

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS:
THE POETRY OF ROBERT BLY

by

DOUGLAS SMITH

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the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

This study argues that the poetry of Robert Bly is essentially Romantic in its impulse and that it has been misclassified under the rubric of "deep image." Chapter One provides an overview of Bly's poetics and influences on his work, while attempting to define "image" from Bly's point of view. Chapter Two examines Bly's first book, Silence in the Snowy Fields, in the light of his poetics, and pays close attention to the book's method of composition, linking it with that of the loco-descriptive poems of the English Romantics. Chapter Two also defines the kind of image that predominates in Silence as a transformational image, a designation whose sources include Wallace Stevens, Eric Neumann and Bly himself.

Chapter Three examines the transformational image as it operates in Bly's second book, The Light Around The Body. It establishes the political and moral framework for the book by exploring the linguistic and philosophical importance for Bly of the book's spiritual father, Jacob Boehme.

Chapter Four investigates the transformational image as an inherently political vehicle in Sleepers Joining Hands. Sleepers combines poetry and prose to give psychological reasons for the Vietnam War, a war which Bly saw as unjust and immoral and against which he organized Writers Against

The War in 1966. This Chapter also discusses the elements of a successful political poem, using the work of W.B. Yeats, Pablo Neruda and William Blake as examples of such. Finally, Chapter Four studies the imagery of Sleepers as an extension of Bly's interest in Neumann and Jung and their theories on the feminine, and the repression of the feminine.

Chapter Five discusses Bly's interest in the prose poem. It examines The Morning Glory in the light of Bly's adaptation of Frances Ponge's object poems, and This Body Is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood as a manifestation of Bly's conviction that the material universe is alive and has consciousness. The transformational image in both books remains the primary vehicle through which Bly expresses his interest in the feminine and its relationship with grief; and it becomes the means by which his theory of association as a form of content is most effectively put into practice.

This study, then, replaces the inappropriate term "deep image" in Bly criticism with transformational image, since it is a term which more accurately describes the metaphorical and psychological relationship between the inward and outward worlds that colors almost all of Bly's work.

The Best of Both Worlds:

The Poetry of Robert Bly

for my Mother and Father:

Nan and Maurice Smith

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last thirty years, Robert Bly has emerged as one of the most important of American poets. His influence on the generation of poets who followed him has been extremely far-reaching. His undaunted moral and political pronouncements have elicited substantial controversy in the poetic community, and his poetry and criticism have inspired a good deal of intelligent commentary. His views on the nature and function of the image are usually the focus of this commentary, but this commentary unfortunately remains not as clearly focussed as it might be. This fuzziness is due to a common misconception among critics of contemporary American poetry: that Robert Bly is a "deep image" poet.

I am primarily concerned with re-defining the 'kind' of image that predominates in Robert Bly's poetry. I examine five of Bly's books, dating from 1962 to 1980. During this period, Bly's work has been repeatedly--and incorrectly--labelled as "deep image" poetry, a label which the poet himself disdains and considers inappropriate to describe his ideas on and his use of the image.

I begin my re-definition with an overview of Bly's poetics as they have evolved out of his discussions of various movements, schools and individuals in twentieth-century poetry.

This overview constitutes the first chapter of the dissertation, "The Iconoclast's Image," which argues that Bly's views on the ideal image are not that it should be "deep," but that it should transform the way we see the world by incorporating the world of the unconscious (the inner world) with the conscious world (the outer world). The first chapter also demonstrates that in advocating such reciprocity between the two worlds, Bly owes a great deal to the work of many Spanish-speaking surrealist poets abroad, and in America to the poetry and poetics of Wallace Stevens.

In Chapter Two, "Cold Pastoral: Silence In The Snowy Fields," I study the imagery of Bly's first book in the context of his poetics. Here I identify the predominating imagery of this volume as transformational, drawing not only on Stevens' influence on Bly as outlined in Chapter One, but on the psychology of Eric Neumann in his Art And The Creative Unconscious for this designation. I identify the "transformational image," moreover, as a contemporary manifestation of the English Romantics' desire to fuse subject and object. More specifically, I characterize many of the poems in Silence In The Snowy Fields as recent versions of the late eighteenth-century "loco-descriptive" poems of Wordsworth and Coleridge. I do not make any attempt here, however, to establish the factors responsible for Bly's tendency toward Romanticism; that has been done by other critics such as Charles Altieri and George Lensing and Ronald Moran. Nor do I make any attempt

to re-define Romanticism in the context of Bly's innovations in esthetic theory and practice, though I do suggest in my conclusion that the transformational image is what the "romantic image," as defined by Frank Kermode, was on its way toward. I place Bly's poetry in the Romantic tradition, then, based on its preoccupation with the relationship between Nature and consciousness; a relationship which, insofar as Romantic poetry can be summarized, serves as its primary characteristic.

In the third chapter, "Bodying Forth: The Light Around The Body," I argue that the anti-war poems of Bly's second book do not represent a shift from landscape poetry to a new concern with America's morals and politics, but rather that they represent a return to original concerns that appeared in Bly's poetry and criticism in the late 1950s. These poems represent an estrangement from a world which refuses to acknowledge the importance, let alone the existence, of a spiritual (inner) reality. The chapter concentrates on the satirical function of the transformational image as a weapon directed against materialistic America.

Jacob Boehme's ideas on language are utilized here because fragments of Boehme's writing constitute four of the book's five epigraphs. I discuss Boehme's difficult mysticism only insofar as it relates specifically to Bly's poems, and find it impractical, for the purposes of this study, to discuss his theology in any depth.

In my discussion of the individual poems of The Light Around The Body, I consider the pungent tension between 'masculine' consciousness and 'feminine' consciousness as it reveals Bly's disgust with his country's moral turpitude and refusal to feel grief. I trace the motif of grief as it develops throughout the book as a basis for its more extensive exploration in Sleepers Joining Hands.

In "Sleepers Joining Hands: The Poetry of Water," I study the paradoxical relationship between the poet's need for solitude and the motivation for and execution of his political poetry, and I attempt to identify the elements of successful political poetry, citing poems by William Blake, W.B. Yeats, and Pablo Neruda as examples of such. In this fourth chapter, I concentrate on the essay at the centre of Sleepers Joining Hands, "I Came Out of the Mother Naked," and on the book's title-sequence, both of which offer psychological reasons for the Vietnam War.

In the essay, Bly advocates a submergence in Mother-consciousness in the wake of thousands of years of destructive Father-consciousness. In my analysis of the essay, I question Bly's stereotyped rendering of 'female consciousness' and his obsession with the Great Mother, and I draw from the work of James Hillman, a Jungian revisionist, to do so.

In my remarks on the long poem that is a companion to the essay, "The Teeth Mother Naked At Last," I argue that the transformational image is an inherently revolutionary vehicle,

since its marriage of two realities--outer and inner--demands that the reader re-appraise the way he sees and, more significantly, accepts the world. In this sense, the transformational image firmly establishes itself as Romantic in its attack on the reality principle. Finally, like other commentators on the book, I treat "Sleepers Joining Hands" as a poetic expression of Jung's individuation process, and I focus on the transformational imagery of the sequence as constellations that plot the stages of that process.

In Chapter Five, "The Prose Poems: Romantic Moments," I study Bly's tendency to fuse mood and landscape. I begin with a synopsis of the genre of the prose poems, and outline the influence of the work of Frances Ponge on Bly's use of the genre. I consider both The Morning Glory and This Body Is Made of Camphor And Gopherwood as expressions of a Romantic sensibility that sees in Nature not only consciousness, but intention. I argue that the imagery of these books captures those paradoxical "Romantic Moments" where poet and object merge, yet remain independent of each other.

The final chapter provides a 'conclusion' for an inexhaustible subject--the image--in that it summarizes the Romantic characteristics of the transformational image and argues that as a phenomenon the transformational image resolves the struggle between the contraries of fact and fiction that all Romantic poetry seeks to resolve.

My overall purpose in this study, then, is to re-define the kind of image that Robert Bly employs in his poetry, and to place that image in the continuing tradition of Romanticism so that the recurrence of certain motifs and the persistence of certain psycho-political views in the poetry may be more thoroughly understood. Bly feels that the image, as defined by Pound or Eliot or Williams, is both inaccurate and insufficient, yet he himself is rather hesitant about reducing such a complex idea to a single definition. My designation of Bly's imagery as transformational is intended to capture the essence of the poet's esthetic: that the poem, and more specifically the image, should hold within it two possibilities at once. Bly's most effective images do not come out of ordinary comparison by means of a simile or even out of an unstated comparison by means of metaphor. The strength of Bly's imagery comes from the hitherto unconsidered yoking of two diverse things or ideas, but in such a way as to instantaneously recreate the universe.

CHAPTER ONE: THE ICONOCLAST'S IMAGE

Before I begin my discussion of Robert Bly's poetry and examine the 'kind' of image which recurs throughout his work, I want to offer an overview of Bly's poetics. In so doing, I hope to provide a context for my study of individual books of Bly's poems that contain various manifestations of what I have called the transformational image. I shall devote this chapter, then, to delineating Bly's position in the evolution of twentieth-century American prosody; to tracing the major influences on his poetry and poetics; to undoing the confusion that has clouded Bly's work since he was unfortunately and incorrectly labelled a "deep image" poet in the early 1960s, and therefore to clarifying Bly's notion of what an image actually is. Because this confusion over the "deep image" has coloured almost all critical commentary on Bly's poetry, it is necessary to discuss and to dispell it first.

1. Confusion over the Deep Image

In 1959, in his poetry magazine The Fifties (which subsequently became The Sixties and then The Seventies), Robert Bly called for an end to the objectivism that had

ruled American poetry since the Imagists. He denounced what he saw as dry, puritanical poetry that had its roots in the aesthetics of Pound and Eliot.¹ Echoing some of the sentiments expressed in Charles Olson's essay "Projective Verse," published nine years earlier, Bly questioned the continuing obeisance to the "new critical" criteria for poetry of civilized learning, wit, elegance, charm, ambiguity, overall formalness, and alleged objectivity. Bly, however, was not to call for composition by field, like Olson, or for earthy spontaneity and the glorification of the "obscene," as Ginsberg did in Howl (1956); nor was he to demand life-as-it-is-lived poems, life-in-the-unlying, unkind-mirror poems of the confessional poets, such as in Robert Lowell's Life Studies (1959); he advocated, rather, "a poetry of the unconscious, a poetry of water," citing the work of foreign poets such as Lorca, Neruda, Paz, Char and Hernandez as examples (The Fifties, 3, p. 7). The work of these poets consisted of an energetic imagination which discovered riches buried in the unconscious, and it was these riches that Bly proclaimed to be true images (The Fifties, 3, p. 9). He denounced Pound and Eliot for failing to explore "primitive depth of feeling" (The Fifties, 3, p. 8), and took his contemporaries to task for their chauvinistic attitude toward poetry written in foreign languages, claiming that, because of their arrogance, American poetry was undernourished in the extreme. Because they had "inherited a poetry of puffy elegance and seedy

rhetoric" (The Sixties, 4, p. 30), American poets were suffering the consequences of inbreeding, their poems growing correspondingly weaker and more deformed. Bly felt that cross-fertilization from other traditions and languages would give American poetry new strength; cultural interaction would act as a kind of aesthetic steroid, building new muscle fibres into the feeble American poetic musculature, and at the same time supplanting the ruling 'poetry of things' with a poetry that was "personal" and "inward" (The Sixties, 4, p. 39).

In 1962, responding to what he considered "the appearance of a demand for a new set of concerns in poetry," the New York poet Robert Kelly offered some "Notes On The Poetry of Deep Image" as "a cogent movement in a new direction" in American poetry.² Kelly adopted the idea of "deep image" from Jerome Rothenberg's experiments with it in Poems From The Floating World.³ In his "Notes," Kelly attempted not only to elucidate the term "deep image" and to demonstrate what constituted "deep image" poetry, but to reveal the "fruitfulness of the approach to the poem via deep image" (Notes, p. 14).

Bly and Kelly were, and often still are, incorrectly linked in purpose and practice--for a number of reasons.⁴ First, critics at the time needed a convenient label to apply to poetry by which they were somewhat puzzled, yet in which they saw something significant. Second, since both Bly and Kelly had issued manifestoes of sorts, and both had championed foreign authors as examples of alternative sensibilities,

and, since both had also held up depth of feeling as a poetic priority, it is understandable that Bly also came to be regarded as a "deep image" poet. Finally, the publication of some of his poems in Rothenberg's Poems From The Floating World encouraged critics to classify Bly in this way.

But Bly has never used the term "deep image" to describe his own poetry, or the poems of anyone else he has published, translated, or merely praised. In fact, he deplores the term, arguing that it wrongly implies that the image issues from a geographical location in the psyche, thereby excluding the larger, more significant portion of body consciousness involved in the imaginative act.⁵ His poetry and poetics must, therefore, be seen in a light different from Kelly's, or from the "deep image" school's, or from any other school's, for that matter.

The "deep image," according to Kelly's "Notes," is a "clothed percept" whose success depends upon the poet's ability to establish a "rhythmic relationship" with other images of similar quality. This is accomplished by subtle "verbalization" and by the "conditioning" of one image by the next. The function of these images is to transform the "perceived world," but Kelly does not indicate what the perceived world should become; he says only that this process of transformation involves the "ACT of relating word to percept, image to image until the continuum is achieved" ("Notes," p. 14).⁶

Now Bly would concur with the need for transforming the perceived world, but he would balk at the manner in which Kelly describes the achievement of this transformation. The idea of one image "conditioning" the next suggests a kind of poetic behaviourism, and rather than achieving the desired "superior rationality of the dream" ("Notes," p. 16), this kind of conscious manipulation of images by the slower operations of the reasoning consciousness produces a rationality disguised as irrationality simply for the sake of achieving a "continuum." It is no accident that in his "Notes" Kelly should have chosen as a prime representative of "deep image" poetry André Breton. Though in some cases Breton's poems achieve, according to Bly, an imagistic fruitfulness⁷ in that one image grows naturally out of, and relates to, its partners, they most often reflect the poet's mistrust of images. He is not sure about the first image, so he invents another, and another, etcetera. The poem of "conditioned" images, then, is constructed "like an upside down pyramid, beginning with a word or metaphor, leading to an image and through conscious or unconscious associations to a series of images. Some . . . poems consist of a simple series, one image provoking the next"⁸:

. . . My wife with the tongue of a stabbed host
 With the tongue of a doll that opens and closes
 its eyes
 With the tongue of an unbelievable stone....⁹

These images by Breton have been taken to the outer edge of inventiveness, and there they have lost their force. They emanate from what Bly calls a "false unconscious" (Talking, p. 231) that he identifies with French surrealism in general and with Breton in particular. He identifies automatic writing as a by-product of this "false unconscious," and claims that it "has more to do with Freud than with poetry" (Talking, p. 263) because it merely upsets the ordering function of the rational mind so that it cannot comprehend the poem. As examples of poets who write out of this false surrealism in America, Bly has cited Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, and Philip Lamantia; as poets of legitimate surrealism--"which simply disregards the conscious mind entirely and, by the use of images, tries to bring forward another reality from inward experience"¹⁰--he offers Cesar Vallejo and Pablo Neruda.

Bly's "false surrealism," to be more precise, is poetry that Anna Balakian has described as not "an expression of ideas or emotions but the creation of a series of images, which would not necessarily owe their existence to an a priori subject."¹¹ The image is thus delimited to abstract and pseudo-irrational rhetoric which lacks an emotional and ideational core. Such is not the case with Bly:

All that hair that fell to the floors of barbershops
 over thirty years lives on after death,
 And those shoelaces, shiny and twisted, that we
 tossed to the side, gather in the palace of death;

The roarer comes,
 The newly dead kneel, and a tip of the lace sends
 them on into fire!¹²

Each image here is "conditioned" by nothing but its own existence, yet there is an associational logic at work connecting cut hair and discarded shoelaces with death and the "fire" of purgatory. Rather than the content of the poem consisting of a series of "conditioned" images for the sake of their own continuation, "the content of the poem lies in the distance between what . . . was given as fact, and what . . . then [was] imagined" (The Seventies, 1, p. 16). The poet begins with a "worldly fact"--hair--and "begins to associate" (The Seventies, 1, p. 16) rather than let image "condition" image. The crucial difference is that in Breton the "deep image" is an end in itself, or a means to the end of a mere "continuum," whereas in Bly the image is an expression of "ideas" and "emotions."

Kelly's own poetry actually has less in common with Breton and French surrealism than it does with a Blakean vision contained within a form closely resembling that of Olson and the Projectivists. His style is considerably more discursive than Bly's and relies less on associative leaps than on composition by

Field

"in which a man is understood & understands"

& becomes

what he thinks,
 becomes what he says
 following the argument.¹³

For Kelly, "argument" is more obvious and discursive than it is in Bly, for whom argument is more submerged and more associative. Where Bly and Kelly do overlap, is in their belief that "the centrality of image [substitutes] for the centrality of [Charles Olson's] syllable and line.... The line is cut with image in mind" ("Notes," p. 15). The essential difference between what Bly considers a "true image" and a "false" or "deep image" is that in the latter the world and rationality dissolve completely for the sake of a conditioned poetic continuum; in the former the factual world, though it exists at some distance from the imagination, has commerce with it: the conscious and the unconscious interact and associate by means of the poet's leaping back and forth among ideas and emotions.

2. Bly and Projective Verse

Bly's dissatisfaction with Projectivist prosody stems from the fact that he considers composition by field just another example of the American preoccupation with technique, arguing that his father, Charles Olson, rather than returning poetry to the primitivity of the breath, as he had intended, stopped short at the typewriter:

Charles Olson wonderfully understood that American poetic form could not be an imitation of English form, and that the roots of form go back to the body and its breath, not to metrical habits. It seems though that he wanted the form to be adult--he was interested in the time after the invention of the typewriter, rather than the primitive time before the baby or the aborigine has ever seen a typewriter.

His essay on projective verse makes the whole problem of form technical, post-industrial, needing ingenuity and a typewriter with a good spacer.

(Talking, pp. 276-77)

Bly also attacked Olson's notion of language as a grid one imposes on a material world with no sentience. The projectivist poem is for Bly an incomplete expression of a "naked confrontation between 'mind' and 'object,' with the 'soul' left out" (Talking, p. 278). The unconscious lies dormant while the intellect remains preoccupied with the margins of the page. Without the presence of the unconscious, the poem for Bly remains only half-conceived and overtly intellectual, void of "emotions" and original "ideas."

In The Fifties Bly argued that the Black Mountain poets --Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Paul Blackburn and Denise Levertov--were bound to the external world and that their work in general displayed a preoccupation with "the Americanism of material, words, meters, and attitude as subjects for poetry" (The Fifties, 2, p. 13). Quoting from Olson's "Projective Verse," Bly pointed out a significant irony in the Black Mountaineer's manifesto:

Objectivism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the "subject" and his soul....¹⁴

Bly saw in Olson's objection to subjectivity as "lyrical interference" another unwitting adherence to Eliot's credo of impersonality in verse. He complained that

The Black Mountain poets are not interested in overturning older ideas or men, but in carrying farther certain ideas of old men such as Pound and Williams. The academic poets carry out the ideas of still older men. The Beat poets are not seriously enough interested in any ideas to be iconoclastic.¹⁵

It was not really fair on Bly's part to paint Creeley, Duncan, Levertov and Blackburn with the same brush, since they write radically different poetry and advocate radically different esthetics. But Bly's purpose in attacking them as a group was to condemn the absence of iconoclasm in American poetry. American poets suffered from an "over-politeness that paralyze[d] the country"¹⁶ and its poetry. Bly believed that if "first-rate writers do not criticize . . . long-standing ideas, the third-rate ones never will."¹⁷ Hence the scathing satire and parody of The Fifties and The Sixties where he accused the Black Mountain poets of a "herd instinct." They subsisted not on "the powerful and secret energy" of "vision" or of "content," but on formal considerations: "they break poetry up into tiny and self-important elements: line-length, sound, speed, head, heart, syllable, perception, etc." (The

Fifties, 9, pp. 60-61). Bly's criticisms apply more to the imitators of the Black Mountain group, since, for example, Robert Duncan's poetry is as visionary a body of work as one can hope to read.

3. Bly and Imagism

Bly rejects Imagist poetics because the Imagists were "misnamed" (The Fifties, 2, p. 8). They wrote poems which contained pictures solely of the outer world, not images. Bly discriminates between pictures and images by arguing that "An image and a picture differ in that the image, being drawn from the natural speech or the imagination cannot be drawn from or inserted back into the real world" (Talking, p. 258). He argues that the Imagists failed to achieve what Pound had originally intended: "to record the precise instant when a thing outward or objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective."¹⁸ Bly's objection to the images in poems like "In A Station of The Metro," or H.D.'s "Oread," or even F.S. Flint's "The Swan"¹⁹ (a poem more subjective than most Imagist pieces), is grounded in the idea that they are merely representational; that although they are designed to transform an outward thing, they do not, and thus they accomplish only the first part of their task. The Imagists merely 'photographed' what they saw in the objective world, "using nothing but pictures . . . pictures are not images" (The Fifties, 2, p. 8).

Bly's criticism of the Imagists notwithstanding, it must be acknowledged that it is only because of them that poetry

was liberated from what Pound called "Victorian slithering" to a poetry that responded "more directly to the inner control of the impression, or image, than to the outer control of a pre-established pattern of accent and rhyme."²⁰ Echoing the Imagist commandment that the poem should be composed according to "the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome,"²¹ Bly wrote, in the second issue of The Fifties (1959): "This old style, with the iamb, its caesuras, its rhymes, its thousands of rhythms reminding us of other poems and other countries, its delicate ways, by slight shifts of feelings, its elegant stanzas, its old tested devices of pauses and counterpauses, is like a man speaking who gestures too much" (p. 36). In the "new poetry" Bly was advocating, he reiterated the Imagist call for a poetry of economy, but rather than demand hard and clear images unaccompanied by emotion, Bly called for images freighted with emotion; emotion that is not "explained" but "expressed" (The Fifties, 2, p. 36).

4. Bly and Williams: "A Wrong Turning"

In criticizing the Imagists for creating emotionless "pictures" rather than expressive images, Bly is actually criticizing their rejection of Romanticism, something for which he criticizes William Carlos Williams in particular. We know that Williams, early in his life, resigned himself to write a poetry of things, of "no ideas but in things."²² He confessed that at the age of twenty he experienced "a sudden resignation to existence, a despair . . . I resigned,

I gave up."²³ What did he give up? Not the ego, as J. Hillis Miller argues,²⁴ but according to Bly, the drama of the inner life which does not thrive on the "inner security"²⁵ of the ego. Miller suggests Williams' resignation puts him "beyond romanticism"²⁶ because the romantic poet does not thrive on "inner security." Rather, he thrives, as Keats put it, on "being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason"²⁷ Williams said that he "quit Keats just at the moment he [Keats] himself did--with Hyperion's scream,"²⁸ and in so doing gave himself over to the world of objects in which Keats refused to submerge himself. In short, Williams' poetry confirms the twentieth-century reaction against Romanticism initiated by Hulme and Pound which in turn was reinforced by Eliot's poetry and criticism. In Williams' announcement that "The province of the poem is the world,"²⁹ he "gives himself up to the world," and "he gives up the coordinates and goals which had polarized earlier literature. Romantic poetry, like idealist philosophy, had been based on an opposition between the inner world of the subject and the outer world of things. Since the world is other than the self, that self can ground itself on something external. This tradition remains valid through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, down to Yeats and the early Stevens. In Williams it disappears."³⁰ In Kora in Hell, for example, Williams writes that "the wish would be to see not floating visions of unknown purport but

the imaginative qualities of actual things"31 Bly, on the contrary, advocates a poetry that thrives on uncertainty, that consists precisely of "floating visions of unknown purport" acquired through a dredging of the unconscious for sacred inner events that correspond with "the imaginative qualities of actual things." As Geoffrey Thurley says of Williams in The American Moment, "the poet's tendency to erect 'place' itself into a concept, so that the actual vigilance of the sensibility was sacrificed to a faintly chauvinistic cult of 'America' . . . helped to slacken the muscles of American writing in the postwar period."32

With Bly (and other poets of his generation such as James Wright, W.S. Merwin and Galway Kinnell) Romanticism resurfaces. Williams' rejection of Romanticism represents for Bly "A Wrong Turning in American Poetry." Bly feels that, ironically, Williams' anti-romanticism put a stamp of approval on the impersonal poetry of Eliot that Williams himself felt had returned American poetry to the classroom. In addition, Bly feels that Williams' objectivism suggests "a fundamental absence of spiritual life" (WT, p. 33).

"A Wrong Turning" is perhaps the most important essay Bly has written to date, inasmuch as it offers the clearest picture of the poet's aesthetic and his views on twentieth-century American poetry. In it he argues that American poetry since Pound has refused to face the unknown, to face the deep "inwardness" (The Sixties, 4, p. 39) that has

manifested itself in poetry in other languages in the twentieth century. He points in contradistinction to modern poetry in Spanish as an example of this inwardness. American puritanism, Bly believes, along with a 'what's good for General Motors is good for America' mentality--in other words, success in outward things--has conspired against the inner world of the unconscious.

Although he does acknowledge the tremendous importance of Williams and Olson for their aesthetics, Bly does blame them for having written poetry that chains the poet to the external world. He cites the work of Marianne Moore as an example of this bondage in the extreme, and argues that her poems distort life because they misrepresent experience by ignoring subjectivity. Bly sees Moore's poetry, moreover, as a denial of objects' "inner force"; for him her objects remain lifeless, inert; and their fragmentary listing is actually anti-poetic and an exercise in propriety (The Sixties, 4, p. 14).

In "Wrong Turning" Bly also traces a "psychic" triumvirate among American poets that consists of "objectivist," "hysterical" and "metaphysical" personalities (WT, pp. 33-47). The "objectivist" personality we have already outlined in the work of Williams, Olson and the Black Mountain poets; their collective psyche reveals for Bly a "Puritanism" that goes back to Eliot's impersonality and a disdain for sensuality of any kind. The "metaphysical" personality is

represented by Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom, who advocated an anti-Romantic poetry of paradox and irony; a poetry, Bly argues, that is preoccupied with "the world's body," with little room devoted to the human counterpart; a poetry, above all, that is "orthodox" in its metaphysicality in that it never strays far from the reality principle and not at all from the notions that poetry exists in a world of its own and that a poem suffers irreparable damage when the poet speaks directly to his audience. The work of Karl Shapiro, Randall Jarrell and Robert Lowell and the so-called "confessional poets" constitutes the "hysterical" personality; a personality characterized by a "persistence of bodiless excitement . . . centered on the notion that an artist must never be calm, but must be extreme at all costs" (The Sixties, 8, p. 94). Robert Lowell's poems, in particular, disclose this "persistence" that comes of the poet's "pretending to be at the center of himself, when he is not. He is pretending to have poetic excitement, when all he has to offer is nervous excitement. And that is accepted as poetry, for American readers are so far from standing at the center of themselves that they can't tell when a man is counterfeiting and when he isn't" (The Sixties, 8, p. 96).

Bly does not doubt that Lowell's "talent is very great," but echoing his own criticism of Williams and Olson, Bly argues in his review of For the Union Dead that Lowell's "mere excitement fails"; when he "sets out in a poem to live inside

a certain emotion . . . suddenly a flood of objects buries the whole project" (The Sixties, 8, p. 94). Significantly, when the confessional poet is successful, it is where "the inner and outer worlds hold together" (The Sixties, 8, p. 95); and in Lowell, as well as in Jarrell and Shapiro, Bly claims such reciprocity is rare. As a group, their poetry suffers from "too many literary conversations" and "an exhausting involvement with the Establishment" (The Sixties, 8, p. 94). Lowell's poems circulate an "air of grandeur" (The Sixties, 8, p. 95) which "embodies exactly what Whitman was fighting against" (The Sixties, 8, p. 94).

5. Bly and Eliot

In his comments on Eliot, Bly has come closest to describing what for him constitutes a "true image." In so doing, he acknowledges the importance of Eliot's abandoning the traditional form of narrative in the dramatic monologue, and he admires Eliot's iconoclastic criticism (Talking, pp. 292-93).³³ He argues, however, that Eliot's poetry does not really contain images at all, but merely "projections":

Let's try to make a distinction between "projection" and "image." Pound and Eliot both believed that a feeling is best kept fresh in art by being "projected" onto the outer world. "Smells of steaks in passageways" becomes an objective correlative of a certain feeling of mingled fatigue and despair Eliot experienced when he entered rooming houses. The substances "smells" "steaks" and "passageways" can all be taken out of the work of art and reinserted back into the

world. So they are "objective." Eliot doesn't use projection exclusively, he uses it mostly. Then, if "smells of steaks in passageways" is a projection of inner fatigue out onto objects, what is an "image"?

(Talking, p. 258)

Here Bly stops short of answering his own question. He consistently refuses, moreover, to reduce the image to definition for the simple reason that it would not be "just to the experience" of image-making "to describe it with one-fourth of the brain" (Talking, p. 206). The result of this process for Bly is certainly not what he considers the depersonalized, expressionless "projection" Eliot called an "objective correlative." To express emotion in a poem, Eliot maintained that the poet must find "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."³⁴ An objective correlative, then, consists of parts that represent a whole; hence Eliot's frequent use of synecdoche, such as "a pair of ragged claws,"³⁵ to evoke an entire complex of individual and cultural emotion. Yet the emotion, in Eliot's definition, is always subordinate to the thought, for "When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for his work he is constantly amalgamating disparate experience . . . always forming new wholes"³⁶ out of the disparities. This is all very well, but again, what Bly points to in his criticism of Eliot's central esthetic is that the

mind invariably projects itself on the external world, implying that subjectivity consists of emotional fragments that the intellect (thought) perforce formulates in order to convey meaning. In the form of an image-object from the external world, these fragments can be "reinserted back into the world" (Talking, p. 258), whereas a true image for Bly--Eliot's "bats with baby faces"--"cannot be inserted into the universe or taken away" (Talking, p. 263). A true image continues to live a life of its own, resonating within an excited, active psyche. It has no need of the rational intellect to press it for meaning, so that Eliot's formula for impersonality suggests to Bly, above all, the distasteful "desire to be scientific, to study things" (WT, p. 33).

The "objective correlative," then, forfeits the power of the particular emotion in question to the world of things, by means of what Bly calls "projections," not images. Eliot's scientific method projects his emotions onto the things of the world, and thus, ostensibly allows him to "escape" from his own personality. Bly's objection to Eliot's method focuses on this objectivist fallacy: that while Eliot's "projections" appear to render the world without the colouring of subjectivity, the conscious choice of objects which shall formulate their author's emotions is subjective in itself. By projecting personality onto the objects he decides are sufficiently significant to represent his state of mind, Eliot sacrifices the integrity and dignity of the psyche and

the energy it generates to produce an entire personality. Thus the objectivity of the "correlative" is quite lopsided, because in directing itself only toward the world, it ignores the unconscious, the other and, for Bly, greater source of the poet's personality. "How can the personality be present if the unconscious is pushed out?" (WT, p. 34). Eliot's "projections" represent "'common experience from the public domain masquerading as unique and vital . . . [and his] 'objective correlative' and other vulgarities dressed up in cryptic terms are nothing but so many frauds'" (WT, p. 34). The poet's essential task, according to Bly, is not to formulate an inventory of objects that ostensibly represent his emotions, but to discover, through the ontological reciprocity of subject with object, world with psyche, "a third world, neither physical nor inner" (Talking, p. 259).

For Bly, then, an image is not the "picture" offered by the Imagists, nor the "projection" offered by Eliot, nor the "deep image" offered by Kelly. In defining it, Bly says that "like those in Blake's poems," an image for him is "an intermingling of worlds"; it "is not anything unusual. It is simply language used in such a way that . . . psychic energy can continue its flow" (Talking, p. 182). Language used in this manner avoids what Frank Kermode sees as Imagism's most displeasing aspect: "the implication of absolute stillness in the Imagine,"³⁷ the lack of flow between the inner and the outer world. So for Bly a true image "is simply a body where

psychic energy is free to move around" (Talking, p. 180). Bly likes to use an example from Lorca to demonstrate a true image: "the elephantine shadow of my own tears" (Talking, p. 258). It is a true image because its "energy has remained inside the psyche, and there it created a new substance . . . Moving with its own immense energy, it becomes equal to the world" (Talking, pp. 258-59). The result is "the precise image, conscious and unconscious" (Talking, p. 298).

A poem for Bly, then, is never just an arrangement of things as objets trouvés, as it often was for Williams. Williams' approach toward experience "is, like Pound's, nominalist. Each object is itself and nothing more should be said about it."³⁸ In Bly, objects are never just defined and discarded one by one, but explored for an "inner longing," an "inner force"; and he "will not let a descriptive line stand unless an inner concern . . . has broken through in it."³⁹ Whereas Williams obliterates all distinctions between subject and object by placing all his faith in the object, in the thing itself, Bly deliberately tries to "hold two possibilities in the mind at the same time."⁴⁰

6. Bly and Whitman

Like Whitman, Bly displays in his work "anti-formalism, subjectivity, the intimate voice, poetic personality, colloquial diction, thick, sensuous imagery, and human, social 'themes.'"⁴¹ But more importantly, Bly has aligned himself

with Whitman as a poet for whom "No division existed necessarily between politics and literature"; Whitman "broke the old idea of the poem, and also announced the end of Class in society."⁴² The two poets do share many concerns and themes, but I would hasten to add to those already cited their willingness to take upon themselves the burden of national grief, and the use of their vocation as poet to challenge contemporary moral and/or political opinion. In fact, one is extremely tempted to install Bly in the Whitman tradition, trace the parallel preoccupations of the two, and be done with it.⁴³ But that would be ignoring a very great difference between the two. Though both poets are ultimately concerned with self-realization, each seeks that state in his own way. Whitman sought it by imbuing the material world with spirit, by seeing the ideal in the actual because the actual was a visible, physical reference to an invisible divinity. One always senses in Whitman Emerson's metaphysical idealism, where consciousness somehow creates and is created by what it is conscious of:

There was a child went forth every day,
 And the first object he look'd upon, that
 object he became,
 And that object became part of him⁴⁴

Bly's poems, on the contrary, give more weight to the inner world, so that there is never a question of a reality which already exists out there (whether or not it is imbued with

spirit), and from which the poet extracts an image, but rather there is an acceptance of the real as imagined and the poem as the ligament connecting the two.

7. Bly and Stevens

Bly's work owes more to the poetry and poetics of Wallace Stevens than to any other American poet. In an essay entitled "Wallace Stevens and Dr. Jekyll,"⁴⁵ Bly cites Stevens as the best example of the "group of American poets born from 1875 to 1890, namely . . . Frost, Eliot, Marianne Moore, Pound, and Jeffers" (WS, p. 6), who successfully incorporated his "'dark side'" (WS, p. 4) through the "awakening of the senses" (WS, p. 6) into his poetry. The other poets in this group were much less successful in incorporating "shadow material" (WS, p. 7) into their work, Bly argues, thus severing themselves from the more primitive energies that, if repressed or ignored, prevent a poet from becoming whole. Bly goes on to say, however, that Stevens himself never became truly whole because he refused to change his life despite "all the advice he read in his own poems" (WS, p. 5). Bly focusses on Stevens' infamous remark about the Ethiopian war of 1935-- "The Italians have as much right to take Ethiopia from the coons as the coons had to take it from the boa-constrictors" --and states that "it is a sentence that everyone who loves Stevens' poems has to face sooner or later" (WS, pp. 16-17). Bly cites the sentence as proof of Conrad's intuition in

Heart of Darkness that "for a white man to recover his shadow at the same time he is exploiting blacks is beyond the power of a human being" (WS, p. 5). Thus, for Bly, Stevens' later poems are "as weak as possible for a genius to write" (WS, p. 15).

Bly's opinion on the quality of Stevens' later work obviously goes against critical consensus;⁴⁶ and his belief that Stevens ultimately failed to achieve decency in his life may legitimately be construed as self-righteous posturing. But taken together they suggest that for Bly the business of the poet is not only to give pleasure, but to instruct. For Bly, as for Sidney, the poet's function is "to teach and delight";⁴⁷ he has moral as well as esthetic obligations to his audience and the two should, finally, become indistinguishable. Bly's belief in this dual role of the poet is most evident in the anti-war poems of his second book, The Light Around The Body (1967) and in The Teeth Mother Naked At Last (1970), a long poem in the manner of Ginsberg that attacks not only the American war-mongers, but the society which acquiesces in the face of their horrific actions.

Stevens' poetry is important to our understanding of Bly's work, however, for other reasons. Stevens' "early poems," Bly wrote in the first issue of The Seventies,

are some of the few poems in English in which it is clear that the poet himself considered association to be a form of content. Often in Harmonium . . . the content of the poem lies in

the distance between what Stevens was given as fact, and what he then imagined. The farther a poem gets from its initial worldly circumstance without breaking the thread, the more content it has /italics mine/.

(The Seventies, 1, p. 16)

Bly cites "The Emperor of Ice Cream" and "On The Manner of Addressing Clouds" as two examples of association-as-content, and of the dictum emphasized above. He notes that Stevens, like Eliot, learned his associative method from French poets: "Gerard de Nerval, Lautremont, Aloysius Bertrand, Baudelaire, Mallarme, also Poulet" (The Seventies, 1, p. 17). His point, once again, is that American poets can only gain from being exposed to poetry from other languages, especially that of the Spanish surrealists, who had for Bly much more than the French to offer American poets in "the ecstatic widening of association" (The Seventies, 1, p. 19).

Like Stevens, Bly constantly seeks a reconciliation between "things as they are" and "things imagined" in his poems. He actively seeks a synthesis of worldly fact (reality) and "fiction" (imagination). Stevens' description of the resolution of the imagined and the fact could actually be taken as an anticipation of Bly's esthetic:

There is, in fact, a world of poetry indistinguishable from the world in which we live, or, I ought to say in the world in which we shall come to live, since what makes the poet the potent figure he is, or was, or ought to be, is that he creates the world to which we turn incessantly and without knowing it and that he gives to life the supreme fictions without which we are unable to conceive of it.⁴⁸

As Bernard Herrigan points out, however, "It is not likely that Stevens means that the two 'indistinguishable worlds' are in all respects the same, but the passage has double relevance to his [Stevens'] theme of the intersection of imagination and reality: socially, in that the poet helps men to live their lives [*italics mine*]; esthetically, and ontologically, in that poetry thereby constitutes a greater reality."⁴⁹ Similarly, Bly feels that "each time a man or woman succeeds in making a line so rich and alive with the senses, as full of darkness as 'quail/whistle about us their spontaneous cries,' he must from then on live differently" (WS, p. 16). The poet's art, in other words, dictates the direction of his life. And for the reader, life should imitate art, and not vice-versa.

Bly, like many other post-World War II poets, felt the inevitable influence of Stevens in his work, but where most others were affected by Stevens' philosophic investigations into the nature of "reality," Bly was more influenced by Stevens' belief in the irrational element in poetry, in his conviction that

Poems have imaginative or emotional meanings, not rational meanings They may communicate nothing at all to people who are open only to rational meanings. In short, things that have their origin in the imagination or in the emotions very often take on a form that is ambiguous or uncertain.⁵⁰

Here Stevens echoes the Keatsian dictum of the necessity of living in uncertainty which Williams rejected outright; thus Stevens represents for Bly one of the few who refused to fall in line with the anti-romanticism of the cult of Eliot.⁵¹ Stevens' belief in the spontaneous imagination as constituting reality anticipates Bly's belief in the inner vision as a means to deepened awareness; Stevens' celebration of a "central" mind⁵² that fuses imagination and fact anticipates Bly's attempt to balance the conscious and the unconscious in the "precise image" (Talking, p. 296); Stevens' desire for a "transparence"⁵³ of form which would offer him an esthetic peace anticipates Bly's interest, in Silence And The Snowy Fields, in the relationship between poetry and simplicity as a kind of sparse sublimity; Stevens' masculine-feminine dichotomy (Moon/Woman/Imagination:Sun/Man/Ratiocination) anticipates Bly's obsession with the struggle between the matriarchal and patriarchal consciousness in The Light Around The Body and Sleepers Joining Hands; and Stevens' general disdain for scholarly asceticism--"scholars/. . . should think hard in the dark cuffs/Of voluminous cloaks"⁵⁴-- anticipates Bly's scathing attacks (in The Fifties and The Sixties) on academic poetry (Talking, p. 211) and the purveyors of the PhD.

In "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" Stevens wrote:

The subject matter of poetry is not that "collection of solid, static objects extended in space" but the life that is lived in the scene that it composes; and so reality is not that external scene but the life that is lived in it. . . . It is not that the imagination adheres to reality, but, also, that reality adheres to the imagination and that the dependence is essential.⁵⁵

This "interdependence" manifests itself in Bly's "precise image," where "an intermingling of worlds" (Talking, p. 182) --conscious and unconscious--is substituted for Stevens' interdependence of reality and imagination. Moreover, Bly's "intermingling of worlds," like Stevens' "interdependence" of reality and imagination, is not based on logic, but on spontaneous, instantaneous, sensory perceptions which are continually undergoing change. (There is dramatic evidence of this in the extemporaneous compositions in Silence.) Stevens' famous declaration about reality--"It Must Change"--is inherent in Bly's theory of "leaping" or "swift association" (The Seventies, 1, p. 30) which transforms reality as rapidly as the images of the poem transform themselves. In fact, the wilder, the more passionate the associations, the better, because for Bly, as for Stevens

. . . The casual is not
Enough. The freshness of transformation is
The freshness of a world.⁵⁶

Following Stevens, then, Bly is interested finally in transforming the world, the "casual," into something astonishing. Such transforming can only be accomplished, however, by

irrational means. In fact, Bly argues that "it is unscrupulous to simply retell an experience because all the snails and grasshoppers and hummingbirds that come to us have gone through enormous transformations to get here."⁵⁷ Bly's transforming power introduces "other worlds" into a poem where we might never have expected to find them. Their introduction seems irrational to us, surreal. But his work is no more irrational than Stevens'.

In his essay "The Irrational Element in Poetry" (1936) Stevens predicted the absorption of the irrationality of the surrealists into the mainstream of American poetry: "They [the surrealists], in time, will be absorbed, with the result that what is now so concentrated, so inconsequential in the restrictions of a technique, so provincial, will give and take and become part of the process of give and take of which the growth of poetry consists."⁵⁸ That the irrational or the surreal has been by now absorbed by American poetry is a certainty, but only because Robert Bly has been its sombrero-wearing champion for the last twenty-five years, fighting those

Rationalists, wearing square hats . . .
 Looking at the floor,
 Looking at the ceiling.
 They confine themselves
 To right-angled triangles.
 If they tried rhomboids,
 Coves, waving lines, ellipses--
 As, for example, the ellipse of the half-moon--
 Rationalists would wear sombreros.⁵⁹

and believing, passionately, as Stevens did, in

the more than rational distortion,
The fiction that results from feeling. Yes, that.⁶⁰

He is confident, as Stevens was, that:

They will get it straight one day at the Sorbonne.
We shall return at twilight from the lecture
Pleased that the irrational is rational. . . .⁶¹

8. "To generalize is to be an idiot" -- William Blake

Bly's critics are in many instances justified when they complain that his generalizations do not obtain. His comment, for example, that Williams' poetry is bonded to things and things alone is quite rash, for in "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," Williams celebrates the inner world as much as he does the outer: "Asphodel/has no odor/save to the imagination."⁶² In "Asphodel," at least, things bloom in Williams' "imagination," just as they bloom in the external world. Moreover, Bly's argument that Olson was preoccupied with form to the extent that he ignored his inner life suggests that Bly had not read Olson's Human Universe as closely as he might have, for in it Olson states that the poet should not "treat external reality any differently than as part of his own process, in other words as anything other than relevant to his own inner life."⁶³

Why, then, does Bly risk sounding like an idiot through such generalizations? He does so in order to puncture holes

in anything written by older poets which has gone previously unchallenged. In many instances, however, Bly's generalizations are quite accurate. His attack on Eliot and the New Critics for their alleged impersonality is, for example, well-founded. Bly likens his role as critic in these matters to the stag who confronts another in order to stake a territorial claim (Talking, p. 293). Bly's 'claim' in the late 1950s and early 1960s was to make room for subjectivity; for personal images that were "true" because they were original: i.e., images that cannot be taken out of or reinserted into the real world. In the next chapter, we shall see how Bly puts theory into practice with the images that constitute much of his first book, Silence in the Snowy Fields.

Notes

Chapter One

¹ Robert Bly, "Some Thoughts On Lorca And Rene Char," in The Fifties: A Magazine Of Poetry And General Opinion (Pine Island, Minnesota: 3 (1959), pp. 7-9. Future references to The Fifties, The Sixties and The Seventies will appear as such in the body of the text, along with issue and page numbers.

² Robert Kelly, "Notes On The Poetry Of Deep Image," in TROBAR, No. 2 (1961), 14-16. Future references to Kelly's essay will appear in the body of the text as "Notes," along with page numbers.

³ Jerome Rothenberg, ed., Poems From The Floating World (New York: Hawk's Well Press, 1957).

⁴ Many critics have grouped Bly and Kelly together as deep image poets. For example: Stephen Stepanchev, in his American Poetry Since 1945 (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 175-80. Stepanchev included Bly, Kelly and Rothenberg with James Wright and William Duffy (co-editor of The Fifties) under the rubric of "The Subjective Image," but defined their work as a group's "movement" (p. 175) which rejected "the objective image" in favour of "the deep image" (p. 180). He succinctly defined the deep image as "a concrete particular that has attracted and operates in a context of powerful feelings and associations in the unconscious of the poet and evokes a similar context in the unconscious of the reader when it appears in an imaginatively conceived and ordered poem" (p. 177). M.L. Rosenthal, in The New Poets: American and British Poetry Since World War II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 320-21, groups Donald Hall, Louis Simpson, James Wright and James Dickey with Bly, but rather than labelling them "deep image" poets, he calls them "social" poets. Bly's work did, in fact, share certain similarities with Wright's and Simpson's, and he published and praised their work in The Sixties,⁸ (52-78) and in 4 (58-61), respectively, but although he had reserved praise for Dickey's Buckdancer's Choice in a review in The Sixties,⁷ (41-57), he viciously attacked Dickey in The Sixties,⁹ (70-

79) for its "gloating . . . power" (p. 70), dissociating himself completely from Dickey because of what he considered Dickey's "smugness beyond race prejudice" (p. 72). (See Dickey's response to Bly's attack in Playboy, Nov. 1973, p. 92; and for an intelligent discussion of the Bly-Dickey feud--which comes out strongly on the side of Dickey--see Ross Bennett's "'The Firebombing': A Reappraisal," American Literature, 52, No. 3 (Nov. 1980), 431-48.) Also guilty of injudiciously assigning the "deep image" label to Bly are Anthony Piccione, in Robert Bly And The Deep Image (Ohio University: PhD Dissertation, 1969) University Microfilms, Inc.; Karl Malkoff in Escape From the Self (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 143; Michael Hamburger in The Truth of Poetry: Tensions in Modern Poetry from Baudelaire to the 1960s (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1969), pp. 286-87); Dennis Haskell, "The Modern American Poetry of Deep Image," Southern Review (Australia) 12 (1979), 137-66; Howard Nelson, in "Welcoming Shadows," Hollins Critic, 12, No. 2 (1975), 1-16; Frances K. Sage, Robert Bly: His Poetry and Literary Criticism (Texas University: PhD Dissertation, 1974); and, more recently, Charles Altieri in Enlarging The Temple: New Directions in American Poetry During The 1960's (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1979), p. 43; "From Experience to Discourse: American Poetry and Poetics in the Seventies," Contemporary Literature, 21, No. 2 (1980), 191-224. Altieri is correct, however, in recognizing that much American poetry in the 1960s was essentially a resurgence of Romanticism.

⁵ Robert Bly, "Infantilism and Adult Swiftness: An Interview with Ekbert Faas," in Talking All Morning (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1980), p. 259. Future references to Talking All Morning will appear in the body of the text simply as Talking, along with page numbers. In another interview in Talking, Bly also refuses to "accept either the word 'subjective' that Stephen Stepanchev and others have used . . . or the idea that subjective images are somehow opposed to reality" (p. 184).

⁶ For another definition of the "deep image" see Denise Levertov's essay "An Argument" in Floating Bear, 2 (1961), 115-17, where she disagrees with Kelly's version, and also her "The Origins of a Poem," Michigan Quarterly Review, 7, No. 4 (Fall 1968), 233-238.

⁷ See Talking (p. 231) for a brief discussion of Bly's views on French surrealism.

