bly had maintained that poetry which did not use images was dead, and he devoted an entire section of his magazine entitled "Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum" to identifying dead poetry and pointing out its characteristics.

Poetry may have been the major subject of the magazine, but the government, The New York Times, and literary commentators also came under the gun. Bly furthered his own views and critical discussions under the name of "Crunk."[24]

Meanwhile, Bly's own poetry appeared in Poetry, Paris Review, and Hudson Review. His first volume, Silence in the Snowy Fields (1962) was pastoral poetry about the Minnesota farmland, a setting which provided the landscape for much of his verse.[25]

In 1966 Bly, a registered Democrat, began his political activism, forming Poets Against the Vietnam War, who organized public poetry readings protesting American involvement in the Vietnam War. After Bly, along with

several other poets, read at Reed College, the demand for anti-war readings spread to other college campuses at a phenomenal rate.

"The Teeth Mother Naked at Last" and some political poems which later appeared in The Light Around the Body came out during this time (1967).[26] It was this political poetry which many critics found to be innocent and childish, drawing their attention along with their condemnation.[27] Nevertheless, Donald Hall, Harvey Shapiro, and Theodore Weiss judged Bly worthy of the National Book Award for poetry in 1968 for "writing about the most important subjects--the great events of the spirit and of the day and of the American past." At the presentation ceremony Bly handed over the $1000 check to Resistance, an anti-draft organization. The year before he had refused the National Endowment for the Arts' $5000 grant to the Sixties Press and cancelled all those subscriptions to his magazine of universities engaged in pro-war research. All this caused Bly to become spotlighted on American campuses.[28]

During the 70's Bly produced eleven new books of poetry, among them The Morning Glory (1970), Sleepers Joining Hands (1973), Point Reyes Poems (1973), This Body is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood: Prose Poems (1977), and This Tree Will Be Here for a Thousand Years (1979).

Early in this period, Bly would leave the farm and

go off for a couple of days a week to a cabin located about thirty miles away. On two other days of the week Carol Bly would work on her own writing while Bly cared for their four children. They were also very much involved in the community. Carol established the Prairie Arts Center in Madison. She worked in the church, and during the winter Robert Bly gave lectures in the church basement such as "The Discoveries of Freud and Jung and How They Apply to Life in Madison." Bly was on the road three months a year giving poetry readings. Bly gave lectures at Jung Institutes across the country as the result of his extensive studies of Jung which influenced Sleepers Joining Hands, a book which also reflects the influence of meditation, which Bly studied under Trunpa Rimpoche in Scotland.

In 1979 Bly dissolved his twenty-five year marriage to Carol Bly, now herself a widely recognized Midwest poet.[29] Bly says that "I felt a kind of grounding in my grief, I came down." Bly married again in 1980, and he and his second wife, Ruth Ray, together with her two sons Wesley and Sam, reside in Moose Lake, Minnesota, where he continues to write. Carol and their children also moved to Moose Lake so that they would be able to share the parenting.[30]

Among Bly's awards are the Fulbright, Guggenheim,

and the Amy Lowell fellowships, which he received in 1962 for Silence in the Snowy Fields. He has been on the executive committee of the Association of Literary Magazines of America.

Bly's translations of works began to appear in 1961 with the Twenty Poems of Georg Trakl (German), and in 1962 with the fiction of Swedish poet Selma Lagerlof, The Story of Gosta Berling. In 1967 he translated Twenty Poems of Cesar Vallejo, and in 1967 he translated the fiction work, Hunger, by Knut Hamsun. Also in 1967 he translated Gunnar Ekelof's I Do Best Alone at Night, and in 1968 the Twenty Poems of Pablo Neruda. In 1975, Leaping Poetry: An Idea With Poems and Translations came out including the translations of other Spanish poets. In 1980 he translated the work of Rainer Maria Rilke. More recently Bly has drawn on British translations to produce the American versions of the ancient Indian poet Kabir and the Japanese poets Matsuo Bashi and Issa Kabryashi.[31]

Notes

[1] Eliot Weinberger, "Gloves on a Mouse," The Nation, 17 Nov. 1979, pp. 503-504.

[2] Ian Hamilton, "Bly, Robert" in World Authors 1950-1970, ed. John Wakeman, (New York: Wilson, 1975) pp. 171-172.

[3] Hayden Carruth, "Poets on the Fringe: 'This Tree Will Be Here for a Thousand Years,'" Harper's Magazine, Jan. 1980, p. 79.

[4] Paul Ramsey, Rev. of Sleepers Joining Hands, Sewanee Review, Spring 1974, p. 402.

[5] William Heyen, "Inward to the World: The Poetry of Robert Bly," The Far Point, Fall/Winter 1969, pp. 42-47.

[6] Deborah Baker, "Making a Farm: A Literary Biography," in Of Solitude and Silence: Writings on Robert Bly, With New Poems by Robert Bly, ed. Richard Jones and Kate Daniels (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981), p. 34.

[7] Bly, in Of Solitude and Silence, p. 35.

[8] Deborah Baker, in Of Solitude and Silence, p. 35.

[9] Deborah Baker, in Of Solitude and Silence, p. 35-36.

[10] Bly, in Of Solitude and Silence, pp. 36-37.

[11] Bly, in Of Solitude and Silence, p. 37.

[12] Baker, in Of Solitude and Silence, pp. 38-40.

[13] Victoria Frenkel Harris, "Robert Bly," in Critical

Survey of Poetry: Authors, ed. Magill. (Salem, New Jersey: Englewood Press, 1982) p. 211.

[14] Deborah Baker, in Of Solitude and Silence, p. 36.

[15] Victoria Harris, in Critical Survey, p. 211.

[16] Deborah Baker, in Of Solitude and Silence, pp. 40-41.

[17] Victoria Harris, in Critical Survey, p. 222.

[18] Deborah Baker, in Of Solitude and Silence, pp. 42-44.

[19] Victoria Harris, in Critical Survey, p. 222.

[20] Deborah Baker, in Of Solitude and Silence, pp. 45-46.

[21] Bly, in Of Solitude and Silence, p. 46.

[22] "Bly, Robert," World Authors, p. 171.

[23] Deborah Baker, in Of Solitude and Silence, p. 51.

[24] Deborah Baker, in Of Solitude and Silence, pp. 51-54.

[25] "Bly, Robert," World Authors, p. 171.

[26] Victoria Harris, in Critical Survey, p. 222.

[27] Paul Ramsey, Sewanee Review, p. 402.

[28] "Bly, Robert," World Authors, p. 172.

[29] Deborah Baker, in Of Solitude and Silence, pp. 65-68.

[30] Victoria Harris, in Critical Survey, p. 222.

[31] "Bly, Robert," in Contemporary Authors, p. 121.

Chapter 2

News of the Universe

Robert Bly once told interviewer David Ossman that most contemporary American poetry is old-fashioned not "from lack of experience [but] from a lack of a way to approach this experience. My conviction is that poetry in the English and American languages has been tied down too much to the kind of poetry...which loses itself in forms and which is too conscious of the English tradition." At the 1966 Houston Festival of Contemporary Poetry Bly noted: "I think it is wrong to approach a poem by studying meter or form....We turn away from content and take refuge in technique because we have a fear of content and a fear of experience, everyone shares it."

Even in the case of the Beat poets, Bly told Ossman, "the poetry itself is old-fashioned. The way [the Beat poets] put together a poem is basically the way a poem was put together in the nineteenth century: making very direct statements and talking directly and specifically about the subject matter....Unless English and American poetry can enter, really an inward depth, through a kind of surrealism, it will continue to become dryer and dryer."[1]

The foregoing comments are key to Bly's philosophy of poetry and the directions it has been taking. Bly's

tracing of the poetic process is the central issue he deals with in his News of the Universe (1980), a combined commentary and selection of representative verse arranged according to Bly's perception of the various developmental periods of poetry. Originally, Sierra Book Clubs had simply asked Bly to edit a collection of environmental poetry. Bly did not want to edit "a bunch of poems about nature." Rather he intended to "strike at the very heart" of a conflict regarding humankind and nature which had haunted him since his undergraduate years at Harvard.[2]

Part One of the edition contains commentary on the Old Position and includes poems representative of it. According to Bly, the Old Position is encapsulated in Alexander Pope's statement that "The proper study of mankind is man" or expressed in Descartes' "I think, therefore I am." This Old Position is the centuries-old popular attitude that "nature is there primarily to be dominated by its master, the human mind." This statement stands in direct opposition to Blake's statement that the human body is a temple, not the mind. By the old European line of reasoning it followed that since thought powers were possible for only humans, then "animals and inanimate objects did not fundamentally exist." Bly termed this "the elevation of reason above nature and unconsciousness," which he addresses in his translation of Gerard de Nerval's 1854 "Golden Lines":

Free thinker! Do you think you are the only thinker
On this earth in which life blazes inside all things?
Your liberty does what it wishes with the powers it controls,
but when you gather to plan, the universe is not there.
Look carefully in an animal at a spirit alive;
every flower is a soul opening out into nature;
a mystery touching love is asleep inside metal.
"Everything is intelligent!" And everything moves you.
In that blind wall, look out for the eyes that pierce you:
the substance of creation cannot be separated from a word...
Do not force it to labor in some low phrase!
Often a Holy Thing is living hidden in a dark creature;
and like an eye which is born covered by its lid,
a pure spirit is growing strong under the bark of stones![3]

Not only did The Old Position serve to isolate women, whom Milton called "a defect of Nature," but it encouraged imperialism, capitalism, war, environmental exploitation and the decline of the Christian Church. Bly contends that in order to break down the Old Position, we will have to study the outer world, for this "temple" is what we share with other animals. Bly discards the notion of the human soul residing inside the human being or of the human soul being given by God at birth in favor of Novalis' statement (which serves as the frontispiece for the book): "the soul is where the inner world and the outer world meet. Where they overlap, it [the soul] is in every point of the overlap."[4]

Goethe's reaction to the Cartesian system in Dichtung und Wahrheit typified the German battle of ideas: "It seemed to us so gray, monstrous and death-like that we could hardly stand it; we shuddered as if facing a ghost." The 18th Century poets included in this section which are representative of the Old Position include Pope, Swift, Schubart, Milton, and Arnold.[5]

In Part Two of The News of the Universe collection Bly discusses the first significant attack on the Old Position which occurred primarily through the pen of the Romantic poet William Blake. It was Blake who suggested the power of the twofold consciousness realm in these lines from The Book of Thel written November 22, 1802:

> Now I a twofold vision see
> And a twofold vision is given to me.
> 'Tis fourfold in my supreme delight-
> And threefold in soft Beulah's light
> And twofold always. May God us keep
> From single vision and Newton's sleep![6]

As Bly pointed out metaphorically, once the Alps became merely an obstacle between France and Italy and no longer a spectacle of beauty, the flowing landscape descriptions formerly found in the diaries of travellers disappeared. Yeats, another Romantic who attacked the Old Position, consolidated his misgivings in a remarkable poem, entitled "Fragments."

