The Politics of Manhood

Profeminist Men Respond to the Mythopoetic Men's Movement (And the Mythopoetic Leaders Answer)

Edited by Michael S. Kimmel

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Manhood

EDITED BY

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for

MICHAEL KAUFMAN

colleague, comrade, collaborator
and constant friend

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"Born to Run": Nineteenth-Century Fantasies of Masculine Retreat and Re-creation (*or* The Historical Rust on Iron John)

MICHAEL S. KIMMEL

The man began to run: now he had not run far from his own door, when his wife and children, perceiving it, began to cry after him to return; but the man put his fingers in his ears, and ran on, crying Life, Life, eternal Life! So he looked not behind him, but fled towards the middle of the plain.

John Bunyon, *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678)

IN THE LAST LINES OF THE NOVEL that bears his name, Huckleberry Finn anxiously plans his escape. "I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before." Since the early nineteenth century, the quest for manhood has revolved around a flight from women. The search for manhood has come to mean a relentless effort to avoid all behaviors that might remotely hint of the feminine. Women signified constraints on manhood—temperance, Christian piety, sober responsibility, sexual fidelity. Women set the tone of those institutions that restrained masculine excess—schoolroom, parlor, church. Women meant, first, mother, with her incessant efforts to curtail boyish rambunctiousness; and later, wife, with her incessant efforts to keep men in harness as responsible and respectable workers, fathers, and husbands. Thus women represented responsibility—marriage, fatherhood, workplace stability. It is from the perceived clutches of "woman," this collection of constraints and responsibilities, as much as real live women, that American men have been escaping for the past two hundred years. And American men have devised a rich and varied collection of escape hatches. Contemporary mythopoetic men may believe they have created these retreats from examining other cultures; a bit of historical perspective on their own culture might prove far more revealing.

In both real life and the dreams that populate American fiction, men have run away to join the army, been kidnapped or abandoned on desert islands, gone west, or, as today, run off to the woods for all-male retreats.

In this essay I want to discuss a few moments of masculinist retreat from feminization in nineteenth-century America. By feminization I refer both to real women, whose feminizing clutches—as teachers, mothers, and Sunday School teachers—was seen as threatening to turn robust boyhood into emasculated little pipsqueaks, and also to an increasingly urban and industrial culture, a culture that increasingly denied men the opportunities for manly adventure and a sense of connectedness with their work. At the end of the nineteenth century, this latter tendency was best expressed by Henry James, in *The Bostonians,* as the dashing Basil Ransome, displaced southern beau, rails against modern society (and suggests his position on women in the process):

> The whole generation is womanized; the masculine tone is passing out of the world; it's a feminine, nervous, hysterical, chattering, canting age, an age of hollow phrases and false delicacy and exaggerated solicitudes and coddled sensibilities, which, if we don't soon look out, will usher in the reign of mediocrity, of the feeblest and flattest and most pretentious that has ever been. The masculine character, the ability to dare and endure, to know and yet not fear reality, to look the world in the face and take it for what it is . . . that is what I want to preserve, or rather . . . recover; and I must tell you that I don't in the least care what becomes of you ladies while I make the attempt![1]

Here was the critique of the feminization of American culture in condensed form. Something had happened to American society that had led to a loss of cultural vitality, of national virility. And ever since the first few decades of the nineteenth century, men have been running away—off to the frontier, the mountains, the forests, the high seas, the battlegrounds, outer space—to retrieve what they feel they've lost—some deep, essential part of themselves, their identity, their manhood.

Part of the struggle was simply to get out of the house. The separation of spheres had transformed the nineteenth-century middle-class home into a virtual feminine theme park—where well-mannered and well-dressed children played quietly in heavily draped and carpeted parlors, and adults chatted amiably over tea served from porcelain services. This delightful contrast with the frantic and aggressive business world made men feel uneasy in their own homes, even as they felt themselves exiled from it. A man's house "is a prison, in which he finds himself oppressed and confined, not sheltered and

protected," wrote Thoreau. "His muscles are never relaxed. It is rare that he overcomes the house, and learns to sit at home in it."[2]

Not only had the home itself become a feminine preserve, but domestic activities, especially the children's moral and religious instruction, were a woman's province. Women were not only domestic; they were domesticators, expected to turn their sons into virtuous Christian gentlemen, that is, dutiful, well-mannered and feminized. Orestes Brownson growled about "female religion" as well as male ministers who were the domesticated pets of widows and spinsters, "fit only to balance teacups and mouth platitudes." The increased roles of mothers and decreased role of absentee fathers in the early nineteenth century meant that it fell increasingly to women to teach their sons how to be men.[3]

Thus did the definition of manhood become the repudiation of the feminine, the resistance to mother's, and later the wife's, efforts to civilize men, to domesticate men. This resistance to feminization, whether in the form of real women (mothers and wives) or in terms of those cultural qualities of modern life that spell enervation and feminization (religion, education, workplace responsibilities, doing "brain work")—this resistance is what I call *masculinism.* Masculinism involves an effort to restore manly vigor and revirilize American men, by promoting separate homosocial preserves where men can be men without female interference. Some masculinist efforts involve the symbolic appropriation of women's reproductive power, by developing distinctively masculine forms of ritual initiation and nurture—initiations that displaced maternal care with manly validation.

Masculinism is, at its center, resistance to femininity, to the forces that turn hard men into soft, enervated nerds; it is by escape from women and resistance to femininity that masculinists hope to retrieve their manhood. In their view, men had to wriggle free of these feminine, feminizing, clutches—ironically, the very clutches that male insecurity had created to free the workplace of female competition and to make the home into a man's castle and thus preserve patriarchal authority. It was in the public sphere that men faced the greatest challenges to their manhood, where their sense of manhood was won or lost, and yet these anxieties were projected, instead, onto women as the bearers of enervating lassitude. Men were suddenly terrified of feminization in the very homes they had created, and now yearned to escape or at least more clearly demarcate themselves from women.

The fears of feminization reached a crescendo in the late 1840s through the 1850s. Beards and moustaches proliferated as masculine fashion, while critics lampooned feminized styles among urban men. Walt Whitman chas-

tised the painted urban male who "looks like a doll," and a writer in *Harper's Monthly* described the human "poodles" who paraded in the cities with their "velvet tunics" and "long glossy locks." And Oliver Wendell Holmes foresaw the end of our race in 1858, convinced that a "set of black-coated, stiff-jointed, soft-muscled, paste-complexioned youth as we can boast from our Atlantic cities never before sprang from loins of Anglo-Saxon lineage."[4]

What was a real man to do? Get out of town. When Horace Greeley advised, in 1837, to "Go West, young man, and grow up with the country," men perked up their ears and followed in droves.[5] The west—both reality and idea—was the centerpiece of masculinist resistance. The west was a safety valve, siphoning off excess population, and providing an outlet for both the ambitious and the unsuccessful. As Frederick Jackson Turner, the historian who made the west the central theme of American history, put it:

> To the peasant and artisan of the Old World, bound by the chains of social class, as old as custom and as inevitable as fate, the West offered an exit into a free life and greater well-being among the bounties of nature, into the midst of resources that demanded manly exertion and that gave in return the chance for indefinite ascent in the scale of social advance.[6]

A more decidedly gendered tone is seen by literary critic David Leverenz, who writes that "[t]o be aggressive, rebellious, enraged, uncivilized; this is what the frontier could do for the European clones on the East Coast, still in thrall to a foreign tyranny of manners." Timothy Flint suggested, in 1831, that these "shrinking and effeminate spirits, the men of soft hands and fashionable life" ought to follow the pioneers, for "there is a kind of moral sublimity in the contemplation of the adventures and daring of such men" with their "manly hardihood." When young men read in Yale's president Timothy Dwight's four-volume *Travels in New England and New York* (1821–22) the author's regret that as the pioneer pushed further and further into the wilderness, he became "less and less a civilized man," or J. Hector St. John Crevecoeur's lament that on the frontier, men "degenerated altogether into the hunting state" and became, ultimately, "no better than carnivorous animals of a superior rank," they probably couldn't wait to get started.[7]

Reports from the field of this westward rush all celebrated the return to manly virtues. Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail: Sketches of Prairie and Rocky Mountain Life* (1849) was an immediate best-seller, as was his later *Discovery of the Great West* (1869). A scrawny, feeble-bodied, rich boy, Parkman saw his masculine salvation in the repudiation of all things civilized (much as did another ruling class weakling Richard Henry Dana, who

penned another masculinist escape memoir, *Two Years Before the Mast* in 1840). Charles Webber's *Old Hicks, The Guide; or, Adventures in the Comanche Country in Search of a Gold Mine* (1848) also celebrated the "philosophy of the savage life."[8]

The rush westward reached its apotheosis with the California Gold Rush of 1849. Never before, or since, have men created such a homosocial preserve on such a scale. Between 1849 and 1850, 85,000 men came to California, composing 93 percent of the state's population—71 percent of whom were younger men, aged 20 to 40. They were lured by the exciting possibilities of sudden and exorbitant wealth, but money alone did not keep them there. It was the homosocial life, the life outside the conventional boundaries of civilization, the life away from wives. "There was no female society," wrote Rev. John Todd, "no homes to soften and restrain." "The condition of the mining population, especially their carelessness in regard to appearances, mode of life, and habits in general," observed C. W. Haskins, "showed conclusively that man, when alone, and deprived of that influence which the presence of woman only can produce, would in a short time degenerate into a savage and barbarous state." One doctor explained that in California, "all the *restrictive influence* of fair women is lost, and the ungoverned tempers of men run wild."[9]

And they looked and acted the part. Forty-niners cast off the cultural baggage they brought from the east, relinquishing evidence of their former civilized lives. They took new names, manly and rough, like Texas Jack, Whiskey Tom, French Flat Pete, Buckeye and Sawbones (a doctor), neither bathed nor changed their clothes, gambled, drank incessantly, swore, attended bare-knuckled prize fights more often than they attended church services. A deck of cards was called the "California prayer book." Thus did the Forty-niners find what they were really looking for in those gold mines; they retrieved their lost manhood, even if they didn't find any gold.[10]

Of course, one needn't go to all the trouble of traveling across the country to retrieve manhood by a confrontation with nature. One could find it in one's own backyard, the way that Henry David Thoreau did. Thoreau, too, rejected the enervated version of Marketplace Men, who led, in his famous phrase "lives of quiet desperation"—a man who is "in such desperate haste to succeed and in such desperate enterprises" that his life is "frittered away by detail." Urban businessmen were literally suffocating on the enervating tendencies of modern life, but working men lacked the leisure to develop their manly integrity: both, Thoreau believed, needed liberation.[11] "We should come home from far, from adventures, and perils, and discoveries

every day, with new experience and character." In short, we need the "tonic of the wilderness," as an antidote to the lockstep inanity of the new marketplace.[12]

So Thoreau set out to live at Walden Pond in 1845, shunning the company of women in order to create himself, to become a self-made man in the wilderness. In a sense, Thoreau conducted his own initiation into a new version of manhood. First, he rejected as a model the old, aristocratic father, England. "I look on England today as an old gentleman who is travelling with a great deal of baggage, trumpery which has accumulated from long housekeeping, which he has not the courage to burn." Then, he baptized himself. "I got up early and bathed in the pond; that was a religious exercise, and one of the best things which I did." And, finally, he took communion, in a rather brutal fashion. "I caught a glimpse of a woodchuck stealing across my path, and felt a strange thrill of savage delight, and was strongly tempted to seize and devour him raw; not that I was hungry then, except for that wildness which he represented." Ingesting the wildness, Thoreau suggests, allows middle-class men to free themselves.[13]

If middle-class men were unable to venture to the west, or even to a local pond, the tonic virtues of the wilderness could be brought to their homes; they could escape through fantasy. In the first half of the century, two forms of fantasy were available: popular biographies of pioneers and backwoodsmen, elevated to the level of national myths, and popular fiction, both of which allowed men to escape through fantasies of identification. For example, although Kit Carson and Daniel Boone were both active in the first two decades of the century, and Davy Crockett active in the 1830s, all became mythic heroes in the 1840s and especially in the 1850s, when their biographies were rewritten as primitivist narratives of innate, instinctual manhood. All three were in constant retreat from advancing civilization.

Boone was the "natural man," disinterested in accumulation of wealth, always on the move, never weighted down. "Boone used to say to me," declared one backwoodsman, who claimed to be Boone's hunting buddy, "that when he could not fall the top of a tree near enough to his door for fire wood, it was time to move to a new place." Another legend held that when Boone heard that someone was clearing a farm 12 miles west of him, he declared the area "too thickly settled"—his version of "there goes the neighborhood"—and prepared his next move. Lionizing such misanthropic grumpiness seems to be a peculiarly American trait.[14]

Equally distinctive was the creation of the American myth of mobility, and especially the link between geographic mobility, social mobility, and self-

recreation as men. The heroic artisan returns in the guise of the pioneer, the masculine primitive, but he is still humble and beholden to his origins. As Richard Slotkin, who has traced what he called the "frontier fable" as a dominant theme in American culture, writes:

> The protagonist is usually represented as having marginal connections to the Metropolis and its culture. He is a poor and uneducated borderer or an orphan lacking the parental tie to anchor him to the Metropolis and is generally disinclined to learn from book culture when the book of nature is free to read before him. His going to the wilderness breaks or attentuates the Metropolitan tie, but it gives him access to something far more important than anything the Metropolis contains—the wisdom, morality, power, and freedom of Nature in its pure wild form.[15]

Though the myth contains an irony invisible to its protagonists—that their very activity in moving west to escape civilization transforms them into its advance guard, as they tame the west for future settlement—it remains a most potent myth today. When one historian dared to debunk aspects of the myth about how and when Crockett died at the Alamo, he was berated by irate writers as a "wimp," fit for nothing better than the lowly profession of college teaching. In the 1992 presidential campaign, Republican challenger Pat Buchanan donned a coonskin cap as he campaigned in Crockett's native Tennessee.[16]

These real-life historical figures were transformed into mythic heroes within a decade or two of their deaths; the fictional creations of early nineteenth-century American novelists made them up as they went along. In their insightful books, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1966), and *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (1988), literary critics Leslie Fiedler and David Leverenz, respectively, describe the two dominant, and related, themes in American literature: male bonding in the escape from women (Fiedler) and discomfort and resistance to the marketplace (Leverenz). Fiedler explains best those writers who embraced and articulated this vision most completely—Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Mark Twain; Leverenz focuses instead on those who were more ambivalent, like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Walt Whitman.[17]

To Fiedler, the classic American novel is entirely different from the classic European novel, in which the plot revolves around a heterosexual couple, struggling with issues of sexual fidelity, workplace responsibility, family and domestic concerns—as in, for example, *Madame Bovary, Tom Jones,* or *Jane Eyre.* American novels are marked by the absence of sexuality, the absence

of marriage and families—the virtual absence of women entirely. The American novel is about "adventure and isolation plus an escape at one point or another, or a flight from society to an island, a woods, the underworld, a mountain fastness—some place, at least, where mothers do not come."[18]

Take Washington Irving's story "Rip Van Winkle" (1820). Alongside the surface treatment of progress—Van Winkle sleeps for twenty years and comes back to find everything changed—there is also the escape from his shrewish wife. "Morning, noon, and night her tongue was incessantly going, and everything he did or said was sure to produce a torrent of household eloquence." Usually, Rip simply "shrugged his shoulders, shook his head, and cast up his eyes" in response. But finally he had to get away. "Poor Rip was at last reduced almost to despair; and his only alternative, to escape from the labor of the farm and clamor of his wife, was to take gun in hand and stroll away into the woods." Rip's musket-laden stroll culminates in a twenty-year alcoholic reverie and confrontation with the homosocial world of the mountain trolls. Upon his return, Rip is most struck by the changes in the gender order that his absence, and his wife's death, has elicited:

> Rip, in fact, was no politician; the changes of states and empires made but little impression on him; but there was one species of despotism under which he had long groaned, and that was—petticoat government. Happily that was at an end; he had got his neck out of the yoke of matrimony, and could in and out whenever he pleased, without dreading the tyranny of Dame Van Winkle. Whenever her name was mentioned, however, he shook his head, shrugged his shoulders, and cast up his eyes; which might pass either for an expression of resignation to his fate, or joy at his deliverance.

The story's last line extends Irving's fable to the "common wish of all henpecked husbands in the neighborhood, when life hangs heavy on their hands, that they might have a quieting draught of Rip Van Winkle's flagon." Rip is the first of this fictional American archetype, the man in flight to avoid persecution—the fugitive, born to run.[19]

By the mid-nineteenth century, until today, this new American male hero also encounters another man, preferably a man of another race, as a sort of spirit guide to this world without women. From Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook, Huck and Jim, Ishmael and Queequeg, all the way to the Lone Ranger and Tonto, Captain Kirk and the Vulcan Mr. Spock, and Lt. John Dunbar and Kicking Bird in *Dances with Wolves,* and Murtaugh and Riggs in the *Lethal Weapon* series, American fiction has celebrated male bonding, "a love between males, more enduring and purer than any heterosexual pas-

sion," which culminates in an asexual counter-marriage "in which the white refugee from society and the dark skinned primitive are joined till death do them part." That a society so defined by racism and homophobia should place homoerotic union between two men of different races as its central theme is somewhat astonishing. Fiedler attributes this to a search for redemption in fantasy for white heterosexual guilt, but I believe it is also a way to present screens against which manhood is projected, played out, and defined.[20] Women and children, in their absence, offer such a screen; they do not even enter the arena of masculinity. The non-white male, then, stands in for them—as dependent child ("Nigger Jim"), male mother (Chingachgook, Tonto), spiritual guide and moral instructor (Queequeg, Chingachgook). Their homoerotic passion is never the passion of equals; the non-white is either the guide and exemplar or the Rousseauian "noble savage" who, in his childlike innocence, is more susceptible to the wiles of civilization.[21]

Sexuality—succumbing to the lustful temptations of the body—would ruin everything, just as carnal desires ruin men's ability to wriggle free of their connection with women. With women, sexuality leads to marriage and family; with men, transforming homo*erotic* bonding into homo*sexual* union would likewise destroy the charged but chaste basis for the bond.[22] Nowhere is this more clear than in the five-novel saga of the Leatherstocking Tales by James Fenimore Cooper, the most popular novelist of antebellum America. Cooper had earlier groped for a way to develop his critique of emerging marketplace manhood and his idealization of the natural man. In his 1821 novel *The Spy,* for example, his critique of one character, Harvey Birch, as a shrewd, acquisitive, Yankee peddlar whose "love of money is a stronger passion than love of his kin" is less effective without another masculine archetype to play off against.

In 1823, Cooper found him in Natty Bumppo, the hero of *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1840), and *The Deerslayer* (1841). In Bumppo, Cooper created the prototype of masculinist flight into the wilderness and "showed how the solitary hunter, unencumbered by social responsibilities, utterly self-sufficient, uncultivated but endowed with a spontaneous appreciation of natural beauty could become the central figure in the great American romance of the West." "And Natty, what sort of man is he?" asked D. H. Lawrence. "Why, he is a man with a gun. He is a killer, a slayer. Patient and gentle, as he is, he is a slayer. Self-effacing . . . still he is a killer." No Marketplace Man, Bumppo is a traditional gentleman, naturally virtuous, in "flight from civi-

lized unmanliness to Native-American traditions of patriarchal comradeship." Natty Bumppo is the first "last real man in America."[23]

When we first meet him, and his Indian companion Chingachgook, they are engaged in a debate about whether whites have any rights to take the Indians' land. At first, Natty says that whites are only doing to the Indians what the Indians used to do to each other, although he acknowledges that it does seem a bit unfair to be using bullets. But then Natty launches into a critique of feminization that seems to come out of nowhere. Modern white men no longer publicly shame the "cowardly" and applaud bravery; nowadays, they "write in books" instead of telling their deed in the villages, "where the lie can be given to the face of a cowardly boaster, and the brave soldier can call on his comrades to witness for the truth of his words." As a result, "a man who is too conscientious to misspend his days among the women, in learning the names of black marks, may never hear of the deeds of his fathers, nor feel a pride in striving to outdo them."[24]

If books are agents of feminization, women are but helpless and frail creatures. Throughout the novel, men spend a lot of time in the forests, risking all manner of danger, to rescue women whom they believe cannot survive without male protection. Enemies are also feminized: "The Delawares are women!" exclaims Hawkeye. "The Yengeese, my foolish countrymen, have told them to take up the tomahawk, and strike their fathers in the Canada, and they have forgotten their sex. Does my brother wish to hear Le Cerf Agile ask for his petticoats, and see him weep before the Hurons, at the stake?"[25] Though Hawkeye delivers the masculinist attacks on effeminate Mama's boys and disdains women, it falls to Chingachgook, the Indian, to deliver the most stinging critique of Marketplace Manhood—in the guise of a critique of the white man:

> Some [The Great Spirit] made with faces paler than the ermine of the forests: and these he ordered to be traders; dogs to their women and wolves to their slaves. He gave this people the nature of the pigeon; wings that never tire: young, more plentiful than the leaves on the trees, and appetites to devour the earth. He gave them tongues like the false call of the wildcat; hearts like rabbits; the cunning of the hog . . . and arms to fight his battles; his cunning tells him how to get together the goods of the earth; and his arms inclose the land from the shore of the salt water to the islands of the great lake. His gluttony makes him sick. God gave him enough, and yet he wants all. Such are the palefaces.[26]

Such was the masculinity expressed by the urban entrepreneur, against which Cooper was rebelling, celebrating instead the return of the virtuous hunter, the Heroic Artisan in the wilderness.

Other antebellum writers were ambivalent about the triumph of Marketplace Man. Some, like Horace Greeley, were concerned that unbridled marketplace competition caused corruption. "The relations instituted among men, by the present form of society, are those of individual Selfishness, which generates Indigence, Fraud, Oppression, War, Disease, and False and delusive Doctrines," which "cannot be prevented by any change short of a thorough social reorganization," he wrote in 1850.[27] Whitman celebrated the vital sensuality of the Heroic Artisan as a counterpoint to the stoic self-control of the self-made man, as in his homoerotic adulation of artisanal comradeship—both physical and spiritual:

> I will plant companionship thick as trees along the rivers of America, and along the shores of the Great Lakes, and all over the prairies.
> I will make inseparable cities with their arms about each other's necks,
> By the love of comrades
> By the manly love of comrades.