- ⁸ Anna Balakian, Literary Origins of Surrealism (New York: New York University Press, 1966), p. 127. See Balakian's later book Surrealism: The Road To The Absolute (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970) for a supplementary discussion of the surrealist esthetic; and also her Andre Breton: Magus of Sun (Old Westbury, New York: Hawk's Head Books, 1971), for a valuable commentary on the foremost French surrealist. See, as well, Marcel Raymond's From Baudelaire to Surrealism (New York: Wintenbarn and Schultz, 1950), pp. 34, 104 and 122, for his differentiation between the classical use of the image and its use by the French surrealists.
- ⁹ Andre Breton, "Freedom of Love," in Young Cherry Trees Secured Against Hares, trans. Edouard Roditi (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), no pagination.
- ¹⁰ Robert Bly, in The Sullen Art, ed. David Ossman (New York: Corinth Books, 1963), p. 41.
- ¹¹ Anna Balakian, Literary Origins of Surrealism, p. 114.
- ¹² Robert Bly, "Hair" in Sleepers Joining Hands (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 10.
- ¹³ Robert Kelly, The Loom (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1975), p. 11.
- ¹⁴ Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," in Selected Writings of Charles Olson (New York: New Directions, 1966), p. 24.
- ¹⁵ Robert Bly, "Poetry in An Age of Expansion," The Nation, 192 (April 22, 1961), p. 352.
- ¹⁶ Bly, "Poetry in An Age of Expansion," p. 352.
- ¹⁷ Robert Bly, "A Wrong Turning In American Poetry," in Choice, III (1963), 40. Further references to this essay will appear in the body of the text as WT, along with the page number.
- ¹⁸ Ezra Pound, "Vorticism," Fortnightly Review, 94 (September 1, 1914), 465-67.
- ¹⁹ See William Pratt, ed., The Imagist Poem (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1963).

- 20 Pratt, The Imagist Poem, p. 25.
- 21 Ezra Pound, in The Imagist Poem, p. 22.
- 22 William Carlos Williams, Selected Letters, ed. John C. Thirlwall, (New York: McDowell and Oblonsky, 1957), p. 147.
- 23 William Carlos Williams, quoted from J. Hillis Miller, Poets of Reality (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 287.
- 24 Miller, p. 287.
- 25 Miller, p. 287.
- 26 Miller, p. 287.
- 27 John Keats, Letter to George and Thomas Keats, Sunday, December 21, 1817, English Romantic Poetry and Prose, ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 1211.
- 28 William Carlos Williams, quoted from Poets of Reality, p. 289.
- 29 William Carlos Williams, Paterson, Book III (New York: New Directions, 1949), p. 122.
- 30 Miller, p. 288.
- 31 William Carlos Williams, Imaginations (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 67.
- 32 Geoffrey Thurley, The American Moment: American Poetry in the Mid-Century (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), pp. 127-28.
- 33 What Bly condemns as the sterility or dryness of Eliot's "projections" can be traced directly to Eliot's infatuation with the French symbolists. Eliot inherited their disenchantment about the possibility of ever realizing verisimilitude, which Allen Tate has described as the Angelic Fallacy,

as opposed to the Realist Fallacy. In this connection, see Nathan A. Scott's The Wild Prayer of Longing (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971) for an invaluable discussion of these two fallacies as the bases of modern literature.

34 T.S. Eliot, "Hamlet," in Selected Essays (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), p. 145.

35 T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in Collected Poems (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 15.

36 T.S. Eliot, "Metaphysical Poets," Selected Essays, p. 287.

37 Frank Kermode, Romantic Image (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), p. 133.

38 Miller, p. 307.

39 Robert Bly, some comments on the cover of Cary Waterman's First Thaw (St. Peter, Minnesota: Minnesota Writers' Publishing House, 1975).

40 Robert Bly, First Thaw.

41 Anthony Piccione, Robert Bly and the Deep Image, pp. 1-42.

42 Robert Bly, Nation (22 April 1961), p. 350.

43 Paul Zweig, "American Outsider," The Nation, 14 November 1966, p. 517.

44 Walt Whitman, "There Was A Child Went Forth," Leaves of Grass, eds. Sculley Bradley and H.W. Blodgett (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1973), p. 365.

45 Robert Bly, "Wallace Stevens and Dr. Jeckyll," American Poets in 1976, ed. William Heyen (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1976), pp. 4-19. Further references to this essay will appear within the body of the text as WS, along with page numbers.

46 For the most comprehensive review of Stevens criticism to date, see Joseph N. Riddel's "The Contours of Stevens Criticism" in The Act Of The Mind, eds. Roy Harvey Pearce and J. Hillis Miller (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), pp. 243-76. Riddel's annotations show that the overwhelming majority of critics see a definite maturation and improvement in the quality of Stevens' work. Bly's opinion of the later poems is echoed by A. Alvarez, in his Stewards of Excellence, when he says that "though Stevens' poetry changed a little, it hardly matured" (quoted by Riddel, p. 263, n).

47 Sir Philip Sidney, An Apology For Poetry, The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. I, General ed., M.H. Abrams (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1968), p. 479.

48 Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," The Necessary Angel (New York: Vintage Books, 1951), p. 31.

49 Bernard Herrigan, "Wallace Stevens: The Use of Poetry," The Act Of The Mind, pp. 2-3.

50 Wallace Stevens, "The Irrational Element in Poetry," Opus Posthumus, ed. Samuel French Morse (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), p. 228.

51 See Joseph N. Riddel, p. 245, for an account of the critical "revaluation" of Stevens' poetry as "a culmination of the Romantic tradition."

52 Wallace Stevens, "Notes," p. 207.

53 Wallace Stevens, "Notes," p. 297.

54 Wallace Stevens, "Notes," p. 205.

55 Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider," p. 25 and p. 33.

56 Wallace Stevens, "Notes," p. 224.

57 Robert Bly, "Developing The Underneath," American Poetry Review 6, No. 3 (1977), 44-45.

58 Wallace Stevens, Opus Posthumus, p. 228.

59 Wallace Stevens, "Six Significant Landscapes," The Palm at the End of the Mind, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p. 17.

60 Wallace Stevens, "Notes," p. 233.

61 Wallace Stevens, "Notes," p. 233.

62 William Carlos Williams, Selected Poems (New York: New Directions, 1969), p. 155.

63 Charles Olson, "Human Universe," Human Universe and Other Essays, ed. Donald Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 11. In regard to Olson's exploration of the relationship between the poet and the world, see William V. Spanos's "Charles Olson and Negative Capability: A Phenomenological Interpretation," Contemporary Literature, 21, No. 1 (1980), 38-80.

CHAPTER TWO "COLD PASTORAL": SILENCE IN THE SNOWY FIELDS

The climate of the rural region of Minnesota where Robert Bly lives has been cynically described as ten months winter and two months poor skating; it is a climate that Bly loves and that he has mythologized in all his work, but nowhere as specifically and as powerfully, however, as in Silence in the Snowy Fields.¹ With the publication of Silence, Bly put into practice at least part of the theory of poetry he had outlined in The Fifties and the early issues of The Sixties. The poems display the "interdependence" between the landscape and the mind that Stevens sought, but the poems' sparse, flat, deceptively simple diction and syntax offer an antithetical approach to the opulence Stevens used in the achievement of that interdependence. Of the poems that comprise Silence Bly has remarked: ". . . the place where I wrote these poems is the place where I grew up, and I believed that our inner feelings cannot become clear to us until we see them in outside objects. Invariably, the outside landscape in which they become clear to us is almost always the place where we were born."² In this chapter we shall explore that interdependence of feelings and landscape.

Place; feelings: ever since Emerson walked across a bare common the relationship between the two has received almost obsessive attention from American poets. Bly's objection to poets who have explored that relationship in the past is that they concentrated their attention disproportionately on the landscape and either ignored or subordinated the role that feelings (subjectivity) played in the relationship. In Silence in the Snowy Fields, Bly sought to marry the two; but since the subjective element had been so long ignored by American poets, he felt compelled to become its champion. So rather than express his life in the conventional manner--as a mirror of the environment--Bly placed emphasis on the inner life by describing the external world as a mirror of mood. Consequently, the landscape is often transformed into something beyond the sensible through the active imagination, the unconscious, and the world of the dream.

Place for Bly becomes even more compelling in winter. Snow, the indiscriminate, covers everything: roads, animal dens, houses, barns, fields. It mutes everything; washes everything in its own crystalline light. Snow is, in fact, the physical manifestation of Bly's most cherished condition: solitude. And when snow falls, the world is not only transformed, but is diminished to such an extent that the inner world expresses itself with increased intensity. The poet, then, becomes a transparency of the place in which his inner being finds peace, be it in a moving car or in the

stillness of an open field. In the poems of Silence, Bly, like Stevens, lives "For a moment in the central of our being, /The vivid transparen³" of himself in the Minnesota landscape.

When Robert Bly looks at a tree, or at moonlight lying on new snow, he is not simply looking at the thing itself (never being satisfied with the thing itself), but at the world of his own thoughts and feelings. In Stevens' terms, the real becomes the imagined in Silence, since

when we look at the blue sky for the first time, that is to say: not merely see it, but look at it and experience it and for the first time have a sense that we live in the center of a physical poetry, a geography that would be intolerable except for the non-geography that exists there-- few people realize that they are looking at the world of their own thoughts and the world of their own feelings.⁴ (italics mine)

In other words, Bly, like Stevens (and like the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty), acknowledges that the whole notion of anything existing independently of human consciousness is fallacious; consciousness is "intentional."⁵ Description in Silence, therefore, acts as an overflowing rather than an objectification of the interior world. That is to say, Bly offers as an equal to his perception of the natural world his unconscious and its associative framework which adds to the landscape until it becomes, in Stevens worlds, "the world in which we shall come to live,"⁶ the world of the poem.

As a consequence of this overflowing, the images in Silence often express elements of the unconscious in the conscious. They are images which I have designated as "transformational" not only because of Bly's acknowledgement of Stevens' demand for "freshness of transformation," but also for reasons which will become evident as we move through the poems, examining their imagery and their method of composition.

Bly achieves Stevens' "freshness" through the joy derived from meditation in solitude. What flows out of the poet during periods of meditation is what Bly calls the "desire-energy" that the

poet ordinarily uses . . . to battle the world, and his poems are half intractable world, and half private energy. The student of the inward road pulls back from the world, refuses to allow it to gobble his energy, he conserves it by solitude, or increases it, by meditation. When he has more than enough, he allows it to flow out and take words for itself.⁷

The solitude to which Bly refers here is not the conventional notion of the writer at his desk confronting the blank page, but of the poet actually out walking alone across snowy fields, of having abandoned the comforts of the study, a fire, and perhaps a good book to venture outside where it's damp and bone-cold. Place and feelings conjoin. The poem is not something recollected in tranquility, but often written literally on the spot. Bly

writes extemporaneously because although

one sees many poems on trees, leaves, animals, plants, nature poems . . . it is clear from reading them that the poem at the moment he [the poet] wrote them was not really out in the field, he was not alone out there in the non-human; on the contrary, he was sitting at his desk, in his usual place . . . If an American wants to write of a chill and foggy field, he has to stay out there, and get cold and wet himself. Two hours of solitude seem about right for every line of poetry.⁸

(Talking, pp. 164-65)

Despite the characteristic flippancy of this formula for poetry, Bly is making an astonishing proposal here. He is arguing that to write about something without having directly experienced it constitutes literary fraudulence, and that this fraudulence is readily discernible in the resulting poem. His assertion implies, moreover, that a true poem is not the product of pleasure, but rather of discomfort, and that the pleasure, paradoxically, comes of the 'pain' of being alone. And even if the poet is celebrating a beautiful autumn day, the poem--which must be written while leaves are actually falling on his notebook--should convey the sense of loneliness one feels "alone out there in the nonhuman." Bly has stated, in fact, that "many of the poems in Silence in the Snowy Fields were written while I was literally sitting under a tree, or in the thirty or forty seconds that it took to write the poem down--and not revised" (Talking, p. 133).

What may we infer from such a method of composition? Of primary consideration is the fact that its extemporaneousness obviously suggests a desire to capture immediate experience. Second, it runs counter to the idea of the poet as craftsman who prunes the imperfect branches of the imagination by recollecting in tranquillity what actually happened during those concentrated moments of "inspiration." Third, it dispells the belief in the inspired poem and replaces it with a picture of an imagination tenacious of its purpose, yet groping blindly forward, deeply perplexed at its own bewilderment. Fourth, it endorses conscientious introspection and places great faith in the resonant utterances of the unconscious. In fact, it may be said that extemporaneous composition, with little or no revision, interalizes inspiration: the Muse becomes the Bemused.

The extemporaneous composition itself has not been uncommon in English poetry. It calls to mind many of Wordsworth's sonnets which he composed while surveying an arresting scene.⁹ It recalls in particular one of the more familiar literary anecdotes which offers an account of the genesis of Keats's "Ode To A Nightingale":

In the spring of 1819 a nightingale had built her nest near my house. Keats felt a tranquil and continual joy in her song; and one morning he took his chair from the breakfast table to the grass-plot under a plum-tree, where he sat for two or three hours. When he came into the house, I perceived he had some scraps of paper in his hand,

and these he was quietly thrusting behind the books. On inquiry, I found those scraps, four or five in number, contained his poetic feeling on the song of our nightingale.¹⁰

One might, then, go so far as to say that the extemporaneous composition is a distinctly Romantic phenomenon in that it suggests an attempt on the part of the poet to foster an organic relationship between himself and the objects of his attention. It marks a deliberate attempt to fuse inner and outer landscape without the intellect dominating their natural correspondence. Historically, the extemporaneous composition is essentially an outgrowth of "local" or "loco-descriptive" poems so popular in England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As defined by Dr. Johnson, "local poetry" is "a species of composition . . . of which the fundamental subject is some particular landscape, to be poetically described, with the addition of such embellishments as may be supplied by historical retrospection or incidental meditation."¹¹ M.H. Abrams states that "This landscape is not only particularized; it is in most cases precisely localized, in place, and sometimes in time as well."¹²

Many of Bly's poems in Silence identify particular towns, places, states or seasons. Their participial titles, aside from stylistically echoing the "local" poems of Wordsworth, "are no less meticulous in giving . . . an exact locality"¹³: "Driving Toward The Lac Qui Parle River"; "Remembering in Oslo The Old Picture Of The Magna Carta"; "With Pale Women

In Maryland"; "Driving Through Ohio"; "On The Ferry Across Chesapeake Bay."

As the "local poem" evolved, as it grew more sophisticated in the hands of Wordsworth and Coleridge, "the focus of interest [was] no longer in the analogical inventory of scenic detail, but in the mental and emotional experience of a specific lyric speaker."¹⁴ We find this "emotional experience" in the poems of Silence, which comprise, moreover, "the interweaving of thought, feeling, and perceptual detail, and the easy naturalness of the speaking voice which characterize the Romantic lyric."¹⁵ Both the method and the content of Silence, then, are inherently Romantic, and it stands as one example of the "reemergence of romanticism . . . noticeably free of the exotic, the escapist, or the allusive" that George S. Lensing and Ronald Moran have described in Four Poets of the Emotive Imagination.¹⁶

Bly's version of the "local poem," however, is much briefer and less complex than "The Eolian Harp" or "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," to name two examples. What we do witness in Bly's poems that is akin to these and other "local poems" is their informal, presentational response to the landscape; a response which consists of a spontaneous overflow of feelings that for Bly is precisely that, and not something made to seem as if it were. It is a response whose tendency is to "displace the landscape as the center of poetic interest."¹⁷ In other words, for Bly, as for the

English Romantics, "description is structurally subordinate to meditation."¹⁸ And, as Abrams also notes, "Even when the initial impression is of the casual movement of a relaxed mind, retrospect reveals the whole to have been firmly organized around an emotional issue pressing for resolution."¹⁹

In Bly's "On The Ferry Across Chesapeake Bay," for example, the "emotional issue pressing for resolution" is the "march" of the body "toward Death." A kind of Crossing Brooklyn Ferry in miniature, "On The Ferry Across Chesapeake Bay" consists of a single, one-stanza strophe which implies rather than states the poem's predication: that the physical body is precipitant upon the waters of the Bay, and that the poet's spiritual nature cannot be separated from the physical, even as the body "ploughs toward death":

. . . 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 answers as it falls into
 itself.

(Silence, p. 35)

Here we see that meditation truly supersedes description. As in Whitman's Crossing Brooklyn Ferry, the passage from shore to shore is a metaphor for passing from the physical to the spiritual through death. The diction is particularly reminiscent of Whitman's poem: the apostrophe

in "O deep green sea" recalls the favourite cataloguing device of Whitman that calls things forth; and the objectification and address of the body echo part 5 of Whitman's poem:

. . . I too had been struck from the float forever
held in solution,
I too had receiv'd identity by my body,
That I was I knew was of my body, and what I knew
I should be I knew I should be of my body.²⁰

Bly, too, receives his "identity" by his "body," since in its "march" toward death--though perhaps temporarily healed by the womblike motions of the water--it is acting out the eternal process of life, flowing out of itself to be reborn in the deep ocean of the spirit. The water itself symbolizes the universal confluence of potentialities, the fons et origo, which precedes all form and all creation. The poet's movement across the bay suggests a movement toward death and annihilation on the one hand, and toward rebirth and regeneration on the other. The water here may also be symbolic of the collective unconscious; as an expression of the vital potential and overwhelming danger of the dark depths of the psyche and its struggle to formulate a clear message comprehensible to the poet's consciousness. The meditation comes to the resolution that the body "must march" toward death, but the fact that it must do so unaccompanied by glorious "golden trumpets" suggests that the "relaxed mind" which began this meditation has become a troubled one

determined to transcend its disturbing resolution by immersing itself in the body, just as the sea "falls into itself."

"Hunting Pheasants In A Cornfield" provides us with an even better example of Bly's loco-descriptive poem as extemporaneous composition:

I

What is so strange about a tree alone in an open
field?
It is a willow tree. I walk around and around it.
The body is strangely torn, and cannot leave it.
At last I sit down beneath it.

II

It is a willow tree alone in acres of dry corn.
Its leaves are scattered around its trunk, and
around me,
Brown now, and speckled with delicate black.
Only the cornstalks now can make a noise.

III

The sun is cold, burning through the frosty
distances of space,
The weeds are frozen to death long ago.
Why then do I love to watch
The sun moving on the chill skin of the branches?

IV

The mind has shed leaves alone for years.
It stands apart with small creatures near its
roots.
I am happy in this ancient place,
A spot easily caught sight of above the corn,
If I were a young animal ready to turn home at
dusk.

(Silence, p. 14)

The repetition of the word "now" in part II underlines the poem's extemporaneous nature, and the poem is written in the

present tense as the landscape draws out the poet's feelings from within him. The opening interrogative, aside from compelling us to read the poem to discover its answer, subtly and succinctly establishes the analogy between "tree alone" and 'man alone.' The immediate correspondence between poet and Nature assumes a mysterious resonance through Bly's repeated circling of the tree. In the tree's autumnal de-creation, Bly recognizes the bare branches of solitude itself. The strangeness of the tree is reflected in the strangeness of the poet's response, which is more physical than intellectual, since he specifies that it is his "body" that is "strangely torn," and not his mind. He is like a dog circling a special place he wants to lie down on, until "At last" he sits down beneath the tree and begins writing the poem.²¹

The second and third sections elaborate upon the setting. By repeating that it is "a willow tree," and that it is "alone," Bly underlines the analogy between solitary tree and solitary man from section one. The description of the tree's fallen leaves anticipates the fusion in section four of mind and nature, in that "The mind," in its meditations, also "has shed leaves alone for years." But if we interpret Bly's image of the mind shedding leaves merely as anthropomorphism, or as pathetic fallacy, we misconstrue the poetic impulse. The image resonates with the insistence that the mind, in order to apprehend Nature, must lend itself to what it is apprehending. To think about Nature--to experience it--the

poet does not manipulate it to suit his mood, but 'marries' it, and begets of that marriage a "dualistic consciousness" belonging to man and to Nature in equal proportion.

In the third part, the poet's solitude is extended, almost to the infinite, by "the frosty distances of space" between himself and the cold; distances which are an extension of the separation between the I ("The mind") which questions, and the self ("the body") which does not:

Why then do I love to watch
The sun moving on the chill skin of the branches?

The answer is implicit in the juxtaposition of the rhetorical question against the simple declaration "The weeds are frozen to death long ago": because of a longing for death, for the ultimate fusion of self with Nature.

The image of the tree itself resonates with the life of the cosmos. In its regenerative aspect, it becomes an image of "Life without death," a concept which, according to Mircea Eliade, stands, from an ontological perspective, for "absolute reality" or "the centre of the world."²² Here place assumes cosmic significance, so that to call Bly's poetry "regional," as M.L. Rosenthal has done,²³ is tantamount to calling "Tintern Abbey" regional. When the tree of the field becomes the tree of the mind there is a fusion of the intellectual and material worlds, and the poem as a whole can be seen as a form of epiphany.²⁴ In fact, almost every

poem in Silence conveys this "centre of the world" or "absolute reality" quality, yet it does this as Stevens' poems did: through the emotional representation of "the structure of the poet's mind [as it] is realized in the act of improvisation."²⁵ In this way, the objective and subjective are fused and, once again in Coleridge's terms, "The Poet's heart and intellect . . . [are] combined, intimately combined and unified with the great appearances of nature, and not merely held in solution and loose mixture with them."²⁶

As an audience to the extemporaneous composition, our problem is to consider the poem as a grouping together of numerous images that flow into the line, tugging the imagination behind them. In the example of the tree-image, we are required not to respond to it as an object, or even as a surrogate object, but to apprehend it as a specific reality. To accomplish this, our consciousness must somehow connect itself with the ephemeral product of the poet's consciousness: the image. In other words, if the poetic epiphany is to be completely communicated, the image must resonate in our unconscious. If it does not, then either the poet has failed in his attempt to renovate our consciousness, or we have rejected the validity of the source of the image and those forces manifested in it that have by-passed the circuits of the intellect and the precedence of sensibility.

We find those forces gathering strength in the book's recurring image of darkness. In Silence, the word "dark" or

"darkness" becomes a metaphysical adjective or noun by means of which the darkness of the world and the darkness of the mind are united. The word dark as word holds an enormously powerful aural value as well. When we read it over and over again, either silently or aloud, its vocal energy reverberates through the bloodstream to the tiniest capillaries. Any recurring word will have this hypnotic effect, but especially a word like dark, which belongs to the inner world more than it does to the outer. Dark evokes within us sleep and its powerful imagery: blindness, death, formless chaos, the void, the unconscious, solitude, the womb, the mother, the feminine, et cetera. Upon hearing it we are transported to the most mysterious forests of being. When we speak it we darken the world; electricity is forgotten; a solar eclipse occurs; we are returned to primitivity; we speak with an ancient voice.

The auditory imagination, as Eliot has shown us, lends poetry its tremendous subconscious activity. Simply taken as a phonetic phenomenon, then, the word dark is a tuning fork that creates the emotional pitch of all the other recurring words in the book--sleep, death, water, snow--and harmonizes cosmos with psyche. But these effects are invariably induced by meaning. Thus, as an adjective, dark will acquire the melancholy of the poet; his depression or his pleasure. So in "Depression," there is a desire for the darkness which will obliterate consciousness because the poet's "body was sour," his "life dishonest" (p. 37). On the other hand, the darkness

"near the earth" can represent a path leading to a profound
mystery:

Beneath the waters, since I was a boy,
I have dreamt of strange and dark treasures,
Not of gold, or strange stones, but the true
Gift, beneath the pale lakes of Minnesota.

(Silence, p. 56)

Darkness also connotes the spiritual blindness of those
imprisoned in the external world, those "asleep in the out-
ward man,"²⁷ as the book's epigraph, taken from Jacob Boehme,
suggests:

. . . a darkness in which
Thieves shudder, and the insane have a hunger for snow,
In which bankers dream of being buried by black stones,
And businessmen fall on their knees in the dungeons of
sleep.

(Silence, p. 25)

Or it teaches us lessons about finding joy in solitude:

There has been a light snow.
Dark car tracks move in out of the darkness.
I stare at the train window marked with soft dust.
I have awakened at Missoula, Montana, utterly happy.

(Silence, p. 47)

But darkness is, finally--as a symbol for the inward world
of the unconscious--"Where We Must Look For Help":

The dove returns: it found no resting place,
It was in flight all night above the shaken seas;
Beneath 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.

(Silence, p. 29)

Even though there is no specific reference to darkness in the poem, the re-interpretation of the Biblical flood, with the crow replacing the dove as the bird which discovers "new mud to walk upon," suggests a faith in the powers of darkness rather than in the powers of light. Rather than seeing darkness as regressive, or as evil, or as chaos and unsublimated forces, as Christianity has traditionally seen it, Bly offers darkness as a hermetic obscurum per obscurius. And, when darkness is illuminated by moonlight, as it so often is in Silence, moonlight indicates an active imagination--

How beautiful to walk out at midnight in the moonlight
 Dreaming of animals--

(Silence, p. 54)

which also elicits a joy:

If I think of a horse wandering about sleeplessly
 All night on this short grass covered with moonlight,
 I feel a joy, as if I had thought
 Of a pirate ship ploughing through dark flowers.

(Silence, p. 55)

It is this active imagination which gives Silence its original, surreal quality. The image of a "pirate ship

ploughing through dark flowers" is an excellent example of what Bly has offered as an image in opposition to the pictures of Imagism. It is an image which juxtaposes elements from the inner world with elements from the external world; the palpable with the intangible; conscious with unconscious. It is a "transformational" image²⁸ because it incorporates within itself a rational and an irrational world. A pirate ship is, obviously, something we can conceive of as "real," but as it begins "ploughing through dark flowers" it suddenly becomes something which cannot be "taken out of the work of art and reinserted back into the world." We are transported to a realm where representational thinking ceases to be of much importance. The sleeping being inside us is awakened, and we sense the hidden congruity between matter and the stuff of which dreams consist. We are ushered through dim corridors to a world of inner light which is not a reflection of the light from the outside world. In fact, the outside world becomes temporarily obliterated and the images from the inner world have no apparent antecedents.

My designation of Bly's images as "transformational" is derived largely from Erich Neumann's larger notion of creative transformation: the "total process in which the creative principle is manifested . . . as a power related to the self, the center of the whole personality."²⁹ This process consists of an "unremitting dialectical exchange between the assimilating consciousness and the contents [of the unconscious]

that are continuously being newly constellated."³⁰ Neumann states that consciousness cannot hope to develop unless it maintains "a living bond with the creative powers of the unconscious."³¹ He insists, moreover, that reality does not consist of the external world alone, but that it is composed to a large extent by "intrapsychic forces."³² The creative process, creative transformation itself, hinges on the dialectic of the conscious with the unconscious. "When the unconscious produces something without the participation of the ego, or where the ego remains purely passive, we have a low level of creativity; the level rises with increasing tension between ego and unconscious."³³ As individual manifestations of this creative (transformational) process, Bly's transformational images display this tension in the ego's apprehension of the world modified by the associations that apprehension elicits within the unconscious. Thus, ordinary chestnut blossoms become "chestnut blossoms in the mind" (Silence, p. 26); snow becomes the "jewels of a murdered Gothic prince" (Silence, p. 19). Neumann stresses that "Only if this tension is endured . . . can a third term be born, which 'transcends,' or surpasses, the opposites and so combines parts of both positions into an unknown, new creation."³⁴

In Silence, the world that Bly imagines or dreams stems from an individual psyche, not a collective, generic one. The transformational images in the book are not, therefore,

archetypal. Bly argues, moreover, that although an image "can be 'close' to an archetype . . . the best way to ruin a poem is to put in a lot of archetypes" (Talking, p. 260). Now it might be argued that the nature of an archetype is often such that the poet is unaware of the fact that an image actually is archetypal, so that he is writing down archetypes when what he thinks he is writing down are original images. But this is to imply that an image necessarily must have a rational function--as in an archetype--whereas an image for Bly also implies an irrational 'function.' Anthony Libby contends that Bly's "greatest strength is his ability to discover in the darkness images that are not archetypal, at least not in the Jungian sense, because they are only beginning to loom into view."³⁵ Therefore, the transformational image is not something which has been lying dormant in the depths of the collective unconscious, and it consequently cannot be understood as a shadow of the racial past. Neither should it be associated with neo-Platonic notions of an ideal. Bly is "sick of hearing Plato's name spoken in every discussion of the image" (Talking, p. 260). The transformational image contains its own reality. It is not symbolic; it simply is what it is. It indicates nothing but itself, and exists as logically or illogically as any object in Nature. Its "meaning," if it has any meaning at all, exists in the resonance which dictates what it can be, as it shifts

shape from one form to another. The overall "meaning" of the poem emerges from the fertile and irresistible conjunction of images which melt into one another by an intuitive process which circumvents metaphor because all the image-objects in the sequence are on par with one another. Due to its dynamic novelty, then, the transformational image exists anterior to reality, and therefore contains its own ontology; an a-causal ontology of nonknowing and eternal becoming. To put it simply: image precedes thought, in both the poet and the reader.

For this process to occur, an inversion of normal psychological perspectives must take place, and the image is felt before it is known. For instance, "pirate," "ship," "ploughing," "dark," and "flowers," convey meaning on the subconscious level prior to the reader's intellectualization of their attributes. Furthermore, the images' syntactical arrangement on the page is subordinate to their psychological resonance. Perception, therefore, supersedes conception. We truly experience "a life of sensations rather than of thoughts." We are astonished first, and it is only because of our admiration for the poet's ability to astonish us, to "make it new," in Pound's terms, that we explore the image from a cognitive perspective. The positivist critical mind, however, being the insensitive creature that it is, wants only to understand the image, rather than take it at its inception, as we must do with Bly. In order to benefit from

Bly's imagery--by imagining before knowing--we should take the image simply as it is and follow it to the limits of its created context. We have nothing to fear but the unconscious which, sooner or later, will force us to deal with the inner reality we refuse to acknowledge. We can remain cynical and proclaim, as many reviewers of Bly's work initially did, that Bly's poems make no sense and therefore deserve little attention; we can, with great rhetorical insensitivity and derision, announce in response to Bly's pastoral mysticism anchored in the unconscious: "All we have to do is open its doors, speak its language, and the vile enchantments of our culture will disappear."³⁶ Or, we can submerge ourselves in this inner reality and inhale the fragrance of "the chestnut blossoms in the mind" (p. 26).

Such an image, which ostensibly has its basis in the external world, is actually a concentration of the total "energy" of the psyche. As such, it receives constant strengthening by means of association throughout the rest of the poem, a 'technique' Bly employs in much of his work, and one which clearly distinguishes him from the French surrealists and the Deep Imagists. Rather than abandon the first image for another and another, etc., merely in order to achieve a continuum, Bly trusts the initial image, the rest of the poem acting as a kind of psychic investigation

of its salience on the edges of consciousness. The poem "Awakening" (p. 26) is a good example of this trust and subsequent psychic probing.

The juxtaposition of the introductory phrase "We are approaching sleep" against the title "Awakening" immediately submerges us in a non-rational realm, since the content of the poem contradicts what the title suggests the poem is about. It is full of images of sleep, tunnels, wells and darkness--always behind the metamorphosis of one image into another is the darkness, the source of the images themselves. Why the title "Awakening" then? Logic, obviously, does not obtain in the inward world. The awakening that takes place in the poem is not the normal awakening from sleep to waking consciousness, but from the rational to the subrational; from the day-world of reason to the night-world of dream and the cries of the dead.

The transformational image "the chestnut blossoms in the mind" is the image with which all others in the poem are magnetically associated: "the long roots of barley," "the oak roots staining the waters dark," the "sodden blossoms" soaking the streets. The result is a merging of conscious and unconscious material that reflects the state of one "approaching sleep." With "the chestnut blossoms" becoming "sodden blossoms" in line six, we have entered or awakened into the dark waters of sleep and the unconscious: "a tunnel softly hurtling into darkness." The use of the first

person plural to frame the stanza--"We are approaching" and "out of this/We have come"--invites that the reader makes the descent and experiences the "Awakening" along with the poet. The syntactical arrangement of the one long sentence into a parataxis of images and abstractions ("pain," "bitterness") not only sets up an associative procession, but enhances our participation in the process of transforming the external world. Each line is open-ended with a caesura at or near its middle, making the process occur that much more swiftly. The repetition of "blossoms" and "roots" and (once again) "dark" creates the hypnotic effect of a deep sleep. This repetition is augmented by the subtle internal rhymes of "pain" with "Staining" and "rain," "soaked" with "oak" and "approaching," the alliteration of "barley, bitterness" (subtly softened by the comma), and the gentle assonance of "thoughts," "blossoms," and "sodden." The stanza's overall effect is not unlike a sedative, then, and we are plunged into the abyss of sleep.

There is "a time lapse" between the first and second stanzas, and Bly has commented that "If there is any poetry in the poems, it is in the white spaces between the stanzas."³⁷ During the "time lapse" we are returned to a specific place: "The small farmhouse in Minnesota." The "poetry" of the white spaces between stanzas one and two, however, has effected a dramatic shift in tone. The sentences of stanza two are much more urgent, more assertive; the images of

darkness that predominate are ominous. The peacefulness of the first stanza has given way to a frightfulness in stanza two: "Even the water in wells trembles." The external storm that "is coming" is merely an extension of the storm in the poet's unconscious. The omni-presence of darkness in lines three through seven, particularly the darkness of the horses and chrysanthemums (the latter image recalling the chestnut blossoms of stanza one), suggests that Bly's (and our) "Awakening," or any awakening--whether it be purely physical or psychological or spiritual--is not without pain or the fear of pain. This is implied by the image of the "small farmhouse" being "hardly strong enough for the storm," and by the horses "who are bearing great loads" in "the dark air." We feel as if it is the poet himself who "trembles" under the potential battering of the psychological storm, that it is he who is the "small farmhouse in Minnesota." The tone remains all the more ominous because the storm never actually arrives; it is the potentiality of its destruction that is frightening, not the destruction itself.

Between stanzas two and three we experience another "time lapse." We are now with the poet in "traffic," and the wheels of his car coalesce into "the great Wheel" of the past rolling into the present. "Lincoln's statue" stands as an emblem of that "long past," and "A bird," "warbling," for the "long present." There is a return to

the initial syntax of stanza one, and with it the re-appearance of the "blossoms." The potentiality of the storm has been transformed into the actual "grinding" and "Washing, continual washing" of a death-in-life existence for those imprisoned, or asleep, in the outward world. The fear of immersion, then, the fear of being drowned in the darkness of water, we can translate as the ego's fear of being overwhelmed by the unconscious.

It has been argued that this "Dying into the darkness [is] at the heart of Bly's poetry."³⁸ But we must not misconstrue the kind of dying that Bly is engaged in here. It is not gross death--physical, literal death--that Bly experiences and re-creates in his poems; it is psychic death, or metaphorical death. But this does not make its experience any less real or less meaningful. On the contrary, psychic death brings with it the most profound notions of awakening into the inward world, the underworld, where all that has been buried and forgotten in each of us paradoxically comes to life. The unconscious becomes the underworld, and when Bly dies into the darkness, he is resurrected inside the imaginative mind.

Many of the poems in Silence proceed under the authority of this unwritten axiom: without an imagination of death, there is a death of the imagination. Death is intimated or commented upon in nearly every poem in the book, and

invariably from a positive perspective. It is "the death we love" (p. 32); "We rejoice at death" (p. 34); the "body ploughs toward death" (p. 35); the poet "has felt the sense of death" and therefore is "full of love" (p. 33); we find ourselves "Diving into the sea of death" (p. 12); "new strength whispers of the darkness of death" (p. 16); "the farmer looks up at the paling sky reminding him of death" (p. 18); "the baboon whistles on the shores of death" (p. 25); there is an undeniable longing to "rest in the black earth of silence" (p. 37); death is personified in "the horse of darkness . . . Carrying a thin man with no coat" (p. 52), so that the thought of death, the possibility of death, is always with us:

Alive, we are like a sleek water beetle,
 Skating across still water in any direction
 We choose, and soon to be swallowed
 Suddenly from beneath.

(Silence, p. 55)

Death, then, is something not to be avoided, but praised. In his praise, Bly is recognizing death as "the prerequisite of every transformation that merges life and death . . . [and] allies himself with the creative God himself, the God of transformation who bestows and is life and death."³⁹

To sleep is to enter this kingdom of psychic death. Many poems in the book are set at night or deal directly with the experience of sleep: "Waking From Sleep," "Afternoon Sleep," "Unrest," "Depression," "Laziness and Silence,"

"Late At Night During A Visit of Friends." To sleep is to awaken into an interior, autonomous existence whose images are a statement from the chthonic depths. We leave behind clock time and move into 'image time.' Thus "Lincoln" co-exists with "The small farmhouse in Minnesota" and, as in the poem "Remembering In Oslo The Old Picture of The Magna Carta," "One thing is also another thing":

The girl in a house dress, pushing open the window,
 Is also the fat king sitting under the oak tree,
 And the garbage men, thumping their cans, are
 Crows still cawing,
 And the nobles are offering the sheet to the king.
 One thing is also another thing, and the doomed
 galleons,
 Hung with trinkets, hove by the coast, and in the
 blossoms
 Of trees are still sailing on their long voyage
 from Spain;
 I too am still shocking grain, as I did as a boy,
 dog tired,
 And my great-grandfather steps on his ship.

(Silence, p. 30)

The experience Bly conveys here is that of having lost time and of being lost without time in a psychic place where succession is invalid. Each image is an image becoming another, and the naturalistic fallacy disappears in the wake of the interchangeable participial verbs which transform one image swiftly into the next. This poem is probably the best example we can find in all Bly's work of the associative method of "leaping" he expatiated in The Seventies. There he stated that the more rapidly the poet associates,

the more substantial and exciting the poem, and that "The farther a poem gets from its initial worldly circumstance without breaking the thread, the more content it has" (The Seventies, 1, 16). In other words, Bly begins with the "worldly fact" of a picture and "leaps" to "an object soaked in unconscious substance to an object or idea soaked in conscious psychic substance" (The Seventies, 1, 6). We "leap" from garbage cans to "doomed galleons" to "blossoms" (once again). The images "doomed galleons" and "blossoms" are, obviously, 'real,' but when the former becomes contained in the latter, the reader is pulled inward toward the reservoir of images where each one mutually requires the other and all are simultaneously correlative. The only notion of causality or origin comes in the title, where Bly presumably associates the Magna Carta with something that captured his attention--a photograph or a painting--in Oslo. Following the title, Bly makes no attempt to illuminate through narrative the connection between one image and the next. This is accomplished by the poem's simple and only abstract declarative: "One thing is also another thing." It is Bly's dictum for the essence of his imaginative life, and the poem's exfoliation of images suggests that things are what they are because of the associations they elicit within us. Each image or "thing" is a sudden accumulation of energy into a form which briefly brings into focus a new

part of the psyche. The rapid transformation of the images reflects the external life-process, but the synchronicity of events suggests the inner life as more vital, less rigid, and therefore primary.

We see a similar principle operating in "Afternoon Sleep" (p. 43). The poem begins with a vision of the poet's consciousness immediately after he has woken from sleep, and consists of sixteen lines, divided into three sections that apparently have nothing profound to offer: "I was descending from the mountains of sleep." It is a vision and not a description because the "of" phrase--which is the syntactical construct that is most appropriate to the rendering of transformational consciousness--is describing neither "mountains" nor "sleep," but "some third substance, which has never existed before, created by the words" (The Sixties, 8, 76). Other examples of "of phrases" from Silence are: "the sea of light," "the pueblos of the lily," "The shacks of the corn," (p. 27); "a confusion of swallows" (p. 31); "strange blossoms of the sea" (p. 35); "the sea of pain" (p. 44); "the ship of his own desire" (p. 57); "handfuls of darkness" (p. 60). Like "the mountains of sleep," these "of" phrases, because they do not denote possession, "cannot be rephrased" (The Sixties, 8, 76). They suggest psychic states which, because they cannot be rendered by perception, are simultaneously intimate and indeterminate; and often

they reverse the normal perspective from which a phenomenon is viewed: Bly is "descending" from "mountains" of sleep rather than rising out of the conventional valleys of the subconscious.

In the waking state the dream is recounted, and the random images of "an old Model A," Bly's wife, and "the loneliness hiding in grass and weeds" simulate the dreaming process itself. The condensed story about "Joe Sjolie" in section two seems completely dissociated from the first section. It is only in section three, where we learn that Bly "drove out to that farm when [he] awoke," that we realize the story in section two is actually a parable about "loneliness," although the poem's inconclusiveness belies this. The apparently arbitrary images of the poet's dream anticipate the details describing Sjolie's farm. The "matted grass [that] lay around the house" is an echo of the dream of "loneliness hiding in grass and weeds"; and the farm is "sheltered" by trees much in the same way the loneliness is hidden in grass and weeds. The image of the "old Model A" in stanza one anticipates Bly's later driving "out to that farm" when he awoke. The poet's happiness, presumably because he has dreamt of his wife, exaggerates the emptiness (and stillness) of Sjolie's "bachelor rocker." Finally, the "mountains of sleep" are themselves transformed into the "hill" where the Sjolie farm stands. We notice that in all these images their appearance in the psyche

precedes their manifestation in the poet's external and social experience. But all the images in the poem are less evocative and less mysterious than those contained in the final lines:

Inside were old abandoned books,
And instructions to Norwegian immigrants.

These lines suggest that Sjolie's loneliness was not simply the loneliness of bachelorhood, but an existential loneliness that could not have been overcome by "books" or by "instructions." When a loneliness of existential proportions such as this "suddenly enters" a man it is, according to Bly, because he has ignored the darker side of himself, the unconscious; that place, once again, "where we must look for help."

Imagery in one poem often corresponds with or echoes the imagery of another, as in the images of blossoms and flowers, and the even more numerous images of snow. This is especially true for the shorter pieces in Silence. The first image of "Afternoon Sleep" flows naturally out of the last two images of the preceding love poem "Taking The Hands":

Taking the hands of someone you love,
You see they are delicate cages . . .
Tiny birds are singing
In the secluded prairies
And in the deep valleys of the hand.

(Silence, p. 42)

Along with the other short poems in the book--"Driving To Town Late At Night To Mail A Letter," "A Late Spring Day In My Life," "Love Poem," "Watering the Horse," and "In A Train"--"Taking The Hands" does without what Bly calls "the scaffolding" of secondary ideas. Because of this, it moves more swiftly than the longer poem and with more intellectual exhilaration."^{39A} By omitting such scaffolding, Bly comes close to the juxtapositional method of the Imagists. We move swiftly from "hands" to "cages" to "Prairies" to "valleys" and finally back to "hand"--all in a few seconds. The associative leaps are short and quick, but the intensity of the emotion, which is lacking in Imagist poems, is captured precisely by the juxtaposition of unexpected images. The poet is travelling the backroads of association, taking us to secret places, and leaving us there:

In a long poem the poet is always there, holding his hand beneath you. He doesn't want you to fall In the brief poem, it is all different: the poet takes the reader to the edge of a cliff, as a mother eagle takes its nestling, and then drops him. Readers with a strong imagination enjoy it, and discover they can fly. The others fall down to the rocks where they are killed instantly.⁴⁰

In "A Late Spring Day In My Life," we are "dropped" after the second line, where the "birds" of "Taking The Hands" become something more primordial:

A silence hovers over the earth:
The grass lifts lightly in the heat

Like the ancient wing of a bird.
A horse gazes steadily at me.

(Silence, p. 40)

The first line prepares us for the "fall" with the portentous silence that, anticipating the image of the wing in line three, "hovers" above the ground. As the grass "lifts" it merges with the silence to become "the ancient wing of a bird." But no sooner have we picked ourselves up from our initial fall than we are rudely dropped again--this time into the consciousness of a horse--and the poem abruptly concludes. The poem conforms to Bly's definition of a poem as "something that penetrates for an instant into the unconscious" (WT, 47).⁴¹ The image of the "ancient wing" certainly "penetrates" the rational layer of the psyche; and the steady gaze of the horse--he gazes as much at the reader as he does at the poet--also "penetrates" the husk of the intellect, forcing us deeply into ourselves. But the effect is not long-lasting; it endures only "for an instant." The title of the poem itself suggests that a day in one's life may amount to a few minimal observations and one resonant image like "the ancient wing of a bird." Bly is not embarrassed by this; in fact, he argues that most poets "have tended to become insensitive to emotions that are too brief for such a poem, which means they are . . . insensitive to three-quarters of the emotions they have."⁴²

Of course, there are emotions which can "endure for hours or days even for lifetimes."⁴³ "Love Poem," another short piece, describes one of the more powerful of these emotions, along with its effects:

When we are in love, we love the grass,
And the barns, and the lightpoles,
And the small mainstreets abandoned all night.

(Silence, p. 41)

And so does "Driving To Town Late At Night To Mail A Letter":

It is a cold and snowy night. The mainstreet is
deserted.
The only things moving are swirls of snow.
As I lift the mailbox door, I feel its cold iron.
There is a privacy I love in this snowy night.
Driving around, I will waste more time.

(Silence, p. 38)

The emotion once again is "love," but this time the love of "privacy" rather than the love of another human. We notice once again that the poet has stopped to record his emotions extemporaneously, and that the emotions here, and in the other short poems, are just as overpowering as, say, those experienced in "Hunting Pheasants In A Cornfield."

The emotion in these short poems, however, appears almost nonchalant; the language is flat, the tone laconic, the grammar loosely presentational. On first reading these short poems we sometimes find ourselves asking the question: So what? But there is something about them that compels us

to re-read, other than the urge to discover something meaningful we might have missed the first time. Upon re-reading, then, we discover that it is the tension achieved by juxtaposing intense introspection with the matter-of-fact. The poet is driving to town late at night to mail a letter: a common enough task. But as he lifts the mailbox door, he experiences a moment of pure emotion, as pure as the "cold iron" and "swirls of snow" synonymous with his "privacy." He is for the moment--and it is barely a moment--alone in the universe; and he loves this state, a state of almost non-being. This love of privacy is underlined by the extremely personal voice which ends the poem: "Driving around, I will waste more time."

In "Watering The Horse," we find the usual pattern of pure emotion or insight occurring "in a state of solitude and in conjunction with some element of the natural world."⁴⁵ For the reader there occurs a kind of recognition in the images of something secret yet something oddly familiar.

The importance of the subjective element in these short poems reveals itself most significantly in the remaining short piece, "In A Train":

There has been a light snow.
 Dark car tracks move in out of the darkness.
 I stare at the train window marked with soft dust.
 I have awakened at Missoula, Montana, utterly happy.

(Silence, p. 47)

Here is another example of a poem which seems to have been written extemporaneously; a poem which is set, not surprisingly in darkness, with the poet having just awakened, once again, from sleep. But to what can we attribute the poet's "utterly happy" state? The "soft dust" on the train window? The dark care tracks? The darkness itself? The "light snow?" All of the above? We cannot say definitely what, if anything, is responsible for the restrained exuberance here. But this is precisely what lends the poem its power of attraction. It is what is left unsaid, what remains ambiguous--the hidden drama of the psyche itself--that finally convinces us. It is the unabashed personal statement, so uncommon in American poetry until the late 1950s and early '60s, that appeals to our interior self. The psyche is relieved of any tension it felt in searching for obscure symbols and there is a concomittant emotional release in the simple statement of facts.

As I have already noted, the prominent introspection of these short poems calls to mind Imagist poetry. In "A Lecture On Modern Poetry," T.E. Hulme suggested that the true nature of poetry should be "definitely and finally introspective" and should deal "with expression and communication of momentary phases in the poet's mind."⁴⁶ In this sense, Bly is beholden to the Imagists as much for their opinions on introspection as he is for their introduction into English

of the shorter, Chinese and Japanese models that have greatly influenced his later work, such as Old Man Rubbing His Eyes.

Introspection pervades the entire book, but is most intense in the poems that comprise the first section: "Eleven Poems of Solitude." In "Return To Solitude" we are out walking with Bly on "a moonlit, windy night," where

The moon has pushed out the Milky Way.
Clouds are hardly alive, and the grass leaping.
It is the hour of return.

(Silence, p. 12)

The comfortable, almost sentimental opening image of night, and the melodramatic pronouncement of the fourth line, are salvaged by the powerfully ominous images in lines two and three. The personification of "moon," "Clouds" and "grass" gives these images a power beyond themselves, a power which extends from the inner world of the poet. Rather than address us from the place of contented solitude, as in "Hunting Pheasants," Bly merely indicates to us the direction he wants us to go. This destination, moreover, is underlined by the distance created by the images "grass" and "clouds." The sudden shift from "hardly alive" to "leaping" produces in the reader some disorientation, which becomes in the fourth line, through the absence of any logical transition, momentary bewilderment. But we quickly

realize that, because "It is the hour of return," we are "leaping" from the material world to the psychic world. The absence of transitional logic suggests Bly's inward state at the time: the imagination has, up to now, like the clouds, been "hardly alive," dormant; a walk in the moonlight sets it free, "leaping." Hence the leap in logic between lines three and four, and the even greater leap that occurs (in the "white spaces," once again) between sections one and two:

We want to go back to the sea,
 The sea of solitary corridors,
 And halls of wild nights,
 Explosions of grief,
 Diving into the sea of death,
 Like the stars of the wheeling Bear.

