Falling into Holes in Our Sentences

This body holds its protective walls around us, it watches us whenever we walk out. Each step we take in conversation with our friends, moving slowly or flying, the body watches us, calling us into what is possible, into what is not said, into the shuckheap of ruined arrowheads, or the old man with missing fingers.

We take our first step in words each day, and instantly fall into a hole in our sounds. Overly sane afternoons in a room during our twenties come back to us in the form of a son who is mad, every longing another person had that we failed to see the body returns to us as a squinting of the eyes when we talk, and no sentimentality, only the ruthless body performing its magic, transforming each of our confrontations 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.

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 mature, that night in a dream I see a policeman holding a gun to the head of a frightened girl, who is blindfolded, the priest talks easily of death, and opening a *National Geographic* sees an old woman lying with her mouth open.

Robert Bly's *Sleepers Joining Hands:* Shadow and Self / Michael Atkinson

In *Sleepers Joining Hands*, Robert Bly offers his readers a various weave of the personal and the public, the psychological and the political modes of experience. Each mode illuminates the other, though, as I hope to show, the collection is most fundamentally and formally psychological. The lay-out of the book is pleasantly indirect: two dozen pages of poems, ranging from haiku-like meditation moments to longer poems of protest. Then there is the essay, a short course in the Great Mother, an analysis of the disturbing but finally nourishing configuration of feminine archetypes in the collective unconscious. And finally we have the oneiric title sequence: four poems and a coda, written at different times and published in different places, but here offered as a single structure, a whole.

The poems on either side of the essay seem to point back and forth to

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each other. And so naturally we ask: what is the relation of the earlier poems to the later sequence? what is the final shape of the book?

The essay points the way. Like most poets who pause to explain themselves, Bly works obliquely. His essay focuses on the work of Bachofen and Neumann; yet the pattern of the book rests firmly on the thought of a successor to the first and the teacher of the second—Carl Jung. The essay coordinates the variety of anima archetypes which inhabit our subconsciousness: the Good Mother who gives us life, the Death Mother who takes it away; the Ecstatic Mother, muse of joy, and the Stone or Teeth Mother who reduces us to the stupor of psychic annihilation. But the title sequence, which is the key to the book's integrity, focuses on two other Jungian dream archetypes—the shadow and the Self.

The symbols of the earlier poems gain resonance in the schematic context of the later sequence: imagist poems move toward plotted action, oracles toward ritual, archetypes toward myth. Here, I would like to present the scheme of the sequence and show its relation to the shorter poems, delineating the system of archetypes that coherently applies throughout the book, linking Biblical allusions to contemporary consciousness and connecting dream images with myth.

After sketching in the profiles of the Great Mother, Bly warns that we should not examine his "poems for evidence of them, for most of [the] poems were written without benefit of them." And further to guide us, he lifts the penultimate paragraph of his essay from Jung: it virtually diagrams the concern and shape of the "Sleepers" sequence, shifting our attention from "the woman within" to the shadow and the Self.

> It would be far better simply to admit our spiritual poverty. . . . The spirit has come down from its fiery high places . . . but when the spirit becomes heavy, it turns to water. . . . Therefore the way of the soul in search of its lost father . . . leads to the water, to the dark mirror that lies at the bottom. Whoever has decided to move toward the state of spiritual poverty . . . goes the way of the soul that leads to the water. [Bly's ellipses]

In Jung's overall schema, the personality striving for full individuation or integration has four aspects, which are personified in our dreams: (1) the ego (or persona), that person (or role) we consider ourselves to be in normal waking consciousness; (2) the shadow, that figure of the same sex as the ego who embodies negative or positive traits which might have been conscious but which have now been repressed; (3) the anima, the woman within the man, that feminine consciousness with which he has to come to terms—or the animus, the man within the woman, representing the male

consciousness with which the woman must reconcile herself; and finally, (4) the Self, that perfect wholeness which the individual can become, when he has reconciled himself with his shadow and anima (or she with her shadow and animus) and become his own potentiality for being.

The first poem of the "Sleepers" sequence hearkens back to the time the ego became split from its shadow by repression, and is appropriately entitled "The Shadow Goes Away." It records the fragmentation of the questor, chronicles his separation from that lost aspect which he must again come to recognize in himself. Until he incorporates his shadow, he is powerless to act effectively. We feel his powerlessness as we gaze with him upon "The woman chained to the shore," Andromeda-like, and hear him express his fear of going into the ocean to fight for her, to liberate her. (In mythic compression, the woman *is* the ocean—la mer, la mère—the womb from which he must be reborn whole.) He fears the sea. Juxtaposed to his feeling of impotence is its cause: his loss of the shadow.