> Locke sank into a swoon:
> The Garden died
> God took the spinning-jenny
> Out of his side.[7]

German Romantics, Goethe, Novalis, and Friederich Holderlein, in particular, expressed anger at the 18th century condescension toward nature which betrayed ordinary people and the ordinary affairs of life. According to Bly, the works of Goethe, Holderlein, and Novalis show four deficiencies of the Old Position: One, it ignores the existence of the submerged feminine side; two, it fails to speak to the loss of psychic energy between men and the creative mythology; three, it fails to heal the gap which occurred when the Church separated men from objects, bringing on their psychic loneliness; and finally, it ignores the "call" one form of consciousness may make to another, dwelling on the elements, exclusively.[8]

Bly cites Novalis, whose Hymns to the Nights praises all that has been ignored in Europe in the preceeding centuries: the unconscious, night, sleep, sensuality, woman. Novalis claimed in this poem that through his love of Sophie he participated in an anima experience in which the feminine side of himself was opened up.[9] Bly himself in a videotape discusses the notion that poetry is written in the submerged, feeling, feminine side and likened a "poet in the city" to a "wife in a cave." Also Bly quotes Jung to substantiate his belief that if one doesn't attend to any part of oneself it becomes primitive. Bly sees this withering occurring in all men. In the

videotape he likens the male's existence to life in a "moon palace," which he describes as a provisional life--the man living metaphorically by reflected light in a family situation where nothing seems real. Bly contends that caring for children is one way men can nourish their natural feminine side.[10]

The second deficiency the Romantics brought out in their attack upon the Old Position was based upon Gerard de Nerval's notion that a psychic channel once existed between Europeans and the ancient Greek gods, and were the channel to be reopened again many ideas and philosophies would collapse: "Underneath the Arch of Constantine a swarthy sybil slumbers, when she awakes the gate will crumble."[11] Bly addresses this possiblity in his translation of Holderlein's "Bread and Wine, Part 7," as well as in Bly's working of Holderlein's "The Sanctimonious Poets:"

Bread and Wine, Part 7

Oh friend, we arrived too late. The divine energies
Are still alive, but isolated above us, in the archetypal world.
They keep on going there, and, apparently, don't bother if
Humans live or not...that is a heavenly mercy.
Sometimes a human's clay is not strong enough to take the water;
Human beings can carry the divine only sometimes.
What is living now? Night dreams of them. But craziness
Helps, so does sleep. Grief and Night toughens us,

Until people capable of sacrifice once more rock
In the iron cradle, desire people, as the
ancients strong enough for water.
In thunderstorms it will arrive. I have the
feeling often, meanwhile,
It is better to sleep, since the Guest comes
so seldom;
We waste our life waiting, and I haven't the
faintest idea
How to act or talk...in the lean years who
needs poets?
But poets as you say are like the holy disciple
of the Wild One
Who used to stroll over the fields through the
whole divine night.[12]

The Sanctimonious Poets

I'm sick of you hypocrites babbling about god!
Rationality is what you have, you don't
believe
in Helios, nor the sea being, nor the
thunder being;
And the earth is a corpse, so why thank
her?
As for you gods, be calm! You are decorations
in their poems,
Even though the energy has drained out of
your names.
And, Mother of Nature, if a word with immense
energy is needed, people remember yours.[13]

The third deficiency of the Old Position, involving the gap of psychic loneliness which resulted when the Church separated men from objects, was first alluded to in the work of Blake. In the poem "A Memorable Fancy" Blake is talking with an angel. When he stops reading Aristotle and Church documents he finds himself on a pleasant river bank listening to the strains of harp music. In the Church Institution Blake and the Angel descend into a pit where human beings are seen devouring each other and themselves. The skeleton that remains is Aristotle's

analytics.[14]

In this regard Bly has charged that the Christian churches' concern with the evils of nature has contributed to the formation of the gap Western human beings feel between the natural world and themselves. The loneliness that this separation elicits, according to Bly, left the churches having to console humans in their loneliness. The right path becomes the path of "obedient resignation" to "the poverty of the Old Position," a psychologically restrained condition alluded to in Eliot's "I have heard the mermaids singing each to each./ I do not think that they will sing to me." Bly cites Rilke's suspicion of Christian virtues, quoting Rilke's enigmatic comment on the gap created by the churches: "Left out to die on the mountains of the heart."[15]

The final deficiency Bly deals with in the Romantic attack on the Old Position concerns the call one form of consciousness makes to another form of consciousness, answered or not. This intriguing notion is explored in Bly's translation of Goethe's "Mignon," a "call poem," in which Goethe states his belief that one needs to take a journey out somewhere away from oneself in order to see if there is a consciousness in nature and find out if it, too, has a dark side (comparable to the dark side of the human psyche). In the three stanzas which comprise this beautiful poem, the forms of consciousness change both in

terms of the final destination of the journey and in terms of the person who is being addressed along the way. In stanza one, the person is addressed as "darling" or "beloved," and the journey's end is a "celestial place." In the second stanza the person is addressed as a "loving protector," and the journey's end is a human dwelling. In stanza three, the person addressed has become one's own father and the destination a northern alpine place of "mountains, mules, fog, danger and dragons."[16] Here then is "Mignon":

> Have you been to that country where the gold
> oranges and the lemony blossoms glow in dark
> leaves?
> A soft wind winds down from the blue air,
> The love myrtle rises quiet and Apollo's tree.
> Have you been there? Truly? That is where
> Oh my darling, I want to go with you!
>
> Have you been to the Great House? Ionian
> columns
> hold the roof, golden walls, rooms full of
> light,
> Men of marble look at me without moving.
> God help us, child, what have they done to you?
> Have you been there? That is where,
> Oh my Keeper from Harm, I want to go with you!
>
> Have you been to the Mountain? Its stairs in
> cloud.
> Hoofs of a mule pick their way through the fog.
> Unconscious dragons breathe inside tunnels.
> Granite splits, masses of water pour down.
> Have you been there? That is where
> the path we take goes! Oh my Father, it is time
> to go![17]

Bly's reading of "Mignon" suggests that although the physical circumstances may change and the people who accompany one through life's journey may change, "the call"

which one's soul receives is the call to make the journey and explore simultaneously the dark side of the natural world alongside the dark side of one's psyche. It is this attending to the dark forms of consciousness which Bly believes integrates an individual, making him psychologically whole.

In an interview with Patricia Holt, Bly suggests: "We are in a really frightful kind of struggle between the Old Position and various positions that have been developed since...." Bly described two strains of poetry that grew from the Old Position upheaval: the one, representing the ironic or academic poets, whose work is thought to be the foundation for modern poetry, which Bly believes began with Corbiere and La Forgue and continues through Auden, Cummings, Eliot, and Pound, and the second strain, representing the multiconscious poets, who include such well-known European poets as the German poets Georg Trakl and Rilke, the Spanish surrealists, Lorca, Neruda, Jiminez, and Antonio Machado, the Chilean poet Martinez and the Peruvian poet Cesar Vallejo. These of course were the poets whose works Bly translated and presented in his magazine. There were also American poets who belonged to this multi-consciousness strain, and they are James Wright, Louis Simpson, W.S. Merwin, Robert Kelly, Jerome Rothenberg, and of course Bly himself.[18]

Bly doesn't like traditional modern poetry in the

Pound-Eliot strain for three reasons. First, Bly believes it is mind-obsessed, confessional poetry, which contains suicidal overtones and fails to address the content of modern life; second, it is psychically alienated poetry because it handles incoming unconscious material poorly; and finally, it is limited in vision because it operates within a crippled creative sensibility, failing to consider the holistic scheme of man.

Returning to the first charge, that modern poetry in the traditional strain is mind-obsessed, James Mersmann explains that Bly is objecting to a poetry that "grows from the intellect" and is like "a plant deprived of its soil." The deep images Bly calls for are not "petals on a wet black bough," but the "images that writhe in the fogs half-way between deep and inarticulate passions and conscious thought."[19]

This modern poetry, according to Bly, also consists of "suicidal life studies and confessionalism," which he claims characterize the art of Mailer, Roth, and Robert Lowell. Bly also points out that the world of confessional poets is distinctive in the absence of trees and praise of landscape, citing Berryman who concentrates on the human element and dies a suicide. The narcissism that results when only the human elements are attended to is a situation which Antonio Machado commented on in the following translation by Bly"

> This modern narcissist of ours
> cannot see his face in the mirror
> because he has become the mirror.[20]

Bly's view of the situation worsens as the outer world no longer functions as the mirror for man in which to view himself. Instead man puts himself out there and replaces nature with his own body, his "consciousness."

Bly contends that this traditional modern poetry cannot carry the content of modern life. That content, according to Bly, is "the sudden new change in the life of humanity, of which the Nazi Camps, the terror of modern wars, the sanctification of the viciousness of advertising, the turning of everyone into workers, the profundity of associations, is all a part."

According to Bly, modern poets, particularly Eliot in The Waste Land, had made one large raid into this life, but they did not persist, and in fact, they finally retreated. Bly's view of the modern world is one, then, that "focuses on an ugliness that is wider and deeper than that exposed by The Waste Land," and which in 1958 had still not been described. That reality, in Bly's mind, could never be described in "the restraints or prettinesses of rhyme, the decorous regularity of iambic meter, the four-letter words of Beat poetry, the vague suggestiveness of the symbolist mode, the impeccable order of poems for Kenyon Review, the narrowness of personal or confessional poetry, or the abstract tendencies of contemporary British

poetry." What was needed, according to Bly, was something capable of reaching down into "the darkness and nightmares of the modern sickness."[21]

The second problem Bly found in traditional modern poetry deals with the way the modern poet handles incoming unconscious source material. In a 1971 interview with Peter Martin in Minneapolis, Bly explains the task of the ego in dealing with unconscious material. According to Bly, by means of the ego one "turns and faces" unconscious incoming material. The ego is unable to control the arrival; it merely observes it. Then, Bly explains, the ego "goes into a depression." Bly cites Jung as saying this depressive state occurred in writers several thousand years ago, and was clearly visible in their poems and stories, and always associated with the arrival of new unconscious material.

Bly has noted that in modern times the ego perceives that more unconscious material is coming in, but it turns its back on the material--the ego doesn't think it over or try to relate it to previous material in what Bly calls an "ethical sense." In modern poetry the ego does not attempt to deal with the new unconscious material and pretends nothing unusual is happening. Jung called this phenomenon "spiritual inflation," and Bly contends it has marred the modern writer's literary style and has produced the "hideously archaic, rhetorical, overblown style of

Nietzche's "Thus Spake Zarathustra" and ruined Pound's style by making the Cantos unreadable.[22]

The third problem Bly has found with modern poetry is that it has operated within a crippled creative sensibility, failing to render the holistic scheme of man. For an explanation of what has occurred, Bly returns to Descartes and explores Descartes' prediction for society in terms of Karl Stern's Flight From Woman in which Stern retells the three dreams Descartes had before he expostulated the ruinous "I think, therefore I am." According to Stern, Descartes was about to divide the world into res cogitans or "thinking something" that has no spatial quality and res extensa or "spatial something" that has no psychic quality, when the dreams began.

In the most vivid dream Descartes walks bent over to the left into strong wind and expresses surprise to see others walking upright. Bly interprets this dream to mean we are all walking bent over now, like Descartes, "our left side crushed. Our feelings lack air," or in Rilke's interpretation, "Everywhere I am folded, there I am a lie." In making this interpretation Bly accepts the recent speculation and research that suggests that the left side of the body favors feeling, music, motion, and touch--qualities Bly contends enable us to "unite with objects and creatures."[23]

The implication is that through the process of

modernization, which has submerged the feminine side, thereby psychically alienating man from a large part of his consciousness, man no longer stands in harmony with himself and the natural world. This results in his losing the capacity to be truly creative. Now, instead, his thoughts circulate within his own self-awareness, narcissistic, sterile, deprived, and even self-destructive.

Bly offers three remedies to modern poetry's deficiencies, and it is these three remedies which are the emerging watchmarks of the new strain of twofold consciousness poetry: one, a transparency of style; two, the transformation of the poet into shaman; and three, the utilization of the object poem technique in prose poem form.

Returning to the first component, the utilization of a transparency of style, Bly explains that the following elements compose "transparency," as it is used here: a serene style, an emphasis on sound, a sparing of details so that there is space to set them off, and the use of personal detail. These are the poems, which, according to Bly, "come from the eye" and simultaneously "glimpse something else, not here." These are poems which truly attend to both "night consciousness" and "day consciousness."