More than any other work, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* provides the most compelling analysis of the mid-century crisis of masculinity. Captain Ahab's "desperate narcissistic rage" and "mesmerizing coerciveness" are the marks of "a man obsessed with avenging his shattered manhood."[28] In Ahab, Melville provides a portrait of gendered madness, a blind rage fueled by sexualized obsession, the self-destruction of the self-made Marketplace Man. Here is a man driven to dominate, compulsively competitive, obsessively insecure—in short, the archetypal capitalist man, a nineteenth-century Type A powerbroker. His monomania, that obsession with domination that is the disease of the driven, is the nineteenth-century male version of hysteria.[29]

The great whale is both the more powerful man against which masculinity is measured and the archetypal woman—carnal, sexually insatiable, Other.[30] What are we to make, after all, of the fact that Ahab, who had lost his "leg" trying to plunge his "six inch blade" into the whale, is now engaged in a "crazed flight to prove his manhood"? *Moby Dick* is "the most extravagant projection of male penis envy" in American literature.[31] Ahab's inevitable failure is both economic and sexual; Marketplace Manhood is no match for the forces of nature, and so the relations are inverted, revealing the terror of being dominated that lies beneath the drive to dominate. Ahab is the male Dora, seducing and seduced, rapist and raped, willing to partake of the savage butchery of his entire crew to avoid humiliation at the hands of his rival. Like the real-life Andrew Jackson, the fictional Ahab is finally hysterically

mute, incapable of speech. He dies strangled in the harpoon's ropes, choking, voiceless and terrified.

These violent passions provide a startling contrast to the tender artisanal homoeroticism between Ishmael and the harpoonist, Queequeg, who discover, as they lie asleep in bed, wrapped in each other's arms, that chaste yet eroticized homosociality that characterizes the purified male bond. To Melville, those bonds were impossible if one adopted the competitive drive of Marketplace Man; they were possible only in the homosocial fraternalism of the Heroic Artisan, all but one of whom is destroyed by Ahab's monomaniacal pursuit of the Leviathan.

TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY FANTASIES OF ESCAPE

By the turn of the century, the frontier was closed. What was a man to do? Well, for one thing, he could join the hundreds of organizations that had sprung up to answer his manly needs—institutions like local sports teams, Muscular Christian revival meetings, or fraternal orders, which boasted over 5.5 million members in 1897—out of an adult male population of slightly less than 19 million! And through the YMCA, Boy Scouts, single-sex schools, he could ensure that his sons received proper training in hardy manhood.[32] Or he could retrieve his deep manhood by fantasy. After all, it is a psychoanalytic axiom that what we lose in reality we recreate in fantasy. Why not gender identity?

For example, the exploits of Frank Merriwell at Yale found avid young male readers. Here was the embodiment of the strenuous ideal, excelling in every sport, always winning the big game for Yale when the chips were down—he could even throw a curve ball that curved twice!—without any compromise of his manly and moral virtues. Like Gilbert Patten (who wrote the Merriwell stories under the name Burt Standish), turn-of-the-century writers pursued male readers with fantasy tales of heroic adventure on the edges of civilization, scathing critiques of sedentary life, and offered their readers the possibility of escape. In fantasy, we re-enter the world of the independent virtuous artisan, our recurring fantasy role model, even up to the present day. In his most famous incarnation, he is the cowboy.

The cowboy occupies an important place in American cultural history—he is America's contribution to the world's stock of mythic heroes. What is most interesting is that the cowboy was not always a hero; he was invented. And he was invented, in a sense, after he had disappeared. In the 1860s and

1870s, the cowboy was called a "herder," and he appeared in public prints and writing as rough, uncouth, shaggy, and dirty; his behavior was violent, barbarous, and rowdy. He was the brutal outlaw, not the good guy. Writing in 1875, Laura Winthrop Johnson saw no glamour in these "rough men with shaggy hair and wild staring eyes, in butternut trousers stuffed into great rough boots." But around 1882, a cowboy named Buck Taylor at the First Wild West Show first captured the attention of a writer, Prentiss Ingraham. The Wild West Show was a conscious re-creation of the west, now tamed for mass consumption, into a traveling circus. Organized by Buffalo Bill Cody, the pre-eminent trader in mythic archetypes, the show depicted the conquest of the wild west, transforming it into an American allegory of expansion and marketplace success. In 1887, Ingraham wrote a fictional biography of Taylor, later expanded in a series of dime novels, and the new cowboy was invented.[33]

By 1887, the great cattle drives that were his home had ended, and the "Big Die-Up" of the winter of 1886–87 had bankrupted many cattle outfits, and so altered ranch life that the cowboy was "less a knight errant and more a hired man on horseback." The cowboy thus emerges in literature at the exact moment of his disappearance as independent artisan and his transformation into a wage worker in a new industry of cattle ranching. Though the cowboy was a worker, "a skilled technician hired to do the boring, and often dangerous business of 'working' cows," his iconic representation shows the possibility of the employee as hero.[34]

If the workaday world of the cowboy had been somewhat proletarianized in real life, in its fictional representation it was all guts and glory. The end of the century also witnessed the creation of the rodeo, a "celebration of the unique and daring sports indulged in and enjoyed by all the virile characters of the western frontier," as a promotional handbill for Cheyenne's Frontier Days put it. The first rodeo was held in 1883 in Pecos, Texas; five years later, folks in Prescott, Arizona, paid admission to see cowboys strut their cowpunching stuff in contained arenas. By the 1890s, rodeos had defined formats and rules which governed the major competitions—steer wrestling, bareback riding and bronco busting. Cheyenne's Frontier Days were inaugurated in 1897 as a self-conscious "annual resurrection of the west as it was, for the edification of the west as it is." One magazine writer explained the significance of Frontier Days in 1909:

> Civilization is pushing everything before it: thriving cities and well kept farms are taking the place of the cattle upon a thousand hills. But the pioneer still

> clings with a pathetic tenacity to the old customs . . . a pathetic but vigorous desire . . . to prove that strong arms and courageous hearts still existed on the range.[35]

Organizers had no doubts that it was rugged western manliness that was also being resurrected. Individual acts were extolled for their "peril to life and limb"; commentators were awed by the "sheer nerve" of the bareback rider, and one waxed poetic about broncos—"murderers that plunge with homicidal fury beneath the cinches of leather of a bucking saddle." For the participants, the rodeo gave the "feeling of being part of the frontier that still lives in the professional rodeo arena. A cowboy on a bronc symbolizes the rugged individuality of the Western man and beast." For the spectators, the rodeo was a "true taste of the wild and wooly."[36] The rodeo pen preserved the frontier as gladiatorial arena; its competitors, participants in a blood sport.

As a mythic creation, the cowboy was fierce and brave, willing to venture into unknown territory, a "negligent, irrepressible wilderness," and tame it for its less-than-masculine inhabitants. As soon as the environment is subdued, he must move on, unconstrained by the demands of civilized life, unhampered by clinging women and whining children and uncaring bosses and managers.[37] His is a freedom that cannot be "bounded by the fences of a too weak and timid conventionalism," as Harold Wright put it in his western novel, *When a Man's a Man* (1916).[38] He is a man of impeccable ethics, whose faith in natural law and natural right is eclipsed only by the astonishing fury with which he demands rigid adherence to them. He is a man of action—"grim [and] lean, . . . of few topics, and not many words concerning these." He moves in a world of men, in which daring, bravery, and skill are his constant companions. He lives by physical strength and rational calculation; his compassion is social and generalized, but he forms no lasting emotional bonds with any single person. He lives alone, a "hermited horseman" out on the range, settling the west.[39]

And, of course, he doesn't really exist, except in the pages of the western, the literary genre heralded by the publication of Owen Wister's novel *The Virginian* in 1902.[40] Wister is not only the creator of the genre, but one of its biggest boosters and celebrators. Born into an aristocratic Philadelphia family, Wister's first love was music, and he went to Harvard to study composition. When it became clear that he would never become a truly great composer, his father insisted that he return home to a position at Boston's largest brokerage house. Within a few months, Wister had a nervous breakdown

and developed Bells palsy (a paralysis of the face). He consulted S. Weir Mitchell, who diagnosed Wister's problem as neurasthenia and prescribed a trip to a Wyoming dude ranch for a cure. At the ranch, Wister slept outdoors in a tent, bathed in an icy creek each morning, spent hours in the saddle, hunted, fished, and worked in the roundup, and helped brand calves, castrate bulls, and deliver foals. "I am beginning to be able to feel I'm something of an animal and not a stinking brain alone" he wrote from the ranch in 1885. In three weeks, Wister believed himself to be completely cured.[41]

And he was completely converted to western life, which he was now devoted to celebrating. The western was his creation, a vehicle for "an upper class composer-short-story-writer with doubts about his independence to claim a robust masculinity," according to literary critic Jane Tompkins.[42] As a genre, the western represented the apotheosis of masculinist fantasy, a revolt not against women but against feminization. The vast prairie is the domain of male liberation from workplace humiliation, cultural feminization, and domestic emasculation. The western provides men with alternative institutions and experiences—the saloon replaces the church, the men sitting around the campfire is the equivalent of the Victorian parlor, the range replaces the factory floor. The western is a purified, pristine male domain, the world that contemporary middle class men believed was once populated by free, independent artisans of the west.[43]

What are the traits of such a mythic figure? Of course, he is manly.[44] He was a natural aristocrat—a "natural nobleman, formed not by civilization and its institutions but the spontaneous influence of the land working on an innate goodness." Like Natty Bumppo or Davy Crockett before him, the Virginian, as the narrator first meets him, finds a "handsome, ungrammatical son of the soil"; "here in flesh and blood was a truth which I had long believed in words, but never met before. The creature we call a *gentleman* lies deep in the hearts of thousands that are born without a chance to master the outward graces of the type."[45] Having served his apprenticeship he is now a master of his craft of riding, roping, and killing. His virtues are artisanal virtues: "self-discipline, unswerving purpose; the exercise of knowledge, skill, ingenuity, and excellent judgement; and a capacity to continue in the face of total exhaustion and overwhelming odds." He is free, in a free country, embodying republican virtue and autonomy.[46]

And he is white. To Wister, the west was "manly, egalitarian, self-reliant, and Aryan"; it was the "true" America, far from the feminizing, immigrant-infested cities, where voracious blacks and masculine women devoured white men's chances to demonstrate manhood. A 1902 review of *The Virginian* in

The World's Work saw this deeper theme in the western at the moment of its origins:

> To catch the deeper meaning of our life, one's path must be toward that Western verge of the continent where all white men are American born, because there only are the culture and conservatism of the East, the chivalrism and the fire-eating spirit of the South, and the broad, unhampered gambler's view of life native to raw Western soil, all transmuted into a democracy of no distinctions.[47]

Perhaps most important, the cowboy hero of the western was an anachronism, obsolete at the moment of his creation, a conscious effort to recreate in fantasy what America had lost in reality. As Wister wrote in an editorial preface to the book:

> What has become of the horseman, the cow-puncher, the last romantic figure upon our soil? For he was romantic. Whatever he did, he did with his might. The bread that he earned was earned hard, the wages that he squandered were squandered hard . . . Well, he will be among us always, invisible, waiting his chance to live and play as he would like. His wild kind has been among us always, since the beginning, a young man with his temptations, a hero without wings.

No western writer of the era managed to cover all these themes as powerfully as Wister, but several writers plied a similar trade. Like Wister, Zane Grey came from a wealthy Philadelphia family, but abandoned his career as a dentist to write westerns. In his first, and most famous, work, *Riders of the Purple Sage* (1912), the hero, Bern Venters, represents the nineteenth-century men who "have been enfeebled by the doctrines of a feminized Christianity," embodied by Jane Witherspoon, who has symbolically emasculated him in the opening pages by taking his guns away from him. Through his transformation, "American men are taking their manhood back from the Christian women who have been holding it in thrall." "Harness the cave man—yes!" wrote Grey in 1924, "but do not kill him. Something of the wild and primitive should remain instinctive in the human race."[48]

Some real men were turned into western heroes, whose skill, bravery, or cunning allowed them to live outside the law or defeat the engines of the bureaucratic machine. Jesse James, for example, developed armed robbery into an artisanal skill. "Highway robbery as a fine art has been cultivated only in a way that has tended to bring it into disrespect," observed a writer in *The Republic* in 1874, until the James gang "burst upon us, and revealed a new field of worthy labor." The mythical James and the real James were

difficult to distinguish, in part because he fueled the myth himself. James embodied the republican virtue of the Heroic Artisan, promoting "the traditional world in which loyalty to family and friends took precedence over the greed and secularism the railroads had unleashed." Like Dick Turpin or Robin Hood (whose names he used when he signed letters, as if to claim a legacy with them), he "sought to reunite the community and reassert tradition by making the reluctant rich and powerful support the weak and defenseless."[49] The mythic figure of George Armstrong Custer was also seen as "the incarnation of the heroic, virile, self-restrained and tough minded American." Dashing, debonair and dutiful, Custer was also ruthless and monomaniacal in his pursuit of his manhood through the conquest of Indians. His carefully constructed persona was part flamboyant aristocrat, part cold sober professional, and part wild savage hunter.[50]

While Custer and James were real men who participated willingly in the cultivation of their mythic sides, Casey Jones (1900), John Henry (ca. 1873), and Paul Bunyan (collected 1912–1914) were mythic representations of the Heroic Artisanal triumphs in the very arenas and against the same forces that had defeated him in reality. Jones's track skills are necessary to keep the Illinois Central trains running; John Henry outperforms a steam drill in a masterpiece of suicidal craftsmanship, dying "with the hammer in his hand," and the giant logger, Paul Bunyan, out cuts the most technically developed chainsaws with his mighty ax. They were "heroes of an industrial world" projected back to the moment of the artisan's demise.[51]

Just as some masculinists called for war for regenerative manhood, so too did novelists celebrate the battlefield as masculine testing ground. Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1896) is perhaps the most famous such novel.[52] When Henry Fleming first sees the enemy, he is "not a man, but a member" of the army, because he "felt the subtle battle-brotherhood more potent even than the cause for which they were fighting." His experience is less about virtue than about the fear of shame, humiliation, and disgrace. His trial, his initiation, is really the substitution of one form of fear—the fear of social humiliation in front of other men—for an earlier, childlike fear, the fear of death. Crane's novel has a similar trajectory to the "Iron John" myth. Fleming tries to "measure himself by his comrades," and falls short. Following his shameful inability to prove his manhood in battle, he was "amid wounds," feeling that his shame "could be viewed." He "wished that he, too, had a wound." But eventually he rediscovers his inner warrior, and his shame and humiliation lead him to fight like a "barbarian, a beast," a "pagan who defends his religion," so that, ultimately, he was a "hero," like other

"proved men." As we leave Henry Fleming we see him now in the possession of

> a quiet manhood, nonassertive, but a sturdy and strong blood. He knew that he would no more quail before his guides wherever they should point. He had been to touch the great death, and found that, after all, it was but the great death. He was a man.[53]

Finally, one could go back—way back—to our earliest natures, to reunite with our Darwinian ancestors, and retrieve our pure masculinity by shedding all the trappings of modernity. Wrenched from effete, civilized life, or born into the life of the primitive, Buck and Tarzan hear the call of their primitive instincts and return to become wolves and apes. When we first meet Buck, in Jack London's *Call of the Wild* (1903), he is a relatively tame house pet in California, dognapped by an impoverished gardener and sold to a Klondike expedition. There, in the wild, he learns quickly the "law of club and fang" and becomes the strongest and most successful and ferocious sled dog. He has a multitude of adventures, including a deep love for the man who saves him from a savage beating and then treats him kindly—a deep, manly love, not the love of a tame animal. But even that love could not "civilize" the "strain of the primitive":

> Deep in the forest a call was sounding, and as often as he heard this call, mysteriously thrilling and luring, he felt compelled to turn his back upon the fire and the beaten earth around it, and to plunge into the forest.[54]

To which he eventually succumbs, in a masterful regression that is at once revolutionary and developmental.[55] London revels in Buck's muscular power and brute ferocity and provides a potent antidote to overcivilization. Here's London at his most eloquent:

> There is an ecstacy that marks the summit of life, and beyond which life cannot rise. And such is the paradox of living, this ecstacy comes when one is most alive, and it comes as a complete forgetfulness of living, comes to the artist, caught up and out of himself in a sheet of flame; it comes to the soldier, war-mad on a stricken field and refusing quarter; and it came to Buck, leading the pack, sounding the old wolf-cry, straining after the food that was alive and that fled swiftly before him through the moonlight. He was sounding the deeps of his nature, and of the parts of his nature that were deeper than he, going back into the womb of Time. He was mastered by the sheer surging of life, the tidal wave of being, the perfect joy of each separate muscle, joint, and sinew and that it was everything that was not death, that it was aglow and rampant, expressing

itself in movement, flying exultantly under the stars and over the face of dead matter that did not move.[56]

This contrast of civilization and animality is the bedrock of Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912) and the subsequent series of Tarzan books that saw him have every manly adventure known to Burroughs, including returning to the old west, and rocketing off to outer space! Tarzan is the personification, Burroughs writes, "of the primitive man, the hunter, the warrior," the Rousseauian innocent, the "naked savage" who is also, it turns out, a blue-blooded English nobleman. In his dramatic and steamy encounters with Jane, we fully understand the power of the primitive.[57] Tarzan embodies the mythic heroism of the "avenging hero, half animal and half human, fusing beast and patrician, descend into an evil underclass to save a helpless bourgeois civilization." Thus portrayed, Tarzan reasserts white supremacy also, the dominance of nature over nurture; after all, Tarzan "has a man's figure and a man's brain, but he was an ape by training and environment." At the climax of this Darwinian nightmare, in which descending the evolutionary ladder is the only mechanism to retrieve manhood, Tarzan tells Jane that he has "come across the ages out of the dim and distant past from the lair of the primeval man to claim you—for your sake I have become a civilized man—for your sake I have crossed oceans and continents—for your sake I will be whatever you will me to be." Tarzan's triumph is that he will be civilized by a woman.[58]

From Tarzan's aristocratic birth to the natural aristocracy of the cowboy avenger and the primitive nobility of the reborn animal in Buck, the myth expressed a paradox of a middle class that is collectively empowered, but in which individual men feel personally powerless and unmanly, in the workplace and at home.

TR, THE STRENUOUS LIFE AND BULLY MANHOOD

The fin-de-siècle masculinist mission to thwart feminization and revirilize American men reached its symbolic apotheosis in the emergence of Theodore Roosevelt as masculine archetype. TR symbolized turn-of-the-century masculinism, embodying the triumph over effeminacy and the enthusiastic promotion of the strenuous life. Roosevelt "epitomized manly zest for the new imperial nation in part because of his jaunty energy, but also because his image brought together both aspects of the new myth: the top rung of

the ladder of social aspiration and the gladiatorial animal arena sensed at the bottom." Perhaps no American has ever so perfectly embodied the contradictions of masculinism. TR was America's self-proclaimed and self-constructed "real man."[59]

Roosevelt's self-creation begins, as they all seem to, with triumph over the body. He was, he recalled in his autobiography, "a sickly and delicate boy, suffered much from asthma, and frequently had to be taken away on trips to find a place where I could breathe." (On one of those trips, to Europe, he was seasick most of the time and rarely came on deck.) Here was a "shy and timid boy, frail in body . . . thin, pale, asthmatic, outwardly the typical 'city feller,' " as the *Boy's Life of Theodore Roosevelt* put it. "Teedie," his family affectionately called him, was a childhood wimp; his father constantly exhorted him to "make your body."[60]

Making his body was also a strategy to make his political image. Entering politics in the early 1880s, TR was called "Young Squirt" and "Jane Dandy" by the local press, and the *New York Star* threw in a little gay-baiting calling him "our own Oscar Wilde." Roosevelt needed "to attain a state of manliness, and attempt to exorcise through exercise his effeminizing sickness, and at the same time . . . attempt to masculinize and thereby strengthen his political position."[61] And where would a wimpy upperclass sissy go to make his body and thereby remake his political image? Go west young man!

Roosevelt arrived in the Dakota territory in April 1885, determined to try his hand at ranching in the rapidly disappearing old west. Like Owen Wister, Frederic Remington, and other eastern boys, Roosevelt had journeyed west to stake a claim on his manhood. On his arrival, a reporter from the Pittsburgh *Dispatch* observed "a pale, slim young man with a thin piping voice and a general look of dyspepsia about him . . . boyish looking . . . with a slight lisp, short red moustache and eye glasses"—in short, the "typical New York dude." A local railroad man recalled "a slim, anemic-looking young fellow dressed in the exaggerated style which newcomers on the frontier affected, and which was considered indisputable evidence of the rank tenderfoot." Locals found him initially a laughingstock, calling him "Roosenfelder" and "Four Eyes" and "the Eastern punkin-lily." When he first mounted his horse, he tapped it and said meekly, "Hasten forward quickly there," which made local cowboys double over with laughter, and the phrase soon became part of Badlands lore.[62]

But TR persevered, and eventually triumphed over his effete dude-ism, becoming the embodiment of "strength, self-reliance, determination"—the three terms that defined his vision of manhood. He became a booster of

the western cure, claiming that he owed "more than I could ever express to the west" because the frontier brings out manly virtues—mutuality, honor, self-respect—not the "emasculated milk-and-water moralities" of the eastern elite.[63] And what became his personal credo for his self-making became the basis for a moral and political philosophy.

Using himself as the example, Roosevelt expressed fears that "overcivilization was sapping the strength of the civilized few, who therefore needed remedial training in barbarism, violence, and appropriation."[64] In two speeches, "The Strenuous Life" (1899) and "The Pioneer Spirit and American Problems" (1900), Roosevelt railed against "the cloistered life which saps the hardy virtues," the "flabbiness" and "slothful ease" and trumpeted the call for the "strenuous life." Roosevelt used his fears of feminization—of men with "small feet and receding chins"—as the springboard to promote a full-scale imperialist adventurism:

> We cannot avoid the responsibilities that confront us in Hawaii, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. All we can decide is whether we shall meet them in a way that will redound to the national credit, or whether we shall make of our dealings with these new problems a dark and shameful page in our history. . . . The timid man, the lazy man, the man who distrusts his country, the overcivilized man, who has lost the great fighting masterful virtues, the ignorant man, and the man of dull mind, whose soul is incapable of feeling the mighty lift that thrills 'stern men with empires in their brains'—all these, of course, shrink from seeing the nation undertake its new duties; shrink from seeing us build a navy and an army adequate to our needs; shrink from seeing us do our share of the world's work, by bringing order out of chaos in the great, fair, tropic islands from which the valor of our soldiers and sailors has driven the Spanish flag. . . .
>
> I preach to you, then, my countrymen, that our country calls not for the life of ease, but for the life of strenuous endeavor. The twentieth century looms before us big with the fate of many nations. If we stand idly by, if we seek merely swollen, slothful ease and ignoble peace, if we shrink from the hard contests where men must win at hazard of their lives and at the risk of all they hold dear, then the bolder and stronger peoples will pass us by, and will win for themselves the domination of the world.[65]

With that speech, Roosevelt catapulted to the head of a long list of American presidents, from Andrew Jackson to George Bush, who sought to prove their manhood through imperial aggression against smaller and weaker countries or cultures. From the Seminoles to the Philippines, from Panama (twice) to Grenada, the best strategy to promote war is to question the President's manhood.[66]

Theodore Roosevelt massaged this epidemic fear of the overcivilized effeminacy of the American upper class into his crowning moment of symbolic manhood, the Rough Riders. The Rough Riders consisted of twelve troops, all but one of which came from the western territories. But this last, K troop, came from "New York and the Eastern states," and was widely believed to be a collection of "swells," who had left their upper-class men's clubs, dress suit in their hands, to follow Roosevelt up San Juan Hill and into the national mythology. The Rough Riders were the symbolic meeting place of the eastern establishment and western manhood—as soldiers. Some may have worn "the broad brim hat and had the bronze cheek of the plains" while others "bore the unmistakable stamp of the student and club man," one reporter wrote, but all "mingled with easy good fellowship." The Denver *Post* reported (21 May 1898) in verse the western men's perspective:

We was somewhat disappointed, I'll acknowledge, fur to see
Such a husky lot o' fellers as the dandies proved to be,
An' the free an' easy manner in their bearin' that they had
Sort o' started the impression that they mightn't be so bad.
There was absence of eye-glasses, an' of center parted hair,
An' in social conversation they was expert on the swear,
An' the way they hit the grub pile sort o' led us to reflect
That our previous impressions mightn't prove so damn correct.