Often—perhaps most frequently in dream and art—the shadow is a figure that embodies the negative aspects of the personality; the negativity provides the reason they are repressed. Thus we have Jekyll's hidden Hyde, Dimmesdale's Chillingworth, Gatsby's Wolfsheim, and the like. But, as Jung notes, we may just as easily deny parts of ourselves that—grown wiser—we would consider good. Because something about them threatens the fragile, narrowly defined persona or ego, they too may be repressed. But ultimately they must be admitted to our consciousness and assimilated, or the results will be disastrous. Ishmael's savage Queequeg, Willy Lowman's Charley, Macbeth's Banquo: each contains "values that are needed by consciousness, but that exist in a form that makes it difficult to integrate them into one's life."

The protagonist in Bly's poems has a shadow that is protean but consistent. The dreamer first imagines himself a brother (probably Judah) to Joseph of the many colored coat; he recalls selling his brother-shadow into slavery. Joseph contains the qualities the dreamer so desperately needs to complete his life. In Genesis (Chapters 37-50) Joseph is sent into the moral wilderness of Egypt, banished, repressed from the consciousness of the family (except the mind of the father, the wise old man, the Self who yearns for Joseph's return). Despite (or because of) the banishment, Joseph gains mastery over the alien realm, understands its laws by understanding dreams both positive and negative, and eventually provides his brothers with what they need to sustain their lives, when they at last seek him out.

Bly's shape-shifting protagonist repeatedly dreams of selling his brother, notably to be carried away into the desert or out to sea (archetypal equivalents for the unconscious, which may be a realm of danger and potential death for the fragmented and brittle ego). Joseph is transformed into an

American Indian: he is "taken in by travelling Sioux," and he learns to "glide about naked, drinking water from his hands, / to tether horses, follow the faint trail through bent grasses." The questor's shadow—and, the poem suggests, ours—is the natural man, the primitive, at home in the world of nature and the unconscious. The pillagers of the tribal village and the Marines who appear late in the poem are intended to remind us how we have duplicated our oppression of the Indian in the bombing of Vietnam. Equations that seem both familiar and strained in political rhetoric are here given greater coherence and vitality in a psychological connection. In each case we have attempted to destroy (or repress) the people who best exemplified the very qualities we most need to acknowledge and cultivate in ourselves—positive shadows.

"The Shadow Goes Away" gives a larger context for a number of the other poems—poems, already integers themselves, now resonate within the larger pattern. "The Condition of the Working Classes: 1970" is blamed not on those above them, but on those they have trod under—blamed not on the oppression that workers might suffer, but on the repression of their shadows, inwardly and outwardly. Thus, we eat "a bread made of the sound of sunken buffalo bones" and drink "a water turned dark by the shadows of Negroes"; the "Sioux dead sleep all night in the rain troughs on the Treasury Building," and because of this our sons are "lost in the immense forest" of the unintegrated unconscious.

As the repression intensifies, so does the terror of living with it. Denying the shadow drives us into the maw of "The Teeth Mother Naked at Last." Here the horror hits its highest pitch and an unfamiliar list toward stereotype and stridence appears. Maybe it is unavoidable—so many have spoken out against the war for so long that even the most telling analysis has deteriorated into formula and finally come to rest in cliché. Bly's poem cannot shake itself free of stereotypy, even though it has considerable power. The power comes not just from its imagery—

> If one of those children came near that we have set on fire, ...
> If one of those children came toward me with both hands
> in the air, fire rising along both elbows
> I would suddenly go back to my animal brain
> I would drop on all fours, screaming,
> my vocal cords would turn blue, so would yours.
> it would be two days before I could play with my own children again

—but from the analysis of cause and effect that is given in the hard terms of imagery which will not allow the luxuries and niceties of rationalization. These cause-effect concatenations generate both the strengths and weak-

nesses of the poem. I suspect each reader will find different equations effective. But when they work, they work; when they don't, they grate.

The poem begins with a deft and horrific picture of planes lifting off on bombing missions. The first stated cause for the missions—Hamilton's plan for a centralized bank. This is entirely too easy. And, though he does return to such, fortunately Bly gets beyond the familiar accusations of economic materialism to a perspective that still has the capacity to arrest us. He tells us to save the tears we shed for exploding children.

