

**The Politics of**

# Manhood

**Profeminist Men**

**Respond to the**

**Mythopoetic**

**Men's Movement**

**(And the**

**Mythopoetic Leaders**

**Answer)**

**Edited by Michael S. Kimmel**

The Politics of

PROFEMINIST MEN  
RESPOND TO THE  
MYTHOPOETIC  
MEN'S MOVEMENT  
(AND THE MYTHOPOETIC  
LEADERS ANSWER)

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EDITED BY

Michael S. Kimmel



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*for*

MICHAEL KAUFMAN

*colleague, comrade, collaborator  
and constant friend*

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THE STRUGGLE  
FOR MEN'S  
SOULS:  
MYTHOPOETIC  
MEN RESPOND TO  
THE PROFEMINIST  
CRITIQUE

# Thoughts on Reading This Book

ROBERT BLY

I WAS FASCINATED IN READING THIS BOOK to see how clearly and passionately most writers here state their point of view: for example, "There is no such thing as deep masculinity because there is no such thing as masculinity." But we have to be careful. No one could see subatomic particles, but physicists finally agreed that they exist. Moreover, physicists now agree that matter can take the form of particles or waves, and not in some either-or manner, but matter can be both at once. Just as there are mysteries that even well-trained physicists could not see for a long time, it's possible there are mysteries that the sociologically trained mind cannot see.

In science there has been a general agreement that all workers are moving toward a common goal of understanding. Physicists of all stripes, for example, have agreed to be honorable opponents. But in this book the contributors exhibit an urge to turn an opponent into a monster. I ask: Have the profeminist men here understood the nonpatriarchal quality of inclusiveness? I am charged throughout this collection with so many crimes that it would take hours to reply to them all: I pick the wrong story, I am an essentialist, I am a Jungian, I am a men's rights person in disguise, I am a Pharaoh, I am a secret patriarch. It's clear that many of the contributors would like to take me to a Chinese neighborhood meeting and have me confess my sins.

Rather than replying to these charges, it may be helpful just to talk a bit. I agree that men, white men particularly, have claimed for themselves a place of privilege that forces women to accept mistreatment in hundreds of ways. I value the persistence with which the contributors talk about masculine arrogance. The question is what to do about this arrogance. Scolding has not helped. When men learn to experience the deep grief they are already

carrying in their bodies, that grief dissolves for some their cultural arrogance and bravado. The work on grief is a part of the battle against male hardness and arrogance; it is not a retreat from the battle.

Men should stand up and speak about the pain that millions of women feel. And yet declaring women's pain is quite different from declaring that everything which comes out of the masculine voice is false or deeply wrong in essence. "There is no such thing as deep masculinity because there is no such thing as masculinity." If there is no such thing as masculinity, then a man has no center in himself from which he can speak. Some of the writers in this book are as afraid of their own 'I' as homophobic men are of gay men. Such writers feel that their 'I' has to be purified by feminist doctrine before it can be trusted. Poems written by a man, then, are naturally full of errors. All poems are full of errors. That can be a stimulus for sorrow rather than self-hatred.

I feel that we as men are making a serious mistake when we give up our voice and speak "for our mothers," or "for all women." Speaking as a married man, I can say that when we speak for our mothers, we usually are disloyal to our wives. So there is no easy path here. Moreover, saying what sincerely aggrieved women want us to say makes us acceptable in the short run and allows us to speak a certain kind of truth, but at the same time it may damage some voice that we hardly know about, which is just beginning to be heard. That voice which we can hear inside ourselves on our best days is not a patriarchal voice. It is a voice trying to come from the heart.

I think we have to be patient in order to allow that voice to come out and not decide ahead of time what the voice should say. None of us wants to reestablish patriarchy. The destructive essence of patriarchy, which I feel vividly in the story of Herod, moves to kill the young masculine as soon as it appears anywhere within range. I felt that Herod quality coming from some professors when I was in college move directly towards me; and that is one reason I dropped out of the university environment and supported myself separately. Herod also moves to kill the young feminine. That's very clear to anyone who works in the university. I have daughters, and the last thing I want is for this Herod energy to move against them. I want all women to have a fair chance when they come up for jobs in the university. I don't want anyone stealing wages from my daughters, or self-esteem either.

I prefer the word "expressive" rather than "mythopoetic" as an adjective to the men's work that many of us do. At conferences we urge men to respect their own fathers and to respect fathering. Our best influence, I think, has been in teaching young men who are fathers to deepen and intensify their

fathering from the day their daughter or son is born. I agree with Michael Kimmel that, "It is through the social practices of parenting that men may connect with the emotional qualities they rejected in real life—nurturing, compassion, emotional responsiveness."

The conferences have been broadening so as to include men of color, and that has intensified this work. The conference at Buffalo Gap in Virginia, for example, included half African-American men and half white men. Michael Meade, particularly, labors with great devotion to create mixed conferences and to bring new teachers in. At Buffalo Gap there were six teachers, two African-American teachers, two African teachers, and two white teachers.

The book before us does not give an accurate picture of the teaching done by men working in the expressive or mythopoetic movement. The profeminist writers become the "people" and all other teachers become the "bad others." Oppositional thinking is by definition misleading. Worst of all, simplified versions taken from inaccurate media coverage are passed on in this book for truths. For example, I taught many workshops for women during the 70s, and summed up much of that work in a long essay I wrote called "I Came Out of the Mother Naked," which defends the matriarchal and pre-matriarchal consciousness. I placed that essay in the middle of a book of poems still in print called *Sleepers Joining Hands* so it would be easily available; it has also been reprinted in several anthologies, but none of the writers in this book mention having read it. It's sad to see writers here, as those in the media, literalize or concretize the Wild Man so that it appears I am defending a biker or a macho. The being under the water is a god, namely Dionysus, who was in Greece a god for both men and women. The word *iron* refers to the color of his hair and his imprisonment inside iron bars. But writers literalize the word "iron" as hardness, as in Iron Man or "pumping iron," or make up misinterpretations, and argue against these.

I like Michael Kimmel's invitation to the two sides evoked in this book to respond to each other's ideas and argue. But surely if we are to be honorable opponents, we need to take a hint from the physicists and agree that we are moving toward a common goal. I would like to think it possible to introduce images, or myths, and not have them misinterpreted through linear thinking. Those trained to think in a linear way will also think literally, so that if iron is mentioned, it must refer to weapons and so be patriarchal. But we know that any given story, such as "Iron John," can be patriarchal and also matriarchal, particle and also wave. If either—or readers insist on approaching stories with a linear mind, looking for traces of the patriarchal devil, then such readers will end up throwing away all stories and eventually all literature.

This collection makes the point that mythological thinking is flawed, but linear thinking is also flawed. Efforts to welcome gay men into the expressive movement have been flawed—Jed Diamond is right about that. Current attempts to reunderstand and reestablish ritual are flawed, and certainly my efforts to understand and speak of initiation are flawed. But we have to be patient with each other. The writers of this collection and I agree on a number of matters. There is a danger, now that the old Father has been seen through, that some people, some voters, frightened, will try to reestablish as President a fake father or fascist father or manufactured father. The election of Ronald Reagan showed that danger very clearly, as does the recent rise of Newt Gingrich.

Marion Woodman and I have been working with men and women the last eight or nine years, and I'll leave you with a thought I have often heard her express. When she talks to either men or women, she says to them, "The next step for us who care is to make clear distinctions between patriarchy and masculinity." We know that patriarchy has damaged masculinity—perhaps not as much as it has damaged the feminine—but still severely. If patriarchy has damaged masculinity, and continues to do so, then they cannot be the same. Spokeswomen for gender feminism made a mistake thirty years ago in failing to make the distinction between patriarchy and masculinity, and, as a result, many young men, rather than being ashamed of being patriarchal, are ashamed of being men. We must be more clear. To be ashamed of your gender is not healthful for anyone.

# The Postfeminist Men's Movement

AARON KIPNIS

INITIALLY, I WAS DELIGHTED TO BE INVITED to contribute to this book. In recent years, I have had several fine discussions with profeminist men. They seemed both interested in reconciling their ideas with our postfeminist views and desirous of taking the good will toward men they experienced in our mythopoetic gatherings into their own communities of men. I was hopeful that this would be the beginning of a vigorous dialog that might start building bridges between our disparate camps. Instead, what I have read is more of a polemic, which sadly has little grasp of the essential arguments which it proposes to debate. In recent years, my male-affirming, feminist partner and I have facilitated forums with thousands of women and men facing one another for thoughtful, well-informed, mostly good-willed debates on controversial gender issues. So, I welcome being challenged in this arena, but the articles here are, for the most part, sadly not up to speed on the conversation.

Much of the feminist writing in this anthology is so mean-spirited and riddled with epistemological and empirical errors, and other academic impoverishments, that the only spirit in which I can respond is that which I would use to address any student trying to pass off sophomoric ideology as a genuine contribution to the field. As a polemic uttered by ideologues who appear to be somewhat out of touch with the lives of men outside their privileged class, this book undercuts dialectical process rather than stimulating it. My greatest disparagement of this book, however, is not its ideas, but rather its severely limited review of the literature of, and dialogs within, the postfeminist men's movement. Instead, these articles react to a few popular books and media distortions, picking on a few off-hand comments or decon-

textualized quotes as representative of an entire body of thoughtful, revolutionary, and revitalizing literature on the postfeminist men's movement's incipient revisioning of Western masculinities.

Clearly you are all intelligent guys. But this book does not present its questions in the spirit of an intelligent academic inquiry. So, this makes me wonder—what is the real purpose of this book? The pursuit of knowledge is endangered when ideologies and academics merge. Standards of evaluation become weakened as the spirit of inquiry succumbs to the tyranny of fundamentalism's polemic. This book doesn't start from a well-developed enough place to truly warrant a response. It fails to rise to the level of dignity the revisioning of masculinity deserves. Yet, after several decades of ubiquitous academic feminist assault on men and masculinity, I find myself in the quandary of no longer being willing to let blatant distortions about our work stand unchallenged in print.

Professor Kimmel privately asserts that he has adequately researched this topic. It is clear, however, from both their comments and bibliographies, that most feminist contributors to this book have not. Is it possible that feminists are so repulsed by the emergence of a new pole of gender dialectic, outside the constraints of the women's movement, that they cannot bear to read our literature or attend in significant numbers open forums in which this conversation is being hosted?

The gender perspective of the postfeminist men's movement resides in a third position, somewhere beyond the militant poles of feminism and so-called patriarchy. Indelibly informed by both, we are also in the early years of articulating an entirely new perspective on men, masculinity, and their relationship to women, nature, spirit, and culture. I welcome a critique that begins at the same level of sophistication as the contemporary social dialog on gender. For the most part, however, that conversation is only happening outside the walls of the academy in forums where men, and women as well, can safely speak about the truth of their experience, freed from the constraints of politically correct doctrines.

Most profeminist men in this book are not responding to a known phenomenon, but rather a poorly researched and highly imagined one. The ad hominem attacks on Robert Bly and attempts to reduce the postfeminist men's movement to a monolithic cult of personality are so blatant and off base that they scarcely deserve mention. Bly, valuable artist that he is, is also simply one of many voices in a broad-based movement concerned with the social, psychological, and spiritual revisioning of masculinity.

The rhetoric of this book reminds me somewhat of that of the mid-60s

when Nixon started reframing the student anti-war movement as a communist plot. We were incredulous then, since many of us thought of ourselves as patriots with a higher vision of our nation's moral responsibility. But then, Nixon never came to any of our meetings or really investigated what we thought and felt. His view was tainted by his political perspective.

Now, instead of the right imagining communist plots everywhere, the academic left finds "patriarchal" ones. In a stranger-than-fiction marriage, feminists have somehow joined the mainstream perspective of materialistic modernity in decrying something they must have mostly seen through the media's eyes and the distortions of their own ideology, both of which have blinded their capacity to see our texts or contexts. The media, with the exception of Bill Moyers, never really investigated the issues either. They merely sensationalized the more colorful aspects of men's break from both traditional heroic stereotypes and new limits placed on masculine imagination by decades of feminist revisionism.

In order to create an adequate forum for debate, profeminist men must *significantly* familiarize themselves with the fundamental texts of the postfeminist men's movement. Where is your commentary on Mark Gerzon's pioneering *Choice of Heroes*,<sup>1</sup> which began reimagining old masculinities over a decade ago? Where are the references to Shepherd Bliss' widely published calls (in dozens of men's journals and anthologies over the years) to discard the warrior as the dominant male-congruent image in favor of an evocative image of men who dance, make music, protect nature, and love women?<sup>2</sup> Where is regard for Sam Osherson's attention to healing the father-son wound?<sup>3</sup> Where is the analysis of John Lee's excellent work helping thousands of men recover from addictions and manage anger in healthy ways?<sup>4</sup>

Also missing are any genuine reading of my first book, *Knights Without Armor*,<sup>5</sup> which calls for a significant spiritual, psychological, and social revisioning of masculinities, and Sam Keen's philosophical commentary.<sup>6</sup> This maliciously careless review of the literature also overlooks Jed Diamond's views on ways men can heal their lives and thus the earth<sup>7</sup> as well. It is probably too late to press for these authors, but also important to this particular mythopoetic theme is Joseph Jastrab's heartfelt *Sacred Manhood, Sacred Earth*.<sup>8</sup>

Other mythopoetic works which have fallen into the profeminist lacunae are: the thoughtful work on Phallos by Eugene Monick,<sup>9</sup> any thorough reading of Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette's five scholarly volumes on masculine archetypes,<sup>10</sup> the Colemans' work on the Earth Father,<sup>11</sup> William Anderson's scholarly *The Green Man*,<sup>12</sup> Gordon Dalbey's mythopoetic Christian

perceptive on *The Masculine Soul*,<sup>13</sup> Michael Gurian's imaginative *The Prince and the King*,<sup>14</sup> Michael Meade's elegant, *Men and the Water of Life*,<sup>15</sup> and many more works with which anyone investigating our field should have at least passing familiarity.

Astonishingly, even more mainstream postfeminist academic works on masculinity are overlooked such as Ruben Fine's profound psychological analysis in *The Forgotten Man*,<sup>16</sup> David Gilmore's anthropological insights in the *Making of Manhood*,<sup>17</sup> and social psychologist Alexander Mitscherlich's *Society Without the Father*,<sup>18</sup> to name but a few. Since several equations between mythopoeses and men's rights advocacy have been made here, one would think that profeminist men would acquaint themselves with at least a few fundamental postfeminist social commentators such as Herb Goldberg,<sup>19</sup> Asa Baber,<sup>20</sup> and Warren Farrell<sup>21</sup> before they dismissed their ideas.

There are hundreds of other credible postfeminist books, anthologies, and articles which, over the last decade, have insightfully detailed previously uncharted territories of the deep masculine psyche. These works simultaneously view the social construction of gender from a significantly different analysis than that done by feminists. All escaped your eye. You have not even done a literature review comparable to that required for a term paper, much less developed the authority to comment on an entire movement and nascent psycho-social-spiritual philosophy. It also appears that several authors in this book did not even conduct a careful reading of the few relevant texts they cited.

It is only because male-bashing is de rigueur in today's academy that such a poorly researched, blatantly misleading, politicized, and unbalanced critique could even be published by a reputable university press. Even though I admire the editor's courage and attempt at fair play through inviting a few leaders of the postfeminist men's movement to respond, the expanded view still fails to validate this work. Since the profeminist positions in this book represent a sequence of recapitulations and narrow variations on ideologically constrained ideas, I will not comment in depth on each article but rather touch on some of the overarching ideas throughout. (1) Bly's ideas, or the rest of ours for that matter, are not "universally rejected by feminism as patriarchal." Many *male-affirming* feminist women admire and support the positive changes the men's movement is generating through its dedication to: fathering, recovery work, environmental protection, reducing violence, mentoring, confronting racism and homophobia, and supporting egalitarian partnerships with women. This latter view may be better understood through reading my *Gender War, Gender Peace* co-authored with Elizabeth Herron,<sup>22</sup>

Carolyn Baker's "Confessions of a Recovering Feminist,"<sup>23</sup> Christina Sommers' *Who Stole Feminism?*<sup>24</sup> and other works by "new" feminists who reject the pathologizing, male-denigrating sentiment so prevalent in "old" feminism. A good anthology, which includes Elizabeth Herron and former head of NOW, Karen DeCrow, can be found in Jack Kammer's *Good Will Toward Men*.<sup>25</sup> (2) Ironically, feminist sources are more frequently cited in this book than the postfeminist texts it critiques. In the feminist authority oft-cited here, *Women Speak about the Men's Movement* [sic. ed.] Spretneck, Steinem, and others extol the image of the soft, obedient feminist male who serves women, carries their pain, and has few needs of his own for women to contend with.<sup>26</sup> Rianne Eisler, here and elsewhere,<sup>27</sup> distorts the valuable idea of partnership between the sexes by imagining a matriarchal world devoid of an autonomous sacred masculinity equal in value to the essential feminine. Starhawk assures us she wants men to be potent as long as they are not "assholes." Yet we would find it "patriarchal" or, in the strange new language of political correctness, europhallogocentric thinking, if men said they wanted women to be empowered as long as they weren't witches or "bitches." Why, then, should we not regard this source text as eurogynothymicentric, heterophobic, reverse sexist doggerel?

The authors in Kay Leigh Hagan's vituperative, twisted, and insidiously conspiratorial volume completely overlooked the excellent postfeminist works on life-affirming masculinity, failed to interview any of us, and declined to attend most public forums in which they could openly dialog with us. They ignored complex, overarching ideas in favor of a myopic, knee-jerk response to something clearly not understood nor sufficiently investigated. Therefore, I find it repugnant that their book is cited as a predecessor to the present volume since as a misandric diatribe it represents an astonishingly weak foundation for a dialectic on gender issues to progress. (3) Rather than threatening the revolution, the postfeminist men's movement is on the precipitous edge of social revision and is, in fact, the male-affirming antithesis of patriarchy rather than its re-entrenchment. Many of its leaders were also on the front lines during the anti-war movement, the free speech movement, the civil rights movement, the environmental movement, and yes, even the women's movement, where many of us spent a decade or two before realizing that men's legitimate social, psychological, and spiritual needs were being utterly forsaken by our feminist comrades. The men's movement is a logical development from feminism, just as women's consciousness was advanced by the civil rights movements, which progressed from democracy's often unimplemented but otherwise liberating visions. We have the same

antecedents and destiny: a gender justice movement that will consider the needs of both genders *equally* in all our institutions. (4) Epistemological approaches can be examined but not dismissed as invalid until vigorously applied to knowledge and then analyzed. This volume's critiques of archetypal psychology are based upon a paucity of research which does not even include its foremost thinkers like Hillman<sup>28</sup> or Jung<sup>29</sup> and fails to demonstrate even a passing understanding of the basic principles of the field. On a similar note, since feminist literature has thrived on the anecdotal, and subjectivity is increasingly becoming the "reasonable woman" standard for new social contracts, how can feminists dismiss the subjective experience of men concerning their social, spiritual, physical, and psychological privation?

It is ridiculous to debate subjectivity or "essentialism" as a men's movement fallacy since feminism, for all its extolling of objective social constructivism, is clearly riddled with essentialist thinking. The blatant heterophobia of MacKinnon,<sup>30</sup> androphobia of Daly<sup>31</sup> and Spretnack,<sup>32</sup> misogyny of French,<sup>33</sup> matrimonophobia of Steinem,<sup>34</sup> and factual distortions by Faludi,<sup>35</sup> to mention but a few, all contribute to a feminist ontological premise which promotes a fallacious, inimical, *essentialist* caricature of a denigrated father that flies in the face of the nurturing, protecting, and sacrificing character of most men.

Provocative comments by some men, though often taken out of context in this volume, deserve critical comment. They are, however, certainly no less vituperative than the rampant misogyny in feminist literature and thus, by feminism's own standards, not sufficient to discredit our work or even deem it antifeminist. After decades of unrestrained male-bashing, men have good cause for anger toward the women's movement. This is not backlash; it is a legitimate response to abuse of academic, social, media, and literary power.

We do confront the shadows of masculinity in our work: not, however, to codify attempts to shame men into changed behavior but rather to help men understand themselves more deeply and thereby develop healthier lives. More important, however, we balance the dialog on perceived patriarchal "privilege" through also analyzing the objective realities of men's privation. Men have significantly higher rates than women of suicide, addiction, injury, victimization by violence, death on the job, and death from the 15 major illnesses, as well as skyrocketing rates of homelessness, incarceration, and impoverishment.<sup>36</sup> In light of these and many other ugly facts, it is not spurious for some of us to wonder seriously about how well men are faring in our culture and to tender the position that some damage may have been done to the masculine soul as well.

On the basis of women's excessive and escalating violence toward children, shall we conclude that women are essentially infanticidal? No. Of course not. This, however, is the bizarre juncture at which feminism rejects the same essentialism it uses to demean men by proposing that women's abuse of power is socially constructed. The postfeminist men's movement is merely reiterating the same premise: if men behave badly, it is because something has happened to their masculinity that obscured its essential goodness. In our own, often still experimental ways, we are attempting to repair some of the damages done to masculinity by the onslaughts of modernity. (5) Concerning wounds and power, it is valuable that feminists have raised our consciousness about the gender-specific wounds of women. In fact postfeminist men actively support women's demands for social, political, and economic equality. It is a given. We also, however, express similar concerns for men and boys. This is the primary element separating the profeminist and postfeminist men's movements. Blatantly missing from feminist analysis of gender entitlements is an understanding of the disproportionate, gender-specific ways in which males suffer, are disempowered, and are at risk for abuse and neglect. Why fault the men's movement for merely recapitulating the same gender sensitivity feminism developed toward women? Apparently, we have learned our lessons well from their example.

Many men are undergoing a major restructuring of the basic paradigms governing masculine consciousness and behavior. If feminism is not primarily interested in helping boys and men, why not support the men who are? Feminist critiques would be much better directed at men who have abandoned their sons and daughters, neglected the planet, and eschewed egalitarian partnerships with women. But those men are harder to reach than the poets, therapists, community activists, and educators who are trying to give the same sort of attention to men's gender-specific needs that women have received over the last few decades.