Bly cites the work of Anna Akhmatova as a particularly striking example of the post-war twofold

consciousness work:

> Sand on the bottom whiter than chalk,
> and the air drunk, like wine;
> late sun lays bare
> the rosy limbs of the pinetrees.
> Sunset in the ethereal waves:
> I cannot tell if the day
> is ending, or the world or if
> the secret of secrets is inside me again.[24]

Bly mentions other poets who have exhibited the twofold consciousness: Kenneth Rexroth with The Signature of All Things, which Bly believes to have had a wave effect on other writers, Theodore Roethke, Robinson Jeffers, and the "transparent" poems of John Haines from Alaska, whose Winter News poems convey a genuine sense of the Alaskan landscape. Also he cites the poetry of John Logan which is transparent in its sense of meter and rhyme:

> Well, what then?
> The old one and the two young
> men. Two fresh stones, or wells--
> and the powerful, untried pen.[25]

The aspect of transparency is one of the emerging developments which Bly believes have helped to unfold the crippled left side. In utilizing transparency American poets are actually drawing on the mood of ancient Chinese poetry. This form of twofold poem was introduced to America by Arthur Whaley, who, basing his observations on a Chinese original, suggests that Milton's raging against Heaven be replaced with quiet verse, flowing "almost transparently as water flows over grass." According to Bly this kind of poem is "drinkable." He further points out

that Chinese poetic form is transparent in a way rhyme and meter are not, and that the possibility may exist of developing new verse forms based on pitch and sound.[26]

The other new development which has also aided the unfolding of the left side relates to the concept of the shaman, which arises in the poetry of Gary Snyder and Jerome Rothenberg. According to Bly, the shaman takes upon himself the sickness of others, and he visits other worlds where he reminds each person he meets of the "night side." Likened to the Apalachian sin eater, he belongs to no class. Bly believes the shaman is a viable generic alternative to the "silly" classifying of poets into academic, beat, and so on. In his explanation, the poets are the moral spokespersons for their particular class for whom the shaman concept serves as a "tunnel for the poet to move back into the far human past." Like the transparent poem, the shaman poems extend from the Taoist poetry in China.[27]

The third component of twofold consciousness poetry which Bly believes will strengthen poetry, enabling it to carry the content of modern life and draw a fully integrated presentation of man, is the incorporation of the object poem into the prose poem format.

According to Bly,

> The prose poem appears whenever poetry gets too abstract, and it is the prose poem which helps bring the poet back to the physical

> world. We see many poems in magazines today with a sort of mental/ physical world. Such poems contain 'flowers,' 'trees,' 'people,' 'children'...but the body doesn't actually perceive in that way. The body never sees 'children playing' in a playground. The body sees first one child with a blue cap, then it sees a child with a yellow cap, then it sees a child with a snowsuit...the body sees detail after detail. An instant later the mind enters and says: 'That is children playing'....[28]

According to Bly, the presence of a large number of plural nouns in a poem suggests that the mind has invaded and the primitive method of perception has been wiped out. The harm Bly sees in confessional poetry is not that it "talks about the personal (which is very brave)" but that the mind dominates confessional poetry to the extent that there is the tendency to use the plural. The prose poem is an exercise in moving against "plural consciousness." "In the prose poem we see the world is actually made up of one leaf at a time, one Lutheran at a time, one apartment door at a time."[29]

Bly cites Russel Edson as the master of the prose poem. Bly has also named the works of Francis Ponge whose "absence of line and ethical form" help the poet's creative mind to relax as well as "providing a neutrally charged psychic arena." Francis Ponge's prose poems are showpieced in the Bly collection as examples of object or thing poems. Bly contends that in his (Ponge's) work the unconsciouss linked with the object provides material it would not have

given if approached directly. Bly also points out that the union of the object with the psyche is a slow process, so a poem may take as many as four or five years to write. Ponge's book, as a case in point, entitled Le Parti Pris des Choses (Taking the Side of Things) was 20 years in the making. In this exemplary book Ponge refrains from exploiting things as symbols or lower class beings; instead, he creates things which have opinions and which take points of view. Things are also portrayed as "fruitful" and "nourishing" rather than "hostile, spiritless, inferior, and unreal."[30]

In recent times Bly has noted that the bulk of poetry written in the 20th century does not give import or assign honor to objects. Bly believes that poets and others today are "frustrated for union with the object." This has resulted in the narcissistic advertising which entails taking for granted the natural world. "The Montana Hills were not created to provide oil for central heating," is Bly's ironic comment on this unique manifestation of the isolation of artists from objects.

The reason Bly feels this is so important is that the type of poetry produced when the object is ignored is the "I poem," in which the poem may begin with an object, but the poet leaves it partway through to return to the "I" notion. And Bly also emphasizes that to stay with the object requires tremendous concentrative craft.[31]

The one question Bly contends he asks repeatedly in the selection is how much consciousness does one assign to objects (represented by nature, animals, and inanimate material)? In summarizing the various poetic flaws, Bly contends that academic poetry, abstract poetry, or concrete poetry is mind-obsessed, and what obsesses it is the organizing mind. By contrast, in the Spanish surrealist Neruda's poetry, the unconscious and the body move in and break up that mind organization: "In translating Neruda I was in the presence of freedom for the first time in my life. The Old Sufis say there are experiences on the other side of Neruda involving a being inside us which uses the unconscious images as food and grows stronger inside you. When you read such a poem you feel doors open on all sides."[32]

Descartes, according to Bly, did not invent the gap humankind feels between itself and nature. He only encouraged the gap, which involves an emphasis on perception rather than on the object that has stimulated the perception. According to Bly this emphasis shift from object to perception tends to trap the energy Bly terms sexual and spiritual inside the body where "it circulates harmlessly" and does not leave. Rilke's phenomenal "Leaving the House" is really an invitation poem, inviting one to leave the house of one's perception:

> Whoever you are: some evening take a step
> out of your house, which you know so well.
> Enormous space is near, your house lies where it
> begins,
> Whoever you are.
> Your eyes find it hard to tear themselves
> from the sloping threshold, but with your eyes
> slowly, slowly, lift one black tree
> up, so it stands against the sky: skinny, alone
> With that you have made the world. The world's
> immense
> and like a word that is still growing in the
> silence.
> In the same moment that your will grasps it
> your eyes feeling its subtlety will
> leave it....[33]

Bly's interpretation of Rilke's poem is that if one uses his creative powers to focus on "seeing" one tree (object) he will have "granted the whole world its being." This is Rilke's suggestion for healing the Descartes wound, and Bly suggests it has to be done individually and alone.

Bly also concedes that there have existed cultures whom Descartes has not visited, metaphorically speaking, citing the Eskimos, the Zuni, and the time period before Descartes when Beowulf was written. This is why, explains Bly, the text could read, "Once there was a being named Grendel," with all the power and energy these words convey as opposed to the weak, "Once there was a consciousness out there so real it was dangerous." The powerful, "oceanic" sound patterns of Beowulf constitute what Bly calls "the power of night vision."[34]

Bly also notes that reopening the gap brings forth tremendous anguish and suffering on the part of the person

experiencing it. Bly cites the Scottish ballad, "The Falcon," in which a young knight lies dying of his battle wounds while his lady weeps at his bedside. His wounds (the gap) are opened but in the wrong way so that the life runs out of him. According to Bly's interpretation, The "orchard" room contains four beings: the dying knight, his maid, the person watching the knight's essence being transferred to the "halle hangid with purpill and pall," and the stone representing Christ. In Bly's interpretation, at the point where the knight becomes locked within his own room, the body of Christ turns to stone, a reiteration of his earlier philosophizing that the early churches failed to meet the spiritual needs of their laity.[35]

Making the "stone" come alive again has been the work of poets like Rilke and Ponge who, Bly suggests, have spent a lifetime of assigning honor and attention to the object in order to retrieve it. Bly cites the ancient poet Rumi who refuses in these lines to abstractly describe the new unity that occurs when the "stone" comes alive again:

> How marvelous is that garden, where apples and pears, both for the sake of the two Marys, are arriving even in winter.
>
> Those apples grow from the Gift, and sink back into the Gift.
> It must be that they are coming from the garden to the garden.[36]

Also Rilke in "Sonnet to Orpheus" presents another example of the "healed, whole" poems, which result from the poet's regaining the ability to "switch from the inner to the outer," drawing all together:

> To praise is the whole thing.
> A man who can praise comes
> toward us like one
> out of the silences of rock.
> His heart, that dies,
> presses out for others a
> wine that is fresh forever.[37]

This then is the praising tradition of Rilke that Bly embraces as his own.

The "news of the universe" concept which these poems embody and impart for Bly originated from an essay written by George Groddeck entitled "Charakter und Typus," in which Goethe, the new European writer, is hailed as the one bringing the world "news of the universe." Groddeck cites "Wanderers Nachtlied II" in this regard:

> There is a stillness
> On the tops of the hills.
> In the tree tops
> You feel
> Hardly a breath of air
> The small birds fall silent in the trees.
> Simply wait: soon
> You too will be silent.[38]

Bly interprets this poem to mean that the "tree consciousness" (object) speaks to the human telling him he will die someday. The poem "whispers" this reminder and it is these "whisperings" which according to Bly keep us grounded.

Bly also cites parts of Groddeck's interpretation

of Goethe's poem in which he remarks that Goethe's poems are impersonal--in them a person is not seen as an "I" but as a part of nature. Groddeck also distinguishes between the "I" poet who "bring news of the mind" and the other poets who "bring news of the universe." According to Groddeck, the "I" poets (including Classical poets) speak from "feeling, will, and intellect," while the other poets utilize these as well as an additional energy Groddeck terms "Gottnatur," which Bly defines as either "divine instinctuality" or "non-human nature."[39]

Bly cites the works of Novalis and Goethe as being the poetic expression of "Gottnatur," an artistic gift involving the ability to intuit the interdependence of all living things along with an attempt to bring them together into oneness inside the work of art. The "non-human instinctuality," according to Bly is that which gives the poem its form.

Bly cites Groddeck's early 1900 studies of the development of poetry which closely parallel and resemble his own. According to Groddeck, European literature after 1600 became obsessed with observing human response, with Shakespeare's verse leading the pack. Bly himself was rather perturbed at this observation, but does accept the notion so far as to say that Shakespeare's model proved (in Bly's words) "narrowing." Groddeck also points out that the Greek dramatists stood in direct opposition to

this by incorporating the non-human, i.e., seasons, rituals, masks.

Groddeck also believes that we are now experiencing the ending of one literature and the beginning of another. The literature obsessed with the study of human response which he believes became "bankrupt" in the 19th century has continued as the dominant form of literature, albeit dead art. Bly agrees with Groddeck by also citing Conrad as the exceptional writer who "takes us inside a human mind, but when we get there it turns out we are deep inside a continent."[40]

Groddeck also suggests the very intriguing notion that when the writers in a society are unable to shift the focus away from the human they will become extreme: "they write of what is out of the ordinary, they make their art from extreme mental states." According to Bly, if a writer is "bringing news of the human mind, and he feels that much of the news has been told....then he will have to bring more extreme news." The writer's search for the extreme may affect his life so much that his life may become the source of material for his work, resulting in breakdowns, rages, insanity, murder, suicide, etc.

Groddeck has also quickly pointed out that the increase in extreme poetry lies not with the many fine poets whom he sees to be "caught in a dying stream." Bly suggests that "for the extreme poet, the poem becomes a

tank that can't maneuver on soft ground without ruining it." And Bly believes Americans see the poet's manipulation of extremes as a sign of inner strength and are always asking for yet more examples.[41]

Ironically, in the face of his own similar interpreting, Bly does concede that Groddeck's reinterpretation of literary history, however brave, may be rather simplistic. Bly claims he is not ready himself to do away with all extreme art, citing the Vietnam War as a case where extreme art may be necessary to "understand" what went on.