> Don't cry at that—
> Do you cry at the wind pouring out of Canada?
> Do you cry at the reeds shaken at the edge of the sloughs?

He asks us to hold our tears and, Yeatsian but joyless, to see the terrible destruction as a natural law working itself out. The natural wind that shakes the reeds and brings the snow is not just meteorological—it is the inner wind of the spirit that blows where it lists.

> This happens when the seasons change,
> This happens when the leaves begin to drop from the trees
> too early
> *"Kill them: I don't want to see anything moving."*
> This happens when the ice begins to show its teeth in the
> ponds
> This happens 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 reeds, of vegetation fallen on vegetation...
> Hamilton saw all this in detail:
> *"Every banana tree slashed, every cooking utensil smashed,*
> *every mattress cut."*

The key here is the aquatic imagery, which so pervades the poem (and the book). Allegorically read, the passage limns in a picture of repression—a freezing of the sensitive living waters, the ice pressing down on the fish, denizen of the unconscious, our evolutionary precursor. And the dying, descending fish sees the pictures of previous repressions, impressions from the coal age, compressed, petrified, transformed, ancient, yet still leaving, layer upon layer, the imprint of their repression deep in the lake floor, beneath the now frozen surface.

Though it is pretty clear that Hamilton did *not* see all this in detail, we can see that these are natural psychic laws we are following. This is why

we lie to others and to ourselves (section II)—to cover with further layers the skin we have already put on things, and so to mask the mask. And from this, a further equation is posited. "These lies mean the country wants to die"—self denial is self denial is self denial. Killing our shadows betokens hunger for our own death.

The poem's other analyses—economic primarily—look best when seen in light of this larger pattern of repression.

> It is because the aluminum window shade business is doing
> so well in the United States that we roll fire over
> whole villages

fortunately cedes to

> 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.

And it is from this analysis that the poem's final prayer comes:

> Let us drive cars
> up
> the light beams
> to the stars . . .
>
> And return to earth crouched inside the drop of sweat
> that falls
> from the chin of the Protestant tied in the fire.

If we have become cruel it is because we cannot remember our own suffering: in our righteousness we have forgotten our pain. Our only hope lies in remembering.

"The Marines think that unless they die the rivers will not move." At a conscious level, we believe we are fulfilling a chosen, comprehensible destiny; but at the unconscious level we are following the path to a destiny not nearly so manifest, though much more powerfully certain. We are rushing to the edge of the sea as "pigs rush toward the cliff" driven by our own demons and there below us we see our history and our destiny, balanced:

the waters underneath part: in one ocean luminous globes
  float up (in them hairy ecstatic men—)
in the other, the teeth mother, naked at last.

She is naked and terrible. But at least we can see her now, as our forebears perhaps could not. In the terror of Vietnam she has become clear to us, our own creation. As Bly explains in his essay, the Teeth Mother "stands for numbness, paralysis, catatonia, being totally spaced out, the psyche torn to bits, arms and legs thrown all over." For the alternative path—the path that leads down into the ocean where "luminous globes float up (in them hairy ecstatic men)"—we must wait until "Sleepers Joining Hands" outlines a map to recovery. Though the outrage of the poem is certainly justified, it looks better in the context of the book as a whole than it does standing alone. "The Teeth Mother Naked at Last" offers a diagram of despair, a brittle anatomy of agony with only a gesture to indicate the possibility of healing, of wholeness.

Here, then, is a picture of the U.S. at our most culturally destructive, annihilating our own shadows—Indians, Blacks, Vietnamese—with whom we must be reunited if we are to have psychic fullness and dimensionality; if we are to be solid enough to cast shadows. Concern for oppression of our shadows pervades the book, essay and poems. But it is neither a continuing accusation nor an extended *mea culpa* that Bly chants, as "Calling to the Badger" shows. This poem, like all of Bly's work on the shadow, is pervaded by a "sadness that rises from the death of the Indians," and that is a sadness for our own loss. "We are driven to Florida like Geronimo" because our imaginations cannot function fully with such a large psychic space blocked out, repressed. Or, in the imagery of "Pilgrim Fish Heads," the Indian we have displaced "vanishes into water. . . . / The Mattapoiset is in league with rotting wood." Thus the denied shadow softens and rots whatever structures we might consciously build.