Social constructionist theory rarely addresses the possibility that male violence is often a desperate response to psychological, social, and emotional trauma. For example, men who batter as adults were often abused themselves as children. Most treatment programs, however, do not address these unintended wounds, but merely attempt to deal with the behaviors. In California, the statutory rape of boys by women was not even made illegal until 1993. Yet in our men's groups, it is apparent that sexual abuse and female battery of boys happen frequently and create just as many psychological problems for males as the reverse does for females. In my opinion, the social

tolerance for *all* forms of abuse toward males is one of the primary causes of male rage and violence.

Feminist attitudes breed many double standards for men. They now affect almost every social institution. For example, schools have recently become very concerned about the ways girls lag behind in math and the sciences. And this needs to change. Feminists fail to mention, however, that boys lag just as far behind girls in reading skills, have lower grades overall, and, more important, have significantly higher high school dropout rates than girls. In many schools, over 5 percent of boys are given behavior modification drugs to get them to conform to a regimented, feminized school environment. The vast majority of teachers and counselors who refer them to psychiatrists for this treatment are women. Girls are not given drugs to make them more assertive and inquisitive. Nor should they be. But why do we tolerate this widespread chemical restraint of boys? Profeminist men would certainly protest similar practices against girls.<sup>37</sup>

In other arenas, self-esteem task forces have become very concerned about girls' mental health. This is good; however, boys' suicide rates are five times higher than girls. Isn't this a measure of a serious self-esteem problem among boys? There are massive public health campaigns to educate women about breast cancer, but little information for men about prostate cancer, a disease affecting 1 in 11 men that kills about thirty-five thousand annually. Because feminists falsely believe that men are, in every case, more privileged and less sensitive than women, they fail to bring the same level of care to men and boys that is extended to women. This is the down side of profeminist male chivalry. Certainly, profeminist men would be alarmed if women were dying over 7 years earlier than men, but the reverse statistic brings little concern.

Feminists usually fail to note that males account for: 70 percent of all assault victims, 80 percent of homicide victims, and 85 percent of the homeless. Males represent the fastest growing impoverished group in America, with over ten million now living in poverty.<sup>38</sup> Ninety percent of persons with AIDS, 93 percent of persons killed on the job, and 95 percent of prisoners are men.<sup>39</sup> In prison these men, many of whom are nonviolent, are raped in numbers matching those of free women. But we have no rape crisis centers or social programs—with the exception of a few, largely postfeminist men's groups—which deal with the posttraumatic stress-induced disorders of men victimized by the American penal system. Why are profeminist men not more concerned about issues which decimate their own gender? Through

helping men to recover from their traumas, women are ultimately served as well, something one would think all feminists would welcome.

At last count there were over 600 academic women's studies programs, yet not a single one examining the rapidly changing needs of men in our society. There are about 15,000 courses devoted to women's studies, yet only 91 courses on men's studies, i.e., courses that *specifically* look at the gender-specific, social, and psychological issues of men and masculinity with the same vigor applied to women's issues. It is little wonder that, in this increasingly antimale academic environment, men have become a steadily diminishing minority of new college students and those preparing for graduate studies.

The study of male roles, male psychology, and interiority has not yet claimed a forum even remotely equal to the feminist initiative. In many instances, male-affirming voices on campus are actually repressed by feminists on the grounds that any views which challenge feminist doctrines must be inherently misogynist.<sup>40</sup> While men still dominate the Senate and the Fortune 500, women's voices even more disproportionately dominate the academy today on the subject of gender. There is no other academic field that I know of that regards open debate on issues as inimical. That sort of fundamentalism is usually only reserved for religion.

Men in America are just beginning to realize the extent of their wounds as they struggle against both traditional male and feminist inhibitions to find their own voices to challenge gender oppression. They are also rediscovering the depth of their masculine spirituality and beauty through mythopoetic men's work. Certainly there is much room for thoughtful criticism of our work. We still have much to learn and can benefit from legitimate challenges. It is equally important to create a forum where critique of feminism can be legitimized as something other than chauvinism, backlash, or counter-social revolution, and where proactive male perspectives are not paranoically distorted as implicitly antifeminist.

My postfeminist colleagues and I welcome serious inquiry. Many male-affirming women have already joined us in that conversation. The gender reconciliation movement emerging from that dialog is lively in the workplace and private educational centers, but still pretty much at bay in academia where, in gender studies, indoctrination still takes precedent over dialectical process. I hope profeminist men will soon expand their mandate to become also inclusively pro-male, for it is only through developing positive regard for both genders that we will ever create gender justice.

In conclusion, I say: Impose on yourselves the same discipline you would

require of us. In the face of feminism, most of my colleagues and I have attended numerous feminist conferences, engaged in many dialogs on gender that were dominated by feminist perspectives, and read dozens of feminist books and hundreds of feminist articles. Read at least a dozen of the books cited in the notes and use the bibliographies within some of those texts as a further resource. I look forward to a better day when we can actually have a real debate on these issues instead of this sad excuse for a genuine pursuit of new knowledge.

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# Healing, Community and Justice in the Men's Movement: Toward a Socially Responsible Model of Masculinity

ONAJE BENJAMIN

AS AN AFRICAN AMERICAN WHO HAS SURVIVED fifty years in a Eurocentric and racist society, I have developed a pessimistic and cynical view of any process—whether political, therapeutic, economic, or spiritual—which emanates from the predominant European American culture. It was with this attitude that I cautiously approached the various activities that collectively are defined as the Men's Movement.

My initial experience was to attend a six-day Multicultural event sponsored by MOSAIC, a nonprofit organization formed by Michael Meade to promote cross-cultural events for men and women. It was held in Buffalo Gap, West Virginia, and was attended by over one hundred men, about half of whom were “men of color,” with gay men on both sides of the racial line.

During the course of the event, Native-American, African-American, Latino and European-American men met in community and engaged in conflict, ritual, dance, grief, and celebration. The collective personal histories, pain, strength, and convictions that emerged were significant and powerful. By nature and composition, this event integrated the personal and the political.

After Buffalo Gap, I was invited to two subsequent men's gatherings in California and North Carolina. Unlike Buffalo Gap, only one other African American was present at each event. Without the presence of a large number of “men of color,” I felt compelled to defend my existence. This was particularly true since I chose to challenge what I perceived to be white male paranoia—racist thinking and self-indulgent victimization among those present.

Although I have since become more empathetic to the wounds that Euro-

pean-American men experience, it was difficult listening to clearly privileged, upper-class, European-American men talk about their suffering and victimization. The level of denial and feigned ignorance triggered my distrust of European Americans, making it difficult to participate in community building.

During this period of introduction to what I define as Men's Work, I joined the staff of a program that provided counseling services for men who were abusive to women. Both the model and the majority of men who staffed this program defined themselves as profeminist and had been active in the evolution of the *National Organization for Men Against Sexism* (NOMAS). Identifying myself as being associated with what some call the mythopoetic wing of the men's movement stimulated much tension and discourse between myself and the other staff.

However, working within a profeminist work environment forced me to take a look at my sexism and challenged my commitment to social change across lines of gender, as well as race and class. A requirement of all men working with this domestic violence treatment program was to look at the ways in which we were abusive to women. I initially entered this activity with a great deal of denial and resistance, but eventually was able to look at my "shadow" as it related to my interaction with women. I learned to identify and change my behavior that was verbally and emotionally abusive to my partners. This exercise, which I continue to practice, has been beneficial in working on my own sexism and better relating to women.

The disdain that many profeminist men have for men in general, or at least those they perceive as not unquestionably supportive of all feminist doctrine, is in my opinion unfortunate, and ultimately counterproductive to the struggle for gender justice. This anti-male sentiment is prevalent in profeminist writings and frequently in programs treating men who are abusive to women. My experience working in a program—one of the oldest and largest profeminist agencies for "batterers" in the country—and my review of other models convinced me that an empathetic approach is discouraged or viewed as a form of "collusion" with the "perpetrator."

I witnessed the physical and sexual abuse of my mother by men, and have had partners who were victims of male violence. Therefore, I support and participate in efforts to stop violence—against both women and men. In order for a treatment model for abusive and violent men to be effective, it must (1) hold these men accountable for their behavior, (2) deconstruct patriarchal and sexist belief systems, and (3) be empathetic to the traumas and wounds these men have experienced which greatly contribute to their violent

behavior. I define these integrated components as a model of “empathetic accountability.”

A report published by the American Psychological Association on youth and violence and research on violence and victimization in the African-American community by Dr. Carl Bell indicate that many individuals who exhibit violent behavior, as children, either witnessed or were victims of violence. As is the case with many children who are exposed to urban warfare or familial abuse, many men who are violent and/or abusive may suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). A significant number of the hundreds of men I counseled for their abusive behavior reported that they were childhood victims of violence.

Men’s social conditioning greatly contributes to the overall level of violence in this culture—the vast majority of whose victims are themselves men. Therefore, it is essential that violence prevention, and other programs serving men, be grounded in the emerging school of Masculine Psychology. In addition to challenging sexism and other discriminatory constructs, there should be a focus on developing models of masculinity that are socially responsible, foster justice, and support equality.

I agree—at least in principle—with a number of the concerns profeminist men have leveled at the so-called mythopoetic men’s movement, but they do not accurately and fairly address the overall experiences and needs of men. The dogmatic concept that men have “all the power” does little to accurately reflect the oppression that men experience along lines of race, class, and sexual orientation. This is not to deny the privilege experienced by men in this culture and the oppression of women perpetuated by sexism and violence, but rather to recognize the need to view oppression and victimization in ways which are not hierarchal or ideologically rigid. The recent emphasis on multiculturalism and diversity within the mythopoetic wing of the men’s movement has challenged its participants to become more aware and sensitive to these forms of oppression.

I do not support the way in which the male victimization is presented by some individuals associated with the “men’s rights” wing of the overall Men’s Movement. Yet, I do believe that models and/or programs for addressing the needs of men and “restructuring” their masculinity in ways that are conducive to creating “gender justice” are necessary. Models and programs should utilize a gender-specific approach in addressing the high mortality rates, suicide, homelessness, drug addiction, inadequate medical care, depression, work-place and domestic violence, sexual assault, and other problems that are prevalent among men in our society.

There must be a political component to *all* “men’s work” that addresses the full spectrum of issues related to inequities in our society. As men, we should be open to challenges regarding our commitment to confronting those systems which perpetuate gender and other injustices. As a presenter at men’s retreats and workshops, I have advocated a more socially responsible focus in men’s work and the idea that Men’s Work must incorporate at least three essential integrated principles—Healing, Community, and Justice. Men’s work must not only concern itself with the psychological and/or ritual aspects of personal development, but also speak to the political realities of social injustice.

Experts in the emerging field of masculine psychology have written extensively about the male psyche and those issues that adversely affect the development of what I call “socially responsible masculinity.” Shame and an inner sense of powerlessness are issues with which most men struggle. These issues evolve out of Patriarchy. Patriarchy does not benefit all men equally. In fact, it is a major cause of much of the wounding men experience in this culture. Like sexism, racism, and classism, it is a manifestation of oppression within our capitalistic power structure that clearly most benefits the wealthy.

I am opposed to the demonization and pathologizing of masculinity in the interest of exorcising patriarchy from society. The deconstruction of patriarchy is quite possible without socially stigmatizing the male gender. While much of what is associated with gender, race, and class is socially constructed, there are psychologically archetypal as well as biological aspects that play a part in how each gender develops and functions—none of which necessarily lead to oppression. Attacking and shaming men is counter-productive to creating meaningful social change and, void of the development of socially responsible models of masculinity, an exercise in feminist fundamentalism and political elitism.

As a father who has been involved in the growth and development of a daughter, two step-daughters, a step-son, and two grandchildren, I have both a personal and political commitment to seeing sexism and gender injustice eradicated. It is for these and other reasons that I believe that the work of creating short-term communities, support groups, ritual, and other cultural-specific events for men are essential for creating a culture which is gender equitable and committed to social change.

My hope and vision is that there can be a dialogue and collaboration between those groups of men that make up the men’s movement and that we can find common ground to enhance our collective efforts to address gender and other forms of social injustice. My commitment to healing, community,

and justice has guided my work in teaching at men's conferences: working with the southern rural poor, imprisoned men, and gays in the African-American community; and developing anti-violence, mentoring, and counseling programs.

I plan to continue my work to build a men's movement that promotes personal healing, builds gender and socially equitable communities, and addresses issues of injustice. I am committed to working with men and women of all cultures, ethnic groups, and sexual orientations. It is clear to me that the models which will bring about meaningful changes and justice in the world cannot and will not function like those institutions which characterize our culture today.

# Mythopoetic Men's Movements

## SHEPHERD BLISS

NOTE: RATHER THAN RESPOND DIRECTLY TO THE ATTACKS, misunderstandings, and ill-informed judgments on men and mythopoetic men's movements by the majority of this book's essays, my response will be indirect. I have edited and expanded my comments from a debate with Michael Kimmel on April 22, 1992, at a Symposium on Men and Masculinity at the University of California, Berkeley. A multicultural, mythopoetic team of musicians and poets from the Kokopelli Lodge accompanied me. However, I do want to say a few direct words of response, trying to contain some of the sadness, anger, and other feelings I had upon reading these essays.

Such anger toward men! Such hatred! So much blaming and shaming! I do not share it. Nor the distortions such anger and hatred bring. So many lies here. I am sorry that these men, and others of both sexes, have been hurt by some men. And others hurt by some women. Let us heal those wounds, rather than perpetuate them. There is much work to be done. I choose to do mine in certain ways. Others choose different ways. You do not need to be like or think like me. Nor do I need to think like, be like, or act like you. Let us honor diversity. We can live here together. And work to improve things.

I first brought the word "mythopoetic" (then an obscure literary term) forward in the mid-1980s, to describe the development of men's movements seeking to revision masculinity. At the time it was being called "the Robert Bly men's movement," after its most visible activist; I did not like associating it with one person. "Mythopoetic" does not mean "myth and poetry" or the contraction "myth 'n poetry," as some think. It comes from the word "mythopoesis," which refers to re-mythologizing. It means re-making, so

the mythopoetic approach means revisioning masculinity for our time. Men, women, and children would benefit from new masculinities. That this word and our movement are misunderstood and so maligned in these pages brings me pain and sadness. The ideologies of most of these writers cloud them from seeing what other men—different from them—are saying and doing. We speak of movements, plural, rather than singular, since there are many—varying by ideas, methods, and geographical regions, as there are many masculinities. A long tradition of nurturing, generating men exists, which the mythopoetic approach to men affirms. This tradition includes historical figures such as Francis of Assisi, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman. Mythological figures representing this tradition include the ancient Greek father of music and poetry, Orpheus, the Mexican plumed serpent, Quetzalcoatl, and the Native American humpbacked flute player, Kokopelli.

Let me admit that we have made major mistakes within our men's movements, though I do not feel the attacks made in the essays here help us. For example, I have published numerous articles in many men's publications questioning the use of the word "warrior." The use of this term opens us to misunderstanding.

I call my brothers away from self-loathing and their castigating of other men. Such attacks are the essence of traditional masculinity. We would all benefit from being more tolerant and increasing our range of being uncomfortable with others and their differing ideas while still accepting them as persons. Let us love one another, rather than cast stones. The loving of men is the best thing we can do to improve gender relations and the world. I call us all to love both men and women. It is time to get beyond and over being so conflictual with each other and so mean to each other, even in the guise of academic objectivity and the search for truth.

Some of the untruths, fantasies, and fears regarding the mythopoetic men's movement presented in many of the essays in this book have come to unfortunate reality in another men's movement—called the PromiseKeepers. This right-wing Christian group has filled football stadiums with over 50,000 men to challenge feminism and gay rights. Founded by University of Colorado football coach Bill McCartney, they plan to mass a million men to a revival in the Mall in Washington, D.C., during the 1996 presidential election campaign. Men are encouraged by this group to return to Jesus and the Biblical image of men who control, dominate, and lead their wives and families. Feminism is blamed for the world's problems. This growing group is a serious threat to women, gay people, and all of us advocating changes in gender relations.

This is the talk: Let me clear the air. I will need more than words for such a clearing. I want to appreciate the musicians from The Kokopelli Men's Lodge for joining me to play their rhythms. I want to establish a different ground on which to discuss men than that presented by Professor Michael Kimmel. In contrast to his socio-political approach, I will take a mythopoetic approach. Being here at the university is like being in a strange forest. I do not recognize these unusual trees and words and ways which sociologists have. So please permit me to prepare my own ground for our discussion of men. I am in a distinct minority in this room, so I hope you will extend me the courtesy of an indirect response to the material presented.

My good friend Capt. Ray Gatchalian serves with the Oakland Fire Department. He is Filipino-American, and we are members of a multi-cultural men's group. He is also a fine musician; I invite you to listen to the ancient sound seeking modern minds which he plays on the *huaca*, a Peruvian clay flute used to "summon the gods." Perhaps it will clear a space so you can hear about the mythopoetic men's movements from the inside, experience it for yourself and participate in it directly, rather than making theoretical judgements based on observation from outside. (Ray plays the *huaca*)

Thank you Ray—for your music and for your work every day as a fire-fighter in the face of disasters such as the recent East Bay firestorm and the earthquake. Ray is one of the many good men—the "majority report" on men who do good for women, men, and children, men who love and care for other human beings. Such men make mistakes, yes, but do not condemn us as a whole group. We would benefit from remembering the good men and praise them for the hard work they do for the community. Men doing good work deserve our support and encouragement. Good will toward men and good will toward women would help us all; then we can work to improve ourselves and gender relations on the basis of that compassion.

As we approach the twenty-first century, it gives me great pleasure to be in Berkeley, where today's men's movements were born in 1970, with the Berkeley Men's Center. So we are relatively young movements, one might say adolescent. We make lots of mistakes. My nephew, who recently moved in with me from Omaha, was born at the same time as the men's movements. They are both in their 20s. He makes lots of mistakes. He learns from them, and we learn together—this middle-aged man and that young man. We avoid attacking each other, even though our differences are substantial; attacking can worsen rather than help situations.

I want to echo the Berkeley Men's Center's Manifesto of the early 1970s, which still guides my own work. My brothers wrote:<sup>1</sup>

We, as men, want to take back our full humanity. We no longer want to strain and compete to live up to an impossible oppressive masculine image—strong, silent, cool, handsome, unemotional, successful, master of women, leader of men, wealthy, brilliant, athletic, and “heavy.” We no longer want to feel the need to perform sexually, socially, or in any way to live up to an imposed male role, from a traditional American society.

. . . I am proud to be a descendant of that legacy. I came to the men's movements directly from the women's movement in the mid-1970s. One way of looking at the history of the men's movement is as follows:

- 1970s—focus on male-female relationships and men supporting women
- 1980s—focus on father-son relationships and men relating to older men and mentors

In the 1990s, mythopoetic men's movements have gotten a lot of media, most of it unwelcome, most of it inaccurate. The powers that be have figured it out correctly: mythopoetic men's movements are a threat to traditional masculinity and power in this country, which is why *Esquire* and *Gentlemen's Quarterly* have attacked us. This was to be expected. What disappoints me is the alliance these powerful conservative forces have made with some feminist women and men in their campaigns against our challenges to traditional masculinity.

While continuing the work begun in the 1970s and 1980s, a main issue for men in the 1990s, in my opinion, should be working to preserve our threatened Earth. We need eco-masculinity rooted in the struggles against war, against violence, and for the environment and ecology. We need to go beyond the warrior. The old stories are not enough. We need new archetypes, masculinities for our time—the 1990s and for the twenty-first century. We need husbandmen of the Earth. We need New Masculinities which do not oppress women, men, or children.

I speak as a member of mass movements, plural, of men in motion to change consciousness. We say movements, plural, rather than singular, because we differ so much by geographical region and local color; we have no common doctrine, ideology, leadership, or even vision, in spite of the media and others who see that gray-haired poet Robert Bly as our leader. It is difficult in this academic forum to describe what the mythopoetic movements are, though it is easy to function in mythopoetic modes, which is one reason we have musicians here. What we do is as important as what we say. We are unlike other movements in history. I do not speak for our movements, but from their contexts. We have no central organization, so I speak

for myself, an individual who participates in many diverse groups. I am a leader in our movements, a ritual leader, which is quite distinct from a political leader. My central concern is the psyche, soul. My key tools are language, music, movement, and other ceremonial arts.

## SOCIOLOGY, SCIENCE, POETRY, AND DRUMMING

Sociology and poetry are two distinct ways of knowing, two often contrary modes of understanding reality, as different as men and women. The sciences and mythology are unique sets of stories, each attempting to explain what is. Linear reasoning differs from narrative logic, both being valid. The twentieth century has witnessed the domination of the sciences, and the consequent development of technology, including its use in modern warfare and the devastation of total war in our century. We are on the edge of collapse, through means such as nuclear war and environmental disaster, *not* because of the men on the front lines, as some would suggest, but because of systems of industrialism and technology and the inappropriate use of the sciences, including the social sciences, to control those men active at the front.

Men and women together have built systems of production and consumption which are run on sexist agreements about the division of labor on the basis of rigid sex roles. We have colluded in building this system together. Those in the active role, men, get blamed, but this system is built with the passive collusion of women. It is unfair to blame the active men and absolve women from responsibility for the world we have built together. The good woman/bad man dualism is too simple. It is in all of our interests to dismantle our sexist system. We must see ourselves as allies, rather than adversaries, if we are to destroy this system. It is time for working together, amidst disagreements, rather than resting in self-righteousness. Poetry, music, mythology, and the mythopoetic men's movements can be crucial in dismantling this sexist system. You have just heard a political sociologist speak. Now I invite you to listen, perhaps with different ears, to a mythopoetic approach to men and gender. I encourage you beyond either-or thinking to both-and thinking, beyond the defective good-bad dualistic paradigm.