Bly believes the Westerner's fate is that the fear of nature has become unconscious and inclusive of all women, the feminine principle, dreams, and so on. All these unfortunate developments may have been completed as early as 1750, according to Bly. Since then, the natural fear of nature, which still exists, for example, among the Native Americans, translates in a modern civilization into "invisible elements which can never be defeated and never loved either."[42]

It is the work of the "twofold consciousness" artists to rebridge the gap between humans and nature, and to reawaken the fear of the dark side of nature so that it may once again be viewed without emotional and psychic distance.

The subtitle of the News of the Universe refers to

the "poems of twofold consciousness," which Bly has arranged sequentially in the text. However, Bly gives no interpretive definition to the term, "consciousness," mentioning only that it "falls between all the words in English." Bly does grant that the term "twofold consciousness" in the subtitle refers to the notion that "while a poem will always contain the background, anguish, vision, and psyche of the human writing it, that poem may also contain the consciousness of the thing written about." Bly speculates that Cartesians might describe consciousness as the ability to process sensory input and produce various points of view and concepts, while others may simply define consciousness as the ability to order elements. The main quality of consciousness for Bly is that it releases energy. Then, according to Bly, it is possible for one to perceive the presence of energy leaving an object and entering our body and returning to the object by becoming aware of "the underworld and the dream."[43]

Bly proposes that electricity may serve as the model for the way some psychic energy moves, namely, libido energy, known to Bly as "desire energy." The workings of "desire energy" are based upon Plato's notion that humans are drawn to goodness and beauty above all else, an observation Kant thought to be the key to understanding perception. According to Bly, when a person perceives something as beautiful (in this case a beautiful woman) the

"desire energy" leaves the body by three paths. First, according to Bly, when he sees a woman who is extremely beautiful, his "desire energy" will have already left his body before he has formed a mental response to her beauty. Second, according to Bly, the woman's interior beauty, implying "developed consciousness," may call out to the energy in him which "loves beauty." Third, according to Bly, inside him is a woman who is beautiful, and when he sees a woman with a face like hers it awakens the feminine inside him.

By now it is obvious that the energy may come from "anything formed in a shapely way," implying consciousness, human or otherwise. According to Bly, the possibility of all three events taking place at once is unique, and it explains why a Chinese painter may spend a month or more painting a small scroll which depicts a person watching a waterfall. In either case, the woman or the waterfall are energy grounds which receive and return unconscious psychic energy from the perceiver. Bly has also mentioned that the grief he suffered as the result of the dissolution of his first marriage "grounded" him, bringing him down. This grief has been identified down through the ages as "the tears of things" (Lucretius), "the slender sadness" (Japanese poetry), and melancholy.[44]

Bly is quick to point out the unity in the varieties of consciousnesses inside things and humans

which lie along a relationship spectrum much the same way bands of light diffuse. Bly also contends that a time once existed in the consciousness of ancient poets and writers when the psychic path between nature and humans was clear, citing the example of Ovid, whose Aeneid includes a section where Virgil breaks off a branch, from which blood flows and words are spoken. Referring to modern times, Bly believes that the sexual energy of modern men "circulates harmlessly" inside the body because men have been taught by the church to perceive women as sources of sin and moral destruction. Then the man's consciousness loses its fertility, and the man, having denied in the process his own submerged, feminine side, produces "a dry womb," a sterile poem, or in Hemingway's terms, "a clean, well-lighted place."[45]

Notes

[1] "Bly, Robert," Contemporary Authors, ed. Barbara Harte and Carolyn Riley. (Detroit, Michigan: Gale, 1980), 5-8: 121-122.

[2] Patricia Holt, "Publisher's Weekly Interviews Robert Bly," Publisher's Weekly, 9 May 1980, pp. 10-11.

[3] Robert Bly, trans., "Golden Lines," by Gerard de Nerval (1854) in News of the Universe, ed. R. Bly (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1980), p. 38.

[4] Bly, News of the Universe, pp. 8-17.

[5] Bly, News of the Universe, p. 29.

[6] Bly, News of the Universe, p. 290.

[7] Bly, News of the Universe, pp. 30-37, 49.

[8] Bly, News of the Universe, p. 37.

[9] Bly, News of the Universe, p. 36.

[10] "R. Bly subject of videotape shown at Muskego Church 8-23," Minneapolis Tribune, 19 Aug. 1979, Sec. G. p. 10.

[11] Bly, News of the Universe, pp. 30-31.

[12] Bly, trans., "Bread and Wine, Part 7," by Friedrich Holderlein (1800) in News of the Universe, p. 47.

[13] Bly, trans., "The Sanctimonious Poets," by Friedrich Holderlein (1798) in News of the Universe, p. 39.

[14] Bly, News of the Universe, pp. 32-33, 52-53.

[15] Bly, News of the Universe, pp. 81-82.

[16] Bly, News of the Universe, pp. 35-37.

[17] Bly, trans., "Mignon," by Goethe (1783) in News of the Universe, p. 69.

[18] Patricia Holt, p. 10.

[19] James F. Mersmann, "Robert Bly: Watering the Rocks," in Out of the Vietnam Vortex: A Study of Poets and Poetry Against the War, (Kansas City: University Press, 1974), p. 117.

[20] Bly, News of the Universe, pp. 126-127.

[21] James Mersmann, p. 116.

[22] Bly, "'Losing the Road:' An Interview with Peter Martin," in Talking All Morning, Robert Bly, gen. ed. Donald Hall Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980), pp. 120-126.

[23] Bly, News of the Universe, p. 124-125.

[24] Bly, News of the Universe, p. 127.

[25] John Logan, in News of the Universe, p. 131.

[26] Bly, News of the Universe, pp. 13-131.

[27] Bly, News of the Universe, pp. 129-130.

[28] Bly, "On Writing Prose Poems: An Interview with Rochelle Ratner," in Talking All Morning, Robert Bly, p. 115.

[29] Bly, Interview with Rochelle Ratner, pp. 115-117.

[30] Bly, News of the Universe, pp. 212-214, 214-222.

[31] Bly, News of the Universe, pp. 210-214.

[32] Bly, Interview with Rochell Ratner, pp. 118-119.

[33] Bly, trans., "Leaving the House," by Rainer Rilke in News of the Universe, pp. 250-251.

[34] Bly, News of the Universe, p. 251.

[35] Bly, News of the Universe, pp. 252-254.

[36] Bly, trans. of a Rumi poem, no titled cited, in News of the Universe, p. 254.

[37] Bly, trans., "Sonnet to Orpheus," by Rilke, in News of the Universe, pp. 254-255.

[38] Bly, trans., "Wanderers Nachtlied II," by Goethe, in News of the Universe, p. 280.

[39] Bly, News of the Universe, p. 281.

[40] Bly, News of the Universe, pp. 282-285.

[41] Groddeck, News of the Universe, pp. 282-285.

[42] Bly, News of the Universe, pp. 284-285.

[43] Bly, News of the Universe, pp. 286-287.

[44] Bly, News of the Universe, pp. 286-290.

[45] Bly, News of the Universe, pp. 291-293.

Chapter 3

Deep Image Poetry

Analysis of Bly's poetic form as it has evolved in his major works will show it to stand firmly centered in the twofold consciousness poetry of the deep image. Early in his writing career, Bly's unpublished works followed standard iambic pentameter and English verse form. At the same time, his criticism, although suspicious of the Eliot-Pound tradition, was not yet attuned to the nuances of the emerging new strain of twofold consciousness seeded throughout American literature. It was Bly's exposure to the German Romantics and shortly thereafter to the work of the Spanish surrealists which finally brought Bly's own poetic and critical motives into focus. This led to the establishment of the Fifties Press and ultimately to Bly's political poetry which has since developed alongside the deep-image poetry, joining with it to become the most recent manifestation of Bly's style.

Bly's work and criticism, which found its roots in the Novalis-Goethe-Holderlein tradition transplanted from European writers, has grown and found shape alongside the more traditional contemporary American poetry strain. Specifically, this discussion of Bly's poetic style and form will include the following: the central concerns of Bly's poetry; his concept of content and form and the

relationship among the parts; Bly's use of the deep image; and finally, Bly's interpretation of the poet's role in society.

The central concern of Bly's poetry is the relationship which exists between the inner consciousness of man and the outer consciousness of the natural world. Earlier in the discussion of the object in "thing" poems and their relationship to the perceiver this notion was alluded to. And Bly is really a descendant of a line of writers running from Jakob Boehme through Blake who believe the human intellect blocks the inner reality from the outer. For these writers, including Bly, poetry is seen as an attempt to do away with the barrier and seek out the "harmonies" which underlie human consciousness. Bly in an effort to write poetry which he claims "disregards the conscious and the intellectual structure of the mind entirely" uses images which "bring forward another reality from inward experience." These deep images as they are known are the substance of his poetry. It is in this context that Silence in the Snowy Fields will be discussed.[1]

According to Jakob Boehme, man inhabits two world realms--the inner world of man's unconscious and subconscious perceptions of himself and the outer world of man's conscious perceptions of the natural world. Consequently, he is in a sense two men--an inner man and an

outer man. Not surprisingly, Bly cites Boehme's observation that "We are all asleep in the outward man" in the epigraph to his Silence in the Snowy Fields. It is the poet's job, he suggests, to attempt to awaken the inner man by revealing connections between these inner and outer realities.[2]

The piece "Solitude Late at Night in the Woods" contained in the volume is primarily an example of this attempt. Included under the section entitled, "Awakening," the poem begins with the statement, "The body is like a November birch facing the full moon":

I
The body is like a November birch facing the
    full moon
And reaching into the cold heavens.
In these trees there is no ambition, no sodden
    body, no leaves,
Nothing but bare trunks climbing like cold
    fire!

II
My last walk in the trees has come. At dawn
I must return to the trapped fields,
To the obedient earth.
The trees shall be reaching all the winter.

III
It is a joy to walk in the bare woods.
The moonlight is not broken by the heavy
    leaves.
The leaves are down, and touching the soaked
    earth,
Giving off the odor that partridges love.[3]

The leafless tree symbolizes the poet's own state in which consciousness has been minimized, for here, as elsewhere in Bly, it is human consciousness which destroys man's

perception of the harmony between man and nature. The poet demonstrates that he understands this connection between the inner and outer realities by identifying with the trees which he sees are "reaching into the cold heavens." And he says that the experience "is a joy." The "soaked earth" and the "trapped fields" to which the poet must ultimately return are the reminders that man does exist in two worlds.

Victoria Frenkel Harris has also explained the concept of inner and outer realities using Bly's own terminology. Harris points out that throughout the volume Bly links light imagery with "day consciousness," or outer reality, and dark imagery with "night consciousness," or inner reality. "Day consciousness" suggests traditional Western thought and perception modes, such as rationality, objectivity, and making distinctions, whereas "night consciousness," or as Bly calls it, "night intelligence," suggests intuitive, subjective, and psychic powers. The poet does not intend that we exchange one for the other, rather that both be attended to at once.

Harris also sees the arrangement of the pieces in Silence in the Snowy Fields into the three areas of "Solitude," "Awakening," and "Silence on the Roads," as a progression from the "initial intuition of heightened night conscious," through the reassertion of the "weight of day" and into a state of serenity which results when

the poet's "day consciousness" and "night intelligence" merge.[4]

This progression is illustrated in "Three Kinds of Pleasure," the first poem in the volume, where Bly's description of a Midwest landscape begins as a physical description of the country road:

> Sometimes riding in a car, in Wisconsin
> Or Illinois, you notice those dark telephone poles
> One by one lift themselves out of the fence line
> And slowly leap on the gray sky--
> And past them, the snowy fields.