To which the Chicago *Tribune* (12 July 1898) responded two months later with the easterners' perspective:

They scoffed when we lined up with Teddy,
  They said we were dudes and all that;
They imagined that "Cholly" and "Fweddie"
  Would faint at the drop of a hat.
But let them look there in the ditches,
  Blood-stained by the swells in the van,
And know that a chap may have riches,
  And still be a man![67]

TR used the presidency as a "bully pulpit" to promote the strenuous life for individuals and as a grounding for the American Empire. Politically, he opposed policies he chastised as "half-and-half, boneless," and railed against opponents he called spineless sissies. He promoted work as heroic, moralizing and masculinizing, and saw big capital and finance as emasculating effeminacy, chastising the "moneyed and semi-cultivated classes" for "producing a flabby, timid type of character which eats away at the great

fighting qualities of our race." He prescribed sports to develop a hardy masculinity—but only "the true sports for a manly race," like running, rowing, playing football and baseball, boxing and wrestling, shooting, riding and mountain climbing." No president before or since has been a bigger promoter of exercise and sporting life—and no number of photos of George Bush sailing or fishing, or of Dan Quayle golfing, could make the point as emphatically as one photograph of TR in full hunting gear. Sport was the vehicle for the self-made and self-constructed manhood of the new century. In a 1900 essay, "The American Boy," TR echoed the same sentiments as Muscular Christians and body-builders:

> Forty or fifty years ago the writer on American morals was sure to deplore the effeminacy and luxury of young Americans who were born of rich parents. The boy who was well off then . . . lived too luxuriously, took to billiards as his chief innocent recreation, and felt shame in his inability to take part in rough pastimes and field sports. Nowadays, whatever other faults the son of rich parents may tend to develop, he is at least forced . . . to bear himself well in manly exercises and to develop his body—and therefore, to a certain extent, his character—in the rough sports which call for pluck, endurance, and physical address.

Roosevelt celebrated the outdoors, creating five national parks, sixteen national monuments, and fifty-one wildlife refuges in America's wilderness, and founding the Boone and Crockett Club to promote the strenuous life for young boys.[68] He sought personal refuge in the wilderness. As late as 1912, after the failure of the Bull Moose crusade, a 53-year-old Roosevelt joined an expedition to probe the unknown regions of the Amazon. Encountering a river never before seen by a white man, Roosevelt was ecstatic, even though the expedition cost the life of one of the explorers, and nearly all of them. (The river was named Rio Roosevelt by the Brazilian government.) Asked why he risked his life for such a venture, he replied that he "had to go. It was my last chance to be a boy." As one of the founders of the American Museum of Natural History, Roosevelt linked Darwinian evolution, eugenics, and racism into a potent blend that historian of science Donna Haraway ingeniously calls "Teddy Bear Patriarchy."[69]

Roosevelt also rehearsed the stock in trade of American masculinism—racism, anti-feminism, and nativism—as rhetorical themes and political strategies for reconstituting American manhood and the world dominion of the American nation. Man-making required the separation of boys and girls; TR consistently opposed coeducation, and praised G. Stanley Hall's efforts

to stem the tide of feminization. Although he supported woman suffrage "tepidly," he was more fervent in his support of women as mothers, and furious at college-educated women who delayed childbearing or did not bear children altogether. Accusing them of race suicide, TR suggested that women who did not bear at least four children be tried as traitors to America, much the same way as soldiers who refused to fight. A woman who "shirks her duty as wife and mother is . . . heartily to be condemned," he commented in an address to the Congress of Mothers in 1908. "We despise her as we despise and condemn the soldier who flinches in battle." Soldiers and mothers—this was the way TR saw the fulfillment of patriotic duty. If the "process of race decay continued in the United States and the British Empire, the future of the white race would rest in the hands of the German and the Slav."[70]

Thus did TR's sexism merge with his racism and nativism. He consistently sounded the alarm about the Yellow Peril, calling the Chinese "an ancient and effete civilization" and attempting to limit immigration at the same time as his overseas military adventures. In his last speech before he died, Roosevelt sounded the post–World War warning that America not slink back to its former effeminacy—in terms that resound against the contemporary debate about multiculturalism and hyphenated Americans:

> There must be no sagging back in the fight for Americanism merely because the war is over. Any man who says he is an American, but something else also, isn't an American at all. We have room for but one flag, the American flag, and this excludes the red flag, which symbolizes all wars against liberty and civilization, just as much as it excludes any foreign flag of a nation to which we are hostile. We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, of American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boardinghouse; and we have room for but one soul loyalty, and that is loyalty to the American people.[71]

Here, then, was a real man for twentieth-century America—rebuilt, recharged, and revirilized for new opportunities in the new century. The materials for his self-construction relied on traditional themes of racial, ethnic and gender exclusion, but more on what men did outside of their work lives than what they did for a living. Though TR paid less attention to reclaiming home life, by the end of World War I, it was clear that the self-construction of American masculinity depended as much on one's consumption as on one's activity in production.

As G. Stanley Hall had identified adolescence as a fragile stage requiring special attention to a rite of passage, so too did Roosevelt offer an adolescent nation the initiation rites to a new manhood. TR was the perfect embodiment of American-as-adolescent boy-man. His definition of manhood was reactive, defensive, an effort to repudiate a sickly childhood and his overdependence on his mother. To accomplish this, Roosevelt engaged in a frenzied effort to appear a man in every possible guise, "changing frenetically from cowboy costume to safari suit to Rough Rider garb, Roosevelt shot more animals, rode more dusty trails, and risked his neck in combat" more than any American before John Wayne.[72] TR wore every conceivable hat—warrior, statesman, pioneer, cowboy, Rough Rider, president, father, historian, hunter, husband, naturalist, diplomat, and preacher—the first "protean man" of the century, able to shift roles depending on external circumstances, a flexible, yet hardened manly presentation of self. In the coming decades this sense of manhood would be sorely tested, as the Depression and another world war threatened to emasculate men as breadwinners and frightened unfit soldiers. What Theodore Roosevelt made clear, by creating a national legend out of his own personal triumph, is that masculinity is a constant test, relentless, unprovable, and evident in every place that men go.

CONCLUSION

Fantasies of western adventure, testing and proving manhood on the battlefield, celebrating the manly in literature, even going native in a Darwinian devolution to pure animality—these were the dominant themes of masculinist literature through the nineteenth century. But escape—from wives, partners, children, work, from adult responsibilities in general—has never provided the stable grounding for gender identity its promoters have promised. From Rip Van Winkle and Natty Bumppo to Iron John and today's "weekend warriors," men have sought the homosocial solace of the wilderness, the frontier, the west. Here, they have found a temporary respite from the feminizing clutches of women and from enervating workplace lives. But the respite has only been temporary, and either must be constantly renewed in ever more bizarre ritual appropriations, or they lapse into the same politics of resentment and exclusion of anti-feminism and racism. Men will be free, D. H. Lawrence wrote, "when they are in a living homeland, not when they are escaping to some wild west."[73] We profeminist men are still waiting for the weekend warriors to come home, and to fight alongside women, along-

side gay men and lesbians, alongside people of color in what will be the most challenging battle of their lives: to create a democratic manhood, a manhood based on equality, a manhood that is at home with itself inside the house as it is off in the woods.

NOTES

1. Henry James, *The Bostonians* [1885] (New York: Modern Library, 1984), 293.

2. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* [1846] (New York: New American Library, 1960).

3. Brownson converted to Catholicism because he felt it to be more manly and patriarchal. Brownson, cited in Barbara Welter, "The Feminization of American Religion, 1800–1860" in *Clio's Consciousness Raised,* ed. Mary Hartman and Lois Banner (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 139. See also Rotundo, "Learning About Manhood," p. 47.

4. Whitman and *Harper's Monthly,* cited in William Leach, *True Love and Perfect Union: The Feminist Reform of Sex and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 217. Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Autocrat at the Breakfast Table" in *Atlantic Monthly,* 1 May 1858, p. 881. An 1851 issue of *Scientific American* celebrated the practicality of the American genius, as against the ornateness and luxury of European inventions. See John Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776–1900* (New York: Grossman, 1976), 151. A wave of anti-European sentiment was fueled in part by masculine panic about feminization.

5. Although I will treat only the west in any detail here, there were other forms of masculinist resistance to cultural feminization. For example, much of the early nineteenth-century commune movement, from Fourierist phalanxes to Oneida, Brook Farm, and New Harmony, were efforts to restore manly dignity to men's work, to return men to the land, from which all integrity sprang. Idealizing the rapidly disappearing Heroic Artisan and yeoman farmer, these communes were, in this sense, reactionary and conservative efforts to retrieve and restore artisanal virtue as the artisan and yeoman were themselves being proletarianized. It is interesting that many of those efforts to restore the manly dignity of the Heroic Artisan did not do so at the expense of women, since many communal leaders actually supported women's equality. Masculinism could be a flight from a feminized *culture,* and still promote women's equality. See Kimmel and Mosmiller, eds., *Against the Tide* (documents by John Humphrey Noyes, Robert Dale Owen). See also Moses Harmon, Ezra Heywood, and other "sex radicals" in the latter half of the century.

6. Turner, *The Frontier in American History,* p. 92. See also Meyer, *The Jacksonian Persuasion,* p. 139. In 1836, a Massachusetts House Committee saw the choice before young artisans and farmers as "the alternative of becoming essentially a manufactur-

ing people, or of bidding adieu to their native hills . . . and following the rising glories of the west." Cited in Schlesinger, *The Age of Jackson,* p. 148.

7. Leverenz, "The Last Real Man in America," p. 763; Flint, cited in Adams, *The Great Adventure,* p. 25; Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York,* 4 volumes (New Haven, 1821), vol. 2, p. 441; Crevecoeur, cited in Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 30.

8. Webber wrote that "[t]he primitive virtues of a heroic manhood are all sufficient, and they care nothing for reverences, forms, duties, etc., as civilization has them, but respect each other's rights and recognize the awful presence of a benignant God in the still grandeur of mountain, forest, valley, plain, and river, through, among, and over which they pass." Such men, Webber wrote, "do not look back to society except with disgust." Charles Webber, *Old Hicks, The Guide; or Adventures in the Comanche Country in Search of a Gold Mine,* 2 volumes (New York, 1855), vol. 1, p. 311.

9. Richard Stott, "The Geography of Gender in Nineteenth Century America: Youth, Masculinity, and the California Gold Rush," paper presented at the 1991 Annual Meeting of the Organization of American Historians, esp. p. 6; Rev. John Todd, 1871, pp. 44–45; C. W. Haskins, *The Argonauts of California* (New York: 1890), 73. Elisabeth Margo, *Taming the Forty-Niner* (New York, 1855), 8.

10. Stott, "The Geography of Gender," pp. 6, 8, 11.

11. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden,* pp. 10, 216, 66. Businessmen "come tamely home at night only from the next field or street, where their household echoes haunt, and their life pines because it breathes its own breath over again," he wrote, while workers "are so occupied with the factitious care and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them." As a result, "[t]he laboring man has not the leisure for a true integrity day by day; he cannot afford to sustain the manliest relations to men; his labor would be depreciated in the market. He has no time to be anything but a machine" (pp. 142, 9).

12. Thoreau, *Walden,* pp. 142, 211.

13. That today, thousands of men troop off to the woods to follow men's movement leader Robert Bly in a similarly stylized initiation process, is, of course, part of the story I am telling. No wonder Bly calls Thoreau one of his heroes. In a recent poem, Bly praises Thoreau for living so "extravagantly alone . . . keeping company with his handsome language." Robert Bly, "The Insatiable Soul," poetry reading at Scottish Rite Temple, San Francisco, 30 January 1993.

14. See Henry Nash Smith, 1950; Turner, *The Frontier in American History;* John Mack Faragher, *Daniel Boone: The Life and Legend of an American Pioneer* (New York: Henry Holt, 1992), esp. pp. 6, 29, 66, 327–28. Recall, also, the words of Stephen Vincent Binet's poem:

When Daniel Boone goes by at night,
The phantom deer arise
And all lost, wild America
Is burning in their eyes

(Benet, *Selected Works,* volume I, p. 402.) In that phantom retreat, was also rebellion; Boone sought to escape the fate of most men who become, as his biographer Gilbert Imlay put it, "mere machines of the state." All three men were, as Yale President Theodore Dwight wrote, "impatient of the restraints of law, religion, and morality;" the pioneer despises the "dull uniformity and monotony" of civilized life when "compared in his mind with the stirring scenes of wild western adventure" wrote David Coyner, in his fictionalized 1847 biography of Carson, *The Lost Trappers,* cited in Turner, *The Frontier in American History,* p. 251. All were fiercely anti-intellectual; Boone, for example, "rather eschewed books, parchment deeds, and clerky contrivances as forms of evil," as his biographer Timothy Flint put it; cited in Dubbert, *A Man's Place,* p. 35. And all were virtuous, embodying the hardiness and simplicity that characterized the Heroic Artisan, "drawing from association with uncultivated nature, not the rudeness and sensualism of the savage, but genuine simplicity and truthfulness of disposition, and generosity, bravery, single heartedness, to a degree rarely found in society" as one popular biographer portrayed Kit Carson in the *Rough and Ready Annual* of 1847; cited in Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment,* p. 204.

15. Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment,* p. 374.

16. Michael A. Lofaro, "Riprorious Shemales: Legendary Women in the Tall Tale World of the Davy Crockett Almanacs" in *Davy Crockett at Two Hundred,* ed. Michael Lofaro and Joe Cummings (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 26.

17. Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Stein and Day, 1966) and David Leverenz, *Manhood in the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989). Though both authors also discuss Herman Melville, I find neither as convincing as Michael Rogin's *Subversive Genealogy* (New York: Knopf, 1983).

18. Fiedler, *Love and Death,* p. 181.

19. Washington Irving, "Rip Van Winkle" (1820), in *Collected Stories of Washington Irving* (New York: Signet, 1963), 43–57. Ever since Rip, writes Leslie Fiedler, "the typical male protagonist of our fiction has been a man on the run, harried into the forest or out to sea, down the river or into combat—anywhere to avoid 'civilization' which is to say, the confrontation of a man and woman which leads to the fall to sex, marriage and responsibility." Fiedler, *Love and Death,* p. 26.

20. See Fiedler, *Love and Death,* pp. 214, 211, et passim.

21. Recent versions of this cross-race male bonding require the absence of any hint of sexual contact between the two men, and so one of them—usually the white man—is transformed into an overtly sexualized—and heterosexual—character. Thus do the movies like *Last of the Mohicans, Lethal Weapon,* and *Dances with Wolves* stress Natty's, Riggs's, and Lt. Dunbar's love interests. The man of color as spirit guide remains relatively desexualized.

22. "The existence of overt homosexuality threatens to compromise an essential aspect of American sentimental life: the camaraderies of the locker room and ball

park, the good fellowship of the poker game and fishing trip, a kind of passionless passion, at once gross and delicate, homoerotic in the boy's sense, possessing an innocence above suspicion." Fiedler, *Love and Death,* p. 143.

23. Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven,* p. 94. D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 59. David Leverenz, "The Last Real Man in America," p. 754, et passim. See also Henry Nash Smith, *Wilderness,* p. 256; Cawelti, *Apostles of the Self Made Man,* p. 78.

24. Cooper, *Last of the Mohicans,* p. 26. Bumppo returns to this theme of anti-intellectualism, and the feminizing qualities of women throughout the novel:

> "Book!" repeated Hawkeye, with singular and ill-concealed disdain. "Do you take me for a whimpering boy at the apron string of one of your old gals; and this good rifle on my knee for the feather of a goose's wing, my ox's horn for a bottle of ink, and my leathern pouch for a cross-barred handkercher to carry my dinner? Book! What have such as I, who am a warrior of the wilderness, though a man without a cross, to do with books? I never read but in one, and the words that are written there are too simple and too plain to need much schooling; though I may boast that of forty long and hard-working years. (P. 132)

25. Cooper, *Last of the Mohicans,* p. 318. But Hawkeye's escape requires that he exchange clothes with David, the bespectacled bookworm and with the golden song. "Are you much given to cowardice?" Hawkeye asks him. "My pursuits are peaceful, and my temper, I humbly trust, is greatly given to mercy and love," David responds, "a little nettled," Cooper tells us, "at so direct an attack on his manhood," p. 323.

26. Cooper, *Last of the Mohicans,* p. 356.

27. Cited in Burns, 1876, p. 89.

28. Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance,* pp. 279, 281. This is the same unconscious obsession, Leverenz argues, that fueled Melville's rage at the capitalist Leviathan that had consumed his own father, driven by marketplace failures to bankruptcy, insanity, and eventually suicide.

29. Like its female counterpart, this insanity is based not on gender nonconformity, but an *over*conformity to crazed behavioral norms.

30. "The monsters of antebellum politics, like Jackson's Bank and Ahab's whale, were centers of hidden power, which explained the bourgeois's failure to master the world," writes Michael Rogin. "They have the power he wants, and the sensual materiality he experiences as resisting his will, and so he makes war against them." Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy,* p. 126.

31. Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance,* pp. 290, 294.

32. These fin-de-siècle institutional mechanisms to retrieve manhood are discussed at greater length in Chapter 6 of *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

33. Johnson is cited in Henry Nash Smith, *The Virgin Land,* p. 122.

34. Wallace Stegner, cited in Ben Merchant Vorpahl, *My Dear Wister: The Frederic*

Remington-Owen Wister Letters (Palo Alto: American West Publishing Co., 1972), ix. James Robertson, "Horatio Alger, Andrew Carnegie, Abraham Lincoln and the Cowboy" in *Midwest Quarterly,* 20 (1979): 253.

35. Frontier Days handbill and program, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming Library, Laramie, W994-t-ch-fd, 1925. E. M. Bond, "The Cowmen's Carnival," in *Sunset,* 23, no. 2 (August 1909): 173. The Union Pacific Railroad was equally boosterish, and with good reason—the railroad was an early sponsor of the rodeos, and offered special package tours for Easterners to Frontier Days:

> Here one may still see the real West of more than a quarter of a century ago—not a weak imitation after the manner of the tented Wild West Show known to the Easterner, but a realistic reproduction in which the actors play but once a year, and that for blood and the glory of a world's championship. It is no tamed Wild West Show under canvas, repeated day by day by tired performers. It is the "real thing," as the Cheyennes boastfully term it—and the increasing crowds from the East each year attest to its realism. It is the biggest show of its kind in all the world, and the only one in which the visitor may comfortably view the spectacular reproduction of the West as it was.

Such authenticity included tableaux of Sioux warriors in full regalia during the intermissions between the events of the rodeo competition. Union Pacific Program to 14th Annual Cheyenne Frontier Days, 1910, in American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, W994-t-ch-d.

36. Bond, "The Cowmen's Carnival," p. 176; Jimmy Walker, "Rodeo Killers" in *True West,* 1958; article in scrapbook at American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Ro 614. See also *The Saturday Evening Post,* 29 November 1919.

37. The cowboy is a man "in flight from his ancestors, from his immediate family, and from everything that tied him down and limited his freedom of movement," writes cultural critic Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: Norton, 1991), 39. To the cowboy, as Wallace Stegner puts it, civilization "meant responsibility, meant law, meant fences and homesteads, and water rights and fee simple land ownership, meant women" (Stegner cited in Ben Merchant Vorpahl, *My Dear Wister,* p. ix).

38. Wright is cited in Mark Gerzon, *A Choice of Heroes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), 77.

39. The unattributed quotations above are all from Owen Wister's letters to his friend Frederic Remington, and an essay "The Evolution of the Cow Puncher" (1893) all in Ben Merchant Vorpahl, *My Dear Wister,* pp. xi, 81, 93, 94, et passim.

40. Owen Wister, *The Virginian* [1902] (New York: New American Library, 1979).

41. Cited in G. Edward White, *The Eastern Establishment and the Western Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 124.

42. Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 136.

43. It was also an eroticized world, which has not escaped the notice of contemporary cultural critics. Robert K. Martin, for example, calls the western a "homoerotic cowboy romance" in which cowboys "gallop 'side by side' in furious flight from an increasingly feminine world in which they fear they will have no place; their search is ultimately for an imagined past before the civilizing entry of women." Robert K. Martin, "Knight Errant and Gothic Seducers: Representations of Male Friendship in Nineteenth century America" in *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. M. B. Duberman, M. Vicinus, and G. Chauncey (New York: New American Library, 1989), 174. Of course, it was not only male camaraderie that was eroticized on the range; in the absence of women, several other props—like guns and horses—also carried that erotic charge.

44. "It is this note of manliness which is dominant through the writings of Mr. Wister," wrote Theodore Roosevelt in 1895:

> Beauty, refinement, grace, are excellent qualities in a man, as in a nation, but they come second . . . to the great virile virtues—the virtues of courage, energy, and daring: the virtues which beseem a masterful race—a race fit to fell the forests, to build roads, to found commonwealths, to conquer continents, to overthrow armed enemies. (Roosevelt, cited in G. Edward White, *The Eastern Establishment and the Western Experience*, p. 197)

On this point, all reviewers agreed. William Dean Howells called it "a man's book throughout," and Morton Payne hailed it as "a man's book with not one touch of sickly sentiment." Frederic Taber Cooper notes it as a "thoroughly virile book." Morton Payne, review of *The Virginian* in *The Dial*, 33, 1902, p. 242; Theodore Roosevelt, "A Teller of Tales of Strong Men" (a review of *Red Men and White* by Owen Wister) in *Harper's Weekly*, 39, 1895, p. 1216; William Dean Howells, review of *Red Men and White* in *Harper's Weekly*, 39, 1895, p. 2032; Frederic Taber Cooper, *Some American Story Tellers* [1911] (New York: Avon, 1968), 379. See also Sanford E. Marovitz, "Testament of a Patriot: *The Virginian*, the Tenderfoot, and Owen Wister" in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 15, 1973, pp. 551–75. To contemporary feminist literary critic Madonne Miner, *The Virginian* is a "panegyric to American manhood" that ultimately fails—"a terrified, and decidedly unsuccessful, response to processes undermining traditional modes of manhood." Miner, "Manhood on the Make: Owen Wister's *Virginian*" in *Men's Studies Review*, 8(4), 1991, p. 15. See also her "Documenting the Demise of Manly Love: Owen Wister's *Virginian*," in *Journal of Men's Studies*, 1(1), 1992. I am grateful to Madonne Miner for her help in thinking through this section.