We drum in the mythopoetic men's movements for many reasons, including the following: It is cooperative, rather than competitive, drawing men together, breaking isolation and facilitating participation. Drumming provides a container for the development of community, offering a means of side-by-side intimacy. It is play, rather than work. Too many men are work-

aholics. Drums can take men back to boyhood. It gets men out of our heads into our hands, bodies, and hearts. Drumming is a body experience which can heighten feelings and animate men's emotional bodies. Men cooperating on drums together are not a threat to women, children, or each other. Men who play tend to be healthier, live longer, and relate better to children. We alter consciousness with our use of the arts and lift men into nonordinary reality, without the abuse of substances such as alcohol, drugs, and other addictions. We drum to get men back to the feminine, to that heartbeat rhythm which we all first heard in our mothers' wombs. We do honor our mothers, women, the feminine, and feminism.

Pleasure can be included in learning. When we took the teachers out of the woods and placed them in classrooms, we lost something. When we took learning out of its context, nature, we lost something. When we divorced beauty and pleasure from teaching and learning, we lost something. When men moved from the country to the city, from farms to factories, we lost something. We need to do some recovery work. We must re-associate learning with direct experience, with animals, plants, and nature itself. It is time to recover such glories as beauty, pleasure, love, and, yes, the feminine. It is important to get back to the basics—especially to the land itself—as that nineteenth century naturalist Thoreau did, an ancestor to those doing today's mythopoetic men's work. Humans used to see themselves as part of the nonhuman world; our disassociation from the Earth is the source of our gender problems, which modern technology heightens. On this Earth Day, April 22, I want to draw our attention to the Earth and our stewardship of it.

#### IN PRAISE OF TEACHERS AND ELDERS

Many of the assaults upon poet Robert Bly made in the media and by other mis-informed people may have less to do with him and more to do with these people's disappointments with their own fathers. People who have never seen or read Bly (except for perhaps his *Iron John*) somehow feel free to attack him personally and politically—knowing little or nothing about his politics or his person. Perhaps our problems have less to do with that evil patriarchy (which means rule of the fathers) and more to do with our culture's massive problems of absent fathers, which produce father hunger, and projecting upon men, especially older men. Studies reveal that the average father in America spends less than five minutes a day with his children, which is not long enough.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps we have too little father, rather than too

much! It is easy to blame fathers for this neglect, but perhaps we need to examine our economic system which keeps men at work away from the home and the family, as some feminists writers indicate. Complaints against the patriarchy (the father) may in fact be longing for the good father. That longing often comes toward older men in forms of passive and active aggression. Being old, gray-haired, and willing to speak his truth, Bly becomes the target for such displaced hunger, which he does not deserve.

I met Bly 25 years ago, when I was a young officer in the U.S. Army on my way to Vietnam. Bly's acts of courage against that war placed him in the poet's prophetic role, where he has remained. Bly helped me leave the army, in spite of my military family, which gave its name to Ft. Bliss, Texas, and has contributed many soldiers and generals to the U.S. military. I am indebted to Bly, as are many young men, because he helped me see the futility of war; I engaged in direct acts against the U.S. military and resigned from the U.S. Army. During the more recent Persian Gulf War, Bly once again was active on a national scale against war. Bly's history of political activism on behalf of peace is one of the most extensive of any major U.S. writer. I do not agree with all Bly's ideas; in fact, I have argued publicly and privately with him for years. But his passion for life has benefited me and many others. I admit to a great love for Robert Bly. I do like being around him. I have struggled with him for a quarter of a century now. Bly is stimulating. I feel alive in his vibrant presence. I enjoy his maleness and the fact that he is an old man who speaks his truth. Perfect he is not. Bly stands for what the ancient Greeks called *alethia*—truth beyond mere facts.

I was raised by the women's movement in the 1960s, as I came into manhood. I have listened to women speak on gender, and will continue to listen. Men must hear women's just complaints about sexism. Feminism is forever in my bones, not just my head; it has entered my blood, my body, and my heart. I cannot separate it from my sense of self, my sense of reality, my sense of purpose and my sense of the "other sex," a term which I prefer to the adversarial and militaristic "opposite sex." These days I am most drawn to spiritual feminism and those parts of the women's movement committed to working with men and to gender reconciliation. As I consider our potential survival on this threatened Earth, images of my teachers come to mind. Nelle Morton opened the door for me in 1966; she wrote *The Journey Is Home*. Carol Gilligan taught me while I was at Harvard University about women's different voice. May Sarton led me to the muse. Three mature psychologists—Jean Shinoda Bolen, Marion Woodman, and Linda Leonard—have

continued to inspire me. These women are part of the women's spiritual movement.

She's coming back—after a long exile. Once again, her names can be heard across the land. A spiritual awakening is occurring. Every year for the last twenty years a group of us have had an annual Great Mother conference, organized by Bly. Its teachers have included women such as Jungian analysts Woodman and Leonard. I want to share a line from a Bly poem that is running through my mind. It is one of Bly's many love of women poems, which perhaps Prof. Kimmel has not read, or he would not distort Bly so, take him out of context, and falsely accuse him of being against women.

In the month of May,  
 when all leaves open,  
 I see when I walk  
 how well all things lean on each other . . .  
 then I understand,  
 I love you with what in me is unfinished.  
 I love you with what in me is still changing.<sup>3</sup>

It's from Bly's book *Loving a Woman in Two Worlds*. I am tempted to spend the rest of my time reciting love poems, but I will refrain. I do want to add another one. It is spring, a time of change, which I feel in my body. As a mythopoet I want to suggest, rather than declare. I want to draw a circle, rather than a rigid line. Rather than a linear, analytical approach, I want to use the languages of feeling—poetry and music. The nineteenth-century American poet Edwin Markham wrote "Outwitted":

He drew a circle that shut me out.  
 Heretic, rebel; a thing to flout.  
 But Love and I had wit to win.  
 We drew a circle and took him in.

This poem reveals contemporary mythopoetic approaches to all men—the good, the bad, and the ugly—"take them in," care for them. We practice what another nineteenth century men's movement ancestor, Walt Whitman, called "manly love." During the Civil War, Whitman worked as a nurse, loving men in both blue and gray uniforms, writing, "All men ever born are my brothers." We echo our great gray poet today. Mythopoetic men's movements are movements of lovers of men, women, and children. We work with gay, straight, and inbetween men. With men from their teenage into retirement years. With men of many different cultures and races. At the risk

of seeming sentimental, let me say that the only solution for our serious gender problems today is the love of men, the love of women, and the love of and caring for children. The hatred and blaming of women will get us nowhere. Nor will the hatred and blaming of men. We must get beyond self-loathing and shame to a place of inclusion. Shame and blame do not motivate people to change; inclusion and love can catalyze people to be transformed.

### THE MYTHOPOETIC APPROACH TO MEN

Mythopoetic refers to re-mythologizing, not merely repeating the old stories. I study the old myths to learn their teachings, and then evolve them. When Bly appeared on the men's scene in the early 1980s, those who moved in response to his ideas were called "the Bly men's movement." I did not like that description. I do not have a great man theory of history. There is much more than one man here. There are authentic movements already involving hundreds of thousands of men. So I spent months studying literature and came upon the somewhat archaic term "mythopoetic." Though the term is awkward and academic, it has stuck in the media and among men. In a 1986 *Yoga Journal* article, I write, "Rather than employing rational, analytical or political thinking, the mythopoetic approach to men uses symbols, metaphor, and archetypal images."<sup>4</sup> The mythopoetic approach is change and future oriented, rather than conservative and past oriented. A mythopoetic approach to men seeks to transform men, masculinities, and manhood.

Our approach is also psychoecological, by which I mean a primary concern with repairing, mending, healing. If we use a merely sociopolitical approach, we may keep ourselves in the gender prison. It is cure that I want. We need to describe the problems of our rigid sex roles and gender inequality in language which can facilitate change, not merely one which creates a bad man/good woman dualism blaming one gender, and leaving the other feeling self-righteous. Hence, instead of blaming men for our problems, and then shaming them, I prefer a holistic approach designed toward a solution. We must all take responsibility for this world which we have colluded in making.

Mythopoeists are not separatists. We hate neither women nor men; we are not misogynists or misandrists. We have both men's only and gender gatherings. My partner Bruce Silverman lives with his wife and two daughters, pleasantly surrounded by the feminine. Bruce teaches weekly drumming classes to women. We do not believe in male domination of the drum, as has historically been the case, or of any other aspect of life. We believe in the

equality and mutuality of both genders. Bruce directs the Sons of Orpheus, a men's mythopoetic community, of which I have been the Literary Director. Orpheus was the Greek father of music and poetry who played the lyre so beautifully that rocks, mountains, fish, trees, and birds swayed to it. In one year alone we had about half a dozen marriages, among three dozen men in the Sons. Part of our work is to get men and women closer; blaming either gender does not help. Recently, for example, one of the men who is having his first child asked for support. The fathers came forward to help him by telling their stories. A few weeks ago a man was remembering pain from his childhood. So he asked that we sing him a lullaby. We surrounded and cradled him. These are the kinds of things we do in the mythopoetic men's movements, hardly being demons who defend that enemized "patriarchy." When a woman friend of Bruce's was being harassed racially, some of us volunteered to stay in her home to help protect her and her young daughter from the racist attacks—hardly a defense of "the patriarchy."

#### TOXIC MASCULINITY VS. THE DEEP MASCULINE

There are many masculinities. Masculinity is not singular or monolithic. Masculinity varies from man to man, from family to family, and from culture to culture. As he ages a man's sense of what it means to be a man changes. Internal dynamics, family and friends, and the environment influence each man's developing masculinity. Masculinity is learned behavior and as such can be changed. Masculinities are made, not born. They become, rather than are. Masculinities emerge; they are processes, rather than events, dynamic rather than static, though an individual man can become frozen in his sense of manhood. Masculinities can be unlearned, relearned, and transformed.

As you can tell, I am not that straw man that some ultra-feminists describe as an "essentialist." I do believe that archetypes influence our behavior, but I also believe in the social construction of reality. The prevailing archetypal psychologist in the mythopoetic men's work, James Hillman, has written a book on social reality.<sup>5</sup> Once again, it is not either-or, that you either believe in archetypes or the social construction of reality; you can have both-and, unless you are a fundamentalist.

Among the allies of mythopoetic men are those men and women working for recovery from addiction. In recent years the recovery movement has stimulated me to consider our addictive society. In the mythopoetic work we

tell classic fairy tales and myths; I have learned to combine the stories of Homer and Dante with stories from my own life and those of the men and women with whom I work. Mythopoetic men's movements overlap with other men's movements—especially the recovery, gay, and feminist movements, and less with the men's rights activists.

Toxic Masculinity poisons through means such as neglect, abuse, and violence. Toxic Masculinity can wound and even be fatal to men, women, children, and the Earth. Masculinity itself is not inherently negative, in spite of some contemporary writings about “men who can't love,” and “men who hate women,” and “refusing to be a man.” Healthy masculinity does many wonderful things—father children, fight fires, harvest food, love the feminine, write poetry, play music. These qualities contribute to what Bly calls the Deep Masculine. It is generative, earthy, nurturing, playful, forceful, and zany.

Let me contrast Toxic Masculinity, which I see as our problem, with the Deep Masculine, which I see as part of the solution. Toxic behaviors can be accumulated in a sexist society. They are not essential and inherent; but they can become addictive. Men are not essentially bad. Boys are born loving. In our sexist society too many men and women continue to play our inherited roles. Together we make a sexist system, which must be dismantled for the sakes of women and men, as well as our children.

Getting beyond blaming, merely political, language and a model which conceptualizes women as victims of masculinity and men as oppressors is important. We would benefit from language from the health and recovery fields which is change-oriented. The addictive system in which we all live is more complicated than simplistic either-or thinking. According to Yale psychologist Helen Block Lewis, our society “injures the two sexes differently.”<sup>6</sup> Women have been describing how this society wounds them; men are just beginning to identify how rigid gender distinctions also damage us. Lewis characterizes the society as channeling men into “expendable warriors” and women into “inferior childbearing.” Men become economic symbols and women become sex symbols.

It is time for men to join women in speaking out against the ways sex roles damage us, not only as allies to women in their just demands for political and economic equality, but as humans also wounded by rigid sex roles. When men add our voices to those of women we can move toward gender justice and gender reconciliation designed to end the sexism which injures both men and women. Since “both are victims,” according to Lewis, rather than fight against each other, “it seems more sensible for them to join in a

common struggle." Part of this joint struggle can be against the addiction of Toxic Masculinity.

The difficulty with some current thinking and writing on men and on gender is that it postulates a good woman/bad man dualism which blames men and glorifies women. Such scapegoating is not healthy or conducive for change or recovery. It can lead to self-righteousness for one gender (refusing to take any responsibility and imaging the-self-as-victim) and shame for the other (being a man is inherently bad). The Toxic Masculinity/Deep Masculine continuum is a dialectical, dynamic alternative to the frozen bad man/good woman dualism. Rather than trying to imitate women or become "honorary women," the path I suggest is to overcome Toxic Masculinity and recover the Deep Masculine, which lies at the base of each man. The Deep Masculine is within him and within the legacy of positive male ancestors who have gone before and taken responsibility for families, tribes, villages, and entire peoples. It interacts with historical reality, and can emerge, or be repressed.

The women's movement describes how women are damaged by what is variously defined as "inequality," "sexism," and "the patriarchy." Though the critique seems basically correct, the language used to describe the problem can separate and imprison us, rather than release us. As Anne Wilson Schaef writes in *Escape from Intimacy*, "Victims never recover. They just stay victims."<sup>7</sup> Yes, women have been victimized by sexism. But we need to understand how to move from that damage to freedom—processes which can be described as healing or recovery and framed in terms of health. In the essay "It's Time for Feminists to Make Amends," Schaef adds, "To hold on to bitterness, anger, defensiveness or a victim status is to stay in the Addictive System."<sup>8</sup>

Men are only beginning to see how our inherited concepts of masculinity damage us. Yet how obvious it is, once we look—men die eight years younger than women in the U.S. today: they have higher rates of cancer, heart attacks, and suicide. More substance abuse, risk-taking, and automobile accidents. At the turn of the century the difference was only two years in the U.S. and it remains two years in some other countries, such as Russia. The male sex role is hazardous to our health. The basic difference in mortality rates is not biological or genetic; it is behavioral and social.

#### ECO-MASCULINITY AND MANY FEMINISMS

We live in a time when the Earth itself is threatened, not so much by those mean old men, as some would contend, as by the forces set loose by industri-

alism, including technology, nuclear weapons and power, and all that pollutes our air, land, and water. Our ways out of these problems are not to condemn men, but to balance the feminine and the masculine, so unbalanced today. The love of mothers and of women, and the love of fathers and of men, both seem crucial to me, if we are to survive. As the goddesses return, they bring with them the gods of the ground, to use metaphors, as poets are prone to. That cooperative masculinity which manifests itself in forms such as raising barns, harvesting food, and volunteering to fight fires is returning. Earthy masculinity does not have time to waste bickering, snickering, and being sarcastic, snide, mocking, and putting down.

The consensus about what it means to be a man in America has eroded. We live in a time when masculinity as we have known it is deteriorating. As a result of economic realities, the changing international situation, and the women's movement, we are witnessing the de-structuring of traditional masculinity. I welcome this dissolution, confusing and even painful as it is for many men and women. I am tired of male violence in the forms of rape, abuse, neglect, and competition. I am tired of men dying eight years younger than women. I am ready for change. Our men's and gender work is a matter of life and death. Our work has saved the lives of many men—from alcoholism, violence, and early death. The stories I have heard and could tell! Men's lives are no less important than women's, nor more. We are not sociological statistics. Mythopoetic men's movements enhance the quality and length of men's lives and hence improve the lives of women and children, providing environments for men to become more loving, better fathers, to care for their families, helping us all.

There are many feminisms, as there are many masculinities. My sociological brother advocates one feminism. I advocate another. I want men and women to work together. My goal is to build a post-patriarchal society. Feminisms which leave men out or place us in a secondary rather than equal role will never end sexism. Feminisms which draw a circle to include men contribute to the ending of sexism. We do not need to be "honorary women" or "imitation women," as shame-based, man-hating writers such as Sonja Johnson and John Stoltenberg advocate.

Poetry and sociology are two distinct ways of knowing. In *Woman and Nature* Susan Griffin<sup>9</sup> contends that we must re-associate ourselves with nature. This has become one of the key methodologies of mythopoetic men's movements—getting back to animals, plants, and nature itself. When we playfully act like animals on all fours it is easy to mock us, as it was easy to mock the early bra-burning women. There is a long tradition of identifying

with animals in indigenous cultures and among poets such as Gary Snyder. Sure, it does look silly to see grown men acting like boys. But for the men participating—rather than for the sociologists observing—it often helps connect them to each other and to the larger nature of which humans are an integral part. We need eco-feminism and eco-masculinity. We can return to earthy masculine archetypes, such as Kokopelli.

We need to get beyond warriors, even gender warriors, and beyond heroes, even feminist heroes, as Allan Chinen documents in his wonderful book *Beyond Heroes*.<sup>10</sup> Let me offer another poem, which points beyond the warrior. It is from the thirteenth century—our ecstatic Sufi ancestor Rumi: “Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,/there is a field. I’ll meet you there.”<sup>11</sup>

Let us get beyond blame and shame to meet each other in such a clearing.

In my many years in school, including five years in graduate school working on my doctorate, I was taught to be a Lone Ranger. Now I never teach or do public speaking without colleagues at my side. Mythopoetic men’s movements have to do with men breaking isolation, which we see as a key cause of problems such as violence. Hence we emphasize men being together, working in groups and building community. Much of male intimacy is side by side, rather than face to face. Rather than always being verbal, it includes doing-together. Men die eight years younger than women in the United States. Our lives are about 10 percent shorter, not for biological but for behavioral reasons. My conclusion—there is something hazardous about the male sex role in America today. Fortunately for humanity, and other species, as we seek to evolve into the twenty-first century, we are witnessing a re-awakening of ancient wisdom, a return to mythology and its languages, poetry and storytelling, and a re-awakening of interest in nature and ecology, as compared to industry and technology.

## GENDER RECONCILIATION

Sociologists and political scientists offer facts. Poets and mythologists offer metaphors. Both facts and metaphors seek to describe reality. The ancient Greeks spoke of *alethia*, the higher truth which they knew was more than mere facticity. It is *alethia* which interests me, and to which the goddesses and spiritual feminism point. Our discussion of men and gender belongs within this larger context. Along with modern science we can turn to more ancient wisdoms in our attempts to understand men and gender. Then we

must go beyond the old stories to the development of new stories for men and for gender.

I advocate an ecumenical spirit in men's movements. I disagree with Michael Kimmel. It does not mean that he is wrong, or that I am right. Just that we differ. As a mythopoet I find reality more complex than simple good woman/bad man. Such dualistic, polaristic thinking is the old paradigm. I prefer the holistic, synthetic thinking of the new paradigm in the physics of Fritjof Capra.<sup>12</sup> I appreciate Michael's passion and concern for justice. I hope you can hear other approaches and not feel you have to choose either—or. We live in a both—and world.

Women's and men's movements are maturing toward a movement of men and women for Gender Reconciliation. Some of the adherents of the original women's and men's movements remain stuck in the early stages of blame, anger, shame, and dualistic thinking. Others have matured to inclusive thinking, a systems approach, and dialectical thinking, rather than polaristic thinking, either—or. Together men and women can end sexism, which injures both genders. As adversaries, we do not have a chance to end sexism, which is rooted in the adversarial relationship. We need to be allies, partners, even when we differ.

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We've Come a Long Way Too, Baby.  
And We've Still Got a Ways to Go.  
So Give Us a Break!

MARVIN ALLEN

I FIND IT DISTRESSING THAT FEMINISM and the media have given such rapt attention to the enigmatic, mythological aspects of the men's movement while ignoring the more grounded and psychologically efficacious elements. A movement rich with diversity, leaders, and goals has been, in the eyes of the media and feminism, reduced to a cult of white-collar drum bangers with visions of kings, warriors, and wild, hairy men dancing in their heads. According to countless newspaper and magazine articles, these seekers of the "deep masculine" were followers of the poet Robert Bly. Whatever Bly said, whether it made sense or not, suddenly became the voice of the Men's Movement. If Bly came across as a bigot or sexist, then the Men's Movement was bigoted or sexist. If Bly was a closet patriarch, then *his* movement was a clandestine attempt by threatened men to win back all the power and virility they lost to the Women's Movement. Why didn't they pay more attention to such well balanced and apparently emotionally healthy leaders as Aaron Kipnis (*Knights Without Armor*), Bill Kauth (*A Circle of Men*), or Sam Keen (*Fire in the Belly*)? Other men's leaders like Herb Goldberg (*The Hazards of Being Male*), Warren Farrell (*The Myth of Male Power*), and Asa Baber (*Naked at Gender Gap*) also have some very salient, if controversial, ideas to offer the men and women of this country. Without diversity in leadership, a movement gets top heavy and extremely vulnerable to criticism—much as a thousand acres of corn can be devastated by a single type of bug. By creating an easy target like Bly as *the* leader, and by focusing on only the sensational or unusual elements of men's gatherings, the media was able to discredit and dismantle much of the Men's Movement in short order.

Most of the 20 percent of American people who have even heard of the

Men's Movement actually believe that the whole thing is about a bunch of white, middle-aged, middle-class men in the woods dancing around in animal skins, drumming wildly, hugging each other, primal screaming, and whining about their lot in life. Yes, there are drums and dancing and some screaming in many of the outdoor gatherings for men. But that's only a small part of what goes on.