The description progresses from dark to light imagery in the following stanza:

> The darkness drifts down like snow on the picked cornfields
> In Wisconsin: and on these black trees
> Scattered, one by one,
> Through the winter fields--
> We see stiff weeds and brownish stubble,
> And white snow left now only in the wheeltracks of the combine.

It is in stanza three that the intuitive leap has been made, that is, the intuition of "night intelligence" becomes full, integrated vision:

> It is a pleasure, also, to be driving
> Toward Chicago, near dark,
> And see the lights in the barns.
> The bare trees more dignified than ever,
> Like a fierce man on his deathbed,
> And the ditches along the road half full of a private snow.[5]

The fusing of "day consciousness" with "night intelligence" has been accomplished, sacrificing neither

one for the other. That is, the natural descriptive images remain extraordinary even in the face of the intuitive leap into "night consciousness."

Harris's observations suggest a formal arrangement and structural development in Bly which is applicable to much of his poetry. It is the three-part organization of "thesis, antithesis, and synthesis"[6] indicated in the earlier poem mentioned, "Solitude." In this poem there is the intuition of something special in the "skyward-reaching trees," there is the return to the "trapped fields" bringing "grounding" once again with the "obedient earth," and, finally, there is the experienced "joy" resulting from the walk in the woods. In the latter poem, "Three Kinds of Pleasure," the three-part organization unfolds from the intuition of something special in the view of "those dark telephone poles/One by one," the "grounding" in the "brownish stubble" and "wheeltracks of the combine," and finally the experienced "pleasure" resulting from the drive from Wisconsin to Chicago.

In some poems, however, the process is reversed. For example, "Summer, 1960, Minnesota" begins with the poet already internalizing the landscape scene, the air already heavy with "excited swallows," "hot beanfields," and "heavy green smoke." According to the speaker, "Inside me there is a confusion of swallows," but he returns "falling into the open mouths of darkness,"

nevertheless to wind up in the "Congo" or at least in the grain mill.[7]

The call of one form of conscious to another is always for unity as can be seen in "Poem in Three Parts":

> The strong leaves of the box-elder tree,
> Plunging in the wind, call us to disappear
> Into the wilds of the universe,
> Where we shall sit at the foot of a plant,
> And live forever, like the dust.[8]

The pastoral quality which permeates the pieces in this volume demonstrate man's feeling of awe in the presence of nature. The poet "stands watching the landscape as the light wanes or snow falls." In addition the poet seems to exclude people (with the exception of his wife and a few close friends) as intrusive, preferring instead animals, objects, and natural phenomena. Howard Nelson has noted that "the snow, fields, barns, lakes, and trees, presented so plainly and precisely, seem to resonate, to glow, with some deep moving mystery." Nelson also points out that Bly's return to silence, solitude, and unconscious, subjective association, along with the age-old device of repetition of images, phrases and feelings, all function to bring the poems in the volume together as if they formed a single long poem.[9]

Louis Simpson has pointed out that Bly's poems are constructed around an "arranging intelligence." He notes, "Bly's ideas are clear. It is his method that is extraordinary...." Simpson likens Bly to the surrealists,

whose poems move "by a central flow; one feeling holds all the parts together." The spare and simple diction which characterizes the verses in this volume extend to the rest of Bly's work.[10]

The tone of the poems is Romantic, and affirmative. The poet of Silence in the Snowy Fields knows that peace, wholeness, and joy are the natural inheritance of man. Bly himself notes his interest in writing the volume to be exploring the relationship between poetry and simplicity, observing that the inward reality of poetry may be approached through solitude. The poems are humorless, with a sense of ritual about them, unlike the later more spontaneous poems:

> Images Suggested by Medieval Music.
>
> I
> Once more in Brooklyn Heights
> A child is born, and it has no father,
> And it is right to rejoice: our past life appears
> As a wake behind us, and we plunge on into the sea of pain.

The imagery throughout the volume is predominately tactile rather than visual:

> II
> I have felt this joy before, it is like the harsh grasses
> On lonely beaches, this strange sweetness
> Of medieval music, a hoarse joy,
> Like birds', or the joy of trackless seas,
> Columbus' ships covered with ice,
> Palace children dancing among finely worked gold.[11]

Bly's major images which first appeared in this

volume and have tended to dominate the works which followed have been delineated by Julian Gitzen in "Floating on Solitude: The Poetry of Robert Bly," and they are the following: darkness, water, snow, and moonlight. All these images have been generated by strong feelings in the poet's unconscious and have been designed to appeal to the unconscious of the reader.

The first dominant image, that of darkness, provides the setting for over one-third of the poems in Silence in the Snowy Fields. Darkness not only signifies solitude, but also the unconscious, which Bly sees as an important realm to explore in the quest for "night intelligence" and finally death. It is in the solitude of the late night walks across the fields that the unconscious images are released, making nature come alive with the connections between humans and objects in a unique moment of consciousness. The dark imagery expressing death shows up in such observations as "the darkness of death" and "I want to go down and rest in the black earth of silence."

The second dominant image present in the volume is that of water, which is frequently linked with darkness. Water has varying depths, and similarly the poet sinks from the various realms of consciousness into unconsciousness to discover what he has already intuited in viewing the sky-reaching trees and the telephone poles which lift

themselves one by one. And "the dark weeds are waiting, as if under water."

The third dominant image in the volume is that of snow, a Bly favorite for indicating sleep and death. Snow and darkness are often linked, enhancing the overall effect: "the darkness drifts down like snow."[12]

The fourth dominant image is that of moonlight. In this regard, Gitzen cites the influence of Jakob Boehme, who accounted for creation in terms of the three principles of light, darkness, and bitterness emerging from the "Divine Will." According to Boehme, these three principles shape man and his world, and the degree to which one principle dominates a single act of creation actually determines its form. During the formation the matter evolves through various stages. Matter which reaches the fourth form, that of fire, acquires self-consciousness, which contains greed, anger and pride. At this level it is within the power of the man to rise to the fifth form, light, which will reveal to him the inner world of Divine Will, or "night intelligence," as Bly calls it.

Bly's concept of an outer reality-focused man--greedy, selfish, and materialistic--is described in the poems in terms of "the hairy tail" and "howling in the dirt."

Boehme also conceived that the fire-source is male and the light-source is feminine. Evidence that Bly made

similar distinctions is in the piece, "A Man Writes to a Part of Himself," where his spirit is described as a "forsaken wife," "starving, without care." And again, in "The Busy Man Speaks," spiritual concerns such as love, art, and grief are associated with the mother, and material concerns delineated by the phrase, "Chase National Bank" are associated with the father.

Bly also adopts Boeheme's association of the feminine with moonlight: "The body is like a November birch facing the full moon/ And reaching into the cold heavens." These trees and their reaching are an example for man to follow, obeying Bly's suggestion to reach for the illumination of "night intelligence."[13]

Richard Howard has observed that the most successful image of the volume is not the water, darkness, moonlight or snow images, which plumb the unconscious, but rather a "poem of wakefulness" or "inspired consciousness," entitled "On the Ferry Across Chesapeake Bay." This is the one piece where the real rather than the metaphorical sea is present when the "intuitive leap" occurs:[14]

> On the orchard of the sea, far out are
> whitecaps,
> Water that answers questions no one has asked,
> Silent speakers of the grave's rejoinders;
> Having accomplished nothing, I am travelling
> somewhere else;
> O deep green sea, it is not for you
> This smoking body ploughs toward death;
> It is not for the strange blossoms of the sea

> I drag my thin legs across the Chesapeake Bay;
> Though perhaps by your motions the body heals;
> for though on its road the body cannot march
> With golden trumpets--it must march--
> And the sea gives up its answer as it falls
> into itself.[15]

Silence in the Snowy Fields, which came out as Bly's first work in 1962, seems relatively untroubled and pastorally calm. However, as critics have pointed out, there are "touches of discontent" which will bloom in the works to follow. According to Herbert Leibowitz, "anxiety gnaws at the edges of serenity" in the topics which arise--death, violence, sin. In "Poems Against the British" the wind which blows through "the box-elder trees" reminds Bly of "rides at dusk" and the Revolutionary War. And everywhere, Bly's invocation to become attuned to the inner consciousness is also a call to rebel against a society which emphasizes man's separateness from nature.[16]

Bly's poetic role in this volume is comparable to that of "psychologist," or in Bly's words, "healer," calling humankind back to the gift of "night intelligence," which is its inheritance.

A number of important and at times abrupt changes occurred in The Light Around the Body, which, although first published in 1959, did not gain recognition until 1967, when it received the National Book Award for Poetry. The change from pastoral poetry to the truly political poetry of The Light Around the Body may have seemed

somewhat jarring to readers and critics of Bly. This shift may be explained as a result of President Johnson's war escalations of the Sixties, compared with Eisenhower's vague war maneuvers of the Fifties. Bly seems to need to make direct political statement, and this leads him into a kind of poetry different from his earlier works. The author of this paper proposes this theory with the reservation that Bly's idea of the poet's role was always developing toward political consciousness, and is well borne out by his later work.

Howard Nelson has described the change from Silence to Light as "jarring," the clarity and purity of the former replaced with surrealism and bizarre associative leaps, which Bly later termed "leaping poetry."[17] Bly presents Jakob Boehme's doctrine of "The Two Worlds" as the frontispiece for this savagely political collection in order to reaffirm his ongoing belief in the power of "night intelligence" resulting from the juxtaposition of two distinctly interposed realities:

> For according to the outward man, we are in this world,
> and according to the inward man, we are in the inward
> world....Since then we are generated out of both worlds,
> we speak in two languages, and we must be understood also
> by two languages.[18]

Nevertheless, the harmonious invocations of the soul in solitude are replaced with political and social

expressions of hate. Nelson has observed that The Light "is an angry, uneven, powerful book and clearly with it Bly made a major contribution to the growth of an American poetry which is truly political and truly poetry."[19]

If one accepts Nelson's notion that this is a truly political poetry being dealt with, then the next question would ask what changes occurred in content and form. Richard Howard has described a change in content involving a sense of inertia experienced by a man who is a "mariner" adrift on a sea of discontent with the present conditions of life. As such all the poems are "at sea," signifying a restless searching.[20] It is, as William Heyen has observed, Bly holding up a mirror to the ages, showing us to be at the mercy of politicians, statisticians, and businessmen.[21]

It was Bly's political poetry which drew the most scorn from the critics following the warm reception for Silence. Paul Ramsey spoke for many critics of Bly in the following comment: "Bly's political poetry is disorganized, crude in style, with images cranked and shoved together."[22] Martin Dodsworth notes that the longer lines of The Light lack authority.[23] Louis Simpson has also observed that "what is true of surrealists in general is true also of Bly; his poems are moving when they are moved by a central flow, one feeling which holds all the

parts together.[24] For example, in "Looking into a Face" the light as a metaphor for understanding seems to flash in and out of the lines like a fish leaping out of the water:

> Conversation rings us so close! Opening
> The surfs of the body,
> Bringing fish up near the sun,
> And stiffening the backbones of the sea!
>
> I have wandered in a face, for hours,
> Passing through dark fires.
> I have risen to a body
> Not yet born,
> Existing like a light around the body,
> Through which the body moves like a sliding
> moon.[25]

Herbert Leibowitz notes that while in Silence the poet is in touch and "not asleep in the outward man," in Light this faith has been lost, and the man, "captured by the spirit of the outward world," is reduced to a state of the lost ability to grieve, reflect, and heal:[26]

> The Executive's Death.
>
> Merchants have multiplied more than the stars
> of heaven.
> Half the population are like the long
> grasshoppers
> That sleep in the bushes in the cool of the
> day:
> The sound of their wings is heard at noon,
> muffled, near the earth.
> The crane handler dies, the taxi driver dies,
> slumped over
> In his taxi. Meanwhile, high in the air,
> executives
> Walk on cool floors, and suddenly fall:
> Dying, they dream they are lost in a snowstorm
> in mountains,
> On which they crashed, carried at night by
> great machines.