The leap is a dangerous one into the unconscious, and "We" make the leap also; it becomes our "hour of return" as well. It is also a leap into the feminine, back into the waters of the womb to a state of peace and perfection. Like birth, however, the "return" to this peacefulness involves pain. We find ourselves diving toward the core of an emotion--"grief"--and its painful "Explosions." We dive through transformational images which make what we have previously known in life absolutely impossible, yet these images become real even though they grow less and less representational and increasingly irrational: from simply "the sea," to "the sea of solitary corridors," to "halls of

wild nights," and finally to "the sea of death." (Notice that the unrealistic images here are all contained in "of" phrases.) The final line--"Like the stars of the wheeling Bear"--re-introduces the illogical astronomy of the first section and the poem leaps back toward naturalistic consistency. The sequence of images is a kind of 'fast-forward' rendering of the emotional experience of solitude itself. It contains the "strangeness" that Bly feels is "present in any good poetry" (The Sixties, 5, 77), and it escorts us through the emotional core of the self--through devolutionary physiological origins--to "explore [that] primitive depth of feeling" (The Fifties, 3, 8) Bly had advocated in The Fifties.

But after our exploration,

What shall we find when we return?
 Friends changed, houses moved,
 Trees perhaps, with new leaves.

We find the objective world "changed" because solitude has irrevocably altered the poet's consciousness. The irrational subjectivity of section two lingers in the word "perhaps," which suggests a world transformed, and our uncertainty both about the new world and about ourselves. Theodore Roethke said that "to go forward as a spiritual man it is first necessary to go back,"⁴⁷ and "Return to Solitude" is an echo of his pronouncement. It is, finally, a poem about the alchemical process, but in psychological

terms. We cannot begin with gold; we must begin with lead, with our own "Explosions of grief", and we must be willing to dive into the "sea of death," to abandon the ego and its material preoccupations, if we are to change dross into spiritual gold.

If there is any moral to be extracted from Silence it is that solitude teaches us to cherish nothingness and emptiness, and therefore prepares us for our final emptiness and nothingness in death. In "Thinking of Wallace Stevens On The First Snowy Day In December," Bly speaks of the "new strength" (p. 16) solitude has given him, and of how the poetry that Stevens wrote about snow as a symbol for nothingness provides instruction for encountering the nothingness at the core of human existence: "nearing death you sang/Of feathers and white snow." The light, ephemeral quality of the feathers and the blankness of the snow suggest the nothingness that stands behind things, the nothingness that annihilates the objects of the external world in the very act of apprehending them. This instruction allows Bly to create, or it demands that he create--as Stevens did--his own world: "New snow" out of "old snow"; the "new dawn" out of "the exhausted dawn"; and "new strength" out of "death" itself, because death is the very ground of being, the ultimate transformation.

In the two little prose-poems which follow the poem for

Stevens, "Sunset At A Lake" (p. 17) and "Fall" (p. 18), properties of darkness from the material world and the psychic world converge. Like "many of the poems in Snowy Fields," this one was "written at dusk" (Talking, p. 131), the time when a "man's unconscious opens" (Talking, p. 130). The transformational image, "rafts of ducks drift like closed eyes," signals the opening of the unconscious, and then "something invisible slowly moves toward shore in the viscous darkness." It is, according to Bly, that "something invisible" which the unconscious notices and responds to, until "the poem is there" (Talking, p. 133). The darkness of the sky becoming one with the darkness of the water--a common enough symbol for the unconscious--alleviates the heavy, "inhospitable" dualism that existed before the unconscious was aroused. Then "Calm falls on the lake" and only a few "troubled" birds break the delicious silence of the day's death. The poem concludes with a delicate burial metaphor--"the clay is sending her gifts back to the earth"--and the external world gives itself over completely to the internal world.

In the other prose-poem, "Fall," also set at dusk, darkness is connected with death, and fear of the darkness intimates a fear of death:

. . . chickens, huddling near their electricity,
and in some slight fear of the dark, walk for the

last time about their little hut

(Silence, p. 18)

Images of death--from dead pheasants in car headlights to a "paling sky reminding him [a farmer] of death" to "the bones of corn" rasping in the wind--are all contingent upon the fact that "it is the first Sunday of pheasant season."

"Because" it is so, death is presented as an unavoidable fact, as certain as the changing of seasons. In the dark, "lights from barn windows can be seen through bare trees," a closing image which suggests the possibility of the existence of some life ("light") on the other side of death ("bare trees").

The transformational quality of the imagery here arises out of the qualifying words "as if," where, once again, one thing--"dusk"--is seen as another thing "through the is-inglass on old coal stoves." The moon, too, is only "half" there, becoming and un-becoming itself. These qualifiers produce an eery ethereality which is augmented by the adjectives "faintly" and "paling." The palpable realm is then transformed into a psychic reminder of death in the persona of the farmer.

In both prose-poems, although meticulous attention is paid to detail--for detail is the prose-poem's most salient characteristic--detail is not offered for its own sake. Bly will note detail after detail in order to establish the core of emotion that corresponds to, or grows out of, the

scene. Hence the personification of Nature in these two poems: "moss stands out as if it wanted to speak"; the lake is "heavier and inhospitable"; birds "speak"; "the clay is sending her gifts back to the center of the earth" (emphasis mine). The natural landscape is converted into an idea of itself, and the Romantic notion implicit in the personification of the natural world is that it, too, possesses consciousness.

"Driving Toward The Lac Qui Parle River" (p. 20) is another poem set at dusk, that time when Bly believes the unconscious flowers. The poem begins, however, with a kind of compressed complacency--"I am driving; it is dusk; Minnesota"--which swiftly expands into an uninhibited proclamation of happiness as Bly observes details of the landscape on either side of the road:

The stubble field catches the last growth of sun.
 The soybeans are breathing on all sides,
 Old men are sitting before their houses on carseats
 In the small towns. I am happy,
 The moon rising above the turkey sheds.

Bly expresses his contentedness through the repeated use of various forms of the verb "to be" as both main and auxiliary verb: "I am driving; it is dusk"; "The Soybeans are breathing"; "Old men are sitting"; "I am happy" (emphasis mine). The passive quality of the verbs underscores the pleasure--a fourth kind of pleasure?--of travelling simply for the sake of travelling. The stubble field and the soybeans are

personified, recognized as having an existence as meaningful as the old men sitting "on carseats" who are content simply to watch the traffic drift past. The poet's spirits rise in conjunction with the rising moon, but the true cause of Bly's happiness is revealed in section II:

The small world of the car
Plunges through the deep fields of the night,
On the road from Willmar to Milan.
This solitude covered with iron
Moves through the fields of night
Penetrated by the noise of crickets.

It is the "solitude" of the experience that delights him. It transforms the car into a "small world"; the full cover of darkness converts the car into a womb-like vehicle "Penetrated by the noise of crickets." The noise of crickets against the rich background of dark silence assumes an important function in the poem, since it is the only thing other than the people talking in part III which invades the microcosmic car. In doing so, it calls to our attention the aural quality of the stanza, upon which Bly has commented interestingly and at some length:

I wanted to have the sense of the crickets penetrating into the close world of the car, but at the moment I wrote it I made a mistake and said that the solitude is covered with iron--which it's not, it's surrounded in a circular way; and even worse, the car is not made of iron at all, it's made of steel. I didn't notice that for three to four months until a friend pointed it out to me, and by that time I couldn't change it. The reason is that somehow

all the sounds in a given line are chosen by your unconscious and conscious mind together in a split second, at the very moment you're also deciding which of the many possible images you will use. Once I chose the word "Iron" which has a very heavy, strong i in it, this affected the sounds coming in the next line which reflect that i and r and that n and join or contrast. I went back later and tried to put in the word steel, the entire stanza disintegrated in sound, and the lines after it lost all their sound interest. So I realized that it was too late at this point to change it. There was nothing I could do about it.

(Talking, pp. 136-37)

As with his images, Bly's sonic effects come from an intermingling of the unconscious with the conscious. Because this intermingling occurs instantaneously, instinct and experience play complementary roles in the writing process. Often instinct (the unconscious) predominates, especially in an extemporaneous poem. The results, in retrospect, are sometimes--as with the word "iron" here--not as favourable as one would want them to be. This is the great risk of writing extemporaneously: the critical faculty (experience) is swept away in the excitement of the moment and by the time it re-asserts itself, it may be "too late." The damage has already been done. Yet in this poem the damage is minimal; and Bly's honesty and meticulousness in this regard do indicate a serious dedication to craft. Bly believes that such dedication should never be practised at the expense of spontaneous psychic energy. "The most important thing is psychic energy. If the craft kills that, obviously we're

worse off than we were before [the critical faculty asserted itself] ("Talking, p. 177).

Bly's dissatisfaction with the aural aspect of the second part of the poem notwithstanding, he is completely successful in transporting us to "The small world of the car." He accomplishes this by the subtle shifts from the general-- "the deep fields of the night"--to the particular--"On the road from Willmar to Milan"; from the repeated general image of "the fields of night" to the particularized "noise of crickets." The run-on structure of the last three lines simulates the car's acceleration and reminds us of the poet's, and our, destination.

The third part of the poem echoes the first's end-stopped lines, details and personifications--

Nearly to Milan, suddenly a small bridge,
 And water kneeling in the moonlight.
 In small towns the houses are built right on the
 ground;
 The lamplight falls on all fours in the grass.
 When I reach the river, the full moon covers it;
 A few people are talking low in a boat--

and expands its tone of contentedness toward that of total serenity. The poem's details are recorded, once again, not for accuracy's sake, but because they correspond to the emotion Bly feels at the time of the poem's composition. The entire poem builds toward the final line which introduces the first and only human sound. The first two lines are a sentence fragment whose lack of a verb both echoes the

compression of the poem's introductory declarative and, through its use of commas and the adverb "suddenly," creates a sense of urgency and potential closure.

Bly has said that when he came to write the poem, after finally arriving at the Lac Qui Parle River, he found himself with the first two stanzas of six lines each and the last stanza with only five lines. He felt he needed another line for symmetry's sake but could not arrive at one. Just then, he heard the "few people talking low in a boat," and the poem completed itself. Bly had not spoken to anyone for about a week prior to this drive, so that it seems as if he were destined to travel to the river simply to hear these people talking. The notation of the crickets' song in part II is perhaps an uncanny anticipation of what he shortly was to overhear. The verb structure of "are talking" is an echo of the verb structure of lines three--"are breathing"--and four--"are sitting." The syntactical similarity equates the natural with the human and an overall tone of tranquility covers the poem like "the full moon" covers the river.

There is, as we have noted, a yearning for death throughout these poems; and it is a yearning that is somehow akin to love and therefore associated with woman or, more generally, the feminine. It is only the elliptical syntax, or parataxis, of the nine lines that comprise "With Pale Women In Maryland" (p. 32) in section II of Silence which prevents this connection from being obvious. One long sentence constitutes the

poem, and the commas that punctuate it convey the very sense of the poet and his company moving over the landscape--

"Passing the proud and tragic pastures . . . Past the tobacco warehouse"--and of moving "Like those before" who are now dead, "through our dark lives" toward physical, literal death. The echo of the first line in the last, which is in conjunction with the poem's main clause--"We move toward the death we love"--rather than expressing a sense of finality, as one might ordinarily expect of such a structure, sustains the sense of movement beyond the poem and literal death. The repeated line conveys, too, by virtue of its framing function, a sense of confidence in the notion that the knowledge of woman is a preview to death. The familiar adjective "dark" is conspicuously employed to exaggerate, by way of contrast, the paleness of the women; and the repeated word "pale" calls to mind Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" and its "pale kings, and princes too,/Pale warriors, death pale were they all."⁴⁸ Keats's poem, like Bly's, is also about one who is "stupefied with love," "dazed/With over-abundant love" into a knowledge of death.⁴⁹ Keats's knight, like Bly, is content in his knowledge, and the beauty and desire of the feminine is replaced by the beauty and desire of death.

Another death poem, "At The Funeral of Great-Aunt Mary" (p. 34), is an attack on the traditional Christian--specifically Lutheran--notion of life after death. In the funeral

service, the minister celebrates death because it is the entranceway to heavenly "mansions prepared/From the foundations of the world." Bly responds with the simple contradiction: "Impossible. No one believes it." The poem begins with the ascerbic sarcasm of "Here we are, all dressed up to honor death!" It is a line which, in its simulation of extemporaneity, sustains the book's casual, direct, unpretentious tone, but also locates the poet and his fellow mourners "Here," in the world--not in any heavenly mansion. The first line of section two, "The church windows are open to the green trees," modifies the sarcasm into a subtle irony: the minister is ignoring the "foundations of the world," the "green trees" which, though they reach heavenward, are rooted firmly in the earth. The trees are symbols of the regenerative powers of Nature, and the poet's denial of Lutheran dogma implies that he believes that the mourners are not "The sons and daughters of God," but of "Mother Nature." It is the earth, after all, to which the "old woman/Born in Bellingham" is returned:

Out on the bare, pioneer field,
 The frail body must wait till dusk
 To be lowered
 In the hot and sandy earth.

This last section is a tiny masterpiece of sound and description, underlining in its simplicity the solemnity of the occasion. What was once a "pioneer field" has become a

a graveyard, and the land that Great-Aunt Mary's ancestors came to break as pioneers she has now truly broken as her body is lowered into her open grave. The word "pioneer" is particularly resonant. Not only does it connect itself aurally with the other words in the stanza containing a mournful "r" sound--"bare," "lowered," and "earth"--but, according to the O.E.D., it means in a figurative sense "one who goes before to prepare the way . . . an original investigator, explorer, or worker; an initiator." And in its general sense it means "A digger, excavator." Great-Aunt Mary, in her death, then, becomes a pioneer in every sense of the word. But her "explorations" or "investigations" do not take her away from "the foundations of the world"; they lead her to them. Indeed, she becomes part of those very foundations. In her death and decay she partakes fully in the cyclic, regenerative processes of Nature; her "being" (the line-break in line two, section two, places great emphasis upon "being" and not on spiritual abstraction) will provide sustenance for the "green trees" that will some day grow out of her bones. Her body is "frail," but this fact is not meant to be derisive or to point, as the minister might, to human frailty as a contrast to the power of God. Our frailty is simply a fact of life, part of our being, and if we can achieve a spiritual union with the world, with the universe, it paradoxically must be accomplished through the physical, through the body.

Bly celebrates the body in many poems in Silence:
 "Surprised By Evening," "On The Ferry Across Chesapeake Bay,"
 "'Taking The Hands,'" "Solitude Late At Night In The Woods,"
 "Images Suggested By Medieval Music." In fact, this rejoicing
 in the flesh is a Whitmanesque theme that runs throughout
 all his work, especially in The Light Around The Body
 and This Body is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood. It is
 nowhere more overt, however, than in "Waking From Sleep"
 (p. 13):

Now we wake, and rise from bed, and eat breakfast!--
 Shouts rise from the harbour of the blood,
 Mist, and masts rising, the knock of wooden tackle
 in the sunlight.

Death impends in "Eleven Poems of Solitude" (and in Silence in general), but it does not prevent Bly from
 experiencing such moments of ecstasy. In fact, because death
 does constantly impend, it encourages the poet to celebrate
 the simple fact of being itself. In moments like this, when
 the inner world comes fully to life, the "whole body is like
 a harbour at dawn." Sleep as the premonition of death--
 "our master"--gives itself over to consciousness and its
 venal mythology. The poem is an extended metaphor--"Inside
 the veins there are navies setting forth"--which recalls
 the sea imagery of "Return to Solitude," and whose
 ecstasy is echoed in "Poem In Three Parts" (first

published in the second issue of The Fifties, p. 41) where the poet exclaims, "Oh, on an early morning I think I shall live forever! /I am wrapped in my joyful flesh" (p. 21). Here the celebration of being-in-the-body comes from having "suffered and survived the night." In both these poems, Bly's celebration comes immediately after waking, suggesting the notion that sleep is not necessarily resuscitative but threatening. Awakening into the body gives the poet cause to think that he "shall live forever!"

The life of the unconscious described in the latter poem as "long rides past castles and hot coals" stands less as a comment on the poet's past life than as an indication, once more, as to where he is travelling. Conversely, the poet makes no attempt to interpret his dreams or the images that shoot suddenly into conscious thought because "the dream has nothing to do with the waking world but is the psyche speaking to itself in its own language."⁵⁰ The poem, then, or that part of the poem where the dream is delineated, is the imagination answering itself: images responding to images. Hence the final section of "Poem in Three Parts" (p. 21), where we are ostensibly returned to the external world with the image of "The strong leaves of the box-elder tree," but are really called, in response to the dream images of section II, into the eternal world of the imagination: "Into the wilds of the universe, /Where we shall sit at the foot of a

plant,/And live forever, like the dust." In "Solitude Late At Night In The Woods" (p. 45), the moonlit darkness transforms nature into an elaborate version of itself-- natura naturata--and the simple "joy" of walking "in the bare woods" renders the poet's body one with its surroundings:

The body is like a November birch facing the full
moon
And reaching into the cold heavens.

The poet's joy may be heavenly, but it is rooted firmly in the earth.

Bly's moments of bodily ecstasy are balanced by moments of despair or anger or confusion. In "Summer, 1960, Minnesota," for example, the objects of the landscape elicit in the poet a kind of nausea rather than elation:

We plunge through the hot beanfields,
And the sturdy alfalfa fields, the farm groves,
Like heavy green smoke close to the ground.

(Silence, p. 31)

Yet these images merely report what Bly sees. It is in section two that the poet reveals to us his psychic state, the "plunge" inward having taken place, once again, in the white interregnum between sections:

Inside me there is a confusion of swallows,
Birds flying through the smoke,
And horses galloping excitedly on fields of short
grass.

The transformational image in the first line of section II conflates the disordered series of images in section I through internalization: "Inside me . . ." This internalization, this "plunge" inward increases in velocity and ominousness in the final section despite the exuberance of the consoling vision of "horses galloping excitedly on fields of short grass":

Yet, we are falling,
Falling into the open mouths of darkness,
Into the Congo as if into a river,
Or as wheat into open mills.

Again, it is not just Bly who is "falling" but "we," too. And what we are falling into is the Conradian heart of darkness inside ourselves, suggested by the imagery of the third line: "Congo" and "river." The poem's final image calls to mind the fields described in stanza one, and "yet" we remain in the inner world--which merely consists of the objects of the external world that have merged with the emotions, as in "mouths of darkness" and "confusion of swallows."

Often for Bly the experience of this heart of darkness occurs in dreams where the unconscious has become a veritable underworld,⁵¹ a Hades, the realm of death whose images are frequently physically threatening or transformed anxieties that are ontological comments on the state of the poet's psyche, as in "Depression":

I dreamt that men came toward me, carrying thin
wires;
I felt the wires pass in, like fire; they were
old Tibetans,
Dressed in padded clothes, to keep out cold;
Then three work gloves, lying fingers to fingers,
In a circle, came toward me, and I awoke.

(Silence, p. 37)

The dream is a statement from the chthonic depths. We might regard it as the vesperal version of the poet's depression over a dishonest life. But that is to argue that the inward world of images and dreams results from sensations and merely perpetuates an Aristotelian fallacy Bly so much abhors. Silence uses perception as a metaphorical mode to deliteralize the senses in favour of a sensual imagination which establishes the image as the psychic source of sensation. So the depression Bly feels is the result of a psychopathy that, once again, produces a desire for death:

Now I want to go back among the dark roots;
Now I want to see the day pulling its long wing;
I want to see nothing more than two feet high;
I want to see no one, I want to say nothing,
I want to go down and rest in the black earth
of silence.

(Silence, p. 37)

We cannot help but feel, however, that the descent from the "engine high in the air" in the first line, to the "black earth of silence" in the last, should not be thought of in naturalistic terms; that the desired death is not so much physical as psychological. The desire "to go back among the

dark roots" is clearly a desire to dwell permanently in the richness of the underworld, to abandon the ego of the day-world and live permanently the life of the dreamer in the nightworld.⁵² The dream-experience is so overwhelming, the sense of physical violation so strong, that it suggests Bly has been seduced by the underworld--underlined by the repeated phrase "I want"--to the point where it not only lingers in an irrational desire "to see the long day pulling its wing," but becomes an undisguised expression of Thanatos.

The power of seduction by the underworld is sometimes so strong that when it is usurped by the lure of the day-world, the poet's response, as in "Getting Up Early," can be violent:

Dawn has come. The clouds floating in the east
 have turned white,
 The fence posts have stopped being a part of the
 darkness.
 The depth has disappeared from the puddles on the
 ground.
 I look up angrily at the light.

(Silence, p. 39)

Despite the frightening aspects of the underworld, Bly senses something pejorative in the coming of the light, since light removes "depth" from things. Here he responds "angrily" to that which robs him of the richness of psychical reality. Darkness, finally, is more nurturing than threatening.

In the final section of the book, "Silence On The Roads,"

Bly escorts us along several of the avenues that lead inward to the private life of the individual liberated from the burdens of ambition, of having to respond as others would expect, of the need to be stimulated or stimulating, challenged or challenging; he leads us to a new reality that, while it remains private, becomes catholic by virtue of its emotional simplicity.

The first of the ten poems that comprise this third section of the book, "After Working" (p. 51), is presented in the familiar form of three numbered sections, and consists also of the familiar flat, declarative sentences that characterize the book's first two sections. It echoes the content of many earlier poems about "moonlight"--a symbol for the active imagination--and extends the idea of "harbors" as a metaphor for the poet's exploration of the ever-changing coastlines and oceans of the psyche:

After many strange thoughts,
Thoughts of distant harbors, and new life,
I came in and found the moonlight lying in the
room.

In section two of the poem, transformational imagery describes the moonlight in terms of "pure sound,/The sound of tower bells, or of water moving under the ice,/The sound of the deaf hearing through the bones of their heads." But what is being described here is not so much the moonlight that "covers the trees," but silence. Now, silence is

expressible only in terms of sound, and therefore it is more a limit than a presence. The sounds Bly describes here grow more and more limited until, with "the deaf hearing through the bones of their heads," they are completely internalized, completely imagined. As clusters of "invisible" images, then, these sounds have a general bodily presence which exists and does not exist simultaneously, and this is one of the salient features of the transformational image: it produces, upon its apprehension by the reader, an experience of something-- "The sound of the deaf hearing through the bones of their heads"--that is real and unreal, rational and irrational, physical and metaphysical, visible and invisible, heard and not heard. Silence itself suggests this kind of experience because it is both there and not there; and, as the horizon of sound, silence suggests both being and not-being.

The richly ambiguous experience of the second section is replaced by the concrete knowledge of the third:

We know the road; as the moonlight
Lifts everything, so in a night like this
The road goes on ahead, it is all clear.

The experience or the phenomenon of moonlight and silence is affirmed; it has given Bly direction, and the literal, external road he is travelling is merely an extension of the inner aesthetic road. The syntax of the stanza remains ambiguous enough that "it" can refer to both "the road" and

to "everything," so that now everything is "clear" or meaningful. And it is this clarity of vision that the simplicity--we might even say transparency--of the poems allows us to share.

The sense of clarity that is achieved through silence and solitude is much more easily lost than gained, as is evidenced in the book's penultimate poem "Silence" (p. 59). As in "After Working," the sounds of the poem approximate a gesture toward silence:

The fall has come, clear as the eyes of chickens.
 Strange muffled sounds come from the sea.
 Sounds of muffled oarlocks,
 And swampings in lonely bays,
 Surf crashing on unchristened shores,
 And the wash of tiny snail shells in the wandering
 gravel.

And, once again, the more detailed the images become, the stronger the gesture toward silence becomes. The associative leap that is delicately made from "wandering gravel" to the poet's "body lost among the wandering stones of kindness" in stanza two, is completed in the final stanza where the poet's aimlessness and "sloth" are projected onto "Something homeless . . . looking on the long roads"--an abstraction which becomes, in the list of images which follows, increasingly concrete and more appropriate to the emotion:

A dog lost at midnight, a small duck
 Among the odorous reeds,
 Or a tiny box-elder bug searching for the
 window pane.

Even the young sunlight is lost on the window
pane,
Moving at night like a diver among the bare
branches silently lying on the floor.

The silence, yet again, is augmented by the darkness of the scene, as it is in titles of several of the poems in this section: "September Night With An Old Horse," "Night," "After Drinking All Night . . .," and "Late At Night During A Visit of Friends." These poems are all set in silent darkness and at least three of them include moonlight in their setting and continue to employ the water metaphor that transforms the downward drift of snow throughout the volume. This downward drift, whether in the form of water or snow, or of drifting into sleep and the underworld, invariably "speaks of those things that oppress the living" (p. 58). But despite these "things," the poet is consoled by many others: "A few friendships, a few dawns, a few glimpses of grass,/A few oars weathered by the snow and the heat" (p. 56); a "butterfly . . . carrying loam on his wings" (p. 55); "A dream of moles with golden wings" (p. 53); "boards lying on the ground in early spring" (p. 57); "The human face that shines as it speaks of things" (p. 58). These things are perceived and presented by a subjective consciousness which is now capable of merging completely with objective reality.

In "Old Boards," for example, chicken tracks are "dry

and eternal" even though they exist, paradoxically, in "wet, and muddy" ground. Subjectivity is now so strong that the irrationality of the poet's psyche appears within the objective world. In the second section of the poem this subjectivity re-asserts the axiom of the earlier "Oslo" poem, "one thing is also another thing." The old boards lying on the ground are also "the wood one sees on the decks of ocean ships, / Wood that carries us far from land." The transformation of "old boards" into "decks" also continues the water-journey motif that culminates, as we shall see shortly, in the book's final image. This wood in section III belongs to the "man who has a simple life," and is transformed further into "the ship of his own desire." Here the relationship that Bly mentions in his cover jottings on Silence--the relationship between poetry and simplicity--comes to the fore again. The man whose life is simple, then, who "sits on dry wood surrounded by half-melted snow," is Bly. The image of "half-melted snow" suggests the flow between subjectivity and objectivity that creates a third realm.

In this connection, it is interesting to note Bly's recollection of the genesis of "Old Boards":

I remember when I was . . . when I saw a wooden board lying there in front of my chicken house and it was sort of half wet. The snow was melting. And there were tracks of chickens around it. And I lifted it up to see if there

were tracks of chickens underneath and there were!
 Somebody had thrown the board down there . . .
 suddenly I had a longing for a poem. So therefore
 it's lucky for me to have old boards lying around.

(Talking, p. 187)

Bly is describing here that "moment of flow" (Talking, pp. 186-87) when the unconscious notices something that corresponds to an idea or an emotion within itself. At that moment the world and the unconscious merge, each transforming the other. A third thing results. Old boards become a "ship of . . . desire!"

The poem that concludes Silence, "Snowfall In The Afternoon," actually returns us to the "half-private" snow, pleasure, darkness and solitude with which the book began:

As the snow grows heavier, the cornstalks fade
 farther away,
 And the barn moves nearer to the house.
 The barn moves all alone in the growing storm.

(Silence, p. 57)

We recall, too, the "small farmhouse" in the poem "Awakening," from the book's second section, that was "hardly strong enough for the storm" (p. 26). Here, in the fourth section of the poem,

The barn is full of corn, and moving toward us now,
 Like a hulk blown toward us in a storm at sea;
 All the sailors on deck have been blind for many
 years.

(Silence, p. 57)

The earlier, physical barn was merely a manifestation of that which by now has evolved and is "moving toward us" as an apparition out of the subjective consciousness. The blind sailors here are the ghostly survivors of the interior, psychic storm of "Return To Solitude," and the ship of desire from "Old Boards" has been transformed into the simple form of "a hulk." The sailors are "blind" perhaps because they are blind to the "darkness which was always there, which we never noticed"; the fecund darkness of the unconscious that if ignored will cause within us the terrible "unrest" described in the first poem of section II.

This final poem consists typically of simple, declarative statements. Their simplicity effectively exaggerates, by way of contrast, the surreal image of the blind sailors on the hulk. Like most of their counterparts in the rest of the book, the simple declaratives are end-stopped. Why? Such line termination, or clause termination, allows the poem's lines to function more expressively and to suggest the inner drama of the psyche. The extended pause at the end of each line makes its closing more emphatic, inducing an incantatory quality when the poem is read aloud. End-pausing also attenuates the sense of the line whose form tends to gather its energy toward a stressed, synoptic close. Thus we are rhythmically persuaded into an acceptance of the irrational images that pervade the book. Our acceptance

of the irrational is also enhanced by Bly's frequent use of the (end-stopped) apostrophe: "How strange to think of giving up all ambition!" "I could take handfuls of darkness!" These exclamations also serve to transform an ordinary perception or event into something miraculous and memorable.

Of the forty-four poems that constitute Bly's first book, exactly half of them are constructed in three parts, either in numbered sections or un-numbered stanzas. The book is divided into three separate but interconnected parts as well. The first poem in the book is entitled "Three Kinds of Pleasures" and the last poem in section I is called "Poem In Three Parts." Is there anything significant in this abundance of the number three, or is its proliferation merely accidental? As a symbolic figure, the number three, of course, is rich in its connotations, particularly in its Christian context. But Bly's attitude toward Christianity has almost always been negative, and Christian symbolism finds little support within the secular context of Silence. The number three is quite meaningful, however, within the context of the transformational image, it being a third thing made out of material from the conscious and the unconscious. The triadic structure of the individual poems and the tripartite architecture of the book as a whole underline the transformational process. And since, according to Pythagorus, three is the first real number--one and two are

not real numbers in that they define point and line but not space--three is the number which suggests space, depth, thus allowing man to conceive.⁵³ It is no accident, moreover, that in Bly's mythology of death there are three figures: solitude, sleep and darkness. Sleep is the source of the resonant world of pure inwardness and imagination. Along with solitude and darkness, it is prior to life and anticipates that toward which life is directed: death. But after reading Silence we know that for Bly death does not exist somewhere in the future. Life dwells at all times within death, and the poet is continually drawn to death like an animal instinctively drawn home to its origin and its end.

Notes

Chapter Two

¹ Robert Bly, Silence in The Snowy Fields (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1962). Further references to the book will be abbreviated to Silence and will appear within the body of the text, along with page numbers.

² Kevin Power, "Conversation With Robert Bly," in The Tennessee Quarterly, 19, No. 3, 80-94.

³ Stevens, "Notes," p. 207.

⁴ Stevens, "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet," Sewanee Review, LII (1944), 528.

⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962).

⁶ Stevens, "Notes," p. 206.

⁷ Robert Bly, "American Poetry: On The Way to the Hermetic," Books Abroad, 46 (Winter, 1972), 22. In Freudian terms, we could describe this process this way: "The libido leaves the inner self when the inner self has become too full. In order to prevent it from being torn, the I has to aim itself on objects outside the self." J.H. Van den Berg, in "The Subject and His Landscape," in Romanticism and Consciousness, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1970), p. 65.

⁸ These remarks were part of an essay published originally in George Hitchcock's poetry magazine kayak, at the request of the publisher. In this essay Bly characterized the typical surrealist kayak poems as "poems that appear to have escaped from the mind-walls (but) haven't really escaped at all," and concludes that there are not "enough good poems to fill a large magazine like kayak" (Talking, p. 163).

⁹ I am thinking here specifically of Wordsworth's sonnets: "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, Sept. 3, 1802"; "Composed by the Seaside, Near Calais, August, 1802"; "Composed Near Calais, on the Road Leading to Ardres," Aug. 7, 1802"; "Composed in the Valley Near Dover, On the Day of the Landing"; "Composed by the Side of Grassmere Lake"; "On the Departure of Sir Walter Scott From Abbotsford, for Naples"; and other poems, including "The Warning" (composed on horseback in a snowstorm); "To A Butterfly"; "Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg"; "Written in March while Resting on the Bridge at the Foot of Brother's Water"; "It is a Beauteous Evening Calm and Free"; and "Lines Written Near Richmond upon the Tames, at Evening."

¹⁰ Charles Brown, quoted in English Romantic Writers, ed. David Perkins (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1967), p. 1184.

¹¹ Samuel Johnson, The Works of Samuel Johnson, ed. Arthur Murphy (12 vols.; London, 1813), IX, 77, quoted in M.H. Abrams' "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," in Romanticism and Consciousness, ed. Harold Bloom, p. 208.

¹² Abrams, p. 207.

¹³ Abrams, p. 207.

¹⁴ Abrams, p. 211.

¹⁵ Abrams, p. 212.

¹⁶ George S. Lensing and Ronald Moran, Four Poets and The Emotive Imagination: Robert Bly, James Wright, Louis Simpson, and William Stafford (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), p. 11. Lensing and Moran present Bly as "the single individual who has been essential to the evolvement [sic] of the Emotive Imagination" (p. 67). The authors state that "The basic techniques of the Emotive Imagination are timing, leaps, and muted shock--all of which work together so that the reader experiences the imaginative interplay between subject and attitude; he feels and is rewarded" (p. 6). Although the work of the four poets they consider demands "a new critical vocabulary" (p. 6), the authors acknowledge Cleanth Brooks' argument in "Poetry Since The Waste Land," The Southern Review, I,

3 (Summer, 1965), that the structure of what had been acclaimed as a "new imagination" is actually "as old as that of Wordsworth's Lucy poems" (p. 499). G.A.M. Janssens, in an article entitled "The Present State of American Poetry; Robert Bly and James Wright," English Studies, 51 (1970), incorrectly divides Lensing and Moran and Brooks into "two embarrassing, warring orthodoxies" (p. 115). He begins by quoting from Donald Hall's introduction to Contemporary American Poetry (Baltimore: Penguin, 1962) where Hall, commenting on poems by Bly and Simpson, states that "a new kind of imagination seems to be working" (p. 24). Janssens goes on to quote Brooks' objection to Hall's claim and his example of Wordsworth's Lucy poems. He then concludes that because Lensing and Moran agree with Bly that the New Critical vocabulary is ill-equipped to deal with poetry which is non-discursive, inward and often surreal, that they disagree with Brooks' statement about the structure of the so-called "new imagination." But, if Janssens had read Lensing and Moran more carefully, he would have seen that they do, in fact, agree with Brooks: "Although it is true," the authors state, "that at a period in the history of American poetry--roughly the decade of the 1950's--Robert Bly began to call for absolute changes in the kind of poetry then being written . . . it would be incorrect to assert that the poetry of Bly, Wright, Simpson, and Stafford was radically and uniquely new" (p. 27, italics mine). Janssens, then, has fabricated a controversy which really does not exist. Moreover, he neglects to mention the fact that it was Bly who originally coined the phrase "the new imagination" in the first issue of The Fifties: "the new imagination . . . which assembles the three kingdoms (of the modern world) within one poem: the dark figures of politics, the world of streetcars, and the ocean world" (pp. 38-9).

17 Abrams, p. 213.

18 Abrams, p. 224.

19 Abrams, pp. 224-25.

20 Walt Whitman, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," in Leaves of Grass, eds. Sculley Bradley and Harold W. Blodgett (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1973), p. 162.

21 I am reminded by this poem of Byron's extemporaneous effusion (in the manner of Wordsworth recalling his childhood innocence and regretting its loss), "Lines Written Beneath

An Elm in the Church Yard of Harrow," whose meditation also quickly usurps the opening descriptive lines.

22 Mircea Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries (London, 1960), quoted in J.E. Cirlot's A Dictionary of Symbols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 347.

23 Rosenthal, p. 321.

24 David Ray, "Notes, Reviews, Speculations," Epoch, XII (Winter, 1963), p. xxii.

25 Ronald Sukenick, Wallace Stevens: Musing The Obscure (New York: New York University Press, 1967), pp. 23-24.

26 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, letter to William Sotheby, July 13, 1802, in The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. II, ed. Earle Leslie Griggs (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 810.

27 The epigraph is from Boehme's Confessions, ed. W. Scott Palmer (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1954), p. 86.

28 Anthony Piccione uses the term "transformational" in his Ph.D. dissertation (Ohio University, 1969), p. 7, but he uses it in the context of the misapplied term "deep image." He is right in asserting that the transformational image "juxtaposes elements of opposing realms" (p. 173), but he falls into the trap of locating the image geographically in the poet's psyche when it is actually "neither 'physical' nor 'inner'" (Talking, p. 259).

29 Erich Neumann, Art and the Creative Unconscious, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), p. 165. A similar term exists in Jose A. Arguelles' The Transformative Vision (Berkeley: Shambhala, 1975) where he uses the term "transformative" to designate the artist's capacity to unify "psyche" (the intuitive) with "techne" (the logical), "and whose dynamic . . . is the transcendence of the conflicts we call history" (p. 3).

30 Neumann, p. 165.

31 Neumann, p. 172.

- 32 Neumann, p. 172.
- 33 Neumann, p. 192.
- 34 Neumann, p. 192.
- 35 Anthony Libby, "Robert Bly Alive in Darkness," Iowa Review, 3: 3 (1972), 87.
- 36 Bert Meyers, "Letter," kayak, No. 13 (Jan., 1968), 14.
- 37 These are Bly's comments on the dust jacket of Silence.
- 38 Libby, p. 80.
- 39 Neumann, pp. 196-97.
- 39A Robert Bly, ed. The Sea and the Honeycomb (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. x.
- 40 Bly, The Sea and the Honeycomb, p. x.
- 41 See Lensing and Moran (pp. 59-61) for a more detailed discussion of Bly's definition.
- 42 Bly, The Sea and the Honeycomb, p. ix.
- 43 Bly, The Sea and the Honeycomb, p. ix.
- 44 Lensing and Moran, p. 74.
- 45 Roger Kingston et al., "A Conversation with Robert Bly," Harvard Advocate, CIII (February, 1970), 5.
- 46 T.E. Hulme, Further Speculations, ed. Sam Hynes (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), p. 68.
- 47 Theodore Roethke, On The Poet And His Craft: Selected Prose of Theodore Roethke, ed. Ralph J. Mills, Jr. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), p. 39.

48 John Keats, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," in Romantic Poetry and Prose, ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 1190.

49 Bly's "death," however, is one that is welcomed rather than shunned, as is Keats's.

50 James Hillman, The Dream and the Underworld (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), p. 12.

51 Hillman, pp. 27-32.

52 Hillman, pp. 32-34.

53 Russell Peck, "Numerology and Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde," Mosaic, V/4, 20.

CHAPTER THREE: BODYING FORTH

The Light Around The Body

Ah! two desires toss about
The poet's feverish blood.
One drives him to the world without
And one to solitude.

Matthew Arnold, "Stanzas in Memory
of the Author of 'Obermann'"

In The Light Around The Body,¹ his second book of poems, Bly charges the transformational image with more power, so that in addition to using it to liberate the psyche from the confines of realism, as he did in Silence, he employs it as a satirical weapon with which to attack American political and spiritual life. Here Bly uses the transformational image as a device to telescope history, in order to provide a context for his attacks on American foreign policy in southeast Asia. He employs it also as the gnostic container of Boehme's "inward" and "outward" worlds and their contrary modes of expression. Indeed, in Light Bly relies heavily on excerpts from Boehme's mystical writings as epigraphs that structurally inform the five parts of the book, and that thematically provide points of departure for Bly's

investigations of 'masculine' versus 'feminine' consciousness, grief, solitude and disinterest.

In Light, the transformational image moves simultaneously in two directions: outward, in satirical anger, against those who in their suppression of grief and the feminine in the collective American psyche are responsible for genocide in Vietnam; and inward, through meditation and imagination, toward re-integration of a divided self. The transformational image, then, becomes the preparatory trope that allows Bly the best of both worlds.

The general response to The Light Around The Body was that it reflected an unfortunate "shift"² away from the meditative tone of Silence to strident polemics. This "shift" was considered a consequence of several disturbing national crises that had occurred in the five years since the publication of Silence. There had been the embarrassingly disastrous invasion of Cuba (about which the president had lied), the Cuban missile crisis, the assassination of President Kennedy, and the American involvement in Vietnam which had escalated to enormous proportions. In opposition to these events, a domestic war against lies had begun on the streets and campuses of America by a so-called "counter-culture."³ Because Bly had, in 1966, as a member of that "counter culture," helped organize Writers Against the Vietnam War, literary critics and book-reviewers were able 'to account for' his movement

away from the cold pastoral of snowy Minnesota farms toward the offices of the White House and the Pentagon. Bly's critics, in other words, assumed it was "the war" which was responsible for the "shift" from "Driving Toward the Lac Qui Parle River" to "Driving Through Minnesota during the Hanoi Bombings."

But Bly's dissatisfaction with his country's moral and political behavior had commenced long before the publication of Silence. As early as 1953, Bly had been writing poems which questioned American foreign policy. In a poem entitled "Choral Stanza," Bly wrote these astonishingly prophetic lines:

For peace and peace and peace the prayers ascend
 From tongues in darkness sung to tongues in light
 In death
 In turbulence of death
 The bodies broken in the Asian streets
 To float in peace
 I've seen the bodies broken in the Asian streets
 The blood comes down like rain
 And bones like hail
 Dear God, we have abundant death.⁴

It is a poem about the Korean War, still raging at the time of its publication, but the image of "bodies broken in the Asian streets" gruesomely anticipates what was to happen ten years later in Vietnam.

In 1957, Bly published three poems in New Poets of England and America, one of which ("A Missouri Traveller Writes Home: 1830") attacked the white men "in Satan's grasp"

who slaughtered the Indians they considered "beasts" and "damned."⁵ And, in the first issue of The Fifties (1958), Bly printed poems which parodied America's "'strong moral condition'" (p. 44). All through the 'fifties Bly had, in fact, been publishing political poems which, in the wake of the McCarthy era, no one wanted to publish in book form. Most of these poems were published in The Paris Review or Poetry. If Bly's reviewers had been more attentive, they might have recognized that Bly's political pugnaciousness had antedated Vietnam; simply by reading the Acknowledgement page of Light, they would have seen that copyright for some poems dated back to 1959. In other words, the strenuous, moral and political poems of Light demonstrate a return to original concerns rather than a departure from them. There was no real "shift" at all between the publication of the two books. When asked why he left the snowy fields of Minnesota for the battlefields of Vietnam and the offices of the Pentagon, Bly replied: "As it happened, I wrote a number of the political poems before I wrote Snowy Fields, but they were published (in book form) later. I write what you call "snowy fields" poems without pause, maybe eight or nine a year. . . . The poem in The Light Around The Body which asks 'Where has the road gone?' was written about ten years before the poem /in Silence/ that says 'We know the road.' Poems are not always published in the order in which they are written!" (Talking, pp. 121-23).

Stylistically, the two books are quite similar. As in Silence, each line in Light begins with a capital letter, still paying homage, during a time of formal innovation, to Robert Graves' belief that if upper case is not employed at the beginning of each line the utterance is not poetry. The conventional punctuation and syntax of Silence also remain. In terms of content, the snowy fields, the dimly lit barns, the dark waters are still present: in Light, however, they exist in a more social, moral context. The deep concern for the inner world is also carried over from Silence. The presence of Boehme also remains; indeed, it resonates throughout Light even more powerfully in the form of epigraphs for four of the book's five sections. In fact, Boehme is so important to an understanding of Light that a brief investigation into his system of thought will repay us later in the poems' explication.

Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), the Lutheran contemplative who lived and worked as a cobbler in his native Silesia nearly all his life, and whose writings were influenced heavily by the gnosticism of Paracelsus, by alchemy and by Jewish Cabalism, has spoken through Schopenhauer, Hegel, and Leibniz among philosophers; and Goethe, Coleridge, Novalis, Blake and Emerson among poets. In this century, Carl Jung focussed his attention on Boehme's mysticism in his investigation of alchemy as a system of psychological symbols.⁷

Essentially, Boehme's "system," contained primarily in the three books Aurora (1634), De Signatura Rerum (1635), and Mysterium Magnum (1640), evolved from his explanation of Creation as a manifestation of the Will of God. For Boehme, God is the one from whom all creation proceeds, but by his self-differentiation into a negation of Himself. God is an abyss: an Urgrund that is ineffable, consisting of neither light nor darkness, neither love nor wrath. Boehme held that Spirit, beginning in God, reproduces itself in all living consciousness, and that this is the principle by which the present world evolved. The invisible, spiritual world, for Boehme, is the prototype of the visible world. As it forms, matter evolves from more primitive unconsciousness to self-consciousness; but this self-consciousness, which Boehme associates with the element of fire, represents the impoverished outward (external) man who traffics in pride, wrath and greed. Because he is dominated by the principle of darkness, man must struggle to escape its shadow of selfish materialism and aspire to the higher and most desired Light of Divine Love. In order to escape, man must follow in Christ's footsteps and vehemently reject the world of Mammon, the distractions of the flesh, and the temptations of Lucifer.⁸

Bly's attraction to Boehme does not come point by point out of the latter's rigid, often curious system, but out of

the realization that man has consistently favoured a world ruled by the exploitation of trade and commerce and ignored the inner, spiritual world where death is perceived not as mere negation, but as a positive phenomenon that acts as life's dialectical contrary; a world (as we shall see in detail in chapter four) perceived by an adrogynous consciousness contained within an individual physical body. The attraction comes also from the shared recognition that devotion to the inward or spirit world is not an escape but an acknowledgement of a realm which illuminates and transforms the external world. The inward world for Bly is the world of the imagination where, through language, man awakens to his true self.

Language was of paramount importance in Boehme's system in that it held the key to the whole and perfect knowledge of all things.⁹ The epigraph to the first section of The Light Around The Body introduces us to Boehme's complicated, often confusing explanation of language: "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 by two languages." Boehme saw the language of the outward world as a remnant of "Volkssprache," a gross collection of the seventy-two "Volkssprachen" which resulted from the Babylonian

confusion of tongues.¹⁰ The language of the inward world he called the "Sensualische" or "Natursprache," the foundation of all languages, because it was the first language (Adam's) used to assign each creature its proper name.¹¹ Paradoxically, the spiritual language is a truly "sensual" one, as Boehme explains in Mysterium Magnum:

. . . when all people spoke in one language, all understood each other. When they no longer wanted to use the "sensual" language, true understanding vanished, because they led the spirits of the sensual languages into a gross form and encapsuled the subtle spirit of understanding in a crude form and learned to speak with this form. Today all people speak only from this same form of their encapsuled sensual languages. No nation understands the sensual language any longer. The birds in the air and the animals in the woods understand it according to their own natures. Man may reflect upon what he has lacked and what is to be gained in rebirth, though not here on earth but in the spiritual world; for all spirits converse with each other in the sensual language. They do not need any other language because this is Natursprache.¹²

We see Bly's desire for linguistic "rebirth" in many of the poems in Light, but especially in the poems "Smothered by the World," "Romans Angry about the Inner World," "In Danger from the Outer World," "The Fire of Despair Has Been Our Saviour," "Hurrying Away from the Earth," and "Moving Inward at Last." The titles of these poems alone suggest Bly's intense commitment to spiritual rebirth, and yet we know from Boehme's paradoxical ideas about language that the spiritual is in the sensual. The poems in Light testify to

this fact, and Bly applies Boehme's gnostic mysticism as he continues to celebrate the body.

Of gnostic mysticism Bly has said:

The spirit is in the body, not outside of it,
and the body is not evil . . . Boehme . . .
both understands and loves the body . . .
Eckhart, who also understands these issues, was
formally charged with heresy by the Church and
could have been sentenced to death for it
[gnosticism]. Then you go on to Jung, who's
a contemporary Gnostic. So the tradition is
still very strong, and from that point of view,
all my poems are Gnostic. That's the tradition
in which I find the most nourishment, going
from the ancient mystics through the Gnostics,
through the people of brotherly love like
Boehme, Eckhart, Blake, St. John of the Cross,
to Jung.¹³

Despite the strength of this tradition, Bly realizes that nobody can understand that the spiritual tongue is in the sensual,¹⁴ so in Light he confirms the separation of the two worlds and their respective languages by attacking the superficiality, the hypocrisy, and the frenetic absurdity of the outward world from the perspective of one who is smothered by it:

Chrysanthemums crying out on the borders of death,
Lone teeth walking in the icy waters,
Once more the heavy body mourns!
It howls outside the hedges of life,
Pushed out of the enclosure.
Now it must meet the death outside the death.
Living outside the gate is one death,
Cold faces gather along the wall,
A bag of bones warms itself in a tree.
Long and bitter antlers sway in the dark,
The hairy tail howls in the dirt.

("Smothered by the World," p. 7)

As in Silence, the body is still progressing toward "the death we love," but in Light, its journey is repeatedly impeded by "the death outside the death," the sterile, selfish materialism of American life. This poem begins with an image of chrysanthemums which, as we saw in "Awakening" (Silence, p. 21), exuded a comforting odour of darkness. Here they are "crying out on the borders of death," signifying the poet's purgatorial existence, stranded between the inner and the outer worlds. This is why "the heavy body mourns!" It longs to pass through "the gate" from the outer, corrupt world to the inner, pure world. This is why it "howls outside the hedges of life"; why it "howls in the dirt." It has been reduced to the level of an animal grovelling at the feet of its cruel master. It has been "Pushed out of the enclosure" of the spiritual world and is now separated from it by a "wall."