This backward look over the shadow poems that begin the book can help define the conditions that apply as the title sequence opens. As in most myths (whether the king be impotent, the land waste, or the virgin guarded by a dragon—all of which conditions more or less obtain as we return to the opening of the "Sleepers" sequence) the call to the quest begins with a perception of a lack, an imbalance. Whereas the earlier, shorter poems mainly expressed despair at the loss, "The Shadow Goes Away" proceeds from recognition to restorative action. Our fugitive imaginations are personified in the protagonist who, too, calls to the badger and otter, animals still in touch with the renewing waters of psychic life, the stream that emerges from beneath the ground.

Bly's seeker goes in search of his shadow, which hides in all dark peoples, Negro, Eskimo, Indian, Asian. He enters the inner and outer desert and sees the Sioux "struggling up the mountain in disordered lines" or opens a drawer, a compartment of the unconscious, and sees "small white horses gallop away toward the back" in retreat. He links the destruction of his shadow with his inability to recognize and unite with his anima, the woman within, his own gentleness and intuition:

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

Yet even now he has begun to incorporate the shadow's consciousness and values. He will no longer participate in the repression, for he sees where it leads: "The Marines turn to me. They offer me money. / I turn and leave." With the consciousness of the shadow resuscitated, he sees the disfugration of his land. "The suppressed race returns: [it sees] snakes and transistors filling the beaches." Even the planets are despoiled: "The Sea of Tranquility scattered with dead rocks / and black dust resembling diesel oil." Beneath this polluted moon "pilots in armored cockpits [are] finding their way home through moonlit clouds." The equation between past and present betrayals, between Indian and Asian wars, is now complete, clear to the protagonist as well as the reader. Refusing to continue the old path of inner denial and outward oppression, he turns from the zeal of battle to view the littered land with primitive consciousness and compassion. He has begun to assimilate the consciousness of the shadow, and can now continue his journey of integration.

The second poem of the sequence finds the dreamer momentarily awake, noting but not yet comprehending the femininity of the earth on which he finds himself: "fragments of the mother lie open in all low places." But his task here is "Meeting the Man Who Warns Me," and the substance of the warning is that he may not understand, may not proceed further without realizing from a transcendental viewpoint where he has already been.

Dreaming again, the sleeper experiences everywhere the death of the father:

> 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.

Even the father's emissary, the Christlike visitor whose circumcising touch

puts the protagonist back into a dream, is seen as inhumanly remote, extraterrestrial. The dreamer experiences absolute separation from the presence of the father because he has seen the father only as external; he has not yet recognized the father-energy as a part of himself, waiting to be actualized.

But now that vision can change, for in the paradoxical logic of myth, once the shadow figure has become visible, the light may be seen.

> My shadow is underneath me,
> floating in the dark, in his small boat bobbing among the
> reeds.
> A fireball floats in the corner of the Eskimo's house—
> It is a light that comes nearer when called!
> A light the spirits turn their heads for,
> suddenly shining over land and sea!
> I taste the heaviness of the dream,
> the northern lights curve up toward the roof of my mouth.
> The energy is inside us . . . .

This energy, this light, is the light of the Self, that truly integrated individual, that near divinity which each human being has the potential to become.

Jung notes that the Self can be symbolized by many sorts of things: a geometric figure, a radiation of light, a tree, stone, well, or any number of "world navel" configurations. But the most prevalent literary and mythical representations of the Self are the babe and the wise old man. It is appropriate that the Self could be represented by youth and age, since it is that nuclear source of energy within us at birth (or reborn in self-discovery), which, if we integrate our lives, comes to the fullness of its wisdom in our maturity. Quite strikingly, as the protagonist of the poem 'sees the light' and realizes that "The energy is inside us," he immediately encounters a personification of the Self:

> I start toward [the light], and I meet an old man.
>
> ....
>
> And the old man cries out: "I am here.
> Either talk to me about your life, or turn back."

When the protagonist pauses for breath and begins to account for his experience, the rendering is most startling; for it comes from a greater completeness, and a greater mythic awareness than either reader or dreamer knew he had. He begins by announcing his own shadow-including nature and proceeds to recount a mythical journey which neither we nor he knew he had taken.

"I am the dark spirit that lives in the dark.
Each of my children is under a leaf he chose from all
  the leaves in the universe.
When I was alone, for three years, alone,
I passed under the earth through the night-water
I was for three days inside a warm-blooded fish.
'Purity of heart is to will one thing.'
I saw the road."