For instance, the Wildman Gatherings I designed, and continue to facilitate with my friend and colleague Dick Prosapio, are weekend retreats dedicated not only to helping men become more emotionally aware and alive, but to assisting them in becoming more available, more nurturing husbands, fathers, and friends. Yes, we use certain Native American ceremonies that we believe will help white, middle-class Americans become more connected with the beauty and the spirit of this Earth. To develop a passion for our planet is one of the goals of the weekend. And, yes, we sing a Native American chant, but we also sing "Amazing Grace." Too bad the media and the feminists couldn't hear the glorious sound of "America the Beautiful" sung by a hundred men's voices rising up through the pines and into a crisp, starlit night in the mountains of Nevada.

And what of the white, middle-class men who are whining about their unfair lot in life? What's that all about? Is it possible that for the first time in their lives many of these men are facing the fact that, as impressionable little boys, they were hurt by an unrealistic masculine code that made a shambles of their natural feelings and pushed them into a robot-like existence? Is it possible that these same men who seem so cool and collected on the outside, have been hiding the fact that they were deeply hurt by neglectful emotionally unavailable, or even abusive mothers and dads? And is it whining to finally give vent to all that buried pain, grief, and rage? Is it really so weird to want to be liberated from all those troubling feelings and belief systems that have driven us into aggressive competition, workaholism, alcoholism, perfectionism, passivity, or raging? Is it so strange to want to seek comfort and validation from other men who have endured the same masculine conditioning process and many of the same experiences as we have? Isn't this, after all, what it's all about? Trying to become more emotionally healthy, balanced men? Are we supposed to be able to transform ourselves by just deciding to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps? Or by going to Sunday School? Or in a Saturday afternoon chat with our wife or lover? Is it possible that working in groups of men may be the most effective and efficient way for males to break out of their emotional armor, defensiveness, and isolation?

It seems ironic that some feminists (and by the way, I consider myself a

feminist who wants to see true equality and fairness between the sexes) complain bitterly about what jerks men are and yet they also complain when men get together to try to change themselves. It seems to me that men need some time and space to understand what's happened to them; to see the relevance that their personal history has in their present day lives; to realize that certain ways they have of thinking, feeling, and behaving may be hurting themselves or their loved ones; to take responsibility for what they've done and are doing; and, finally, to get whatever help is necessary to create positive change in their lives. I know of no better way for the average male to achieve these goals than to be in the company of other like-minded, nonblaming men.

You see, men have come a long way, too, baby. And a significant part of our journey has been through hell in this twentieth century. First there was World War I, then World War II, then the Korean War, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf War, and several "skirmishes." Remember, too, that during most of this century men who didn't volunteer were forced to fight the wars or go to prison, or, at the very least, were considered cowards. To be effective and efficient in these wars and in earning a living, males had to be "toughened up" by parents, schools, churches, media, and the military. As they grew into adulthood, these males were expected to display characteristics of leadership, independence, toughness, courage, responsibility, and quiet stoicism. These traits became synonymous with manliness and played a major role in keeping our country free and our standard of living high. Traditionally, men from other cultures around the world have been conditioned in similar ways.

Unfortunately, however, while millions of men in our country have had the traditional masculine traits drilled into their heads and hearts, they've been taught very little about the traditional "feminine" ways of being. Without the feminine—I prefer to call them human—qualities of patience, vulnerability, gentleness, compassion, and empathy, these men are destined to become emotionally unbalanced. Millions of American boys continue to be emotionally stunted in this way before they reach their 18th birthdays. Many of these boys who didn't get enough good parenting will try to compensate for their low self-esteem and insecurities by following the rules of manhood in an exaggerated fashion.

Thus, under such circumstances, "Be stoic and don't let your feelings get in the way of positive action," becomes "Don't ever cry or show your vulnerable emotions, no matter what." "Be strong enough to get the job done and don't give up too soon," becomes "Don't ever be weak, don't compromise, and never give up." "Be brave," becomes "Don't ever be scared, but if you

are, never let anyone know." "Be capable of leading when necessary," becomes "Prove your manliness by controlling and dominating those around you." "Be a responsible provider," becomes "Prove your worth to bosses, co-workers, and wives by pleasing them and achieving at all costs."

After working with thousands of males in our country, I am convinced that a significant number of men have been so influenced by one or more of these exaggerated masculine rules that their ability to enjoy meaningful relationships or even life itself has been deeply diminished. Although following the manly code may have paved the way for men to achieve success in business, sports, or war, the toll on their wives, their children, their friends, their planet, and themselves has been unacceptable.

Millions of American men spend a lot more time trying to prove themselves than they do celebrating themselves. They spend more time feeling numb, anxious, or angry than they do feeling joyful. To make matters worse, many of these men just go through the motions in their relationships. Because they can't be vulnerable and haven't developed the necessary communication skills, they are often unable to experience the deep inner satisfaction that should come from intimate relationships with wives, children, and friends. Instead, they may find themselves outside the loop in their own families, spending much of their lives trying to cope with soul wrenching isolation and loneliness.

Emotionally unbalanced men fall prey to very "unmasculine" feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, depression, and dependency. To avoid or to cope with these painful and embarrassing emotions, millions of men have turned to such manly solutions as excess work, alcohol, TV sports, food, sexual compulsions, and even aggression and violence. Unfortunately, these "solutions" not only don't work, they create more problems. I sincerely believe divorce, addictions, wife battering, child abuse, suicide, and crime could all be reduced by 75% or more if men could just become a little more emotionally balanced. While men who use violence against their wives and children must be stopped and prosecuted to the full extent of the law, we must also realize that incarceration alone will not heal these men's problems. They need help in the form of effective and appropriate counseling and treatment. Otherwise, they will just serve the time and repeat the same crimes with their families or with new ones.

While rape and wife battering are serious and widespread, we must understand that these criminal acts are only the visible and extreme tip of the iceberg. There are also millions of other emotionally unbalanced men who would never rape or physically batter but who continue to be excessively

critical, controlling, and emotionally abusive to their wives and children. In millions of other men, emotional imbalance takes the form of sulking, stony silence, and passivity.

These serious maladies affecting so many American men must be addressed if our families and our communities are to flourish. As a nation, we must understand that the vast majority of American men are goodhearted, well-intentioned people who, as a group, are reflecting both the positive and the negative effects of traditional masculine conditioning. If we are to replace sexism, racism, and violence with mutual respect, dignity, and equality, surely a first step must include a new masculinity that demands emotional honesty, wholeness, and balance. Certainly this new masculinity must also recognize that excellence in relationships is every bit as manly a trait as excellence in business, sports, or war. To do this, men and women must work together in fresh, nonblaming ways to raise awareness and to encourage meaningful dialogue that fosters understanding and compassion. To help them develop healthier ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving, men must be encouraged and supported to get the assistance they need from counselors, men's groups, classes, relevant books, and friends. Finally, we must find the wisdom and the courage to raise our sons to be the well-balanced, emotionally healthy men that our Creator intended them to be.

So for God's sake, let's support the elements of the men's movement that foster true growth and development. Don't throw the baby out with the bath water. Why not take the energy that's being spent fighting Bly and turn it into a resource that supports the practical, down to earth, psychologically sound aspects of the men's movement? The truth is, that part of the men's movement that smacks of patriarchy or lacks substance and groundedness will go down the drain without much outside intervention. In fact, if you listen closely you may hear a giant sucking sound right now!

# Twenty-five Years in the Men's Movement

JED DIAMOND

I AGREE WITH MICHAEL KIMMEL that the articles titled *Profeminist Men Respond to the Men's Movement* "leave(s) the dialogue incomplete" and am pleased to accept his invitation to offer my own thoughts and feelings.

I have been actively involved in men's work since 1969 when my first son, Jemal, was born. Holding him for the first time, moments after his birth, I made a vow to have a different kind of relationship with him than the one I experienced growing up. To do that, I knew I would have to help create a different kind of world for us all to live in.

My life work is to help people escape the current dominator culture (what some call patriarchy) that is destroying men, women, children, gays, people of color, indigenous peoples, and ultimately the entire human race. I want to help build a new partnership society in which we can once again live as equals in balance with the totality of life. I believe we don't have the luxury of sniping at each other. The ship of civilization is sinking and we need all the allies we can muster if we are going to survive on this planet.

Since so many of our views on men, masculinity, sexism, and the men's movement are colored by our own lives, I think it is helpful to share some of my own life experiences. I hope this will allow my own biases, fears, concerns, and passions to surface. When we truly understand where the other is coming from, we are better able to appreciate our similarities and differences without attacking each other.

## MY ROOTS IN LIFE

I entered the world on December 21, 1943, in New York City, the first and only child born to parents who were Jewish by tradition, but intellectually opposed to religion. I attended my first march and rally when I was six months old, and though I didn't hear the term "red diaper baby" until much later, it captures the politically charged atmosphere of my youth.

We moved to Los Angeles and bought a small house in the all white suburbs of the San Fernando Valley. While my mother stayed home with me and earned money typing manuscripts for soon-to-be-black-listed writers, my father, an actor in New York, tried desperately to break into the emerging television industry. Repeated failures to find meaningful work led to a nervous breakdown and eventual hospitalization when I was six years old. I didn't see my father again until I graduated from college.

I was raised by a mother who loved me desperately, hated "weak" men like my father, and became a self-sufficient, independent, politically active feminist. (She didn't use the term "feminist," but described herself as "just a woman trying to survive and raise my kid.")

## MY ROOTS IN THE MEN'S MOVEMENT

When I met my first wife, Candace, in 1964, she insisted I read Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, and I learned that "the problem that has no name" was my problem too; though I had no idea what to do about it other than to read more books and dialogue with my wife. In the summer of 1971 we attended a feminist conference with 700 women and about 20 men, which both excited and terrified me. Though I felt a lot of anger from some of the women, many welcomed my presence and encouraged me to join with them in attacking the problem of sexism. It took me another year to find enough like-minded men to form a men's group, which lasted until I moved out of the area four years later. In 1979 I joined my present men's group, which has been meeting regularly for 15 years. A year and a half ago we joined with an Asian men's group to explore issues of racism.

When Candace and I separated in 1976, I was shocked to see how much rage we had toward each other, particularly around issues of child support and custody. She wanted more money than I felt I could pay, and I wanted a kind of involvement with our two children that she found unacceptable. During that time I found a good deal of support from a group called *Equal*

*Rights for Fathers* and later attended a number of local and national conferences on "Men's Rights."

In 1982 I was finishing my first book, *Inside Out: Becoming My Own Man*, when I read the *New Age Journal* interview with Robert Bly. In Bly I recognized a man who was wrestling with many of the same demons that haunted my life: the loss of my father, my ambivalent feelings toward women, my sense of powerlessness, my pain and rage, my addictiveness, and my vindictiveness. Since then I have probably attended forty or more gatherings with Bly and others he works with.

In 1983 I attended my first NOMAS Conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan. I loved the intellectual atmosphere and appreciated the presence of men of color, gay and bisexual men, and a few feminist women. What moved me the most were the evenings of music, poetry, song, storytelling and dance when we got out of our heads and into our bodies. I brought my son and daughter to the next two conferences and both attended a number of the California Men's Gatherings with me. I have been active over the years in the Men's Studies Task Force. I have probably attended thirty or more profeminist men's gatherings.

In recent years I have felt the importance of extending my therapeutic, political, and social action to healing our relationship to the Earth.

I have found many allies in the last thirty years in many parts of the movement. In my recent book, *The Warrior's Journey Home: Healing Men, Healing the Planet*, I acknowledged a few of them: Shepherd Bliss, Robert Bly, Warren Farrell, Betty Friedan, Herb Goldberg, Fred Hayward, John Lee, Joseph Pleck, and Anne Wilson Schaefer.

#### POSSIBLE BLIND SPOTS

As a whole the articles by the profeminist men are quite negative in their view of "the men's movement." Like Kenneth Clatterbaugh, most seemed to reject the movement as being "patriarchal or at least as patriarchy friendly." That is not my experience. Perhaps I am blinded by my own biases, or perhaps the men who wrote the articles are missing something.

The first difficulty I see is that the title of the publication is *Profeminist Men Respond to the Men's Movement*, yet most of the response is to Robert Bly. I counted 191 references to Bly. Robert Moore was mentioned 17 times, Shepherd Bliss 7 times, James Hillman 6, Michael Meade and Doug Gillette 4 each, John Lee and Aaron Kipnis 2 each, and Sam Keen once.

To me that would be like saying I was going to critique the Profeminist Men's Movement and then putting 90 percent of the focus on John Stoltenberg and his book *Refusing to Be a Man*.

I have seen many people inflate Bly's importance, then, having blown his influence out of proportion, proceed to attack him. "If a person continues to see only giants," observed Anais Nin, "it means he is still looking at the world through the eyes of a child." I wonder if the men who see Bly worthy of 191 mentions and all the rest of the men in the movement a total of 44 are missing something important.

The second difficulty I see is that the men who have written the response seem to have made their judgments based on limited experiences attending workshops and a reading of Robert Bly's *Iron John*. Bly is first and foremost a poet. I wish there had been more focus on *Loving a Woman in Two Worlds* or *The Man in the Black Coat Turns* or his *Poems of Kabir* or *Poems of Rumi* or his translations of Antonio Machado.

Shepherd Bliss, who coined the term "mythopoetic," is mentioned only in passing. I would hope that those who want to understand the men's movement would read some of the numerous articles that Bliss has written over the past twenty-five years.

The third problem I see is that those who have written the most critical responses to the mythopoetic men's movement are writing as academicians. They are using the logic of the university mind to judge an experience that cannot be understood in those terms. This is like trying to understand the early consciousness-raising groups of feminist women by holding them to the standards of male academia. This approach misses the point for the same reasons that most scientists fail to understand the wisdom contained in Native American cosmology. The critics seem to be reading *Iron John* as though it were a doctoral dissertation on the men's movement rather than a rough summary of a ten-year ritual dialogue between Bly and thousands of men and women throughout the country.

### SPECIFIC CONCERNS

There seem to me to be six major concerns that profeminist men have with mythopoetic men. I'd like to state them and then comment briefly on each.

1. *The movement is patriarchal or at least is patriarchy friendly.*

In the years I have been leading workshops and attending gatherings with

Robert Bly and others I have found much that supports my work in dismantling the patriarchy and little that is patriarchy friendly. The patriarchy is supported by unconscious men (and women) who are blind to the destructive effect the dominator culture has on themselves and others. Men coming together to acknowledge their wounds, feel their pain, release their rage, own their responsibility, and share their love are not patriarchy friendly.

Some would wish us to be more outwardly political, more direct in our commitment to women, gays, and lesbians, people of color, and those trapped in poverty. I would remind our critics that the women's movement began with a similar personal agenda. The feminist understanding that "the personal is political" is no less true for men. Many of us are moving beyond the personal and taking on social issues of consequence. These moves are far less publicized by a media that, for the most part, would trivialize our work (as they did with the early women's movement). Feminist women were once portrayed as angry, sexually repressed bra-burners. Many of us are portrayed as inarticulate, sexually oppressive drum-beaters.

*2. In contrast to the profeminist movement, we lack a clear agenda for social change.*

The concern seems to be that we are fuzzy-headed and illogical and, though we may have good intentions, we are politically naive and prone to drift with the patriarchal tide. As a result, Kenneth Clatterbaugh argues that "the mythopoetic men's movement is unlikely to go in any direction other than toward some version of patriarchy."

Having attended many profeminist and mythopoetic gatherings I can well understand the confusion. Mythopoetic gatherings are more like sacred rituals than conferences. They are closer to the world of indigenous spiritual ceremonies than to the world of academic argument.

I believe that is a strength, not a drawback. We also feel free to test our ideas, to say the most outrageous things, to be illogical, to celebrate the joy of being male, to express our pain and anger, to tell Robert Bly (and others on stage) they are full of shit. It is only the media and some critics who portray Robert Bly as the Grand Old Man of the Movement, The Patriarch. Those within the movement see him as a brother. Sometimes we see him as a naive and boisterous younger brother. At other times we see him as a wise and considerate older brother.

*3. We overemphasize wounds from the personal and familial and exclude exploration of the social and institutional contexts.*

This concern, I believe, stems directly from overemphasizing Robert Bly as a spokesman for the movement and taking *Iron John* as the primary expression of Bly's views on men.

I think there is great value in exploring the personal and familial roots of our pain. If we don't do that we end up, as many men and women in the movement have, projecting unresolved issues from our childhood onto our friends and critics. This contributes to conflict and misunderstandings and damages the movement.

Those who haven't recognized our commitment to social and institutional change have failed to delve deeply enough into the work of Bly, Bliss, Keen, Kipnis, or Hillman, to name only few. For example, in his book written with Michael Ventura, *We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy and the World's Getting Worse*, James Hillman is very critical of a movement that would have us heal our inner wounds without dealing with the oppression in the outer world. He says that every time we take our pain and rage over social injustice to a therapist or personal growth group, "We're depriving the political world of something. And therapy, in its crazy way, by emphasizing the inner soul and ignoring the outer soul, supports the decline of the actual world."

4. *We emphasize heterosexual experience and deny or minimize the homosexual experience.*

I agree with this concern. I think it is a major failing of the mythopoetic work. Unacknowledged homophobia keeps us from fully expressing who we are as individuals and as change agents in the society. I agree with men's leader Keith Hennessy who says he wants

more direct acknowledgment of homophobia, a weapon used against every boy, which inflicts deep wounds that breed everywhere men gather. Homophobia takes up so much space in our movements! Most of the land we call *dancing* is occupied by homophobia. Most of the land we call *touch* is fenced off by homophobia. Most of the public land we call *friendship*, including asking for and providing care, is fenced off by homophobia. All of the oceans we call *emotions*, except for anger and depression, are fenced off by homophobia.<sup>1</sup>

I feel hopeful that there are enough men in the mythopoetic movement who agree that this major omission in our work will be addressed and healed. "I believe that in this gender-torn world," says Hennessy, "men meeting together to tell stories and pray and touch and challenge and commit to love is a world healing r/evolutionary act."

5. *The movement fails to appreciate the limitations of stories and myths as a basis for understanding men.*

Though I believe that all labels have their drawbacks, I believe the term "mythopoetic" is useful in describing the work of Robert Bly and Michael Meade. It becomes less useful when we use it to encompass the work of other leaders associated with the movement such as James Hillman, John Lee, Robert Moore, Malidoma Some, and John Stokes.

To criticize the movement because it emphasizes myths and stories fails to recognize the contribution of therapists, social activists, recovering addicts, dancers, tribal elders, aikido masters, ecologists, and many more who offer forms other than myth and poetry for expressing the truth of the male experience.

6. *In drawing men together the movement perpetuates the separation between men and women and contributes to male rage and violence toward women.*

This critique of the movement seems to be based on the media stereotype of men in the woods baring their chests, beating their drums, bemoaning the plight of oppressed white men being attacked by angry women, and generally wanting to return to the good old days when men were men and women knew their place. That stereotype has as much truth as feminist women being portrayed as ball-breaking bitches, bent on blaming men for all that is wrong in the world. Though there may be a few men and a few women whose words and behavior fit the stereotypes, they are a very small minority of men and women in the movement.

My experience with men in the wilderness has allowed me to feel my connection to the nonhuman world, to experience and heal some of the wounds I received in childhood, to release the shame of feeling less than a man because I was different, to dance joyfully with other men, to feel gratitude to women for waking me up to the deadly dominator culture, and, as Robert Bly challenges us, "to discover the sound that male cells sing."

But men meeting together in the wilderness is a very small part of the work we do. It also involves men and women coming together to air our differences and find our common ground. Some of the best workshops I have attended have focused on gender reconciliation. These include those led by Angeles Arrien and Robert Bly, Clarissa Pinkola Estes and Michael Meade, Malidoma Some and Sobonfu Some, and Elizabeth Herron and Aaron Kipnis.

I believe the men's movement has the potential to transform our society. Our strength comes from our commitment to change, the diversity of our

various approaches, and the good will and common purpose that are at the core of our work. I look forward to our joint efforts in the coming years and echo the words of the poet Rumi, who said, "Out beyond ideas of wrong doing and right doing, there is a field. I'll meet you there."

NOTE

1. Keith Hennessy, "Queer Healing," a workshop at the 18th National Conference on Men and Masculinity, July 8-11, 1993, San Francisco, Calif.

# VI

CONCLUSION:

CAN WE ALL

GET ALONG?

# Why Mythopoetic Men Don't Flock to NOMAS

MICHAEL SCHWALBE

IN SEPTEMBER 1990 I BEGAN TO STUDY a group of men engaged in mythopoetic activity. From then until June 1993 I attended 128 meetings and gatherings of various kinds; observed and participated in all manner of mythopoetic activities; read the movement's guiding texts; read small mythopoetic publications from around the country; and listened to audio tapes of talks by movement leaders. I also interviewed twenty-one of the local men at length.<sup>1</sup>

Any sociologist who has studied a group from the inside will tell you that there is always more diversity within the group than most outsiders see. This is true in the case of the mythopoetic men. People often ask me for a quick account of who the men are, what they are doing, and why—as if the men are all alike and one explanation fits all. While there are commonalities of experience and outlook among the mythopoetic men, there are also differences. With regard to gender politics, which is my concern here, the mythopoetic men embrace a range of views from profeminist to men's rights. I want to acknowledge this diversity at the outset, because in what follows I'm going to refer to the men as a group.

The question I'm trying to answer here is this: Why don't men who get involved in mythopoetic activity flock to the National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS)? On the surface it seems that there's no good reason why the mythopoetic men should be unwilling to endorse NOMAS-style profeminism. Most mythopoetic men would endorse, in principle, NOMAS's goals of ending all forms of violence against women, ending racism, affirming gay relationships, and enhancing men's lives. Indeed, some men involved in mythopoetic activity do support NOMAS and attend its

national conferences on men and masculinity. Yet most mythopoetic men disidentify with NOMAS and its profeminist stance. Examining some of the reasons for this may shed light on both the mythopoetic phenomenon and gender politics in the United States.