45. Donald Worster, *Under Western Skies: Nature and History in the American West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 80; Will J. Wright, *Six Gun Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 152; Robert Murray Davis, *Playing Cowboys: Low Culture and High Art in the Western* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 13. In Wister's fiction, as in many westerns, a tenderfoot narrator serves to bring the eastern reader into the western setting, and we see the west through his admiring and less-manly eyes.

46. The western hero is the living repudiation of Marketplace Masculinity. Wister writes that the cowboy scorned the traveling salesman's "being too soon with everybody, the celluloid good fellowship that passes for ivory with nine in ten of the city crowd. But not so with the sons of the sage brush. They live nearer nature, and they know better." Wister, *The Virginian,* p. 16. Wister rededicated the novel in 1911 to Theodore Roosevelt.

Of course, the cowboy rides a horse, just as modern men's lives were increasingly dominated by steam and gasoline powered modes of transportation. The horse, literary critic Jane Tompkins aptly notes, represented "everything the bureaucratic, machine-run, rule bound modern world would deprive them of—spontaneity, beauty, freedom from rules and routines, and the right to enjoy life" (Tompkins, *West of Everything,* pp. 12, 102). By contrast, the automobile suppressed manhood, demanding a sobriety and attention that precluded rambunctious animation. As Henry Adams saw it in 1906:

> The typical American man had his hand on a lever and his eye on a curve in the road; his living depended on keeping up an average speed of forty miles an hour, tending always to become sixty, eighty or a hundred, and he could not emit emotions of anxieties or subconscious distractions, more than he could admit whiskey or drugs without breaking his neck. (Adams, cited in Diane Johnson, "Something for the Boys" in *New York Review of Books,* 16 January 1992, p. 17)

47. Interestingly, Wister's western egalitarianism halted before inequality based on race, gender, or even class. There are really two classes in America, he claimed, the "quality and the equality." "It was through the Declaration of Independence that we Americans acknowledged the *eternal; inequality* of man . . . [and] gave freedom to true aristocracy, saying 'Let the best man win, whoever he is' . . . That is true democracy. And true democracy and true aristocracy are one and the same thing" (cited in Robert Murray Davis, *Playing Cowboys,* p. 14).

48. Cited in Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything,* pp. 167, 33.

49. David Thelen, *Paths of Resistance: Tradition and Dignity in Industrializing Missouri* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 74, 75. When the gang robbed a train in 1874, they examined the hands of all male passengers, because they did not want to rob workingmen, but only the "plug hat gentlemen."

50. Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment,* p. 363.

51. James Robertson, "Horatio Alger, Andrew Carnegie . . ." p. 251.

52. Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* [1895] (New York: Penguin, 1983). When more than 100 historians, novelists and journalists were asked by *American Heritage* magazine to name their favorite historical novel in U.S. history, *The Red Badge of Courage* was the most often mentioned—an amazing feat for a work of fiction in which virtually no women appear, the only exception being Henry Fleming's mother, and she only in his memory. (*Gone with the Wind, The Scarlet Letter* and *War and Peace* were tied for second, another astonishing result, since those surveyed were specifically asked about *American* novels. *USA Today,* September 30, 1992.)

53. In his famous short story, "The Open Boat" (1896), Crane presents an allegory of baptism by fire, immersion and regeneration, only after the ordeal of survival in a lifeboat can the men who did survive "then be interpreters" of life. Overcoming the first fear, the fear of death, the fear born of woman, is the masculine project, so that action can be motivated by the second—homosocial—fear is Crane's version of the transition to adult manhood.

54. Jack London, *The Call of the Wild* [1903] (New York: Signet, 1975), 75.

55. In the last line of the book, Buck becomes both wolf and boy, so that now "he may be seen running at the head of the pack through the pale moonlight or glimmering borealis, leaping gigantic above his fellows, his great throat a-bellow, as he sings a song of the younger world, which is the song of the pack" (p. 102). I'm afraid I had precisely the opposite reaction to this book when I first read it at about age 13. I was heartbroken when Buck was dognapped, and the only conclusion that would have pleased me, since I could only imagine this happening to my own little beagle puppy, was if Buck returned to his *real* family back in the garden in California, who were probably worried sick about him. Even in rereading the book, I was dismayed that once dognapped, we never again hear anything about the bereft family Buck leaves behind.

56. No wonder critics raved. "Such a primitive story, in the atmosphere of decadence and over-civilization which enveloped the turn-of-the-century years, came to its readers as a bracing wind," writes one critic, while another assesses London's popularity as due to

> the great elan and vigor that are properly associated with this country and its people emerge from his pages. Europe drained dry of such faculties, it is understandable that London's people, their concerns and their virtues, should have a nostalgic appeal that Europeans might even read of them as more credulous generations read of such heroic figures as Roland and Hector. (Harry Sylvester in *The New York Times*, 19 August 1951)

Contemporary literary critic David Leverenz adds that "London unambivalently contrasts Buck's natural leadership with the degeneracy of [feminized] men. Nevertheless, ideal manliness thrives in Buck only because he becomes less and less human, more and more wild, while his admiring narrator—like Cooper—writes a 'wild' book about him for boy-men readers who feel trapped in the maturation and long for exotic virility" (David Leverenz, "The Last Real Man in America: From Natty Bumppo to Batman" in *American Literary History*, 3, 1991, p. 761).

57. Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes* [1912] (New York: Signet, 1966). When Jane first sees him, she is a captive of a great ape, and Tarzan swings in on a vine to her rescue. Jane's "lithe young form flattened against the trunk of a great tree, her hands pressed against her rising and falling bosom, and her eyes wide with mingled horror, fascination, fear, and admiration—watched the primordial age battle with the primeval man for possession of a woman—for her" (pp. 155–56). When Tarzan has slain his foe, he grabs Jane's arm and she rebuffs him. "And then Tarzan

of the Apes did just what his first ancestor would have done. He took his woman in his arms and carried her into the jungle" (p. 157).

58. Burroughs, *Tarzan*, p. 243. See also David Leverenz, "The Last Real Man in America," p. 759.

59. David Leverenz, "The Last Real Man in America: From Natty Bumppo to Batman" in *American Literary History*, 3, 1991, p. 763. "Probably no finer illustration of American manhood has ever occupied the office of the presidency than Theodore Roosevelt" was how one contemporary observer put it. John Brisben Walker, "A Working Man in the Presidency" in *The Cosmopolitan*, 32, 1901, p. 25. I have also relied on several contemporary accounts of Roosevelt, including Kathleen Dalton, "Theodore Roosevelt: Morality and Manliness in the Progressive Era," unpublished manuscript, 1979 and "Why America Loved Teddy Roosevelt," in *Our Selves/Our Past: Psychological Approaches to American History*, ed. Robert J. Brugger (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981); William Davison Johnson, *TR: Champion of the Strenuous Life* (New York: Theodore Roosevelt Association, 1958).

Of course, TR himself was a frequent contributor to his own mythology. I have relied here on *Addresses and Papers of Theodore Roosevelt*, ed. W. F. Johnson (New York: The Unit Book Publishing Co., 1909); *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt*, 20 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1926); *Autobiography* [1913] (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1958); *The New Nationalism* (New York: The Outlook Company, 1910); *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, ed. Elting Morrison (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951).

60. Herman Hagedorn, *A Boy's Life of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: Harper, 1918). One of the best selling boys' books of all time, Hagedorn made Roosevelt's journey a template for twentieth-century American men.

61. Tom Lutz, *American Nervousness, 1903*, p. 79.

62. Roosevelt, himself, thought he looked smashing in his "sombrero, silk neckerchief, fringed buckskin shirt, sealskin chaparajos or riding trousers, and alligator hide boots" and with his "pearl-hilted revolver and beautifully finished Winchester rifle," he felt "able to face anything," as he wrote to his sister, cited in Donald Day, ed, *The Hunting and Exploring Adventures of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: Dial, 1955), 47. See also G. Edward White, *The Eastern Establishment and the Western Experience*, p. 83, and John Eliot, "TR's Wilderness Legacy" in *National Geographic*, September 1982, p. 344.

63. *Autobiography*, p. 76. The west, he wrote, "is no place for men who lack the ruder, coarser virtues and physical qualities, no matter how intellectual or how refined and delicate their sensibilities" (*Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*, 1888, p. 56, 10).

64. Tom Lutz, *American Nervousness, 1903*, p. 28.

65. Theodore Roosevelt, *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt*, volume 13, pp. 322–23, 331.

66. Of course, this concern was particularly salient at the turn of the century; as

one California newspaper editorialized in the 1890s, "the ardor and strength of prime manhood is a much needed quality in American government, especially at this time, when all things political and all things social are in the transition stage." Cited in Bruce Curtis, "The Wimp Factor" in *American Heritage,* November 1989, p. 44. Masculinist themes resounded across the political spectrum, as the campaigns for James Garfield—"the workingman's best friend; Ignoring fop and dandy"—or that between Benjamin Harrison, "the man who captured flags in battle's blazing track," and Grover Cleveland, "the cringing craven who would give them back" would attest (*Songbooks,* pp. 139, 140). Senator Roscoe Conkling continually characterized his opponents as "the man-milliners, the dilettanti and carpet knights of politics," whose stock in trade is "rancid canting, self-righteousness," and who "forget that parties are not built up by deportment, or by ladies magazines, or by gush." See Roscoe Conkling, *The Life and Letters of Roscoe Conkling,* ed. Alfred Conkling (New York: Webster, 1889), 540, 541. Even Woodrow Wilson eventually had to assert his manhood, since his early bookishness as president of Princeton did not outfit him for the manly heroism of the Presidency of the nation. One article praised his transformation from the rarefied realm of Princeton, where he was "bulwarked by books," into a "boss wrecker of corrupt machine, and militant master of his party." See *Munsey's,* October 1911, p. 3.

67. See "Muster Out Roll," reprinted in Roosevelt, *The Rough Riders,* pp. 238–69. Santa Fe *New Mexican,* 11 May 1898. These journalistic reports are cited in G. Edward White, *The Eastern Establishment,* p. 155.

68. His boys' books, *The Wilderness Hunter* (1894), *American Big Game Hunting* (1894), and *Hunting in Many Lands* (1896), were written for the Boone and Crockett Club, and became part of boy culture in the early twentieth century.

69. William Davison Johnson, *TR: Champion of the Strenuous Life,* p. 138, 126–27; Donna Haraway, *Private Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989), Chapter 3.

I admit to a very personal relationship to Teddy Bear Patriarchy. My great uncle, Morris Michtom, was one of those Americans who was completely mesmerized by this big-game hunting rough and rowdy image of the President. An immigrant candy store owner and part-time tailor on the Lower East Side, Morris read about TR's hunting exploits and was particularly struck by a story of how TR refrained from killing a bear because he suddenly saw her small cub. Piecing together a little model of the bear cub, he sent it to TR in the White House, where the President was so pleased with his trophy that he displayed it in a magazine photograph. Within days, Uncle Morris was deluged by Washington's political elite with requests for copies, and soon Morris had hired a collection of local neighborhood boys to manufacture these "Teddy Bears." Morris Michtom founded the Ideal Toy Corporation the next year.

I also admit to having been completely taken in by TR's image in my youth. After devouring *The Boys' Life of Theodore Roosevelt,* I vividly recall a family outing to Saga-

more Hill, TR's home and retreat on Long Island. His study was the manliest room I've ever encountered: animal rugs on the floor, deep rich leather chairs and book bindings, animal heads covering the dark brown wood paneling, and, most impressive to me, a chair made entirely from elephant tusks and covered with zebra skin. For years, I kept a postcard of the room on the bulletin board at my desk and fantasized about the life that must have been lived in order to collect such trophies.

70. Roosevelt, *Addresses and Papers*, p. 433; German and Slav quote cited in Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 189. Roosevelt also opposed women's working, believing that it would work "change and disturbance" in American life, especially since it also produced the "decrease" in marriage and especially in the birth rate." See *Addresses and Papers*, p. 275.

71. Cited in *Boys Life of Theodore Roosevelt*, pp. 384–85.

72. See Kathleen Dalton, "Theodore Roosevelt," p. 11. Dalton argues that even as he charged up San Juan Hill, TR "could not murder his invalid self" (p. 12).

73. D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Thomas Selzer, 1923), 9.

Deep Masculinity as Social Control: Foucault, Bly, and Masculinity

TIMOTHY BENEKE

We are often reminded of the countless procedures which Christianity once employed to make us detest the body; but let us ponder all the ruses that were employed for centuries to make us love sex, to make the knowledge of it desirable and everything said about it precious. Let us consider the strategems by which we were induced to apply all our skills to discovering its secrets, by which *we were attached to the obligation to draw out its truth* . . . we need to consider the possibility that one day, perhaps in a different economy of bodies and pleasures, people will no longer quite understand how the ruses of sexuality, and the power that sustains its organization, were able to subject us to that austere monarchy of sex, so that *we became dedicated to the endless task of forcing its secret,* exacting the truest of confessions from a shadow.

The irony of this deployment is in having us believe that our "liberation" is in the balance.

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*[1]

FOUCAULT

The later writings of Michel Foucault offer an unsettling perception: increasingly, it is through seeking a deep, presumptively liberating truth about ourselves—formulated and established by authority—that we are likely to cast aside our freedom. Power works less as an external force which constrains us, and more by giving us a self-interpretation which implicitly, even urgently, dictates action within the context of institutions under the guise of liberation.

I want to apply this notion to Robert Bly's *Iron John* and the contemporary mythopoetic men's movement's search for the "deep masculine." I am less concerned with the accuracy of my interpretation of what is a small part of Foucault, than with the usefulness of its appropriation.[2] Finally, I will offer some remarks about the political implications of the concept of masculinity.

FOUCAULT

Following Foucault, we can distinguish two notions of power which I will call "external power" and "power/knowledge." External power is what we traditionally understand as power; one separate external entity or force exerts power over another entity or force. This model appears to be grounded in the workings of the physical world where one object exerts physical pressure against another. Master and slave, jailer and prisoner, occupier and occupied, owner of the means of production and worker, society's dicta and repressed self, censorer and censored are thought to be in this relation of power. Power in this sense is negative: it represses, denies, prohibits and constrains.

On this model, power is resisted through the pursuit, expression and application of truth, which is believed to unmask and delegitimize power and provide strategies for its undoing. The power of tyrants will be overcome by perceiving their moral illegitimacy; Marxist truth will free workers of their chains and establish a classless society; Freudian truth will unleash repression caused by societal taboo and enable a freer negotiation with society's oppression; Jungian truth will connect the self to collective archetypes which will deepen the meaning of existence and free one from social repression. From the standpoint of those attempting to resist external power, it is necessary to subjectively cultivate a demystifying grasp of the workings of power in order to subvert its authority. The oppressed self is separate from and at odds with authority, and must understand how authority dominates it. Truth on this model is seen to be intrinsically opposed to power and to play a liberating role in relation to it: the truth will set us free.

The Foucaultean notion of power/knowledge turns external power on its head. Power/knowledge functions by the internalization and pursuit of truth—one is in fact precisely controlled by power through the pursuit of a deep truth about the self. On this model power is not something separate from truth, but operates *through* truth, specifically the truth of the social sciences and religion. Power/knowledge functions to interpret us to ourselves. In trying to know ourselves by way of theory provided by authority, we are placed invisibly under the sway of power.

Power/knowledge is "positive" and productive: it produces discourses, self and societal interpretation, liberatory projects; it constructs psychological, social, and political reality. The great Foucaultean irony is that power/knowledge, in its purest form, functions through masking itself as liberation from power, conceived as external power.

With the advent of Christianity, Foucault believes, humankind took a wrong turn, and gave *knowing* the self priority over *caring* for the self. A certain enduring structure solidified itself. An authority, the priesthood, had privileged access to truth about the self and its relation to the cosmos, and offered a practice—confession and expiation—which could interpret and redeem the self. The early Christians learned to scrutinize their consciousness for evidence that the devil was tempting them; then they would confess the results of their scrutiny, along with sins of behavior, to a priest, who, possessing privileged knowledge and theory, would offer techniques of remediation. In seeking to free oneself through knowledge of the self one was under the sway of institutional power.

This relation among authority, theory, institutions, and self understanding, constituted a misguided and dangerous conjunction: as the pursuit of knowledge of the self took hold, an endless multiplication of discourses became possible, each of which committed to exfoliating deep truths about the self. For Foucault this was dangerous because there is in truth no human nature, no deep truth about the self, no human essence. There exist selves and subjectivity constructed by the discourses of culture, that with the advent of Christianity, became subject to certain tendencies: the establishment of institutions and expertise which could construct the self and self knowledge and provide standards of normality that would become grounded in science; the obsessive examination of consciousness in the pursuit of truth.

The tendency—inherent in the pursuit of knowledge and the eventual hegemony of scientific thinking—to form comprehensive, coherent, generalizing, totalizing theories resulted in the construction of the "dubious disciplines": the so-called sciences of man which have turned out to be unstable circulators of power/knowledge, and instruments of normalization. For Foucault, in the social sciences, unlike the physical, there is no real progress, no rough accumulation of a body of truths; there is merely one story after another, each grounded in degrees of plausibility and likely to be instruments of power and normalization, and each attempting to explain away any anomalies of human nature.

The most vivid manifestation of power/knowledge is in the domain of sexuality and psychoanalysis, where sexuality has been constructed as a deep truth which must be endlessly inspected. But for Foucault it is all a ruse; there is no such thing as "sexuality": only bodies and pleasures. For Foucault, "sexuality" is something that we create, not something that possesses deep truth which we must discover through self inspection.

Psychoanalysis and the whole post-modern therapeutic culture have

clearly exemplified the relation between theory, authority, institutions, the deep self, liberation, and power/knowledge. Freud's genius crystalized a preexistent tendency and opened a wider door for the persistent pursuit of deep truth about the self. Theories of the self became more elaborate, intellectually "deeper," more arcane, and held in trust by the privileged, initiated few who alone possessed the time and the ability to grasp them. The freeing of repressed feeling from the constraints of society became a fetish; everything generated by the psyche became fodder for theory; every motive suspect. A deep distrust of the self conjoined with the necessity of liberating the self to establish a therapeutic culture bent on liberation, but really under the sway of power/knowledge.

BLY

From the outset, let me be clear: I do not find *Iron John* sufficiently rigorous, scholarly, or downright serious enough to merit much attention. But as a social phenomenon which has riveted American men, and as the apparent source of new liberatory institutions, it deserves scrutiny. I am as much interested in Bly's relation to power and liberation as in the content of his ideas, which as others have shown, fail to withstand examination.[3]

Bly's basic story is that an array of forces have brought men to a state of malaise and identity crisis: the most recent wave of feminism which has softened men excessively; the loss of connection between sons and fathers brought on by the industrial revolution, which relocated places of work outside the home, and which has resulted in the loss of male wisdom, and connection to the "deep masculine," which can only be passed on from older men to youths; the deadening effects of contemporary work; the general loss of connection with myths and initiation rites. Bly's discourse takes place in the general context of the American therapeutic culture which rather vaguely sees modern life as enervating, stressful, and soul destroying.

He offers a solution in a lost deep truth about masculinity which can only be reclaimed by following some kind of initiation, perfected by pristine cultures of the past, and alive in a few such "primitive" cultures today. The particular initiation he advocates centers around the reclamation of grief over one's lack of connection with one's father, and rituals which enable men to feel their "wildness" and recover their capacity for nurturance. "Deep masculinity" is a pan-cultural, transhistorical essence, built into the male psyche and (presumably) biology, which is men's true, "deepest" identity. It

seems vaguely modeled on traditional Asian mysticism, eg., the relation of identity between the atman, the deep self in the individual, and the brahman, the deep self or energy from which the manifest universe emanates in Hinduism; or the "original face" or Buddha nature, which underlies the phenomenal self in parts of Buddhism.

Bly's "deep masculine" is said to be approached in more pristine cultures through aggressive initiation where boys endure physical pain and injury in the presence of older men. This somehow connects boys to psychic pain and enables them to become men and ready to mate with women.[4] He uses a myth from Grimms' fairy tales, "Iron Hans," as a device to illumine men's psychospiritual condition.

It is striking the degree to which his descriptions of reality carry with them implicit incitements for men to change. Consider a few:[5]

> Eventually a man needs *to throw off all indoctrination* and begin to *discover for himself* what the father is and what *masculinity is.* For that task, ancient stories are a good help, because they are free of modern psychological prejudices, because they have endured the scrutiny of generations of women and men. . . . (P. 25 emphasis added)

> The ancient practice of initiation then—still very much *alive in our genetic structure*—offers a third way through, between the two "natural" roads of manic excitement and victim excitement. (P. 36, emphasis added)

> Having abandoned initiation, our society has difficulty in leading boys toward manhood . . . we have so many boys and so few men. The main reason I think is our own ignorance of initiation, and our dismissal of its value. (P. 182)

> . . . the *structure* at the *bottom* of the male psyche is still as firm as it was twenty thousand years ago. A contemporary man simply has very little help in getting down to it. (P. 230, emphasis added)

Contrary to his rhetoric, Bly's basic conception of manhood is conservative—he supports the prevailing cultural notion that masculinity is an achievement. One earns, discovers, gains deep knowledge of, one's quasi-mystical manhood. Bly is only a step away from the edict that manhood is something one proves through taking distress "like a man." Otherwise, one is not a "real" man. Whoever and whatever you are as a man, you are not enough, unless you have been initiated into the deep masculine. Since few have been, almost all are made to once again feel inadequate about their status as men. The uninitiated are characterized as possessing an array of negative features—too superficial, wimpish, lost, brutal, too out of touch

with the "feminine," too in touch with the "feminine," too repressive of grief, too indulgent of grief. Contemporary American manhood, for Bly, is not something that you *are* "naturally" but something which, through arduous struggle, you discover at the core of your being under the guidance of older "real" men. Or, to put it differently, it's something that *is* your true natural self but which you have lost touch with and must now recover.