Yet the poet is not alone in his purgatory. "Cold faces gather along the wall," so that the "we" of Boehme's epigraph includes everyone. And our separation from ourselves is powerfully underlined by Bly's use of a series of synecdoches--"Lone teeth walking . . .," "Cold faces gather . . .," "Long and bitter antlers sway"--that builds toward the poem's final terrifying image that completes the sequence: "The hairy tail howls in the dirt." The fragmentary images suggest that living solely in the material world renders us

incomplete, and as fragmentary as these images are, they manage to cohere into a hideous image of the "body." This "body" mourns its many manifestations because it is denied by the world the opportunity to turn inward, to complete itself.

The first section of Light begins with two poems which present portraits of those who live solely in the material world: "The Executive's Death" (p. 3), in which we find that "Merchants have multiplied more than the stars of heaven," and "The Busy Man Speaks"¹⁵ (p. 4), which portrays the villainous consciousness of those who not only are ignorant of the inner world, but openly antagonistic toward it. "The Busy Man" extols the material rewards of the outward world and idolizes, in the form of a rigid masculine god, all those things Bly associates with a corrupt America: "righteousness," "cheerfulness," "perfect gestures," and, above all, "money." As the busy man gives himself over to these values, he resolves never to give himself to those of the opposing world governed by a maternal, nourishing consciousness associated with "art," "sorrow," "love," "suffering," "the ocean" and darkness ("the night full of crickets").

In "Romans Angry about the Inner World," the executives who perpetrate the madness of the outward world witness the torture of "Drusia," "a woman/who has seen our [the executives'] mother/In the other world!" (p. 9). The executives,

like Roman torturers, have "put their trust/In the outer world" (p. 9). They view "the other world" as an annoyance, "a thorn/In the ear of a tiny beast" (pp. 9-10), whereas it is actually "a jagged stone/Flying toward them out of the darkness" (p. 10). This last image suggests that if we ignore or deny the inner world long enough, its forces will gather themselves and attack the outer world so that a war between the two ensues.

The conflict between paternal and maternal in these poems reflects Boehme's attitude toward the masculine and the feminine. Boehme considered the male of the species more violent, more "bitter," and less "sweet" than the female; and although he attributed the fire-source to the male, the light-source (art/imagination) belonged to the female. Bly, in this connection, has said that "men cannot write without their woman consciousness being present with them in the room" (Talking, p. 132), and "The Busy Man Speaks" confirms both his and Boehme's feelings on this subject. The poem was written before Bly "had read Neumann or Jung on the subject" (Talking, p. 208) without wanting to suggest that masculine consciousness was essentially destructive. For Bly "masculine consciousness in itself is not evil. Far from it. In its highest levels, it is pure light. There must be a balance between two poles of consciousness" (Talking, p. 209). Later, in Sleepers Joining Hands (1970),

particularly in the long, anti-war poem, "The Teeth Mother Naked at Last," Bly will expand his thinking in this area, enlarging the image of "Drusia" into the Magna Mater with help from his reading of Bachofen, Groddeck, Jung and Neumann.

Though Bly has been attacked for representing "executives," "bankers" and "accountants" as evil, money-grubbing stereotypes,¹⁶ we must admit that, harmless as most of these people might appear to be, they are the "carriers" of the modern disease of progress that had been earlier assailed by Pound and Eliot, and even more vociferously by e.e. cummings, who described America as "a spiritually impotent pseudocommunity enslaved by perpetual obscenities of mental concupiscence; an omnivorous social hypocrisy, vomiting vitalities of idealism while grovelling before the materialization of its own deathwish."¹⁷ It is this "deathwish" in America which Bly is really attacking in Light; the bankers, dentists, and accountants are merely individual manifestations of a national psychic disorder. While Bly's attacks are a good deal more surreal than cummings'--for cummings "a salesman is an it that stinks to please" and "a politician is an arse upon/which everyone has sat except a man"¹⁸-- Bly does share cummings' grim, horrifyingly grotesque sense of humour:

Accountants hover over the earth like helicopters,
Dropping bits of paper engraved with Hegel's name.

Badgers carry the papers on their fur
 To their den, where the entire family dies in
 the night.

("A Dream of Suffocation," p. 8)

Here the accountants have inherited Hegel's "the rational is real, and the real is rational" philosophy. It is the rationalist who denies the existence of an inner, spiritual world and who ultimately ties the woman's legs to the "iron horse" (p. 9) of reason. It is, for Bly, the Hegelian rationalist who puts law, society and the state above individual morality, art and religion in the form of a quasi-religion that demands absolute obedience from those on whom it is imposed.

That the "ghost of Locke" (p. 22) hovers menacingly over these poems--the ghost of the English philosopher of materialism and positivism (who actually advised parents to crush any sign of poetic expression in their children)--is no accident. Because his ghost floats "above the railroad tracks" upon which the "iron-horse" of reason runs, Locke also is indicted as one of Drusia's torturers. For Locke the mind was a "tabula rasa," a blank tablet upon which experience is impressed, and his theory denies the a priori existence of that which both Boehme and Bly uphold: an inner world.¹⁹

The poem "Watching Television" (p. 6) presents an image of the national psyche as tabula rasa, of the nation lulled

into complacency by the cathode tube behind the images that flicker across television sets throwing sinister shadows across every living room in America. The audience remains entirely passive, yet through their passivity they participate in the selling and buying of violence:

The detective draws fifty-five million people into
his revolver,
Who sleep restlessly as in an air raid in London;
Their backs become curved in the sloping dark.

This mass passivity results in a society which is not only physically deformed--"Their backs become curved"--but spiritually deformed as well:

The filaments of the soul slowly separate;
The spirit breaks, a puff of dust floats up,
Like a house in Nebraska that suddenly explodes.²⁰

Bly gives neither Locke nor Hegel, nor any other individuals he condemns in Light, much credit for contributing anything positive to western civilization. Presidents of the United States, the Pope, army generals--they are all equally culpable for the spiritual bankruptcy of America in particular and of the modern world in general. Thus Bly tends "to push everything to extremes" (The Sixties, 8, 77), and he has argued that true poets, "out of devotion to poetry" (The Sixties, 8, 77), never allow themselves to be compromised: they refuse to be "on-the-other-hand-men If you say, the Christian Church is corrupt, they [lesser

poets; Bly cites Whittemore and Nemerov as contemporary examples/ would say, 'On the other hand . . .' If you say, 'John Foster Dulles was as close to being crazy as most statesmen get,' they would say, 'On the other hand . . .'" (The Sixties, 8, 77-78).

In his own poems, however, Bly's uncompromising stance --some would describe it as a self-righteous, inverted Puritanism--is rarely expressed in the rational language of Lockean or Hegelian thought; only ironically will he use the hyper-rationality of accountants. He seeks, rather, the "Naturesprache" of the inner world, which is not the language of reason, but of the imagination. Therefore, the poems do not necessarily 'make sense.' (Boehme, in fact, warned his readers not to expect his writings to appeal to their reason.) And though Bly's images often appear ordinary and logical enough--"The crane handler dies, the taxi driver dies . . . executives/Walk on cool floors, and suddenly fall" (p. 3)--we sense in their juxtaposition a nightmarish quality whose source cannot be explained, yet cannot be denied. They are precisely the kind of images most appropriate for our time, which Bly has called the "Age of Expansion."²¹ The images' ontology may seem predominantly chaotic, but that is only because they correspond with the distressing reality of the outward world. It is a reality characterized in the first section of Light by alienation, suffocation, isolation; in

sensual terms, by coldness, hardness, barrenness. Executives are "lost in a snowstorm in mountains"; one "lies on a wintry slope, cut off and dying" (p. 3). The busy man worships rocks, steel; he inhabits "the desert . . . the parched places . . . the landscape of zeroes" (p. 4); and the men in President Johnson's cabinet sing "in harsh and gravelly voices,/Old Etruscan songs on tyranny" (p. 5).

The poem "Johnson's Cabinet Watched by Ants" introduces us to the undisguised political poems in the book. It anticipates the poems in section two which explore the historical roots of the nation's current domestic and foreign policies, as well as the book's third section, "The Vietnam War," which deals explicitly with the hyper-rational that finds expression in every facet of American life: from watching television, where "The body tears off its own arms and throws them into the air" (p. 6), to a meeting of those who advise the president. It is the poem's more irrational images--of "ants . . . gathered around an old tree" singing "Old Etruscan songs on tyranny," and of toads who "clap their small hands, and join/The fiery songs"--that constitute two of the more haunting images of the book's first section. Along with the absurdity implicit in the "stuffed baby alligator" that grips "a branch painted white" in "a window of a trucking service" (p. 8), the surreal images of the ants and the toads in "Johnson's Cabinet" terrify by their enormous

distance from reality.

The poem begins innocently enough--"It is a clearing deep in a forest"--but that innocence is changed, just as "the citizens we know during the day,/The ministers, the department heads,/Appear changed"; and the ironic image of "the generals dressed as gamboling lambs" suggests an hypocrisy which is spelled out more clearly in the second part of the poem:

Tonight they burn the rice-supplies; tomorrow
They lecture on Thoreau; tonight they move around
the tree,
Tomorrow they pick the twigs from their clothes;
Tonight they throw the fire bombs, tomorrow
They read the Declaration of Independence; tomorrow
they are in church.

The "citizens we know during the day" undergo a Hyde-like change at night. Their daytime innocence turns into a night time evil; the hypocrisy which disguises their true natures is heinous. That these men should lecture on Thoreau, the poet who lived alone with Nature for nearly two years, and who was jailed for civil disobedience, is tremendously ironic. We remember also that in Walden Thoreau warned against the tyranny of reason (in the form of the railroad) when he said that we do not ride on it so much as on the backs of those sacrificed for its construction. Thoreau, moreover, would have made soup from "the twigs" the men of the Cabinet "pick" from their clothes.

The final detail of the poem, that which describes the choir of toads--"their five long toes trembling in the soaked earth"--is, again, all the more eery because of the weird humour contained in the idea of a choir of toads. The fact that the ants and toads--creatures we would usually consider innocent and harmless--are singing songs about tyranny suggests that the nature of evil for Bly, as it was for Boehme, is only the possibility of good spoiled. That is, the cause of the fall of any creature, whether a toad or a general, does not come from outside, but from within.

In the second section of Light, where Bly examines more deeply the historical sources for America's psychic imbalance and spiritual decrepitude, the ghosts that float through the poems include those of presidents (Andrew Jackson, Theodore Roosevelt, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and John F. Kennedy); of Locke, once again; of the slave-owners of Rome, Greece, and New England; and even of Jehovah! Entitled "The Various Arts of Poverty and Cruelty," the poems of section two express the despair Bly feels as one of "those being eaten by America," and offer a counter-balancing mockery of those doing the eating. Three epigraphs introduce the poems. The first, taken again from Boehme--"When we think of it with this knowledge, 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"-- follows directly from the epigraph to part one of Light. It echoes the Blakean inversion of ideals in the world: that in order for us to view the world correctly we must see Heaven as Hell and vice-versa. The second epigraph, taken from an "Old liturgy"--"Our fathers ate manna in the wilderness and they died"--projects an atmosphere of gloom and false hope over the poems that follow. And the third, taken from Freud--"What a distressing contrast there is between the radiant intelligence of the child, and the feeble mentality of the average adult"--though it speaks for itself, could also be considered as a comment on Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience.

Just as the executives of the first section of Light represent materialistic lust and spiritual bankruptcy, the American president in section two represents, as Chief executive, the historical precepts for America's present authoritarianism and imperialism. In these poems Bly once again over-simplifies--perhaps even distorts--history; but he does this for good reason, since he is intent on distinguishing poetic truth from historical 'fact.' Of this distinction, Northrop Frye has written: "Poetry . . . does not state historical truth, but contains it: it sets forth what we may call the myth of history, the kind of thing that happens. History itself is designed to record events, or

. . . to provide a primary verbal imitation of events. But it also, unconsciously perhaps, illustrates and provides examples for the poetic vision"²² (italics mine).

The "examples" from history that Bly transforms into "poetic truth" go back much farther than the modern world, the American Colonies and Puritanism. In "The Current Administration" (p. 22) "a farmyard in Montana," an "Assyrian lion," and "Jehovah" are co-terminous:

Snow fell all night on a farmyard in Montana.
And the Assyrian lion blazed above the soybean fields.
The last haven of Jehovah, down from the old heavens,
Hugged a sooty corner of the murdered pine.

Jehovah, of course, was the vengeful masculine god of the Hebrews who required utter obedience from his worshippers. Here, by telescoping time, Bly condemns the righteous, jealous Old Testament masculine deity and the rigid, rational consciousness which invented him; a consciousness which, because it still persists in modern America, fosters a climate of legitimized murder.

In the first part of the poem we are given a brief catalogue of those who legitimize murder: the first, "Morgan," refers to J.P. Morgan (1867-1943), the last Morgan to head the great banking 'House of Morgan.' That he should die "like a dog among whispers of angels" is a tremendously--almost vindictively--ironic (imagined) end for the man who was actually remembered upon his death for bringing "financial

stability" to his "country over more than one trying period." Morgan is the epitome of the busy man who values, and is valued for, "financial stability" rather than for moral purpose.

The second, Andrew Jackson, comes after the image of a saint "born among tin cans," an irony analogous to Christ's birth in a stable. It is an irony more easily accepted, however, than the naming of a rose--a symbol from Dante through Yeats of eternal beauty and peace--after Jackson, whom Bly described, in his acceptance speech for the National Book Award (March 6, 1968) as "the General Westmoreland of 1830" (Talking, p. 106). Jackson, according to Bly, conducted an official program of genocide against the American Indian, "recommending murder of a race as a prudent policy, requiring stamina" (Talking, p. 106). As James F. Mersmann points out in regard to Bly's comments on Jackson, "Both 'prudence' and 'stamina' are, in such a context, obviously distasteful 'masculine' qualities that remain as forces behind the mentality of the Vietnam War."²³ And, as Mersmann also suggests, naming a rose after Jackson calls to mind Blake's "O rose, thou art sick."²⁴ Spiritual beauty has been infected by American materialism.

The Pope "with a lily," meeting a "delegation of waves" and blessing "the associations/of the ocean," is the third villain on Bly's list. That the Pope should be holding a lily, the

Christian symbol of purity, apparently makes sense, except that the lily, in its mediaeval context, was associated strongly with the Virgin Mary and thus represents the feminine aspect of spirituality which the male-dominated Catholic Church has successfully suppressed. That the Pope should be blessing waves suggests, moreover, a mindless obeisance of the Church membership. This absurd image is followed by "the ghost of Locke," so that the four images of Locke, the Pope, Morgan and Jackson merge into a four-headed giant which embodies the worst aspects of each. The implications that arise out of their merging, reinforced by the image of Jehovah in part 2, is that the Church and State remain indistinguishable in the modern world, and that the two are equally guilty of repressing the feminine, which Bly associates with the inner world.

The tortured "heavy body" of part one becomes the scarred "coarse body" of part two, yet it has the courage, in part three, to enter "the giant's house." Inside are more ghosts, this time from the poet's own family: "an aunt and uncle/ Dead for twenty years working with hoes"; and there is a Blakean "mill grinding." We discover that the giant is actually the President, "The Father" ("Jehovah") whose "Current Administration" perpetrates the sins of all those exposed in the poem.

Andrew Jackson also appears in the poem entitled "Three

Presidents" (pp. 19-20) where he, along with Teddy Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy, actually speaks. Jackson's speech is the briefest of the three:

I want to be a white horse!
 I want to be a white horse on the green mountains!
 A horse that runs over wooden bridges, and sleeps
 In abandoned barns

(p. 19)

The repeated phrase "I want . . ." suggests a childish self-centredness; and the desire to be a horse--a symbol of intense desires and instincts--underlines the immaturity of the tone. Jung, interestingly, associated the horse with "the mother within," or intuitive understanding, so that unconsciously Jackson's desire is really to align himself with his feminine side. The fact that Bly should choose to make the horse "white" suggests, moreover, Jackson's desire to purify himself.

In "Andrew Jackson's Speech" (p. 24), we hear "Old Hickory" again, but this time immediately after his reading Virgil. Jackson's infamous repeated defenses of his wife's honour are juxtaposed with the poem's epigraph, taken from Virgil--"Dido to Aeneas: 'I have broke faith with the ashes of Sichaeus!'"--in order to point up the hollowness of the general's 'love' for his country. He pledges himself to the ideals of a past long since disappeared, ideals that are as meaningless as the "cinders" of Dido's dead husband Sichaeus.

This meaninglessness is compounded by George Washington's warning to "the poor never to take another husband," while in the poem's final, bitterly ironic line, "His [Washington's] voice rose in the noisy streets of Detroit," Bly once again collapses history, so that the riots that occurred in Detroit ghettos in the early '60s coexist with "Washington, riding in cold snow at Valley Forge." The poem, then, implies that the hypocrisy of Jackson and Washington, and the hypocritical ideals they espoused, are indirectly responsible for the "harsh ravishers in Detroit."

Of the other two presidents, Kennedy appears the more tragic and less ridiculous. Kennedy wants to be everything Roosevelt, Jackson and the busy men of contemporary America are not: he wants "to be a stream of water falling--/Water falling from high in the mountains, water/That dissolves everything . . . Able to flow past rocks" (p. 20). Bly said once during a reading at the University of North Dakota (1979) that Kennedy was well-meaning, but had too much of the light consciousness, that he suppressed the darker, feminine side of himself. Hence the "light" images of him "Glittering in the sun, like the crystal in sideboards" (p. 20).

The picture that Bly provides of Roosevelt is a frightening yet humorous caricature of the man who walked softly and carried a big stick:

When I was President, I crushed snails with my
 bare teeth.
 I slept in my underwear in the White House.
 I ate the Cubans with a straw, and Lenin dreamt of
me every night.
 I wore down a forest of willow trees. I ground the
 snow,
 And sold it.

(p. 19)

That Roosevelt should crush "snails," a symbol for spiralling inwardness, and that he should not only wear down Nature, but sell it, succinctly expresses the aggressive, exploitive personality of the busy man. Unlike Kennedy, Roosevelt wants "to be a stone . . . A stone that suddenly gets up and runs around at night,/and lets the marriage bed fall." This last image, of the stone causing the marriage bed to fall, once again suggests a separation of the feminine and masculine, and the suppression of the inner world by the tyrants of the outer world.

The outer world is a world where even "things," inanimate objects such as "removed Chevrolet wheels," "shredded inner tubes," "curly steel shavings," and "roads in South Dakota" feel Bly's "despair." In "Come With Me" (p. 13), the poem which opens part II of Light, Bly extends a Whitmanesque invitation to join him in a short tour of the "abandoned" things of the world "that have felt this despair for so long." In this poem, the images capture America's spiritual emptiness. The wheels and inner tubes are like men "abandoned," men who have "collapsed," men "that tried and burst," men

who have been "left behind" or who "have given up, and blame everything on the government." They are pathetic, desperate creatures "that howl with a terrible loneliness" over their betrayal by the materialists. Eric Neumann would characterize these images as "'irruptions' of the unconscious into consciousness," and would attribute their appearance to an "irruptive character" fighting against "a culture based on ego stability and a systematized consciousness," such as that of contemporary America.²⁵ On the personal level, these images express the conflict between the inner and outer worlds in Bly himself; and they direct the reader both inward into his unconscious and outward into his moral, political awareness of the world.

The invitation to travel with the poet "into those things" that populate the spiritual wasteland that is contemporary America is echoed in part three of Light with an invitation to explore the most gruesome symptom of America's spiritual decrepitude: "The Vietnam War." In the eight poems which make up this section of the book, Bly tries "to give inward reasons" (Talking, p. 155) for the war. The primary reason turns out to be displaced suffering, or the collective avoidance of grief:

. . . Our own gaiety
 Will end up
 In Asia, and in your cup you will look down
 And see

Black starfighters.
We were the ones we intended to bomb!

(p. 37)

Because America has refused to deal with its own guilt,
because it concentrates on improving the standard of living
rather than trying to atone for the sins of its past, it
projects its guilt onto another nation. Bly feels that
because America could no longer continue to wage war against
Negroes or Indians, it conveniently substituted the people
of Vietnam:

Underneath this all the cement of the Pentagon
There is a drop of Indian blood preserved in snow:
Preserved from a trail of blood that once led away
From the stockade, over the snow, the trail now lost.

(p. 36)

But the trail is not lost! It leads directly to Hanoi and
Saigon, to My Lai and the

Terror just before death,
Shoulders torn, shot
From helicopters, the boy
Tortured with the telephone generator,
"I felt sorry for him,
And blew his head off with a shotgun."

(p. 37)

This is how men register their sympathy for other men if they
follow a "trail" devoid of grief. It is a trail which leads
to an arrogant, violent chauvinism that does not take the

enemy seriously. In "Asian Peace Offers Rejected without Publication" (p. 30), Bly attacks those responsible for making this hideous arrogance official policy. But the attack is not limited to Bly's contemporaries. In denouncing Rusk, the secretary of defence--"Men like Rusk are not men:/ They are bombs waiting to be loaded in a darkened hangar"-- Bly 'explains' him by once again telescoping American and world history.²⁶

In "After the Industrial Revolution All Things Happen At Once" (p. 29), "The Whiskey Boys," Henry Cabot Lodge, President Wilson, Coxey's Army, George Washington, the dead of Cripple Creek, and Henry Ford are congregated in "a strange world, where the Hessian Christmas/Still goes on."²⁷ This telescopic vision operates also in "Hearing men Shout at Night on MacDougal Street" (p. 21), where "now at midnight there is about to sail/The first New England slave-ship with the Negroes in the hold." The ramifications of the arrival of that first slave-ship are still being felt on "MacDougal Street" in an unnamed city. Rather than a melting pot, then, there exists in American society "a boiling that only exhaustion subdues" (p. 21); and that exhaustion is felt especially by those who are the victims of prejudice.

Those responsible for "longings to kill that cannot be seen" (p. 33) are hidden in the giant's shadow, which is merely an extension of "that darkness among pine boughs/That the

Puritans brushed/As they went out to kill turkeys" (p. 34).
 It has become a darkness of a violent imperialism that extends
 to "the edge of the jungle clearing" (p. 35) in Vietnam. It
 has become "cup of darkness" (p. 35) with which America in its
 war-making, now anoints itself.

Only in such a society, an overly rational society
 obsessed with numbers--social security numbers, phone numbers,
 credit card numbers, serial numbers, bank account numbers,
 student numbers--could a voice calmly say:

Let's count the bodies over again.

If we could only make the bodies smaller,
 The size of skulls,
 We could make a whole plain white with skulls in
 the moonlight!

If we could only make the bodies smaller,
 Maybe we could get
 A whole year's kill in front of us on a desk!

If we could only make the bodies smaller,
 We could fit
 A body into a finger-ring, for a keepsake forever,

("Counting Small-Boned Bodies,"
 p. 32)

This is a poem, as Paul Zweig states, that "lets us in on a
 ghastly practical joke. In his office an executive is acting
 out his name, 'executing' the rebellious lives in those
 bodies, while he dreams of gathering his kill in small, clean
 heaps on his desk, purified of suffering, as far from the
 broken lives and villages as the pilot in a B-52 bomber,
 6 miles higher than the clouds."²⁸ His voice could have

belonged to any efficiency expert employed by Dow Chemical or the C.I.A. during the Vietnam War, or to any commandant of a Nazi concentration camp from World War II. The calm insistence of the repeated line--"If we could only make the bodies smaller"--and the progressive reduction in size of the "bodies" of the Vietnamese victims--from "a whole plain white with skulls" to a "year's kill . . . on a desk" to a body into a "finger-ring"--indicates the evil hyper-rationality of military 'intelligence'--and of the culture at large. As Norman O. Brown argues, this kind of "commitment to mathematize the world . . . is a commitment to sublimation," and sublimation "is a mortification of the body and a sequestration of the body into dead things As such, sublimation represents a gain for the reality-principle"²⁹ which, as we have seen, Bly is continually battling in these poems with the spirituality of the Natursprache.

Part IV of The Light Around The Body begins with "Melancholia," a poem which offers a kind of coda crystallizing Bly's reaction to the atrocities of the Vietnam War and to American materialism. It is divided into four parts, each of which contains a scene that dramatizes the separateness of Boehme's two worlds and which objectifies the poet's melancholy. In the first part, the poet is "On the road to the dark barn" (p. 41), the barn being a symbol for the spiritual world Bly knows is there, wants to inhabit, but has not yet reached. He is walking through a storm, which

corresponds to the storm within him as the things of the external world obscure his vision of the spiritual. Suddenly he sees a light through the snow, but it disappears, and the spiritual world remains obscured, shadowed and threatened by the "black dog" Bly meets "Halfway there." "Halfway" suggests that Bly is only halfway toward his goal--inhabiting the inward world--and that in the remaining poems in the book he will attend to the completion of the task.

In the last part of the poem, the image of "a wound on the trunk" of a tree represents the pain of self-division on the personal level, while the details of "Where the branch was torn off/A wind comes out of it,/Rising, swelling,/Swirling over everything alive," suggest that the nature of the affliction is cosmic in magnitude. Indeed, the wind that emanates from the wound on the tree-trunk is a supernatural expiration akin to the whirlwind in Job, only here it not only scatters cold, but contaminates "everything alive."

Such implied malevolence anticipates the book's final epigraph from Boehme, whose own melancholy came out of the tragic recognition that evil is an ineluctable aspect of the universe:

But when this had given me many a hard blow,
doubtless from the Spirit that had a desire for
me, I finally fell into great sadness and
melancholy, when I viewed the great depth of
this world, the sun and the stars and the clouds,
rain and snow, and contemplated in my mind the
whole creation of this world.

So then I found in all things good and evil, love and wrath, in creatures of reason as well as in wood, in stone, in earth, in the elements, in men and animals. Withal, I considered the little spark "Man" and what it might be esteemed to be by God in comparison with this work of heaven and earth.

In consequence, I grew very melancholy, and what is written, though I knew it well, could not console me.

(p. 51)

For Boehme there is something even "in stone" that contributes to the spoiling of cosmic harmony. Evil, as an inherent aspect of the universe, is necessary in order to activate the will toward unifying the spiritual and material worlds. Without the "obstacle" of evil, which can be overcome not by abolition, but by transformation, the will cannot move beyond the anguish of division toward the unity of the divine nature. Yet for Boehme, and apparently for Bly as well, the knowledge of evil as necessary is a small consolation in the face of "the great depth of this world."

One might be tempted to say, then, that Light begins with resolution and ends in sadness. But it does not. Bly refuses to wallow in his sadness; instead he praises his grief and uses it as a salve for his wounded spirit. Boehme's alchemystical system holds that what is base--the material world--must not, and indeed cannot, be destroyed; it must be transmuted into what is superior. One should not, therefore, despise the inferior, but transform it and put it to good use. To unite the two worlds and escape his melancholia,

then, Bly must first transform the external world.

This happens in "Turning Away from Lies" (p. 43), where the lies of Church and State are transformed into the song of saints who "rejoice out loud upon their beds." Their voices replace those of the generals and executives of the first three sections of the book--the "thieves" of the material world--by drowning out their pseudo-Christian dogma and national hypocrisy with a song that "moves through the troubled sea/The way the holy tortoise moves/From dark blue into troubled green,/Or [the way] ghost crabs move above the dolomite." The title, and the images of the tortoise and crabs, echo the title and images of "bullheads" and "Half-evolved antennas of the sea-snail" in "Suddenly Turning Away" (p. 18). But whereas the images in the earlier poem are negative, casting "shadows/Of not-love," the images in "Turning Away from Lies" are more positive. The saints transform the cloudy sensitivity of the "State Department [that] floats in the heavy jellies near the bottom" (p. 36) of the sea into a "holy" song that has conquered the "troubled" world. In "Suddenly Turning Away," the kind of behaviour typified by the man whom Bly describes as an exhausted crustacean, Northrop Frye has characterized as "ego-centric; everything he regards as real he also regards as outside himself; everything he takes 'in' immediately becomes unreal and 'spectral.'" He tries to become an armored crustacean alert for attack or defense; the price of selfishness is

eternal vigilance. This kind of Argus-eyed terseness proceeds from the sealed prison of consciousness which Blake calls 'opaque.'"³⁰

In contradistinction to this opaque vision is the clear vision of Gnosticism. One way to prevent the "selfishness" of the world from impending is to assume disinterest. Meister Eckhart, for example, placed disinterest above humility and love as the chief virtue of man. He argued that God's purity derives from disinterest, and that "man proceeds from purity to simplicity and from simplicity to unchangeableness, and thus the likeness of God and man comes about."³¹ Disinterest, then, involves the relinquishing of all desire; an emptying of oneself, for "to be full of things is to be empty of God, while to be empty of things is to be full of God."³²

In "A Home in Dark Grass," Bly offers a poetic formula for disinterest:

That we should learn of poverty and rags,
That we should taste the weed of Dillinger,
And swim in the sea,
Not always walking on dry land,
And, dancing, find in the trees a savior,
A home in dark grass,
And nourishment in death.

(p. 44)

In our poverty we learn that:

We did not come to remain whole,

We came to lose our leaves like the trees,
 The trees that are broken
 And start again, drawing up from the great roots....

(p. 44)

And thus we learn to accept our own "fall" (in every sense of the word), and realize that, like the trees, we die a death only to be restored by "the great roots" deep inside us. In our acceptance, we will find "nourishment in death" rather than "fear." The leaves we should let fall are our attachments to the outer world; if we do not let them fall, "the body [becomes] burdened down with leaves" (p. 47).

Meister Eckhart also wrote that "Sometimes a good man robs his outward person of all the soul's agents, in order to dispatch them on some higher enterprise; so, conversely, animal people rob the inner person of the soul's agents and assign them to the outward man."³³ Bly describes a robbery of the inner man by the outer in "In Danger from the Outer World":

The grave moves forward from its ambush,
 Moving over the hills on black feet,
 Living off the country,
 Leaving dogs and sheep murdered where it slept;
 Some shining thing, inside, that has served us well
 Shakes its bamboo bars--
 It may be gone before we wake.

(p. 47)

There is something inside us that robs us of our humanity, and we live in a cage of murderous selfishness. Conversely,

there is something in our humanity that prevents us from waking to the fact that the cage inside us, the cage that houses the spirit, has been robbed and is empty: "It may be gone before we wake."

It is important to note that while an ascetic mystic like Eckhart favours the reality of a spiritual world which transcends the reality of the senses, Bly, on the other hand, endows the senses with power from the psyche to re-create or transform the material world. His is the "unmediated vision" characterized by Geoffrey Hartman³⁴ as a vision unencumbered by religious dogma of any kind; a 'revealed' religion rather than a 'natural' religion, hence the poems' persistence toward a magical synthesis of the conscious with the unconscious, and hence the odd juxtapositions of images that predominate in this poem and throughout the fourth and fifth sections of Light. We move rapidly from an image of the body and its "opaque flesh, heavy as November grass," to "another day [that] disappears into the cliff," to "Eskimos [who] come to greet it with sharp cries," to "black water [that] swells up over the new hole," etcetera. What we notice in following these images is that Bly chooses to use the general rather than the particular--it is the cliff, the Eskimos, the black water, the new hole, the grave, the hills, the country, thus following the pattern that was set at the outset of Light: "The crane handler dies, the taxi

driver dies" (p. 3). Here, and throughout the rest of Bly's work, the use of the general rather than the particular establishes a dream-like immediacy that takes the reader from the familiar outward world into an illogical, continually astonishing, inward realm. Using "the" rather than "a" also lends the poem a density that convinces us of the disinterested reality of the inward world.³⁵

Bly does not use the general exclusively, however. He shifts occasionally to the particular to render a subject more personal, more concrete, while at the same time using the subject to represent a particular 'type' of personality. In "Looking at New-Fallen Snow from a Train," for instance, Bly uses the particular and not the general to denote the meaninglessness of a salesman's life and death:

A man throws back his head, gasps
 And dies. His ankles twitch, his hands open and
 close,
 And the fragment of time that he has eaten is
 exhaled from his pale mouth to nourish the snow.
 A salesman falls, striking his head on the edge of
 the counter.

(p. 45)

This stanza comes as an indented interjection, an aside, between two stanzas that describe the snow falling outside the train in which the poet sits and--presumably--writes. The poem's final stanza describes another man who "lies down to sleep":

Hawks and crows gather around his bed.
 Grass shoots up between the hawks' toes.
 Each blade of grass is a voice.
 The sword by his side breaks into flame.

(p. 46)

Louis B. Hammer objects strenuously to this poem, stating that although "interesting," the poem's images suffer from "vagueness." He asks: "Who is that salesman and what does he sell, and why are we being introduced to him?"³⁶ The point of the poem is precisely that! The anonymous salesman is a type of Willie Loman whose life lacks any meaning beyond the last sale. It matters not whether we know what the salesman is selling; to Bly, all salesman are one salesman: "No one in business can be a Christian" (p. 43). As for the final stanza, it seems foolish to try to explicate it. It provides a peaceful contrast to the violence of the second stanza, and the image "Each blade of grass is a voice" echoes that of the "pine stump" talking to the executive of Goethe and Jesus. The voices in each case, along with the image of the sword bursting into flame here, imply the paradox that pervades the entire book: sleep is both nourishing and threatening. If one is "asleep in the outward man," he risks living a death-in-life existence, "with coins on his eyes" (p. 58). On the other hand, if one grants the interior world autonomy, he is capable of healing the "wound" (p. 42) of divided consciousness.

This wound cannot be healed, however, without an acceptance of grief. In "The Fire of Despair Has Been Our Savior," Bly contrasts the preponderance of grief in the "Ice Age" and the "Middle Ages" with the lack of same in his own age. Grief in the Ice Age is portrayed as:

Another child dead,
 Turning bone stacks for bones, sleeves of snow
 blowing
 Down from above, no tracks in the snow, in agony
 Man cried out--like the mad hog, pierced, again,
 Again, by teeth-spears, who
 Grew his horny scales
 From sheer despair--instants
 Finally leading out of the snowbound valley.

(p. 48)

The "road" (p. 49) toward psycho-spiritual balance cannot be found without a proper understanding of grief. "In the Middle Ages," Bly says, "people studied grief; it was all around, and the road was easier to find then, I think. But now everyone studies cheerfulness. Everyone wants to be cheerful. And so in the end of the /above/ poem I am saying that my despair over failure to sense grief is a kind of grief itself" (Talking, p. 124). Bly, then, finds sustenance in the very thing the materialists struggle to avoid. In alchemical terms, Bly describes grief as lead, the element we must use if we ever hope to turn base metal (the material world) into gold (the spiritual world). The materialists want to begin with gold, but that is impossible. We must

actually begin with our own lead--grief--if we hope to transform "despair" into "hidden joy" and avoid "the snowy field of the insane asylum" (p. 25). Bly feels, however, that "The Fire of Despair" does not satisfactorily communicate his grief. "I got the first stanza done, the second stanza done, and I could not finish the third stanza in the way I wanted it. Finally, in desperation, I put it into The Light Around the Body. I worked on it ten years, and still the last line isn't any good" (Talking, p. 124). The line goes: "Not finding the road, we are slowly pulled down" (p. 49). The awkwardness of "Not finding" and the passiveness of "we are slowly pulled" are indeed unsatisfying. It is the same awkwardness and passiveness we saw in "The Executive's Death" and in "Hurrying Away from the Earth," where the disagreement between pronouns [he and they] unnecessarily confuses us. Likewise, in "Looking at Some Flowers," sentence fragments and ambiguous syntax send us to multiple references in a hopeless search for the core of the poem:

Light is around the petals, and behind them:
 Some petals are living on the other side of the
 light.
 Like sunlight drifting onto the carpet
 Where the casket stands, not knowing which world
 it is in.
 And fuzzy leaves, hair growing from some animal
 Buried in the green trenches of the plant.
 Or the ground this house is built on,
 Only free of the sea for five or six thousand
 years.

(p. 50)

The first two lines are fine; and the two that follow--consisting of a simile in the form of a sentence fragment--are easily comprehended as a continuation of the first two. But the last four lines consist of two more sentence fragments, the antecedents of which could be any number of things: "the casket," the "sunlight," or the "petals" themselves. We know that poems are places where the rules of grammar are broken for good reason--usually to astonish. And there is nothing wrong with sentence fragments per se; they are often the most effective way of stating something. But in "Looking at Some Flowers" there is no central flow that holds all the fragments together. It is not enough to say that these fragments are deliberately irrational; and this may, in fact, be the root of the poem's problem. The comparisons are forced, and despite the poem's wonderful compression--especially in the last line--we feel left out and undernourished.

Perhaps the reason we feel left out, however, is because Bly, in these final poems, is moving rapidly inward. We notice that many of the titles of the poems in the fourth and fifth sections of Light are participial, and, therefore, suggest movement. Most of the verbs within the poems, too, are participial. The associations become more and more rapid, more wild. And the number of transformational images increases dramatically in the final section. We encounter "The surfs of the body" and "the backbones of the sea" in "Looking into a Face" (p. 53); "the caskets of the sun" and

"the plains of heaven" in "Hurrying Away from the Earth" (p. 54); "the tunnels of joyful death" in "The Hermit" (p. 55); "the tunnels of the tortoise's claws" and "chunks of the moon" in "A Journey with Women" (p. 56); the "grandson of fishes," the "nephew of snails," a man "dragging a great tail into the darkness," and "fire passing up through the soles of my [the poet's] feet" in "Evolution from the Fish" (p. 59); "a paw/[that] Comes out of the dark/To light the road" in "Wanting to Experience All Things" (p. 60); we see "Crowds waving from inside the oyster shell," a neck that "swings to bite the dog," and "Cloths folded that murdered great princes" in "Opening an Oyster" (p. 61). As manifestations of the Natursprache (the spiritual in the sensual) these non-representational images, which proliferate in the final group of ten poems, indicate that the shell of the outward world has been broken and the inward world penetrated. "The outer world is not despised," however, "it has simply fallen away like a husk, or a rocket stage, and we have the psyche moving in the psyche."³⁷ Bly uses non-representational images rather than representational ones to indicate this breakthrough because the latter imply the dualism which characterizes the world of the "busy man." The three-dimensional nature of these transformational images, on the contrary, refuses to idealize that bivalent world and its invariable perspective on reality.

"Looking into a Face," the poem from which both the

fifth section's and the book's title are taken, presents a fusion of the masculine and feminine that were so dramatically divided in "The Busy Man Speaks":

Conversation brings 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.

(p. 53)

The sea-images in stanza one and the moon-image in the last line cohere in an image of the feminine as a sacred body which engenders for the poet a kind of salvation. The "light around the body" is that luminous zone (the "third world") where the outward (male) and inward (female) worlds come gently together. This "light" corresponds to Boehme's "Flash" (blitz), which was the crucial energy that allowed man to choose to remain either at the level of anguish that results from the chaos of sensation, or to "die" unto himself and rise again in imitation of Christ's suffering and triumph. Bly's rising is a purely gnostic one, however, since the goal of gnostic striving is the release of the inner world and its return to its native realm of light.³⁸ He rises "to a body/Not yet born": the body of the inward

man. But his rising--and his spiritual vision as well--is not an act of transcendence. What Bly offers instead is a mysticism of the body beyond the body; a sexual conjunction that affords not only sensual pleasure, but a sacred hierogamy where woman realizes her masculinity through man and man realizes his femininity through woman.

The union of the masculine and feminine continues in "A Journey with Women" (p. 56). The poem is filled with disguised sexual images that suggest a mystical-sexual communion. The man and woman--the "we" of the poem--are "Floating in turtle blood, going backward and forward" in the motions of love. They enter the sexual "tunnels of the tortoise's claws"; they carry "chunks of the moon": transformational images of fertility and imagination respectively. The couple find themselves in the sexual "darkness between constellations" of the inward realm. By the end of their journey, the man and the woman are "transparent, pulling/In the starlight" as if they were not only feeding on cosmic energy, but generating it themselves through their bodily communion.

"The Hermit" (p. 55) represents an alternative to the communion of masculine and feminine; a different "road" leading to the inward world. The hermit's body "is perfectly whole" because he has married himself to solitude and has studied grief. He has given up the world and "is no one.

When we see/Him, we grow calm,/And sail on into the tunnels of joyful death." We should not mistake the hermit's contemplative life for that of the cloistered, however. He is not St. Paul, whom Bly despises and often cites as the root of all hypocrisy and hatred of the body in organized Christianity; he is, rather, Eckhart's man of disinterest who does not squander the strength of his soul; who is empty of things and full of the spirit of the inner world.

In contrast to the hermit, who remains calm with "the storm behind him," Bly describes "The poor, and the dazed and the idiots" of the world in "Hurrying Away from the Earth." Their despair has grown so heavy they can no longer stand the burden of existence:

Some men have pierced the chest with a long needle
 To stop their heart from beating any more;
 Another puts blocks of ice in his bed
 So he would die, women
 Have washed their hair, and hanged themselves
 In the long braids, one woman climbed
 A high elm above her lawn
 Opened a box, and swallowed poisonous spiders....

(p. 54)

The fire of despair rather than the fire of love burns in the hearts of these lost souls. They can bring themselves neither to the ascetic nor to the communal roads to regeneration. Consequently, they "cry when they hear stories of someone rising from the dead" (p. 54). Part of their failure stems from their refusal to accept the fact that "We did not

come to remain whole" (p. 44); another from their refusal to shed the shell of hard-hearted logic that characterizes "the busy man" and the "exhausted crustaceans" that run the State Department and wage war; and part comes, too, from their inability to recognize that in order to go ahead spiritually, they must acknowledge their primitive origins, which Bly describes in "Evolution from the Fish" (p. 59).

In this poem a man undergoes a form of devolution which acts as a retrogressive requisite for his "moving toward his own life." He is called a "grandson of fishes," a "nephew of snails"; he is "fur, mammoth fur"; he moves toward the animal; he drags "a great tail into the darkness." It is almost as if he were undergoing a reversal of the individuation process. The man who "lies naked on a bed/With a smiling woman" turns into a "long man with a student girl" (he is her teacher as well as her lover), with "the spirit" of their communion "moving around them." In his devolution to what we all once were, the man becomes more representative, and the poet can now say "we blaze up, drawing pictures/Of spiny fish" (italics mine), and "we" also experience this devolution. Then the process is reversed: the man "goes inside a [womb-like] jewel, and sleeps" (p. 59). This marks the end of his journey to the inward ocean, and the poem concludes with three ecstatic exclamations from the poet:

. . . Do
 Not hold my hands down! Let me raise them!
 A fire is passing up through the soles of my feet!

(p. 59)

Although "laments/And filaments pull us back into the
 darkness" (p. 60) of the outer world occasionally, we see
 what happens when the inward world is finally won in "Moving
 Inward at Last":

The dying bull is bleeding on the mountain!
 But inside the mountain, untouched
 By the blood,
 There are antlers, bits of oak bark,
 Fire, herbs are thrown down.
 When the smoke touches the roof of the cave,
 The green leaves burst into flame,
 The air of night changes to dark water,
 The mountains alter and become the sea.

(p. 57)

As the outward, wounded man--the bleeding bull--expires on
 the mountain (a symbol for the hard, material world), a new
 life begins inside the mountain, in the inward world. The
 world is changed--"The mountains alter and become the sea"--
 because the man is changed (healed). The inward man becomes
 unmoved and disinterested. He remains "untouched/By the
 blood" of the outward world; and the antlers inside the
 mountain are no longer "bitter," as they were when the poet
 was "Smothered by the World" (p. 7). When this transformation
 occurs, when the "air of night changes into dark water," it
 is "a joyful night in which we lose/Everything, and drift/
 Like a radish/Rising and falling" (p. 62) in the ocean in the

inner world.

The Light Around The Body ends with an apocalyptic vision of the ruination of the outward world:

Images of death,
 Images of the body shaken in the grave,
 And the graves filled with seawater;
 Images of a wasted life,
 Life lost, imagination ruined,
 The house fallen,
 The gold sticks broken,
 Then shall the talkative be silent,
 And the dumb shall speak.

("When the Dumb Speak," p. 62)

As a concluding passage this is most appropriate because it encapsulates the spiritual decrepitude of the nations of the western world, with particular emphasis on America's crass materialism and the nightmare of the Vietnam War. Its paratactic structure, moreover, has a Biblical ring to it. The last line--"And the dumb shall speak"--is a strong echo of God's wrath against the nations in Isaiah 35: 5-6: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy." The deaf and dumb are examples of those who live continuously in the outward world. When the outward world falls away, they shall speak the truths of the inner world.

This paradox is the final one in the series of paradoxes that has propelled us through the poems of Light. The source of this propulsion is the central paradox that grief, despair

and suffering are nourishing rather than debilitating; and that the avoidance of these emotions leads only to a sterile death-in-life existence of "The Busy Man." By suffering, and, more importantly, studying his grief, Bly imaginatively passes through death to the inward world. From that vantage point--and from that vantage point only--he is able to see that death, too, is nourishing since it is the one thing all humans share; the one thing that joins us with all things in the cosmos. Thus "Life lost" and "Imagination ruined" are regained through death.

There are, then, two distinct modes at work in Light: satire and vision. Satire runs through the first three sections of the book, and the voice, or voices which are projections of that satire are the voices of those who speak the language of the outward world and hyper-rationality. In his book, Allegory, "Angus Fletcher points to the near-identity between a kind of satire and Gnosticism: One gets the impression sometimes that the most powerful satirists are dualists, users of 'negation,' to the point that they have become naive gnostics."³⁹ It is not so odd, then, that Bly combines scathing satire with gnostic mysticism. The separation between the poet and the bankers, dentists, presidents, generals, etc., who speak "Newspeak," marks Bly's "naive dualism," and signifies the separation of the outward and inward worlds. The Vietnam

War, moreover, is the logical consequence of a society which communicates only in the language of the outward world. Bly digests and satirizes that language in the first three sections of Light, and although it grieves him greatly to speak it, he must, in order to transform it and the corrupt world it idealizes into the language of the imagination.

The poems in the last two sections of Light plot the gradual process of the outward world's transformation. The process involves a moving "backward and forward" (p. 56) between psyche and world until in the final section Bly moves completely inward "at last." The abundance of transformational images signals the movement inward until we find ourselves living in the "third world" of the unconscious present. This state is characterized by an androgynous, floating ocean of the imagination which stands as Bly's alternative to the masculine, hard, bright, cheerful outward world of business and commerce. The poems in the last two sections proceed by means of associative leaps and abrupt juxtapositions of images which produce the sensation of being liberated from gravity and the things of the world. The images remain physical, however, because out of the union of the two worlds comes a tension which is strung across the entire body, as in a waking dream. In the unconscious present we are offered a truth of a different order, and "a truth of a different order acquires a physical presence."⁴⁰ This truth is one where the rational, the habitual, do not obtain. The palpable

and the intangible, the past and the future, life and death: all co-exist without contradicting each other. Embodying this physical presence is the transformational image. A transformational image such as "backbones of the sea" constitutes, then, a "bodying forth" which gives "The forms of things unknown" a validity or physical presence both inside and outside the context of the poem. Like gnostic metaphor, the transformational image "depends . . . upon the most outrageous dualism . . . In a Gnostic metaphor, the 'inside' term or pneuma and the 'outside' cosmic term are so separated that every such figuration becomes a catachresis, an extension or abuse of metaphor."⁴⁰ The axis of the transformational image is not, consequently, rational discourse, but in the original sense of the Logos, a gathering of chaos into unity. The apparent formlessness of Light, and of all Bly's work, is really fixity and flux held in suspension by the transformational image. In Light, it incorporates within it not only the sins of the nation's fathers, past and present, but the darkness that is caged in each of us; the primitive and ineradicable force that "Shakes its bamboo bars," startling us into an awareness of the disintegrated self which haunts man in the twentieth century.

On one level, The Light Around The Body is an attempt to heal this disintegrated self, to give it a coherence; on another level, in its irrational or surreal vision, it offers an alternative direction to the "wrong turning" American

poetry took with Eliot and Williams and the spiritual 'vacancy' of their static objectivity. Noah-like, Bly builds in Light an immense ark out of transformational images; an ark which he believes will save the imagination and the spirit from the materialist flood.

Notes

Chapter Three

¹ Robert Bly, The Light Around The Body (New York: Harper and Row, 1967). Further references to this book will appear as Light within the body of the dissertation, along with page numbers.

² Lensing and Moran, pp. 77-8.

³ See Theodore H. Roszak's The Making of a Counter-Culture (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc.), 1969.

⁴ Robert Bly, "Choral Stanza," in The Paris Review (Summer, 1953), p. 79.

⁵ Robert Bly, "A Missouri Traveller Writes Home:1830," in New Poets of England and America, eds. Donald Hall, Robert Pack and Louis Simpson (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), pp. 25-8.

⁶ For a discussion of Boehme's influence on Coleridge, specifically on the composition of "Kubla Khan," see Dorothy F. Mercer's "The Symbolism of 'Kubla Khan,'" Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 12 (1953-54), 46-66.