> As he lies on the wintry slope, cut off and dying,
> A pine stump talks to him of Goethe and Jesus.
> Commuters arrive in Hartford at dusk like moles
> Or hares flying from a fire behind them,
> And the dusk in Hartford is full of their sighs;
> Their trains come through the air like a dark music,
> Like the sound of horns, the sound of thousands of small wings.[27]

Lisel Mueller observes that the poems which discuss life in present-day America are harsh and sad "with a bitterly sharp edge," except for the compassionate Vietnam War poems. She also points out that as far as form goes the volume demonstrates an attempt by Bly to release the poem from any "rhetorical trappings" whether of the traditional school or the contemporary strain in order to recreate "the light around the body," which she sees as symbolizing the perception of an experience unhindered by the encroachment of any literal setting. As such Mueller also sees The Light as a work with a mystical approach.[28]

Harriet Zinnes has also seen The Light as a deliberate attempt on the part of Bly to cast off corruptness. This despair is personal, she notes, in that the reader is constantly reminded that there is an "I" behind the lines who is in despair. "Once more, the heavy body mourns....That is why these poems are so sad."[29]

Bly's reaction to the American involvement in Vietnam is "shock" rather than outrage. The poems are

either broadly satirical or they render a finely tuned interpretation of the term "disturbance": "The things that we must grasp,/ The signs, are gone, hidden by spring and fall, leaving/ A still sky here, a dusk there/ ...where has the road gone?" There is no searching for sanity and harmony in the aftershock of world unrest, Bly seems to be saying here in "The Fire of Despair Has Been Our Saviour."[30] "The Great Society," for example, indicates the uneasy relationship which exists between man and "domesticated nature": "Dentists continue to water their lawns even in the rain;/ Hands developed with terrible labor by apes/ Hang from the sleeves of evangelists." In the center of the poem, "The President dreams of invading Cuba," it is not clear whether the gloomy landscape makes the President feel desperate or whether it too is only a manifestation of his desperate thoughts. The rest of the images are presented in juxtaposition with no attempt to establish a causal relationship. "Murdered kings," "the coffins of the poor," and "a mayor sitting with his head in his hands," are juxtaposed with movie houses, junkyards, and "the chilling beach." It's all a state of being rather than a set of causes, Bly seems to be saying. This poem like others in The Light functions as both a description of a society which has sold its birthright and a "portrait of a man in despair."[31]

The poem "Romans Angry about the Inner World"

metaphorically reenacts the suppression and even destruction of the inner reality. Two Roman public men (Roman soldiers, statesman, or leaders--it matters not) torture a woman who symbolizes the inner reality. To these public men inner reality is a threat as it would remove their power base. They want to conquer the natural world, not necessarily live in harmony with it. Bly implies that Americans are the Romans:

> The two Romans had put their trust
> In the outer world. Irons glowed
> Like teeth. They wanted her
> To assure them. She refused. Finally they
> took burning
> Pine sticks, and pushed them
> Into her sides. Her breath rose
> And she died. The executioners
> rolled her off onto the ground.
> A light snow began to fall
> And covered the mangled body,
> And the executives, astonished, withdrew.
> The other world is like a thorn
> In the ear of a tiny beast!
> The fingers of the executives are too thick
> To pull it out!
> It is like a jagged stone
> Flying toward them out of the darkness.[32]

So it becomes once again evident that the tripartite organization which occurs in Silence within each poem also occurs within the grouping of pieces in The Light. The first group paints the portrait of intuitive shock and despair, the second group, including the "Romans" piece place the blame, and the final poems return to the search for unity amidst the psychic suffering and longing for the naturally integrated state. The restless

voyage has been through political waters, however, and there is every reason to believe that this has added an extra dimension to the poetry. For example, in the piece, "Solitude Late at Night in the Woods," the flesh is described as "opaque," indicating the body is neither in harmony with nature nor "healed" and whole. Furthermore, the poem ends ominously with references to "some shining thing inside that has served us well," which "may be gone before we wake." There is no pastoral joy and uplifting feeling of wholeness here, rather a threat to the very survival of man's soul is registered: "The black water wells up over the new hold./ The grave moves forward from its ambush."[33]

Where is the hope in this poetry collection, whose groupings include titles like "The Two Worlds," "The Various Arts of Poverty and Cruelty," and "The Vietnam War"? The answer lies in a poem included in the last grouping of "A Body Not Yet Born," entitled "Looking into a Face." Only a man in harmony with himself can look into a mirror, which symbolizes the natural world, and see the inner reality reflected there in the form of his own face. At this instant he is both perceiver and perceived, and the unique juxtaposition of "day consciousness" with "night intelligence" has occurred:

> I have wandered in a face, for hours, ask me!
> Passing through dark fires
> I have risen to a body

> Not yet born,
> Existing like a light around the body
> through which the body moves
> like a sliding moon.[34]

The clear hope here for man lies in his potential for harmony with the natural world.

In Light Around the Body the specific detail of Silence in the Snowy Fields has become the deep image, the inwardness becomes a window through which the poet views the world, and the "I" of the private vision becomes the "we" of the man as a part of the community of man. The Wordsworthian flavor of Silence could deteriorate just as easily as the rhetorical nature of The Light. The major deep images expressed in the work, according to James Mersmann, are those of "maniacal fury" and "total inertia," the major components of defeat.[35]

In "Come with Me" Bly is describing the suffocation and isolation of modern man, who is propelled along by forces he neither understands nor controls:

> Come with me into those things that have felt
> this despair for so long--
> Those removed Chevrolet wheels that howl with
> a terrible loneliness,
> Lying on their backs in the cindery dirt, like
> men drunk, and naked,
> Staggering off down a hill at night to drown at
> last in the pond.
> Those shredded inner tubes abandoned on the
> shoulders of thruways,
> Black and collapsed bodies, that tried and
> burst,
> And were left behind;
> And the curly steel shavings, scattered about
> on garage benches,

> Sometimes still warm, gritty when we hold them,
> Who have given up, and blame everything on the government,
> And those roads in South Dakota that feel around in the darkness...[36]

These images, according to Mersmann, explode from the deep conscious as in "War and Silence":

> One leg walks down the road and leaves
> The other behind, the eyes part
> And fly off in opposite directions...[37]

In "Watching Television" Bly points out the unbelievable horror and revulsion experienced by modern man, who longs for his own destruction to do away with his debased state:

> Wild dogs tear off noses and eyes
> And run off with them down the street--
> The body tears off its own arms and throws them into the air.
> The filaments of the soul slowly separate:
> The spirit breaks, a puff of dust floats up,
> Like a house in Nebraska that suddenly explodes.[38]

Bly believes men are caught in death-in-life, and that consequently we long to annihilate our alienated selves. He cites the influence of Jakob Boehme once again as the frontispiece for the section entitled, "In Praise of Grief":

> O dear children, look in what a dungeon we are lying, in what lodging we are, for we have been captured by the spirit of the outward world; it is
> our life, for it nourishes and brings us up, it rules in our marrow and bones, in our flesh and blood, it has made our flesh earthly, and now death has us.[39]

Bly, according to Mersmann, sees in our hatred for

others and our desire to kill others only a manifestation of self-hatred and the death wish. According to Mersmann, Bly's poems suggest that Americans are obsessed with death because it offers solitude and silence in place of realizations, it offers an escape from worldly problems, it is a way to avoid the apocalypse of destruction which he sees as imminent, it offers relief from the urge to annihilate the alienated outward self, and finally it is a punishment Americans think they deserve for accumulating so many "anti-life impulses" for so long. Death is the price Americans must pay for sinning against their very nature. Bly suggests that these death impulses are present elsewhere, but particularly in America where progress has been most rapid.[40] For example, in "Hurrying Away From the Earth," "Men cry when they hear stories of someone rising from the dead."[41] (And in "The Hermit," "[We] sail on into the tunnels of joyful death.")[42]

It is the imagery delineating divisions between what is masculine and what is feminine that serves to subtly unify the themes of Bly's protest poetry, as is the case here in The Light. Mersmann has observed that in Bly, the conflict exists between "related polarities"--masculine and feminine, hard and soft, rock and water, active and passive, barren and fertile, frozen and fluid, power and weakness, "love and not-love," and of course, light and dark.

It is the coherency of Bly's poems, Mersmann notes, which underlies all the many perceptions and subconscious patterns of the work, making it worthy of the National Book Award. In the award citation Theodore Weiss, Harvey Shapiro, and Donald Hall, wrote: "If we poets had to choose something that would be for us our Address on the State of the Nation, it would be this book."[43] Charles Molesworth also points out that Bly offers a criticism of modern society. His antiwar poems don't stop at the expression of values for humanity to embrace. Rather they explore the "forms of false consciousness" which have caused the gross inhumanities of war, poverty, depletion, and destruction of the earth's natural resources.[44]

The most important images of the volume, according to William V. Davis, are those of light and dark. In citing "Two Worlds" Bly unrolls once more Boehme's notion that light and dark are vying for dominance. As such the beginning poems are, as Davis suggests, set in "a kind of twilight zone."[45] In "The Executive's Death":

> Commuters arrive in Hartford at dusk like moles
> Or hares flying from the fire behind them,
> And the dusk in Hartford is full of their sighs;
> Their trains come through the air like a dark music.[46]

The commuters drive on, unaware of the twilight zone of consciousness which surrounds them.

As is the case with the progression of form in

Silence, so here in The Light, as Davis points out, there is a similar progression of form, expressed through imagery rather than a shift of consciousness. Now the "twilight zone" becomes the "dark night of the soul" which Bly sees as the country's political position. Citing Boehme: "We see that we have been locked up, and led blindfold, and it is the wise of this world who have shut and locked us up in their art and their rationality, so that we have had to see with their eyes."[47]

Finally, the last sections of the book have tiny flashes of light peeking through as in "a light seen suddenly in the storm," "A candle that flutters as a black hand/ Reaches out," "chunks of the moon/ To light the tunnels." These tiny flashes of light are also used by Jakob Boehme, whom Bly cites once again at the beginning of the final section entitled "A Body Not Yet Born:" "Withal, I considered the little spark 'man' and what it might be esteemed to be by God in comparison with this great work of heaven and earth."[48]

William Davis suggests that this tiny light is what Bly was later to refer to as the essence of "leaping poetry," the "leaping poem" giving off light as it shifts from the inner to the other reality and back again in the "points of overlap" Boehme referred to as the soul. In a mystical sense, Davis points out, Bly leaps from the inward world of Silence to the outward world of The Light.