And when the Self urges him—"Go on! Go on!"—he continues:

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 . . ."

Suddenly he has discovered in his own experience, not only the realization of the shadow (which we had shared with him) but also the shape of a quest—complete with a three-day immersion in the belly of a whale, the traditional typological symbol for a descent into the most terrifying aspects of the unconscious (viz. Jonah, Christian iconography, Pinocchio, *et al.*). Until now, he had, like a child born again, forgotten his links with the sea; he was like a king, stranger to his own shore, suddenly realizing the extent of his right and rule. His realization is as sudden as it is complete, as astounding for the dreamer as for the reader. Having thought all the fathers were dead (i.e., having felt the lack of his own origin) he now discovers the light of illumination within himself, and encounters a fatherly wise old man who corresponds to that light in the outer world, only to realize that he, the dreamer himself, is both father and child, "dark spirit" and "boy." Wounded, that is, born and circumcized into the adult male world, the protagonist stops to reflect.

We, too, might take a moment to stop and reflect—to consider the poem's method of proceeding. In the last few paragraphs I have been concerned to establish and outline the continuity of the poem—a continuity which is so far from obvious as to be truly problematic. The obscurity arises, primarily, from the high degree of compression with which the poem was written. (The sequence, I was told casually, was originally five times its present length.) The epiphanic mode, not so unusual in itself, is further complicated by a reversal of the usual relation between outer event and psychic response; here the changing phenomena are dictated by shifts in psychic

states (as in dream) rather than the other way around. In order to manage this material, Bly replaces the conventional narrative structure with an implicit and continuous parallelism to Jung's schema of dream imagery in the individuation process.

Though Jung's way of reading the language of dreams is enormously insightful, it is legitimate to ask whether it is so essential a part of our culture that it may be alluded to as a structural principle, as Joyce, say, uses the *Odyssey*. Following archetypal patterns, of course, produces neither merit nor defect in poems, novels, or situation comedies. But requiring external knowledge of patterns is problematic, especially when what is required is not just a general sense of the quest, but Jung's interpretation of it. For without the Jungian frame, and a fair amount of time to apply it, most readers will find some real problems of coherence; and no matter how telling the individual images or how striking the poem's particular emotional effects, difficulties with coherence will diminish the final effect of the poem. Clearly, various readers will count the cost in differing ways—based largely, I suspect, on the ways they have already decided to handle matters such as Eliot's classical eclecticism, Yeats' esotericism, Rothke's Emersonianism, Kinnell's magic, and the like. But a problem that some feel worth overcoming is a problem nevertheless.

The synoptic recollection of the journey of the protagonist, which appears in the last lines of "Meeting the Man Who Warns Me," is expanded in "Night Journey in the Cooking Pot," which is a flashback composed of reflections on the experience and meaning of his immersion, of the dark, still uncomprehended part of his quest. Here, again, a problem of continuity confronts us; but the apparently confused and confusing emotional swings of "Night Journey" can be understood once we see that the poem divides itself into two movements, describing two phases of the mythic journey: the departure into the realm of mystery and also the return to the ordinary world. As the seeker begins to reexperience and rearticulate his journey retrospectively, we hear a familiar pattern: "I was born during the night sea journey." That he "love[s] the whale with his warm organ pipes" is less expected, but perfectly consonant: for Bly, this going-out is an *ecstasis*, a standing-outside-of the ego, an ecstasy; it is the return to the world of ordinary men and affairs that proves the difficult leg of the journey.

The departure into the water is a journey into ego-dissolving solitude, a necessary prelude to finding a path of effective action in the ordinary world: "I float on solitude as on water . . . there is a road" (Bly's ellipsis). The poem's first movement explores his privacy, which for Bly is sister word to privilege, not privation. Here we see the rejuvenating exhilaration of going a little crazy in private, deprived of human contact in the "womanless loneliness." The enthusiasm for isolation expressed in "Night Journey"

is reinforced and clarified by several of the book's earlier poems. Because it rejuvenates, solitude itself becomes a welcome state, well-captured "In a Mountain Cabin in Norway" where "No one comes to visit us for a week." The short poems which begin the volume deal frequently with solitude in both its aspects, as a going out and as a coming in to center. Ecstasy as *ec-stasis* animates "Six Winter Privacy Poems":

> There is a solitude like black mud!
> Sitting in this darkness singing,
> I can't tell if this joy
> is from the body, or the soul, or a third place."