#### FEELING BETTER ABOUT BEING MEN

First, it is necessary to consider what the mythopoetic men are seeking. For the most part they seek self-change, not social change. The men want to feel better about themselves as men; to feel things more fully and to live richer, more authentic emotional lives; to act with more self-confidence; to know themselves better as emotional beings; and to experience emotional communion with other men. That men are gathering to try to help each other achieve these goals is in itself an important bit of social change. But it is not a change effort that examines or targets the larger political, economic, and cultural arrangements that created misery for women and men.

The foremost goal for many of the men who participate in mythopoetic activity is self-acceptance. They want to feel better about who and what they are as individuals, and especially as individual men. The Jungian psychology that guides mythopoetic activity helps tremendously. It tells the men that their wounds, weaknesses, and shadow sides are potential sources of strength and wisdom. This is exactly what the men want to hear; it is a healing message in itself. Jungian psychology also allows the men to deflect “shaming messages” because it says these messages come from people who are projecting elements of their own shadows. Hence critics, whoever they might be, can be readily discounted.

Jungian psychology also helps the men revalue the category (men) to which they belong and from which they derive their central identity. It does this by celebrating the goodness of masculine energies that are supposedly essential parts of every man. The men can thus feel better not only about their defects, which are redefined as potential strengths, but also about belonging to a category of beings who possess energies said to be valuable for the healthy survival of the human species. Jungian psychology—especially as used by Bly, Hillman, Meade, and others—helps the men redeem themselves as flawed individuals and redeem the category to which they belong.

No matter what psychology provided the theory behind the practice, the warmth and supportiveness found at mythopoetic gatherings would be therapeutic in their own right. Being listened to, accepted, and even comforted as

they talk about their suffering helps the men feel better about who and what they are. The small support groups to which many of the men belong also serve this function. It's clear that many of the mythopoetic men find that their therapeutic needs can be met without engaging in political analysis and action around gender issues. In fact, as I'll explain later, such analysis and action would probably keep the men from getting what they want out of mythopoetic activity.

It's easy to lampoon twelve-step programs and New Age psychobabble about wounded inner children. The mythopoetic men, perhaps a third of whom also have a foot in the recovery movement, have been likewise lampooned for their jargon and unusual therapeutic practices. But I've seen that many of these men really do have serious psychic wounds to contend with. These may stem from childhood experiences of being shamed for their behavior or appearance, from being sexually abused as children, or from failures in their adult lives—including failures to live up to the ideals of traditional masculinity. Belonging to a *group* that is relatively privileged *materially* has not spared the men these troubles as individuals.

So when I look at these men as flesh-and-blood people, and not as members of a social category, I can see that their psychological distress is real. I can also see the strength of their needs for self-acceptance. This is in part why they join a therapeutic movement based on a psychology that encourages guilt-free self-acceptance. And even if it is true that their material privileges allow them the luxury of doing "inner work" instead of just struggling to survive, this doesn't mitigate the seriousness of their psychic pain.

One reason the mythopoetic men don't flock to NOMAS should thus be clear: it offers no comforting psychological theory. It offers no guilt-absolving, guilt-deflecting "healing messages." In fact, NOMAS's profeminism is perceived by many mythopoetic men as offering just the opposite. As one mythopoetic publication put it, the profeminist branch of the men's movement is declining because its "critical attitude toward men alienates many potential supporters and newer branches offer more positive alternatives."<sup>2</sup>

It seems to many mythopoetic men that NOMAS accepts the "shaming messages" that come from radical feminist women. This is why many mythopoetic men see NOMAS as the guilt wing of the men's movement. The profeminist stance is seen as guilt- and shame-inducing, and disempowering, because it gives angry women too much power to define the nature and worth of men and masculinity. Given what these men are experiencing psychologically, and the therapeutic quest they are on, NOMAS's profeminism strikes many of them as toxic.

## NONSOCIOLOGICAL THINKING ABOUT GENDER AND FEMINISM

While I think the mythopoetic men misunderstand feminism and NOMAS, there is a grain of truth in their view. The truth is that if men take feminism seriously they must engage in self-critique. Part of this critique is recognizing the sexist impulses that are ingrained in us by virtue of our socialization into a male-supremacist society. If this leads men to see the ways in which they are unfairly privileged in this society and how their unconscious sexist behavior hurts women, then some guilt is entirely likely.

Perhaps it is that many men drawn to NOMAS can distinguish between productive guilt and neurotic guilt, the former being what motivates us to change, the latter being what erodes our sense of worth. To make this distinction it is necessary to think sociologically—that is, one must be able to see unjust gender arrangements as historical conditions that predated and shaped men who are alive today. From a sociological point of view, it makes no sense for men today to feel guilty for the sexism they inherited. Yet this same view imposes responsibility for working to change sexist social arrangements and metes out deserved guilt if we do not.

The problem is that few of the men involved in mythopoetic activities think sociologically about gender. They do not see gender as a social construction that depends for its existence on humanly created ideologies and institutions. Rather, following Jung, they see gender as an essential, timeless feature of males and females. In light of the psychological distress many of the men suffer, it is more comforting for them to embrace an essentialist view of gender than to acknowledge their ingrained sexism, recognize its harmful effects, and take responsibility for changing themselves and society. That's a tall order even for the healthiest of people.

Because the men don't think sociologically, they take feminist criticism of men personally. Part of the problem here is a misunderstanding of feminism. To many mythopoetic men, feminism is exaltation of the feminine; it is militant action in pursuit of equal rights for women; it is strident criticism of men and masculinity; it is women telling men to be more like women; it is women seeking to turn the tables and dominate men. Men who embrace feminism therefore must be self-denigrating and weak, since this means accepting the view of angry, wounded women that there is nothing good about "maleness."

The big thing the mythopoetic men have missed in feminism is the analysis of unjust social arrangements that produce gendered beings all too suit-

able for enacting dominant and subordinate roles. Because they think in psychological terms and operate with an essentialist understanding of gender, the men take feminist criticism of patriarchal institutions personally and seek to defend themselves against it. They experience this social criticism as an indictment of their moral worth as men.

Many of the men react especially sharply because they see themselves as advocates of equality for women. (Most of the men in the group I studied supported liberal feminist positions.) What this means is that some of the men have experienced *radical* feminist criticism of men as a kind of betrayal. Many of the men tried hard all their lives to please women. And then women, or at least some women, turned on them, criticizing them for what they could not help being: men.

What the mythopoetic men want to do is to reinvest the identity 'man' with new moral value. Anything feminist or profeminist is seen as a threat to this project. The NOMAS profeminist position is thus tainted. Profeminist men, as seen from the mythopoetic perspective, have bought into the feminist perspective that shames men. This is not what mythopoetic men want, which is anything but more shame and guilt. NOMAS may claim to "enhance men's lives," but it doesn't celebrate masculinity or manhood *per se*, and so it promises little or nothing by way of immediate gains in self-acceptance or in feelings of worth as a man.

To sum this up: another reason the mythopoetic men don't flock to NOMAS is that the profeminist NOMAS stance is perceived as feminist-inspired political dogma, which is accepted by men who are willing to let themselves be shamed by, or used by, women. The profeminist NOMAS stance is not seen as growing out of a sociopolitical analysis of unequal gender arrangements because the mythopoetic men don't see gender as a social construction; because they don't have a clear view of structural inequalities between women and men; and because they are focused on their own psychological troubles.

#### POLITICS AS AN OBSTACLE TO SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND COMMUNITAS

I don't think the mythopoetics are an unusual or unusually troubled group of men. For the most part they are quite ordinary. This means that in being socialized to manhood they were taught to repress many of their feelings. It also means that as they pursued careers and raised families, they experienced

much isolation from other men. What they're now seeking, in addition to self-acceptance, is to receive the emotional part of themselves that has been repressed, and to achieve emotional communion with other men. A political analysis of their circumstances would probably not be of much help in doing these things.

Part of the mythopoetic philosophy is that men raised in our society are taught to "live in their heads," that is, to be rational to the point of being emotionally numb. Getting out of this debilitating way of being is said to require taking a risky, emotional path into the psyche. A sociopolitical analysis of gender inequality simply wouldn't do the trick. In fact, it would probably have the opposite effect of encouraging the men to think and talk in an abstract, intellectual manner. This kind of talk would "come from the head and not the heart." It thus wouldn't do much to help the men explore the inner reaches of their psyches or to gain knowledge of themselves as emotional beings. The sociopolitical discourse that is associated with NOMAS's gender politics is thus unappealing.

The other problem with collective political analysis is that it leads to arguments. This is not what the mythopoetic men seek at their gatherings. They do not want to compete over whose interpretation of social reality is correct. They want to make emotional connections with other men. They want untroubled brotherhood in which their feelings are validated. They want what Victor Turner calls "communitas."<sup>3</sup> When discussions at mythopoetic gatherings turn political, inadvertently, and disagreements surface and tensions arise, someone will usually say, "we're getting away from the important work here." The important work being maintaining a mood of fellow-feeling.

The main problem is that the mythopoetic movement does not provide men with tools for reflecting on the sexism that is deeply ingrained in all men socialized in male-supremacist societies. In fact, in celebrating maleness and masculinity, albeit nontraditional masculinity, there is inevitably a great deal of sexist baggage that comes along for the ride. When the group doing the celebrating consists of men only—men who want acceptance and validation of their feelings from other men—challenges to expressions of sexism are less likely to be made. While the mythopoetic men by and large do not engage in "woman bashing," there is a great deal of low-level, unconscious sexism evident in their talk and behavior.

Two qualifications to this account are necessary. One is that the mythopoetic men are generally not apolitical in the sense of being uninformed, apathetic, and socially unconscious. The men in the group I studied are generally left-liberal in their politics, informed about current political events, and

supportive of progressive causes. But they are willing to compartmentalize politics and emotion work so that they can get what they want out of their mythopoetic activities. As one man said in response to an earlier version of these remarks, "I don't go into the woods to be socially responsible. . . . When I want to be socially responsible I march, write letters, and sign petitions."

The second qualification is that at least one prominent mythopoetic teacher, James Hillman, disparages the easy separation of the emotional and the political. He has argued that men's feelings of grief and anguish often have a real basis in the lousy state of the eternal world, and that if we dissipate these feelings in therapy instead of using them to propel political action, then we're not doing what we should.<sup>4</sup> In Hillman's view, political action can be a path to personal growth. Some mythopoetic men are taking Hillman seriously and looking for ways to turn their emotional energies toward social action. Others cling to the notion that personal healing must be complete before such action is undertaken.

#### HOMOPHOBIA AND INVISIBLE PRIVILEGES

The mythopoetic men are predominantly self-identified as heterosexual, although a substantial proportion (a fourth to a third, by my estimate) have interest in homoerotic contact with other men. Despite their recognition that homophobia is a problem—because it keeps men isolated from each other and afraid to show affection for each other—the mythopoetics definitely want to reaffirm their heterosexual identities. This is evident in the practice of qualifying any expression of desire for physical affection or touch from other men with the caveat that the desire is for *nonsexual* contact. Homophobia is also evident in the concern the men show for public perceptions of their activities. In an interview a man told me that one reason he didn't like media coverage of men's retreats was that it fostered misperceptions. "The camera might show us dancing," he said, "and people would think we're a bunch of gay guys."

NOMAS is known to the mythopoetic men to include a large number of gay men. One mythopoetic publication labeled the profeminist branch of the men's movement the "profeminist/gay affirmative" branch, thus highlighting the association with gay men. Even more revealing was the statement, in the same place, that "heterophobic gays and bisexuals far outnumber straight men" in the profeminist men's movement.<sup>5</sup> This statement reflects a percep-

tion of NOMAS as hostile territory for heterosexual men. How might such a perception have been formed? I would guess that it is the result of challenges to heterosexist behavior.

If the mythopoetic men reject homophobia in principle, why should the presence of gay men in NOMAS bother them? I think part of the reason is a vestige of the homophobia that gets instilled in men raised in heterosexist societies. But something more is revealed by the use of the term “heterophobic” to describe the gay men involved in the profeminist men’s movement. One thing that is revealed here is a resistance to giving up two invisible privileges of middle-class, heterosexual, white manhood. The first privilege is not having to defend the value of one’s identities. The second is not having to critically reflect on the habits—the assumptions of superiority or at least normality—that come from being socialized as a member of the dominant group.

The term heterophobic also implies a symmetry of oppression between gays and straights. The suggestion is that if gay men object to heterosexist behavior on the part of straight men, this is being heterophobic, which is no different from homophobic straights criticizing gays and lesbians. I see reflected here the same absurd notions of symmetrical oppression upon which men’s rights thinking is based.<sup>6</sup> Just as feminist criticism of men is dismissed as “neo-sexist,” gay criticism of heterosexist behavior is dismissed as heterophobia. The immense power imbalances that characterize relations between gays and straights and women and men are thus swept from consciousness.

The mythopoetic men are allergic to criticism, all of which tends to be discredited as shaming or wounding. Only a group that is secure in its power and status can get away with dismissing its critics in this way. The mythopoetic men have the privilege of ignoring feminist criticism and so they’re not going to go out of their way to get more of it in NOMAS. By the same token, the mythopoetic men are unused to being members of a minority. Hence they fear being outnumbered by allegedly heterophobic gays. The common thread here is a desire to protect a safe place—the mythopoetic movement—where they can feel strong and close ranks against threats to their invisible privileges.

### CONNECTING HEADS AND HEARTS

The story of the mythopoetic movement is still unfolding. I think the movement can be steered, which is part of what I’m trying to do. I want to docu-

ment, interpret, and intervene. I think it is possible to inject more feminist consciousness into the movement, if it's done right. Two things that have to be done are, first, to respect where the men are at psychologically, and two, to show how a sociological analysis of gender inequalities can be not only guilt and shame alleviating, but ultimately more empowering than any psychological view.

If the mythopoetic men can be shown how their desires for self-acceptance, authenticity, and supportive community can be achieved only through a transformation of society that includes eliminating class, race, and gender inequalities, then they will come along. Their hearts are in the right places in many ways. The hard part will be the recognition, and the resistance it evokes, that such a transformation will entail the loss of some of the power and privileges these men now take for granted.

What I would like to see, in other words, is the mythopoetic men link their rejection of the iron cage of rationality, of alienated work, of competitive relationships among men, and of soulless culture, to a project that recognizes how these things harm us all, men and women—and more so people of color and working-class women and men than relatively well-off middle-class white men. This will require sociological thinking and a more radical political consciousness—as some feminist women argued almost twenty years ago. In speaking of “men’s liberation,” Carol Hanisch hoped that men would get in touch with what the mythopoetics might today call their lover and warrior energies:

Women want men to be bold—boldly honest, aggressive in their human pursuits. Boldly passionate, sexual and sensual. And women want this for themselves. It's time men became boldly radical. Daring to go to the root of their own exploitation and seeing that it is not women or “sex roles” or “society” causing their unhappiness, but capitalists and capitalism. It's time men dare to name and fight these, their real exploiters.<sup>7</sup>

Taking up this challenge will require embracing an analysis that recognizes the role of elite white *men*—those who run the capitalist economy and its lapdog government—in orchestrating the reproduction of the iron cage, of alienated work, of homogenized culture, and of competitive social relationships. Feminist theory offers some of the most powerful intellectual tools available for making these connections. As I see it, the task is to get mythopoetic men to recognize the moral imperative, which ought to resonate with what is already in their hearts, to take up these tools, or their equivalents, and work to dismantle the iron cage rather than just to spring themselves from it temporarily.

## NOTES

This is a revised version of a talk given at the 17th National Conference on Men and Masculinity, sponsored by the National Organization for Men Against Sexism, July 1992, Chicago. Thanks to Sherryl Kleinman for helpful comments on earlier drafts.

1. For a full account of my study, see *Unlocking the Iron Cage: Understanding the Mythopoetic Men's Movement* (New York: Oxford, 1995).

2. *Wingspan: Inside the Men's Movement*, ed. C. Harding (New York: St. Martin's, 1992), xiv.

3. See V. Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969), 131-65.

4. Hillman has made this point in statements at mythopoetic gatherings and in a number of articles reprinted in mythopoetic publications. This is the main theme of his book of conversations and letters with Michael Ventura. See J. Hillman and M. Ventura, *We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy—and the World's Getting Worse* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

5. *Wingspan: Inside the Men's Movement*, ed. C. Harding (New York: St. Martin's, 1992), xiv.

6. For an analysis of the tortured logic upon which men's rights thinking is based, see K. Clatterbaugh, *Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1990), 61-83.

7. C. Hanisch, "Men's Liberation," in ed. Kathie Sarachild, *Feminist Revolution—An Abridged Edition with Additional Writing* (New York: Random House, 1978), 76. I first saw this quotation in bell hook's essay, "Men: Comrades in Struggle," which appears in her book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984).

# In Defense of the Men's Movements

DON SHEWEY

## AN EXERCISE IN SACRED SPACE

Think about something tender. Think about something sacred. Think about something that makes you cry. Think about a romance that made you love every living creature, a loss you didn't think you could bear, a death that opened the bottomless pit of mortality below you.

Now imagine talking about it to someone you barely know standing in a noisy bar in Grand Central Station at rush hour.

That's what it's like trying to discuss what's called "the men's movement" in the media.

But a crowded bar in Grand Central Station is not the right place to talk publicly about love or inner life. You need sacred space—ritual space. "Change or transformation can happen only when a man or woman is in ritual space," poet Robert Bly elaborates in his bestseller, *Iron John*. "A man or woman remains inside this heated space (as in Sufi ritual dance) for a relatively brief time, and then returns to ordinary consciousness." Just as the feminist movement emboldened women to do consciousness-raising and ritualizing without men, men have discovered that they can only do certain kinds of soul work without women present to perform for or to try to please. Around the country, men are creating ritual space where they can enter and sustain a discourse on the male psyche, initiation, poetry, excess, desire, grief, shame, and the Three Stooges.

Women would probably be surprised at how little time is spent at these gatherings talking about them. The subtext of the question "Where are we at as men?" is not men's relationship to women but to the world. What can

be done about the environment, the economy, education, AIDS? What can men do? How come good men don't seem to get things done these days, while the retrogressive Republican ideologues behind Reagan and Bush seem to have no trouble moving their agenda? One thing that can be said about right-wing conservatives is that they're generally religious people or, at any rate, churchgoers, meaning that they recognize some transpersonal commitment. Many Americans (including many on the left) have no such navigational system, no attachment to something beyond material reality. It's unfashionable even to talk about God.

Robert Bly and the other teachers who lead men's gatherings hardly ever invoke the deity, and when they do, they talk about the gods. What they're doing is holy work nevertheless. Fortunately, they don't claim to have all the answers. "We're going to talk about the male psyche tonight, a subject about which we know almost nothing," I once heard Bly say at the beginning of a program. "We always say a few things that are true, but we don't know which ones they are."

#### WHO ARE THESE MEN?

It's a beautiful Saturday morning on the campus of the New Mexico School for the Deaf, and 500 men fighting spring fever are lining up to enter the James A. Little Theater through the stage door. In the hallway, a shirtless man is dancing wildly and whooping; from behind him wafts the rumble of drumming. As we get closer to the entrance, a sense of chaos radiates, ever-stronger, from the other side. A tunnel of pine branches has been constructed as a sort of ritual birth canal. Just before I stoop to go through, the gatekeeper (a balding man in a flannel shirt and jeans) leans to whisper in my ear, "Let your movements be a blessing."

In a flash I'm through. I stumble into bright lights, a thicket of drummers, men coming at me, the steady pulse of clapping. Where am I? Suddenly, there's Bly, in my face, his blue eyes going all googly behind his steel-framed glasses, his long arms waving and wiggling like flapping wings. He's dancing like a big, silly silver-haired walrus in Tom Wolfe-white trousers and a blue brocade vest. I lock into his gaze and go into my own basic boogaloo, and we dance together across what turns out to be the stage of the auditorium before he shakes my hand and points me down the stairs to the audience. Pleased to meet ya.

I look back and notice that some guys accept the invitation to dance, but

most just stagger offstage looking dazed. The house is already full of guys standing and clapping. Led by mythologist and frequent Bly collaborator Michael Meade, a fireball of energy who beats out the tempo on a cowbell, they're chanting "Go back-back, go back-back, go back-back, go back!" At least half the men are locals; they're the ones with tans wearing shorts and greeting one another with hugs. The rest of us make small talk with the first friendly face or circulate like lone wolves looking to connect with that secret buddy in the crowd. I would venture to guess, though, that I'm not the only one wondering, "Who are these men?"

That's what everyone wants to know. What kind of men go to men's gatherings? And what goes on there? Looking to answer those questions, partly out of personal interest and partly out of journalistic curiosity, I've spent the last year attending men's gatherings of various descriptions, including three different conferences conducted by Bly, Meade, and psychologist James Hillman. The first was the event in Santa Fe, a two-day seminar last April in Santa Fe sponsored by the C. G. Jung Society of New Mexico. For the First Multicultural Men's Conference, held in May in Buffalo Gap, West Virginia, those three guys invited three black teachers—playwright Joseph Walker, poet and essayist Haki Madhubuti (ne Don Luther Lee), and Burkina Faso-born scholar Malidoma Some—to spend a week sharing cabins in the woods with 50 black men and 50 white men. Early in November, Bly, Hillman, and Meade (sounds like the men's movement equivalent of Crosby, Stills and Nash, doesn't it?) took over the Manhattan Center ballroom on West 34th Street for another two-day seminar sponsored by a local men's group, On the Common Ground.

The week in Buffalo Gap was a historic occasion beyond anyone's expectations, and it deserves its own in-depth report. This article will focus on the two-day events in Santa Fe and New York in some detail, as a way to get beyond the media stereotypes to the substance of what Bly has called "men's work."

The media—TV, magazines, newspapers—have picked up the scent of something fresh and wild and intriguing going on with these men, but they don't know exactly how to deal with it. The usual media handles are missing; the men with the ideas don't consider themselves celebrities, so they've declined offers to go on *Donahue* and *Oprah*. Spiritual transformation cannot be televised. So the media basically make fun of the whole thing. Mock the leaders, mock their attire, mock their rituals, reduce their ideas to cartoon clichés, mock the clichés, ignore the content, chase the animal into a trap and kill it. How many articles have you read about "guys out in the woods

banging on drums and dancing around fires” that make it all sound like the most ludicrous kind of pretentious, self-indulgent, corny, macho bullshit behavior in the world?