Arguably, Bly has taken a traditional model of American manhood, which involves proving masculinity through enduring external distress and conquering the wilds, and refocused it inward. If you can face your grief and your *internal* wildness and demons, and endure initiation, you may discover your true hidden (and virtually divine) masculine self. Bly's success can in part be attributed to the fact that his view of men is, at once, consonant with, and ennobling of, reigning conceptions of masculinity: what you have been as a man is inadequate, but who you truly are underneath is a god.[6]

Bly's persona is that of a psychic revolutionary preaching individual transformation. He positions himself against the forces of repression on behalf of deep truth. His model of power is reminiscent of the Freud of *Civilization and Its Discontents,* only following Jung, he is more sanguine about the possibility of achieving some kind of peace in the face of necessary repression. Bly sees himself as fighting external powers which in modern industrial societies keep men from their true identities. He presents himself as at odds with the forces of external power and "indoctrination."

In an important sense this is true. White, middle-aged, middle- and upper-middle-class men giving vent to their grief over their painful relationships with their fathers, and offering each other support, is surely an attempt to throw off social conditioning which denies men's ability to feel vulnerable and invigorating emotions, and support each other.[7]

But this is only a small part of the story. Bly exemplifies Foucault's structures of power/knowledge: Bly, an authority, tells men that there is a deep truth about ourselves that we are out of touch with, and that constitutes our true identity. Through age old initiatory wisdom "alive in our genetic structure" we can see our "genuine face or being" and recapture our "true radiant energy" in the "magnetic field of the deep masculine." We can thus gain knowledge of "male spirit and soul." To do this we "need to throw off all indoctrination and discover for ourselves who our father is and what masculinity is." So we have an authority with privileged access to theory, disseminating a view of the self which offers liberation through initiatory methods to be provided by the authority.

Men are asked to internalize this self-interpretation and seek liberation in

terms of it and its institutions. This is where Bly becomes insidious. It is a commonplace in moral philosophy that we often simultaneously evaluate by describing and prescribe by evaluating. Bly's descriptions of reality not only evaluate and prescribe: they incite. If one really believes his account, one is inexorably tied to his institutions, and panic would be a not unreasonable emotion. It is only because men at this point in history are in such extreme confusion that they need someone to sell them identity.

It is here worth noting that *Iron John* grew out of Bly's public talks and presentations and is inseparable from the evolving institutions of the mythopoetic men's movement where men, let us not forget, pay money to search for their identities. *Iron John* came along when the politics of identity, with all their moral complexity, blossomed; when patriarchal assumptions have slowly become dismantled, and as manhood has become decentered, men have become visible to themselves as men, bringing with it enormous identity confusion, and a need to form their own enclave. Just at a historical moment when feminism seems to be attempting to engage men, Bly has come on the scene preaching the existence of a quasi-divine ontological essence which men can only recapture through going off with other men and grieving over their fathers. It is tempting to view the mythopoetic men's movement as a neurotic symptom: the forming of a grandiose self image and flight into longing for the father as a defense against the anxieties brought about by women's entry into the work force and feminism's engagement of men.[8]

Bly represents yet another twist in the search for deep knowledge of the self. Masculinity, or more broadly, gender is now the source of deepest truth; not sexuality or manifestations of the devil. Notice what Bly does not say: he does not merely say that, "Well, we men are confused and depressed these days, and almost all of us feel sad about what happened with our fathers. It might be valuable for us to get together to express our feelings and talk about it. Maybe we can beat on some drums and dance and find a way to be strong without being oppressive or brutal. This might shake some of our depression." Instead he sacralizes masculinity and calls upon the romantic authority of the past and "primitive" men to legitimize himself as a kind of priest.

But what of the specific "self" generating technologies which are used in the mythopoetic men's movement? Sociologist Michael Kimmel, describing his experience at a mythopoetic weekend retreat, makes several interesting observations. He notes that workshop leader Shepherd Bliss uses a particular locution as he guides men to retrieve a "sacred masculine space" through ritual incantation and guided fantasy:

Bliss leads the group by suggesting what some of us might *feel* like doing . . .

'Some of you might want to get on all fours and explore the ground with your hands' he mentions. All the men drop to their hands and knees to feel the earth tilled by their ancestors.

'Some of you might feel some noises coming into your throats, the noises of male animals,' he mentions. Everyone immediately starts growling, snorting. A few howls.

'Some of you might feel like moving around the room, getting in touch with other animals,' Bliss predicts. Everyone is now moving slowly around the room, growling and snorting, occasionally bumping into one another.

'Some of you might even feel yourselves recalling that most repressed sense, our sense of smell and begin sniffing.' Suddenly men are sniffing one another as they move through the room on all fours . . .[9]

Soon Bliss tells them they might find themselves feeling like "that most masculine of animals the billy-goat. Billy-goats are very rambunctious and playful and they love to butt heads." Kimmel observes that the men play "human bumper cars" for a while. Bliss appears to generate emotions by telling these men "what they might find themselves feeling like doing." Notice: it is the language of self discovery Bliss is applying. He is telling them what they might "*find* themselves feeling like doing." But it is clear they are expected to "find themselves feeling" what he suggests. And the men are eager and willing to do so. Again notice: he does not say, "Everyone start screaming like a pig," or "Everyone start sniffing each other." Instead he persuades.

A few minutes later, the lights are turned down and the men are taken through a guided fantasy in which they encounter their fathers, and say and hear things they always wanted to say and hear but never could. Suddenly the men are overflowing with grief over their lost intimacy with their fathers. Kimmel hears sobs coming from around the room. What most astonishes him is the sudden shift of emotions; no more than three minutes before, they were butting heads and growling and sniffing each other like rutting billy goats. Kimmel finds it remarkable that they are able to retrieve the appropriate emotion at will.

Their emotions are scripted and cued; they seem to be following what Arlie Hochschild calls "feeling rules." They are expected to feel spontaneously—and "authentically"—what they are encouraged to feel. Most of the men have been to these workshops before and know what is expected of them. Bliss is like a father guiding them to the right emotions. They support each other as they move quickly from exhilarating "deep masculine wildness" to "deep father grief."

Can such emotions be real? Is there such a thing as a real emotion? Emotions, as any actor knows, can be easily evoked and triggered and maintained with a little help. Bliss would doubtless insist that he is applying the technology of modern psychology to enable these men to discover the deep truth of their masculinity. But is this truth discovered or constructed? Are the emotions heartfelt or generated? Or is there any such distinction? The men who go to these retreats would most likely see themselves as overcoming the forces in their lives that keep them from feeling vital, in touch and close to other men—a fact that ought not be analyzed away or dismissed.

Is it too glib to argue that just as confession and expiation expel genuine guilt and restore psychic equilibrium, so too does organized, scripted catharsis release real pain? But how much of the grief that is contacted and released is a matter of "good boy" tears, tears shed in the spirit of approval seeking or praise from authority? How much of it is white middle- and upper-middle-class men being high achievers in a different realm? No single answer can or should be given. But the questions are worth pondering. It is one thing for men to begin to painfully acknowledge what's inadequate about their lives; quite another to absorb a whole narrowly focused political ideology which confers and romanticizes identity, and scripts emotions.

Following Foucault I would argue that, just as there is no such thing as "sexuality," but only bodies and pleasures, there is no such thing as "deep masculinity" because there is no such thing as masculinity. There are only humans with certain primary and secondary sex characteristics and cultures which, for reasons often unclear, rather invidiously generate certain modes of experience, being and behavior according to sex characteristics.

It is an open question to what degree the genetic makeup of human males and females offers a kind of "governing causality" which structurally constrains the range of possible variables of being, behavior and experience for each sex. Obviously in matters such as physical size and strength and childbearing, the constraints are bracing.

We need neither a new "masculinity" nor an old one, but none whatsoever. Otherwise we will be endlessly pursuing a mirage generated by power/knowledge. Men certainly need to change, but not under the banner of masculinity.

"MASCULINITY"

All definitions are motivated. We can define more or less descriptively, by simply showing how a concept is used: "Bly uses masculine to mean . . ."

We can define in order to prescribe how we ought to use a word and how we ought to live, often by invoking putative essences: "Real masculinity is that powerful yet gentle force at the center of the psyche." We can define ascriptively for purposes of clear communication: "I will define masculinity as . . ."

But is there a morally legitimate use for the word "masculine"? Can it do anything but oppress us? Can we safely use the word masculine "merely" to describe? Can we think of the "masculine" or "feminine" without evoking and legitimating a whole cluster of associations which reconstitute oppressive conceptions of men and women?[10] These questions demand a separate essay; here I will only make a few points.

Certain uses are destructive and ought to be eliminated. From *Iron John:*

> Our obligation . . . is to describe *masculine* in such a way that it does not exclude the masculine in women and yet hits a resonant string in the man's heart . . . Our obligation is to describe the *feminine* in such a way that does not exclude the feminine in men but makes a large string resonate in the woman's heart. (Pp. 235–36)

These uses invoke and tacitly legitimate male and female essences, which is precisely what oppress us. By describing essences one implicitly prescribes appropriateness; one cannot speak of the "masculine in women" or the "feminine in men" without implying that there exists a set of features which do, and therefore, *should* characteristically belong to men or women. I believe it is preferable that men and women feel free to embody a wide range of qualities which are important for humans to possess. To refer to any human quality as masculine or feminine is to perpetuate an artificial association between that quality and men and women.[11] Such an association can only be based upon the distorted notions of humanity that gender has thus far given us. Thus it perpetuates the problem.

The same point holds for the following, which identifies masculinity and femininity in terms of cosmic principles. "Fire manifests the masculine principle in the cosmos; water the feminine." Again, to speak of "masculine" and "feminine" aspects of the cosmos grandiosely legitimates the association between certain qualities and actual men and women. The gendered division of labor may well cause us to differentially distinguish certain qualities as characteristically "masculine" or "feminine" but this is something we ought to take pains to avoid.

A useful principle might be: to use "masculine" or "feminine" without either explicitly or by context denying the legitimacy of an association be-

tween "masculine and feminine" qualities and men and women is to perpetuate sexism and the oppressiveness of gender. This is because we ordinarily tacitly assume that it is desirable for men to be "masculine" and women to be "feminine" unless otherwise stated or implied.

But what about "simple description"? It is tempting to counter this point by saying that we can innocently say, "Pete Rose is very masculine," and know that we merely mean that Pete Rose has characteristics that we normally associate with men, which does not mean we *should* make this association.

But we are *never simply describing.* Linguistic context commits us to background assumptions which if not abjured, will be assumed. It is likely that in attempting to avoid destructive assumptions in talking about men and women, we will for a long time be mired in messy circumlocution. If I don't distance myself from my language by putting "masculine" in quotes or saying "stereotypically masculine" I legitimate the notion that men are and should be like Pete Rose.

It is not clear to me that there exist any desirable, "earnest" uses of "masculine" or "feminine." Attempts to ennoble men and women often call upon notions of "the masculine" or "the feminine," but again, these offer prescriptive identifications on the basis of sex. To "metaphysicalize" gender may encourage momentary identities which correct against social repression—"I am in touch with the 'deep masculine' and able to be wild"—but, ultimately, such efforts serve only to constrain us.

NOTES

1. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Random House, 1978), 159, emphasis added.

2. Interpreting Foucault is something of an industry. The ideas from Foucault in this essay derive from *The History of Sexuality, An Introduction* and *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977,* ed. C. Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980). By far the most useful secondary source is H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow's *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1983). The problems of interpretation are legion.

3. I have found Michael S. Kimmel and Michael Kaufman's "Weekend Warriors" quite clarifying, as well as R. W. Connell's essay "Drumming Up the Wrong Tree," both reprinted here. Bly's anthropology, psychohistory, and psychoanalytic theory, aside from being intellectually wrong, all seem to me to mask and legitimate a backlash against women.

4. It seems to me that Bly's idea that the widespread practice of initiating boys through forcing them to endure physical pain and distress without losing composure is a way of connecting them with, and healing *psychic* wounds, has it backwards. Bly believes that the initiation "tells men what to do with wounds." The initiation is much more likely to be training in the art of resisting the impulse to regress and demand nurturance when distressed. It strikes me as an attempt to force a traumatic identification with manhood through learning the art of repressing "weak" feelings that would demand that one seek nurturance and identification with mother. It isn't wisdom about wounds that such rituals teach, but flight into repression in the service of resisting regression.

5. Quotations are from Robert Bly, *Iron John* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1990).

6. This seems to be a basic therapeutic move among Jungians: to encourage us to see ourselves as "participating" in quasi-divine archetypes. It strikes me as the fundamental way that "vulgar" religion makes people happy: by interpreting the self and world as "better" than they are. In depression, one "distorts downward" and poisons one's mood by making the self and world seem worse than they are. Religious and Jungian cosmologies uplift the self and one's mood by instilling "positive" beliefs which can't be confirmed or denied.

7. It may be that the mythopoetic men's movement is valuable for reasons peripheral to its intellectual claims. It may provide a sense of community and support and may create a space for men to reflect upon their identities in constructive ways. But this has nothing to do with the movement per se. It could do this and possess a completely different intellectual content.

8. I am indebted to sociologist Chuck Stephen for this formulation. Stephen also persuasively argues that with entrenched multicultural interests, along with feminism, beginning to decenter white middle-class masculinity, the mythopoetic men's movement can be usefully understood as attempting to establish itself as an ethnic group, with its own rituals, a glorified past, and a discrete cultural identity. From such a standpoint it can gain political and personal strength.

9. From Michael S. Kimmel, "The Men's Movement and Me: A Weekend At The First International Men's Conference" in *Brother: The Newsletter of the National Organization for Men Against Sexism* (Fall 1992): 2.

10. "Masculine and feminine" are not parallel in usage. "Femininity" has become part of what radical feminists have attacked as destructive to women: the cultural compulsion to be "feminine"—soft, afraid of bald truths, nurturant, incapable of earthiness or lust. Feminists have attempted to retrieve and exalt what's valuable in the "feminine" but so far as I am aware, they have not attempted to exalt "femininity" in the traditional sense.

11. It seems to be that "man" and "woman" are themselves oppressive words because to even think them is to evoke and therefore legitimize stereotypes. Our ways of categorizing the world necessarily commit us to prototypes from which individual

members of a category may vary. Such prototypes themselves ride upon idealized cognitive models, so it may be impossible to categorize human males and females without calling upon implicit models of gender, which will be as oppressive and sexist as the culture they dwell in. Still a certain fluidity and watchfulness and irony may be useful when thinking and speaking "man" or "woman." For more on categories see George Lakoff, *Woman, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

A Woman for Every Wild Man: Robert Bly and His Reaffirmation of Masculinity

DAVID S. GUTTERMAN

IN DECEMBER OF 1991, I AND HUNDREDS of other men attended a retreat in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, led principally by Robert Bly and Robert Moore, entitled "Making a Small Hole in Denial: Grief, Courage and Beauty in Male Soul." Among the remarkable assertions made by Bly and Moore was the following statement by Robert Bly. Bly is discussing images of women in the 1950s and the impossibility of women merging completely with a man "à la Doris Day." Wondering what options are available to women, Bly declares:

> Well one thing you can do is to go to the opposite side and say "I will depend on nothing from a man. I'm going to have nothing to do with a man. I'm going to become a lesbian and forget the whole thing. *And I don't become a lesbian out of joy, I become one out of anger.* And the decision that I can live completely separately from any man and that I'll never be dependent on any man again."
>
> But I was thinking about that. How isolated it makes these women, is that right? Part of the loneliness of men is this feeling that thousands, millions of women have made this decision. And they don't want to give anything to a man, nor receive anything from a man. And we know that somewhere, we know that somewhere in our bodies.
>
> And then I happened to pick up this poem of D. H. Lawrence. And what is the trouble with that idea? The trouble with the idea that since I can't merge with a man, I'm going to have nothing to do with him at all? (Audience member says, "It's the denial of the masculine side." And Bly says,) "Yes, that's quite right. It's also a complete inability to understand what it's like to be *completely isolated.* Terrifying, it's probably more terrifying than being Doris Day. But the feminist movement has not warned them of what it's like when you are in your

room by yourself and don't have any friends and no man or anybody to fight with.

But D. H. Lawrence looks at it differently and he took me by surprise. He says that what's happened is that they have forgotten the "Third." They are thinking of the man and the woman and they are forgetting the Third. And this is where Lawrence says it:

"As we live we are transmitters of life and when we fail to transmit life, life fails to flow through us. That is a part of the mystery of sex. It's a flow onwards. *Sexless people transmit nothing.*"[1]

I have quoted this passage at length, for it powerfully demonstrates a series of fundamental problems with Bly's efforts to reassess masculinity. I believe that it is critical to recognize that the definition of masculinity (at least in the United States today) is based on the entanglement of normative male gender behavior and normative heterosexual behavior. Bly's assessment of masculinity focuses only on the component of male gender and neglects to critically examine the constitution of sexuality. As a result, his critique of contemporary American manhood is dangerously deficient.

Let's take a brief look at how Bly addresses the question of sexuality in this passage in order to indicate an elementary problem with his analysis. In particular, I want to highlight that in Bly's vision, heterosexuality serves as the core of the natural order essential to the health and well-being of society. Homosexuality—in this case lesbianism—is the aberrant result of irrational anger which leads to isolation, terror, and "lifelessness." There is no joy, no community, no sexuality, and no sexual pleasure, in Bly's conception of lesbianism. Rather these "angry women" inhabit a bleak and barren world isolated from men. Beyond the gloominess of this world, these women are also responsible for betraying men, leaving the males, who in Bly's heterosexual ideal would be the partners of these women, aching with loneliness deep in their bodies. Bly somehow cannot imagine that women can survive and thrive without men, that women don't need to depend on men for friendship, for sex, or for life itself. Nor does Bly have room in his world for men who don't long for these lost women, but who instead long for each other.

Indeed, Bly's central concern in this passage seems to be with the preservation of a society composed of heterosexual pairs. In fact, Bly's entire framework rigidly divides the world into opposite genders and fixes heterosexuality as the "natural" state of being. This uncritical reaffirmation of the heterosexual matrix which underwrites our social order is a central problem in Bly's examination of masculinity. I want to offer some thoughts on how to

rethink this heterosexual matrix through the use of feminist theory, queer theory and postmodernist philosophy. I will then return to Bly and the mythopoetic men's movement to further discuss the importance of critically addressing the heterosexual matrix.

In the United States today, a great deal of attention is focused on reexamining questions of sexuality and gender, including issues of how individual identity and behavior are shaped by society. The recent and current efforts of the American feminist and "gay liberation" movements (including their academic arms in Women's Studies and Gay and Lesbian Studies) have been instrumental in raising these concerns. As John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman assert in *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America,* "Both movements focused national attention on issues of sexuality, sharply challenging common assumptions about the 'naturalness' of gender and sexuality."[2]

These efforts to critically explore the social construction of sexuality and gender are further reinforced by postmodern philosophy's attempts to deconstruct the transcendental nature of humans common to Enlightenment philosophy. In short, postmodernism focuses on the ways social forces constitute human subjects. Rather than viewing people as coming before culture and creating society through their actions which are rooted in "Reason," such a notion of the transcendental subject is dramatically rewritten.[3] For example, a leading figure in the postmodern philosophic tradition, Michel Foucault, instructs us that social subjects are discursively "produced" by "relations of power."[4] By perceiving a subject in relation to a variety of social discourses (for example: race, class, education, religious belief, body type, etc.) it becomes clear that subjects are multiply constituted.[5] In other words, an individual's identity is produced by the intersection of cultural discourses of race, gender, sexuality, etc. Moreover, one cannot simply "add" race to gender to sexuality and thereby understand (or "get") a person's identity, but rather must explore how race, gender, sexuality and other cultural discourses, are mutually constitutive. (For Bly, as we will see, this multiplicitous constitution is dismissed in favor of an essential mythical core within all individuals.) For now, I want to simply focus on the inter-relationship between discourses of sexuality and gender.

The modernist or Enlightenment tradition which has largely governed cultural discourse in the West is rooted in dualistic formulations. Binarisms such as male/female, self/other, heterosexual/homosexual, black/white, same/different, etc., represent a series of either/or categories within which individuals are expected to exist. Moreover, each identifier is associated with

another series of dualisms (i.e., male/female, public/private, culture/nature, active/passive, mind/body, etc.).[6] The hazards of perceiving identity within this absolutist binary framework are manifold, particularly with regard to the perception of difference. William Connolly asserts:

> An identity is established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized. These differences are essential to its being . . . Identity requires difference in order to be, and converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty.[7]

For example, the axis which serves as the fundamental basis of gender identity in the West clearly functions along this organization of same/different. That is, the perception that men and women are "opposite sexes" (with accompanying "genders"—masculine/feminine) creates the expectation that one is either a man or a woman and that these two categories are essentially disparate. This sense of difference then becomes the demarcation of otherness when gradations of value are placed upon the two distinct domains. In our culture, of course, that which is usually associated with men (Activity, Culture, Reason) is usually held in higher esteem than that which is associated with women (Passivity, Nature, Emotion).[8]

Accordingly, as Jeffrey Weeks has illustrated, the social construction of masculinity provides a striking demonstration of the ways the "drive to convert difference to otherness" has functioned. Weeks states:

> Masculinity or the male identity is achieved by the constant process of warding off threats to it. It is precariously achieved by the rejection of femininity and homosexuality.[9]

Implicit in this notion is the recognition that masculinity is contingent and unstable. It must be constantly reaffirmed by establishing and maintaining the barriers between normative standards for men and women and heterosexual and homosexual. This concept of rigid demarcations serves as a framework of the heterosexual matrix. Drawing from the work of Monique Wittig and Adrienne Rich, Judith Butler defines the "heterosexual matrix" as:

> [A] hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality.[10]

In other words, the cultural demand for heterosexuality creates the need for clear markers of gender so that sexual partners can be "correctly" chosen. In this way discourses of (hetero)sexuality establish the categories of gender, and these categories enable the perpetuation of that system of sexuality. Because this system is "oppositionally and hierarchically defined" any aberration from either the categories of gender or normative heterosexuality is met with efforts to silence, change or destroy the differences. This process illustrates how gender is used to maintain heterosexuality which is itself a "contingency branded into" men and women in our culture (Connolly, p. 176).

If we can conceive of the heterosexual matrix which governs in our culture as contingent rather than "natural," institutions and cultural values which sustain the sexist and homophobic state of our culture can be challenged more readily. For example, we can critically assess Bly's conception that lesbians (and presumably gay men) are "sex-less" people who do not "transmit," or produce, "life." Within the heterosexual matrix which has been naturalized in our culture, sexual behavior is supposed to be between a man and a woman (i.e., "opposite" genders) and is intended for, or at least bound up with, reproduction. However, if the relationship between sexuality and (re)production is denaturalized, the role of heterosexuals as reproducers of life becomes unstable. The political implications of this recognition are manifold—not the least of the potential outcomes is the proliferation of "non-normative heterosexual" parental and familial structures.