Conversely—as a gloss on "Night Journey's" oracular exhortation "inward, inward, inward"—the "Shack Poem" muses, "How marvelous to be a thought entirely surrounded by brains!"

Finally, of course, this privacy is the solitude of the womb, for the voyage he recalls in "The Night Journey in the Cooking Pot," is the night sea journey in the womb of la mer, notre mère. The cooking pot of the title, like the oven and hearth as Bly explains in his essay, is the province of the woman and symbol of the womb. In the opening movement of "Night Journey" images of rebirth abound: "I feel . . . / the baby whirling in the womb," and "Nuns with faces smoothed by prayer peer out from holes in the earth." When he sees and realizes the possibilities brought by the visitants from the realm of snow and death ("sleeping in anguish like grain, whole, blind in the old grave"), when he intuits the chants of the shamans "with large shoulders covered with furs, / Holy ones with eyes closed," then he comes to rejoice in all signs pointing toward the death that precedes rebirth:

> Leaves slip down, falling through their own branches.
> The tree becomes naked and joyful.
> Leaves fall in the tomby wood.

And it is out of the experience of the retreat, the death, the hibernation that he sings his song of joy.

> Suddenly I love the dancers, leaping
> in the dark . . .
> I start to sing.

But this song is not an easy one, and he knows it. In the second movement of "Night Journey" he faces the difficulty of returning to the world of ordinary experience. Like Buddha, whose ultimate temptation was simply to stay in the oceanic trance of nirvana, like the silent Lazarus and other

such questors, this seeker sees how difficult it will be to communicate the joy of going beyond the ego, the personality, the boundaries of our daily round. But like Whitman in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," he urges us to realize that we are not separated from him, but united by a common experience we sometimes forget.

> 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.

Here, in his protagonist's plea for understanding, it would seem that we have Bly's apologia for his own method. By writing in the language of dream and vision, he does not hope to remove himself from our experience, for we are all dreamers, and can eventually intuit the scheme of our dreams. If we do not immediately see our waking and sleeping lives as whole and one, it is because the waters of sleep's deep well give the illusion of discontinuity.

> For we are like the branch bent in the water . . .
> Taken out it is whole, it was always whole . . . .
> [Bly's ellipses]

Though he acknowledges that the poem's oracular words may seem skew and difficult, he assures us that when he emerges from the water (night, mother, chaos, unconscious, dream) his speech will be straight as the branch—a promise, as we have seen, difficult to fulfill. What he hopes for (as he said in an earlier poem) is a day in which "if only the fragments in the unconscious would grow as big as the beams in hunting lodges, . . . / we would find holy books in our beds, / Then the Tao Te Ching would come running across the field!" If only.

But such a conclusion is far too optimistic, or else many would have returned and spoken, and redemption would be daily for all men. Bly realizes that—and in the second movement of "Night Journey," the questor suffers the inexorable difficulty of returning to the realm of ordinary experience while preserving his vision. Used to mental traveling, he finds himself constricted by the physical limitations of waking reality: "I think I am the body / the body rushes in and ties me up." Aware of his new clumsiness, he is "ashamed looking at the fish in the water," for he is a fish out.

The new being born inside him—the "child in the old moonlit villages of the brain"—is threatened with execution by that Herod, the waking ego and the social system of which, as ego or persona, he finds himself a part. He discovers himself in a role that his deeper, nascent Self had not intended. Hearkening back to the imagery of the early West which characterized "The Shadow Goes Away," he realizes

> Suddenly I am those who run large railroads at dusk,
> who stand around the fallen beast howling,
> who cannot get free, ...
> This is not the perfect freedom of the saints.

Having become one of the very people he would fight against, he realizes the difficulty of action after vision, the dichotomy between what he knows in the absolute realm and the position he occupies in the relative realm. With a fuller understanding he has arrived at the point at which he began the journey we have shared with him in "The Shadow Goes Away."

The personality is divided against itself: with fuller vision now, he sees how he has become his brother's vendor, betrayer of the shadow:

> 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.

He is ashamed looking into the limpid pool of his dreams. The poem has moved fully from the ecstasy of the journey to the restrictions of the return. And those restrictions include the difficulty of making the poem "good enough."