The general impression seems to be summed up in one of Matt Groening’s “Life in Hell” cartoons, an ad for “Akbar & Jeff’s Wild Man Weekend,” which advises participants to bring “1 loincloth (or bikini-style underpants), 1 jar of warpaint (wife or girlfriend’s lipstick OK), 1 large cigar, and \$300.” The schedule of activities includes nude jumping jacks at dawn, chest pounding, flower sniffing, and a lecture on “How to Fantasize About Sleeping with Lots of Attractive Women.” It’s a hilarious cartoon, and it perfectly illustrates that hip, sophisticated way we have of equating things with their marketing—dismissing a movie because of its trailer, judging candidates by the quality of their television commercials, discussing books on the basis of their reviews. Why not? You can learn a lot about animals by examining their shit. Not everything, though.

Here are some of the kinds of men people *think* go to men’s gatherings: macho men wanting to be macho together; wimpy men wanting to be macho men; gay men wanting to fuck each other. These, of course, are categories (along with “yuppie” and “New Age devotee”) that few self-respecting middle-class American men would admit to belonging to. I’ve been to enough men’s gatherings, though, to know that all these varieties are indeed likely to show up.

Here are some other varieties (none of them mutually exclusive). *The isolated*—these guys are hungry to be around other men, especially men who will talk more than TV-talk (instant opinions, soundbites, punch lines). *The wounded*—wounded by divorce, alcoholism, substance abuse, medical mistreatment, bad luck. A surprising number of men turn out to have been sexually abused as children. Then there are *the numb*—they’ve got all the exterior signs of success (good career, happy home life) but they have no inner life. They’ve just turned 35 or 45 or 55 and they feel life is passing them by; they realize they’ve been sleeping and they need to *wake up*.

There’s another bunch of guys heavily represented at men’s gatherings who don’t get mentioned much. They might be called “the responsible men.” These are men who accept that almost any urgent problem facing the world today (homelessness, racism, destruction of the planet’s natural resources, poor education, abuse of women and children) can be traced directly to the male sex—to the greed, low self-esteem, sexual insecurity, cynicism, and spiritual poverty of individual men. They accept that men, too, are victimized by patriarchal values. They accept that electoral politics and mass

demonstrations are a limited solution at best. They accept that every man who has the strength, ability, education, and courage to do something to change the world for the better has a personal responsibility to do so.

They accept that the capacity to change has to be cultivated within oneself before it can be expressed outwardly, but then it *must* be expressed outwardly. They accept that—despite some women's fear and suspicion that male bonding is exclusionary, dangerous, and destructive—there is great creative potential in men working together for change. They accept that getting men to love, value, and honor the child within, the man within, the woman within is a giant step toward loving, valuing, and honoring men, women, and children outside. They don't necessarily know how to do that or even how to begin, but many of the men who show up at men's gatherings recognize that the work has to start somewhere and they're ready to do it.

At least that's the impression I get from the men I encounter at gatherings. The median age is early forties. (This men's work doesn't speak to young men as dramatically as it does to those who've been around the block and had the stuffing knocked out of them once or twice.) It doesn't surprise me that there are a lot of doctors, health-care workers, and therapists around; soul work is essentially healing work. It also doesn't surprise me that there are few men of color. American society is ruled by straight white men, and that's the group within whom profound changes must take place before profound changes can be made in the world.

But finally, the most truthful answers to the question "Who are these men?" are specific ones. Among the men I meet in Santa Fe are: Steven, a divorced potter who lives in Taos; Jim, a schoolteacher from Michigan who lives on a Navajo reservation where his wife works as a doctor; Thomas, a gay priest from the Midwest who was forced to resign from his job after being outed by a fellow priest; and Scott, a farmer who grows alfalfa for cattle in Colorado.

In New York, I mostly hang out with Dirk, a cabinetmaker from Katonah whom I met at Buffalo Gap, and the three friends he's nudged into taking the workshop. Russell, a red-haired, wise-cracking, emotionally free carpenter, has been on a spiritual journey for a couple of years since he took his wife and kids to North Dakota to spend time with a Native shaman. Walter, a black social worker who trains inner-city kids in workplace literacy skills, is drawn to the men's work specifically to get ideas about mentoring young black men. Meanwhile, Al, an Italian-American lawyer from Westchester who probably spends most of his professional life playing it close to the vest,

seems nervous, intrigued, and a little over his head in this hotbed of masculine expressiveness.

Talking to these men, I recognize in each of their stories reflections of my own quest to hitch the wagon of my talents, education, and good intentions to a larger purpose. And as a group, these individuals represent a perfect cross-section of the different degrees of readiness and apprehension with which people approach the men's work.

### SLIPPERY DEVIL

There's no question that most people are drawn to these events because they want to be around Robert Bly, who after decades of renown as a poet, translator, and antiwar activist has become the indisputable star of the men's consciousness movement. Though hardly the first to gain prominence writing about contemporary men, Bly has been leading men's conferences since 1981 and developing his ideas in print since his landmark 1982 interview with Keith Thompson called "What Men Really Want."

But Bly entered the mass American brain almost overnight when his interview with Bill Moyers, *A Gathering of Men*, was broadcast on PBS in January of 1990. That documentary has become practically the Magna Carta of the men's spirituality movement; I once heard an elderly man say he'd watched the video three times in one week and found himself sobbing each time. In our post-literate culture, any TV show reaches more people than any book. Still, *Iron John*, Bly's unclassifiable volume of literary analysis, philosophy, and cultural criticism, was on the *New York Times* hardcover best seller list for over a year.

It's funny what that "leader" business brings out in people, though, and it's fascinating to see how Bly deals with it. When someone steps into the spotlight and commands attention, two things tend to happen. That person instantly attracts resentment, suspicion, attitude. Especially among the intelligentsia, anything that smacks of spiritual or visionary leadership kicks off an allergic reaction to gurus. Notice how in recent years the word *guru*, a beneficent Hindu term for teacher that literally refers to one who leads people "from the darkness to the light," has been transformed into a pejorative term, synonymous with *charlatan*. That probably has to do with the other strong reaction to leaders deeply embedded in the American character, which is the thirst for a savior, the willingness to surrender one's own flawed

self to follow note-for-note the program of someone who seems to know better.

Bly circumvents those knee-jerk reactions by being as off-putting and unpredictable as possible. Just when you're beginning to see him as a wise old man, he reveals a little boy's delight in dirty jokes. Just when you're admiring him as a repository of guru-like wisdom, he makes some insulting remark about Tibetans. Just when you're ready to dismiss him as a gruff macho poseur, he whips out some delicate bit of verse or remarks knowingly about joy or ecstasy. Try to compliment him, and he'll either thank you or bite your head off. He's a trickster, a clown, a slippery devil.

I was very put off by him at first. Watching *A Gathering of Men*, I hated his voice with its combination of Midwestern mushmouth, mean-father barking, and sarcastic mimicry. As a writer, I chafed at the vagueness of his language ("There's a lot of grief around men these days . . ."). Listening to an audio-cassette (the post-literate equivalent of the literary essay) called "The Naive Male," I found myself torn between agreeing with compelling and surprising truths and violently objecting to vast overgeneralizations and undue put-downs. And I couldn't stand his habit of snapping "You understand me?" or "Is that clear?" to bully a response out of audiences.

When I finally got over my resistance to Bly and sat down with *Iron John*, I was pleased to discover that he not only practices that quality in Roland Barthes that Susan Sontag superbly describes as "a festive (rather than dogmatic or credulous) relation to ideas" but also encourages it in others. It's surely no accident that Bly begins many of his readings with a poem by Antonio Machado called "Walker," which deflects the guru worship of would-be cult followers by declaring the non-existence of The Way: "We make the path by walking."

Women have a whole other set of fears about this men's work. Some women see the idea of a men's movement as a kind of nightmare, especially at this moment in the wake of the Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill hearings. As one friend says over dinner, "Women feel totally oppressed by men, and the idea of them going off in the woods to worship maleness makes me very nervous." One of the most commonly heard sentiments was expressed in *Newsweek's* cover story, "What Do Men Really Want?": "If middle-class males have the lion's share of economic, political and sexual power in this country, why are many of them so unhappy?"

There's no denying the inequities between men and women in American society. But it's also a mistake not to notice that men are asking the same questions. "If men have all the power in the world, why do I feel so power-

less?" A lot of the hostility between men and women stems from misunderstanding and miscommunication (as Deborah Tannen so lucidly lays out in *You Just Don't Understand*). One thing that we fall into is making vast generalizations about men and women that quickly take the form of polar opposites. If men are powerful, women are powerless. Another way that works is that the categories become mutually exclusive. If men are competitive, then women are not and cannot be. Or that if women feel pain, men don't.

The media have stoked women's fears by portraying the men's movement as hordes of men gathering in packs trying to become the same man: a wild-haired, chest-thumping, cigar-chomping, woman-crushing he-man. And there are various factions of the men's movement that provide ammunition for that attack. There are groups of aggrieved men who want to circulate "The New Male Manifesto" and wear buttons that say "Save the Males." And there are numerous men's gatherings where the leaders put participants through paramilitary exercises with the idea of getting them to reclaim their abandoned masculinity, snap out of their passivity around women and authority figures, "get their balls back." I've been to one of those men's weekends that promises nothing less than "a 20th century initiation into manhood." Those gatherings sometimes do a lot of good, especially for men who've been walking around asleep for 40 years. The danger of turning out these cookie-cutter "new warriors," of course, is that it locates the essence of a man on the outside—how he walks, how he talks, how he looks. And that's hardly an alternative to the philosophy of the ghetto or the Army that you can turn a boy into a man by giving him a gun.

To me the most impressive thing about the mythopoetic men's movement, as exemplified by Bly, Hillman, and Meade, is that it scrupulously avoids indoctrinating men with some est-like formula of behavior. When Bly talks about men getting in touch with the "wild man" inside, he's not suggesting that corporate types go marching into business meetings with warpaint and a tomahawk any more than he's advocating taking teenagers from Crown Heights into Prospect Park, starving them for three days, and circumcising them without anesthetic.

I've noticed that many people have opinions about Robert Bly without knowing anything about the ideas he and others doing men's work disseminate. It doesn't surprise me. After all, more people have seen the parody of Bly on *Murphy Brown* than the Moyers interview on PBS. More people have seen pictures of Bly in his trademark, multicolor-striped vest than have bought *Iron John*. And I think it's safe to say that more people have bought

the book than have read it. So I'll mention just a few of the key ideas that run through Bly's writing and speaking about men.

One is that many contemporary American men suffer from a lack of initiation—by which he means not just the brutal physical trials we usually associate with male initiation (fraternity hazing, army basic training) but also the emotional and spiritual instruction from elders required for men to grow into maturity as integrated individuals. Without initiation (whose ingredients include separation from the mother, symbolic wounding, an encounter with another reality, and being welcomed into a community of older men), a man often has no understanding of his capacity for pain, no concept of rites of passage or cycles of life. He remains a boy in an adult man's body, to whom life just seems like one blurry skidmark from graduation to the grave.

The behavior of uninitiated males, Bly contends, has given a bad name to masculinity, which is surrounded entirely by negative associations and held responsible for all the ills of the world. This situation has given rise to what he calls the "soft" or "naive" male who, in rejecting the aggressive and obnoxious male traits that women dislike, has also abandoned the forceful and heroic aspects of masculinity, to the detriment of society.

To analyze what's missing from contemporary men and to seek reparation, Bly turns to folk tales and myths from ancient cultures to find richer, deeper, more complex images of masculinity than those in today's pop culture, which glorifies the macho (Arnold Schwarzenegger) and the money-mad (Donald Trump) and ridicules almost every other kind of man as impotent, foolish, or wimpy. In stories, as in dreams, every character is you, so mythology offers men a variety of kings, magicians, warriors, lovers, and clowns to model. In particular, Bly has latched onto the Grimm Brothers' story "Iron John," whose central character is a wild hairy man whom Bly discusses as an initiatory figure, a source of spontaneity and natural wisdom through whom a young man gains tools with which to face the ups and downs of life.

To combat women's complaint that men have no feelings, Bly has proposed his own set of underrecognized male modes of feelings, and first among them is grief. Sometimes that grief is traceable to an absent father, a failed romance, a lost child, a shattered dream, but often, says Bly, "Men feel a very deep grief that has no cause." To honor that grief and not deny it, he stresses the need for periods of "dwelling in the ashes." As he pointed out to a Philadelphia radio interviewer, "Our agricultural system is a disaster, our relationship with children and the schools is a disaster, the relationship to the blacks is a disaster, to single women raising children, the whole

thing—and we're hiring president after president who says, 'This is wonderful, and we're doing great.' ”

Another masculine tradition Bly likes to emphasize comes from David Gilmore's anthropological study *Manhood in the Making*. In most cultures, Bly reports, “A man is defined as a person who goes to the center of the village and speaks his mind. If you don't, you're considered a trash man.” Bly himself doesn't hesitate to speak up—maybe you've noticed—and he doesn't mince words. Last spring, at the height of patriotic revelry over the triumph of Operation Desert Storm, Bly repeatedly reviled the Gulf War as “shameful,” the media coverage as “disgusting,” and the display of yellow ribbons as “cowardly.”

Appearing with Deborah Tannen at Cooper Union the night before the men's weekend, Bly wasted no time voicing his opinion on the Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill affair. “She was obviously telling the truth,” he said, to thunderous applause. “There's no greater reason for the men's movement than to look at this hearing,” he continued. “Hatch, Simpson—these guys are fossilized fragments of the patriarchy disguised as Republicans. On the other side, we have the Democrats, who are nothing. *Is that it for men in the United States??*”

On the lecture circuit, Bly could make a fortune going around by himself preaching his Wild Man gospel. And he does do a fair share of solo poetry readings and “A Day for Men with Robert Bly” workshops. Most of the time, though, he travels with Meade, the Seattle-based mythologist whom he met in 1979 through their shared love of Irish storytelling, and James Hillman, the renegade psychologist who was director of studies at the Jung Institute in Zurich after Jung's death and subsequently turned Jungian theory upside down with books like *Re-Visioning Psychology* and *The Dream and the Underworld*.

Other fellow travelers on this journey sometimes include Robert Moore, the Southern-drawling psychologist best-known for his study of male archetypes *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover* (co-authored with Douglas Gillette), and wilderness expert John Stokes, who earned his reputation as a tracker by undergoing wilderness training with native teachers in North America, Hawaii, and Australia. After the multicultural men's conference in West Virginia, Bly expanded the crew to include Haki Madhubuti, who offers poems and perceptions from his provocative studies of African-American culture (most recently *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous?*), and Malidoma Some, who rivets men's gatherings with his recollections of his initiation as a member of the Dagara tribe.

Appearing with a posse serves two functions: it cuts the ego inflation and media attention that gravitates to lone superstars, and it gives the men who come to these conferences a living, breathing model of a community of men in which joking, grieving, disagreeing, being silly, and saying important things are not only possible but encouraged.

### PLAYING IN THE BAND

Every men's gathering I've been to has had a touch of theatricality to it: there's generally a scenario, a script of sorts, often a star, some audience participation. The Bly, Hillman, and Meade weekends seem especially like theater, and by theater I mean the way the Greeks originally thought of it—as an opportunity for the community of citizens to gather and, in a formal way, discuss the things that matter to them. Over the course of the weekend, the guys on stage read poems, tell stories, play music, lead songs and chants, ask questions, interact with the audience, tell jokes, and instigate anger and dancing, returning again and again to matters of importance to men in American society. It feels like nothing so much as a town meeting, only the community in question exists not on the map but in the hearts of men.

The theme for the weekend in Santa Fe is “The Community of Men and the Language of Desire,” so the program begins with a round of poems about desire. Meade, a round-faced Irishman with a Prince Valiant haircut, accompanies himself on Cuban tackhead conga, while Bly occasionally plucks at a bouzouki, which, he admits, is more of a stage prop than an instrument he knows how to play. It fascinates me that this branch of the men's movement revolves around poetry; going to poetry readings seems like the ultimate sissy pastime. I suppose only someone as big and gruff and eminent as Robert Bly could make the case for reclaiming eloquence and verbal decoration as male virtues. Throughout the weekend, the poems are not beside the point, not a lull or a diversion from the real stuff—they provide some of the major statements and images that recur in the discourse. Good stuff, too: Auden, Neruda, Garcia Lorca, William Stafford, Sharon Olds, Bly's own work (of course), a surprisingly wild piece from Carl Sandburg. “We didn't get that one in high school,” notes Bly, “we just got the *fog* creeping in on fucking *cat's feet*.”

After Meade reads the Blake poem that begins “Man was made for joy and woe,” Bly asks him to repeat it, this time dedicated to Etheridge Knight, the black poet who died recently of cancer at the age of 55. Addicted to

heroin after being wounded in the Korean War, Knight spent years going in and out of prison, where he started writing. Bly befriended him and coaxed him into the usually all-white environment of men's gatherings. Knight made one of his last appearances at a reading with Bly in Indianapolis, looking every bit as sick as he was. A friend who was there told me that, after Knight left the stage, Bly bawled for two minutes before he could continue.

Today Bly reminisces a little about Knight and reads a wonderful, salty self-interview poem called "Welcome Back, Mr. Knight, Love of My Life" ("How's your pussy problem?/Your lady-on-top-smiling-like-God-titty-in-your-mouth problem?"). Hillman continues with more Knight, a litany of imprecations: fuck this, fuck that, "Fuck everything/I want my woman back so my soul can sing." "A Jungian theme song," Hillman suggests. "Fuck Scotty Peck," Bly throws in (a reference to the author of the self-help best-seller *The Road Not Travelled*). This quickly becomes the all-purpose expression of the weekend. When Meade says, "Women have access to a wide range of emotions and can switch from one to another—men are slower at it, so they get accused of not having feelings," someone in the audience calls out, "Fuck that!"

Some men's gatherings, even ones that revolve around celebrated guests, hew to a circular structure that encourages group intimacy, easy exchange of ideas, and socializing. Sooner or later, you pass a talisman or talking stick around the circle and say who you are and why you're here. Not at this event. It's strictly a frontal situation, The Big Guys onstage, the rest of us locked in theater seats with limited leg and elbow room. They talk, we listen. The number of people taking notes reinforces the university-lecture feeling.

But if you're going to listen to three guys talk all weekend, this is a pretty good group. For one thing, they're all strikingly different from one another in looks, demeanor, and expertise. And in the course of the weekend each has a role to play, both in the sense of function and of character. Bly is the bard who looks inward for the truth of a situation, the grand old man whose seniority and temperament cast him as the master of ceremonies—he decides when it's time to move along. Meade is the communal storyteller who constantly monitors the temperature of the group feeling and tries to keep everyone happy (often smoothing the feathers Bly ruffles). And Hillman is the resident intellectual whose references to philosophy, psychology, and classical mythology create a challenging mental obstacle course along the path to the male psyche. Not just an academic but an original thinker, he gives each idea his own crazy spin; replace his tweedy wardrobe with a cape and staff, and you'd call him a sorcerer or holy fool.

The camaraderie among them is also inspiring to observe, especially for men exploring how to do soul work in groups. Rather than sprawling across the stage, they huddle quite close together, almost in formation, like a doo-wop group. (Each has his own microphone, though. The entire weekend is being recorded—of course!—and you can order the tapes before the show and pick them up a half-hour after it ends.) Actually, a jazz combo would probably be the better analogy. The three of them have played together a lot, but not so much that they've memorized the script. They like to keep things loose and surprise one another. So it seems as much for their own sake as for the audience's that they begin the conference in earnest with each making a statement—taking a solo, as it were, on the theme of *Why I'm Doing This Men's Work*.

Hillman addresses the social value of men's work head-on. "In the early '70s," he says, "you frequently heard this expression: 'Let me share this with you.' Now you hear 'I don't want to know about that' or 'I know.' It seems to me the one thing of uppermost importance now is that men meet to talk with each other about the contemporary world, from their hearts. If not, we turn all talk over to the media.

"What matters now is: where is the republic going? Have we crossed the border into empire, where all that's important is circuses, propaganda, and centurions? This is serious. The Jewish French philosopher Levinas says that the fundamental aspect of human life is ethics, and that ethics is constellated by a face. But in technological warfare, you see blips, not faces. We can't have an ethical reaction if we haven't see the faces of the enemy; we only see the commentators on CNN. So our reactions are paralyzed. Shame, paralysis, responsibility, anger—these things have to be expressed, and not privately. That's why I'm here: we have to express our feelings, so that we don't stop talking."

It's not surprising that Hillman should talk more about ideas than about himself, but he does say one thing you don't hear men say very often: "The ability to bring my intellect out into the public and share it is enjoyable—a blessing."

By contrast, Bly links his soul work directly to personal history. "In high school my emotions were a complete mystery to me," he says. "I went to my father and asked for protection, but he was wild and dangerous psychologically, and he said no. When my mother said yes, I went numb from my neck to my knees. To accept my mother's protection, I had to learn to think and feel like a woman—that was the deal. I decided to have no emotion at all,

rather than have a woman's. I learned to fake it," he adds slyly, "by quoting poems from Yeats.

"My mother didn't really protect me, though. A lot of stuff went on in the household that she ignored. So where's the protection going to come from? In my twenties, if a woman seemed strong, I'd enlist. Does that work, to let a woman protect you?" Men in the audience call out various answers (including, "She's the one who we need protection from"). "I found more and more I was receiving protection from men," Bly says, "especially when I started doing some work with Joseph Campbell. What I said *interested* him, and that interest was a blessing. It made me more able to be with other men. I get a blessing from these three men," he says, gesturing toward the others onstage.