Another potential result of perceiving the heterosexual matrix as contingent is the freeing of sexuality from binaristic formulations. That is, as Samira Kawash points out, if, as the heterosexual matrix dictates, the gender of a person's sexual object choice is perceived as the defining element of one's sexuality, cultural notions of sexuality will revolve around the axis of the heterosexual/homosexual binary.[11] One ramification of this configuration of sexuality is the way:

> It delegitimates non-gender-exclusive desires. Current struggles over the 'authenticity' of bisexuality illustrate this effect: if the world is divided into 'same' and 'different,' 'homo' and 'hetero,' then bisexuality is something which cannot exist, and individuals claiming a bisexual identity are confused or in a state of transition. (Kawash, p. 28)

Efforts to destabilize the heterosexual matrix thus will enable bisexuality and other forms of sexuality which do not conform neatly to governing categories to be culturally perceived as "authentic." In *Epistemology of the Closet,* Eve Sedgwick offers a brief list of alternate ways of conceiving sexuality that

illuminates the possibilities opened by freeing sexuality from the dualisms of the heterosexual matrix. Included in this list are: "To some people, the nimbus of 'the sexual' seems scarcely to extend beyond the boundaries of discrete genital acts; to others, it enfolds them loosely or floats virtually free of them. Many people have their richest mental/emotional involvement with sexual acts that they don't do, or even don't want to do [i.e., fantasy]."[12] Ultimately rethinking the relationship and the distinctions between sexuality and gender enables a reimagination of sexuality which is open to a cornucopia of contingent, shifting, identifying "axes."

The recognition of the contingent quality of sexuality and gender also enables a critical exploration of masculinity. One illustration of how the governing definition of masculinity, established by the heterosexual matrix, is being interrogated is the way gay men challenge definitions of normative male gender identity. For example, some gay men adopt what Jeffrey Weeks calls a "macho-style" (Weeks, p. 191). As Richard Dyer explains:

> By taking the signs of masculinity and eroticising them in a blatantly homosexual context, much mischief is done to the security with which "men" are defined in society, and by which their power is secured. If that bearded, muscular beer drinker turns out to be a pansy, how ever are they going to know the "real" men any more? (Dyer, as quoted in Weeks, p. 191)

Clearly, this is a case where standards of normative masculinity exhibit a slippage from the supposed "state of nature" of the heterosexual matrix.

The mythopoetic men's movement and its most prominent leader, Robert Bly, also proclaim that they are undertaking a major revision of contemporary American masculinity. Bly begins *Iron John: A Book About Men,* by stating, "We are living at an important and fruitful moment now, for it is clear to men that the images of adult manhood given by the popular culture are worn out; a man can no longer depend on them."[13] The emphasis on emotions (from grief to joy), the critique of definitions of "success" and the militaristic attitudes prevalent among men in our culture, and the prominent use of poetry in Bly's efforts, provide hope that a fundamental reassessment of masculinity is being entertained. Unfortunately, Bly's approach is incomplete. While he is willing to challenge male gender role behavior in his search for the "Eternal Masculine," he fails to examine the social construction of male sexuality.

Indeed, Bly's position on sexuality varies from reaffirming the heterosexual matrix to silencing homosexuality's challenge to his conception of masculinity. As Don Shewey, in a 1992 article in the *Village Voice* suggests, part of

the mythopoetic movement's homophobia comes from the need to prove their own manhood, surrounded as they are by poetry which has been "feminized" in our culture. Shewey also believes that, "Bly and [another mythopoetic leader Michael] Meade purposely want to limit the amount of gay expression at their events for fear that too strong a gay presence will drive away straight men. . . ."[14] As a result, the role played by homophobia in the construction of normative masculinity in our culture is never examined. The more challenging step of questioning the naturalness of heterosexuality is far from being entertained.

Instead, Bly's ideas concerning gay men are conspicuously absent—he simply maintains that he is speaking to men and that whatever he says about heterosexual men applies to gay men as well. This is clear in the introduction to *Iron John,* where Bly writes, "Most of the language in this book speaks to heterosexual men but does not exclude homosexual men. It wasn't until the eighteenth century that people ever used the term homosexual; before that time gay men were understood simply as part of the large community of men. The mythology as I see it does not make a big distinction between homosexual and heterosexual men" (Bly, p. x). Gay men were mentioned by the facilitators twice during the day-long retreat I attended, both times simply to assert that whatever was being said about heterosexual relationship applied to "them" as well. Given that the subject of the retreat was male denial and courage, it is disturbingly ironic that Bly and Robert Moore couldn't find the courage to confront society's—or their own—homophobia.

Indeed, I believe that this silencing of questions concerning sexuality is no mere accident. Rather the preservation of the heterosexual matrix and the "naturalness" of heterosexuality is essential to Bly's theories. In order to discover the "Eternal Masculine" which purportedly lies within every man, Bly needs to reaffirm and accentuate the differences between men and women. To preserve this dualistic heterosexual order, Bly, in turn, needs to either ignore homosexuality, or frame homosexuality as an irrational, unnatural aberration. Thus while Bly is willing to challenge contemporary male gender behavior, he neglects questions of sexuality—the deeply entwined and complementary component of normative masculinity. As a result, Bly's re-vision of contemporary American manhood is not just incomplete, but fundamentally, and, in light of Bly's popularity, even tragically, flawed.

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NOTES

1. Robert Bly and Robert Moore, "Making a Small Hole in Denial: Grief Courage and Beauty in Male Soul" (Audiotape: Sound Horizons, 1991); emphasis added.

2. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), xii.

3. Postmodernism, in many ways, can be traced to Nietzsche's pronouncement in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* that, "There is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything" (trans. Walter Kaufman and R. J. Hollingdale [New York: Vintage Books, 1967], 45). The subject is thus perceived as being constituted by the event.

4. Michel Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977–1984*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988), 118.

5. The historic conflicts between African-American and white women within the feminist movement provide an illustration of the way in which the cultural constructions of women in our society vary due to other cultural discourses like race and class.

6. For further discussion of binary logic, see Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

7. William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 64.

8. I say "usually" here for I want to suggest that within broad cultural paradigms there are often localized situations where gendered attributes can be reversed. This inversion transpires both in terms of identity (i.e., women who compel men to attend the opera are sometimes seen as the bearers of culture) and of value (i.e., when male aggressiveness intersects with the racial identity of African-Americans in our society, the assertive, forceful qualities of those men are demonized rather than valorized by portions of the larger American population.)

In negotiating the obstacles to opening closed binary systems (grounded on difference as otherness), it is crucial to remember that not only are cultural norms socially constructed but so too are the values and roles attached to those norms (see Smith, especially chap. 3.).

9. Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents: Meanings, Myths & Modern Sexualities* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 190.

10. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 151.

11. Samira Kawash, "Feminism, Desire and the Problem of Sexual Identity," in

Proceedings from "Engendering Knowledge/Engendering Power: Feminism as Theory and Practice," ed. Cynthia W. Baker (Durham: Duke University Women's Studies Program, 1993), 28.

12. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 25–26.

13. Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1990), ix.

14. Don Shewey, "Town Meeting in the Hearts of Men," *The Village Voice,* vol. XXXVII, no. 6 (11 February 1992): 45.

Renewal as Retreat: The Battle for Men's Souls

TIMOTHY NONN

THE MEN'S MOVEMENT AND THE CHURCH

The contemporary search for a male soul by religious conservatives and mythopoetics appears to have a certain affinity with Christian spirituality. Perhaps this explains a recent proliferation of articles on the men's movement within Christian journals. But there are other reasons for the mainstream Christian embrace of the concept of a male soul that derive from resistance to the political struggles of women, gays and people of color. Although the men's movement is politically diverse, the perspectives of religious conservatives and mythopoetics on masculinity dominate Christian journals. Significant differences exist between religious conservatives and mythopoetics but their interests converge in a two-pronged offensive: opposition to feminism and valorization of masculinity. In brief, "masculine spirituality" is offered as an antidote to the supposed feminization of the church.[1]

The religious conservative and mythopoetic branches have been contrasted with the profeminist branch of the men's movement.[2] Kimmel divides the men's movement among profeminists, antifeminists, and masculinists.[3] In this analysis, I use the term "Masculine Renewal" to refer to antifeminist elements of the men's movement in the church. Masculine Renewal represents a quasi-religious quest for an essential meaning to masculinity. Historically, Masculine Renewal is part of a larger social project whose purpose is the continued subordination of women, gays and people of color. The valorization of masculinity—"renewal" denotes belief in an essential masculine identity—includes blaming feminists, gays, and other groups for men's confusion and pain over shifting gender roles and a blurring of gender identities.

Three basic claims unite mythopoetics and religious conservatives under the banner of Masculine Renewal: (1) Men are victims of oppression, either directly by newly empowered social groups (feminists, gays), or indirectly by an indifferent social order. Men are the victims of reverse discrimination, Moore argues, because "sexism is a two-way street" (p. 114). (2) Men must gather together in spiritual retreats to rediscover their authentic masculine identity. (3) Men must unite under male leadership in order to preserve and protect the natural gender order and Western civilization. Masculine Renewal frequently relates arguments about spirituality, soul, and male essence to Biblical figures.[4] Yet when their claims are compared with the lives and teachings of Moses and Jesus, an inseparable gulf divides Masculine Renewal and Christian faith. In their responses to the cries of the oppressed, Moses and Jesus may actually be seen as early "profeminist" men.

THE VICTIMIZED MALE

The first claim of Masculine Renewal is that men have been emasculated by feminists and gays. Men have lost touch with their eternal masculinity—hence, the quest for a male soul (Trippe, p. 120).[5] *Newsweek* characterizes men's response to social turmoil over race, gender, and sexuality as "white male paranoia."[6] But Masculine Renewal interprets the crisis of male identity as a source of social chaos and destructiveness. Men must rediscover their masculine nature to restore social and metaphysical harmony. In *Iron John*, Robert Bly claims that "soft men" are products of dominant mothers and lovers.[7] Mythopoetics worry that the "male soul" is endangered because only wimps and women occupy the pews of a "feminized" church (O'Malley, p. 405). Patrick Arnold asserts that misandry (hatred of men) has driven men from a "dominantly feminine" church.[8] Religious conservatives attack feminists for disputing that God's "masculinity is essential."[9]

Attacks on feminists and gays proliferate in the rhetoric of Masculine Renewal. Arnold claims that the ultimate goal of feminists is male castration (p. 7). Compromise is impossible, antifeminist author Donna Steichen argues, because feminism is a "deadly disease" attacking all women: "[F]eminism is a continuum: it is a single disease that progresses from incipient rebellion to raving lunacy. If we think of it as the moral equivalent of AIDS, even those in the early stage could be seen as HIV positive, and predictably doomed."[10] Masculine Renewal claims that men are severely constrained in a feminized society. Bly notes a widespread lack of male energy. Moore

echoes that "warrior energies" are repressed in a society dominated by women. Masculine Renewal advocates men's retreats as a means to regain male power through ritualized practices. But power is relational; masculinity is constructed in the context of historical relations of gender, class and race. Masculine Renewal has alienated various groups of men—specifically, gays and men of color—by myopically relating masculinity to the white European history of conquest and domination.

Masculine Renewal structures its response to feminism around a claim of male victimization. Men feel defeated. Toxic hostility toward expression of genuine masculinity has condemned men to desperate, empty lives. Religious conservatives and mythopoetics fault "radical feminists" for a decline of manhood and morals. Charles Colson, convicted Watergate conspirator and right-wing evangelist, says that legislation supported by militant feminists dehumanizes men. Since witnessing a prison scene in which a female guard intruded upon a male inmate in a toilet, Colson argues that antidiscrimination laws demand unnatural gender integration.[11] Leon Podles warns that liberal social engineering in pursuit of gender equality undermines masculinity because it obscures the "deep structures of human nature" that divide men from women and heterosexuals from homosexuals.[12] The religious rhetoric of Masculine Renewal blames feminists for unleashing demonic forces upon society. Robert Moore, a popular mythopoetic writer, says: "One of the things we have to get the churches to do, both Protestant and Catholic, is not continue getting aboard this bandwagon of demonization of the masculine gender that has become so popular among some radical feminists, though by no means all" (p. 114). Others describe Christian feminists as "witches," "spiritual termites," "women of rage," "pagan," and "heretics." There is no room for dialogue, conservatives argue, since "angry" feminists seek total victory: "This rage is unappeasable except by annihilation of the Church and complete supremacy of radical religious feminism."[13]

Masculine Renewal inadvertently highlights the centrality of power in gender relations by linking a "revealed" masculinity to political opposition to feminism. It is untenable to argue that middle-class heterosexual white men are victimized in a society where they exercise power and privilege; masculine identity, a product of gender relations, is socially constructed through men's collective power. Masculine identity conceived through the marginalization of women, gays, and people of color is destabilized by the resistance of subjugated groups to domination.[14] Hence, Masculine Renewal signifies the mobilization of a privileged class of men determined to maintain position and power in church and society. Kimmel documents cycles of anti-

feminism in American history.[15] Beverly Harrison, a leading Christian feminist, points out that the core of misogyny "is the reaction that occurs when women's concrete power is manifest." She advocates a relational view of "mutual" power in contrast to a zero-sum view. Through a relational approach, men and women are mutually empowered and attain human dignity. Harrison argues that anger leads women from victimization to moral agency: "The deepest danger to our cause is that our anger will turn inward and lead us to portray ourselves and other women chiefly as victims rather than those who have struggled for the gift of life against incredible odds. The creative power of anger is shaped by owning this great strength of women and others who have struggled for the full gift of life against structures of oppression."[16]

Religious conservatives and mythopoetics, instead, portray feminists' anger as the root of men's victimization. Colson warns that scattered skirmishes between men and women will lead to "all-out gender wars" (p. 72). In Masculine Renewal, the experience of victimization is the basis for an ideological offense against feminism. In striking contrast, the lives of Moses and Jesus demonstrate that personal failure—decline in social status and power—may lead to a new consciousness in which an awareness of suffering and an identification with the oppressed provide a foundation for collective liberation.

Two related stories in the second chapter of Exodus reveal the character and destiny of Moses. Moses grew up in the Egyptian royal household. He had everything obtainable through power and privilege. But after murdering an Egyptian overseer who was beating a Hebrew slave, he was forced to flee. In Exodus 2:16–17, Moses was destitute when he spotted seven young women at a well in the Midian desert: "They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defense and watered their flock." Both stories show that Moses hated injustice. They also reveal his compassion for the exploited and powerless. We see the seeds of a personality that became identified with God's liberating power in history: Moses, the liberator, became a great religious figure only because Moses, the person, responded to the cries of the oppressed.

The character and destiny of Jesus are similarly revealed in his response to society's victims. Jesus acted with compassion toward the poor and oppressed but, like Moses, became a fugitive from a corrupt and paranoid ruling elite. In Luke 10:38–42, Jesus praised Mary for pursuing religious contemplation instead of household duties. Women were not allowed to be-

come rabbis, or study and discuss holy scripture. Despite public disapproval and institutional opposition, Jesus supported Mary's decision to become his disciple. He accepted the stigma of "gender traitor" out of a deep commitment to social justice. In Mark 7:27–29, Jesus rebuffed a woman's plea for her ailing daughter because she was from Syrophoenicia, and not Israel: "He said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' But she answered him, 'Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.' Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.' " It took someone from the bottom of society—an impoverished woman from an alienated social group—to teach Jesus the true meaning of his mission. After this encounter, Jesus reached out to the lowly and persecuted of every religious and cultural background. Jesus was open to a universal vision of justice only after experiencing hardship and persecution. The Syrophoenician woman helped Jesus move from chauvinism to solidarity.

These Biblical stories highlight the relationship between failure and the development of empathy for the oppressed. Similarly, a decline in social status and power in contemporary society need not lead to a "valorization of victimization" or "a kind of chauvinistic particularism" but divulges our "mutual dependence and vulnerability."[17] Masculine Renewal distorts the Christian message of compassion and solidarity through its call to entrenchment and division. A focus on men's victimization privileges men's experience of pain and confusion while denying the malleability of gender roles and identity. The claim of victim status for men is detrimental to faith and community because it seeks to replace the vital dialogue of women, gays and people of color with the worn-out monologue of white middle-class heterosexual men. Victimization is not a privileged status but a beginning point in the process of creating just social relations. Religious conservatives and mythopoetics evidently find it difficult to join a dialogue of equals and a process of coalition-building. Consequently, Masculine Renewal fails to guide men of faith along paths of personal or social transformation and, instead, leads them to a dead end of distortion, confrontation, and separatism.

MEN IN RETREAT: THE EXCLUSIVE MALE SOUL

The second claim in Masculine Renewal is that men must retreat from women to recover their masculine identity. Popular Christian writers draw

on the tradition of spiritual retreat in support of Masculine Renewal. In the wilderness, it is argued, men will find the elusive male soul. Catholics and Protestants writing about masculine spirituality concur that the male soul is discovered in separation from women (O'Malley, pp. 405–6; Trippe, p. 118).[18]

Separation from women presumably allows men to free masculine "energies" (Moore, p. 113); but the new age mythopoetic man bears a suspicious resemblance to the traditional man of religious conservatives. Masculine Renewal emphasizes an heroic masculinity in which the male soul is identified with violence, power and conquest personified by the "warrior" archetype (Thompson). Some differences emerge between mythopoetics and conservatives on the warrior's image. On the one hand, mythopoetics envision a more benign type of warrior. Trippe supports a "hero's journey" in which sensitive men "listen first to our own souls and to each other" (p. 118). Moore argues that "warrior energies" must be used discriminately, in a mature and responsible manner, to create a better society (p. 113). O'Malley venerates the crusading warrior: "The male soul thrives on challenge, the heroic, the wild, the individuated—qualities not expected in Catholic males, in pew or in the pulpit At work, a man is expected to be a stallion; at Mass, to metamorphose into a gelding. That temporary neutering is not possible. What Catholic males need to regain is our sense of pilgrimage, of the bloodless crusade: the Grail quest" (pp. 405–6).

Religious conservatives, on the other hand, favor a violent hero at war with a hostile world. Kreeft argues that we live in an era of "spiritual warfare" between pagan feminists and authentic Christians (p. 28). Podles writes that men's violence is an expression of a militant Christian faith: "The hero is the ultimate pattern of maleness. He goes forth from ordinary life to confront the powers of evil, to battle with them, to be wounded and scarred by them, and only then to take his place as King . . . Sacred violence is the ultimate meaning of masculinity."[19] Contemporary religious images of men's violence, widespread in Masculine Renewal, are reminiscent of Christian patriarchal warfare against women and non-Christians: the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, witch hunts, and, today, Serbian rape-camps for Muslim women. Podles believes that "sacred violence is the ultimate meaning of masculinity" (1991, p. 8) and that "masculinity is, at heart, a willingness to sacrifice oneself even unto violent, bloody death for the other" (1993, p. 39). Despite variations, the prominence of the warrior motif in Masculine Renewal springs from a culture of terror in which masculinity is the organizing principle for the subordination of women: violence creates men. Walter

Wink argues that "the myth of redemptive violence" is used to adversely condition boys in our society in an arbitrary use of violence. He writes that violence assumes a quasi-religious form: "Redemptive violence gives way to violence as an end in itself—not a religion that uses violence in the pursuit of order and salvation, but a religion in which violence has become the ultimate elixir, sheer titillation, an addictive high, a substitute for relationships."[20]

The stories of Moses and Jesus provide an alternative understanding of violence and power. Violence is not an essential aspect of masculinity; it is associated with institutionalized domination. Power is not interpreted as a self-interested possession; it is the shared responsibility of the community. Power is the process by which a just society is maintained. Moses and Jesus did not retreat into the wilderness to tap into an inner resource of supernatural power that would allow them to exercise extraordinary abilities or violently assert their will over others. Instead, in retreat, they discovered their own humanness—a profound relatedness to all Being. They experienced a sacred sense of the unity, not division, of humanity. Elie Wiesel writes that Moses, the greatest figure in Jewish tradition, identified with the whole community: "Moses was a humanist in all things. Even his courage, his generosity were human virtues; all his qualities and all his flaws were human. He had no supernatural powers, no talent for the occult. Everything he did, he conceived in human terms, concerned not with his own 'individual salvation' but with the well-being of the community."[21]

Moses and Jesus accepted an individual loss of power in pursuit of the liberation of an oppressed people. Their understanding of leadership did not consist of an identity that set them apart from others but evolved from their identification with the struggle of the oppressed for justice. James Nelson says that Jesus "mediates God's vulnerability and weakness, thereby eliciting our own. In our mutual need we are, for the moment, bonded in life-giving communion."[22] Jesus confronted his own vulnerability and, thereby, discovered the relational power that makes collective liberation an historical possibility. Harrison writes that the transcendence of self-interest is vital in the struggle for justice: "The genuine experience of transcendence arises in the ecstatic power emergent between those who have connected with each other, intimately engaged with God, in emancipatory praxis" (p. 263). The renunciation of self-interested power and manifestation of relational power marks the radical nature of spiritual retreat. Moses and Jesus emerged from retreat with a commitment to the liberation of the oppressed. They had not discovered their inward nature so much as their social role. Franciscan spirituality

reflects this tradition of social responsibility. The prayer of St. Francis begins: "Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace." The Christian tradition of spiritual retreat provides a basis for addressing unequal social relations. It is not a military tactic for reorganizing the troops. The claim in Masculine Renewal that men must separate from women in order to discover genuine masculinity obscures both the actual origin of masculinity in gender relations and the path to gender justice.

MASCULINE RENEWAL AND MALE POWER

The third claim in Masculine Renewal is that men must unite under male leadership in order to preserve and protect the natural gender order and Western civilization. Stu Weber, a conservative Christian minister, relies on mythopoetic authors Robert Bly and Robert Moore to construct a Christian model of masculinity. Weber, in opposing feminism, argues that men are destined to rule over women. Like Moore (p. 113), he believes that masculine "hardwiring" preconditions men for the roles of "king" and "warrior."[23] The Christian right has adopted the language of mythopoetics in an antifeminist media campaign. Weber used an appearance on "Beverly LaHaye Live" (June 23, 1994) to attack feminists, claiming "men feel beat up." LaHaye, president of Christian Women of America, agreed that "the antics of the radical feminist movement" victimize men.