In the fourth poem, Bly spells out the nature of the journey as explicitly as possible:

> Here is some prose
>   *Once there was a man who went to a far country*
>   *to get his inheritance and then returned.*

This, of course, is (in the phrase of James Joyce and the system of Joseph Campbell) the "monomyth" in its briefest form: the story of the hero who is called from the ordinary world of experience into the realm of the mysterious, where he battles various foes, conquers or converts them, and gains a boon, his "inheritance," a life-restoring elixir with which he recrosses the threshold and with which, after some readjustment, he transforms the world or his vision of it.

Bly uses his water imagery to suggest an intriguing relation between the realm of mystery and the boon snatched from it. The pool, the lake into which he has gazed, the night sea through which he has traveled in dream vision, all now become "Water Drawn Up Into the Head." The questor now encompasses what once encompassed him. In the same way that, in the Judaic tradition, the redeemed feast on the now delicious flesh of the devouring monsters Behemoth, Leviathan, and Ziz, so the very ocean of the night sea journey becomes the elixir which nourishes the poet, granting him the serenity of the final poem and the joy of the "Extra Chorus" which follows it.

This liquid optimism has already found voice in "Water Under the Earth": "everything we need is buried . . . , it's under the water guarded by women." (And in "The Turtle," "huge turtle eggs / lie inland on the floor of the old sea.") The promise of the water is that consciousness can be bathed in, nourished by and brought to rebirth via the fluid world of the unconscious. If tapped, the subterranean sea can yield the healing balm that unites the diverse aspects of fragmented man within his Self and joins him with all other men. Progression begins with regression, conscious realization with a descent into the unconscious.

> There is a consciousness hovering under the mind's feet,
> advanced civilizations under the footsole,
> climbing at times upon a shoelace!
> It is a willow that knows of the 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!

The mind, like a funerary willow, draws the water from beneath the earth and manifests it in leaves and swaying branches: water drawn up into the head produces that fluid and protean vision of the poems Bly has created, nourishes his vision of himself and all men.

"When alone," when in privacy with the wellspring of the unconscious, "we see that great tomb [the material world] is not God," and "We know of Christ, who raised the dead, and started time. / He is not God, and is

not called God." Trying to find God outside ourselves, Bly suggests, is to deny the inner springs, the water drawn up into the head. "Best is to let them lose themselves in a river:" best to immerse yourself in the energy of the unconscious, energy of the Self, and learn from your dreams, visions and intuitions that you yourself are the transcendental; and then to drink from that knowledge continuously.

> So rather than saying Christ is God or he is not,
> it is better to forget all that
> and lose yourself in the curved energy.
> I entered that energy one day . . .

The God he discovers himself to be a part of has no name, because he is beyond the pairs of opposites, good and evil, kine and predator:

> We have no name for you, so we say:
> he makes grass grow upon the mountains,
> and gives food to the dark cattle of the sea,
> he feeds the young ravens that call on him.

There is a nascent realization, a new Self, "another being living inside" the poet: "He is looking out of my eyes. / I hear him / in the wind through the bare trees." It is the wind in the barren trees that alerts him to his own birth, it is the death of the old self that so confidently presages the new. And "that is why I am so glad in fall." The poet beside the bare and naked tree trunk waits for true nakedness to come to him as well. And as Jung observes, the tree is often a symbol for the developing self, bringing forth energy from the invisible underground reservoir of the unconscious to be manifested in the world of light and form.

As Ginsberg ended *Howl* with a joyous footnote—not as a palinode, but to affirm the divinity of the horror he chronicled—so to this strange and often painful oneiric journey, Bly appends "An Extra Joyful Chorus for Those Who Have Read This Far." In several ways the chorus alludes heavily to Whitman. Its closing lines (and indeed the very title of the entire "Sleepers Joining Hands" sequence) bear strong resemblance to the opening of the last section of Whitman's poem "The Sleepers":

> The sleepers are very beautiful as they lie unclothed,
> They flow hand in hand over the whole earth from east
> to west as they lie unclothed.

And, chiasmatically, lines that Whitman uses to close his poem on a cyclical note

I will stop only a time with the night . . . . and rise
  betimes.
I will duly pass the day O my mother and duly return
  to you

Bly transforms into a paradoxical opening for his "Joyful Chorus":

I love the Mother.
I am an enemy of the Mother.

The allusions are clear. Yet, though both poems record psychological night sea journeys, and though both close with affirmations, the similarities between the poems are not continuous. Bly borrows from Whitman for his own ends, as we shall see.