⁷ See C.G. Jung's Psychology and Alchemy, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968) and his Mysterium Coniunctions, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970).

⁸ Hans L. Martensen, Jacob Boehme (London: Rockcliff, 1949), pp. 79-92.

⁹ Klaus K. Klostermaier, "Man Carries the Power of All Things in his Mouth: Jacob Boehme's Ideas on Word and Language," In Revelation in Indian Thought: A Festschrift in honour of Professor T.R.V. Murte, eds. Harold Coward and Krishna Sivaraman (Emeryville, Cal.: Dharme Publishing, 1977), p. 87.

10 Klostermaier, 89.

11 Klostermaier, 89.

12 Klostermaier, 90.

13 Robert Bly, "A Conversation with Robert Bly," 86.

14 Klostermaier, 89.

15 Galway Kinnell, in "Poetry, Personality, and Death," criticizes "The Busy Man Speaks" for its poor use of a persona. The poem leaves Kinnell "unsatisfied, as do all poems which divide men into two kinds. Someone less unwilling to reveal himself might have reversed the positives and negatives. But if Bly had said, 'To the mother of solitude I give myself/ Away, to the mother of love . . .,' then he would, perhaps, have been obliged, in the second stanza, to say, "And yet I give myself, also, to the father of righteousness. . . ." Speaking in his own voice, the voice of a complicated individual, he would have been forced to be lucid regarding his own ambiguous allegiances" (Field, No.4 (Spring 1971), p. 58.

In his criticism of the persona, however, Kinnell misses the point of the poem, which is to present the point of view of a representative of those who have consciously chosen to sever themselves from the inner world. Bly has not divided "men into two kinds"; American society has. There are business (busy) men who run things and worship Dow Jones, and spiritual men who worship "the mother of solitude." Bly clearly aligns himself with the latter.

16 See Michael Goldsman, "Joyful in the Dark," New York Times Book Review, 18 Feb., 1968, pp. 10-12; and Louis Simpson, "New Books of Poems," Harper's Magazine, Aug. 1968, pp. 73-77.

17 e.e. cummings, i: six nonlectures (New York: Atheneum Press, 1971), p. 103.

18 e.e. cummings, 100 selected poems (New York: Grove Press, 1954), pp. 86, 87.

19 Locke will re-appear in Sleepers Joining Hands, and I will consider his theory of perception in relation to the transformational image in Chapter Four.

- 20 See Bly's explanation of the poem's final line in Talking, pp. 194-96.
- 21 Robert Bly, "Poetry in An Age of Expansion," The Nation, 22 April 1961, p. 354.
- 22 Northrop Frye, "The Keys to the Gates," in Romanticism and Consciousness, p. 234.
- 23 James F. Mersmann, Out of the Vietnam Vortex: a study of poetry and poets against the war (Lawrence: The University of Kansas, 1974), p. 138.
- 24 Mersmann, p. 139.
- 25 Neumann, Art and the Creative Unconscious, p. 152.
- 26 See Talking (pp. 103-04), where Bly links political arrogance to the decline of New Critical influence in American poetry.
- 27 A Hessian is one whose service in politics or war can be easily bought, so called for the German mercenaries, primarily from Hesse-Cassel and Hesse-Darmstadt, who fought for England in the American Revolution.
- 28 Paul Zweig, "A Sadness for America," The Nation, (25 Mar. 1968), 419.
- 29 Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1959), pp. 296-98.
- 30 Northrop Frye, Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1947), pp. 348-9.
- 31 Meister Eckhart, trans. Raymond B. Blakeney (New York: Harper and Row, 1941), p. 85.
- 32 Eckhart, p. 85.
- 33 Eckhart, p. 87.

34 See Geoffrey H. Hartmann's The Unmediated Vision (Boston: Yale University Press, 1954), pp. 127-73 for his definition of the term.

35 See Bly's poem "buffalo" in kayak No. 34 (March 1974), p. 51, for a perfect balancing of general and particular.

36 Louis B. Hammer, "moths in the light," kayak, No. 14, p. 64.

37 Robert Bly, "American Poetry: On The Way to the Hermetic," 22.

38 For an introduction to Gnosticism, consult Robert M. Grant's Gnosticism and Early Christianity (New York: Harper and Row, revised edition, 1959). For an extensive examination of the origins, doctrines and aspects of Gnosticism, see R.S. Mead's A Faith Forgotten (New York: University Books, Inc., 1960); and for a thorough, concise discussion of the subject see A.D. Nock's "Gnosticism," Harvard Theological Review, 57 (1964), 225-79.

39 Quoted in Harold Bloom, "Lying Against Time: Gnosis, Poetry, Criticism," in The Oxford Literary Review, 3, No. 3 (Spring 1979), 10.

40 Bloom, "Lying Against Time," 10.

CHAPTER FOUR: SLEEPERS JOINING HANDS

The Poetry of Water

In the previous chapter we saw how, in The Light Around The Body, Bly contrasted the spiritual, the inward and the feminine with the materialistic, the outward and the masculine. He expressed these contraries by juxtaposing the vocabulary of the organic imagination--the Natursprache--with the vocabulary of pseudo-reason, and identified the political ramifications of ignoring, or of even attacking, the inward world in his poems against the Vietnam War. We saw, too, how the transformational image, used as a vehicle for telescoping history, located some of the causes for that war in America's spiritual past and in its present foreign policy.

In this chapter, I will continue to consider the transformational image as it operates on a psycho-spiritual level, drawing once again on the theories of Jung and Neumann, but I will concentrate more extensively on it here as a political phenomenon. In my study of the poems and the essay that constitute Sleepers Joining Hands, I will also examine

the components of the successful political poem and how it incorporates material from the unconscious not only to transform the outward world through metaphor, but to radicalize it by undermining the way the conscious mind apprehends reality. To demonstrate this, I will use examples of successful political poems by W.B. Yeats, Pablo Neruda and William Blake, three poets who, like Bly, were deeply concerned with the politics of their nations and of the world.

In a letter to Katherine Tynan in 1888, W.B. Yeats wrote:

I have noticed some things about my poetry I did not know before It is almost all a flight into fairyland from the real world, and a summons to that flight. The Chorus to the "Stolen Child" sums it up--that it is not the poetry of insight and knowledge, but of longing and complaint--the cry of the heart against necessity. I hope some day to alter that and write poetry of insight and knowledge.¹

Yeats realized that the shrill "cry of the heart" can only arouse disdain or derision from one's audience; that the poet's indignation or despair over not getting one's way, or over the world's misbehaviour, must not be spoken with the breath of bitterness. Likewise, the poet must refrain from sentimental whining over what might have been, as Yeats could not do in many of his early poems.

The poetry of "insight and knowledge" that Yeats later came to write began with his political poems about the Easter uprising of 1916. We know, however, that Yeats was a

passionately private man, a man who, through the use of masks and antithetical personae, winding stairs and spiraling gyres, sought publicly to resolve the ineluctable antinomies of life: youth and age, faith and doubt, madness and wisdom, time and eternity, etcetera. He became obsessed with "the desire for a transfiguration of the present world and the present self,"² and with that which could make this transfiguration possible: "the delicate balance of self and world, of blending fact with imagination" into "an image of the modern mind's discovery of itself."³ Perhaps the best example of this "balance" and "blending" can be found in "Meditations in Time of Civil War," a poem Yeats begins with the very personal, private "fact" of "Sato's gift, a changeless sword," and ends with an impersonal vision of:

The cloud-pale unicorns, the eyes of aquamarine,
 The quivering half-closed eyelids, the rags of
 cloud, or of lace,
 Or eyes that rage has brightened, arms it has made
 lean,
 Give place to an indifferent multitude, give place
 To brazen hawks. Nor self-delighting reverie,
 Nor hate of what's to come, nor pity for what's gone,
 Nothing but grip of claw, and the eye's complacency,
 The innumerable clanging wings that have put out the
 moon.⁴

"Meditations" is an extraordinary poem, and it serves as an exemplum of Robert Bly's conviction about political poetry: "that what is needed to write good poems about the outward world is inwardness . . . the political poem comes out of the

deepest privacy" (Talking, pp. 98-99). Indeed, Bly's axiom applies not only to Yeats, but to all great writers who have dealt with political subjects: Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Blake, Tolstoy, Dostoyevski, Auden--all led intensely private, spiritual lives which they balanced with political writings on man's inhumanity to man. Bly's reading of Yeats, in particular, has influenced his development of criteria for a successful political poem. He uses Yeats's "marvellous word entangle" (Talking, p. 99) to suggest the necessary "blending" of the personal and the private in political poetry:

[Yeats] suggested that the symbolist poem entangles some substance from the divine world in its words. Similarly a great personal poet like Villon entangles some of the private substance of his life in his language so that hundreds of years later it still remains embedded Many poets say flatly--and proudly--that they are "not political. . . ." But a modern man's spiritual life and his growth are increasingly sensitive to the tone and content of a regime. [Bly's ellipses]

(Talking, p. 99)

Yeats realized that for a political poem to become more than rhetoric, it must supplant the "Monstrous familiar images [that] swim to the mind's eye"⁵ out of daemonic rage. Familiar images were "monstrous" to Yeats because they belonged to the "senseless tumult"⁶ of the world he wished to transfigure. The images of "cloud-pale unicorns" with "eyes of aquamarine," of "clanging wings that put out the

moon," are, as Yeats would explain them, images from another world: the Spiritus Mundi. Bly describes this realm as

a psyche larger than the psyche of anyone living, a larger sphere, floating above everyone. In order for the poet to write a true political poem, he has to be able to have such a grasp of his own concerns that he can leave them for a while, and then leap up into this other psyche. He wanders about there a while, and as he returns he brings back plant seeds that have stuck to his clothes, some inhabitants of this curious sphere, which he then tries to keep alive with his own psychic body.

Some poets try to write political poems impelled by hatred, or fear. But these emotions are heavy, they affect the gravity of the body. What the poet needs to get up that far and bring back something are great leaps of the imagination.

(Talking, pp. 100-101)

The political poem, then, is well-suited to Bly's prescription for poetry in which association is a form of content. The poet leaps up from the quotidian into a spiritual world of unfamiliar images. Another way of putting it is to compare the imagination which created "Picasso's 'Guernica'" with the "superficial imagination [that] finds satisfaction with the usable representational art of Marines planting the flag on Iwo Jima."⁷ In "Meditations" Yeats describes the things of the world which obscure his vision of the divine as a "mist" of familiarity. He moves beyond the mere hatred of this mist, however, to create images like "Magical unicorns" with "a part of the mind inaccessible to hatred" (Talking, p. 102). He turns his "savage indignation,"⁸ by means of

what Bly would describe as "a sudden drive inward" (Talking, p. 98), into one of the most memorable poems in the language.

The logical or rational mind might respond to these surrealist images by saying that, as one critic of Bly has done, "there are no reasons for them in the poems . . . The poem doesn't provide any context for understanding . . .

[them]. These are nice-sounding phrases but they don't make sharp images."⁹ Bly's point is that these images do not

need reasons for existing in the poem. They exist because the poem is "an infinite concentration of the personality-- Yeats believed this is what a poem was . . . (WT, p. 34).

When a critic argues that a transformational image is not "sharp," he is basing his objection solely on criteria from the outward world of photography and the static images of "picturism." The transformational image, like Yeats's image of the unicorn, does not just convey a picture; it conveys an intuition, an intuition "embodied in experiences private to the poet (which the reader can nonetheless share)"

(WT, p. 34).

In his essay entitled "Five Decades of Modern American Poetry," Bly seems to have outlined Yeats's "image of the modern mind's discovery of itself":

There is an imagination which realizes 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, and the relationships unexplained; in short, the whole revolution, of which we know much more than anyone knew in the 1910's, and which has still not been described. There is an imagination which assembles the three kingdoms within one poem: the dark figures of politics, the world of streetcars, and the ocean world.

(The Fifties 1, pp. 38-39)

For Bly, however, the poet who comes even closer than Yeats to expressing this threefold imagination is the "wildly romantic" Pablo Neruda, who, like Yeats, was deeply involved in the politics of his nation. Neruda's work though, contains considerably more "unconscious substance" than Yeats's. Bly feels that "Neruda has a gift for living in the unconscious present. Aragon and Breton are poets of reason, who occasionally throw themselves backward into the unconscious, but Neruda, like a deep-sea crab, all claws and shell, is able to breathe in the heavy substances that lie beneath the daylight consciousness. . . . His imagination sees the hidden connections between conscious and unconscious substances with such assurance that he hardly bothers with metaphors--he links them by tying their hidden tails."¹⁰ We witness this uncanny ability in a poem like "The Dictators," where Neruda describes the obscene terror of a South American dictatorship in the most chilling manner by "bringing in unexpected images . . . images one would expect in an entirely different poem" (Talking, p. 102):

The tiny palace gleams like a watch
 And the rapid laughs with gloves on
 Cross the corridors at times
 And join the dead voices
 And the blue mouths freshly buried.
 The weeping is hidden like a water-plant
 Whose seeds fall constantly on the earth
 And without light make the great blind leaves
 to grow.¹¹

We certainly would not expect to find in a poem about a South American dictatorship an image such as "rapid laughs with gloves on," but Neruda "ties the hidden tails" of the voices of the dead and the voices of their murderers ("rapid laughs") together with "weeping" of those grieving for the victims. Neruda, of course, was not the first poet to make such invisible links in poetry; nor was he the first to write political poems that "entangle in the language the psychic substance" of the nation by means of what Bly calls a "massive intelligence" (Talking, p. 102). Blake (studied with "passionate intensity" by Yeats) is a particularly good example of an earlier poet who also makes connections between conscious and unconscious substances. In fact, Blake's "The French Revolution" is no less surreal than Neruda's "The Dictators":

In the tower named Bloody, a skeleton yellow
 remained in its chains on its couch
 Of stone, once a man who refus'd to sign papers
 of abhorrence; the eternal worm
 Crept in the skeleton. In the den nam'd Religion,
 a loathesome sick woman bound down
 To a bed of straw; the seven diseases of earth, like
 birds of prey, stood on the couch

And fed on the body. She refus'd to be whore to
 the Minister, and with a knife smote him.
 In the tower nam'd Order, an old man, whose white
 beard cover'd the stone floor like weeds
 On his margin of the sea, shrivel'd up by heat of
 day and cold of night....¹²

Though Blake's poem is more allegorical than Neruda's, both poems display a characteristic Romantic moral indignation, and both proceed by associative leaps: in Blake, from a "skeleton" to the state of "Religion" as "a sick loathesome woman," to the tower of "Order" inhabited by God (an old man with "a white beard"); in Neruda, from a "palace" to "blue mouths freshly buried," to a hidden "weeping" that constantly replenishes itself "on the earth" even though its leaves are (like dictators) "blind." The vision of each poet absorbs the world, but only to the extent that it mediates between external reality and the unconscious, leaving all matters of determination or interpretation to the imagination. Bly echoes the "massive intelligence" of both poems in Sleepers with more of the same kind of indignation that appeared in The Light Around The Body. Part of this earlier indignation came from the poet's discontent with the unquestioned 'wisdom' of civilization. Like Blake, Yeats, and Neruda before him, Bly admits that he "violated," in Light, "the rules for behavior set up by the wise. The conventionally wise assure us," Bly continues, "that to a surrealist the outer world has no reality--only his inner flow of images is real."¹³ Our expectations that a surrealist poet be concerned with political

matters is thus a common misconception. And although Yeats was by no means a surrealist poet, Bly did learn from him that responsibilities begin in dreams; from Neruda that the political "poem's task is to entangle in the language the psychic substance of . . . a country" by "bringing in unexpected images . . . (Talking, p. 102); and from Blake, that he should "intermingle" worlds in his images. From all three he learned that the poem that is a true political poem has no designs upon us; it "does not order us either to take any specific acts; like the personal poem, it moves to deepen awareness" (Talking, p. 101).

We find Bly's most ambitious political poem in his next major collection, Sleepers Joining Hands (1973).¹⁴ Entitled "The Teeth Mother Naked at Last,"¹⁵ it is closely related in tone and content to the unusual essay which stands at the center of the book, "I Came Out of the Mother Naked."¹⁶ The essay informs the poems that precede and follow it, so we should consider the essence of the essay before discussing "Teeth Mother."

The essay is a loose conglomeration of Bly's understanding of the historical and psychological theories of Groddeck, Bachofen, Jung and Neumann, although he relies most heavily on the latter two men's investigations of feminine archetypes in the collective unconscious. Bly begins by briefly discussing Johann Bachofen, "The Swiss scholar" who "suggested

for the first time in his book Mother Right, published in 1861, the idea, embarrassing to the Swiss, that in every past society known a matriarchy has preceded the present patriarchy. His evidence, drawn from Mediterranean sources, was massive. Just as every adult was once inside the mother, every society was once inside the Great Mother. In Greece this mother absorption lasted until maybe 200 B.C. What we call masculine consciousness is a very recent creation" (p. 29).

Using Bachofen as a point of departure, Bly goes on to summarize Neumann's The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype, which argues, as its subtitle suggests, that the great mother is the archetype; that the world's primitive religions were organized around the power of the female rather than the male; that the Greeks, Romans and Jews waged war against the matriarchies and replaced goddesses with gods. Turning to Neumann's mentor, Carl Jung, Bly then extrapolates from Jung's theories about sexual consciousness, anima archetypes and individuation to illuminate the psychic and spiritual sources of the Vietnam War. Following Neumann again, Bly outlines four basic aspects or "force fields" which he personifies as the Good Mother (associated with procreation), the Ecstatic Mother (who "tends to intensity mental and spiritual life until it reaches ecstasy"), the Death Mother (whose function "is to end everything the Good Mother

has brought to birth"), and the Stone or Teeth Mother (who "stands for numbness, paralysis, catatonia, being totally spaced out, the psyche torn to bits"). These mothers correspond mythically to Demeter, Artemis, Kali, and Medusa respectively. Men are drawn to one or more of these "force fields" like "magnets," and Bly offers the examples of Dante, who "met an Ecstatic Mother, whom he called Beatrice"; Keats, who met a Death Mother and died young; Poe, who was attracted by the Stone Mother, and whose "'Descent into the Maelstrom' suggests the horror of descent"; and Holderlin, who was overwhelmed by the Ecstatic Mother and went insane (pp. 38-40). Bly believes that "All men's poems are written by men already flying toward the Ecstatic Mother. It's possible for a poem to talk about the Death Mother, but I think the energy that brings the words alive belongs to the Ecstatic Mother. . . . Men in patriarchies try to deny the truth that all creativity lies in feminine consciousness; it is part of the fight with the Mother" (p. 40). Neumann, moreover, insists that the "creative man, like the hero of myth, stands in conflict with the world of the fathers, i.e., the [society's] dominant values because in him the archetypal world and the self that directs it are such overpowering, living, direct experiences that they cannot be repressed."¹⁷

Bly's views on the feminine, although they may seem to be liberated from traditional masculine consciousness, carry

with them vestiges of Freudian and Jungian sexism. Jung argues--and Bly echoes Jung in his essay--that feminine consciousness is inherently intuitive, emotional and assertive¹⁸ in contradistinction to masculine consciousness which is rationalistic, materialistic and repressive. Bly argues that a "woman radiates her energy whether she wants to or not; she has it from birth," reducing destiny to biology, much like Freud did.¹⁹

In his discussion of the feminine, and of woman's alleged inferiority, Bly unfortunately gives Freud very little attention. He says only that "Freud could only imagine a great father running the primal horde" (p. 29). James Hillman points out in his The Myth of Analysis that Freud began his career in psychoanalysis by treating women for hysteria. Hillman argues that Freud, and psychoanalysis in general, "found the feminine faulty," and that for both, "confrontation with the female body produces fantasies of its inferiority, which are then elaborated by scientific observations into misogynist theory."²⁰ Freud, then, represents the culmination of two thousand years of misogynist theory dating back to Galen.²¹ Hillman convincingly demonstrates that the notion of "female inferiority is not biological and that misogyny has not a biological source but a psychological one."²² Characterizing this point of view as Apollonic,²³ Hillman claims that what Freud and others before and after him have

termed hysteria could more accurately be described as Dionysian consciousness; a consciousness which is unified by its bisexual nature.²⁴ Hillman concludes that the only way to heal the psychic split in Apollonic psychology (Bly's father-consciousness) is "to take back into the psyche what has been put upon the body, to take back centuries of misogyny, to take back into consciousness the physical, the feminine and the inferior."²⁵

It should be added here that Hillman is not discounting all Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Hillman rightly argues that without Freud's original diagnosis of hysteria, as misogynist in nature as it was, the scientific discovery of the unconscious and the notions of repression and displacement might never have been investigated²⁶ (or might have been substantially delayed so that today we might still be labouring under Freud's misapprehensions). In this sense, then, Bly's essay owes as much to Freud as it does to Jung and Neumann, especially in its echoing of Freud's discovery of thanatos, for Bly sees the genocide of the Vietnamese as a displacement of America's death-wish.

The importance of the parallel between Bly's mother-consciousness and Hillman's Dionysian consciousness lies in their mutual opposition to father-consciousness or Apollonic consciousness and the conflicting attitude of each pair to life, death and nature. Although it may be simplistic to do

so, we traditionally associate Apollonic consciousness with reason, order, purity, moderation, illumination, discipline; Dionysian consciousness with fertility, blind and dynamic energy, wild revelry, and madness. (Hillman reminds us, however, that Dionysian orgies were orgies of initiation into bisexual consciousness: "Death and bisexual consciousness are what Dionysus involves.")²⁷ The Apollonic view of death is such that the essence of nature lies beyond the material; that true nature is form without matter, spirit without body. It argues that the body--matter--although it is that which individuates, is an obstacle to man's partaking of ultimate reality; it blocks the path toward perfection, wisdom and virtue; it becomes the source of human fallability, of man's hubris. Taken to an extreme in Christian (Puritan) theology, the body is the very source of evil and destruction.

Apollonic consciousness thus views Nature itself, because it is not perfect, immutable, and completed, because it changes and decays, as belonging to an inferior order of reality.²⁸ It sees this inferior reality reflected in the alleged biological and emotional inferiority of women. An Apollonic society such as America represses all that is natural, or instinctive, or feminine. The many masculine voices which speak to us in Light and in "Teeth Mother," then, are different aspects, or manifestations of, Apollonic consciousness.

Dionysian consciousness, on the contrary, values everything which the Apollonic degrades or despises: it views the body not as limiting or evil, but as "polymorphously perverse,"²⁹ to use Norman O. Brown's phrase. It considers Nature not imperfect, but perfectly natural. Death is not an illusion; it is a door that opens to a new reality: being itself. The feminine is not inferior, is not to be repressed or overcome, but is to be incorporated into masculine consciousness so that the two no longer exist separately, but conjunctionally. The conjunction of the masculine and the feminine is, in essence, Dionysian consciousness.³⁰ Bly's hope, then, for the conjunction of father consciousness with mother consciousness (along with the recognition of the negative or threatening aspects of the latter) is also a call for Dionysian consciousness as defined by Hillman.

From the Dionysian (Bly's) point of view, then, the body is "resurrected" when it embraces both the masculine and the feminine. So what Bly faces in his essay and in the poems which accompany it, is "the problem of the resurrection of the body."³¹ In his essay, in addition to psychoanalytic writings, Bly calls upon the mysticism of Boehme, Taoism (the Tao de Ching), and the poetry of Blake and Rilke as examples of art that have faced this problem: "psychoanalysis declares the fundamentally bisexual character of human nature; Boehme insists on the androgynous character of

human perfection; Taoist mysticism invokes feminine passivity to counteract masculine aggressivity [*sic*]; and Rilke's poetic quest is a quest for a hermaphroditic body."³²

Aside from its mild sexism, another problem with Bly's essay, and therefore with the theory he cites in it, is one that Hillman has discussed in The Dream and the Underworld. In distinguishing between the underground (ge) and underworld (chthon) Hillman states:

Psychology's great-mother complex has swallowed even her own differentiations. Small wonder that this complex is also called "uroboric consciousness," for even she herself vanishes into an interpretive monotony that makes me believe that the monotheistic psychology I so often belabor is less a mimesis of ancient Hebrewism . . . than it is a mimesis of the Great Mother. Monism as Momism. Be that as it may, when we read analytical psychology today to discover about the 'chthonic,' we find it has taken on her meaning of primitive earthiness. Moreover, as primitive and earthy, it must mean matriarchal and feminine. Thus our instinctual body, whether in flesh or image, in men or in woman, in the past or now, belongs to her, and we must become murderous heroes to get it back. The great-mother complex hangs the trinket of female gender on agriculture and fertility, as well as on the earth, body, instinct, and on depth. This move ignores that chthonic is an epithet belonging also to Hermes, Dionysus, and to Zeus himself; and it ignores, in the sense of "is ignorant about," a chthon that cannot be identified with instinctual body or earthy soil.

Let us be clear: the chthonic is not only female, not only instinctual, not only physical, and it does not have to do with fertility rites.³³

In his essay, Bly is guilty of what Hillman calls "interpretive monotony" and "monotheistic psychology." His claim,

for instance, that no man can write without a feminine presence in the room is certainly monotonous. Fortunately, Bly's poetry does not suffer the same fate. In fact, and as Bly is careful to point out, most of the poems in Sleepers were written before he had read Neumann or Jung. They do not, therefore, convey the reductive vision we find in the essay. But then Bly is neither a psychologist nor an anthropologist, and, like Coleridge, he takes anything he can from the fields of medicine, philosophy, psychoanalysis, etcetera, and incorporates it into a "system" which complements, or comments upon, the reality of his poems. We can think of "I Came Out of the Mother Naked," then, as a kind of miniature version of Yeats's A Vision, in which the poet designs the ideas and facts that integrate his life and work into one transparent body of public and private thought.

Despite its "mother-complex," one thing becomes clear when we read Bly's essay, and that thing cannot be denied: "the despising of the feminine soul has been the cause of some of our greatest errors and disasters" (p. 49). Yet Bly does not completely forsake father-consciousness. He advocates a balance between the two: "They are both good" (p. 48). A man, according to Bly, must "join his father-consciousness and his mother-consciousness so as to experience what is beyond the father veil" (p. 48). In this sense, the ideas in "I Came Out of the Mother" are merely the continuation of

those taken from Boehme and expressed in The Light Around The Body. There the "father veil" encouraged the rejection of grief, the avoidance of suffering, and the accumulation of material wealth with its attendant spiritual poverty.

"The Teeth Mother Naked at Last" presents, through "the dream-voice of the poem" (p. 29), the symptoms of America's spiritual poverty. But whereas the political poems in Light concerned themselves largely with the war in the abstract-- that is, with the consequences of the war for those who merely opposed it--"Teeth Mother" is more graphic and presents the war and its casualties in the fashion of a surreal documentary.

Although the poem begins realistically enough--

Massive engines lift beautifully from the deck.
Wings appear over the trees, wings with eight
hundred rivets.
Engines burning a thousand gallons of gasoline a
minute sweep over the huts with dirt floors--

(p. 18)

by bringing in "unexpected images"--"chickens feel the new fear deep in the pits of their beaks./Buddha with Padma Sambhava"³⁴ (p. 18)--Bly soon manages to convey the tremendous fear one must experience in war, as well as the violence of the confrontation between two extremely different cultures. The 'camera-eye' of the poet moves deftly and swiftly from the 'close-up' of the chicken's beaks to a 'long shot' of "immense gray bodies" [aircraft carriers] "out on the China sea"

(p. 18). In the background we hear the 'multi-channel' sound of screaming jet engines, helicopters, and B-52s:

Helicopters flutter overhead. The death-
bee is coming. Super Sabres
like knots of neurotic energy sweep
around and return.
This is Hamilton's triumph.
This is the advantage of a centralized bank.
B-52s come from Guam. All the teachers
die in flames. The hopes of Tolstoy fall asleep
in the ant heap.
Do not ask for mercy.

(p. 18)

The 'voice-over' of the poet at this point is calm, however; and it wastes no time in providing an historical and psychological overview of America's aggression. America's technology is not only a death-dealing technology--it kills not only physically, but spiritually as well--it is a form of "neurotic energy" that inevitably turns on itself. The inner world and the natural world are both destroyed in order to buoy up the economy. And by means of an associative leap, or 'jump-cut,' to continue the filmic metaphor, Bly once again telescopes history to focus on the source of the current obsession for order and mechanical efficiency: "This is Hamilton's triumph./This is the advantage of a centralized bank."³⁵

Looking through one of the poem's "past-tunnels," this is what we see: Alexander Hamilton, the great deviser of measures, the father of the centralized bank and the government's

unlimited, "implied powers." Hamilton, of course, could not have seen "all this [Vietnam] in detail," despite Bly's claim to the contrary. But that is precisely the point of Bly's accusation: Hamilton saw nothing except the material world, and the advantage of a centralized bank. He refused to see its disadvantages in relation to the spiritual wealth of the nation. His short-sightedness, therefore, is indirectly responsible for America's corrupt prosperity, for the "neurotic energy" that produces "The death-/bee." Hamilton and his ilk--the bankers and business executives--are the ones truly responsible for "the teachers/[who] die in flames," for "The hopes of Tolstoy [that] fall asleep in the ant heap."

After the flashback to Hamilton, Bly moves forward to focus on "the staff sergeant from North Carolina . . . dying" who "has an empty place inside him" (p. 19). The reason for this "empty place" may seem at first simplistic--"one night . . . his parents came home drunk"--but it is provided merely to balance the public or national with the private or individual. It serves also to include among the victims of the war Americans as well as Vietnamese. The syntax of the lines about the sergeant are ambiguous enough so that we are not sure whether or not he was born out of his parents' drunkenness, or if he witnessed it later at an age which would have allowed him to understand and be wounded by their behaviour. Either way, the damage done was irreparable and

contributed to his spiritual emptiness: "he knows the mansions of the dead are empty" (p. 19).

The entire poem--seven sections in nine pages--proceeds in this manner: moving from the details of war--"800 steel pellets fly through the vegetable walls" (p. 19)--to their contemporary economic sources--"This is what it's like to have a gross national product" (p. 23)--to their historic and philosophic sources--"Plato wants to go backwards . . ." (p. 24).³⁶ As in Light, Bly uses a number of voices to present the contrary visions of the inward and outward man. The major voice, of course, is Bly's own, which condemns, pleads, ridicules, questions and dreams; it speaks the Natursprache, which has digested Orwellian "Newspeak" in order to point up the latter's--and its employers'--perverse nature. Bly sets the "Newspeak" in italics, thereby creating a dramatic tension between authorial presence and the antiphonal, military 'intelligence':

Bamn 25, this is 81. Are there any friendlies in the area? 81 from 25, negative on the friendlies. I'd like you to take out as many structures as possible located in those trees within 200 metres east and west of my smoke mark.

(p. 22, Bly's italics)

This is the 'language' of the Pentagon; a vitiated language; a language which, through its overt abstractions, has stripped meaning of its muscle and left only dry bones. Instead of

saying "huts," the pilot says--because he has been brain-washed by the purveyors of "Newspeak"--"structures."

In other words, "the technocrats have withdrawn energy from the word 'structures' in order to tell lies about what they are doing" (Talking, p. 229). Using "Newspeak" poetry is, however, dangerous and difficult:

You have to be aware of who is withdrawing energy from a word before you put it into a poem, otherwise it'll withdraw energy from your poem. Since so many words have had their energy corrupted, it's very difficult to write poetry, and I'm not surprised that people work five to six months on a single short poem, I do myself. Some words are still rich and abundant. But millions of people spend their entire lives with words from which other people have withdrawn energy.

(Talking, pp. 229-30)

The first three parts of "Teeth Mother" are really about the withdrawal of energy from language and the lies that result from this process:

The ministers lie, the professors lie, the
television lies, the priests lie
These lies mean that the country wants to die.³⁷

And a long desire for death flows out, guiding the
enormous caravans from beneath,
stringing together the vague and foolish words.

(Sleepers, p. 21)

The death of language is merely a symptom of the death of the spirit. The corruption of language by the technocrats is actually a "desire to take death inside" (p. 21); and

once taken inside, it becomes an addictive stimulant: "the thrill that leads the President on to lie" (p. 21). But the President, "the Chief Executive" (a noun closely resembling executioner) lies not only about building democratic institutions in Vietnam, as we would expect, but lies also about totally unexpected things: "about the date the Appalachian Mountains rose"; about "the acreage of the Everglades"; about "the birthplace of Attila the Hun"; about "the composition of the amniotic fluid"; he even lies about "the time the sun sets" (pp. 21-22). These "lies," along with other unexpected images such as

A green parrot shudders under the fingernails.
 Blood jumps in the pocket.
 The scream lashes like a tail

(Sleepers, p. 20)

are created "by a part of the mind inaccessible to hatred"; and while they convey the horror of the self-destructive impulse at work in the President and the nation as a whole, they allow the poet to transcend hatred and advise the reader not to be "angry at the President--he is longing to take into his hand/the locks of death hair--to meet his own children dead, or unborn . . ." (p. 22). He wants, in other words, like all Americans, to die because death is the only thing he cannot own. The energy he steals from language is converted into building death machines and poisonous chemicals.

His lying becomes a form of killing, but the killing merely becomes "knots of neurotic energy [that] sweep/around and return." So America's compulsion to kill is actually a displaced death-wish. The president's "press conference" expresses "a desire to eat death,/to gobble it down,/to rush on it like a cobra with mouth open" (p. 23).

The tone of the first three parts of "Teeth Mother" is, in true documentary fashion, 'objective' and impersonal. The antiphonal voices, interspersed throughout without comment, enhance the public tone, the desired documentary-like objectivity. But by the middle of part three Bly replaces this objectivity with a subjectivity that asserts the poet's reasons for the war:

It's because the aluminum window shade business is
 doing so well in the United States that we roll
 fire over entire villages
 It's because a hospital room in the average American
 city now costs \$90 a day that we bomb hospitals
 in the North.

(p. 23)

Once again, Bly's explanations for America's actions may appear simplistic, but they are so simplistic as to be startlingly unexpected, and thus provoke an emotional response to an otherwise dehumanizing capitalist economy where the poor cannot afford to get sick. The effect is attenuated by the associations of "window shade" with "fire over entire villages." As with the association of the President with

Attila the Hun, Bly provides a personal psychology about the phenomenon of perverted power.

In general, the unexpected images that lurk throughout "Teeth Mother" are an attack upon the reality-principle which, according to Norman O. Brown, is the source of all war, whether on an interpersonal or international or global level. He points out that "the reality-principle is an unreal boundary drawn between real and imaginary."³⁸ The unexpected image, as we have seen, removes this boundary; shows it up to be the illusion it actually is. "To give up boundaries is to give up the reality-principle,"³⁹ and to give up the reality-principle is to free the self from its own repression.

The economic reasons for the war that Bly outlines are merely superficial. At the heart of corruption of power and language--and therefore at the heart of the war--is the repression of grief:

It is because we have so few women sobbing in back
rooms,
because we have so few children's heads torn apart
by high-velocity bullets,
because we have so few tears falling on our own
hands
that the Super Sabre turns and screams down toward
the earth.

(p. 23)

America's obsession with "the pursuit of happiness" through material wealth and a centralized bank has indeed managed to eradicate grief from the daily lives of a majority of its

citizens, and grief has been replaced by a dark anger:

There is a black silo inside our bodies, revolving
fast.
Bits of black paint are flaking off,
where the motorcycles roar, around and around,
rising higher on the silo walls,
the bodies bent toward the horizon,
driven by angry women dressed in black.

(p. 24)

The wounds of grief form "the gates through which flows the stream of the unconscious,"⁴⁰ and the repression of grief and darkness causes a psychic imbalance and a moral darkness. The whirling silo, and the motorcyclists riding out of control on its walls, call Yeats to mind once again. His image of the falcon "Turning and turning in the widening gyre"⁴¹ to represent the imminent collapse of western civilization and the moral darkness that will "drop" subsequent to this collapse are re-stated by Bly here in an equally chilling and concrete manner. But, with Bly, it is an unexpected series of images which carries the ferocious actuality of the war beyond the war itself. The "centre cannot hold" because grief,⁴² which is so necessary for psychic balance, has been banished from the collective American psyche. Fear and rage have replaced it, and with the fear and rage, the nightmare life of the black silo takes the nation faster and faster toward its own demise. The nation sinks into its own darkness, drowning in the terror of its own actions, as when

. . . the heavy layers of lake water press down on the fish's head, and send him deeper, where his tail swirls slowly, and his brain passes him pictures of heavy roads, of vegetation fallen on vegetation

(p. 19)

The fish, as we know from "Evolution from the Fish" in Light, represents our physiologic and psychic past. Having been pushed down into the waters of the unconscious and not allowed to surface in the national psyche, the fish here represents the American people and their repressed grief. The weight of the repression becomes so "heavy" that the nation's psychic disfigurement is projected onto the Vietnamese and their environment.

"Every banana tree slashed, every cooking utensil smashed, every mattress cut."

(p. 20)

The first four parts of "Teeth Mother," then, dramatize America's corruption of language and love of mechanical energy which, ironically, have turned against America itself. They posit a moral cause-effect relationship between material wealth and spiritual impoverishment, and a psychological relationship between emotional repression and military aggression.

The fifth and briefest part of the poem crystallizes Bly's grief with a tone more personal than that expressed in any of the previous parts. It begins with a simple question

every mother must have asked herself after receiving news of her son's death--"Why are they dying?" (p. 24)--and then condenses and augments the reasons for the war given in Parts I through IV in six succinct statements:

They are dying because the President has opened a Bible again.
 They are dying because gold deposits have been found among the Shoshoni Indians.
 They are dying because money follows intellect!
 And intellect is like a fan opening in the wind--

The Marines think that unless they die the rivers will not move.
 They are dying so that the mountain shadows will continue to fall east in the afternoon,
 so that the beetle can move along the ground near the fallen twigs.

(p. 25)

The President's Christian hypocrisy and self-righteousness are simply unspeakable. The gold which buys America its power is the product of "intellect": the super-rational mind so intoxicated with its knowledge it cannot discern right from wrong, or refuses to do so for the sake of the power its knowledge promises. The Marines, like the President, genuinely believe they are fighting for God and country; and that if they do not fight--read kill--things will not progress as they should: "the rivers will not move." The unexpected, yet trivial image of the "beetle . . . near fallen twigs" juxtaposed with the image of the marines "dying" for no reason exaggerates the absurdity of their deaths.

Part six expresses Bly's horror over the imperviousness of America to grief. Television's coverage of the war brought images of children "with both hands/in the air, fire rising along the elbows" (p. 25) into millions of American living rooms every evening. People would calmly pass the salt and spread butter on bread as the images flickered past their eyes and into their subconscious. Bly writes that if they had the slightest sense of compassion, upon seeing such images they should have fallen "on all fours, screaming" (p. 25). He himself says that "if one of those children came near that we have set on fire," he "would suddenly go back to [his] animal [mammal] brain,"⁴³ that part of the psyche which is most basically human, the seat of the emotions. For the American public, even the primal instinct to scream has been destroyed.

The imagined scream which ends section six is followed by an almost petulant whining in the final section of the poem. An exhausted voice speaks, a voice belonging to one who is tired of hearing about the atrocities of the war; who believes that nothing can be done to alleviate the victims' suffering; who also refuses to acknowledge his capacity for grief; and who would rather sleep:

I want to sleep awhile in the rays of the sun
 slanting over the snow.
 Don't wake me.
 Don't tell me how much grief there is in the leaf
 with its natural oils.

Don't tell me how many children have been born
with stumpy hands all those years we lived
in St. Augustine's shadow.

(p. 25)

This voice speaks a "Newspeak" that is not interested in
"the frightening laborers who do not read books" (p. 26).
The accompanying vision of the "mad beast covered with
European hair," "hairy and ecstatic men" and "the teeth
mother, naked at last" (p. 26) are images from which the
technocrats cannot withdraw energy.

The image of the waters parting here, with "luminous
globes" floating to the surface, stands in opposition to
the earlier aquatic imagery used to suggest repression. The
emergence of the teeth mother can be seen, then, as an
ineluctable evolutionary fact: terrifying because she is
"naked," she rises into consciousness when the American ego
can no longer displace the shadow with Indians or Vietnamese.
And although the teeth mother's appearance should signal a
new phase of psychic acceptance of the shadow, and although
the unexpected call to "drive cars/up/the light beams/to the
stars" (p. 26) suggests a transcendence of grief and the
tragedy of the war, the poem's final stanza offers a warning
to America of what is in store for it if it thinks it can
avoid the teeth mother--a living Hell:

And [we] return to earth crouched inside the drop
of sweat that falls

from the chin of the Protestant tied in the fire.

(p. 26)

Bly sees the Vietnam War as the critical event in the history of his nation. And although he is unwilling to excuse America's transgressions, he is willing to admit that "America is still young" (Talking, p. 105). America can either accept the teeth mother as one aspect of matriarchal consciousness it has repressed over the centuries--and embrace her in her nakedness--or America can try to suppress her and the "mother right" in general, and continue along the path toward self-destruction. If America chooses the latter, then it will be annihilated by the very thing it tries to deny, like the "Protestant tied in the fire" by the 'savages' he has attempted to Christianize. In other words, America "may become something magnificent and shining, or she may turn, as Rome did, into a black dinosaur, the enemy of every nation in the world who [sic] wants to live its own life" (Talking, p. 105).

To become "magnificent and shining" America must integrate both aspects of the feminine into its collective psyche; the good and the bad; the terrifyingly brutal and the nourishingly gentle. This is not to say that America must forfeit patriarchal thinking altogether. Father-consciousness is not necessarily evil or dangerous; and opting for either mode of thought at the exclusion of the other constitutes,

for Bly, psychic suicide. The Vietnam War, as a physical manifestation of the suppression of mother-consciousness, is merely a signpost on the road toward spiritual death. In fact, it is "quite possible that the country of Vietnam represents . . . mother consciousness" itself (Talking, p. 218).

America must learn to integrate within its culture those whom it has not only suppressed, but consciously tried to annihilate: "Indians," "Negroes." Bly sees these minorities as manifestations of the nation's psychic shadow, and in several of the earlier poems in Sleepers which anticipate "Teeth Mother," Bly laments the nation's treatment of them. In "Calling to the Badger" (p. 16), Bly writes of the "sadness that rises from the death of the Indians" who, in "still calling to the badger/and the otter, alone on the mountains of South Dakota," unlike "white" Americans, remain in close contact with the spirit of the place. In "Pilgrim Fish Heads" (p. 17), a poem which describes the ominous darkness of an early American "Pilgrim village," where "words like 'Samson' hang from the rafters" of the houses, an "Indian, damp, musky, asking for a bed," is rejected by the good Samaritans "walking on Calvinist ground":

The Mattapoiset is in league with rotting wood,
 he has made a conspiracy with the salamander,
 he has made treaties with the cold heads of fishes.
 In the grave he does not rot, but vanishes into
 water.

The Indian goes on living in the rain-soaked
 stumps.
 This is our enemy, the outcast,
 the one from whom we must protect our nation,
 the one whose dark hair hides us from the sun.

(Sleepers, p. 17)

Here the Indian is feared and hated for the same reason the Vietnamese were feared and hated in "Hatred of Men with Black Hair" in Light: he has "dark hair." He represents the morally inferior or "dark" side of the Puritan (American) personality. Because it is unwilling to assimilate the shadow into its consciousness, the American personality projects the apparently morally inferior traits onto others (Indians) who, as Jung has observed, obstinately resist "moral control and prove almost impossible to influence."⁴⁴ They become outcasts, enemies, "from whom we must protect our nation" (p. 17). Thus denied, the shadow, in Jungian terms, "dissolves,"⁴⁵ "vanishes into water" (p. 17) and, ironically, rots whatever the nation builds to exclude and oppress him.

In "Conditions of the Working Classes:1970," "the Sioux dead sleep all night in the rain troughs on the Treasury building" (p. 15). This image brings to mind Alexander Hamilton, the centralized bank, Andrew Jackson and the drop of blood under the Pentagon. "Working Classes" is a condensed "Teeth Mother" in which Bly, once again by telescoping American history, addresses the state of the

Union. The poem begins with the contemptuous "You United States," and derides the country's fear of the "dreams of Guatemala" (p. 14). Bly's derision is exaggerated by the repeated "ū" in "You United," which undercuts the whole idea of unity. It is a unity born of

building houses with eight-mile-long wings to
imprison the Cubans,
eating a bread made of the sound of sunken
buffalo bones,
drinking water turned dark by the shadow of
Negroes.

(p. 14)

It is a murderously imperialistic unity born of greed; of "eating" and "drinking"; a unity born of an exclusive "father-consciousness," where

. . . businessmen climb into their F-4s
the chocks are knocked out,
the F-4 shoots off the deck, trailing smoke,
dipping slightly, as if haunted by the center
of the ocean,
then pulling up again, as Locke said it would.

(p. 15)

In the context of the "Working Classes," Locke's theory of the mixing of one's labour with Nature in order to make part of Nature his "property" has enormous political significance. When considered in the light of Locke's perceptual theory of the mind as tabula rasa, each member of the working classes becomes, in Norman O. Brown's words,

. . . detached observer, who participates without action, is the passive spectator. The division of citizens into politically active and passive is the major premise of modern political . . . organization. The detached observer is the major premise of the Lockean or Cartesian mind, waxen tablet for passive impressions: "The mistake in empiricist theories of perception has been the representation of human beings as passive observers receiving impressions from the outside."⁴⁶

As the great-grandfather of father consciousness, Locke encourages a view of reality which allows only for the rulers and the ruled. Perceptually it "distanciates subject and object, allows the subject only pictures . . . spectral images on the inside, which represent reality Correspondence is then a relation of likeness, or copying, or imitation, between internal image and external reality; instead of correspondence as sympathy or action at a distance, or active participation, methexis and not mimesis."⁴⁷

In his Essay concerning Human Understanding, Locke used the very word that Bly "hate/s/" (Talking, p. 261)--archetype--to describe the way external reality becomes etched on the blank page of the mind. For Locke, and presumably for Bly, "archetype" suggests some impressed pattern, a reflection of something external, rather than something innate.

For Locke images did not denote anything "physical" (Talking, p. 259) or substantial, as they do for Bly, but rather "copies of things really existing . . . made by the

mind, to rank and denominate things by"48 Lockean empiricism, then, which excludes feeling and relies on material experience as the sole measure of knowledge and meaning, is that which Bly objects to in Imagism and Objectivism. Bly's criticism of Imagism as picturism and of Objectivism as a "wrong turning" in American poetry is therefore not based solely on aesthetic dissatisfaction. Picturism and Objectivism for Bly are founded on a perceptual theory in which the subject acquiesces to the reality that surrounds him, even if that reality includes men attaching electrodes to the testicles of other men. Artists (and audiences) who accept this version of reality are, Yeats writes, in a "swoon":

Locke sank into a swoon;
 The Garden died;
 God took the spinning-jenny
 Out of his side.⁴⁹

Marshall McLuhan says that "The Lockean swoon was the hypnotic trance induced by stepping up the visual component in experience until it filled the field of attention. Psychologists define hypnosis as the filling of the field of attention by one sense only. At such a moment, 'the garden' dies. That is, the garden indicates the interplay of all the senses in haptic harmony."⁵⁰

Yeats's poem, and McLuhan's comments on it, establish the firm opposition between the mechanical and the organic. Bly obviously associates the mechanical with the material

world and with discursive (patriarchal) thought, or rhetoric; the organic with the superior, richly associative inner 'logic' of Dionysian consciousness. Bly's transformational images, or unexpected images, bring us out of that mechanical swoon by actively engaging the reader's imaginations in re-making the world. These images are methectic; that is, they allow us to participate in the re-making or modifying of the existing world. The reader is not reduced to passive spectator; he has a share of time. On the other hand, a weak or "hypnotic" image is one which presents the audience with one world only: a red wheel barrow beside some white chickens. Bly's transformational images, often because they defy sense experience, defy the subject-object/ruler-ruled empirical habit of mind. In a discussion of Romanticism, Northrop Frye says that "The present significance for us of this . . . is that the notion of inwardness of creative power is inherently revolutionary."⁵¹ The transformational image is therefore a polemical phenomenon.

Bly attributes the unexpected images of "Teeth Mother," such as the "scream lashes like a tail" and "the whines of jets pierce like long needles," to his reading of Blake. We find many Blakean passages in the first group of poems in Sleepers, especially in the wildly surreal "Hair." The poem proceeds much like one of Blake's. Martin Price describes this method as breaking "down conventional narrative continuities by embodying

relationships in constantly shifting images . . . they undergo the transformations that we recognize in the 'condensation' of dream-processes."⁵² In Blake's work we often find polemical narrative submerged in catalogues of dream-like imagery, such as in this passage from section 30 of the first book of Milton:

The Sons of Ozoth within the Optic Nerve stand
 fiery glowing,
 And the number of his Sons is eight millions and
 eight.
 They give delights to the man unknown; artificial
 riches
 They give to scorn, & their possessors to trouble
 & sorrow & care,
 Shutting the sun & moon & stars & trees & clouds
 & waters
 And hills out from the Optic Nerve, & hardening it
 into a bone
 Opake and like the black pebble on the enraged
 beach⁵³

In Bly a similar mode of transformational "'condensation'" operates:

In a bureau drawer there are tiny golden pins full
 of the glory of God--
 their faces shine with power
 like the cheekbones of saints radiant in their beds
 or their great toes that light the whole room!