Masculine Renewal is flowering under the tender care of religious conservatives who find in mythopoetic rhetoric about masculinity a basis for mobilizing Christians against feminist and gay liberation movements. There are, of course, significant differences between religious conservatives and mythopoetics; but accessibility of mythopoetic concepts and terminology by religious conservatives suggest that, in both cases, we are witnessing a reinscription of white heterosexual masculinity under the guise of belief in a male soul. The experience of women, gays, and men of color is marginalized. For instance, Dittes assures men that the mythopoetic "men's movement is about becoming more manly, not less; it is not about becoming more feminine or more androgynous" (p. 589). O'Malley clarifies that "a man is not a woman and a woman is not a man" (p. 403). Religious conservatives, with thinly-veiled racism, argue that white heterosexual men regard the "ethos of manhood" as an ideal not shared by men who live in "mild climates" (Podles, 1993, p. 37). Whatever tension exists between religious conservatives and mythopoetics is visible only in conflict over political strategy. On

the one hand, conservatives support open, direct confrontation with feminists and gays. Feminism is described as "a radically different religion from Christianity" (Kreeft, p. 25). Non-whites and the poor are also targets. Podles writes: "Inner-city blacks, the underclass, the lumpenproletariat of America, have a vicious and destructive ethos of pseudo-masculinity" (1993, p. 40). On the other hand, mythopoetics argue that the men's movement must reach out to gays and men of color. George Trippe writes: "Further, our sense of "together" must expand as never before to include all men, especially those who were oppressed or excluded in patriarchal structures. We men need to take up the task together—men of all races and ethnic groups, men of all sexual orientations, men in all our sorts and conditions" (p. 121). White middle-class mythopoetics have already set the agenda for the recovery of male power. It is not surprising that gays and men of color feel excluded and resent the appropriation of their cultural traditions. A Native American writer quips: "White men can't drum!"[24]

The concept of male liberation also differentiates mythopoetics from religious conservatives (Dittes, p. 589). But, in accord with Masculine Renewal, male liberation rests on an interpretation of men as victims. In fact, men are viewed as the most oppressed sector in society because they carry "the burden of civilization, law and order, government, and culture throughout history" (Arnold, p. 51). Schurman argues that supporters of male liberation are white, well-educated, middle-class men in search of individualistic emotional fulfillment rather than social change.[25] The illusory search for the male soul is a symptom of social pathology nourished by therapists and clergy who would rather comfort the besieged male than challenge a sexist society. Male liberation, favored by mythopoetics, converges with the reactionary politics of religious conservatives in scapegoating women and gays for shifting gender roles. Both groups are united around the reassertion of male power, one consciously, the other, perhaps, unwittingly.

At the heart of Masculine Renewal is a litany of rituals designed for boys (Moore, p. 113). O'Malley says "the distinctively male soul" requires that boys be initiated into manhood through ritual practices to prepare them for positions of power in the church (p. 406). Others, in the tradition of Billy Sunday, offer Jesus as a model of masculinity for boys. Arnold, a mythopoetic, writes: "Jesus was himself a very manly figure, and the biblical metaphors for God in the ancient Judeo-Christian traditions are charged with masculine archetypal energy" (p. 68). Kreeft, a conservative, argues that Roman Catholic female priests would be flawed role models because Jesus will "forever be a male body" (p. 22).

Through their focus on male powerlessness, the conservative and mythopoetic branches of the men's movement fail to help men change. There is no place for gender justice within Masculine Renewal because religious conservatives do not recognize the basic right of women and gay men to organize collectively for social equality. Mythopoetic essentialism also problematizes women. First, by arguing that destructive masculinity is related to an undiscovered universal male nature, mythopoetics evade historical responsibility for patriarchal social structures that privilege men. While promoting the "warrior" archetype, Moore blames the arms race on "a lot of emotionally and spiritually immature boys living in grown-up men's bodies (p. 113). Others attempt to distinguish negative "masculine energy" from authentic masculinity which will usher in "a postpatriarchal era" (Trippe, p. 118). Second, the individualistic essentialist perspective undermines accountability to the women's movement since only men are able to discover their true masculine nature. Women have nothing men need because "a men's movement is about men" (Dittes, p. 589).

Perhaps most ominous are demands for purges of feminists in social and educational institutions—beginning with the church. In Arnold's attack on Christian feminists, traces of antisemitism are evident as he rallies men to battle: "Males need to know when someone is poisoning their wells, whether in the media, at school, or at work" (p. 63). Masculine Renewal has also spread its net in the moderate waters of mainstream Christian evangelism. Charles Colson writes in Billy Graham's *Christianity Today* that feminists are undermining American society: "The fundamental pillar of our society, the family, has been under assault for years, and its crumbling has long been of vital concern to Christians. But do not miss the progression. The artillery salvos are escalating against something even more fundamental: the very notion of what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman" (p. 72).

Feminists have evaluated reactionary elements in the men's movements with humor, suspicion, and alarm. Caputi and MacKenzie argue that the mythopoetic "movement for liberation is actually a manifestation of an authoritarian backlash and joins the political and religious right" in opposition to the women's movement.[26] Moore attempts to deflect feminist critique of the men's movement by distinguishing between "mature" and "immature" forms of masculinity (p. 113). But Rosemary Radford Ruether finds that certain basic claims, such as male victimization, are absurd. She relates mythopoetic rhetoric to the hypothetical rise of a "white people's movement":

> We are told that white people are deeply wounded by the lack of positive white role models, exacerbated by the 'vicious' criticism of white people that took place in the civil rights and the anti-apartheid movements. What is needed is to restore white people's confidence in whiteness as a manifestation of strong and positive psychic traits. Journeys to regions of pure white sands and skies are recommended in which white people, dressed in white sheets, can dance around a birch wood fire, brandishing symbols of white power . . . Perhaps David Duke might become the cultural hero of such a white men's movement.[27]

Religious feminists, like Ruether and Mary Daly, are under assault in the church for challenging traditional male images of God. Kreeft warns that Daly is attempting to castrate "God the Father" (p. 28). The attack against a "feminized" church, articulated in Masculine Renewal, has led to a state of crisis in several religious denominations. Participants at an international Christian feminist conference "found the use of Sophia as a name for God to be liberating." But the conference was "denounced as blasphemous" by conservatives who fear that "change in church teachings on sexuality or language about God are driven by contemporary political causes."[28]

The claim that men are oppressed, and, therefore, must unite to achieve liberation, cannot be effectively supported by appeals to Biblical authority. Moses and Jesus drew a sharp division between oppressed and oppressor; their lives demonstrate a downward movement from privilege to marginalization. Moses lived many years in the Egyptian court before he finally committed a single act of solidarity with the Hebrew slaves. He must have listened to their cries of anguish for many years before he acted; it was not easy to change. Jesus was unwilling to assist the Syrophoenician woman because he regarded her as inferior. Only after the woman humbled herself did Jesus modify his understanding of liberation. He also found it difficult to change. Moses and Jesus were blind to their own privilege and power until the cries of the oppressed penetrated the dominant consciousness that formed their identities as men. Their greatness lies in their capacity to respond to the oppressed. While it is difficult for men to change, Moses and Jesus demonstrate that personal and social transformation—even gender justice—is an historical possibility. Moses and Jesus learned, through their experiences of downfall and retreat, to identify with the weak and powerless. They put aside individual self-interest to work for the well-being of the whole community. Religious conservatives and mythopoetics have not yet confronted their own social privilege and power. Instead, they retreat to a place where the genuine voices of the oppressed are drummed into silence. In the mythopoetic scenario, Moses and Jesus would retreat into the wilder-

ness merely to obtain self-awareness through ecstatic spiritual awakening—probably in a sweatlodge! Moses and Jesus pleaded with God not to compel them to leave their safe havens because they feared for their lives. Moses had a good life in the Midian desert raising goats. If he returned to help the Hebrew slaves, he faced death at the hands of Pharaoh. Jesus faced crucifixion by a Roman occupation army for assisting the poor and oppressed.

Middle-class, white men who discovered their "masculine energy" face no real danger. Their battle for men's souls is not an occasion for persecution but an opportunity to persecute. Moses and Jesus demonstrate the hazards and opportunities of risk-taking: their individual sacrifice brought forth collective liberation. Contemporary men have found change to be a laborious and painful process. They have found it easier to defend the old than risk the new. Masculine Renewal is a reactionary movement leading men down a path of confrontation with feminists, gays, and people of color in defense of men's privilege and power. The renunciation of power by a privileged social group requires a visionary spirit rooted in the Biblical mandates of service and justice. The lives of Moses and Jesus reveal compassion culminating in justice and justice rooted in compassion. Today, heterosexual white men must learn to put aside their masculine privilege and join together with women, gays, and men of color in the struggle for gender justice. The new man will be born when we discover our identity—not as leaders, but as servants.

NOTES

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4. George E. Trippe, "Between the Wimp and the Rambo: Finding New Models in a Post-Patriarchal Age," *The Catholic World* 235 (1992): 120. See also William G. Thompson, "Men and the Gospels," *The Catholic World* 235 (1992): 105–10.

5. See also William J. O'Malley, "The Grail Quest: Male Spirituality," *America* 166 (1992): 402–6.

6. David Gates, "White Male Paranoia," *Newsweek* (29 March 1993): 48.

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22. James B. Nelson, *Body Theology* (Louisville: Westminster, 1992), 109.

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26. Jane Caputi and Gordene O. MacKenzie, "Pumping Iron John," in *Women Respond to the Men's Movement*, ed. Kay Leigh Hagan (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 72.

27. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Patriarchy and the Men's Movement: Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution?" in *Women Respond to the Men's Movement*, ed. Kay Leigh Hagan (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 16–17.

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Mythopoetic Men's Work as a Search for Communitas

MICHAEL SCHWALBE

IN THE LATE 1980S AND EARLY 1990S, the commercial media discovered the mythopoetic men's movement. Newspapers, magazines, and television reported that thousands of middle-aged, middle-class white men were retreating to rustic settings to share their feelings, to cry, hug, drum, dance, tell poems and fairy tales, and enact primitive rituals. The men were supposedly trying to get in touch with the inner "wildman" and other masculine archetypes, as urged by movement leader Robert Bly, a famous poet and author of the 1991 bestseller *Iron John*.[1] Mythopoetic activity was covered because it was offbeat and so, not surprisingly, most stories played up its odd trappings. The serious side of the movement—its implicit critique of men's lives in American society—was not examined.

While most observers thought mythopoetic activity was harmless and silly, others saw it as dangerous. Feminist critics accused Bly and the mythopoetic men of nefarious doings at their all-male retreats: whining about men's relatively minor psychological troubles while ignoring the much greater oppression of other groups, especially women; "modernizing" rather than truly changing masculinity; retreating from tough political realities into boyish play; unfairly blaming mothers and wives for men's troubles; and reproducing sexism by using fairy tales and rituals from patriarchal cultures. Critics thus saw the mythopoetic movement as part of an anti-feminist backlash or as a New Age maneuver in the battle of the sexes.[2]

Much of the criticism of the movement was based on the same superficial stories fed to the public. More responsible critics at least read Bly's book, saw his 1990 PBS interview ("A Gathering of Men") with Bill Moyers, attended a retreat, or read other pieces of mythopoetic literature.[3] Even so,

almost none of the criticism was based on firsthand knowledge of what the men involved in mythopoetic activity were thinking, feeling, and doing together. The men themselves either disappeared behind the inflated image of Bly, or critics presumed that there was no need to distinguish them from Bly. But while Bly was indeed the chief public figure of the movement and a main source of its philosophy, mythopoetic activity or, as the men themselves called it, "mythopoetic men's work," was much more than Robert Bly.

In the fall of 1990, before Bly's *Iron John* raised the visibility of the mythopoetic movement, I began a participant-observation study of a group of men, associated with a local men's center, who were engaged in mythopoetic activity. I wanted to find out how the men began doing "men's work" and how it was affecting them. I was especially interested in how it affected the meanings they gave to their identities as men. So from September 1990 to June 1993, I attended 128 meetings of various kinds; observed and participated in all manner of mythopoetic activities; attended events led by the movement's prominent teachers; read the movement's major texts and many smaller publications; and interviewed 21 of the local men at length. The full account of my study appears elsewhere.[4]

Two points may aid understanding of the mythopoetic men. One is that, while they held Robert Bly in high esteem, they did not see him as an infallible guru. Most of the men knew that Bly could be obnoxious, that he tended to exaggerate, and that he liked to be the center of attention. It would be fair to say that the men saw him as wise, entertaining, charismatic, and challenging—but hardly without fault. Many of the men had equally high regard for other teachers in the mythopoetic movement, especially the Jungian psychologist James Hillman and the drumming storyteller Michael Meade. Even so, the mythopoetic men were wary of leaders and did not want to be dependent on them. They believed that men could and should learn to do men's work on their own.

The second point is that many of the men rejected the label "movement" for what they were doing, since to them this implied central organization, the imposition of a doctrine, and political goals. It's true that mythopoetic activity was not centrally coordinated, overtly oriented to political goals, or restricted to those who swore allegiance to a particular set of beliefs. There was, however, an underlying philosophy (derived in large part from Jungian psychology), a circuit-riding group of teachers, a body of inspirational literature, nationally circulated publications, and many similarities of practice among the mythopoetic men's groups that had sprung up around the country. So to add this up and call it a movement is a legitimate convenience.

Many of the men also shared certain goals which they sought to achieve through mythopoetic work. As individuals they sought the therapeutic goals of self-acceptance, greater self-confidence, and better knowledge of themselves as emotional beings. As a group they sought to revalue 'man' as a moral identity; that is, they collectively sought to define 'man' as an identity that implied positive moral qualities. Identity work of this kind, which was partly a response to feminist criticism of men's behavior, was accomplished through talk at gatherings and through the movement's literature. Much of what the men sought to accomplish thus had to do with their feelings about themselves as men.

It's important to see, however, that mythopoetic men's work was not just about sharing feelings, as if the men knew what they were feeling and then met to talk about it. Things were not so simple. Often the work itself aroused feelings that surprised the men. And these feelings were not always pleasant. But even unpleasant feelings were resources for fashioning a special kind of collective experience. It was this experience, which the anthropologist Victor Turner calls "communitas," that the men sought to create at their gatherings. This was a rare and seductive experience for men in a highly bureaucratized society such as ours.

COMMUNITY AND COMMUNITAS

Most of the mythopoetic men were between the ages of 35 and 60. Nearly all were white, self-identified as heterosexual, and college educated. Most had good jobs, owned homes, and helped maintain families. They were, by and large, successful in conventional middle-class terms. Yet the men said that living out this conventional script had left them, at midlife, feeling empty and dissatisfied. They found that the external trappings of success were not spiritually fulfilling. What's more, many of the men felt isolated, cut off from other men, except for competitive contexts, such as the workplace. Hence many described mythopoetic activity as part of an effort to create a community where they could interact with other men in a supportive, non-competitive way.

But it was not exactly community that these men created through mythopoetic work. Although they sometimes established serious friendships and networks of support, the men did not enter into relations of material dependence upon each other, live in close proximity to each other, work together, or interact on a daily basis. The men who met at gatherings and in support

groups usually went home to their separate lives. Thus, strictly speaking, it was not a true community they created. What the mythopoetic men sought, and tried to create at their gatherings, was both more and less than community. It was communitas.

Victor Turner, an anthropologist who studied tribal rituals, describes communitas as both a shared feeling-state and a way of relating. To create communitas people must relate to each other outside the constraints of formally defined roles and statuses. As Turner describes it:

> Essentially, communitas is a relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals. These individuals are not segmentalized into roles and statuses but confront one another rather in the manner of Martin Buber's 'I and Thou'. Along with this direct, immediate, and total confirmation of human identities, there tends to go a model of society as a homogeneous, unstructured communitas, whose boundaries are ideally coterminous with those of the human species.[5]

Communitas, as Turner says, can happen when the force of roles and statuses is suspended; that is, when individuals in a group feel themselves to be equals and there are no other significant differences to impede feelings of communality. Although the mythopoetic men did not use the term communitas, they sought to relate to each other in the way that Turner describes as characteristic of communitas. At gatherings they tried to engage each other in a way that was unmediated by the roles they played in their everyday work lives. The men tried to practice this kind of relating by talking about the feelings they had which they believed arose out of their common experiences as men.

Turner distinguishes three types of communitas: normative, ideological, and spontaneous or existential. Of these, it is spontaneous or existential communitas that the mythopoetic men sought to create. Turner says that spontaneous communitas is "richly charged with affects, mainly pleasurable ones," that it "has something 'magical' about it," and that in it there is "the feeling of endless power."[6] He compares hippies and tribesmen in a passage that could also apply to the mythopoetic men:

> The kind of communitas desired by tribesmen in their rites and by hippies in their 'happenings' is not the pleasurable and effortless comradeship that can arise between friends, coworkers, or professional colleagues any day. What they seek is a transformative experience that goes to the root of each person's being and finds in that root something profoundly communal and shared.[7]

There are several ways in which Turner's description of spontaneous communitas fits mythopoetic activity. First, the men sought personal growth

through their experiences of "connection," as they called it, at mythopoetic gatherings. A connection was a feeling of emotional communion with another man or group of men. Such connections were made when a story, poem, dance, ritual, or psychodramatic enactment brought up strong feelings in one or more men, and this in turn induced emotional responses in others. In these moments the men learned about their own complexity as emotional beings. The changes they sought were greater awareness of their feelings, more clarity about them, and better ability to use those feelings constructively.

The mythopoetic men also presumed it was possible to establish deep emotional connections with each other because they were all, at root, men. This presumption grew out of the Jungian psychology that informed mythopoetic activity. The idea was that all men possessed the same set of masculine archetypes that predisposed them to think, feel, and act in similar ways.[8] In Jungian terms, these masculine archetypes are parts of the collective unconscious, to which we are all linked by our common humanity. Thus all men, simply by virtue of being male, were presumed to possess similar masculine energies and masculine ways of feeling. Mythopoetic activities were aimed at bringing out or tapping into these energies and feelings so that men could connect based on them and thereby mutually reinvigorate themselves.

Turner's references to pleasurable affects and mysterious feelings of power are echoed in how the mythopoetic men described their experiences. Mythopoetic activity was enjoyable, the men said, because "It's just being with men in a way that's very deep and powerful"; "There's a tremendous energy that grows out of men getting together and connecting emotionally"; and "It just feels great to be there connecting with other men in a noncompetitive way." And indeed the feelings were often intense. As one man said during a talking circle at the end of a weekend retreat, "I feel there's so much love in this room right now it hurts." Men also said that going back to their ordinary lives after a gathering meant "coming down from an emotional high." I, too, experienced this transition from the warm, open, supportive, emotionally-charged atmosphere of a gathering to the relatively chilly atmosphere of a large research university.

The success of a gathering was measured by the intensity of the emotion it evoked and the connections thereby established. A less successful gathering was one where the emotional intensity was low and the men did not make strong connections. At a small two-day gathering, one man commented somewhat sadly, "We've had some good sharing, but only once did I feel much happening to me. That was when B. was talking. I felt tears welling

up. So there's a deeper level we could get to." This was said at the start of the final talking circle, in hopes of prompting a more emotional discussion before the gathering was over. In addition to showing the desire for communitas, this statement also shows that it took effort to achieve. Spontaneous communitas did not happen spontaneously.

CREATING SPONTANEOUS COMMUNITAS

Mythopoetic men's work was in large part the conversation work required to create spontaneous communitas. I'll explain here how this work was done, through talk and other means. It should be understood that not all gatherings were aimed as intently at creating the same degree of communitas. Some gatherings were more "heady," in that they were devoted to discussion of a topic, such as fathering or men's health or men's friendships. Often there were moments of communitas at these kinds of meetings; but it was at the retreats—those which had an explicit mythopoetic or "inner work" theme—where the greatest efforts were made to produce communitas. Talk, ritual, and drumming were the chief means for doing this.

Forms of Talk

At mythopoetic gatherings men often made personal statements that revealed something shameful, tragic, or emotionally disturbing about their lives. Such statements might be made by each man in turn at the beginning of a retreat, as part of saying why he was there, what he was feeling, and what he hoped to accomplish at the retreat. Before any statements were made, the leader of the retreat or gathering would remind the men of the rules to follow in making statements: speak briefly, speak from the heart (i.e., focus on feelings), and speak to the other men—who were supposed to listen intently, make no judgments, and give no advice. The idea was that the statements should bring the unrehearsed truth up from a man's gut, since this would stir feelings in him and move other men to speak their "belly truth."

A great deal of feeling was stirred up as men talked about troubled relationships with fathers; being sexually abused as children; struggling to overcome addictions; repressed anger over past hurts and betrayals; grief and sadness over irreplaceable losses; efforts to be better fathers to their children. When men choked up, wept, shook with fear, or raged as they spoke

it induced strong feelings in other men in the group. At one gathering a man, after hearing several moving personal statements, said to the group as a whole, "Your stories give me life. They make me feel more alive."

The sequence in which personal statements were made amplified this effect. Men would often begin their remarks by saying, "What that [the previous statement] brings up for me is . . . ," or "I really identify with what _____ said, because . . ." The more disclosing, expressive, and moving a man's statement, the more likely it was to evoke from the other men heavy sighs, sympathetic "mmmms," or a loud chorus of "Ho!" (supposedly a Native American way of affirming that a man's statement has been heard and felt). If a statement seemed inauthentic or insufficiently revealing it might evoke little or no reaction. The men thus reinforced a norm of making risky, revealing, and evocative statements.

The men were thus not only sharing feelings but, by virtue of how they talked, knitting those feelings together into a group mood. In this way they were also creating communitas. It is important, too, that the settings in which these statements were made were defined as "safe," meaning that, by agreement, the men were not there to compete with or judge each other, but to listen and provide support. Even so, there was an element of risk and a degree of anxiety associated with making personal statements, since the mythopoetic men, like most men in American society, were unused to sharing feelings of hurt and vulnerability with other men. This anxiety aided the achievement of communitas because it created a higher-than-usual level of emotional arousal to begin with. It also allowed the men immediately to identify with one another over being anxious. As Turner likewise noted: "danger is one of the chief ingredients in the production of spontaneous communitas."[9]

In making personal statements, and in their general conversation at gatherings, the men could not help but refer to people, events, and circumstances outside themselves that evoked the feelings they had. In doing this, the men were careful to add to their statements the disclaimer "for me," as in "For *me*, the Gulf War was very depressing." This disclaimer signified that the man speaking was talking about *his* feelings based on *his* perceptions of things, and he was making no presumptions about how other men should feel. The use of this disclaimer helped the men maintain the fellow-feeling they sought by avoiding arguments about what was true of the external world. The mythopoetic men wanted their feelings validated, not challenged. As long as each man spoke the truth from his heart, no one could say he was wrong.

Talk about fathers was another way the men achieved communitas. It worked because almost every man had a father to talk about, and those few who didn't could talk about not having fathers. So every man could participate. Father talk also worked because it brought up feelings of sadness and anger for many of the men, and thus created the necessary emotional charge. Because many of the men experienced their fathers as physically or emotionally absent, or in some way abusive, the men could identify with each other based on these common experiences. Father talk may have helped them to reach insights about their relationships to their fathers. But father talk went on to the extent it did because it was so useful for creating communitas.