"The other thing is this," he continues. "Every family gives you a wound. In mine, it was my father's alcoholism. Where does healing take place? In the family? Isn't that crazy? The wound has to be healed by the gender that gave it to you. Groups of men have done it for me. I urge you, when you leave here, to join a small group of six or seven men. It's a fundamental experience."

"Ho," someone calls out. I cringe a little inside. This is one of the things people make fun of about men's gatherings. "Ho!" is a Native American expression that can mean "Amen, brother" or "Good point"—it's the butch equivalent of a drag queen's snaphology. Acceptable in the ritual atmosphere of, say, a sweat lodge, it seems hokey in this setting. I think I'd prefer "Fuck that!"

"My father's been dead for 12 years," begins Michael Meade's narrative. "He died from depression and loss. He was a truck driver, and when I was a boy I became seriously curious about what was keeping my father alive. The best answer came one day when I found a violin stored away in the basement. He'd had it since he was a child. He'd never learned to play it, but he never got rid of it. That's what brings me to these things—I'm trying to avoid giving up my desires in life. Many men, when they take on the responsibility of family and work, they stop dancing. That feeling of being big inside goes away. It's the love of art, music, languages, the foolishness of our own desires that keeps us alive."

He pulls out a quote from Albert Camus: "Man's work is nothing but a slow trek to rediscover through the detours of art those one or two images in whose presence his heart first opened." He reads it again to let it sink in.

"I'm here looking for more opportunities to do that, to go back," Meade says. "The other side of it is that I feel the eyes of my children watching me.

I spend a lot of time with adolescents, and they're scared about what's going on in the world. They don't hear enough conversation among adults. What's needed to heal their confusion and despair is art and ritual. That's what's missing in our society, men displaying their beauty rather than force or brutality."

#### PROLETARIAN PRINCE

It's strange to hear this talk about male beauty in a room full of mostly heterosexual men. The word *male* is more commonly a prefix for domination, violence, and chauvinist pig. Having heard those words for years, flung like spears by angry feminists, many men have gotten used to ducking them, backing away from asserting their maleness lest it be labeled machismo, effectively neutering themselves so as not to be identified with the enemies of women. To hear male beauty spoken of is curious, confusing, intriguing, almost unbelievable.

Which is not to say that these leaders have found a miracle cure for homophobia. There's plenty of that around—not just fear of gay men but also men's fear of their own feelings of warmth or desire for other men. People frequently comment on the amount of hugging that goes on between men at these events; the *Boston Globe's* coverage of one 1989 men's weekend revolved around the reporter's biggest fear: "Could he escape being hugged?" Bly and Meade always make a show of physical affection, but it's usually what I call "the straight men's hug"—their chests may be touching, but they're standing two feet apart so they form an A-shape.

Part of this is just plain erotophobia. The Bly, Hillman, and Meade events are always more talk than action, because the leaders themselves are more in their heads than in their bodies. Toward the end of the New York weekend, one man calls out, "Where is the sex and lust in this story?" Meade replies, "Why are you expecting it? Was it in the brochure?" Hillman is more comfortable with physical stuff than Bly or Meade; he's given whole series of lectures on the asshole, and he's the only one who dares to bring up homophobia as a major obstacle to mentor relationships between older men and younger men.

But the fear of gay men is not to be discounted. My gaydar tells me that up to 30 per cent of the men in the Santa Fe and New York weekends are gay, bisexual, or undeclared. Gay men have some things to learn from these gatherings about overcoming passivity and asserting their purposefulness,

and they have many things to teach: male display as a substitute for combat, expressing grief, celebrating diversity. For gay men, coming out is an initiation, sometimes benign, often brutal. They've already learned half the things Bly and Meade are trying to teach. But they're not encouraged to share their gifts, and most of the time their presence in the room goes completely unrecognized. At conferences all across the country, gay men have gone up afterwards to complain.

Bly and Meade try to be welcoming, bless their hearts, but gay culture is clearly alien and threatening to them; after all, Meade went to Catholic schools all his life, and Bly was a teenage mama's boy who wrote poetry and who was probably scared to death that people would think he was queer. So they can hardly be expected to speak for gay men; if anything, their jitteriness is a burning reminder of the need for gay men to tell their own stories and myths. At the same time, I suspect Bly and Meade purposely want to limit the amount of gay expression at their events for fear that too strong a gay presence will drive away the straight men who are terrified even to dip their toes into this kind of soul work.

That it's possible for these groups of ordinary men to talk about soul work or male beauty at all is a tribute to the character of Michael Meade. Unlike Bly and Hillman, Meade has practically no credentials to speak of—no titles, no degrees, no books. He's just a guy, a working-class Irish Catholic kid from Queens who knows how to do this cool thing of playing a drum and telling stories at the same time. And he's become a populist hero. The men adore him. He's the perfect foil to Robert Bly. If Bly comes off as a lion, king of the jungle, Meade is more like a frog—homely, close to the ground, a proletarian prince. Anyone can relate to him. He's Everyman's brother. Any concern that this mythologizing and poetry reading is sissy stuff flies out the window when Meade opens his mouth. Blunt, direct, street-smart, he sounds just like Columbo.

Meade exudes a distinct male authority that's comradely and unthreatening. And he's thoroughly grounded in the legends and mythology that have been his passion since he was 13. For instance, one key piece of research Meade has turned up in his cross-cultural survey of masculine mythology is the universal principle that the Masai tribe of East Africa calls *litima*: "that violent emotion, peculiar to the masculine part of things, that is the source of quarrels, of ruthless competition, possessiveness, power-drivenness, ambition and brutality"—as Meade points out, "They're not pulling any punches here"—"but is also the source of independence, courage, upstandingness, wildness as opposed to savagery, high emotions, ideals, of the move-

ment toward individuation.” And during the New York weekend, when Dirk’s friend Walter challenges *The Guys Onstage* to come up with a model of mentoring that’s not Eurocentric, it’s Meade who has at his command African tales of knighthood in which smiths make powerful talismans with their own blood and Asian stories about princes who seek out wise old men.

Meade’s main contribution to men’s gatherings is, in a way, their most theatrical, hard-to-describe, you-have-to-be-there element. Accompanying himself on drum, he tells stories—some of them five-minute “dilemma stories” that lead up to an open-ended question, others elaborate hero’s journeys that take all weekend to narrate—and then breaks them down for discussion, character by character, episode by episode, image by image. The theme of the seminar in New York is “Making a Hole in Denial,” which Meade introduces with a story called “The King with the Cannibal Tastes.”

The stories Meade tells serve two purposes. First they invite men to enter the realm of mythology, to relate to different characters as archetypes or aspects of themselves. It’s Jung 101: “How am I like the king? What part of me does the Old Hag represent?” But discussing the stories is also a way to begin building trust in the room, to test the ability of the group to contain the emotions that might come up—not unlike what goes on at an AA meeting. (If any one thing has laid the groundwork for a movement of men making time in their lives to explore emotional, psychological, and spiritual issues, it’s been the proliferation of 12-step programs.)

As the weekend progresses, the safety of ritual space enables men to voice remarkably personal sentiments. “Someone sexually abused my young daughter,” one man mourns, setting off a ripple of gasps and moans throughout the room. Another sprays the crowd with anger over his wife’s infidelity as if his rival were among us. Bly himself reveals a touching fragility. “My favorite aunt died yesterday at the age of 94,” he confesses. “I feel lonely.” Perhaps the most unusual thing about these sharing sessions is that whatever feelings are aroused, men are invited not to fix them but just to feel them.

## RITUAL COMBAT

Tenderness is not the only way to build trust among men, though. Another of Bly and Meade’s tried-and-true theories is that a group of men can’t truly bond until there’s a possibility of violence that’s averted.

One afternoon in Santa Fe, Bly is going on and on (a bit too much for my

interest level) about what family therapist John Bradshaw calls “the inner child.” It’s a concept Bly values, but he suggests that there’s danger in spending too much time coddling that part of ourselves, that the time comes when the inner child has to be killed so the adult male can emerge.

Suddenly, a flash of heat erupts in the room. “This talk about killing the inner child sounds like the craziest thing in the world to me,” declares a man who identifies himself as a therapist and goes on to testify as to the usefulness of the inner child in his own life.

“I thought we were talking as human beings. You’re talking as a therapist,” Bly responds in a tone that makes it clear how fond he is of therapists.

“What we’re talking about is an inner divine child,” Meade explains, quickly trying to calm the waters. “When we metaphorically kill it, it can still come back as an image.”

“We’re not talking about the historical child but the divine child,” Hillman chimes in. “The imagination doesn’t spend enough time with the divine child because it’s so wrapped up in ‘My father didn’t play ball enough with me.’”

“Something in this guy’s smugness irritates me,” Bly announces, zeroing in on the therapist. “The way he talks about his inner child sounds like the way England used to talk about India.”

Whoa, Nellie! The feeling in the room turns combative. Tension rises. No one can believe Bly is singling someone out for attack. The dynamic is fascinating. Being tough with the guy, Bly openly challenges him to be tough right back. But the therapist gets intimidated and clams up. Urged on by others in the audience to defend himself, all he does is give Bly the finger.

This is felt throughout the room as an inadequate response.

“Power comes from hearing your own voice,” Bly advises. “Get your adult masculinity into your voice.”

“To feel you are powerless and we are powerful brings the child into the room,” Hillman notes. “This constant talk about empowerment and identification with the inner child is what paralyzes the body politic, which doesn’t vote.”

Someone in the audience accuses the men onstage of pretending to ignore the power differential in the room. “You’re on a higher platform,” he points out, “and you’re making definitions.”

“That’s what I’m getting paid to do,” says Bly. “What would you rather I do?”

“Express your opinions without being judgmental.”

“Impossible!” Bly snaps.

Expressing impatience with the spineless attitudes of sensitive-New-Age-guys is what gets Bly labeled "arrogant." It's also one of his great gifts in life. He cuts through the bullshit, and he has fun doing it. "I understand that you have to get rid of the child inside you to become a man," says someone in the audience, "but it's the word killing that bothers me. How about *transmute*?"

"Aw, you're eating too much yogurt," Bly snorts. "When you want a hamburger, you kill a cow. You don't *transmute* it."

Bly and Meade have their act together. They're like the rhythm section of this jazz band, relentlessly collaborative. But every so often throughout a weekend, they basically concede the floor to Hillman, who's more eccentric, a one-man band who gives a dazzling, half-composed, half-improvised rap on whatever topic seems pertinent to the occasion—mentoring, beauty, the cross-cultural associations of the word *white*.

I happen to think Hillman is brilliant, but I've noticed that he drives some Bly and Meade followers crazy. His patrician style of criticism strikes some men as "caustic," and his characteristically contrary thinking puts others' noses out of joint. In New York when Meade launches into a prepared talk on the distinction between neurotic suffering and genuine suffering, Hillman summarily announces, "I'm not interested in suffering." And he takes a dim view of this "inner child" stuff. "By worshipping the inner child, we cling to the abuse of 20, 30, 40 years ago rather than attending to the abuse in our daily life."

What most enrages the Madison Avenue ad exec sitting near me in the New York seminar is that, unlike almost everyone else in the room, Hillman speaks with virtually no reference to his personal experience. I don't share that objection, but on the other hand whenever I feel overly intimidated by Hillman's erudition it does help to remember that he was born in Atlantic City and that his hobby is tap dancing.

In Santa Fe Hillman's moment of glory is his solo on the subject of needs, wants, and desires. He begins with three thoughts: 1) we take our needs literally; 2) we believe our needs can be fulfilled; and 3) we believe if they're fulfilled, they'll go away. "I'm suggesting that none of these is true," he says. "Needs are statements of the soul. You have to ask: what does the need need? Let need really come up. Say it aloud. Listen to it in your own body. Sing the blues. Complain. Feel the lack as a lack rather than focusing on what would fill it."

"Do that eeee thing," coaches Bly, sounding every bit like a groupie requesting his favorite song.

Hillman obliges by demonstrating the plaintive, whiny sound in *need*, *please*, and *weak*. “That’s not what a woman wants,” he says. “A woman wants to be wanted, not needed. Need produces long marriages where the people need to be together but don’t want to be.” Need, he says, creates an infantile, passive feeling in the body, whereas want moves out to get something—a step in the right direction.

Toward desire, that is. Not sexual desire, or rather not just sexual desire. He’s really talking about the kind of mysterious yearning that can never be fulfilled. “Desire is a potent thing we lose early,” he says. “Think of those moments you had as a teenager—your yearning for fame, for glory, the princess, the castle. We are born with wings of desire, then they’re blocked, secularized, humanized into needs. The more therapy helps you meet your needs, the more it blocks the realization of your desires.”

Say what? Bly asks him to run that one by us again, and he obliges. “The more therapy helps you meet your needs, the more it blocks the realization of your desires. Then you end up with small triumphs, like going shopping.”

Someone starts to ask “How do you . . .” and Hillman cuts him off. “Let’s put aside how-to questions for the moment. We have a huge addiction to how-to in this country. The first how-to we need to learn is how to listen to an idea that throws your other ideas around.”

## MEN’S WORK: THREAT OR MENACE?

As Hillman points out, a lot of men come to these gatherings begging for instruction, hungry for tools: what can I do? how do I become a man? how can I fulfill my dreams, serve my community, change the world? And judging from the volume of business in books and tapes at conference bookstalls, a lot of men would happily embrace Robert Bly’s *Rules of Order*. The instructions they get, though, are somewhat frustrating: Go inside. Work on yourself. Don’t skip steps. Ground yourself in study, inner work, purification. Use your imagination. Don’t ask for something unless you want it. Know what you want. Don’t give your power away. Don’t expect other people to do it for you.

At the first International Men’s Conference in Austin last month, I had a conversation with an African-American man from Houston named Abati Akinlana, whom I first met at the multicultural conference in West Virginia. He suggested that the ultimate effect of what’s going on among men won’t be the creation of a movement focused on memberships, legislative goals,

and an articulated public policy agenda. Instead, the best way to think of it is as a revolution in consciousness. "This is the biggest threat to military madness," he said. "When Bush proposes something crazy like the Gulf War, the people won't let it happen. Men will stand up and say, 'This is bullshit.' But first they have to be able to say that to their parents, their wives, their bosses, whatever."

It has to be acknowledged, though, that American society does not want this consciousness to spread—perhaps precisely because it's an inquiry and not a movement, a process and not a product. Everything in America is about moving the merchandise. So get ready for the 15 minutes of Men.

Despite the best efforts of the media to create celebrities and promote a national men's movement, it remains largely a grass-roots activity, and that in itself contains a political threat. During the New York weekend, I had a conversation with James Hillman in which he mentioned his theory that ordinary men are increasingly being marginalized in American society—alongside women, gays, and people of color—so that the only political power resides with an elusive elite, Noam Chomsky's "government by conspiracy."

The media contributes to suppressing men's consciousness by its anti-spiritual bias. The men's movement is seen as silly because the substance is edited out. It's seen as trendy and superficial because that's what can be shown on TV or described in *Timenewsweek*speak—they get the soundbites but not the Yeats poems. Men's work is seen as apolitical because the politics are censored.

During the Gulf War, which got high approval ratings because the American public liked the coverage on CNN, Bly and Meade were among those repeatedly expressing opposition in impassioned, provocative terms. Bly wrote an editorial that among other things compared Bush's squandering the peace dividend on the one-side bloodbath in Iraq to Agamemnon's sacrificing of his daughter; the *New York Times* refused to publish it, though the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* did. Bly says he gave an interview about his men's work to the *Los Angeles Times* on the stipulation that half the article would talk about the war; when it came out, almost everything about the war had been cut. Making a rare talk show appearance on CNN just after the cease-fire, Bly called the 60-mile corridor into Iraq (which allied forces described as "a turkey shoot . . . like shooting fish in a barrel") as "our My Lai." The interviewer changed the subject. "Are you just going to let that lie on the floor between us?" Bly asked. She said, "Yes."

Maybe Bly's remarks on the war were obvious. Maybe talk about censorship is paranoia. Nonetheless, there's a pattern to how the men's movement

gets portrayed in the press. It's a pattern recognizable from the trivializing coverage—not so long ago—of feminism as a movement of “libbers” and “bra-burners,” of man-haters and ugly women.

Robert Bly and his colleagues know what they're up against. It's why they keep going. In his closing remarks at the men's weekend in New York, Haki Madhubuti encourages idealistic thinking while acknowledging it isn't the safest or most popular path to tread, as the last few decades of American history have shown. At the risk of sounding like Oliver Stone, he puts the audience on notice that not everybody feels warm and fuzzy inside about the idea of men coming to consciousness. “There are people who have orders from on high to do you harm,” he says. “You are a considerable foe. Many are prepared to eliminate you with extreme prejudice. Let them know they are in for a fight.”

# Betwixt and Between in the Men's Movement

MIKE DASH

## INTRODUCTION

Of the many branches of the “men’s movement,” two branches in particular are like oil and water. These are the mythopoetic and the profeminist. They rarely mix and are often contemptuous of each other, though both are valuable. As if I had friends who couldn’t stand each other, I find myself in-between; I would like to build a bridge.

My own experience is rooted in activist, profeminist politics. Thus, there is clearly much in mythopoetry that I find problematic. But I think we can have both, we need both, and the two movements need each other.

Mythopoetry focuses on what is missing—a vibrant, life-affirming masculinity—but has no focus on removing what is toxic in masculinity. Profeminism works to eliminate what is toxic—a death-dealing, patriarchal, violent masculinity—but has not developed a vision of what will take its place. Neither approach can succeed by itself.

As movements, these two branches need each other. Mythopoetry needs profeminism to save it from its current drift toward the reactionary politics of the men’s rights movement. Profeminism needs mythopoetry’s personal and communal richness as well as its large audience.

A synthesis or alliance between movements would be a significant step toward building a broader men’s movement. At present, men separate their own personal work from the political work. Mythopoetry does intense personal work with politics left out, though it would like to carry its inner work forward into activism. Profeminists are intensely political but our personal work is not usually an explicit part of what we do together. What we stand to gain is a men’s movement that combines activism with inner work.

## MYTHOPOETRY

I first came to men's work in a community of nonviolent direct activists who were working against U.S. militarism. The women in the group challenged the men on our sexism. This led us to try forming a men's affinity group for consciousness-raising and other personal/inner work.

However, we never came to a shared vision of the group's purpose and it did not last long. In contrast, the women had a strong political/action affinity group as well as a strong personal/spiritual connection. I was left with the feeling that something—some kind of shared, personal men's work—was missing.

Around this time I read a short interview with Robert Bly, in which he said, "I am superficially masculine, but not deeply masculine."<sup>1</sup> I had no idea what "deeply masculine" might mean, but I wanted to know more. A year later, he scheduled a six-day conference nearby and I attended it.

For the first day or two of the conference, I was quite uncomfortable. I had expected it to have a consensus-based egalitarian style like the activist community I came from. I was completely unprepared for the orchestrated agenda and the clear delineation between leaders and participants. But I also found much to like. Whereas the men's community I came from had been unsuccessful in doing personal work, the Bly conference was quite successful. Mornings started with movement and meditation. Days combined storytelling, poetry, and lecture with role-playing and small-group discussions. Evenings were given to "night work"—ritual, poetry, and dance—and to personal testimonies.

The testimonies, in particular, were passionate and moving. Conference organizer Michael Meade set the tone on the first night, saying, "When men gather in seriousness of purpose, it is important for each man to be able to tell his story." Men spoke with great feeling about their lives and listened intently to each other. Some were in pain; some spoke of their longings; others were exultant, angry, or hopeful. I came away feeling that I had found a good place to accomplish some of the personal men's work I had been wanting to do.

In the years since, I have continued to do mythopoetic work along with profeminist work. My ongoing contacts with mythopoetry include another of Bly's six-day conferences plus workshops, ritual groups, retreats, and wisdom councils. From these experiences, I see several things that mythopoetry could offer to an alliance with profeminism.

- A recognition that contemporary masculinity is in trouble. “[T]he images of adult manhood given by the popular culture are worn out; a man can no longer depend on them.”<sup>2</sup> Of course, this is not news to profeminists—but mythopoetry has been able to convey that recognition to a wide audience, with which profeminism has had little success. In its place, mythopoetry offers a model of masculinity that is grounded and inwardly oriented. The model is similar to the hero’s quest described by Joseph Campbell. It says that a man’s primary life work is in the psyche, in becoming whole—not in money, power, status, or the domination of women.
- A recognition that the solution requires inner work. As James Hillman puts it, “Unless his spirit ventures toward the invisible, a man will be unable to perform his daily round with purpose.”<sup>3</sup> Mythopoetry also provides some tools for “making soul,” as Hillman calls it: ritual, poetry, myth.
- A recognition that the solution requires working in a community of men; a man cannot solve this problem alone. Beyond simply recognizing this, mythopoetry provides some tools for building a supportive, nurturing fellowship of men. One example is the wisdom council, which gathers so men can speak openly and from their own experience. In Seattle, where I live, there are at least sixteen wisdom councils. The largest is seven years old and draws more than two hundred men each month.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, mythopoetry clearly has many faults. Because these have been well-analyzed by others, I will give only a summary. In particular, there are several that are especially relevant to the question of whether profeminists can build an alliance with mythopoetry.

- Mythopoetry wants to withdraw from rationality, as if intuition alone can guide us. My question for mythopoetry is this: unless we incorporate a political analysis (among others), how can we distinguish a healthy, intuitive sense of direction from a toxic one?
- There is a limited view of the root causes of the crisis in masculinity. Mythopoetry sees this crisis as arising from the loss of a tradition of manhood. That loss is seen as coming from the collapse of the defining mythology of our age and from the damage that the industrial revolution did to the father-son bond (by taking the father out of the home, so the son grows up without male guidance). This may be a workable starting place. But the roots of the crisis go back so far that they affect all aspects of life—political, psychological, socioeconomic, and so on. Mythopoetry needs to look at all factors—not just industrialism and the collapse of myth—if it is to achieve any significant changes in men’s lives.