(Sleepers, p. 11)

Both poets' imagery shoots up from "a layer of consciousness that runs alongside our life, above or below, but is not it. Perhaps it is older. Certain works of art make it their aim

to rise up and pierce this layer."⁵⁴

"Water Under the Earth" is an exploration of the layer of consciousness that runs literally and metaphorically "under" our lives. (I count at least twenty-five references in the poem to things which are "under" or "beneath" or "buried" or "swallowed.") When we have "pierced" this layer of consciousness, we have reached the point of anagnorisis and the coherence of all images simultaneously into integrated vision:

There is a consciousness hovering under the mind's
feet,
advanced civilizations under the footsole,
climbing at times up on a shoelace!
It is a willow that knows of water under the earth,
I am a father who dips as he passes over underground
rivers,
who can feel his children through all distance and
time!

(p. 7)

Bly is masculine, "a father," but a father who has begun to integrate the feminine into his personality, much in the way the "willow" draws "water [from] under the earth." It is a feminine water that not only nourishes, but heals the scintillated psyche; a water that will bring with it prophetic power. Like the Blakean bard who past, present and future sees, Bly "can feel his children," his creations, "through all distance and time!" Breaking through time's limits to eternity, the poem ends in a burst of new psychic growth.

Thus, what began as a confessio of failure--

O yes, I love you, book of my confessions,
 when the swallowed begins to rise from the earth
 again,
 and the deep hungers from the wells.
 So much is still inside me, like cows eating in a
 collapsed strawpile all winter to get out--

(p. 6)

ends in ecstatic joy: "So much ecstasy . . ." (p. 7). Implicit within this confession is Bly's belief in the redemptive healing powers "of what Jung called 'the earth, darkness, the abysmal side of bodily man with his animal passions and instinctual nature and . . . "matter" in general.'"⁵⁵

Everything we need now is buried,
 it's far back into the mountain,
 it's under the water guarded by women
 You too are weeping in the low shade of the pine
 branches,
 You too feel yourself about to be buried too,
 You are a ghost stag shaking his antlers in the
 herony light
 what is beneath us will be triumphant
 in the cool air made fragrant by owl feathers.

(Sleepers, p. 6)

The association of water, women, and darkness with the central idea that "what is beneath us will be triumphant" suggests that conscious progress can be made only by submersion in the unconscious and the feminine; we notice, in fact, that the baptismal water of spiritual rebirth is "guarded by women." Moreover, because psychic vitality is

buried in the dark, Bly is intuiting, perhaps, that if creativity is to yoke its power, the creator must paradoxically live close to death: "I am only half-risen" (p. 6); "I enter rooms full of photographs of the dead"; "I see faces looking at me in the shallow waters/where I have thrown them down"; "I have piled up people like dead flies between the storm window and/the kitchen pane" (p. 7).

The contemplation of death is best carried out in the mothering unconsciousness of solitude; for example, in the solitude of a "Mountain Cabin in Norway" (p. 9) where "Sparks of darkness float around" the poet, sparks that issue out of the spontaneous combustion of the meditating mind. It is the solitude of "a thought surrounded entirely by brains!" (p. 8). It is "a solitude like black mud," where the poet, sitting in the dark, "can't tell if this joy/is from the body, or the soul, or a third place" (p. 4). These lines are from "Sitting Alone," one of six little poems that comprise the larger poem "Six Winter Privacy Poems,"⁵⁶ a sequence of short, meditative pieces which provides an introductory tone of quiet intensity that counter-points the more hysterical tone of "Teeth Mother," which ends the book's first section.

Considered together, "Six Winter Privacy Poems" display the fierce intensity that "is impossible without having intense feeling, intense thinking, intense intuition, and intense love of colors and animals"⁵⁷--all of which derive

from privacy (solitude) itself. This intensity is reflected in the economy and compression of language; the deletion of verbs and narrative links, and the use of end-stopped lines:

About four, a few flakes.
I empty the teapot out in the snow, feeling shoots
of joy in the new cold.
By nightfall, wind,
the curtains on the south sway softly.

(Sleepers, p. 3)

The poem as a whole is an expression of samadhi, of being absorbed in meditation. In style and tone it hearkens back to the short poems of Silence, particularly that of "Watering The Horse." Privacy encourages "giving up all ambition"; indeed, it encourages giving up striving altogether. The ego disintegrates, or goes out amid the landscape, and unification of poet and nature occurs:

My shack has two rooms; I use one.
The lamplight falls on my chair and table
and I fly into one of my own poems--
I can't tell you where--
as if I appeared where I am now,
in a wet field, snow falling.

(p. 3)

This poem reads like a Zen koan. We cannot tell, just as the author cannot, whether he is in one of his "own poems" or standing "in a wet field, snow falling." What re-awakens the poet is sense stimulation: "new cold," "snow falling," "flakes of light."

The 'mechanics' of such an experience--the emptying of consciousness--Jung explains this way:

The unconscious is an unglimsable completeness of all subliminal psychic factors, a "total exhibition" of potential nature. It constitutes the entire disposition from which consciousness takes fragments from time to time. Now if consciousness is emptied as far as possible of its contents, the latter will fall into a state (at least a transitory state) of unconsciousness. This displacement ensues as a rule in Zen through the fact of the energy of the conscious being withdrawn from the contents and transferred either to the conception of emptiness or to the koan The amount of energy that is saved goes over to the unconscious, and reinforces its natural supply up to a certain maximum. This increases the readiness of the unconscious contents to break through to the conscious.⁵⁸

Jung's explanation sheds light on Bly's contention that what is needed to write true political poetry is inwardness. Inwardness is achieved through privacy, deep meditation, solitude. When the poet re-enters the public world, via the poem, all that energy stored in the unconscious during meditation, or periods of solitude, shoots into the poem in the form of "unexpected images." The Tao Te Ching, the brief book of aphorisms which is attributed to the founder of Taoism, Lao-tzu, insists that when the world is un-named it is without limits and bounds, and so is the consciousness which perceives it. When the world is unclassified and unbounded, "anything is possible."⁵⁹

One would think, however, that meditative poetry would

not be conducive to wild association and transformational imagery. But this is not the case. Bly argues that ancient oriental poetry, for example, "belongs to the whole area of changing substances and transforming them" (Talking, p. 262, italics mine). It's just that those who translate these poems "are used to 'projection' poetry and they translate the poems into the barn-door poetry they know" (Talking, p. 261). Because they have not been exposed to the images of poets like Trakl and Lorca, which Bly maintains are quite close to Chinese images, these translators (and we, their audience) "will be blind to [the wilder aspects of] Chinese poetry" (Talking, p. 262).

With these ideas in mind, we can see why Bly's "Shack Poem" (p. 8), especially parts one and three, is so surprisingly wild in its associations and transformations:

1

I don't even know these roads I walk on,
I see the backs of white birds.
Whales rush by, their teeth ivory.

3

Hurrying to brush between the Two Fish,
the wild woman flies on . . .
blue glass stones a path on earth mark her going.

As a poem which defies logic, and is all the more arresting because of that, "Shack Poem" is an example of Bly's brilliant use of rhythm and sound to express "psychic realities" (Talking, p. 199). The consonance of "brush"

and "Fish" underlines the content, the idea of "Hurrying." The pair of alliterations, "brush between" and "wild woman," simulates the woman's acceleration which, after the brief pause created by the elipsis at the end of line two, becomes even more rapid with the nine monosyllables in line three. There is a subtle internal rhyme of "blue" with "Two"; and an even more subtle repetition of the first syllable of "Hurry-ing" in "earth" and "her," all of these framed by the participals that begin and end the poem. It is a poem which plots the progression of the feminine along the "path" of life, associating that progression with creatures from the place of our origins: the sea ("fish," "whales").

The solitude that informs the shorter poems of the first section of Sleepers testifies to Jung's claim that solitude stimulates the unconscious and rejuvenates the conscious. In "The Turtle" (p. 5), Bly describes this stimulating process which, on the literal level, seems merely to be a description of a turtle climbing out of the water onto a rock:

How shiny the turtle is, coming out
of the water, climbing the rock, as if
the body inside shone through!
As if swift turtle wings swept out of darkness,
crossed some barriers,
and found new eyes.⁶⁰

Just as the turtle crosses the barriers that separate sea from earth, the poet crosses (and re-crosses) the barriers that separate conscious from unconscious; the dream vision

and the waking vision. In "Sitting Alone" Bly transcends the duality of body and soul, intimating that to attempt to name the source of his joy is not only futile, but foolish, and destroys the whole purpose of meditation: that it has no purpose. In "Listening to Bach," the fifth poem in the sequence, Bly echoes the sentiments of the fourth:

There is someone inside this music
 who is not well described by the names
 of Jesus, or Jehovah, or the Lord of Hosts!

(Sleepers, p. 4)

Yet, in a kind of negative affirmation, Bly is saying that inside Bach's music live all three!

Another way of expressing this union of soul and body, or crossing of barriers, can be found in the first stanza of the tenth poem Bly has translated in The Kabir Book: Forty-Four of the Ecstatic Poems of Kabir:

Between the conscious and the unconscious, the
 mind has put up a swing:
 all earth creatures, even the supernovas, sway
 between these two trees,
 and it never winds down.⁶¹

The "swing" between the conscious and the unconscious is, as we have seen, paralleled by a swing between the public and the private. The poems in Sleepers "swing" from the private, dealing with solitude and its ecstatic effects, to the public outrage of "Teeth Mother" and the "mad generalizations"

(Talking, p. 251)⁶² of the essay on matriarchy, and back to the private in the long, dreamy title poem that, in concluding the book, swings from present to past and back again. The title poem proceeds in a manner similar to Whitman's "The Sleepers." And if Jacob Boehme was the spiritual father of The Light Around The Body, then Walt Whitman is the spiritual father of Sleepers Joining Hands. Whitman's first official biographer, Richard Maurice Bucke, said of Whitman's poem what is also true of Bly's. It is

a representation of the mind during sleep--of connected, half-connected, and disconnected thoughts and feelings as they occur in dreams, some commonplace, some weird, some voluptuous, and all given with the true and strange emotional accompaniments that belong to them. Sometimes (and these are the most astonishing parts of the poem) the vague emotions, without thought, that occasionally arise in sleep, are given as they actually occur, apart from any idea--the words having in the intellectual sense no meaning, but arousing, as music does, the state of feeling intended.⁶³

Bly's poem contains far more social and political references than Whitman's does, and at this point in the book these references have the effect of being superfluous or redundant: by now we have had enough of "humpbacked Puritan ministers" (p. 54); of men "smashing and burning" huts (p. 55); of "Marines" offering the poet "money" (p. 55). As Howard Nelson has pointed out, "There are places [in the sequence] where the language is clumsy: 'tomby woods' and 'piney tops' are awkward; a line like 'reading Rilke in the womanless

loneliness' falls hopelessly in love with alliteration and assonance. In its image, rhythm, and unfortunate rhyme, the lines 'The feminine creature at the edge of town,/men with rifles all around' sounds as if it belongs on an old album by the Doors rather than in this poem."⁶⁴

The strength of "Sleepers" lies in its intuited psychological insights that blend with buried allusions to form a constantly shifting gestalt. In Jungian terms, Bly's poem is an extravagant example of individuation, and begins with a dreamer's attempt to assimilate the shadow into consciousness and his failure to unite with his anima. Now Jung defines the shadow as "a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real."⁶⁵ In the first poem of the "Sleepers" sequence, "The Shadow Goes Away," Bly's dreamer recognizes "the dark aspects" of his personality in the many "projections" that populate the poem: the "Sioux," "Africa" (Negroes), "the rat," "snakes," "the Shadowy People," and the dreamer's own "shadow" itself. As Jung says, simply to recognize one's projections "is a moral achievement beyond the ordinary,"⁶⁶ and the sequence as a whole is a record of the completion of the dreamer's (Bly's) moral achievement.

The poem opens with an image of repressed femininity "The woman chained to the shore stands bewildered as night comes" (p. 53)--which indicates the dreamer's quest: to free the anima from the chains of the unconscious and incorporate her into his consciousness. ("Sleepers" as a whole is really a surreal dramatization of this incorporation-quest.) The dreamer is not yet asleep, but sinking into sleep; and his fears of failing in his quest are expressed in the remaining lines of the first stanza:

I don't want to wake up in the weeds, and find the
 light
 gone out in the body, and the cells dark....
 I see the cold ocean rise to take us
 as I stand without feathers on the shore
 and watch the blood-colored moon gobbling up the
 sand....

(p. 53)

At the edge of sleep the dreamer lies at the boundary between the conscious and the unconscious: "on the shore." He fears that the anima (Jung's term for the personified figure which represents a man's inner femininity and soulfulness in his own psyche) will prove too strong for him and devour him just as the "blood-colored moon" is "gobbling up the sand." As a guide through darkness, the moon is a potent feminine symbol. Here its feminine symbology is underlined by its being "blood-colored," drawing on the intimate correspondence between the lunar cycle and the menstrual cycle. As a

primary symbol for the anima, the moon, which is constantly changing, waxing and waning, disappearing (dying) and re-appearing (being reborn), is connected to primitive blood mysteries which involve not only menstruation, but the latter's cessation during pregnancy, the birth process itself, and the return of the menses in the tenth month. In other words, the appearance of the anima in the male psyche is rooted in the biological (primitively mysterious) transformation of the female. Neumann has shown how the anima, as one aspect of the great mother, superintends not only transformation of the body, but transformations of external objects from one thing into another. He concludes that all principles of transformation are connected with the feminine because the female body is the source of incarnation, birth, and rebirth.⁶⁷

It is no accident, then, that the image of the anima in "The Shadow Goes Away" is embodied by a transformational image: "The woman chained to the shore." Neumann argues, in fact, that the "motive of transformation" is synonymous with the feminine principle" which . . . becomes discernible as an 'anima,' [and] is usually associated with the image of the maternal."⁶⁸ Because the anima is so closely related to the moon, she is also, of course, connected with water and light. That is why the anima here is chained to the shore; and why she will somehow determine whether or not the dreamer will wake to "find the light/gone out in the body"

(italics added). The anima is also embodied in all the animal images which constellate the poem and which represent her positive and negative aspects. These animal images also tend to be transformational in nature:

I open a drawer and see small white horses gallop
away to the back.
I see the birds inside me,
with massive shoulders, like humpbacked Puritan
ministers,
a headstrong beak ahead,
and wings supple as the stingray's,
ending in claws, lifting over the shadowy peaks.

(p. 54)

The transformation of the external images--"horses," "birds"--takes place internally--the poet opens "a drawer" of the psyche--just as the bodily transformation of the female takes place internally. Like feminine transformation, Bly's transformational images do not "arise out of a 'technical' process, as our secularized consciousness sees them, but out of a mystery"; and therefore their creation "always has a spiritual character transcending the merely real."⁶⁹ This is why Bly affirms "'mysterious arbitrariness'" as the "most important thing about a poem" (Talking, p. 279), and why he refuses to discuss the whole process of making images. To do so, he argues, would "fragment the psyche too much" (Talking, p. 266); to do so would be to ask for "intellectualist formulations of various experiences which are bound to fragment the experience" as well (Talking, p. 268).

In "The Shadow Goes Away" the fragmentation of the psyche results from the dreamer's failure to stay united with his anima:

I have been divorced five hundred times,
six hundred times yesterday alone.

(p. 54)

Hence the desecration of the anima's symbol, the moon, at the end of the poem:

The Sea of Tranquility scattered with dead rocks,
and black dust resembling diesel oil.

(p. 55)

The dreamer's disunity is a reflection of his earlier rejection or repression of the shadow:

I fall asleep, and dream I am working in the
fields....
Now I show the father the coat stained with
goat's blood....
The shadow goes away,
we are left alone in the father's house.
I knew that.... I sent my brother away.
I saw him turn and leave. It was a schoolyard.
I gave him to the dark people passing.

(p. 53, Bly's ellipses)

Here the shadow is personified in the figure of Joseph, who was sold out of jealousy by his older brothers to passing merchants--"the dark people"--who carried him to Egypt. The Biblical parable merges in the dreamer's personal unconscious

with memories of "high school" repression, which in turn merge with "Stanley's visit to Africa" (p. 54).

Joseph, we remember, is sold (repressed) because of a dream he had, into the desert of Egypt (the unconscious) where, ironically, he thrives (as do all repressed thoughts). He returns (as all these thoughts must) to Canaan (consciousness), but only after having learned to interpret his dreams; to integrate them into conscious life. This is precisely the power Bly's dreamer at this point lacks. Thus he gives his brother away; and the brother, like the Biblical Joseph, thrives in the wilderness. Only it is not the Egyptian wilderness, but the wilderness of pioneer America; and the dreamer's repression is an individual version of the national repression of America's cultural genocide:

He learned to sleep alone on the high buttes.
I heard he was near the Missouri, taken in by
traveling Sioux.
They taught him to wear his hair long,
to glide about naked, drinking water from his
hands,
to tether horses, follow the faint trail through
bent grasses....

(p. 53)

The dreamer's denial of his own shadow is linked with those who, either in the past (in Indian wars), or in the present (in the Vietnam War), have suppressed those upon whom they have projected the darker aspects of their own personality. And yet in the mere recognition of the shadow in its various

manifestations, lies the dreamer's "moral achievement." It comes in his rejection of those who suppress "the Shadowy People": "The Marines turn to me. They offer me money./I turn and leave" (p. 55). His turning away here mirrors the earlier action of his brother (Joseph) just before he goes away with the "dark people": "I saw him turn and leave" (p. 53). He has, in other words, begun to incorporate the darker side of himself into his consciousness. Only now is the dreamer ready to begin his journey toward complete psychic integration.

The first evidence of this integration occurs in "Meeting The Man Who Warns Me," which begins with the dreamer confronted once again by his anima:

A woman whispers to me, urges me to speak truths.
"I am afraid you won't be honest with me."

(p. 56)

The dreamer feels that to "be honest" with the woman he must deny his masculinity, deny the father-consciousness he approved in "Water Under the Earth":

I dream that the fathers are dying.
Jehovah is dying, Jesus' father is dying,
the hired man is asleep inside the oat straw.
Samson is lying on the ground with his hollow
hair.

(p. 56)

He tries to banish from his unconscious all traces of the

Apollonic-patriarchal spirit his abstract male intellect has produced. But he is unsuccessful. On the dream-road he meets "an old man" who "warns him: 'I am here./Either talk to me about your life, or turn back'" (p. 57). The old man is both the physical father and the spiritual father, although the recognition of the latter is prevented by what Jung calls "the fallacy of enkakalymmenos ('the veiled one')." ⁷⁰ Bly describes it here as "the blind spot in a car" (p. 57). It is expressed in the dreamer's unwillingness to recognize the old man (his "father") in himself. The dreamer is allowed to pass only when the old man is satisfied that the dreamer has 'seen the light' that presaged his appearance; the "light the spirits turn their heads for" (p. 57). What the dreamer sees he expresses in a recollected dream within the dream; a dream in which the child becomes the father of the man:

"A whale bore me back home, we flew through the
air....
Then I was a boy who had never seen the sea!
It was like a King coming to his own shores.
I feel the naked touch of the knife,
I feel the wound,
this joy I love is like wounds at sea...."

(p. 58)

The dreamer's retrogression to the state of childhood is actually a leap forward toward psychic integration. Jung states that "the occurrence of the child-motif in the

psychology of the individual signifies as a rule an anticipation of future developments, even though at first sight it may seem like a retrospective configuration In the individuation process, it anticipates the figure that comes from the synthesis of conscious and unconscious elements in the personality."⁷¹ He goes on to say that "out of this collision of opposites [conscious mind with new and as yet unknown unconscious content] the unconscious psyche always creates a third thing of an irrational nature, which the conscious mind neither expects nor understands."⁷² The appearance of the child, then, paves the way for a positive change in the dreamer's personality.

Jung's discussion of the child motif provides us with a further insight into the nature of the transformational image. We have already noted that, like the "child-motif," it is the irrational and unexpected result of "conscious and unconscious elements" cohering in the poet's psyche; and we have seen also that it is, like primitive feminine transformation, not technically, but organically created, as grain is turned into bread, milk into cheese, grapes into wine. Thus, the transformational image "excels in 'wholeness' the conscious mind when torn by opposites and thus surpasses it in integrity."⁷³

The child himself is important for Bly because he represents--not just figuratively or archetypally, but physically, in flesh and blood--the possibility of psychic

freedom and fulfillment. The child, although like "a King coming to his own shores," is not merely a literary device. Perceiving the world through a child's eyes reveals the pain and absurdity of the venal universe run by "busy" men. Neumann describes the child's experience of the world as "an overwhelming unitary reality that surpasses and overpowers him [the child] on all sides. . . . It is the period in which the whole and undivided world, infinite and beyond the compass of the ego, stands behind every pain and joy."⁷⁴ Whether it is manifested in a painful inherited corruption, or in a joyous, innate innocence, the child's role in poetry, and especially in Romantic poetry, has historically been to expose, by antithesis, the world's depravity. Yet Bly does not respond with any overt remonstrance; his grief, his "wound," provides the energy necessary to purge the psyche of its emotional burden so that the self becomes revitalized: "I was a boy."

The source of his grief is explored in the book's penultimate poem, "The Night Journey in the Cooking Pot." It is a poem grounded in solitude which swims its way in and out of the streams of disguised autobiography (Talking, p. 257), with extended detours along uncharted mysterious tributaries of the psyche. The disguised autobiography begins with a recollected, first-person narrative spoken by an Orpheus figure who, relieved of his classical and neo-classical

baggage, acts as a diviner of the darker regions of the psyche and undergoes rapid transformations of experience:

I was born during the night sea-journey.
 I love the whale with his warm organ pipes
 in the mouse-killing waters,
 I love the men who drift, asleep, for three nights
 in octopus waters,
 the furry men gathering wood, piling the chunks by
 walls,
 I love the snow, I need privacy as I move,
 I am all alone, floating in the cooking pot
 on the sea, through the night I am alone.

(p. 59)

Since Ovid's extensive version of the Orpheus myth in his Metamorphoses, Orpheus has been traditionally linked with the power of transformation.⁷⁵ The Romantic poets were particularly drawn to the myth because it gave them sanction to transform the cold, inanimate Cartesian universe--"the weight of all this unintelligible world"--into a living, breathing organism. Bly's poem incorporates the other main aspect of the myth also attractive to the Romantics: the capacity to transform the nature of the individual, and therefore, indirectly, that of society, by means of the voyage downward to the dark but pure centre of the self. Once the voyage to this centre has been made, with its sometimes horrifyingly disturbing self-recognition and concomitant self-transformation, the poet 'returns' to the world which in turn undergoes, as it is apprehended by his altered consciousness, radical transformation.

Bly's use of the Orpheus myth here is extremely limited and private; it is an abstraction of the original in which he replaces the traditional imagery with personal imagery. He projects a vision of the relationship between himself (the dreamer) and the world; between the man within the man and 'reality.' The "cooking pot," for example, is Bly's personal symbol for the Hades into which Orpheus descends. It is a psychological realm the poet enters of his own volition, not a place to which he is sent by the gods. It is the hell within himself, the dark night of the soul which must be endured in order for the poet to re-emerge into the ordinary world completely whole. It is a perilous journey; an entering into the belly of "the whale"; of drifting in "the mouse-killing waters . . . octopus waters"; the unpredictable waters of the unconscious.

The "road" to the unconscious, to Hades, is described in Orphic terms in the first narrative recollection:

I float on solitude as on water.... there is a road.... I felt the road first in New York, in that great room reading Rilke in the womanless loneliness.⁷⁶

(p. 59, Bly's ellipses)

The "road" is the road of "solitude"; the Orphic road of "womanless loneliness"; the road that leads to Eurydice and to the recovery of the feminine. It is the path of "inwardness, inwardness, inwardness" (p. 59).

It is significant that Bly discovered the road while "reading Rilke." Bly considers Rilke "The greatest poet we've had in five hundred years"⁷⁷ and has translated his work extensively. He considers Rilke's Sonnets to Orpheus "as [expressions of] not just learning the right time to praise and to grieve," but of the fact that "we have exhausted for now the possibility of learning through rejoicing.... 'Only Grief still learns.'"⁷⁸ Grief, however, "doesn't belong in a poem unless praise has already been there."⁷⁹

The dreamer in "Night Journey," and in the Sleepers sequence as a whole, vacillates between praise and grief. He praises those things which symbolize the death that will precede his rejuvenation: "Leaves slip down, falling through their own branches./The tree becomes naked and joyful" (p. 61). He rejoices over the fructifying dark he experiences in the "winter of privacy" (p. 60) that echoes the book's opening poem:

For the first time in months I love the dark.
A joy pierces into me, it arrives like a runner,
a radio signal from inside a tree trunk,
a smile spreads over the face, the eyes full.

(p. 60)

He rejoices in the life spawned by the dark. He feels the "blood" of "the baby whirling in the womb"; follows a mouse "down the tunnel where the mice-infants light the whole room!" (p. 60); Something shining "visits" him from "beneath

the snow"; "Holy ones with eyes closed" (p. 61) appear. In a Whitmanesque gesture he pledges closeness and love to the reader:

I am not going farther from you,
 I am coming nearer,
 green rain carries me nearer you,
 I weave drunkenly about the page,
 I love you,
 I never knew that I loved you
 until I was swallowed by the invisible,
 my black shoes evaporating, rising about my head....

(p. 61)

The dreamer's descent is to a realm we all share: the collective unconscious; so that is why rather than "going farther" from us, he is "coming nearer." Solitude, then, paradoxically links the sleeper with all other sleepers: hence the title of the sequence and the book. With this closeness comes the comforting knowledge that we are "like the branch bent in the water . . . Taken out, it is whole, it was always whole . . ." (p. 61).

Even with such knowledge, returning along the road, taking that knowledge with you back to the day-world, is not easy. As Rilke says in his third sonnet to Orpheus, "Erin Got vermags," "A God can do it."⁸⁰ But sometimes the ordinary sleeper cannot:

I am on the road, the next instant in the ditch,
 face down on the earth,
 wasting energy talking to idiots.

(p. 62)

These are not Whitman's "sacred idiots,"⁸¹ but men synonymous with the "wise men" sent "to kill the child [Christ--an Orpheus figure himself] in the old moonlit villages of the brain"; and with those "who run large [Lockean] railroads" (p. 62). The dreamer confesses that he is one of "those" (p. 62), and is "ashamed" (p. 63). His confession marks the "moral achievement" of the poem. He has become what he despises, and has had to turn against himself because he has made the fatal mistake of trying "to accomplish something, to become a better person, to achieve salvation."⁸² The whole object of meditation, of seeking privacy and solitude, of "piercing into" the core of the self, is, as Rilke (translated by Bly) puts it: "not wanting something that can ever be achieved."⁸³ And so the dreamer--and the poem--breaks down under the grief that comes from this recognition:

I fall into my own hands, fences break down under
 horses,
 cities starve, whole towns of singing women carrying
 to the burial fields the look I saw on my father's
 face,
 I sit down again, I hit my own body,
 I shout at myself, I see what I have betrayed.
 What I have written is not good enough.
 Who does it help?
 I am ashamed sitting on the edge of my bed.

(p. 63)

What he has "betrayed" is mother-consciousness, as he has failed to reconcile it with father-consciousness:

"There cannot be two rulers in one body'" (p. 62). Just as

Orpheus fails to return Eurydice to the day-world and reconcile Hades with Earth (death with life), the dreamer (Bly) fails to reconcile feminine with masculine: "Singing women carrying to the burial fields the look I saw on my father's face" (p. 63). This is an image which, mutatis mutandis, recalls the head of Orpheus, after having been torn off by the Maenads, still singing despite its dismemberment.

In the book's final poem, "Water Drawn Up Into the Head," masculine and feminine, light and dark, life and death are all reconciled, and the sequence ends with "An Extra Joyful Chorus for Those Who Have Read This Far." The multi-reconciliation has been made possible by the realization that as much as he loves "the Mother," the dreamer is also "an enemy of the Mother" (p. 66). As Bly emphasizes in his essay, there are extremely negative and threatening aspects of Mother-consciousness besides the more positive, nourishing ones, and those negative aspects must also be incorporated into consciousness.

The water which was "Under the Earth" at the beginning of the book, "Under the mind's feet," has been "Drawn Up Into the Head" by the end of the dreamer's quest. Now it informs the nightmares, visions, dreams, prophecies and intuitions of the unconscious. So just as Whitman ends "The Sleepers" with a cyclical reference--"I will duly pass

the day O my mother and duly return to you"⁸⁴--Bly concludes Sleepers Joining Hands with this image of the other being inside him he glimpsed in the book's first poem:

There is another being inside me.
He is looking out of my eyes.
I hear him
in the wind through the bare trees.⁸⁵

(p. 65)

Both passages call to mind one describing Wordsworth's incumbency in The Prelude II:

A tranquillising spirit presses now
On my corporeal frame, so wide appears
The vacancy between me and those days,
Which yet have such self-presence in my mind,
That, sometimes, when I think of them, I seem
That, musing on them, often I do seem
Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself
And of some other Being.⁸⁶

(ll. 27-33)

Both Bly's and Wordsworth's "two consciousnesses"--the mind contemplating itself--are manifestations of the "tranquillizing" energy that comes from deep solitude. And, echoing Whitman's closing devotion to "my mother," Bly's poem ends with a similar devotion--"I love the Mother" (p. 66)--which is followed by a catalogue of personal metamorphoses reminiscent of section IX of Song of Myself:

I am the ball of fire the woodsman cuts out of the
wolf's stomach,
I am the sun that floats over the Witch's house,
I am the horse sitting in the chestnut tree singing,

I am the man locked inside the oakwomb,
waiting for lightning, only let out on storming
nights.

I am the steelhead trout that hurries to his
mountain mother,
to live again in the stream where he was born,
gobbling up the new water.

(p. 66)

He is, like Whitman in Song of Myself, everyone and every-
thing. He embraces the cosmos, and more: he illuminates it:
"I am the evening light rising from the ocean plains" (p. 67).
The evening light, of course, emanates from the moon, symbol
of the anima, and the dreamer is the evening light: psychic
integration seems complete. And yet he is "no one at all"
and "the one whom [he has] never met" (p. 67). He has lost
himself (the ego) in the transformational flow of things, in
"the eternity of cod heaven." He has "felt the silver of
infinite numbers" (p. 66). Thus, the road he began walking
in Silence, which was temporarily lost in Light, Bly has
re-located in Sleepers. It is "a long road," however, where
he feels like "the naked thing alone in the universe,/the
hairy body padding in the fields at dusk . . ." (p. 66).
He remains, in Lear's words, "a poor, bare fork'd animal"--
a man--no more significant a form of life than any other
on this planet. In his humility Bly can proceed, again like
Whitman, to embrace both the outcast--"the last inheritor
crying out in deserted houses" (p. 67)--and the favoured--
the "angel breaking into three parts over the Ural Mountains!"

(p. 67) with no diminuation of awe or judgement.

By its end, Sleepers Joining Hands is a book which, although it advocates a balance between Father-consciousness and Mother-consciousness, is overbalanced on the feminine side. But this is by no means a flaw; the book was intended to reclaim and to celebrate the feminine and to explore the dark consciousness associated with it. The overwhelming majority of images, therefore, are feminine, or ones Bly associates with the feminine; the most common being the cave and the ocean. The cave for Bly is a womb-image, an image of the dark part of the psyche, and the ocean a teeming enlargement of it: the unconscious. The moon is a symbol for the inward world of the imagination, for the cyclical, as opposed to the patriarchal linear. The counterpart to the image of the cave is the mountain, upon which Father-consciousness pronounces its commandments. "The Chinese describe it [Father-consciousness] as the cold, the clear, the south side of the mountain (on which the light always falls), the north side of the river (always in sunlight), the rational, the spirit, the hard" (p. 33). The image which Bly uses to unite the "two worlds of consciousness" (p. 31) is the tree, particularly the leafless tree. Its appearance at the book's end represents the conscious, day world with its roots in the unconscious, night world; the conjunctio of Apollonic and Dionysian consciousness:

That is why I am so glad in fall.
 I walk out, throw my arms up, and am glad,
 The thick leaves fall,
 falling past their own trunk,
 and the tree goes naked,
 leaving only the other one.

(p. 65)

Looking back over the book as a whole, we become aware that, as a species of image, the transformational once again predominates. We have seen that as a political vehicle it is inherently revolutionary. In its defiance of logic it tears down and rebuilds the world. In its "unexpected" form it ambushes impressionist perception theory and allows its audience to participate in and not just observe the re-creation of the universe. We have seen, too, that the transformational image is an image appropriate to the feminine, since, according to Neumann, it is the female who embodies, during pregnancy, the most primitive and sacred source of all transformation.

The effect of these transformational images, although each astonishes individually, is incremental. We move through them by means of "leaps" and associations more rapid and wild than those required in Silence or in Light. Whereas the images in Bly's earlier poetry tended to "concentrate on a single perception and make a jump within the poem," the images in Sleepers tend "to be more . . . accumulative . . . and /to be/ moving towards a more ecstatic form" (Talking, p. 201) a form

a good deal more 'open' than that of his first two books. And although Bly's sentences remain predominantly declarative, there are in Sleepers more complex and compound-complex sentences than in Light and Silence combined, thereby enhancing wilder association and longer leaps into the unconscious and out again.

The upper case at the beginning of each line in Sleepers appears only when necessary; i.e., other than at the beginning of the poem, only when the poet wants to signify a new set of associations or train of thought. This creates a more relaxed, more organic form than that which appeared in either Silence or Light. The authority of the left-hand margin has relaxed its hold in Sleepers, too, and Bly indents the odd line for purposes of contrast or emphasis, or to signal ideas in apposition with one or more which has preceded them:

He lies about the number of fish taken every year
in the Arctic,
he has private information about which city is
the capital of Wyoming, he lies about the
birthplace of Attila the Hun.

(p. 21)

The purpose of all these innovations is "to encourage us to let up a little in repression, ease up the projection, and move out a bit from the lowest stage of consciousness" (Talking, p. 281). The collection's "surrealism and open

form . . . are launch points into the unknown. We launch out, and go away from patriarchal form . . . into the union of yang and yin as the ancient Chinese art and poetry did" (Talking, p. 253). The absence of conventional narrative also forces us to "move out" into the transformed realm; forces us to "weave drunkenly about the page" (p. 61) and absorb the intoxicating effects of Bly's gnostic ecstasy.

Sleepers Joining Hands is, finally, a meditation upon the poet's own psycho-spiritual evolution and a dramatization of his nation's contrasting moral stance. It is Bly's answer to his call for "a poetry of water" in The Fifties in its celebration of the feminine, its persistent investigations of the unconscious and the dark or irrational side of existence. And since it is so concerned with the development of the individual self (the psyche viewed as a self-regulating system, as an organism with its own internal laws of growth), Sleepers is quintessentially Romantic. It exists to transform the universe into a personal mythology. It reminds us of the Romantic notion that the power to heal is not to be found solely in the appearances of Nature, but within ourselves. It provides, like Wordsworth's Prelude, a "look/Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man," and becomes Bly's "haunt," and the "main region" of his "song." Its intense lyricism is, moreover, underlined throughout by a Romantic urge to confront the shadow; the "I" behind the eye.

It fights its own self-consciousness, however, with a transforming imagination that grows inwardly on its island of solitude, thereby fulfilling the most salient Romantic purpose. And in its dream-vision and the surrealistic mode the dream-vision encourages, Sleepers constitutes an argument with reality⁸⁷ as a polemical phenomenon. The inwardness of the dream-quest simultaneously becomes a code of conduct for the poet's actions in the outer world and a healing agent for private wounds. It reminds us of that which we all share as human beings and therefore must preserve: a living universe. Above all, it nourishes our imagination and utters truths which, as Morse Peckham has argued, "cannot be perceived from the 'evidences of nature' but only through the unconscious and creative mind."⁸⁸

Notes

Chapter Four

- ¹ The Letters of W.B. Yeats, ed. Allan Wade (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1954), p. 63.
- ² Miller, p. 68.
- ³ W.B. Yeats, The Words Upon The Window Pane (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1934), p. 3.
- ⁴ W.B. Yeats, Collected Poems (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1933), p. 232.
- ⁵ Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 231.
- ⁶ Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 231.
- ⁷ Mersmann, p. 117.
- ⁸ Yeats, "Swift's Epitaph," Collected Poems, p. 277.
- ⁹ Louis B. Hammer, "moths in the light," kayak, No. 14, 3 (Apr. 1968), p. 63.
- ¹⁰ Robert Bly, "On Pablo Neruda," The Nation, 25 Mar. 1968, p. 414.
- ¹¹ Pablo Neruda, "The Dictators," Neruda and Vallejo: Selected Poems, ed. Robert Bly (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 93.
- ¹² William Blake, "The French Revolution," The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne and The Complete Poetry of William Blake, eds. John Hayward and Geoffrey Keynes (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 637.

13 Bly, "On Pablo Neruda," p. 418.

14 Robert Bly, Sleepers Joining Hands (New York: Harper and Row, 1973). Further references to this book will appear in the body of the text, abbreviated to Sleepers, and will include page numbers. Prior to the publication of Sleepers, Bly published two smaller books of poems: Jumping Out of Bed (New York: Barre-Wheatover, 1973) and The Morning Glory: Prose Poems (Santa Cruz: kayak, 1969). The latter was published in a larger version by Harper and Row in 1975, and will be discussed in Chapter 5. The former is a collection of short, meditative poems based on ancient Chinese models. Their themes of solitude, privacy and non-striving are found in the first section of Sleepers, and therefore I have chosen not to discuss them in detail, but to mention them only briefly (in notes) by way of comparison.

15 "The Teeth Mother Naked At Last" was originally published in a somewhat different form by City Lights Books (San Francisco) in 1970. Parts of it appeared earlier in The Nation and the New American Review.

16 The title of the essay forms part of one epigraph to Jumping Out of Bed:

All around me men are working;
but I am stubborn, and take no part.
The difference is this:
I prize the breasts of the Mother.
--Tao Te Ching

I came out of the Mother naked,
and I will be naked when I return.
The Mother gave, and the Mother takes away,
--Old Testament, restored

The second of the two epigraphs expresses the essence of the essay contained in Sleepers; that is, there are negative, as well as positive aspects to the feminine: "The Mother gave, and the Mother takes away" (italics added).

17 Neumann, p. 243.

18 See Jung's "Psychological Types" in The Portable Jung, trans. R.F.C. Hull, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: Viking Press, 1971), pp. 178-272.

- 19 For an excellent reading of Freudian and Jungian sexism, and for an extensive feminist bibliography, see Mary Daly's Gyn/ecology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979).
- 20 James Hillman, The Myth of Analysis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. 288.
- 21 Hillman, pp. 237-38.
- 22 Hillman, p. 292.
- 23 Hillman, p. 250.
- 24 Hillman, pp. 258-87.
- 25 Hillman, p. 282.
- 26 Hillman, pp. 283-84.
- 27 Hillman, p. 259.
- 28 Hillman, p. 281.
- 29 Norman O. Brown, Love's Body (New York: Random House, Inc., 1966), pp. 141-61.
- 30 Hillman, The Myth of Analysis, p. 282.
- 31 Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death, p. 312.
- 32 Brown, Life Against Death, p. 313.
- 33 Hillman, The Dream And The Underworld, pp. 35-36.
- 34 Padma Sambhava, the eighth-century Indian who visited Tibet at the invitation of the reigning king, is credited with founding the Nyingma-pa school of Buddhism, but there is at present no evidence of its existence prior to the twelfth century. He apparently initiated a period of translation, and the Bardo Thodol (Tibetan Book of the Dead) is associated with his name. As a saint he is venerated second only to the Buddha.

35 Alexander Hamilton, from 1789 to 1795, as the first United States Secretary of the Treasury, was probably the strongest force in Washington's administrations. Besides organizing his department along general lines which have endured up to the present day, Hamilton devised and recommended measures which established public credit on a firm basis. The most important of these measures were those for funding the public debt, for the federal assumption of state debts, incurred because of the war, and for the establishment of a national bank. His report On Public Credit (1790) is considered to have laid the cornerstone of American finance under the Constitution. In arguing against Jefferson and others, Hamilton made the first strategic use of unprohibited governmental powers, later labelled "implied powers." He also recommended the imposition of an excise which helped spark the "Whiskey Rebellion" (see Light, p. 29), the snuffing of which demonstrated the central government's undeniable power.

36 For a superb discussion of the reference to Plato see Mersmann, pp. 147-50.

37 A similar version of this catalogue of lies appeared in Bly's The Satisfaction of Vietnam: a play in 8 scenes, in Chelsea 24/25 (Oct., 1968), 32-46. Bitingly satirical, Satisfaction anticipates the cause-effect structure of "Teeth Mother," but on a more personal level. A member of the "REDS," who "own most of the world now," and who are beings "of Straight Lines" (p. 32), says: "Yesterday I beat up this gook-girl, you know. She was 16 years old. She's my whore. I just beat the hell out of her. You know why? Because my wife gets her hair done twice a week" (p. 36). The play is full of the grim humour that operated in many of the poems in Light. The "REDS," for example, have developed a "Bachofen bomb . . . designed for his sort of primitive culture. By knocking out the mother, you break the lines of communication. The Bachofen bomb explodes just above the roofs of private houses. It gives birth to splinter bombs just a foot above the power nodes of the matriarchal system . . ." (p. 37).

38 Brown, Love's Body, p. 150.

39 Brown, Love's Body, p. 149.

40 Neumann, Art And The Creative Unconscious, p. 194.

41 W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming," Collected Poems, p. 210.

42 For an interesting discussion of grief in the context of philosophy and religion, see Ralph Harper's The Path of Darkness (Cleveland: Case Western University Press, 1968) and C.G. Montefiore's Ancient Jewish and Greek Encouragement and Consolation (Bridgeport, Hartmore House, 1971). For a useful discussion of grief from a psychoanalytical perspective, see David K. Switzer's The Dynamics of Grief (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1970).

43 Bly's interest in the brain and split-brain experiments relates directly to his investigation of the feminine as opposed to the masculine. "By studying the 'half-brains' separately, they [brain doctors] found out that the left side of the brain (controlling the right side of the body) is basically rational, logical, and linear. It is involved in time. Probably it is the super-ego Freud talked about. Then the right side of the brain (that controls the left side of the body) is intuitive; it is emotional and associational, it has values we call 'feminine'; it deals with space, not time

. . . .
You can see . . . a movie [of an experiment] in which a man with split-brain has become angry. The man's left arm lifts up an ax, and is about to bring it down, suddenly the right hand sweeps in again, and holds the arm this time, preventing it from coming down. That scene appears to be a narrative in which the superego intervenes to prevent the id from taking action. That scene suggests the possibility that the patriarchies were developed to control the wild angers of the matriarchies.

No one can read these experiments without realizing how much we need both 'sides' . . . in recent years, both men and women have been reluctant to respect the male side" (Talking, pp. 228-29).

Furthermore, Bly believes the three physically distinct sections of the brain--the limbic node, the cortex and the neo-cortex--correspond with what he calls reptile consciousness, mammal consciousness and new consciousness respectively. Certain brain research has revealed that "the brain system is extremely conservative: the ancient reptile brain that we had once is still in the base of the skull, perfectly preserved; the mammal brain from the time when we were mammals is also perfectly preserved and is called the cortex; and finally, the neo-cortex, or the new brain, developed maybe fifty thousand years ago, has been laid on top of the mammal brain. . . . Paranoia seems . . . to be simply a reversion to the archaic reptile brain without the person being aware of it. . . . Nixon is a perfect example . . ." (Georgia Review, p. 90).

- 44 Jung, The Portable Jung, p. 146.
- 45 Jung, The Portable Jung, p. 147.
- 46 Brown, Love's Body, p. 120.
- 47 Brown, Love's Body, pp. 120-21.
- 48 John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. Alexander C. Fraser (Oxford: Clarendon, 1894), I, p. 504.
- 49 Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 240.
- 50 Marshall McLuhan, The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), p. 17.
- 51 Northrop Frye, "The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism," in Romanticism: Points of View, eds. Robert F. Gleckner and Gerald E. Enscoe (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 306.
- 52 Martin Price, "The Standard of Energy," in Romanticism and Consciousness, p. 256.
- 53 William Blake, The Complete Poetry, p. 515.
- 54 Robert Bly, trans. and ed. "The Boundary Between Worlds," in Truth Barriers: Poems by Tomas Transtomer (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1980), p. 9.
- 55 Hillman, The Myth of Analysis, p. 283.
- 56 "Six Winter Privacy Poems" bear close resemblance in form and content to "Some November Privacy Poems" in Jumping Out of Bed (no page numbers). In the latter poem Bly writes: "It may be the trees I see have consciousness/and this desire to weep comes from them." This conjecture will become a firm belief in the later News of The Universe: poems of twofold consciousness, and in the prose poems of The Morning Glory and This Body Is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood.

- 57 Robert Bly, trans. "Some Rumors About Kabir," in The Kabir Book: Forty-Four of the Ecstatic Poems of Kabir (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 68.
- 58 Carl Jung, in D.T. Suzuki's An Introduction to Zen Buddhism, foreword by Dr. C.G. Jung (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 22.
- 59 Robert Bly, The Kabir Book, p. 63.
- 60 "The Turtle," originally published in The Massachusetts Review under the title "Turtle Climbing From a Rock," also appeared in Jumping Out of Bed under the same title. There the third line read /as if/ "Buddha's body were to shine!" In Sleepers it has been changed to /as if/ "the body inside shone through." The change from the particular--"Buddha's body"--to "the body inside" renders the poem less specifically eastern and more concerned with the inward world in general.
- 61 Robert Bly, The Kabir Book, p. 11.
- 62 Bly's essay owes an enormous debt to Lawrence's Fantasia of the Unconscious, in which Bly "first saw the possibility . . . /of/ A book of unsupportable generalizations about things that interest us. I don't think my essay would exist without Fantasia of the Unconscious" (Talking, p. 251). He acknowledges, too, that he has learned "much from Lawrence, not from his poetry, but from the motion that he made away from the intellect and down into the body" (Talking, p. 251). What Bly does admire about Lawrence's poetry is that it is "without 'skill'" and . . . when his poems come out, one out of fifteen or one out of twenty of them is marvelous. If a man has experienced certain things, I'm not sure how much craft is essential in order to do something that's really . . . marvellous . . . that really has psychic energy" (Talking, p. 177). Lawrence himself, in a letter to Edward Marsh, wrote: "I have always tried to get an emotion out in its own course without altering it. It needs the finest instinct imaginable, much finer than the skill of the craftsman. . . . I don't write for your ear . . . I can't tell you what pattern I see in any poetry, save one complete thing." Selected Poems, ed. Keither Sagar (Hammondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972), p. 13.
- 63 Richard Maurice Bucke, Walt Whitman, quoted in Leaves of Grass, pp. 424-25.

- 64 Howard Nelson, p. 5.
- 65 Jung, The Portable Jung, p. 145.
- 66 Jung, The Portable Jung, p. 146.
- 67 See Neumann's The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype, second edition, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 53-63 and 211-39.
- 68 Neumann, Art And The Creative Unconscious, pp. 182-83.
- 69 Neumann, The Great Mother, p. 59.
- 70 C.G. Jung, Psyche and Symbol, ed. Violet S. deLaszlo (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958), p. 127.
- 71 Jung, Psyche and Symbol, p. 132.
- 72 Jung, Psyche and Symbol, p. 133.
- 73 Jung, Psyche and Symbol, p. 133.
- 74 Erich Neumann, Art And The Creative Unconscious, p. 180.
- 75 Elizabeth Sewell's The Orphic Voice (New York: Harper and Row, 1960) remains an invaluable book for any understanding of the Orpheus myth and its manifestations in modern poetry. See also: W.K.C. Guthrie, Orpheus and Greek Religion (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1952); I.M. Linforth's The Arts of Orpheus (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1941); Vittorio D. Macchioro, From Orpheus to Paul: A History of Orphism (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1950); and S. Reniach, Orpheus: a general history of religions, trans. Florence Simmonds (London: Heinemann, 1909).
- 76 These lines describe the period "of depression, solitude and self-analysis" Bly spent in New York "living in a small room, very poor . . . a period in which I did much writing" (Talking, pp. 256-57).
- 77 Robert Bly, "Conversation With A Poet," TWA ambassador 13, No. 12, 36.
- 78 Robert Bly, trans. and ed. Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), p. 185.