And so with technique. The "Joyful Chorus," Bly's chant of polymorphous identity which echoes and goes beyond his handling of the protean shadow in "The Shadow Goes Away," also recalls Whitman's chants of universal identity. Here again, there are some important differences to balance the similarities. Whitman's sympathetic identifications are usually directed toward the commonplace and the possible, encouraging the reader to follow along:

I am the actor and the actress . . . . the voter and
  the politician . . . .

. . . .

A shroud I see—and I am the shroud . . . . I wrap a
  body and lie in the coffin . . . .

Most typically, in the words of "Song of Myself," "I am the man . . . . I suffered . . . . I was there." Bly, on the other hand, opts to include the fantastical and folkloristic along with the ordinary and credible, which encourages the reader to relate these elements to other symbolic quests or to translate them into his own terms, but not to engage directly in the protagonist's own identification:

I am the ball of fire the woodman 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.

While both poets work within the tradition of the psychic quest, Bly is also *referring* to it, and asking the reader to refer to it, schematically.

Like Whitman, Bly makes use of the transcendent power of the aggregate. The catalogue of beautiful and ordinary and terrible beginnings which dominates the first sixty lines of section 15 of "Song of Myself" yields the aggregate exhilaration of Beginning; in "The Sleepers" the catalogue of actor, nominee, stammerer and criminal in an averaged aggregate of sleeping humanity allows Whitman to say

> The soul is always beautiful
> The universe is duly in order . . . . every thing
> is in its place . . . .
>
> ....
>
> The diverse shall be no less diverse, but they shall
> flow and unite . . . they unite now.

For Bly's protagonist the transcendent aggregate is the experience of the completed quest: its component parts, no matter how painful, finally become redeemed because of their place in the whole. Even "fleeing along the ground like a frightened beast" or being "the last inheritor crying out in deserted houses" become fit matter for a "Joyful Chorus" when the protagonist realizes that he is at every moment "an eternal happiness fighting in the long reeds." Each act contains the imprint of all others, and of the completed sequence. Bly's questor images his life everywhere at once and at all stages simultaneously. Perhaps most summatively he is "the man locked inside the oakwomb, / waiting for lightning, only let out on stormy nights." He is that core of life in the tree of the Self, drawn from subterranean waters and waiting, now that the old foliage has died, to manifest himself in the new spring. He is everyone and "no one at all" simultaneously, for he is prior to personality. Thus, in the womb, aching to deliver himself, he can paradoxically say:

> I love the Mother.
> I am an enemy of the Mother, give me my sword.
> I leap into her mouth full of seaweed.

For he honors the womb of the unconscious and arational which he has reentered as embryo, and he honors the rational and masculine desire to translate that primeval wholeness into the articulate world of forms—water to leaves, sea to sword.

Further, he sees and feels the archetypal nature and universal possibility of his experience—new incarnations and new Bethlehems for all men who attend to their dreams:

Our faces shine with the darkness reflected from the
Tigris . . . .
The panther rejoices in the gathering dark.
Hands rush toward each other through miles of space.
All the sleepers in the world join hands.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

MICHAEL ATKINSON is an associate professor of English at the University of Cincinnati. He is the author of several works of literary criticism.
MARVIN BELL is using a Guggenheim Fellowship to stay at home. A new book of his poems, *Stars Which See, Stars Which Do Not See,* will be published by Atheneum in February.
ROBERT BLY's next book will be *The Kabir Book: Forty-Four of the Ecstatic Poems of Kabir,* which Beacon Press will publish in December.
VANCE BOURJAILY's selection, "See Sato in the Funny Papers," is from his new novel *Now Playing at Canterbury* (Dial Press).
HENRY CARLILE is the author of *The Rough-Hewn Table* (University of Missouri Press, 1971). He teaches at Portland State University and is the recipient of a 1976 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship.
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RUSSELL EDSON's most recent book is *The Intuitive Journey & Other Works* (Harper & Row).
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LOUIS GLÜCK's *The House on the Marshland* was published by Ecco Press in 1975. In 1976-77, she is teaching at the University of Iowa Writers Workshop.
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DONALD HALL's most recent book is *The Town of Hill* (Godine, 1976).
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MARK JARMAN teaches at Indiana State University at Evansville. His poetry is appearing in *Kayak, Field,* and *Poetry Northwest.* He is in search of a publisher for his book of poems, *Go Back to Your Bairns, Mr. Knox.*