As such, there exist, as suggested by Boehme (cited by Bly earlier), two different languages, simultaneously juxtaposed upon each other to form "one voice." And the "private individual dream" of Silence becomes the "public nightmare" in The Light, as the outer world presses on the inner consciousness.[49]

The element of mysticism which first surfaces in this work becomes of great concern in Bly's later work. Anthony Libby has spotted this appearance in Silence but only in the form of an "awakening" that comes in the walks in the woods at nightfall, in sleep, or in death. Mysticism expresses itself in the light glimmerings of the prophetic poems near the end of the volume, which gain force in their juxtaposition with the political poems. The apocalypse which is sure to follow, according to Bly, is the natural end of a larger process of psychological destruction and: "The world will soon break up into small colonies of the saved." As it is described by Anthony Libby, the poet's role, if any, in this case, is to exercise the primal scream.[50] Charles Molesworth sees Bly's purpose in this last section of meditative poetry as arranging the structures of consciousness which are imaged through light metaphors and the relation of the facts the poet observes to their value in the context of the vision.[51] Bly's political concerns have always, according to William Davis, been centered around the fact that

"we have never developed a man like Pasternak, a man who wrote great poetry, who took a clear stand, and whose word itself has serious political meaning." Again, Bly believes the fault is with a culture which "tries to turn its artists and writers away from political content" and the poets themselves who "do not bother to penetrate the husk around their own personalities, and therefore cannot penetrate the husk that has grown around the psyche of the country either."[52]

How is integration through political content achieved? James Mersmann suggests Bly intends that man reunite the inner and outer realities in his consciousness both by giving up material desires and by accepting the sacredness of man. Then, according to Bly, there will come "a joyful night in which we lose/ Everything, and drift like a radish/ Rising and falling, and the ocean/ At last throws us into the ocean."[53]

According to Charles Molesworth, Bly's Sleepers Joining Hands which came out in 1973 can best be described as a transitional volume, containing both the anti-war themes of the late sixties and the religious-mystical poetry which was to follow in the seventies. Molesworth also points out that the title poem of Sleepers Joining Hands is certainly Bly's most powerful work, perfectly merging his pastoral and political concerns in a Whitmanesque chanting of lines. The only other long prose

poem in the volume is "The Teeth Mother Naked at Last," his most ambitious political poem. The other poems in the volume include the pastoral "Six Winter Privacy Poems," ten short wildly surrealistic poems like "Hair," and a commentary on the poetry in the center of the volume entitled, "I Came Out of the Mother Naked."

The world outlined in Sleepers Joining Hands is a natural world of great emotional depth and capability. The Whitmanesque chanting which occurs in the five-part section of the title poem, "Sleepers Joining Hands," comprises a dream vision. A new consciousness is forming in this poem, founded on a new ego. There is also a desire present comparable to Rilke's desire to "see things from the other side." To accomplish this Bly develops a "floating" sense of space and time such as is experienced in dreams. Simultaneously, there is what Molesworth has termed a "spatial sense," an awareness of inner reality and inwardness on the part of the poet.[54]

Howard Nelson has observed that the dominant principle in Sleepers is "swift association," to which Bly devoted an entire issue of his magazine The Seventies (#1). According to Howard Nelson, the "swift association" has three connotative meanings. First it is a structural principle involving the absence of connectives or natural word order. Second, it has to do with the speed with which a poet moves from image to image, or as Bly puts it,

from "the known part of the mind to the unknown part and back to the known." Third, the "swift association" concept means the ability of a poet to travel from a literal subject as a starting point into subjectivity (and the unconscious) and still retain the literal subject. This poetry is not only demanding to write, it is demanding to read, and as Nelson points out, either the effects can be "breathtaking" or a confusion of words and muddled images.[55]

In "I Came Out of the Mother Naked" Bly argues that human societies were originally matriarchal, indicating that male consciousness is a relatively new phenomenon. Bly also includes the notion that the "spirit" which presided over the lives of primitive men is known as the "Great Mother," of which there are four types--the "Good Mother," which is the life-giving entity; the "Death Mother," whose job is to complete the creations of the "Good Mother" through death; the "Ecstatic Mother," who oversees and nourishes man's mental and spiritual development; and the "Stone Mother" or "Teeth Mother," who stands in opposition to the "Ecstatic Mother," dissolving the consciousness much as the "Death Mother" undoes the work of the "Good Mother." Bly denotes the Father-consciousness as logical but not necessarily evil.

Here as in The Light Bly employs the feminine images of "night" and "the moon" to advance his argument

that humankind is growing weary with the logical arguments of the Father-consciousness and longs to return to the intuitive Mother-consciousness of pre-history. The path of return, according to Bly, is through the unconscious and the state of "creative solitude" which the poet-man must emphasize in his own life. Bly mourns the loss of decency, kindness, and sympathy which has been replaced in the American culture by selfishness, greed, and a lack of compassion for fellow man. The title for "I Came Out of the Mother Naked" comes from the King James version of Job:

> I came out of the mother naked,
> and I will be naked when I return.
> The Lord gave, and the Lord takes away,
> Blessed be the name of the Lord.

However Bly sees the images to be disparate and proposes that the poem once read:

> I came out of the Mother naked,
> and I will be naked when I return.
> The Mother gave and the Mother takes away
> I love the Mother.[56]

This change, of course, would justify for Bly the trouble that has occurred in mankind's leaving the Mother-consciousness for the Father-consciousness, which has fueled the components of progress since early times.

It is at this point that one begins to wonder if Bly is not so much intent on explaining reality in terms of what he perceives as he is concerned with ordering reality to fit his by now formed inward vision. Bly himself

claims he is only looking for a return to the balance which rediscovering the "Great Mother" would bring to man's spirituality. He is encouraged by finding in the works of other living poets "fundamental attempts to right our spiritual balance, by encouraging those parts in us that are linked with music, with solitude, water and trees, the parts that grow when we are far from the centers of ambitions."[57]

Michael Atkinson calls Bly's Sleepers Joining Hands a "weave" of the psychological or personal modes of experience with the political or public modes. The indirect layout of the book--ten short poems, the essay, and the two long prose poems--Atkinson finds pleasantly refreshing. The poems on either side of the essay seem to point back and forth to each other in a unique relationship that Atkinson observes as comprising the form of the book. The anima mother archetypes which are explained in the central essay are actually a commentary on the poems on either side of it. In addition, the sequence entitled "Sleepers Joining Hands" focuses on two other archetypes--the "shadow" and the "self."

According to Atkinson, the image poems which precede the essay become action poems in those which follow it. "Oracles" become "ritual," "archetypes" become "myth." This system of Jungian archetypes, according to Atkinson, gives the volume its coherency. According to

Atkinson, Bly uses Jung's scheme for the self-actualization of the personality which includes these four dimensions: ego or persona (man's normal waking consciousness); the shadow (the same-sex figure of the ego who embodies repressed negative or positive traits); the anima or feminine consciousness; and finally, the self, signifying that state of full realization which a human can attain once he has reconciled himself with both the shadow and the anima enough to "become his own potentiality for being."

Appropriately, as Atkinson points out, the first poem of the "Sleepers" sequence is entitled "The Shadow Goes Away," and retells the separation of the ego from the shadow, which leaves man paralyzed and inert. The poet-man gazes at "the woman chained to the shore," but is unable to act because he fears the "cold ocean." He has lost his shadow ("The shadow goes away") leaving him afraid to free his feminine self. The shadow which has been lost is the "natural or primitive man," who is at home in the natural world of consciousness. Now the anti-war images are juxtaposed in order to draw a parallel between the pillagers of the tribal village and the Marines of Vietnam.

As this repression intensifies throughout the volume it finally drives mankind into the condition of terror described in "The Teeth Mother Naked at Last."

This prose poem is, according to Atkinson, both "naked and terrible."[58] As Bly explains in the central essay, the Teeth Mother "stands for numbness, paralysis, catatonia, the psyche torn to bits, arms and legs thrown all over."[59] In Atkinson's words the prose poem of the same title is a "diagram of despair" with only a hinting at a possibility for healing. Just as the poems which follow the essay are shadow poems which portray the end result, the opening poems help define the conditions which brought them about. Just as in mythology the perceiving of a lack of imbalance calls for a quest, so the early poems perceive the imbalance while the later poems rage out in search of an answer. The progression is now from recognition toward restorative action.[60]

Not all the critics of Bly's work found Sleepers Joining Hands such a wonderful presenting of the psychological process of humankind's return to Mother-consciousness and psychological healing, however. As Alan Helms noted, "The essential shift in Bly's recent poetry...is a turn from charting and chanting the geography of America's psychological and moral landscape, to mapping and mourning the battered terrains of his own fragmented sensibility. 'O yes, I love you, book of my confessions,' Bly seems to be saying in the confessional mode he claims to despise."[61] Viewed as transitional poetry, the disabling effect on Bly of his divorce during

the Seventies in which Sleepers was written may in part explain the instability and Whitmanesque introspective wandering that critics have seen in the volume.

Bly's most recent developments in the late Seventies and early Eighties have been in mysticism, translation, and his recitations which have taken on a religious tone. Mysticism showed its first "glimmerings" in The Light poems, characterized by the associative "leaps" which yield revelations about the nature of man's discourse on the earth. According to Charles Molesworth, Bly's poetry progresses from Midwest pastoral to anti-war poetry, to natural history, to religious vision. However, he notes that what might appear as a change in subject matter is really an intensification of his style. It is in this context that This Body is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood (1977) signaled a turn in Bly's poetry toward what he described as religious poetry, and what critics have designated as mystical poetry. What distinguishes Camphor and Gopherwood is the dominance of religious yearnings in it. Bly's attempt in the volume is to "domesticate the sublime," according to Molesworth, putting it within our own experience. Molesworth also points out that Bly, like other post romantic poets, faced the problem of "how to write a liturgy without a theology."[62]

Bly's response in part has been to hold the unconscious as sacred. Then Bly's poetry in Camphor is an

attempt to return to the notion of the sacredness of the body which serves as the host and symbol for the unconscious. The body is the source of stability at the same time that it bears the burdens of circumstance and degeneration. The "curiously alive and lonely body" is "made of energy compacted and whirling." Molesworth points out that in the passages where the "body" is mentioned, the more traditional word "soul" could be substituted:

> This body longs for itself far out at sea it floats in the black heavens, it is a brilliant being; locked in the prison of human dullness...

In effect, Bly has made "the body" equivalent to "the soul," and it is this distinctive trait which only serves to emphasize Bly's intention, unlike those of other American poets, to "simultaneously celebrate the body and incorporate all the aspects which make up the concept of soul." Molesworth also points out that Bly's answer to the question of "how to domesticate the sublime" lies in the act of secularizing the immediate perceptions of the body/soul. Hence, according to Anthony Libby, the private "awakening" which occurs in Silence becomes a whole-world mystical transformation in The Light. The "sleepers join hands" during the renewal period of Sleepers, and finally the mysticism is full-blown in Camphor and Gopherwood.[63]

William Davis also points out that

The Morning Glory (1975) and Old Man Rubbing His Eyes (1975), which were also published during the transitional period, actually return to the territory of Silence both mystically and thematically, this quiet verse in the eye of the storm, as it were. Davis proposes that Bly needed to go back to his poetic beginnings, perhaps seeking renewal because he was on the verge of a new beginning, exemplified by Camphor and Gopherwood.[64] In this regard, one question remains unanswered: is Bly a mystic? James Mersmann observes: "there are convincing signs that Bly at least understands mysticism. That is itself a rare gift. He also seems to have learned, in Eliot's words, "to care and not to care," that difficult passivity that leads to revelation.