79 Bly, ed. Selected Poems of Rilke, p. 190.

80 Bly, ed. Selected Poems of Rilke, p. 190.

81 Walt Whitman, "The Sleepers," Leaves of Grass, p. 424.

82 Bly, ed. Selected Poems of Rilke, p. 187.

83 Bly, ed. Selected Poems of Rilke, p. 187.

84 Walt Whitman, "The Sleepers," p. 433.

85 The earlier version of this 'doubling' experience occurred in "Six Winter Privacy Poems": "I am alone, yet someone else is with me, /drinking coffee, looking out at the snow" (p. 4).

86 William Wordsworth, The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850, eds. M.H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1979), p. 67.

87 See Harold Bloom, "The Internalization of Quest Romance," in Romanticism and Consciousness, pp. 3-24 for a discussion of the poet's conflict with reality.

88 Morse Peckham, "Toward a Theory of Romanticism," in Romanticism and Consciousness, p. 243.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PROSE POEMS: ROMANTIC MOMENTS

"The greatest poverty is not to live
In a physical world."

- Wallace Stevens,
"Esthetique du Mal"

". . . I have found
That outward forms, the loftiest still receive
Their finer influence from the life within...."

- Coleridge, "Lines Written
in the Album at Elbingerode,
in the Hartz Forest"

In addition to its presence in Bly's 'lined' poetry, the transformational image appears frequently in his prose poems. In the prose poems, Bly explores correspondences that exist between Nature and the imagination and suggests that Nature has consciousness, and that there is a primary ground where the inner and outer worlds fuse. Bly defines this ground by means of the transformational image, which encompasses both worlds.

In The Morning Glory (1975), Bly's use of the transformational image implies that, in Coleridge's words, "the material

universe . . . is but one vast complex mythus, that is symbolical representation,"¹ In delineating that "mythus," Bly does more than merely record the myriad details of the natural world. Like Coleridge, and like Wordsworth, Bly looks through the appearances of Nature to discover the topography of the eternal. Like most Romantic poets, Bly sees Nature not as alien or antagonistic, but as a "genuine physiology"² whose form is a living, breathing body which deserves the dignity accorded any conscious being.

In This Body Is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood (1977), Bly enlarges this "mythus" to include within the "genuine physiology" of Nature the human body. In doing so, he returns to an overriding concern in his poetry: the necessity of seeing the spiritual in the physical. He continues here as well his study of the darker side of the American collective psyche, the more regrettable aspects of its history, and its repression of grief and the feminine.

In both books, Bly records what may be regarded as "romantic moments," and in this chapter I will attempt to define these "moments," and to suggest how they are achieved. But before I discuss the first of these two books, it is necessary to investigate the ambiguous nature of the prose poem itself in the context of a brief history of the genre.

The term prose poem is a nebulous one which has included under its rubric the fable, the fairy tale, the extended epigram, the diary entry (such as in Dorothy Wordsworth's

Journals or her Recollections of a Tour in Scotland, hymns (such as those composed by Novalis), and dream or nightmare reproductions (such as de Quincey's Confessions and The English Mail Coach). Indeed, much of the prose by English Romantics and the American Transcendentalists (Emerson's essays and, of course, parts of Thoreau's Walden) display those elements of poetic prose--feeling and imagination fused in paragraphs of high intensity--which literary historians have traditionally associated with the prose poem.

The prose poem began in the latter part of the eighteenth century in France in the imaginative prose of Diderot and Rousseau, which was inherited by and reached its zenith in the works of Chateaubriand and his "beaux morceaux."³ And although we tend to associate its popularization with Rimbaud and Baudelaire, we know that they were not the first to experiment with the form. It developed in an earlier reaction against the rigid demands of classical French verse which had discouraged informal imaginative flights more appropriate to prose. It made its first appearance in an obscure work by Alphonse Rabbe called "La Pipe" (1825), yet most literary historians credit Aloysius Bertrand (whom Bly mentions in The Seventies 1, 17) in his "Gaspard de la Nuit" (1842) as the originator of the genre, since he was the first to employ it in a sustained manner. Enid Starke notes that, before Baudelaire, the prose poem "had tended . . . to be narrative and descriptive . . . whilst both Gerard de Nerval and Baudelaire

had favoured the narrative form. . . . With Rimbaud the prose poem is generally stripped of all its anecdotal, narrative or even descriptive content, and it becomes highly concentrated and short."⁴ It is generally agreed that the prose poem, which may consist of only three or four lines, as in some of Rimbaud's Illuminations (1886), loses the pregnancy of its emotional charge if it ranges beyond three to four pages. Hence its tendency to be descriptive rather than narrative.

In general, the prose poem may be said to combine the density of poetic utterance with the rhythms of prose. Russell Edson's proposed formula for the prose poem is that it is a

poetry freed from the definition of poetry, and a prose free of the necessities of fiction . . . Superficially a prose poem should look somewhat like a page from a child's primer, indented paragraphs, justified margins. In other words, the prose poem should not announce that it is a special prose . . . The idea is to get away from obvious ornament, and the obligations implied therein....

The language will be simple, the images so direct, that oftentimes the reader will be torn with recognitions inside himself long before he is conscious of what is happening to him,...

What makes us so fond of it is its clumsiness, its lack of expectation or ambition.⁵

(ellipses mine)

Baudelaire prescribed a less precise formula for its composition in his dedication "To Arsene Houssaye," in Petits Poèmes en Prose (Le Spleen de Paris) in 1869:

Which one of us, in his moments of ambition, has not dreamed of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical, without rhyme, supple enough and rugged enough to adapt itself to the lyrical impulses of the soul, the undulations of reverie, the jibes of conscience.⁶

It is a formula which takes its lead from the formula for the short poem devised by Poe, who, as we know, influenced Baudelaire tremendously:

. . . the extent of the poem may be made to bear mathematical relation to its merit--in other words, to the excitement of elevation--Again, in other words, to the degree of true poetical effect which it is capable of inducing; for it is clear that the brevity must be in direct ratio to the intended effect.⁷

Poe's formula for brevity balanced by intensity, and Baudelaire's formula for a dreamily supple, yet rugged, musical, even moral prose, have combined to inform the use of the prose poem by its twentieth-century master: Francis Ponge.

In The Morning Glory, Bly emulates the method Ponge employed to renew the world of objects in Le Parti Pris des Choses (Taking the Sides of Things). There Ponge created "description-definition-literary art works, that is, definitions which . . . establish uncommon relationships, break up ordinary classifications, and thereby make themselves more incisive, more striking and more pleasing as well."⁸ Bly does not rely on the dictionary or linguistics to aid him in his "art-works," as Ponge did, but does address himself to

the task of viewing everyday objects in a new light. In Taking the Sides of Things Ponge describes a crate, a candle, a door, a cigarette, an orange, bread; in The Morning Glory, Bly describes a bird's nest, a hollow tree, a dead wren, a turtle, frost, some rocks, a caterpillar, a tumbleweed. Yet even in describing a pebble, for Bly, as for Ponge, "It is less a matter of observing the pebble than installing oneself in its heart and seeing the world with its eyes, like the novelist who, in order to portray his heroes, lets himself sink into their consciousness and describes things and people as they appear to them."⁹ In other words, Bly borrows Ponge's prosopopoetic method not just to allow objects to speak for themselves, but "to give honor to objects again" and to establish "the faith that matter is not simply to be dismissed as matter."¹⁰ Such a faith implies that in matter there is a mysterious and invisible essence which will become manifest to the careful, sympathetic eye of the poet; it implies that within every object in the universe--be it a stone or a snail or a tumbleweed--there is a hidden will. In order to recognize this hidden will, the poet must eliminate all distance between himself and the object under scrutiny, because the least bit of distance will produce in the poet a false sense of superiority. Writing about Ponge's prose poems, Bly has, in fact, remarked that Ponge refuses "to exploit things, either as symbols or as being of a lower class"

("Two Stages," 107).

In some of Bly's prose poems it is unclear whether the reality being described is a reality of the inner life, or the outer world, or a fusion of the two. In most cases it is the latter, but for Bly the distinction does not necessarily matter, since Nature, as in the Romantic tradition, is perceived as signifying psycho-spiritual potential beyond the pale of the quotidian. This potential can be negative as well as positive--like the feminine, Nature has a dark side as well as a light side--but its negativity is invariably subsumed under a larger process of positive (cosmic) transformation.

Bly associates the prose poem with the poet's moving away from himself (subjectivity) toward a preoccupation with the people, events and things that surround him (objectivity). In this regard he quotes Novalis, who considered this movement crucial to the maturation of the poet and to the development of his work:

Self-expression is the source of all abasement, just as, contrariwise, it is the basis for all true elevation. The first step is introspection --exclusive contemplation of the self. But whoever stops there goes only half way. The second step must be genuine observation outward--spontaneous, sober observation of the external world.

("Two Stages," 105)

Here Bly seems to be contradicting himself and his reproach of Olson and Williams for their objectivism, but the object for Bly does not constitute reality in its entirety, as it often did for Williams and Olson. For Bly the object in The Morning Glory, as in his earlier work, is the "initial wordly circumstance" (The Seventies, 1, p. 16) from which the poem often makes its point of departure, via association, into the unknown, and to which the poem eventually returns. We must remember also that Bly's criticism of Williams and Olson was based on the fact that both Olson and Williams tried "to avoid 'the soul getting between us and the objects' But it's possible," Bly asserts, that "we share soul with objects" (Talking, p. 278). Bly bases his attack on Williams and Olson--though they obviously are not the only ones with this view--on the fact that they both refused to grant Nature consciousness. As we shall see, the poems in The Morning Glory and This Body Is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood are founded, in contrast, upon "the ancient view," also reflected by Boehme, "that there is a consciousness inside Nature."¹¹ They are poems of "twofold consciousness"; poems that suggest that objects have an awareness of humans. Bly finds strong evidence of these poems in the English and German Romantics' poetry of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, in the poetry of Rilke, Lawrence, Brecht, Lorca, Neruda, Himenez and Machado among foreign poets, and in

Wallace Stevens, Hart Crane and Robert Frost among American poets in the twentieth century.

The great advantage that the prose poem has over lined poetry or "free verse," according to Bly, is its ability to absorb, in its prose rhythms, "great detail" ("Two Stages," 107). We witness an abundance of details in almost every prose poem in The Morning Glory, but since it is impossible to consider every prose poem, we shall study a representative sampling from each of the book's three sections.

"Looking at a Dead Wren in my Hand,"¹² the third prose poem in The Morning Glory, re-introduces the theme of death-as-nourishment that runs through Silence, Light and Sleepers. As a tender elegy, this prose poem also recalls the idea of spiritual renewal that comes with death, the ultimate transformation. Bly's apprehension of the essence of the dead wren is evidenced by the rapid transformations the bird undergoes. Its "tiny rice-like legs" become "bars of music played in an empty church"; its "tail feathers open like a picket fence"; its "bill is brown, with the sorrow of an old Jew whose daughter has married an athlete"; the "black spot" on its head is its "own mourning cap." The wall between life and death, between the possible and the impossible has been removed, and the wren, wearing its "own mourning cap," is restored. Indeed, the wren becomes more

than itself in death, just as it evokes in Bly a sober recognition of more than himself, too. Death, in The Morning Glory is once again, then, something Bly "is not afraid of; death is like the sound of the motor in an airplane as we fly, the sound so steady and comforting" (p. 6). As a subject it once again predominates, especially in the longer prose poems, where the poet gives himself more time to ruminate on it as a compelling paradox.

Because they make the most efficient use of detail, however, the shorter prose poems of the book are often the most effective and memorable. They resemble Ponge's prose poems in their presentation of the object at hand as a work of art. "Frost on Window Panes" (p. 20) is the best example of natural object as art-work:

It is glittery, excited, like so many things laid down silently in the night, with no one watching. Through the two lower panes the watcher can dimly see the three trunks of the maple, sober as Europe. The frost wavers, it hurries over the world, it is like a body that lies in the coffin, and the next moment has disappeared! In its own skin the mind picks up the radio signals of death, reminders of the molecules flying all about the universe, the icy disembarking, chill fingertips, tulips at head and foot. I look in the upper panes and see more complicated roads . . . ribbons thrown on the road....

[Bly's ellipses/

The poem begins with an image of muted dynamism--"It is glittery, excited"--that is quickly undercut by a simile

of quiet unobtrusiveness--"like so many things laid down silently in the night"--which is reinforced by the subtle self-effacement of "with no one watching." The vague image of "things laid down in the night," moreover, anticipates the later simile of the frost "like a body that lies in the coffin." The second comparison extends the initial self-effacement and is rendered all the more powerful by virtue of its apparently unsolicited nature. "It is as if the object itself . . . has links with the human psyche, and the unconscious provides material it would not give if asked directly. The unconscious passes into the object and returns" ("Two Stages," 107).

Bly presents the details of an object, and the unconscious ideas they evoke, as he has always done: by means of associative leaps and not by conventional narrative. For example, we notice that "it is not so much the object [frost] as the idea of the object"¹³ [death] with which Bly is concerned. Therefore, the details of the piece do not describe the frost on the window panes so much as they provide an emotive pattern--like the pattern of frost on glass--of associations: "radio signals of death . . . the icy disembarking, chill fingertips, tulips at head and foot" (ellipsis mine). The narrative does not move in a linear fashion. Rather, it remains submerged in the emotive pattern that spreads out in an imaginative curve, with the final sentence bringing our

attention back to "the upper panes" (is the play on "panes" intentional in this death poem?) and the ambiguous "things" of the first sentence become the "ribbons thrown on the road" in the last. The prose poem ends with an enigmatic emotive significance; a kind of 'open-ended closure' which characterizes many of the pieces in the book.

Many of Bly's prose poems end like many of Hemingway's short stories do: without resolution, true to life. If the reader expects a neat and tidy package, he will not get it from Bly. The reader, moreover, may actually feel that Bly is distorting reality. He may feel, like John Haines, that at the end of each piece there occurs "a wrenching of reality that has probably little to do with surrealism."¹⁴ But it is not reality that Bly wrenches; it is the reader's desire for a static or standard reality that he denies. Bly's prose poems indeed have "little to do with surrealism" and a lot to do with life as it is lived; life filled with incidents which go mysteriously unresolved.

Details that evoke unconscious associations abound in the shorter pieces, especially in "Looking at a Dry Tumbleweed Brought in from the Snow" (p. 22). Again, it is short enough to quote in its entirety:

What is this wonderful thing? Brown and everywhere!
It has leaped up on my desk like surf, or like a
bull onto a cow! It rushes everywhere in front
of me And my sleeping senses are shouted at,
called in from the back of my head, to look at it!

Well, it is only a broken-off bush, a tumbleweed, every branch different, and the whole bush the same, so in that way it is like the sea. Taken in from the deserted shore, it talks of queens sent away to live in cramped farmhouses, living in the dirt, and it talks of coffins and amazing arrows, no it is a love, some love we forget every day, it is my mother.

The opening interrogative suggests a kind of anecdotal innocence on the part of the author. It forces us to concentrate not on the poet, but on the object--immediately. The fragment "Brown and everywhere!" brings the object even closer in the protracted fervor of an exclamation followed by a longer one containing two wildly associated similes. Even when it is still, the tumbleweed, in its sprawling form, "rushes everywhere"; and in its energetic silence it shouts at the poet's "sleeping senses . . . to look at it!" (ellipsis mine). Another exclamation! The poet is "called" not to surrender just to his momentary impressions, contained in the two comparisons of the second sentence, but to project himself into the object--to divest himself of the "I"--in order that the object might speak for itself. Perceived merely as an antithesis, as something foreign to the "I," the poet can only see it as "a broken-off bush" and make another comparison: "it is like the sea." The subjective exclamations give way to prosopopoeia, and the essence of the tumbleweed announces itself. It "talks of queens" and "talks of coffins and amazing arrows." The momentary yet valid

impressions of the tumbleweed subside; intuition replaces observation. Intuition creates what Susan Langer describes as "the matter of a new experience in which subjective and objective have so cooperated that neither has any longer an existence by itself."¹⁵

The rapidity of the leap from observation to intuition is enhanced by the run-on structure of the final sentence. We are given little time to catch our breath by the commas between "arrows" and "no," "love" and "some," "day" and "mother," but we are given sure footing for our associational leaps by repeated short o sounds in "houses," "coffins," "love," "love" (again), and "mother." The rapid transformations the tumbleweed undergoes in the light of intense intuition culminate in the most basic and nourishing identification of son with mother: "it [the tumbleweed] is my mother." Bly is, as it were, simultaneously brought into being and annihilated by complete identification with the object.

The object, however, has no need of the poet. In a short forward to The Morning Glory, Bly emphasizes the independence of objects:

. . . If we examine a pine carefully, we see how independent it is of us. When we first sense that a pine tree really doesn't need us, that it has a physical life and a moral life and a spiritual life that is complete without us, we feel alienated and depressed. The second time we feel it, we feel joyful. As Basho says in his

wonderful poem:
 The morning glory--
 another thing
 that will never be my friend.

Ponge explains the independence of things in a similar way. He says that "objects, landscapes, events, individuals of the external world give me much pleasure. They win my trust. For the simple reason that they don't need it."¹⁶

Ponge's remarks call to mind D.H. Lawrence's notion of "otherness": the purity of non-human life. Like Bly, Lawrence echoes Basho's rejoicing over the fact that the natural world is completely other and will never need to be his friend. In Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious, Lawrence expressed Basho's feeling as "the satisfaction of the objective finality [from which] derives the sense of fatality . . . of the isolation of the self."¹⁷ He describes his 'method' of apprehending this otherness and of achieving this "satisfaction" as an "act of pure attention . . . you choose that object to concentrate on which will best focus your consciousness."¹⁸

This sense of otherness that Lawrence and Bly share is characteristic of the Romantic artist in general. The Romantic artist is, after all, one who sees himself as the centre of the world of objects, yet who, like Keats yearning to be one with the nightingale, is wise enough to know that the object is ultimately, of its own volition, inassimilable.

But rather than the otherness of an object rendering him diminished, or withdrawn, the object fills the Romantic artist with its mystery. Bly's reverence for the enigmatic otherness of things is one more example of the Romantic temperament of his work.

This otherness is embodied throughout The Morning Glory, but most obviously in the caterpillar with the "obstinate jaw, made for eating through sleeping things without pain of conscience . . ." (p. 21). The caterpillar's lack of conscience Bly compares with the innocence of his three-year-old daughter, who has brought him the creature as a gift. He says that "He is not as beautiful as she thinks" (p. 21), implying that Nature has a darker side that is completely other than the human world of conscience. For Bly, Lawrence's concept of otherness is best expressed in a prose poem because of its low-profile presentation of objects. As well as being "useful for renewing the narrative, and for expressing complicated human perceptions," Bly feels the prose poem can (in the manner of Ponge), because of the "absence of line and 'ethical form,' help the poet's mind to relax and so sink into the mud of the earth, the water around creatures, the moist landscape of Hades, understood as the underworld. This kind of prose poem provides a psychic arena, charged but neutral, where the non-human object can live, as well as the perception of it" (News, pp. 131-32). The prose poem

is the form most conducive to achieving an "act of pure attention" because the poet is not pre-occupied in a struggle with the tension of the line, or line-breaks; the "narrative" form allows him, rather, to concentrate on the object, on the content, and passing through that content free "a being inside us which can use . . . unconscious images as food" (Talking, p. 118).

The prose poem is the form most conducive, in other words, to meditation, or to what Bly calls, in his foreword to The Morning Glory, "'curving lines'" thought. Rilke called this kind of thought "inseeing," and confessed that "my all-greatest feeling, my world-feeling, my earthly bliss was to be found . . . in such inseeing, in the indescribably swift, deep, timeless moments of this divine inseeing."¹⁹ Such meditation, or "inseeing," if it is indeed to be of a "divine" nature, Bly can achieve only in solitude. Nature becomes his private temple and every object in that temple he perceives as being holy:

I bend over an old cottonwood stump, still standing, waist high, and look inside. Early spring. Its Siamese temple walls are all brown and ancient. The walls have been worked on by the intricate ones. Inside the hollow walls there is privacy and secrecy, dim light. And yet some creature has died there.

On the temple floor feathers, gray feathers, many of them with a fluted tip. Many feathers. In the silence many feathers.

("A Hollow Tree," p. 11)

This prose poem operates on the level of understatement so characteristic of the contemplative. The first line produces an aura of unobtrusiveness and, once again, apparent insignificance. The fragment "Early spring" both enhances Bly's mild inconspicuousness and in its brevity sets off the lilting rhythm of the first line. This is followed by two simple declaratives--"Its Siamese temple walls are brown and ancient. The walls have been worked on by the intricate ones"--whose phrasing marries breath to sense and gracefully collapses thousands of years in the buoyancy of its perception. The fact that those who have "worked on" the walls of the stump (presumably ants or termites) are referred to as "the intricate ones" evokes a sense of mystery or "secrecy" and suggests a strong reverence for the stump in particular, and for the processes of Nature in general. This reverence is specifically accounted for in the final line of the first paragraph: "And yet some creature has died there." The stump is both a work of art and a tomb for an animal killed by the bird whose feathers carpet the "temple floor." The repetition of "feathers" four times in the short concluding paragraph brings the experience to a hushed, gentle, trance-like conclusion that belies the life-and-death struggle that surely occurred. Its incantatory effects bring to mind the religious ceremonies of a Siamese temple, as well as the ideas that conflate in the poem: solitude, death, nothingness.

By now we can see that the music of Bly's prose poems, the music which Baudelaire emphasized, shares equal significance with description. True to Baudelaire's formula, Bly's rhythms are "supple" yet "rugged." The first line of "Looking into a Tide Pool" (p. 12) is a perfect example of a sentence whose language is so sumptuous that it contains a delicate lilt and a pounding articulation simultaneously: "It is a tide pool, shallow, water coming in, clear tiny white shell-people on the bottom, asking nothing, not even directions!" It is an example of rhythm animating content, as water rushes strongly in and draws delicately back. The second and final sentence, using varying combinations of fragility and density, exemplifies how the imagination can use rhythm to work organically with content to pierce the real and fructify it: "On the surface the noded seaweed, lying like hands, slowly drawing back and returning, hands laid on fevered bodies, moving back and forth, as the healer sings wildly, shouting to Jesus and his dead mother." Consisting of seven short phrases punctuated by commas, this sentence also demonstrates how the form of the prose poem can give rise to "buried impulses . . . half-buried thoughts"²⁰ that would otherwise never reach consciousness. We can say, then, that Bly's prose poems are only superficially discursive, given the fact that their syntactic and associational discontinuity augments the aura of the anecdotal.

The source of the deliberate discontinuity of the prose poems in The Morning Glory is the nature of reality itself: it is constantly changing. Because the means of expression the poet uses to describe the world is given to him by that ever-shifting reality, the means must reflect that perpetual motion. Moreover, each time the poet identifies an object, a portion of the flux that is reality, the unconscious part of him that identifies it paradoxically transforms the object, so that the means must also somehow express that transformation. In The Morning Glory, Bly uses ellipses to signal transformation, or, rather, the series of transformations--for no object is static--he projects upon an object. "The Hockey Poem" (pp. 14-17), which is the longest piece in the book, is a good example of Bly's use of ellipsis. Others include "Watching Andrei Voznesensky Read in Vancouver" (pp. 23-25); "Sunday Morning in Tomales Bay" (pp. 45-46; "Calm Morning at Drake's Bay" (pp. 55-56). Ellipsis, which appears more often in these longer prose poems where an object or an event undergoes multiple transformations, strengthens and lends significance to the most fragmentary or apparently trivial detail. It allows for a proliferation of referentially discontinuous statements that reflect both the flux of reality and the associative energy of the psyche. Ellipsis, moreover, suggests in Bly's prose poems the act of contemplation itself, and corresponds to those "white spaces" between the stanzas in the poems of Silence where, Bly claimed,

the real poetry of the book was written. That the subject is never purely a subject, that the poet never frees himself from his liaison with the world--these facts are contained within the ellipsis. Typographically, too, ellipsis suggests psychic activity transposed to the page; the moment of transformation pressed into ink; the punctuated border joining the inward and outward worlds.

"The Large Starfish" (p. 55) is a splendid example of Bly's use of ellipses to signal psychic activity and transformation. As part of the larger sequence "The Point Reyes Poems" that constitutes the second and central section of the book, "The Large Starfish" is set in the coastal waters of California. It is a setting where the borders of two worlds blur into each the other: water and earth; inward world and outward world. Images from these separate worlds meet in this poem, and the line between reality and imagination is obliterated by means of ellipses. Its method tends toward what Baudelaire called "delicious obscurity,"¹⁷ arrived at by overwhelming the senses with detail:

It is low tide. Fog. I have climbed down the
cliffs from Pierce Ranch to the tide pools. Now
the ecstasy of the low tide, kneeling down, alone.
In six inches of water I notice a purple starfish
--with nineteen arms! It is a delicate purple,
the color of old carbon paper, or an attic dress
. . . at the webs between fingers sometimes a
more intense sunset red glows through. The
fingers are relaxed . . . some curl up at the tips
. . . with delicate rods . . . apparently globes
. . . on top of each, as at World's Fairs, waving

about. The starfish slowly moves up the groin of the rock . . . then back . . . many of its arms rolled up now, lazily, like a puppy on its back. One arm is especially active . . . and curves up over its body as if a dinosaur were looking behind him.

[Bly's ellipses/]

Bly's ellipses work to signal the starfish's rapid transformations. Beginning with its color, Bly sees the starfish as "old carbon paper," as "an attic dress," an "intense sunset." He compares the "globes" on its "fingers" to those "at World's Fairs" which revolve. It becomes "a puppy on its back," and finally "a dinosaur . . . looking behind him" (ellipsis mine). The poet's reality becomes the starfish's reality; and vice-versa. Out of the sea, the starfish becomes "a man," becomes the poet "blindly feeling" or "inseeing." And when the poet puts him "back in," the starfish continues with his watery life: "the snail-like feelers waving as if nothing had happened, and nothing has." For the starfish, it is true "nothing has happened" because it owns, as Lawrence wrote of the non-human mind, a "consciousness [which] is only dynamic and non-cerebral . . . [having] no mental life, but only an intensely vivid dynamic mind."²²

Hidden behind this prose poem's casual opening and apparent retiringness are exquisite revelations. The first is the "ecstasy" of the ocean at low tide, and of the poet stepping outside himself and sharing it. The shared ecstasy

suggests that the sharing of soul with the starfish has an erotic quality to it. This is clearly indicated later in the piece when Bly describes the "thousands of tiny tubes [that] begin rising . . . like a man looking for a woman" (p. 56, ellipsis mine). Generally, Bly has managed to capture the instinctual consciousness of the starfish, its "intensely vivid dynamic mind," by proceeding to do what comes naturally--write--in the most natural of forms--the prose poem.

In the previous prose poem, "The Dead Seal near McClure's Beach" (pp. 52-54), Bly engages in another "act of pure attention," an act of sympathy in which he recognizes a seal's ineluctable otherness. Arranged in two parts, this prose poem displays Baudelaire's "jibes of conscience" over the imminent death of a seal caused by an oil spill. The seal undergoes many transformations in Bly's two successive encounters with it: originally, "he looks like a brown log"; on closer inspection the "seal's skin looks like an old overcoat." Dying, he "looks like an old lady who has lost her hair." The phrase "He is dying" in part 1, echoed in part 2 by "He is taking a long time to die," underlines the sense of guilt that poet and reader--as humans responsible for the seal's unnecessary death--both share. This guilt is voiced even more emphatically in the admission contained in the penultimate sentence that confirms the seal's otherness: "You don't want to be touched by me." Bly leaves the seal

to his "pure death," as opposed to the corrupt and absurd human deaths due to the "assassinations" of those madly vying for power in an oil-thirsty world. The seal's death is a single example of the larger assassination of the world by men who value profits above the life of the planet. Because these men--the executives, the busy men--refuse to grant consciousness to Nature, refuse to hear "The weeping in the pueblos of the lily" (Silence, p. 27), we are forced to live in a world where our experience of wild creatures is restricted either to acquiescence to their extinction, or to desperate measures undertaken too late to try and prevent same.

Under these kinds of circumstances, 'wildlife' is all the more astonishing and valuable when it can be "touched." When Bly finds a salamander while walking in the afternoon, an apparently trivial experience is elevated to the level of epiphany:

I make a kind of pulpit of my hand, and turn him upright; his head and front legs look out at me, the hands resting on my crossing thumb....
When I roll my hand over, I see the long orange-black tail hanging down into the cathedral of the open palm.... [Bly's ellipses]

("Finding A Salamander on
Inverness Ridge," pp. 48-49)

Here is a fact of Nature, one of those many otherwise "dull, strange, despised things" which, when perceived by "the aroused intellect," to use Emerson's terms, is revealed as

"an epiphany of God."²³ As in Joyce's original use of the term, the epiphany, or "sudden spiritual manifestation,"²⁴ suggests a visitation of divinity in a common object. Hence Bly's makeshift "pulpit" and "cathedral" built out of his own fingers and palm, and his specifically symbolic "crossing" thumb (*italics mine*). As a sacred phenomenon, the salamander becomes potentially redemptive by the end of the prose poem, which opened with a very brief, casual reference to "The war still going on." In the final, rambling, associative sentence, Bly sees the salamander's tail as "some rudder on an immensely long boat, a rudder that can't be seen by those on board, who walk up and down, looking over the hand-rail." The tail, the salamander itself, perceived as holy simply because it lives, not only acts for Bly as a "rudder" to provide moral direction; as a particular example of Romantic "natural supernaturalism,"²⁵ it acts as a redemptive force. Nature in its non-striving spontaneity, as evidenced in the behavior of a starfish or a salamander, can lead man away from war-making to an abiding respect for all living things. In Taoist terms, this attitude is known as wu-wei (non-striving). Paradoxically, then, the direction the salamander, or that Nature as a whole can provide for man, is directionlessness.

Bly images this sense of directionlessness or purposelessness in "Waterfall Coming over a Cliff" (p. 29). Water

following its own course is the classical image of wu-wei, and in "Waterfall" it is described as "a deep plunge, loveless, floating," something "the meditator" can sometimes "glimpse." Purposelessness, or non-striving, takes the meditator out of himself, so that it is possible to forget "the name his father gave him [as he] sits silent for hours and then suddenly breaks out singing" ("A Rock Inlet on the Pacific," p. 35). Directionlessness, however, is more fully expressed in "Walking among Limantour Dunes":

Thinking of a child soon to be born, I hunch down
among friendly sand grains And the sand
grains love us, for they love whatever lives
without force, a young girl looking out over her
life, alone, without horses, with no map, a white
dress on Whatever is not rushing blindly
forward, the mole blinking at the door of his
crumbly mole Vatican, the salmon sensing in his
gills the Oregon waters crash down, or this planet
abandoned here at the edge of the universe, the
life floating inside the Pacific of the womb,
near the falls, feeling the breakers roaring.

(p. 40)

Here the poet's imagination reflects the peaceful existence of the sand which "lives without force," and of the mole, that creature of the underground, which here lives without "rushing blindly forward." The imagination moves underground too, by association, from one idea or image to the next, emancipated from the restrictions of the technological mind divided against itself and against the world it seeks to control by means of reason. Near the end of the piece Bly

returns to the original, peaceful thought "of a child soon to be born" in the example of that which "is not rushing blindly forward": "the life floating inside the Pacific of the womb, near the walls, feeling the breakers roaring."

In "November Day at McClure's" (p. 39), mood and meditation merge so that it is virtually impossible to say where one ends and the other begins:

Alone on the jagged rock at the south end of McClure's Beach. The sky low. The sea grows more and more private, as afternoon goes on, the sky comes down closer, the unobserved water rushes out to horizon, horses galloping in a mountain valley at night.

Here the diffusion of self is embodied in "the unobserved water," and in the "black ducks that fly desolate, forlorn, and joyful over the seething swells." Bly's interior life is at once "desolate, forlorn and joyful" in its experience of solitude, and he reveals to us these qualities of solitude in the manner of a concealed epiphany: "It is not our life we need to weep for. Inside us there is some secret." Bly does not actually reveal the secret, and the prose poem is all the more powerful precisely because the secret remains hidden. He leaves us only with the "eerie" feeling he has upon its discovery: "We are following a narrow ledge around a mountain, we are sailing on skeletal eerie craft over the buoyant ocean."

The two fairly brief prose poems which conclude the

first section of The Morning Glory, and which anticipate the central "The Point Reyes Poems"--"On the Rocks at Maui" (p. 34) and "A Rock Inlet on the Pacific" (p. 35)--as their titles suggest, are also set near water. In "On the Rocks at Maui," Bly wonderfully imagines the consciousness of a black crab that has climbed "up a searock sideways." He first describes the crab as "a demon listening in Aramaic," a remarkable description if only, once again, for the telescoping of time, since Aramaic was the lingua franca of the near east during the time of Christ. We thus sense the ancient nature of the crab, and sense also the more ancient quality of the stones he climbs over because Bly places them in a cosmic context: "stones with whirl-holes the shape of galaxies."

But the astonishing portion of this prose poem comes in the second paragraph, in the two repetitive run-on sentences which constitute the crab's consciousness:

I am not married, I have no parents, I wave my black claws and hurry over the rock. I love these with the seaweed clinging to them (they are stars), I am alone inside myself, I love whatever is like me, I leap out of the sea, I hold fast to a rock, no night-mother can pry me loose, I think many thoughts, I pray all day, and the seagrass, waving, is foolish, and I sway too, I am glad no cows come and eat me, I withdraw into the desert and return, I never want, I hurry through the womb-systems at night, I meet shining boulders, I fail, friends whisper to me in my dream that I have lost their friendship, I sleep next to women, I wake.

(p. 34)

What is remarkable here is not simply the poet's capacity to intuit what a crab might 'think,' but the paratactic confidence with which he "leaps" from one thought to the next. The repetition of "I" almost convinces us that it is a crab thinking these thoughts, and the short, predominantly monosyllabic phrases which it 'thinks' simulate the waving of its claws and its sideways motions over the rocks. We could, in fact, regard this prose poem as one of Bly's finest versions of "negative capability." Bly becomes the creature he observes, and in so doing--in monitoring the undulating vibrations of the sea and sea-creatures--Bly expands and realizes more of his own being. Yet the crab remains other. The coldness of the crab, its refusal to participate in emotion, confers on it a consciousness impossible to penetrate completely, while the abrupt manner with which Bly closes the prose poem--"I sleep next to women, I wake"--belies the crab's isolation by identifying it with the feminine.

In "A Rock Inlet on the Pacific," it is the otherness of the true or expanded self which is the subject:

The man meditating who has forgotten the name his father gave him sits silent for hours and then suddenly breaks out singing, the heart pumps, only the seawaters entering and leaving, jumping up nearly touching the tern's foot, the jellyfish opens and closes, the mouth longs for the salt water.

Paradoxically, the expanded self is a loss of self, which Bly expresses in zen-like fashion: the man "who has forgotten the name his father gave him" is reminiscent of the zen aphorism, 'the face you had before you were born.' The "meditating man" (Bly himself?) intuits the principle of purposelessness of external nature--specifically the source of all life on this planet, the sea--and diffuses himself in every direction. In other words, he liberates himself from the narrow fixation of mind and enters into a sympathetic relationship with the surrounding landscape. He participates in that which animates his surroundings and a spontaneous synthesis occurs. The inlet assumes a 'body' not unlike his own: it is "like an eyeball," its "nostrils feel the bite of the salt." The final image, however, confuses the "man meditating" with the anthropomorphized "inlet": "the mouth longs for the salt water." The ambiguity of the first definite article ("the") completes the synthesis.

The movements of the sea itself are forcefully represented by participial verbs: "sweeping," "howling," "climbing," "sloshing," "jumping," etcetera. There is a timelessness to their movement--"it goes on for centuries"--which Bly sees as an extension of the meditating mind freed from time. These participles, moreover, reflect the liberated mind's passive stream of associations and the unpredictable images that result: "mad sights climbing the walls." Yet the mind is able to reserve and organize these images, just as Nature

reserves and organizes its myriad parts. Thus Nature and art (Bly's prose poem) are organically linked in that each has as its foundation an organizing consciousness.

At the juncture of sea with land, Nature exhibits an exceptional energy, and so does the poet. Bly's more vigilant intuitions correspond to Nature's intensity. The sea reverberates; Bly's consciousness reverberates. Soon the reverberations fuse; there is no within and without. Nature becomes a continuous apparition; all things are transformed, as in "Sea Water Pouring Back over Stones":

Waves rush up, pause, and drag pebbles back around stones . . . pebbles going out . . . it is a complicated sound, as of small sticks breaking, or kitchens heard from another house, bodies turning over at night . . . then the wave comes down to the boulders, the draws out over the stones always wet--it is the gentleness of William Carlos Williams after his strokes . . . and the sound of harsh death waves racing up the roof of leopard stones, leaving a tiny rattling in the throat as they go out . . . and the ecstatic brown sand stretched out between stones, we know there are still young women who get angry.

(p. 50)

Ocean meeting land, then, is not a single place, but a place of multiplicity. Each reverberation constitutes its own universe, and corresponds with a human universe. The sound of seawater pouring over stones is the "gentleness of William Carlos Williams," the death rattle in the throat of us all. The movement of the waves lifts itself beyond the contours

of its own reality, "as if the earth were reverberating under the feet of one dancer" (p. 50). Thus the prose poem begins with a simple description of the waves as they live and resound, isolated, it would seem, from the poet by the very violence or gentleness which they embody as they define their universe. But suddenly, supplanting the passive intensity with which his senses absorb such violence and gentleness, there pour from Bly correspondent imaginings.

He hears

the note of Paradise carried to the Egyptian sands,
and I hear the driftwood far out singing, and the
great logs, fifty miles out, still floating in,
the water under the waters singing, what has not
yet come to the surface to float, years that are
still down somewhere below the chest, the long
trees that have floated all the way from the Pacific
islands, and the donkey the disciples will find
standing beside the white wall....

(pp. 50-51)

Out of the unconscious, out of "the water under the waters singing, what has not yet come to the surface" of consciousness, comes the final, astonishing image of the prose poem: "the donkey the disciples will find standing beside the white wall...." It is an image that suggests that all discoveries are miracles. The world itself scintillates miraculously, becomes a "note of Paradise" in which Bly hears the echo of Boehme's image of the world "as Paradise . . . the type of the heavenly pomp."²⁶ But there is nothing

less celestial than Bly's paradise, nothing less paradisaical than the "heavy underground roaring" of the ocean or of his corresponding intuitions. The literal flood of images that "come to the surface" of his consciousness not only occupies the scene, it creates the scene with a dilating energy that expands outward in space, and both forward and backward in time. As the waves echo in the depth of memory, Bly's imagination moves "fifty miles out," yet remains fixed. It moves both forward in time to the "years that are still down somewhere below the chest," and backward to images of an anterior life which, like the waves that "rush up," "pause" in his consciousness just long enough for him to record their content. So, in the sight and sound of waves pouring over stones, Bly can see and hear Christ's donkey; see and hear that miraculous moment out of the past as it reverberates through all time.

"The Point Reyes Poems," then, point up the richness of living in a physical world. This richness derives not simply from the objects that inhabit the world, but from the fact that each object is susceptible, at the hands of the poet, to infinite transformations. As objects that are perceived by the senses, they become interiorized, occupying a realm where they often find themselves out of context--and thus transformed--as other, earlier interiorized objects rise to the surface of consciousness beside them. As we know from our earlier investigations of this realm, the result of this

interiorization is often irrational, yet in such irrationality Bly expresses the infinite variations which all the facets of his existence can offer. In an irrational realm, then, waves can become "bodies turning over at night," and because there is "ecstatic brown sand stretched out between stones, "there are still young women who get angry."

For Bly, however, the spiritual resides in the physical. One prose poem in The Morning Glory where we witness this is "In The Courtyard of the Isleta Mission" (pp. 30-31). In this piece Bly sets in opposition what he sees as the rigid rationality of the Protestant mind that distrusts intuition, and the non-rational, non-linear "Indian" mind that operates primarily by intuitional means. He aligns the Indians with the spontaneous, organic world of "the ants and the wind," and with the world of shadows that the German priest shuns as mere superstition. These shadows, representing the powers of the unconscious, could be the "airiest impulses we have," if we chose to recognize them. The priest refuses to believe that "the coffins of the old priests" rise every spring. He attributes this rising to "the rising water table." The Indians, who are more capable of entertaining the possibility of miracles than the priest, resent the priest's renunciation of the annual miracle. So, "The Indians collected him one night, covered him with chains, threw him out of the car, padlocked the church, and closed the rectory."

They would rather leave the church--and themselves--in "the hands of the ants," than in the hands of the skeptical priest. Likewise, "if we [could] agree to put ourselves in the hands of the ants," if we learned to live like them, to become "detached" from "the wealth of the world" like the wind, we should have no need for miracles. The ants have their own heaven, "the purest ant heavens," and in this admission Bly acknowledges and celebrates the ants' otherness.

The sardonic tone of this prose poem is quite different from the only other one in the book which specifically concerns religious faith, "Christmas Eve Service at Midnight at St. Michael's," located in the third and final section. In this prose poem Bly displays a reverence for the traditional celebration of Christ's birth in the Catholic mass. In celebrating one of the most significant events through which Christians establish an eternal rapport with God and Christ, Bly once again renders the passage of time illusory:

At midnight the priest walks down one or two steps,
finds the infant Christ, and puts him into the
cradle beneath the altar, where the horses and
the sheep have been waiting.

(p. 73)

Christ's birth becomes the central moment in divine eternity and perfect totality. It is a moment, moreover, that marks the transformation of spirit into matter. The priest moves in a miraculous sphere which Bly represents with the "Christmas

pine, who is the one inside us, green both summer and winter," and with "the angel on the right of St. Michael's altar." These two images precipitate toward the eternal and also contradict the notion of duration by virtue of their transformative nature. The angel, of course, represents the coalescence of spirit and matter, while the pine represents the soul residing "inside" the body, that which never perishes, remaining "green" always.

But while the birth of Christ is an instant of metamorphosis that affirms life, it gives way to one which affirms death: the crucifixion.

Just after midnight, he [the priest] turns to face us, lifts up the dry wafer, and breaks it-- a clear and terrifying sound. He holds up the two halves . . . frightening . . . for like so many acts, it is permanent. With his arms spread, the cross clear on his white chasuble, he tells us that Christ intended to leave his body behind . . . it is confusing

(p. 77, Bly's ellipses)

Christ's death is also an instant detached from the flux of time. Symbolized by the breaking of the wafer (Christ's body), the death of Christ suggests the fragility of the human as opposed to the strength and immutability of the divine. The wafer, small as it is, breaks with "a clear and terrifying" cosmic immensity. As the most "permanent" of all acts in Christian theology, Christ's willed sacrifice imbues "so many acts" with religious significance. Yet for

Bly, Christ's intention "to leave his body behind" is "confusing." Why? The reason is framed by the two references to Bly's dead brother at the prose poem's outset and conclusion: the first reference is explicit--"My brother, who had been killed six months before, was absent"--and the second is disguised by means of transformation--"A large man is flying over the water with wings spread, a wound on his chest." Like Christ, Bly's brother is present by virtue of his absence.

In The Morning Glory, Bly does continue his attacks on the hard-hearted masculinity of American religion and politics. This is evident in the implied condemnation of the "German priest" in the aforementioned prose poem, and even more evident in "A Poem about Tennessee" (pp. 32-33). In this prose poem, we once again meet one of Bly's favorite political targets, Andrew Jackson, who "slept a good sleep, his dream of the Presidency bordered by women proud of him. . . ." Here, amid descriptions of wild Tennessee swampland, Bly's political concerns and moral outrage over American history return. We are not allowed to forget, amid the beauty of "Reelfoot Lake, Green Island Cutoff," Jackson's "murder of a race as a prudent policy" (Talking, p. 106). Thus, in the "Indian villages nearby, tears fill the sockets of the Indian grandmothers" as they look upon their grandsons, the grandfathers of whom were killed by "the flint-gun hung like Calvin over the fireplace."

Here, again, Bly contrasts the masculine, life-denying consciousness that sees Indians and blacks as inferior beings, with the feminine, life-giving consciousness, represented by the many water images, but especially by the tears of the Indian grandmothers. In the "exiled Mississippi water," "some dead fish float by like neglected wives." This image suggests the "neglected" and "exiled" feminine aspect of consciousness. Death images, like this one, abound; some of them are quite grotesque, and along with the repeated references to things "lonesome" or "lonely," they suggest the troubled history of this region of the Mississippi where "so many black bodies have floated home." This accounts for Bly's repeated description of the water as "heavy": "How heavy the water is . . . we are all here in the heavy waters." The water's heaviness embodies the grief and guilt Bly feels for those who have suffered the consequences of the Calvinist's flint-gun; the "tired women," the "many [Indian] husbands with English names." But despite his disdain of the Calvinist righteousness that was responsible for the deaths and grief of so many, the beauty of the lake (the "lily pads," the "cardinals in the bushes like red nuns," "the setting sun," "cypress knees breathing") and the presence of other "men who do care," Bly feels grateful to be where he is: "'I shall give thanks in Tennessee!'"

The beauty of the place is closely linked with death,

and brings to mind Stevens' pithy aphorism: "Death is the mother of beauty." In fact, in this prose poem death and beauty undergo mutual transformation, especially in the first paragraph. Bly notices first that there are some "lily pads" that "rise above the water, like hands held up to receive." In the next sentence, a "rotted carcass . . . on the shore" undergoes a series of transformations because of its uncertain appearance: "maybe a buffalo fish, or a pig or an immense beaver; now it is a rotted glove, with the hand still inside." The lily pad has become a dismembered hand, anticipating the image of "black bodies" that comes later in the prose poem. These bodies are the "reminders" that the metamorphosing carcass is "sending out." They are "reminders," too, of the European heritage of the American pioneers which is hidden in the prose poem's final image: "we come in, the shadows in Rembrandt, the black and white tiles on the floor, the map above on the wall." The syntax of this run-on sentence wonderfully collapses history, something which we have seen Bly do repeatedly in earlier work. Here, however, the compression of time is even more acute. The overhanging cypresses, by means of apposition, become "the shadows in Rembrandt." (The compression is enhanced by the fact that Bly does not say "in [a] Rembrandt" painting.) Also in apposition, the image of "the black and white tiles on the floor" is at once part of the imagined painting's content and

a symbol for the conflict between the races in the American south. The final image, "the map above on the wall" (it, too, apparently in distant apposition with "cypresses") fuses past with present as the final "reminder" of the place of origins of those who stole the water from the Indians: "'water that is ours,' the Indians said."

These polemical poems are more the exception than the rule in The Morning Glory. Most of the prose poems are works of magic, alchemical hymns of hyperbole that celebrate the physical. Bly sees everything in a stupor of excitement, like a child. As with Rimbaud's Illuminations, Bly's prose poems are often designed to express brief flashes of new sensations, each of which takes place only once, and of what those sensations evoke, as the unconscious passes into it. The recording of these sensations in The Morning Glory is like the process of "convalescence" which Baudelaire associated with the vision of childhood. There are several poems in the book in which Bly evokes the world of the child: "My Three-Year-Old-Daughter Brings Me A Gift," "Climbing up Mount Vision with My Little Boy," and "August Rain." These poems are convalescent exercises in the

sense that they relieve the poet from the burden of time, history, and the atrocities of the everyday world. In "Climbing up Mount Vision," Bly turns the prose poem into a fairy tale with a happy ending, and captures the innocence of a small child's mind that can be so refreshing:

The land on top is bare, sweeping, forbidding--so unlike a little boy's mind. I asked him what he liked best about the whole walk. He said it was Bethany (an eight-year-old friend of Mary's) going peepee in her pants while hiding.

(p. 44)

The child's mind is rich and complex, not "bare"; painfully exacting, not "sweeping"; inviting and curious, not "forbidding." And these are the qualities that, in general, characterize the prose poems in The Morning Glory. Their penchant for detail, of course, is their most child-like characteristic. Moreover, in their rendering the world a plenum of continuous movement and infinite activity, the prose poems of this book reflect the child's sinuous and expansive imagination.

The child's vision of the world is best approximated, perhaps, in "August Rain" (pp. 69-70). The prose poem describes a cloudburst "After a month and a half without rain." Bly is sitting on the porch watching 'he rain fall. The many tiny events going on around him--"bubbles slide toward the puddle edge, become crowded and disappear"--are better expressed in a prose poem than in a 'lived' poem

because "In the rolling rhythms of a [*'lived'*] poem it is difficult to put in these 'insignificant details'" (Talking, p. 193). In commenting further on the appropriateness of the prose poem as a medium for recording such an experience, Bly has remarked: "I was astounded at how many separate events were taking place only once. Each needed to be given space in the poem separately, and I was glad for the prose poem form" (Talking, p. 115).

The many separate events of the rainstorm provide apt accompaniment for the poet's associative ruminations:

The older we get the more we fail, but the more we fail the more we feel a part of the dead straw of the universe, the corners of barns with cowdung twenty years old, the chairs fallen back on their heads in deserted houses, the belts left hanging over the chairback after the bachelor has died in the ambulance on the way to the city.