Poems and fairy tales were also a staple part of mythopoetic activity.[10] Most of the time no commentary or discussion followed the reading or reciting of a poem. The men would just steep in the feelings the poems evoked. An especially stirring poem, like a moving personal statement, would elicit deep sighs, "mmmmm," "yeah," sometimes "Ho!", and often calls for the reader to "read it again!" And as with the personal statements, these responses, which were signs of shared feelings, served to turn the individual feelings into a collective mood, and thus helped to create communitas. When fairy tales were told there usually was commentary and discussion, in a form that also encouraged communitas.

When a story was told the storyteller would usually instruct the men to look for an image that evoked strong feelings. That image, it was said, would be a man's "doorway into the story"—his way of discovering what the story could tell him about his life as a man. This is consistent with Turner's observation that the "concrete, personal, imagist mode of thinking is highly characteristic of those in love with existential [or spontaneous] communitas, with the direct relation between man and man, and man and nature. Abstractions appear as hostile to live contact."[11] In the case of the mythopoetics, the emphasis on specific images grew out of Jungian psychology, according to which the psyche was best explored by working with emotionally evocative images.

After a story or part of a story was told, men would talk about the images that struck them and the feelings these images evoked. In a large group of men many different images might be mentioned. Sometimes men reacted strongly to the same image. Talking about the stories in this way created more chances for men to express feelings and to find that they shared feelings and experiences with other men. This was in part how feelings of isolation were overcome and connections were made. Again, the stories may have helped the men to better understand their lives. But it was *how* the stories

were talked about that helped the men to experience the good feelings and mysterious power of communitas.

Ritual

Ritual is different from routine. Routine is the repetition of a behavioral pattern, like brushing one's teeth every night before bed. Ritual involves the symbolic enactment of values, beliefs, or feelings. It is a way of making external, visible, and public things that are normally internal, invisible, and private. By doing this, members of a community create a shared reality, reaffirm their common embrace of certain beliefs and values, and thereby keep the community alive. Ritual can also be a way of acknowledging changes in community members or of actually inducing such changes. The mythopoetic men used ritual for the same purposes: to call up, express, and share their otherwise private feelings, and to make changes in themselves.

Not all gatherings were ritual gatherings, though most included some ritual elements. Those gatherings where an explicit attempt was made to create "ritual space" or "sacred space" usually began with a symbolic act of separation from the ordinary world. For example, sometimes men would dip their hands into a large bowl of water to symbolize a washing off of concerns and distractions linked to the outside world. Other times at the outset of gatherings the "spirits of the four directions" (and sometimes of the earth and sky, too) would be invoked and asked to bring the men strength and wisdom. Still other times the men would dance their way into the space where the meeting was to be held, while the men already inside drummed and chanted. The point was to perform some collective act to mark a boundary between outside life and the ritual space.

The scene of a gathering also had to be properly set. Ritual gatherings were often held at rustic lodges where various objects—candles, bird feathers, masks, antlers, strangely shaped driftwood, animal skulls—might be set up around the main meeting area. Sage was often burned (a practice called "smudging") to make the air pungent and to cleanse the ritual space for the action that was going to take place. Usually the leader or leaders of the gathering made sure these things were done. Again, the idea was to heighten the sense of separation from ordinary reality, to make the physical space where the gatherings would take place seem special, and to draw the men together. This preparation was talked about in terms of "creating a container" that could safely hold the psychic energies about to be unleashed.

The separation from ordinary reality also helped the men let go of the

concerns for status and power that influenced their interactions with other men in everyday life. In the ritual space the men were supposed to be "present for each other" in a direct and immediate way, as equals, as "brothers," and not as inferiors and superiors. Defining the situation as one in which feelings and other psychic matters were the proper focus of attention and activity helped to create and sustain this sense of equality. Thus the men seldom talked about their jobs, except to describe job-related troubles (and sometimes triumphs) in general terms. Too much talk about occupations would have introduced status concerns which in turn would have corroded the sense of equality and brotherhood that fostered feelings of communitas.

Two examples can help show more concretely how the mythopoetic men used ritual to create communitas. One example is from a six-day gathering of about 120 men in a remote rural setting. At this gathering the men were divided into three clans: Trout, Ravens, and Lions. During the week each clan worked with a dance teacher to develop a dance of its own, a dance that would symbolize the spirit of the men in the clan. At the carnivale on the last night of the gathering, each clan was to share its dance with the rest of the men. One clan would drum while another danced and the third clan "witnessed."

The carnivale was held in a large, dimly lit lodge built of rough cut logs. Many of the men wore the wildly decorated masks they had made earlier in the week. When their turn came, the 40 men in the Trout clan moved to the center of the room and formed a circle. The men stood for a few moments and then hunched down, extended their arms with their hands together in front of them, and began to dip and sway like fish swimming. Then half the men began moving to their right and half to their left, creating two flowing, interweaving circles. The Trout men also carried small stones, which they clicked together as they moved. About 30 men drummed as the Trout men danced. The rest of the men watched.

After a while the Trout men stopped and stood again, holding hands in a circle inside the larger circle of witnesses. They began a sweet and mournful African chant that they said was used to honor the passing away of loved ones. One by one each of the Trout men moved to the center of their circle and put down the stones he was carrying. As he did so, he called out the name of a person or people whose passing he wished to honor. Another of the Trout men walked along the row of men standing in the outer ring and said, "We invite you to join us by putting a stone in the center of the circle to honor your dead." The drumming and chanting continued all the while.

At first a few, then more and more of the Raven and Lion men stepped

outside to get stones. Each man as he returned went to the center of the circle, called the name of the dead he was honoring, put down a stone, and then stepped back. There was sadness in the men's voices as they spoke. This lent gravity to their acts and drew everyone into the ritual. By now all the men had picked up the chant and joined hands in one large circle. The sound filled the lodge. After about 20 minutes the chanting reached a lull—and then one man began to sing "Amazing Grace." Soon all the men joined in and again their voices rose in chorus and filled the lodge. When we finished singing we stood silent, looking at all the stones between us.

This example shows how a great deal of work went into creating spontaneous communitas. The dance was carefully choreographed and the stage was elaborately set (one could say that the five days leading up to the carnivale were part of the stage setting). But later I talked to Trout men who said that they had planned the dance only up to the point of asking the other men to honor their dead. They were surprised by what happened after that, by how quickly and powerfully the other men were drawn in. No one had expected the surge of emotion and fellow-feeling that the ritual induced, especially when the men began to sing "Amazing Grace." Several men I talked to later cited this ritual as one of the most moving experiences they had had at a mythopoetic gathering.

Another example comes from a sweat lodge ritual modeled on a traditional Native American practice.[12] In this case the lodge was tiny, consisting of a framework of saplings, held together with twine, upon which were draped several layers of old blankets and tarps. Before the frame was built a fire pit was dug in the center of the spot on which the lodge stood. Although a lodge could be made bigger, here it was about ten feet in diameter and four feet high—big enough for a dozen men to squeeze in. From the outside it looked like a miniature domed stadium.

It was a drizzly 45-degree morning on the second day of a teacher-led weekend retreat. I was in the second group of 12 men who would go into the lodge together. This was the first "sweat" for all of us. The men in this group were almost giddy as we walked from the cabins to the shore of a small lake where the sweat lodge had been built. When we got there the men from the previous group had just finished.

The scene stopped us abruptly. Next to the lodge a large rock-rimmed fire was burning. A fierce, black-haired man with a beard stood by the fire, a five-foot staff in his hand. Some of the men who had just finished their sweat were standing waist-deep in the lake. Others were on shore hugging, their naked bodies still steaming in the cool air. Our moment of stunned

silence ended when the leader of the retreat said to us, matter of factly, "Get undressed, stay quiet, keep your humility." We undressed and stashed our clothes under the nearby pine trees, out of the rain.

Before we entered the lodge the teacher urged us to reflect on the specialness of the occasion and to approach it with seriousness. Upon entering the lodge through a small entry flap each man was to say, "all my relations," to remind himself of his connections to the earth, to his ancestors, and to the other men. Once we were inside, the teacher called for the fire tender to bring us fresh, red-hot rocks. As each rock was placed by shovel into the fire pit, we said in unison, "welcome grandfather," again as symbolic acknowledgement of our connection to the earth. Now the teacher burned sage on the rocks to scent the air. When he poured water on the rocks the lodge became a sauna. The space was tightly packed, lit only by the glow of the rocks, and very hot. We were to do three sessions of ten to fifteen minutes each. Because of the intensity of the heat, a few men could not do all three sessions.

During one of the sessions the teacher urged us to call upon the spirits of our ancestors from whom we wanted blessings. In the cacophony of voices it was hard to make out what was being said. Some men were calling the names of people not present. A few were doing what sounded like a Native American Indian chant learned from the movies. The man on my right was gobbling like a turkey. At first this all struck me as ridiculous. I looked around the lodge for signs of similar bemusement in other men's faces. Surely they couldn't be taking this seriously. But those whose faces I could see appeared absorbed in the experience. Some men seemed oddly distant, as if they were engaged in a conversation going on elsewhere.

Although I was still put off by the bogus chanting and baffled by the gobbling, I too began to feel drawn in. I found myself wanting to suspend disbelief and find some meaning in the ritual, no matter how culturally foreign it was. In large part this was because the teacher and the other men seemed to be taking it seriously. I certainly didn't want to ruin the experience for them by showing any sign of cynicism. These were men who had taken my feelings seriously during the retreat. I felt I owed them the same consideration in the sweat lodge.

In both examples, a carefully crafted set of appearances made communitas likely to happen. The physical props, the words and actions of the ritual leaders, and the sincere words and actions of some men evoked real feelings in others and drew them in.[13] Because it seemed that there were genuine emotions at stake, it would have taken a hard heart to show any sign of

cynicism during the Trout dance or the sweat lodge. To do so would have risked hurting other men's feelings and dimming the glow of communitas. It would also have cut the cynic himself off from the good feelings and mysterious power being generated by these occasions. Whether or not everyone "really believed" in what was happening didn't matter. Appearances made it seem so, and to achieve the communitas they desired, all the men needed to do was to act on these appearances.

Another dynamic was at work in the case of the sweat lodge. On the face of it, the idea of late 20th-century white men enacting a Native American sweat lodge ritual was absurd. And for most of these men, the idea of squatting naked, haunch to haunch, with other men would have been—within an everyday frame of reference—embarrassing and threatening to their identities as heterosexuals. Thus to avoid feeling ridiculous, threatened, or embarrassed the men had to stay focused on the form of the ritual and show no sign of doubting its content or propriety. Because there was such a gap between their everyday frame of reference and the ritual, the men had to exaggerate their absorption in the ritual reality just to keep a grip on it. In so doing the men truly did create a common focus and, again, the appearance that a serious, collective spiritual activity was going on.

The sweat lodge example also illustrated how the creation of communitas was aided by literally stripping men of signs of their differences. In the sweat lodge, men were only men—as symbolized by their nakedness. They were thus also equals. When a small group of us spoke afterwards about the experience, one man said, "The closeness and physicality, and especially being naked, are what make it work. Everyone is just a man in there. You can't wear any merit badges."

Drumming

Next to Bly, the most widely recognized icon of the mythopoetic movement was the drum. Drumming was indeed an important part of mythopoetic activity. Some mythopoetic groups held gatherings just to drum, although the group I studied was more likely to mix drumming with other activities. Not all of the men drummed. A few didn't care for it; others preferred to use rattles or tambourines during drumming sessions. The most enthusiastic men had congas, African-styled djembes, or hand-held shaman's drums, though all manner of large and small folk drums appeared at gatherings. On one occasion a man used a five-gallon plastic pail turned upside down.

Why did the mythopoetic men drum? Some of the men in the local group

said that they began drumming after a visit by Michael Meade, a prominent teacher in the mythopoetic movement, who was skilled at using drumming to accompany his telling of folk tales. This is what inspired one man I interviewed:

> Bly came and told his "Iron John" story and that was my first introduction to using stories as a way of illuminating dilemmas or emotional situations in your life. Michael Meade came the following year in the spring and introduced some drumming at that weekend. I just loved the energy of that right away. It just really opened me up. After drumming I felt wonderful. I liked the feeling of it and felt a connection with the mythopoetic ever since then, more to the drumming than to anything else.

But on only a few occasions did any of the local men use drumming as accompaniment to story telling. Most of the drumming was done in groups, which varied in size from six to forty. And while the men who were better drummers might lead the group into a complex rhythm, often something samba-like, the drumming was usually freeform, leaderless, and simple.

The appeal of this activity had little to do with acquiring virtuosity at drumming. Rather, much of the appeal stemmed from the fact that the men could be bad drummers and still participate. It was, most importantly, another means to achieve communitas. Victor Turner notes that simple musical instruments are often used this way: "It is . . . fascinating to consider how expressions of communitas are culturally linked with simple wind instruments (flutes and harmonicas). Perhaps, in addition to their ready portability, it is their capacity to convey in music the quality of spontaneous human communitas that is responsible for this."[14] This was equally true of drums, which were also readily portable and required even less skill to play.

What the mythopoetic men say about their experiences drumming tells much about not only drumming, but about the communitas it helped create and about the mythopoetic experience in general. In an interview another man, a 48-year-old salesman, spoke of drumming as both ordinary and special at the same time:

> You can kind of lose yourself in it. It's like any hobby—fishing or playing ball or whatever. There is something that happens. You go into an altered state almost, hearing that music. At this national meeting in Minnesota a month ago the common thing was the drums. You could hear the beating of that drum. At break people would drum and we would dance. So it's this common bond.

Put another way, drumming was an activity that gave men who were strangers a way to quickly feel comfortable and familiar with each other. Some of

the mythopoetic men believed that men in general had a special facility for connecting with each other via non-verbal means. The way that men were able to quickly bond via drumming was seen as evidence of this.

Although the men were aware that drumming was not an activity limited to men, some clearly felt that it held a special appeal for them. Another man, a 33-year-old technical writer, said in an interview:

> Drumming does something—connects me with men in ways that I can't understand, in the same way I've observed women who have babies connecting with each other. There's something in it that I don't participate in emotionally. In the same way, the drumming—society with other men—is emotionally important to men in ways that women don't understand. They can't.

Some of the mythopoetic men's ideas about gender are evident in this statement. Many of them believed that women, no matter how empathic they might be, could not know what it was like to be a man, just as men could not know what it was like to be a woman. Hence men needed the understanding and support that could come only from other men, just as women needed the same things from other women.

For other men drumming was both a communal and, sometimes, a personal, spiritual experience. In an interview a 42-year-old therapist told me:

> There was one point where I was really deeply entranced just drumming and then all of a sudden I had this real powerful experience where I felt like I was on a hill, on some mountainside or some mountaintop, in some land far far away, in some time that was all time. And I was in the middle of all my men, who were my brothers, who were all men. It was one of those powerful mystical experiences where all of a sudden I felt planted in the community of men. And that changed my life, because I felt like I was a man among men in the community of men and we were drumming and the drum was in my bones and it was in my heartbeat and it was good.

This statement captures in spirit, tone, and rhythm the experience that many of the men found in drumming. Even if they didn't report such flights of imagination, others said that drumming provided a similar sense of communality, of connection, which I have been calling communitas.

My own experience corroborates this. I found that when I could pick up a beat and help sustain it without thinking, the sense of being part of the group was strong. It was as if the sound testified to the reality of the group and the rhythm testified to our connection. By drumming in synch each man attached himself to the group and to the other men in it. The men valued this also because the attachment was created by physical action rather than

by talk, and because it seemed to happen at a non-rational level. Drumming thus helped the men do two other things that mythopoetic philosophy called for: getting out of their heads and into feeling their bodies; and bypassing the rational ego that kept a lid on the archetypal masculine energies the men sought to tap.

COMMUNITAS AND POLITICS

My point has been to show that much mythopoetic activity can be understood as a search for communitas. This experience was rare in these men's lives and precious on the occasions when it occurred. Sometimes the men talked about the activities at their gatherings as "inviting the sacred to happen." Particular forms of talk, the orchestration of ritual, and drumming were means to this end. Because communitas was so valuable to the men, there were also things they *avoided* doing to make communitas more likely to happen. One thing they avoided was serious talk about politics.

This is not to say that the men were apolitical. Most of the men I studied were well informed on social issues and supported progressive causes. They were also critical of the rapacious greed of big corporations, the duplicity and brutal militarism of Reagan and Bush, and the general oppressiveness of large bureaucracies. But there were two revealing ironies in the politics of the mythopoetic men. First, while they were critical of the behavior of corporations and government, they avoided saying that these institutions were run by men. Usually it was an unspecified, genderless "they" who were said to be responsible for destroying the environment or for turning all culture into mass marketable schlock. And second, while many of the men saw corporate power and greed as root problems in U.S. society, they were uninterested in collective action to address these problems. This is as one might expect, since the white, middle-class mythopoetic men did not do so badly in reaping the material benefits of the economic system they occasionally criticized.

In other words, the men were selectively apolitical. They did not want to see that it was other *men* who were responsible for many of the social problems they witnessed and were sometimes affected by. To do so, and to talk about it, would have shattered the illusion of universal brotherhood among men that helped sustain feelings of communitas. Talk about power, politics, and inequality in the external world was incompatible with the search for communitas, because it would have led to arguments, or at least to intellec-

tual discussions, rather than to warm emotional communion. When discussions at mythopoetic gatherings inadvertently turned political, disagreements surfaced, and tensions arose, someone would usually say, "We're getting away from the important work here." Or as one man said in trying to stop a conversation that was becoming an argument, "I think we're losing the power of the drums."

The mythopoetic men believed that engaging in political or sociological analysis would have led them away from their goals of self-acceptance, self-knowledge, emotional authenticity, and communitas. The men wanted to feel better about themselves as men, to learn about the feelings and psychic energies that churned within them, to live fuller and more authentic emotional lives, and to experience the pleasure and mysterious power of communitas. They did not want to compete over whose interpretation of social reality was correct. They wanted untroubled brotherhood in which their feelings were validated by other men, and in which their identities as men could be infused with new value.

Here can be seen both the power and limits of mythopoetic men's work. Through this work some men have begun to free themselves from the debilitating repression of emotion that was part of their socialization into traditional masculinity. Feminism provided the intellectual basis and political impetus for this critique of traditional masculinity, though the mythopoetics have difficulty appreciating this. Yet they deserve credit for developing a method that allows some men to explore and express more of the emotions that make them human. Mythopoetic men's work has also helped men to see how these emotions can be the basis for connections to men they might otherwise have feared, mistrusted, or felt compelled to compete with. And to the extent that men begin to see that they don't have to live out traditional masculinity, and can even cooperate to heal the damage it causes, mythopoetic men's work has progressive potential.

One problem is that the progressive potential of mythopoetic men's work is limited because it leads men to think about gender and gender inequality in psychological or, at best, cultural terms. Mythopoetic men's work may open men to seeing things in themselves, and help them make connections with each other, but it also blinds them to seeing important connections between themselves and society. For example, the mythopoetic men do not see that, in a male-supremacist society, there can be no innocent celebration of masculinity. In such a society the celebration of manhood and of masculinity—even if it is a supposedly "deep" or "authentic" and thus a more fully human version of masculinity—reaffirms the lesser value of women, whether

this is intended or not. The therapeutic focus of mythopoetic men's work—as done by a largely homogeneous group of middle-class white males—also blinds them to matters of class inequality and to the exploitation of working-class people and people of color by the elite white *men* who run the economy.

Yet mythopoetic men's work is a form of resistance to domination. It's not just an entertaining form of group therapy, or collective whining over imagined wounds, or retrograde male bonding. These middle-class white men, who are not the ruling elites, are responding to the alienation and isolation that stem from living in a capitalist society that encourages people to be greedy, selfish, and predatory. Their goal of trying to awaken the human sensibilities that have been benumbed by an exploitive economy is subversive. But to get to the root of the problem men will have to do more than take modest risks among themselves to try to heal their psyches. They will have to take big risks in trying to abolish the race, class, and gender hierarchies that damage us all. They will have to learn to create communitas in struggles for justice.

NOTES

A slightly different version of this essay appears in M. Kimmel and M. Messner (Eds.), *Men's Lives*, third edition (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1995). It is an abbreviated version of a chapter from my book *Unlocking the Iron Cage: Understanding the Mythopoetic Men's Movement* (New York: Oxford, 1995).

1. Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1990).

2. See Kay Leigh Hagan, editor, *Women Respond to the Men's Movement* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992); Kenneth Clatterbaugh, *Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1990), pp. 85–103; Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Crown, 1991), pp. 304–312; R. W. Connell, "Drumming Up the Wrong Tree," *Tikkun* 7, no. 1 (1992): 31–36; Sharon Doubiago, "Enemy of the Mother: A Feminist Response to the Men's Movement," *Ms.*, March/April (1992): 82–85; Fred Pelka, "Robert Bly and Iron John," *On the Issues*, Summer (1991): 17–19, 39; Diane Johnson, "Something for the Boys," *New York Review of Books*, January 16 (1992): 13–17.

3. For a sampling of other writings in the mythopoetic genre, see Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette, *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990); Wayne Liebman, *Tending the Fire: The Ritual Men's Group* (St. Paul, Minn.: Ally, 1991); Christopher Harding, editor, *Wingspan: Inside the Men's Movement* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992).

4. Michael Schwalbe, *Unlocking the Iron Cage: Understanding the Mythopoetic Men's Movement* (New York: Oxford, 1995).

5. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell, 1969), pp. 94–165.

6. Ibid., pp. 131–132.

7. Ibid., p. 139.

8. For an introduction to the basic concepts of Jungian psychology, see Calvin Hall and Vernon Nordby, *A Primer of Jungian Psychology* (New York: Penguin, 1973); or Frieda Fordham, *An Introduction to Jung's Psychology* (New York: Penguin, 1966). For more detail, see Edward C. Whitmont, *The Symbolic Quest* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton, 1991).

9. Turner, p. 154.

10. Many of the poems frequently read at mythopoetic gatherings are collected in Robert Bly, James Hillman, and Michael Meade (eds.), *The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992). Many of the fairy tales told at gatherings, including Bly's "Iron John," originally known as "Iron Hans," are taken from the Grimm brothers' collection.

11. Turner, p. 141.

12. A description of the sweat lodge ritual can be found in Joseph Epes Brown (recorder and editor), *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma, 1953), pp. 31–43. This account was a source of inspiration for some of the mythopoetic men. See also William K. Powers, *Oglala Religion* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska, 1977).

13. Catherine Bell writes about how ritual "catches people up in its own terms" and provides a "resistant surface to casual disagreement." See Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 214–215. Other observers have noted how the improvised rituals at mythopoetic gatherings had this power to draw the men in. See Richard Gilbert, "Revisiting the Psychology of Men: Robert Bly and the Mytho-Poetic Movement," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 32 (1992): 41–67.

14. Turner, p. 165.