Mersmann always adds that this gift for receiving revelation is usually learned through pain and defeat, and that Bly nowhere shares with the reader the details of his personal suffering.[65] Hugh Kenner has offered the following explanation of the title Camphor and Gopherwood. The title harkens to the Song of Solomon (1:14) "My beloved is to me as a cluster of camphor," and to Genesis (6:14) where God told Noah the ark was to be made "of gopherwood." Kenner goes on to explain, "The Ark was by some accounts an allegory for the body, and that's all the explanation you're going to get in these pages about what it's like to be alive in a body; in it, yet through it

mysteriously part of everything else material."[66]

This hands-off attitude towards Bly's mystical poetry has influenced many other critics including James Finn Cotter, who believes Bly isolates the reader from Bly's own personal brand of mysticism with impenetrable phrases like: "So for two days I gathered ecstasies from my own body, I rose up and down, surrounded only by bare wood and bare air and some gray cloud, and what was inside me came so close to me, and I lived and died!" In Sleepers Bly convinced the critics and readers alike of a mystical experience by imagining and hinting at its existence. But, in Camphor and Gopherwood the mystical is overdone, with the exception of "Coming In for Supper," a poem describing the poet's children and their friends about to put on a play. Without this poem, Cotter points out, one would wonder whether private family existed for Bly at all, or even mattered in Bly's world. Cotter also points out that the love poem which closes the volume, "The Cry Going out over Pastures," is rhetorical rather than moving, "I first met you when I had been alone for nine days." Cotter's only comment on this poem is that it's "A strange way to greet someone you love."[67]

This mysticism has found its expression in the recent poetry recitations of Bly which have changed from the anti-war readings of the early 1970's to the "preacher meetings" of the late 1970's and 1980's. At a 1973

anti-war poetry reading at Southwest College in Marshall, Bly appeared with his hair neatly combed back and sporting a three-piece navy polyester suit. His motions were few, although he removed his glasses and gestured with his right hand intermittently. What a shock was in store when the author of this thesis viewed a 1980 videotape of Robert Bly in which, hair unkempt and flying, he gave a "fire and brimstone" reading to the people in a Minneapolis church. The "sermon" was interrupted frequently when one or other of the audience members would run forward to meet Bly in an emotional embrace.[68] Earlier, in November of 1979, Eliot Weinberger noted that Bly "at his many public readings, still stomps around the stage in a rubber L.B.J. mask, to symbolize 'masculine'--which he believes is destructive--energy. He has dismissed most of the North American masters (Pound, Williams, Eliot, et al.) and has publicly knelt and kissed the hand of Pablo Neruda, his muse and role model."[69] Many other uncomplimentary remarks have been recorded in scholarly journals about Bly's style of presentation in his poetry recitations. Bly sheds light on his preacher-like behavior in the videotape in which he claims the poet's role is to provide spiritual instruction for those who come to poetry seeking it and to aid people in getting back in touch with their senses and feelings. As such Bly says he "directs like a director of a symphony

orchestra," and preaches like a preacher with the message, "Let the events that are about to come, come!" And Bly's reply to the negative criticism is "Write a poem, drop it by the side of the road, go!"[70]

The last area which Bly has perused since his encounter with the Spanish surrealist poet, Neruda, while he was in Norway, is that of translations. Bly has translated the works of Spanish, German, Norwegian, Swedish, and now Japanese poets whom he believes incorporate the "deep image" into their poetry. Bly's translations of Norwegian poetry have been acclaimed as "communicating something permanently new." Bly is one of the few poets who can translate from many languages. Bly has said himself that he has found in the Spanish poetry a power that "grasps modern life as a lion grabs a dog, and wraps it in heavy countless images, and holds it firm in a terrifically dense texture."[71] Bly told interviewer David Ossman that translation is "the real way poetry in a given language remains fresh--by receiving stimulation and suggestion constantly from other languages."[72] Bly's translations lack criticism not because they are uninteresting, but because most critics lack the knowledge to work with them. Bly, in the videotape panel discussion, compared the encounter with a translated poem to a meeting with a beggar. An old Indian adage cautions: meet an old beggar and one may be in the presence of God. Bly

interprets this to mean watch for the old people living in little old cheap hotels. Their eyes, he says, "are just recovering from a big fever/ who so gradually become themselves once more/ gone into sleep and light."[73]

David Ignatow, whose poems Bly collected and edited, has said of his friend: "He has only now begun to see the outlines of his future as poet and, as I see it, that future is extraordinary and of central importance to American writing yet to come."[74]

Questions remain. Recently, Bill Zavatsky, in "Talking Back: A Response to Robert Bly," wrote in response to Bly's overriding question in News of the Universe (how much consciousness the poet is willing to grant to trees or hills or living creatures not a part of his own species): "Is this really the question? What about granting consciousness to other people? We have so many poems with things and tress and rivers and hawks in them, but so few that really bring us what it is like to experience another human being....Does Bly think that we will automatically grant respect and affection to women and to people of color if we grant them to trees and animals?"[75] Zavatsky misunderstands Bly. Bly says we are only fully human when we are aware of the consciousness of other beings.

And as for the deep image which brings grief, Larry Levis says: "Bly has said that 'the ocean comes to

grieving men.' There is only one problem with men who grieve absolutely. They may be beyond language, or language may no longer have any real hold on them."[76] This is precisely Bly's dilemma. His anti-rational premises force him into a distrust of language, which of course is all a poet--even a great poet--has.

Notes

[1] Bly, "Craft Interview" with Mary Jane Fortunato, Cornelia P. Draves, Paul Zweig, and Saul Galin, in Talking All Morning, pp. 202-203.

[2] Patricia Goedicke, "The Leaper Leaping," in Of Solitude and Silence, pp. 116-118.

[3] "Solitude Late at Night in the Woods," in Silence in the Snowy Fields, p. 45.

[4] Victoria Harris, Critical Survey, p. 223.

[5] "Three Kinds of Pleasure," in Silence in the Snowy Fields, p. 11.

[6] Victoria Harris, Critical Survey, p. 223.

[7] See "Summer, 1960, Minnesota," in Silence in the Snowy Fields, p. 31.

[8] "Poem in Three Parts," in Silence in the Snowy Fields, p. 21.

[9] Howard Nelson, "Welcoming Shadows: Robert Bly's Recent Poetry," The Hollins Critic, Apr. 1975, pp. 1-15.

[10] Louis Simpson, "New Books of Poems," Harper's Magazine, Aug. 1968, pp. 73-77.

[11] "Images Suggested by Medieval Music," in Silence in the Snowy Fields, p. 44.

[12] Julian Gitzen, "Floating on Solitude: The Poetry of Robert Bly," Modern Poetry Studies, 7, No. 3 (Winter,

1976), pp. 231-240.

[13] Richard Howard, "Robert Bly," in Alone with America: Essays on the Art of Poetry in the United States Since 1950 (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1969), pp. 38-48.

[14] Richard Howard, p.38.

[15] "On the Ferry Across Chesapeake Bay," in Silence in the Snowy Fields, p. 35.

[16] Herbert Leibowitz, Rev. of The Light Around the Body, Hudson Review, Autumn 1968, pp. 554-57.

[17] Howard Nelson, in The Hollins Critic, pp. 3-4.

[18] "The Two Worlds," in The Light Around the Body, p, 2.

[19] Howard Nelson, in The Hollins Critic, pp. 3-4.

[20] Richard Howard, in Alone with America: Essays on the Art of Poetry in the United States Since 1950, pp. 46-47.

[21] William Heyen, in The Far Point, pp. 42-47.

[22] Paul Ramsey, in Sewanee Review, p. 402.

[23] Martin Dodsworth, "Towards the Baseball Poem," in The Listener, 27 June 1968.

[24] Louis Simpson, Rev. of The Light Around the Body, in Harper's Magazine, pp. 73-77.

[25] "Looking into a Face," in The Light Around the Body, p. 53.

[26] Herbert Leibowitz, in Hudson Review, pp. 554-57.

[27] "The Executive's Death,", in The Light Around the Body, p. 3.

[28] Lisel Mueller, Rev. of The Light Around the Body, Shenandoah, Spring 1968, p. 70.

[29] Harriet Zinnes, "Two Languages," Prairie Schooner (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, Summer 1968) pp. 176-78.

[30] "The Fire of Despair Has Been Our Saviour," in The Light Around the Body, p. 17.

[31] "The Great Society," in The Light Around the Body, p. 17.

[32] "Romans Angry about the Inner World, in The Light Around the Body, pp. 9-10.

[33] "Solitude Late at Night in the Woods," in Silence in the Snowy Fields, p. 45.

[34] "Looking into a Face," in The Light Around the Body, p. 53.

[35] James Mersmann, in Out of the Vietnam Vortex, p. 127.

[36] "Come with Me," in The Light Around the Body, p. 13.

[37] "War and Silence," in The Light Around the Body, p. 31.

[38] "Watching Television," in The Light Around the Body, p. 6.

[39] "In Praise of Grief," in The Light Around the Body, p. 40.

[40] James Mersmann, in Out of the Vietnam Vortex, pp. 136-152.

[41] "Hurrying Away From the Earth," in The Light Around the Body, p. 54.

[42] "The Hermit," in The Light Around the Body, p. 55.

[43] James Mersmann, in Out of the Vietnam Vortex, pp. 136-152.

[44] Charles Molesworth, "'Rejoice in the Gathering Dark': The Poetry of Robert Bly," The Fierce Embrace: A Study of Contemporary American Poetry, (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1979), pp. 112-38.

[45] William V. Davis, "Hair in a Baboon's Ear: The Politics of Robert Bly's Early Poetry," The Carleton Miscellany, 18, No. 1 (1979-80), pp. 74-84.

[46] "The Executive's Death," in The Light Around the Body, p. 3.

[47] William Davis, The Carleton Miscellany, pp. 74-84.

[48] "A Body Not Yet Born," in The Light Around the Body, p. 52.

[49] William Davis, The Carleton Miscellany, pp. 74-84.

[50] Anthony Libby, "Fire and Light, Four Poets to the End and Beyond," Iowa Review 4, No. 2 (Spring 1973), pp. 111-13.

[51] Charles Molesworth, in The Fierce Embrace, pp. 112-38.

[52] William Davis, The Carleton Miscellany, pp. 74-84.

[53] James Mersmann, in Out of the Vietnam Vortex, pp. 156-57.

[54] Charles Molesworth, in The Fierce Embrace, pp. 112-38.

[55] Howard Nelson, in The Hollins Critic, pp. 3-4.

[56] "I Came Out of the Mother Naked," in Sleepers Joining Hands, pp. 29-50.

[57] Bly, "I Came Out of the Mother Naked," pp. 49-50.

[58] Michael Atkinson, "Robert Bly's 'Sleepers Joining Hands': Shadow and Self," in The Iowa Review, 7, No. 4 (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, Fall 1976), pp. 135-53.

[59] Bly, "The Teeth Mother," p. 50.

[60] Michael Atkinson, "Shadow and Self," p. 153.

[61] Alan Helms, Rev. of Sleepers Joining Hands, Partisan Review, 44, No. 2 (1977), 288.

[62] Charles Molesworth, in The Fierce Embrace, pp. 129-38.

[63] Anthony Libby, pp. 112-113.

[64] William Davis, "Defining the Age," in Moons and Lion Tailes, 2, No. 3 (San Francisco: The Permanent Press, 1977), pp. 85-89.

[65] James Mersmann, in Out of the Vietnam Vortex, pp. 122-127.

[66] Hugh Kenner, New York Times Book Review, 1 Jan. 1978, p. 10.

[67] James Finn Cotter, Rev. of This Body is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood, Hudson Review, Spring 1978, pp. 214-215.

[68] "R. Bly subject of videotape," Minneapolis Tribune, p. 10.

[69] Eliot Weinberger, The Nation, pp. 503-504.

[70] "R. Bly subject of videotape," Minneapolis Tribune, p. 10.

[71] Leif Sjoberg, "The Poet as Translator: Robert Bly and Scandinavian Poetry," in Of Solitude and Silence, p. 207.

[72] Contemporary Authors, pp. 121-122.

[73] "R. Bly subject of videotape," Minneapolis Tribune, p. 10.

[74] David Ignatow, "Reflections Upon the Past with Robert Bly," in Of Solitude and Silence, pp. 190-191.

[75] Bill Zavatsky, "Talking Back: A Response to Robert Bly," in Of Solitude and Silence, p. 139.

[76] Larry Levis, "Some Notes on Grief and the Image," in Of Solitude and Silence, p. 174.

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