(p. 70)

The rain and its steady rhythm are a kind of baptism that restores in Bly the convalescent vision of childhood: "I feel triumphant, without need of money, far from the grave." But though he feels "far from the grave," Bly refuses to ignore his mortality, for through it he becomes one with "the dead straw of the universe." Here identification and non-identification, the "I" and the "not I," are synthesized, and Bly is humbly and humourously transfigured into the anonymous: "cowdung twenty years old." Human lives and their

failures are determined largely by natural processes, by the anonymous. Thus Bly completely strips himself of the "I" and passes over into the "us," the pronoun that governs the book, which in turn governs and is governed by the things of the universe:

These objects belong to us, they ride us as the child holding on to the dog's fur, these appear in our dreams, they are more and more near us, coming in slowly from the wainscoting, they make our trunks heavy, accumulating between trips, they lie against the ship's side, and will nudge the hole open that lets the water in at last.

(p. 70)

Here is what Lawrence called the "living wholeness"²⁷ of mortality. Stripped of the ego, the poet recognizes this wholeness everywhere--in as many anonymous objects as there are anonymous raindrops.

We can see this and almost every other prose poem in The Morning Glory as a modern variation of the "Romantic Moment" in which we "see into the life of things." M.H. Abrams argues that the "modern Moment," as an echo of the "Romantic Moment," "is frequently connected with the concept of freshness of sensation, as well as with the discovery of the charismatic virtue of a trivial object or event, and it is expounded both in secular and in religious frames of reference."²⁹ The Morning Glory, then, is a collection of "modern" moments against a background of Romantic

consciousness in which "an ordinary object or event suddenly blazes into revelation."³⁰ As a form, the prose poem manages to avoid the self-consciousness which so disturbed the Romantics. It is a simple, unassuming, unpretentious form, the syntax and tone of which are casual and suggest direct and spontaneous honesty in dealing with the object at hand. Bly, like Ponge, refuses to exploit the objects that captivate his attention; he "has confidence that things are fruitful and unlike the Imagists and objectivists, nourishing, not hostile, not emptied of spirit, not inferior, not unreal" ("Two Stages," 107). Lacking usual conjunctions and relative pronouns, Bly's prose poems reflect this "confidence" in the object: their language sparkles with the essential, yet by means of rapid association and astonishing metaphor Bly "refreshes sensation." His objects become all the more "nourishing" as they are transformed from essence to quintessence. By transforming the "wild things of the universe" (p. 71), Bly once more echoes the poetic utterances of Orpheus who caused the trees themselves to attend his song.

II. This Body is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood

The body is the first proselyte the Soul makes.
Our life is but the Soul made known by its fruits,
the body. The whole duty of man may be expressed
in one line--Make to yourself a perfect body

--Thoreau

But first the notion that man has a body distinct
from his soul is to be expunged....

--Blake

The prose poems of This Body Is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood³¹ are not studies of objects or scenes or events the way the prose poems of The Morning Glory are. Although there is a good deal of description in the book, that description remains, as it did in Silence in the Snowy Fields, subordinate to emotional issues and meditations. The familiar subjects of dreams, waking from sleep, and communion with Nature abound here, but they are subjects ancillary to the poet's celebration of the flesh. This preoccupation with the body is also a recurring subject in Bly's poetry, but in This Body it becomes a book-length, piece-by-piece fascination.³² Bly expresses this fascination, once again, in transformational imagery that captures the myriad transformations the body makes in its gestures toward the responses to the impulses of Nature, and this part of the chapter will devote itself to studying the nature of those gestures and responses.

When Bly uses the term "body" here, we should remember from our consideration of Light that he does not mean to distinguish flesh from spirit; for Bly flesh and spirit are

both aspects of the same cellular intelligence that inheres in life itself. Moreover, he does not accept the Christian view of flesh and spirit as being diametrically opposed, or of the spirit as that which has descended via grace and which must struggle to escape from its sin-ridden prison. The body for Bly is not, moreover, distinct from mind; it is, rather, that Dionysian vessel which contains all the organs, only one of which is the mind, the organ through which consciousness is filtered. The body, furthermore, is in a constant state of becoming, or transformation. Its very existence, in fact, is the 'result' of transformation; is transformation itself. Always in an 'in-between stage'--in between birth and death--the body is forever in a process that appears to have an end, but which is actually part of an endless cosmic process: life out of death out of life. The body in its transformations is, ultimately, a manifestation of the mysterious nature of this cosmic process, mediated through the downward path of the sensestoward that which is indirectly related to this mystery: the unconscious.

It is through the body (the senses) that we know the world, and in This Body, Bly presents the body's transformations as it vacillates between the two emotional poles of grief and ecstasy. The body is the source of ecstasy--"for two days I [the poet] gathered ecstasies from my own body" (p. 47)--and also of depression: the body "is a brilliant

being, locked in the prison of human dullness" (p. 23). In either case, Bly endows the body with a latent will, since "it offers to carry us for nothing--as the ocean carries logs--so on some days the body wails with its great energy, it smashes up the boulders, lifting small crabs, that flow around the sides" (p. 19). Bursting with great energy, the body is an "ocean" unto itself, containing the innumerable forms of life an ocean contains; and, also like the ocean, the body performs its function "with no sentimentality, only the ruthless body performing its magic, transforming each of our conversations into energy, changing our scholarly labors over white-haired books into certainty and healing power, and our cruelties into an old man with missing fingers" (p. 29, italics mine). Whether it is being cruel or healing, the body is continuously "transforming" itself. The body, in other words, is all things: "the body is the great poem," as Stevens says, and contains the universe.

Bly's version of this universe-in-the-body is infinitely varied. The body is

the wind that carries the henhouse down the road dancing, and an instant later lifts all four walls apart. It is the horny thumbnail of the retired railway baron, over which his children skate on Sunday, it is the forehead bone that does not rot, the woman priest's hair still fresh among Shang ritual things....

(p. 51)

It is a young hawk sitting on a tree by the Mississippi, in early spring, before any green has appeared on the earth beneath.

(p. 59)

The body, for Bly, is both witness to and part of the phenomena of Nature. In its intimate associations with other phenomena and their consciousness, the body discovers "other worlds" (News, p. 9). For example, in "The Origin of the Praise of God," a prose poem which is dedicated to Lewis Thomas and his The Lives of a Cell, Bly discovers

. . . the magnetic fields of other bodies, and every smell we take in the communities of protozoa see, and a being leaps up toward it, as a horse rears at the starting gate. When we come near each other, we are drawn down into the sweetest pools of slowly circling energies, slowly circling smells. And the protozoa know there are odours the shape of oranges, of tornadoes, of octopuses . . . [ellipsis mine]. The sound that pours from the finger tips awakens clouds of cells far inside the body, and beings unknown to us start out in a pilgrimage to their Saviour, to their holy place. Their holy place is a small black stone, that they remember from Protozoic times, when it was rolled away from a door . . . and it was after that they found their friends, who helped them to digest the hard grains of this world. . . . The cloud of cells awakens, intensifies, swarms . . . the cells dance inside beams of sunlight so thin we cannot see them. . . . To them each ray is a vast palace, with thousands of rooms [Bly's ellipses].

(pp. 35-36)

In The Lives of a Cell, Thomas demonstrates that the energy organizing the tiniest portions of our being has intelligence,

foresight, and memory. In his prose poem for Thomas, Bly sees infinity not in a grain of sand, but in the almost invisible "cloud of cells" that defines, on the most basic, yet most complex, sacred, and miraculous level, our humanity. To Bly our humanity--the smallest particle of it--is holy, and is that which constitutes "The Origin of The Praise of God."

In this prose poem, and throughout This Body in general, Bly presents all matter as intelligent and as having a disposition toward the psychological. Echoing Boehme once again, Bly disdains "the sleeping man [who] is all withdrawn into himself" (p. 17) and who refuses to grant matter consciousness. In this sense, Bly's conception of Nature is not unlike the hylozoism espoused by such notable thinkers and philosophers as William James, F.C.S. Schiller, F.W.G. von Schelling, G.J. Fechner, Josiah Royce, and, going back through Italian and German Renaissance philosophers, Paracelsus, Giralamo Cardano, Bernadino Telesio, Giordano Bruno and Tomaso Campanella, to Thales, Anaximenes, Empedocles and Plotinus. Such contemporary figures as A.N. Whitehead, Samuel Alexander, Charles Hartshorne and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin are among those who also believe that matter has an inner or psychological being. Bly would also include in this list Boehme, his spiritual father, who "founded his theology on the idea that there is a consciousness inside nature" (News, p. 9). In addition, as literary examples of

of this stream of belief, Bly offers the poetry of Wordsworth, Blake, Holderlin, Goethe, Novalis, Keats, Smart, Thoreau, Rilke, Lawrence, Lorca, Jimenez, Machado, and Neruda (News, pp. 79-207). For these (predominantly Romantic) poets, as for Bly, matter is, in opposition to Plato or Berkeley, intrinsically active, not essentially inert or passive. Thus it is through hylozoism that Bly recovers the profound natural energy from which man has been disconnected.

Bly senses this energy inside the smallest snowflake, which he believes has a life of its own of which it is conscious:

The light settles down in front of each snowflake,
and the dark rises up behind it,
and inside its own center it lives!

("Walking to the Next Farm,"
p. 32)

Each snowflake, like each cell in the body, is part of what A.N. Whitehead would call a "structured society,"³³ a self-sustaining system whose existence is its reason for existence. If we consider this in gnostic terms, what Bly uses when he looks at the snowflake in such a contemplative state is its "aura." "In the aura what is known knows the knower, what is seen sees the seer...."³⁴ Bly sees, moreover, an intimate correspondence between the "structured society" of snowflakes and the "structured society" of the body's cells,

and so the description of one society is an echo of the other:

The sunlight lays itself down before the protozoa,
the night opens itself out behind it,
and inside its own energy it lives!

(p. 35)

Walking through a field of "powerful snow energy" then, Bly experiences a kind of rebirth, "as if a new body were rising, with tremendous swirls in its flow" (p. 31). Like Josiah Royce, Bly does not regard the psychic existence of inorganic bodies as being inferior to that of human beings or animals. Royce viewed the difference mainly as one of speed, and argued that the "fluent" nature of the inner life of inorganic "structured societies" tends to go unnoticed because of its "very vast slowness."³⁵ This slowness, Royce insisted, does not indicate "a lower type of consciousness."³⁶ Recognizing this, Bly writes:

Then what is asked of us? To stop sacrificing one energy for another. They are not different energies anyway, not "male" or "female," but whirls of different speeds as they revolve. We must learn to worship both, and give up the idea of one god. . . . I taste the snow lying on a branch. It tastes slow. It is as slow as the whirl in the boulder lying beneath the riverbed Its swirls take nine thousand years to complete, but they too pull down the buffalo skin boats into their abysses, many souls with hair go down.

(pp. 31-32, Bly's ellipses)

Male-female; stone-snow; the energy whirling in each is different in degree, not kind. Female energy is not subordinate to male; human energy is not superior to snow energy, or to stone energy. Organic and inorganic bodies must not be regarded as belonging to two separate worlds. There is constant interaction between them. They are composed of similar ingredients and acted on by similar forces. If this were all there was to say, however, Bly would simply be begging his own question, "what is asked of us?" We could object to this view of matter and argue that, unlike animals and plants, objects like boulders are lifeless and static and rigid, lacking any spontaneity. But this is merely to apply a bias based on Aristotelian theory, subsumed by the materialist scientists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that matter is inherently and absolutely passive. For Bly, this notion, whether in its ancient or modern form, is simply untenable. A boulder for him is by no means devoid of inner impulses. Humans treat boulders as inanimate, Schiller argues in his Studies in Humanism, because of "their immense spiritual remoteness from us,"³⁷ and because of "our inability to understand them."³⁸ Although Schiller contends that a stone does not "apprehend us as spiritual beings,"³⁹ he insists that it "is aware of us and affected by us on the plane on which its existence is passed."⁴⁰ Its "'awareness' can apparently be shown by being hard and heavy and colored

and space-filling, and so forth. And all these things the stone is and recognizes in other bodies."⁴¹ Now a stone, Schiller continues, does not indeed "know or care" whether a human being gets hurt by it; it simply plays "its part and responds according to the measure of its capacity."⁴² Thus in "Walking to the Next Farm," Bly's boulder "responds" by pulling down "the buffalo skin boats into their abysses."

All matter for Bly, therefore, exhibits will in the form of energy ("whirls of different speeds"). Yet Bly is not content merely to celebrate natural energy, or to glorify it for its own sake. Absorbed by his imagination, the energy that takes him through nature to other worlds is that which allows him to telescope time and space as he has done so often:

As the Tibetan exhales, fifty pale men melt back into the ground. Huns fade back into the forest around Vienna, the doctor leaps up from his desk, he curses the stupidity of his life, grinds his teeth. Lenin refuses to eat with others. The carriage goes on through the night.

(p. 31)

Natural energy releases material from the unconscious where time past is contained in time present. "Tibetans," "Huns" and "Lenin" co-exist as the imagination travels through time like a "carriage /that/ goes on through the night."

In This Body Bly celebrates the most common yet most miraculous manifestation of this energy in the Minnesota

landscape: snow. We remember from Bly's earlier poems that snow, like the body, carried with it both positive and negative associations. It could stand for the pleasure of solitude and protective privacy, as in "Three Kinds of Pleasures" (Silence, p. 11). On the other hand, it could signify the cold, impersonal, life-in-death existence of business executives, as in "The Executive's Death" (Light, p. 3). In the prose poems of This Body, snow is described most often in a tone which emphasizes its mysterious, and sometimes portentous, silence:

It makes the sound the porgies hear near the
ocean floor, the sound the racer hears before
his death, the sound that lifts the buoyant
swimmer in the channel.

("Snow Falling on Snow," p. 49)

Despite its silence, the snow contains enormous powers of transformation: for example, as the snow keeps falling, "four pigeon-grass heads" become "heron legs in white morning fog" (p. 49). And in "Snowed In" (pp. 55-56), when electrical power has been knocked out by a three-day storm, Bly perceives a powerful connection between a plant in blossom in his writing shack and the snow swirling by outside "at forty miles an hour." Each "structural society" is a tender consciousness that shares a common purpose, or purposelessness, with the other:

So there are two tendernesses looking at each other, two oceans living at a level of instinct surer than mine . . . yet in them both there is the same receiving, the longing to be blown, to be shaken, to circle slowly upward, or sink down toward roots . . . one cold, one warm, but neither wants to go up geometrically floor after floor, even to hold up a wild-haired roof, with copper dragons, through whose tough nose rain water will pour . . .

(p. 55, Bly's ellipses)

These "two tendernesses" express the precise relationship between the two realms of being--between the inner, unconscious life and the conscious, external world--separated here only by a pane of glass which acts as a kind of mediator between the plant (the unconscious) and the snow (the world). The dynamism of the two--the reaching plant, the falling snow--suggests an instinctive relationship between the two. As in "Six Winter Privacy Poems" (Sleepers, pp. 3-4), and the 'object' poems of The Morning Glory, the snow and the blossoms of "Snowed In" are natural examples of wu-wei (non-striving). And when that gentle energy carries over into the human realm, "two tendernesses" merge in the physical act of love:

A man and woman sit quietly near each other. In the snowstorm millions of years come close behind us, nothing is lost, nothing rejected, our bodies are equal to the snow in energy. The body is ready to sing all night, and be entered by whatever wishes to enter the human body singing. . . .

(p. 56, Bly's ellipsis)

But when the connection between "two tenderesses" is severed or blocked in the human realm, not only does the body become depressed and sexually frustrated or "knotted," as Bly puts it, but the soul shrinks, for the soul is the body:

When the sperm wants to move and does not, then it is as if the earth were not made for me at all, and I cannot walk with the cricket voyaging over his Gobi of wood chips; he is too free for me. I hear a howling in the air.

And what the soul offers, we never see clearly, though spears fly through the air, crossing above our heads . . . and the naked old man walks by the ecstatically grieving sea, by the tumbling waters And how can the soul walk without its body? When its own seed stops the wheel, then the body lets nothing through its pores, it longs to groan and stretch out, to walk in procession shaking the sistrum, to disappear into the fog

. . . .
And it is knotted. The sun hunches over and walks with its eyes on the ground, the moon hardens, it will not pass away, it refuses to become the sickle, but it holds up its face at the window The water goes back disappointed to the root, the house of sticks falls, we stand alone on the plain. . . .

("When the Wheel Does Not Move,"
p. 45)

When the life force is blocked, the soul becomes dessicated, becomes a "Gobi" of its own, and the poet truly is "locked in the prison of human dullness" (p. 23). Thus even a cricket, which apparently is Bly's favorite insect as a signaller of emotional states, is "too free" for him. Alienation sets in; the poet labors under an existential

despair: "it is as if the earth were not made for me at all." Events in the natural world correspond with the inner experience of dessication. "The sun hunches over," "the moon hardens," and "The water goes back disappointed to the root." The last of these images, and that of the "house of sticks" collapsing, are graphic representations of frustrated sexual desire and detumescence. The final image--"we stand alone on the plain"--crystallizes the angst of the existential situation of standing outside (ex sistere) experience, severed from the life principle within and without.

"Finding the Father" (p. 19) describes the severed connection between the "two tenderesses" of father and child (presumably a son):

Someone knocks on the door, we do not have time to dress. He wants us to come with him through the blowing and rainy streets, to the dark house. We will go there, the body says, and there find the father whom we have never met, who wandered in a snowstorm the night we were born, who then lost his memory, and has lived since longing for his child, whom he saw only once . . . while he worked as a shoemaker, as a cattle herder in Australia, as a restaurant cook who painted at night. When you light the lamp you will see him. He sits there behind the door . . . the eyebrows so heavy, the forehead so light . . . lonely in his whole body, waiting for you.

It is the "body" which follows the anonymous guide to the reunion with the father "we have never met"; i.e., the father of spiritual consciousness, of non-rationality, whom Bly believes was destroyed by the Industrial Revolution (News,

p. 33). We feel the lonely, "heavy" grief of the father in the sonorous closed vowels that populate the passage, in the plodding rhythms created by a surplus of commas, and especially in the pair of ellipses which bring the piece to a slow close. Yet, as in the poems of Light, there is an ecstatic energy that is the by-product of the body's grief; the energy waiting to be tapped and which is contained in the final phrase set off by a comma, "waiting for you."

Human energy, the energy of the body, is most concentrated in the unconscious, according to Bly, and manifests itself in dreams and their transliteration into art. We tend to associate creative energy solely with the mind, but Bly's concept of the unconscious as "the underneath-ocean-darkness path" that the body follows in its physical transformations suggests a larger source for that energy. Elizabeth Sewell reminds us that to divide body from mind is to underestimate "the body's forms of thought and knowledge."⁴³ She points out that, "for the living individual, the body is the original generator of forms,"⁴⁴ and that the "body mates with forms no less than the mind does."⁴⁵ This is why we say: the legs of a chair, the arms or face of the clock, a chest of drawers, etcetera. The body partakes in the gesture of naming, and so we apprehend the particulars of experience as an integrated 'body' of details. This is not to say that we are all narcissists, perceiving the world only as a reflection

of ourselves; rather, it is to suggest that we apprehend the world's 'body images,' and the best way to express those 'body images,' Bly feels, is through the prose poem:

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 snowsuit . . . the body sees detail after detail. An instant later the mind enters and says: "That is children playing."

(Talking, p. 115, Bly's ellipses)

The body, moreover, does not translate form "into pictures," but "calls forth from the body a physical response, [that] is perceived as an image, if that is the right word, by the body which is the source of all forming activity."⁴⁶ This explains Bly's hostility toward Imagism, which he considers merely to be trafficking in pictures, and it accounts for his insistence on the "physicalness of the image" (Talking, p. 259) as it is expressed by the entire body.

The central image of these prose poems--the book's very title--is especially physical. It is another "of" phrase which transforms Bly's body--the human body in general--into a sacred vessel made from the aroma of ancient camphor laurel (camphor was used by the Alchemists as a transforming

agent) and gopherwood, which, in Genesis 6:14 is the material God orders Noah to use to build the Ark: "Make thee an ark of gopher wood." In transforming the body into an Ark, Bly offers it up as the Word made flesh; a manifestation of the divine energy (he does not use the term God) which governs the cosmos:

My friend, this body is made of camphor and gopherwood. Where it goes, we follow, even into the Ark. As the light comes in sideways from the west over damp spring buds and winter trash, the body comes out hesitatingly, and we are shaken, we weep, how is it that we feel no one has ever loved us?

("The Left Hand," p. 15)

The body is a guide we follow; and even if it does lead us into the storms of life, and we hesitate to follow, we have no choice. We are grounded in the body, and in its endless transformations it is "calling us into what is possible." The body speaks its own language which, as well as having its own internal 'grammar' of cells and organs, as it were, "holds its protective walls around us" (p. 79) as it communicates with, and tries to make sense out of, the forms of the external world:

We talk all morning of the confusion of others, and in daylight the car slides off the road, I give advice in public as if I were adult, that night in a dream I see a policeman holding a gun to the head of a frightened girl, who is blindfolded, we console each other, and opening a National Geographic see an old woman lying with her mouth open.

(p. 29)

The quick leaps and wild associations of this run-on sentence suggest emotional energy rather than logical energy. The 'method' of this passage--and that of the book as a whole, with its lack of conjunctions, relative pronouns, and conventional narrative links--was anticipated by Lawrence in Phoenix (I) as "thinking emotionally or passionately, thinking and feeling at the same time."⁴⁷ When Bly travels the "underneath-ocean-darkness path," as Lawrence did, he does

not think rationally: and therefore, and therefore, and therefore. Instead, the mind makes curious swoops and circles. It touches the point of pain or interest, then sweeps away again in a cycle, coils round and approaches again the point of pain or interest. There is a curious spiral rhythm, and the mind approaches again and again to the point of concern . . . as [it] stoops to the quarry, then leaves it without striking, soars, hovers, turns, swoops, stoops again, still does not strike, yet is nearer, nearer, reels away again, wheels off into the air, even forgets, quite forgets, yet again turns, bends, circles slowly, swoops and stoops again, until at last there is the closing in and the clutch of a decision or a resolve.⁴⁸

If we replace Lawrence's "mind" with Bly's "body," we recognize Bly's style in these prose poems. A particular "point of pain or interest" provides a springboard for Bly's leaps or "swoops" away from rational discourse and "the organizing mind" (Talking, p. 118). In fact, Bly's leaps or "swoops" are so "curious," as Lawrence puts it, that they render a definite exegesis of many passages virtually impossible. It seems as if they demand multiple exegesis;

or, perhaps, they demand that every reader be his or her own exegete. This is not to say that This Body is unintelligible; the wild flights to "other worlds" may indeed be private, but they correspond with the emotional patterns and rhythms hiding in the darker regions of the reader's body. As with the extemporaneous poems of Silence, the prose poems of This Body lack 'technique,' not because Bly is lazy or incompetent, but because he is intent on expressing original (intuitional) ideas or emotions rather than those already known and therefore obscured by organized thought: in Lawrence's words, "therefore, and therefore, and therefore." In This Body, "the unconscious and the body move in and break up that mind organization" (Talking, p. 118) and replace it with "a being inside us which can use . . . unconscious images as food" (Talking, p. 118). This movement is a movement away from what Jung calls "directed or logical thinking . . . a thinking which adjusts itself to actual conditions, where we . . . imitate the succession of objectively real things, so that the images in our mind follow after each other in the same strictly causal succession as the historical events outside our mind."⁴⁹

As individual bodies that compose a "structured society" themselves, the prose poems of This Body speak to one another in that inasmuch as each phrase or sentence or poem has its own "curious spiral rhythm" and flies its own course, each

one is pulled down by the gravity of its own body to a level of personal myth where meaning floats just beneath the surface of each word and each transformation. Thus the body is not only "made of camphor and gopherwood" (p. 15), it is "food for the thousand dragons of the air"; "full of the bales of sleep"; and made of "herbs and gopherwood" (p. 23); "of bone and excited protozoa" (p. 35); "of energy compacted and whirling" (p. 51). These metamorphoses are merely the body's awareness of itself in the process of change, and of the individual prose poem's body extending beyond itself toward the "society" or sequence as a whole.

Although these central and unifying (and sometimes surreal) images of the book are derived from Christian sources, the tone of This Body more strongly echoes Bly's "versions" of Kabir and the "bhakti tradition" (Kabir, p. 65), which sees the body as divine and worships "heart-love, feeling, dancing . . . love of color, of intensity, of male-female poles, avoidance of convention" (Kabir, p. 65). In This Body, Bly even addresses the reader as Kabir does, using the familiar "My friend . . ." to introduce an idea or perhaps an entire poem. In "Going Out to Check the Ewes" (p. 23), Bly begins: "My friend, this body," echoing Kabir's "Friend, listen: the God whom I love is inside" (Kabir, p. 6). In "A Dream of What Is Missing" (p. 27), Bly also sounds very much like Kabir talking about the "Secret One"

(Kabir, p. 29), or the "Guest" (Kabir, p. 35), when he writes:

The dream said that The One Who Sees the Whole does not have the senses, but the longing for the senses. That longing is terrible, and terrifying--the herd of gazelles running over the savannah--and intense and divine, and I saw it lying over the dark floor . . . in layers there. The one who thinks does not have feeling, but the longing for feeling--that longing makes the lines of force at the bottom of Joseph's well.

(p. 27, Bly's ellipses)

Just as Kabir combines "ecstatic Sufism" with Hindu sobriety (Kabir, p. 62), Bly combines in this poem Kabir's didactic, meditative diction with the disturbing mysteriousness of the Biblical parable of Joseph's well.

The prose poems of This Body mark another spiral in Bly's continuing movement toward visionary ecstasy. Yet, paradoxically, the movement inward does not estrange the poet from the world; it restores his unconscious identity with it. He sees in a minute particular--an ant hurrying "up its mound of dirt" (p. 43)--correspondence with the microscopic intelligence^s travelling within himself. Thus the human body and the body of the world--the universe--are one, and in their naming and re-naming Bly loves and praises their shared consciousness, like "the first man who wrote down this joy clearly, for we cannot remain in love with what we cannot name . . ." (p. 59).

Bly's use of the prose poem in both books is finally a reaction against what he sees as pluralist consciousness (Talking, p. 193)--the refusal to pay attention to detail--and against the refusal to grant matter consciousness. His prose poems are contemporary examples of a stream of poetry which has been traditionally designated as Romantic, but which Bly refers to as poetry of "twofold consciousness" (News, pp. 79-207). Bly speaks from a position of isolation in a world where men regard Nature as being void of consciousness, as something which can be manipulated and altered irrevocably by technology for the sake of "progress." It is here, in celebrating "poems of twofold consciousness"--Nature's as well as man's--that Bly most clearly echoes the sentiments of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats in their unilateral disdain for the rationalist philosophies that reduce Nature to an unconscious and therefore exploitable set of laws, and for the "elder poets" who consequently misrepresent "the visible universe." Bly quotes a lengthy passage from Wordsworth's 1815 Preface in this regard, and part of the quotation is worth repeating here:

Now, it is remarkable that, excepting the nocturnal Reverie of Lady Winchelsea, and a passage or two in the Windsor Forest of Pope, the poetry of the period intervening between the publication of Paradise Lost and the Seasons does not contain a single new image of external nature; and scarcely presents a familiar one which it can be inferred that the eye of the

Poet had been steadily fixed upon his object, much less that his feelings had urged him to work upon it in the spirit of genuine imagination [italics mine]. To what a low state knowledge of the most obvious and important phenomena had sunk, is evident from the style in which Dryden has executed a description of Night in one of his Tragedies, and Pope his translation of the celebrated moonlight scene in the Iliad. A blind man, in the habit of attending accurately to descriptions casually dropped from the lips to those around him, might easily depict these appearances with more truth. . . . If these two distinguished writers could habitually think that the visible universe was of so little consequence to a poet, that it was scarcely necessary for him to cast his eyes upon it, we may be assured that those passages of the elder poets which faithfully and poetically describe the phenomena of nature, were not at that time holden in much estimation, and that there was little accurate attention to those appearances.

(News, pp. 11-12)

What Wordsworth--and therefore Bly--is criticizing here is not simply the fact that the poet has invariably misrepresented Nature by not keeping his eye "steadily fixed upon his object," but that "his feelings had [not] urged him to work upon it in the spirit of genuine imagination." It is not enough merely to imitate Nature; the talented poet may certainly do this but it is the poet who has genius who can create after the fashion of Nature herself. The relationship between the two such perforce be organic.

Earl Wasserman, in his essay "The English Romantics: The Grounds of Knowledge," has succinctly summarized how four Romantic poets achieve an organic unity with Nature.

He begins with Wordsworth who, because he "derives from the [eighteenth century's] empirical and associative doctrines, accomplishes the task by assimilating "the outer world to the mind, to absorb object into subject."⁵⁰ "Keats, who is Wordsworth's exact antithesis . . . absorbs the self into the essence of the object, and therefore he condemned Wordsworth's inversion of this relationship as the 'egotistical sublime.'"⁵¹ Shelley anticipates the phenomenological philosophy of Husserl and his followers by denying any division whatsoever between subject and object, but does so not because objects cannot exist independently of consciousness, but because such dualism is the result of "the whole falsity of our mortal condition."⁵² Coleridge, much more of a philosopher-theoretician than the others, and drawing heavily on the German philosophy of his day, offered an extremely sophisticated--and often confusing--method of resolving the subject-object paradox. Essentially, Coleridge reconciles the phenomenal world of objects with the nominal world of reason by asserting "I am" and then developing the "'I am'" in the "'it is.'"⁵³

All four poets desired a dissolution of opposites; and while Wordsworth and Keats opt for the sympathetic power of the imagination to achieve the task, and while Shelley and Coleridge employ a more active power, their differences should not be emphasized, but rather their shared desires,

desires which are similar to those Robert Bly holds.

Of these four, Bly has more in common with Wordsworth and Coleridge in his attitude toward the natural world. In 1802, Coleridge wrote, in "Dejection: An Ode," "we receive but what we give,"⁵⁴ suggesting that there is within the human being an inherent consciousness of Nature. And Bly, in 1979, in explaining how we become attracted to objects in Nature, writes:

. . . inside the human being watching the waterfall there is an inner waterfall, an inner field of wheat with three crows over it, an inner grove of trees. What I am saying is this: inside the "human consciousness" there is a small bit of "tree consciousness." When that "tree consciousness" sees a large tree out there, it joins it, even over miles of air, and the man feels union with the tree. That is the experience called "The Garden of Eden," walking in the Garden of Eden, knowing that there is, in Wordsworth's phrasing, "something far more deeply interfused."

(News, p. 211)

Both passages stress a sense of "I" and "not I." The imagination confronts an object and feels "I am that." Keats explained it as "negative capability," which, from a Freudian perspective could be seen as a denial or abandonment of the ego. From an Eastern perspective, which is as

we have seen very often the one Bly often assumes, the denial of the ego is essential in "enlightening" one's consciousness. Only after this has been achieved will the subject's resistance to control feeling from outside disappear. Then the balancing or reconciling process--of subject with object in western terms; the more resonant yin with yang in eastern--comes into full effect; not by intention on the part of the subject, but only as it is seen that the feeling of being the subject, the ego, is itself part of the stream of experience and does not remain outside it in a controlling posture. The subject literally becomes an object, or an inseparable pole or terminal in an electric subject-object identity.

The prose poem is the most appropriate medium in which to express this identity, since it "provides a psychic arena, charged but neutral, where the non-human object can live, as well as the perception of it" (News, p. 132). As well as being "useful for renewing narrative, and for expressing complicated human perceptions," the prose poem, in its "absence of line and 'ethical form,'" becomes "the final stage of the unpretentious style" (News, p. 131) after which Bly has striven since Silence in the Snowy Fields.

Notes

Chapter Five

¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Friend I, In The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Ed. Barbara Rooke (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 524. These are not actually Coleridge's words, since they are a paraphrase of Plotinus.

² Coleridge, "The Meaning of Existence," p. 527.

³ See Suzanne Bernard's Le Poeme En Prose De Baudelaire Jusqu' A Nos Jours (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1978).

⁴ Enid Starkie, Rimbaud (New York: New Directions, 1961), pp. 240-41.

⁵ Russell Edson, "Portrait Of The Writer As A Fat Man," Field No. 13 (Fall, 1975), pp. 25,26-27.

⁶ Charles Baudelaire, Le Spleen de Paris (Paris Spleen) trans. Louise Varese (New York: New Directions, 1970), pp. ix-x.

⁷ "The Philosophy of Composition," in Great Short Works of Edgar Allen Poe, ed. G.F. Thompson (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 531.

⁸ Francis Ponge, The Voice of Things, trans. Beth Archer (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1974), p. 88.

⁹ Ponge, p. 9.

¹⁰ Robert Bly, "The Two Stages of an Artist's Life," Georgia Review 34 (Spring, 1980), 106-07. Further references to this article will appear in the body of the text as "Two Stages," along with page numbers.

¹¹ Robert Bly, News of The Universe: poems of twofold consciousness (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1980), p. 9. Further references to this book will appear in the body of the text as News, along with page numbers.

12 Robert Bly, The Morning Glory (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 5. Further references to this book will appear within the body of the text under individually-titled prose poems, along with page numbers. Twenty of the poems in this edition were published under the same title by kayak Press in 1969. Section II, "The Point Reyes Poems," was published earlier by Mudra Press under the same title in 1974.

13 Ponge, p. 100.

14 John Haines, "The Poet Against Life--Some Recent Kayaks," The Dragonfly III, No. 2 (1972), 2.

15 Susan Langer, Feeling and Form (New York: Scribner's, 1953), p. 40.

16 Ponge, p. 83.

17 D.H. Lawrence, Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious (New York: Thomas Seltzer, Inc., 1921), p. 40.

18 D.H. Lawrence, Etruscan Places (New York: Viking Press, 1932), p. 92.

19 Rainer Maria Rilke, Letter to Magda von Hattinberg, 17 February 1914, quoted in Later Poems, trans. J.B. Leishman, (London: Hogarth Press, 1938), p. 26.

20 Robert Bly, "What The Prose Poem Carries With It," American Poetry Review, 6, No. 3 (1977), 44-45.

21 Bernard, p. 361.

22 D.H. Lawrence, Fantasia of the Unconscious (New York: Thomas Seltzer, Inc., 1922), p. 215.

23 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Journals, June 21, 1838," in Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Stephen Whicher (Boston: Riverside, 1957), p. 90.

24 See M.H. Abrams' A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, Inc., 1957), pp. 52-53, for an extended definition of Joyce's term.

25 M.H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1971), p. 68. (The title of Abrams' book, of course, comes from Carlyle's Sartor Resartus.)

26 Geoffrey Grigson, ed. The Romantics: An Anthology (London: G. Routledge and Sons Ltd., 1942), p. v.

27 D.H. Lawrence, Apocalypse (London: Sicker, 1932), p. 190.

28 Lawrence, Apocalypse, p. 45.

29 Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p. 419.

30 Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p. 385.

31 Robert Bly, This Body is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood (New York: Harper and Row, 1977). Further references to this book will appear within the body of the text under individually-titled prose poems, along with page numbers.

32 In Silence, in "Waking From Sleep," Bly described the body as "a harbor at dawn." There were "navies" patrolling his veins; "Tiny explosions at the water lines, / And seagulls weaving in the wind of the salty blood" (Silence, p. 13). In "Hunting Pheasants In A Cornfield" it was the "body" that was "strangely torn" (p. 14) by a willow tree. It was "our skin" that could "see far off" and "under water" in "Surprised by Evening" (p. 15). The poet was "wrapped in /his/ joyful flesh" in "Poem in Three Parts" (p. 21). In "Unrest" (p. 25) Bly described "the diamonds of the body." In "On The Ferry Across Chesapeake Bay" (p. 35) he wrote: "This smoking body ploughs toward death." His "body was sour" in "Depression" (p. 37). With "Solitude Late At Night In The Woods" (p. 45) we learned that "The body is like a November birch facing the full moon / And reaching into the cold heavens." And in "Silence" (p. 59) Bly described his body's search for a home in this emotive stanza:

My body also wanders among these doorposts and cars,
Cradling a pen, or walking down a stair
Holding a cup in my hand,
And not breaking into the pastures that lie in the
sunlight.

This is the sloth of the man inside the body,
The sloth of the body lost among the wandering
stones of kindness.

In Light, in "Smothered by the World" (p. 7), "Once more the heavy body mourns." He describes "another darkness" besides the natural darkness of night, in "Listening to President Kennedy Lie about the Cuban Invasion" (p. 16). It is the "darkness in the fences of the body." In "The Current Administration" (pp. 22-23) Bly walks "with a coarse body." "Counting Small-Boned Bodies" (p. 32) attacks those who view the flesh as a meaningless impertinence. "In the deep fall, the body awakes," we are told, in "A Home in Dark Grass" (p. 44). We experience "the body burdened down with leaves" in "In Danger from the Outer World" (p. 47). There the flesh is "opaque," "heavy as November grass, / Growing stubbornly, triumphant even at midnight." "Looking into a Face" (p. 53) we experience the ecstasy of rebirth and the "light around the body." The hermit's body is "perfectly whole" (p. 55). And there is also "The body raging / And driving itself," in "When The Dumb Speak" (p. 62).

33 Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1938), p. 157.

34 Bloom, "Lying Against Time: Gnosis, Poetry, Criticism," 15.

35 Josiah Royce, The World And The Individual: Second Series (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1959), p. 227.

36 Royce, p. 227.

37 F.C.S. Schiller, Studies in Humanism (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1907), p. 442.

38 Schiller, p. 444.

39 Schiller, p. 442.

40 Schiller, p. 442.

41 Schiller, p. 442.

42 Schiller, p. 442.

43 Sewell, p. 36.

- 44 Sewell, p. 36.
- 45 Sewell, p. 37.
- 46 Sewell, p. 37.
- 47 D.H. Lawrence Phoenix (I), The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence, ed. Edward D. McDonald (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1936), p. 249.
- 48 Lawrence, Phoenix (I), pp. 249-50.
- 49 C.G. Jung, Psychology of the Unconscious (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1949), p. 14.
- 50 Earl Wasserman, "The Grounds of Knowledge," in Romanticism: Points of View, p. 340.
- 51 Wasserman, p. 340.
- 52 Wasserman, p. 344.
- 53 Wasserman, p. 342.
- 54 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Dejection, An Ode," in Romantic Poetry and Prose, ed. Noyes, p. 418.

CHAPTER SIX: "THE MYTH OF THE INDIVIDUAL"

Toward A Conclusion

Part of the problem in my attempt to define the transformational image has been its inherent resistance to intellectual probing; another problem stems from the many contradictory definitions of image which, as a term, is actually still in its infancy.

It was not until well into the eighteenth century that the term image was applied in literary criticism;¹ previously it had been used only to refer to things which were by definition pictorial--like tapestries, paintings and sculpture.² Wordsworth's Preface marks one of the first attempts to define what an image or imagery is, and what it should do. In reproaching Pope for having abandoned the imaginative use of figural diction in favour of a merely decorative allegorization, Wordsworth argues that objects really existing and felt to exist, are imagery, and they may form the materials of a descriptive poem, where objects are delineated as they are. He describes the "appropriate business of poetry," moreover, as presenting things "not as they are, but as they appear to the mind of the poet."³

Implicit in Wordsworth's description is a balance between the inner world of the poet (subjectivity) and the outer world of objects (objectivity) achieved by an active imagination. And of course, when we think of balance with regard to the imagination, we immediately think of Coleridge's ascribing to the secondary imagination the primary act of knowing by dissolving the elements of perception in order to recreate them, revealing itself in the "balance or reconciliation of discordant qualities," including the reconciliation of intellect with emotion, and of thought with object: "the idea, with the image."⁴ Romanticism as a whole was engaged in reuniting the world Descartes and Newton had torn apart. It sought to re-vitalize a natural world that had been proclaimed dead and to re-integrate man within that world by enriching it with a "figural imagination."⁵ The structure of the language grew increasingly figurative (originally a "figure" was an image⁶) and the image came "to be considered as the most prominent dimension of the [Romantic] style."⁷ A personal poetry that tended toward the invention of images --rejection of the mirror in favour of the lamp--presented itself. Imagination was raised to the level of a deity: "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation of the infinite I AM." Images in poems like "Kubla Khan," "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," "Resolution and Independence," "The Thorn," "The Eve of St. Agnes," "La Belle Dame

Sans Merci," as well as almost all those in Blake, display a growing dissatisfaction with mere description and a corresponding reliance on the imagination to provide subjects for poetry. Thus it is the product of the imagination, the image per se, that contains within it all the tensions of the dialectic between the imagination and the external world.

Paul de Man, in his "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image," argues that "During the long development that takes place in the nineteenth century, the poetic image remains . . . grounded in the intrinsic ontological primacy of the natural object."⁸ He suggests that the attempts of the Romantic poets and their inheritors to fuse matter and imagination by subsuming consciousness in the external world is really only "nostalgia for the object [that] has become a nostalgia for an entity [an "unmediated vision"] that could never, by its very nature, become a particularized presence."⁹ It is only through the creative or active imagination, de Man continues, that this "nostalgia" can be overcome and thus allow consciousness to co-exist with the world. But, de Man concludes, the Romantics were unable to achieve such co-existence, and were "at most, underway toward renewed insights"¹⁰ that were to come with challenging the ontological priority of the sensory object. He feels that no one since has successfully taken up the cause, and confesses

that "We know very little about the kind of images that such an [independent] imagination would produce, except that they would have little in common with what we have come to expect from familiar metaphorical figures."¹¹

The Symbolists, de Man contends, do not represent this imagination because with them "the object nearly vanishes under the impact . . . of words"¹²; the object's ontological priority is not challenged, i.e., balanced by consciousness, but rather it is dissolved by it for the sake of "lucid poetic awareness." (The French Surrealists challenged "reality," but with a grab-bag of rationalist techniques that were passed off as spontaneous and therefore "free.") On the other hand, the work of the Imagists represents the culmination of the movement of the image "closer and closer to the ontological status of the object," to the point where consciousness is completely debarred from the poem, or is only admitted as a static, fragmentary representation of an alleged "objective" reality. In the case of the Symbolists, matter is slandered and does not receive the dignity it is due. In the case of the Imagists, consciousness was almost entirely ignored. In the case of French Surrealism, although it certainly challenges "the ontological primacy of the object," both consciousness and the natural object come under attack simply for the sake of attack. In all three cases what is lacking is a balance of matter and imagination.

Without slandering matter, and without deifying consciousness, Robert Bly's poetry has achieved this balance. By means of an almost religious devotion to minute particulars and their relationship with the feelings and ideas that exist in his unconscious, Bly has tried to restore poetry to a state of balance he claims it has lacked since ancient times (The Seventies 1, 4).

The vehicle with which Bly has often achieved this balance is the transformational image; an image which embodies the insight Paul de Man says the Romantics were "underway towards"; an image which draws energy from the inner and outer worlds simultaneously, yet respects the independence of each; an image which has two mutually independent faces which cannot --and therefore should not--be bisected by the intellect; an image, finally, which "is not a product of intellect, except in so far as intellect is involved in that creative operation of the whole mind which is Imagination; 'intellect' as such merely contaminates it, attempting to explicate . . . what is, though finite, inexplicable, simply because of the way the human mind works."¹³

As a more complete version of the romantic image, then, the transformational image contains within it the "myth of the individual" which is the product of what Geoffrey Hartman has called "two 'moments' of the poetic imagination: intense matter of fact or . . . passionate fiction."¹⁴ Both cannot

exist simultaneously, "but tend toward a third moment, as toward an ideal, when the creative will of man is either spontaneous or suspended."¹⁵ As we have seen, the transformational image, by fusing "fact" and "fiction," resolves this paradox and embodies a "third moment," and by now we are familiar with Bly's description of this ideal in terms of the image: "Moving with its own immense energy, it [the psyche] becomes equal to the world. Instead of depending on the outer world for support, it begins to create a third world, neither 'physical' nor 'inner'" (Talking, p. 259).

Bly's "spontaneity"--as evidenced in the extemporaneous poems of Silence--or his suspension of creative will--as seen in many of his prose poems--stands as an outgrowth of the Romantic impulse, particularly of the originality, spontaneity and sincerity Wordsworth advocated in his Preface to Lyrical Ballads. Bly's poems, therefore, constitute a re-discovery of a mode of intuitive communication that subordinates rational discourse to a modifying imagination. Rather than a commentary on the growth of the poet's mind, Bly's poetry often presents the very workings of the unconscious as it reaches "the thoughts that lie too deep for tears." In so doing, besides re-capturing "the myth of the individual," Bly re-captures "the sense of estrangement, of a lost and isolated existence in an alien world" that "is not peculiar to our own age of anxiety, but was a commonplace of Romantic philosophy."¹⁶

This alienation or estrangement is most obvious in the satire of The Light Around The Body, in the polemics of "The Teeth Mother Naked at Last," and in the meditations that populate Bly's oeuvre. His great need for solitude, and his articulation of purposelessness, may be seen as contemporary versions of Keats's "negative capability." His belief in unpremeditated and unadorned form can be traced back through Whitman to Wordsworth. The transformational image itself is the result of a creative process similar to that which Wordsworth describes in his 1815 Preface. There Wordsworth describes the image-making process as the result of "either conferring additional properties upon an object, or abstracting from it some of those which it actually possesses," enabling it to "re-act upon the mind which hath formed the process, like a new existence."¹⁷ So, in "Resolution and Independence," the leech-gatherer has conferred upon him the properties of "a huge stone" and his purpose abstracted so that he "seems a thing endued with sense . . . a sea beast."¹⁸ In Bly's "Come with Me" (Light, p. 13), the "additional properties" of howling, staggering, drowning, etcetera, are conferred, quite unexpectedly, upon "removed Chevrolet wheels." In another of Bly's poems, "Written in Dejection near Rome" (Light, p. 15)--a Romantic title indeed!--"men walking thoughtfully with their families" are abstracted into "vibrations/of exhausted violin-bodies." In each of these

examples, including Wordsworth's, we should notice that, true to the nature of the Romantic image as defined by Kermode, rational analogy has been abandoned.

In the case of both Bly and Wordsworth, there is a creative consciousness employing material perceptions in a sequence of transformations. If we can call such a consciousness "Romantic," we can say that it is one which re-creates or transforms objective reality in subjective forms. It is a consciousness which apprehends familiar objects and presents them, re-arranged, in an original psychic structure; a consciousness intent on discovering the unknown among things and within its own subconscious self, expressing those discoveries in individual terms. Bly goes farther than Wordsworth in expressing those discoveries, since for Wordsworth, the unconscious--as a phenomenon--was something which he could only guess existed. For Bly it is an unlimited source of ideas and emotions that correspond with elements from the external world. The transformational image, as a realization of the Romantic image, embodies such correspondence and thus establishes poetry as existing in two worlds, and as having the best of both.

Whether as a satirical weapon directed against the politics and religion of his country, as a psychological probe for confronting the shadow, as a vessel that contains a balance of 'masculine' consciousness and 'feminine' consciousness,

or as a vehicle that promotes "unity of being" between poet and Nature; the transformational image is the realization of the nineteenth-century Romantic image. It is a creation which is strong enough to support "the myth of the individual" yet flexible enough to pass through the straits of solitude and envelop the universe.

Notes

Chapter Six

¹ Ray Frazer, "The Origin of the Term 'Image,'" English Literary History, 27 (1960), 149-61.

² P.N. Furbank, Reflections on the Word Image (London: Secker and Warburg, 1970), p. 6.

³ William Wordsworth, Essay, Supplementary to the Preface in Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, ed. W.J.B. Owen (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 192.

⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, Chapter XIV, in Modern Romantic Poets, p. 519.

⁵ See Nathan A. Scott's The Sacramental Vision: The Return of the Figural Imagination.

⁶ Frazer, 150.

⁷ Paul de Man, "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image," Romanticism and Consciousness, p. 66.

⁸ De Man, p. 70.

⁹ De Man, p. 69.

¹⁰ De Man, p. 77.

¹¹ De Man, p. 70.

¹² De Man, p. 71.

¹³ Frank Kermode, Romantic Image (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), p. 47.

¹⁴ Geoffrey Hartman, The Unmediated Vision (New York: Hartman, Brace & World, Inc., 1966), p. 8.

¹⁵ M.H. Abrams, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," p. 218.

¹⁶ See Wylie Sypher's Loss of The Self in Modern Literature (New York: Vantage Books, 1962). Sypher neatly brings "into contrast the 'romantic' self of the nineteenth century and the self in our own day," which he calls "an anonymous self" (p. 6). He looks "back to the romanticisms of the nineteenth century to see how the romantic affirmation of the self was followed by a rejection of the self" (p. 8) in the twentieth century.

¹⁷ William Wordsworth, Preface to Lyrical Ballads, 1815, in Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, p. 182.

¹⁸ William Wordsworth, Preface to Lyrical Ballads, 1815, p. 182.

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