In addition to a feminist analysis, mythopoetry needs to add analyses of race, class, and heterocentrism. Bly, for instance, almost never mentions gay or bisexual men. In a rare exception, the introduction to *Iron John* says “. . . this book speaks to heterosexual men but does not exclude homosexual men” (Bly 1990, x). However, mythopoetry cannot become truly “male-positive” without understanding the oppression of men who love men. Similar comments can be made about the oppression of men who are not “white” or middle-class.

- Male privilege is generally invisible to men and mythopoetry does not address it. Mythopoetry thus can open a man’s eyes to his own wounds while leaving them closed to the wounds of others. As a result, it sees no contradiction between feminism and the men’s-rights movement. “I consider myself a feminist as well as an advocate for men’s rights.”<sup>5</sup>
- Mythopoetry misunderstands the difference between sex and gender, between what is inherent in maleness and what is learned. Thus, when feminism gives a critique of masculinity, mythopoeists mistake this for being anti-male: “Anti-patriarchy . . . may arise from anti-male sentiment.”<sup>6</sup>

### BUILDING A BRIDGE

In an illuminating comment, Ken Clatterbaugh has pointed out that women have easy access both to a feminist political movement and to a feminist spirituality. Clearly, this is not the present situation for men. It is as if mythopoetry is luxuriating in perfumed gardens. Understandably, many men are attracted to this. Meanwhile, profeminism is out in the desert, living on bread and water—which doesn’t appeal to many men. As a result, the profeminist movement is small and its members are prone to burnout and isolation. What we need is access to both: we need a profeminist mythopoetry or a bridge between movements.

#### *What Mythopoetry Can Offer Profeminism*

- A wide audience of men who are ready to examine their masculinity.
- A place to do personal/communal work, in which a man can “continue throughout his life working and playing with male companions who earnestly try to develop personal as well as collective soul.”<sup>7</sup>
- The left, as has often been said, is no fun. It can be arid, isolating, and

overzealous; activists burn out. Mythopoetry would give us place to recharge our batteries.

### *What Profeminism Can Offer Mythopoetry*

Profeminism can offer mythopoetry the advantages of a broad-based analysis. As presently constituted, mythopoetry is vulnerable to wandering off-track because it relies almost exclusively on intuition and on the intuitive interpretation of myths, stories, and poetry.

Thus mythopoetry has no compass or reference point by which men can tell when their intuition is steering them in the wrong direction. Profeminism can help because it checks itself against the conclusions that others arrive at—that is, against the conclusions of women, men of color, and indigenous peoples—so that it is less vulnerable to self-delusion.

- Mythopoetry wants to translate its inner work into action. For example, *Men for the Earth: A Call to Action* says, “We ask men to stand as allies with aware women, indigenous people, social justice organizations, [and] environmental groups . . . to create bold and far-reaching action strategies. . . . We commit ourselves to the time, hard work and celebration required. . . .”<sup>8</sup> So far, however, mythopoetry has not created such strategies or acted on them. Profeminism can offer a clear vision of what work needs to be done and some good tools for doing it.
- Joining with natural allies. Sexism, racism, and heterocentrism are bad for everyone, including the privileged men who make up much of the “men’s movement.” Women, gay/bisexual men, and men of color are natural allies for mythopoetic men who want to confront the illnesses of current masculinity: profeminism already has these alliances.
- A way out of an increasingly embattled position. Mythopoetry sees itself as under siege: “Men doing Men’s Work will come under attack as never before. . . . [and] the attack is already under way.”<sup>9</sup> It finds itself in this position because it sees feminism as anti-male. This is amplified by the perception that *any* critique of mythopoetry is an attack on men: one writer refers to essays in the book *Women Respond to the Men’s Movement* as “radical feminist [and] anti-male.”<sup>10</sup> We can help mythopoetry see that what is under attack is male supremacy, not men.

### *Obstacles to Bridge-Building*

- An on-going concern for mythopoetry has been the issue of blame. Thus, for example, mythopoets may fear that they are being personally and indi-

vidually included when we say that we have to end male violence—and then feel that they need to defend themselves. Profeminists need to help mythopoetry understand the difference between individual and collective responsibility. Until this happens, it may not be possible for profeminism and mythopoetry to work together at all.

- Mythopoetry views itself as “male-positive” and part of its appeal is that it offers a heroic vision of maleness. However, this is seen as incompatible with feminism. We need to clarify that men can be profeminist and male-positive.
- Many mythopoetic men seem to believe that sexism is easily addressed and easily unlearned—that all we need to do, for example, is stop using sexist language. They are then surprised and hurt to hear the issue of sexism reopened when they feel they’ve already dealt with it. We need to help them see that unlearning patriarchy is an ongoing process.
- Profeminists also present an obstacle in the form of our zeal. We can get overzealous, lose perspective, and throw the baby out with the bath water. In working with mythopoetry, we need to decide when an issue is important enough to struggle over and when it is small enough to be let go.
- Finally, profeminism’s disdain for mythopoetry has been part of the problem. What has happened is that the men’s rights movement is trying to commandeer mythopoetry. So far, this effort is succeeding—partly because of the total absence of profeminist voices in mythopoetry. For the most part, men come to mythopoetry to learn about masculinity and about themselves; they do not come for reactionary reasons. Until we start talking to mythopoetry, we should not be surprised at the success that reactionary voices are having in swaying mythopoetic men.

## CONCLUSION

Is it possible to build a profeminist mythopoetry? The answer is far from clear. Mythopoetry may already have set its course irrevocably. But if we don’t try, mythopoetry will probably continue to be apolitical at best and antifeminist at worst.

If we succeed, the rewards would be significant. We may be able to find new allies. We may be able to reach outside our tiny circle of profeminist men. And we may get to have a men’s movement with a personal/spiritual focus *and* an activist focus.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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# Afterword

MICHAEL S. KIMMEL

So I soon made up my mind about the poets too. I decided that it was no wisdom that enabled them to write their poetry, but a kind of instinct or inspiration, such as you find in seers and prophets who deliver all their sublime messages without knowing in the least what they mean. It seemed clear to me that the poets were in much the same case, and I also observed that the very fact that they were poets made them think that they had a perfect understanding of all other subjects, of which they were totally ignorant.

Socrates, in Plato, "The Apologia"<sup>1</sup>

WHEN I BEGAN THIS PROJECT, I shared Socrates's sentiments, partly, I suppose, as a way of defining turf. But I've been challenged—at times creatively and at times through confrontation—by much of the dialogue created here. William James, not ordinarily one of my favorite thinkers, once wrote that the best scholars were people who were driven by some particular passion but were always ready to be surprised. In my work, such sentiments are more prescriptive than descriptive; I hope all my work is animated by a passion for justice and that I remain open to find allies in that struggle in unlikely places.

So I'm surprised to find allies among the mythopoeists—some of them at any rate—in the struggle for gender justice. This will certainly surprise those who know me as one of their more visible and vociferous critics. It will certainly surprise many of the mythopoeists themselves. And I suspect it will surprise some readers of this volume, who see how much anger and defensiveness seem to drive the words of a few of those writers.

But I believe that if one clears away the thick underbrush of anger and defensiveness that dominates several of these essays the potential for that alliance will become clear. I consider the mythopoeists partial and potential

allies of the work with which profeminist men and feminist women have been engaged for the past several decades. But they have some work to do.

Reading the responses by many of the leaders of the mythopoetic men's movement left me both saddened and guardedly hopeful. I was unprepared for the defensiveness and anger in the reactions of some. Yet I also found them compassionate, sincere, and often harmlessly befuddled. I was startled—and most saddened—by the casual dismissal of the substantive claims made by their critics. Virtually none of the writers took on any of these substantive claims. These were met with either categorical dismissals, the defensive yowls of wounded men, or sarcastic bombast. It was as if once stung by the criticism, it was impossible to actually engage with the ideas in a healthy and constructive dialogue. Many of their essays felt like schoolboys taunting other schoolboys that words didn't hurt them after all.

Several of the writers did sound notes of reconciliation and healing, even if they did not explicitly take on any of the substantive arguments of their critics. I found, for example, Onaje Benjamin's sentiments most inviting, and believe that we could work towards a more constructive dialogue. I was also touched by the tone of Marvin Allen's piece, and included Don Shewey's article because it seemed the least defensive and guarded of any observer of these events.

Robert Bly's words were generous and conciliatory. I agree with him that "[o]ppositional thinking is by definition misleading." But it can also be temporarily clarifying, as it helps us define ourselves in contrast to another position, even as we then must work to break down the division such thought has created. If there was a time for stakes to be planted, for turf to be defined and defended, surely that time has passed. It's time to explore the common ground, the place where our visions intersect. And to confront our common enemies, those forces moving in our culture who would set back the gains of women, or people of color, and of gays and lesbians to some terrifying degree.

Given that political imperative, it is sad, though perhaps expected, that the two camps seem to continually talk past each other. The mythopoeists consistently take the profeminists to task for not citing enough of their work, but none of them ever mentions the work of profeminist men as having had any impact at all on their thinking. This is especially strange since profeminist writers (like Joseph Pleck, Jack Sawyer, Bob Brannon, Peter Filene, Marc Feigen Fasteau) began exploring these issues over a decade *before* Bly's epochal 1982 interview in *New Age* magazine ignited the current interest.

Pleck's *The Myth of Masculinity* (1981) even has the word "myth" in it—you would have thought they'd gobble that one right up!

I write this not to play tit-for-tat, but to suggest that perhaps there are two distinct universes of discourse that each group relies upon for its analysis. On one side lies the world of the spirit, the soul—poetry, myths, legends and non-European ritual; on the other side lies the world of political and intellectual engagement—history, social science, journalistic narrative. These works feed and nourish different parts of a person. But there are ways to bring them together, and I think we need to explore what those ways might be. I find the poets to make poor analysts when they ignore the work of those of us trained to do that analysis; but I find the work of my academic colleagues invariably impoverished if we cannot draw inspiration, references (or even the occasional epigraph) from the poets. We need the others' work, whether we acknowledge it or not. Socrates had it only half-right in the lines that open this essay: poets may be ignorant and inspired, needing to ask the experts before they mouth off about what they don't know anything about, but perhaps many political academics do have rather thin and impoverished interior lives that might well do with some spiritual nourishment.

I confess I am still somewhat surprised by the anti-intellectualism that bubbles over in several essays, especially those by Aaron Kipnis and Shepherd Bliss. This is particularly odd, since both men have their doctorates, and since several of their profeminist critics are not in university settings but are therapists and political activists. Ours is a political debate, not a debate between academic eggheads who have no contact with the real world and activists who get down and dirty with real guys. All of us—whether our primary arena is the university, the therapeutic office, or the street—are activists with strong political commitments.

It's predictable, I suppose, that a university professor like me would believe that the mythopoeists could learn much from the academics. What could they learn? Well, for one thing, there's this thorny question of essentialism versus social constructionism. It *seems* right these days to argue that gender identity is socially constructed, that it is constituted within the framework of gender relations. But one can't stop here. What is the "framework of gender relations" but relations of inequality, of power? Masculinities and femininities come to mean what they do within a framework of privilege and power. These dynamics of privilege and power are painfully obvious to those who do not have privilege. But they are painlessly invisible to those who have it. Try getting a white person to understand that being white is, as Peggy McIntosh puts it, an "invisible weightless knapsack" which one carries

around, loaded with “special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks.”<sup>2</sup>

Most social scientists who have explored the meaning of social constructionism would agree that the very use of the term now implies this unequal playing field on which gendered identities are constituted. In other words, social constructionism is irretrievably about power imbalances.

To social scientists, then, myths and legends provide a cultural road map to explore the grounds upon which such power imbalances are legitimized by the cultures where they originate. But it seems to me that the mythopoeists put such myths and legends to quite another use, to search for something that, as Shepherd Bliss writes, “lies at the base of each man.” Bly invites us “to discover the sound that male cells sing,” as Jed Diamond cites approvingly. (Since Michael Kaufman and I make this point about Bly’s work in “Weekend Warriors,” I won’t belabor it here.) This is the language of essentialism, whether one claims it or not. Frankly, if I were a mythopoeist, I’d claim it as proudly and as loudly and as often as I could, since it would set me apart from the dreaded linear facticity of social science.

This question of power—what it is, who has it—underlies much of the difference between the two camps. Profeminist men often sound only one note: men have all the power. It’s accurate, I suppose, at the aggregate level, even though the note becomes rather monotonically shrill after a while. Mythopoeists listen more carefully than profeminists, it seems to me, when men say, “If I’m supposed to have all the power, then why don’t I feel powerful? My wife bosses me around, my children boss me around, my boss bosses me around. I’m completely powerless!”

The feminist understanding of men having the power rested on a symmetry in women’s lives. At the aggregate level, women were not *in power*. Just look at those corporate boardrooms, those collegiate boards of trustees, those legislatures and executive mansions. At the individual level, women did not *feel powerful*. Feminism, then, was a political movement to challenge women’s social powerlessness and their individual feelings of powerlessness. But the symmetry breaks down when applied to men. Sure, men are *in power* at the aggregate level. But individual men feel powerless.

Other movements of men privilege men’s experience of powerlessness. Antifeminists like Warren Farrell claim that male power is a “myth.”<sup>3</sup> “Feel powerless?” he seems to say. “Of course, you do. Women have all the power. We’re the real victims of reverse discrimination, affirmative action, custody and alimony laws. Let’s get some of that power back from those feminists!” Some of the mythopoeists also seem to privilege the personal feeling over the

social and political. If you don't feel powerful, then you're not powerful. "Come with us into the woods," they seem to say. "We'll go get some power. Here's the power chant, the power ritual, the power drumming." I remember a few years ago when mainstream American men, who were supposed to feel such renewed power under Reaganism, resorted to wearing power ties and eating power lunches to demonstrate their power—as if power were a fashion accessory. What better expression of political and economic impotence than to be eating and wearing the signs of one's power!

Mythopoeists and antifeminists often use Farrell's analogy of the chauffeur to illustrate their argument. Think about a chauffeur: He's in the driver's seat. He knows where he's going. He's wearing the uniform. So, they say, you'd think he has the power. But from his perspective, someone else is giving the orders, and he's not powerful at all.

I think this analogy has some limited value: individual men are not powerful, at least all but a small handful of individual men. But they're right for the wrong reasons. What if we ask one question of our chauffeur, and try to shift the frame just a little: what is the gender of the person who *is* giving the orders?

Then we shift from the analysis of the individual's experience to a different context, the relations between and among men as relations of power. Because men as a group do have the power, and that power is organized against women, but it is also organized against other men. Only profeminism possesses the tools to bring those levels together, to both adequately analyze men's aggregate power, and also describe the ways in which individual men are both privileged by that social level of power and feel powerless in the face of it.

It seems to me that mythopoetic defensiveness reaches its zenith around the question of power, as if to identify and challenge men's power was to ignore men's pain. Such a trade-off is unacceptable politically, and, frankly, a non sequitur. Men's pain is caused by men's power. What else could it be? Would we say that the unhappiness of white people was caused by black people's power? The pains and sexual problems of heterosexuals were caused by gays and lesbians? Profeminism requires that both men's social power and individual powerlessness be understood as mutually reinforcing, linked experiences, both of which derive from men's aggregate social power.

As I read through their essays, I began to notice a pattern to the defensiveness of the mythopoetic responses that was structural, not personal, and that revolved around the connections between these social and individual levels of analysis and experience. In this, I believe I saw a key difference between

the two camps, and, at the same time, some possibilities for common ground. The responses of the mythopoeists vacillate between an abstract and global understanding of the “bad” part of masculinity, and a reductive, personally concrete “good” part. Thus Shepherd Bliss, for example, rails against what he calls “toxic masculinity”—which he believes is responsible for most of the evil in the world—and proclaims the unheralded goodness of the men who fight the fires and till the soil and nurture their families.

There is something important in Bliss’s notion of toxic masculinity, a claim that masculinity itself is not, by itself, the problem to be fought against, but rather a specific construction of it, a construction shaped by a mold of patriarchy and privilege. Here, too, Robert Bly’s distinction between patriarchy and masculinity is useful to disentangle two facets of our identities as men that have become so knotted as to be almost indistinguishable.

But as anyone who has ever tried to knit would tell you, the way to untangle knotted yarn is not to pull tightly on “your end” but to gently shake the entire skein, letting the natural weight of the knots release some of their tension. I’ve spent a good portion of the past five years pulling on my end of the yarn. Perhaps it’s time for us to take the mythopoetic men at their word and together shake the mess we men have created, extracting a healthy masculinity from tightly wound associations of power and privilege with our sense of ourselves as men.

It’s in that spirit that I reflected on these essays, and especially on the defensiveness in several of them. I was reminded of the defensiveness that one encounters among white people when first confronted with the evils of racism. While they can often understand how racism is a heinous and oppressive system—something terrible being done to someone else—their response to a more immediate understanding of the ways in which racism constructs *their* lives is often angry and defensive. “Don’t blame me!” they shout. “My family didn’t own slaves!”—as if racism were simply the individual actions of individual slaveowners.

But as we have come to understand, even if one is not a racist, in the sense of subscribing to racist ideologies or acting in racist ways, we gain certain privileges simply for being white. This is more concrete than just talking about systemic racism or sexism. These are privileges which we get whether we choose them or not. Just last week, for example, the former mayor of New York City, a black man, was bypassed by several taxicabs who stopped for white people further down the block. There was nothing those white people did to generate that privilege, little, in fact, that they could do to avoid it. But it can be acknowledged as a component of our identities. Not with a

self-loathing shame that would prevent us from hailing a cab, but a politicized anger that such invisible privileges make it impossible for racial equality to develop.

A similar defensiveness pervades the mythopoeists' responses that celebrate the heroic individuals and lambast the toxic aggregate. "Don't blame me!" they shout in unison. "I'm not a rapist!"—as if rape were simply an individual act by one man against one woman, rather than a systemic, yet incoherent collection of individual acts against women, by which virtually all women are rendered defensive, frightened, defiant, or intimidated and silenced.

What's missing, it seems to me, is a middle ground between the generalized abstractions of toxic masculinity and the concretely personal level of the good and decent men who populate the mythopoeic universe. This is a place where both the analytic and the expressive can join forces, where profeminist and mythopoeic men can become powerful allies.

Let me illustrate what I mean by this middle ground by taking one of Shepherd Bliss's examples: his friend Ray Gatchalian, the firefighter. I am sure that Mr. Gatchalian is a good and decent, caring and nurturing man: "one of the many good men" whose countless good deeds go largely unnoticed in the swirl of tabloid notoriety. At the same time, there are few organizations which have been more fiercely resistant to women's equality than the nation's fire departments. Almost daily, we read of sexual harassment in some fire department, or a vicious rage among firemen at any woman who would even seek to become one of their fraternity. (The Los Angeles Fire Department recently circulated a videotape of women failing at certain exercises to demonstrate their continued opposition to women's entry in the department.) This misogyny is an *example* of what Bliss calls "toxic masculinity."

Let me be clear: I am not accusing Mr. Gatchalian of sexual harassment, misogyny, or anything else. I am arguing that the two levels of analysis must be joined, somehow linking the toxic abstractions with the concrete good men. The very institutions of toxic masculinity may be populated by many of those nurturing eco-masculinists whom Bliss celebrates. What does it mean that so many good men are to be found in such toxic institutions?

To me it means that they aren't fulfilling their mythopoeic mission, that they are not living up to their promise as the good, caring, compassionate men they almost certainly are. For to be fully nurturing and caring, one must bring that vision into the workplace and into the public arena and challenge the elements of toxicity even among those very good men.

In short, one must politicize—bring to public awareness—the good, car-

ing, and compassionate parts of manhood that the mythopoets herald. Here, then, we enter the terrain of the profeminist—not through guilt, blame, or shame, but through the very structures of accountability and the feelings of nurturing and compassion that animate the lives of the mythopoets.

I also believe that profeminist men can learn a lot from the mythopoets. I think that they do valuable work, important work, even essential work. I am less interested in categorical dismissal than these essays might suggest; I believe that, in their original formulations, both written and in workshops, the mythopoets laid out an important thesis, to which profeminist critique has provided an antipode. I believe that there are several places where we can now begin to unite in respectful dialogue and debate, and in wary alliance.

For one thing, the mythopoets acknowledge one another's work. Did you notice how often they referred to the work of other mythopoetic men? I don't read this as a defensive circling of the wagons; they genuinely appreciate each other's work. We profeminists are often so busy picking politically incorrect holes in one another's positions, or vilifying each other for not completely living up to our ideals, that we forget to acknowledge and appreciate how hard we are working in our common struggle. Profeminist men's conferences have felt to me like meetings of the old left, where party-line hacks spent more time ripping each other to shreds for deviations than they did fighting to dismantle inequality and oppression. Political paralysis is the only result of such political cleansing.

Living up to one's ideals is messy business, since our ethical ideals come from our heads, and our feelings often seem to come from somewhere else. It's enormously difficult, sometimes painfully so, to enact one's principles in everyday life. Those of us who try find that discomfiting feelings seem to show up at the least opportune or predictable times. Often, profeminists would have us will those feelings away, in a kind of puritanical assertion of control. Alternatively, we could realize that we are simply irretrievably and irredemptively bad—that is, "male"—and thus we can only hope to spend our days in sniveling self-abnegation.

Many profeminist men seem to decide, politically, the right thing to feel, and then set about acting as if we felt it. As any therapist will tell you, this is part of the problem, not its solution; these untidy and incorrect feelings will eventually explode into resentment and rage that can attach to anything or anyone who happens to be close.

The mythopoets welcome these feelings, and, in so doing, pose an alternative that, when linked to a political vision and critique, can take us to the

next stage. After all, it is the mythopoets who encourage men to express their feelings, especially the less pleasant ones like pain, anguish, anger, and deep sadness and grief. These are emotions that men often feel humiliated to express, let alone feel. In mythopoetic settings, they are encouraged to feel and express those feelings. Forget for a moment what may strike some as hokey ritualism: these are real feelings pouring out. And it's about time, too.

I don't think it's just the outpouring of feelings that makes the mythopoetic work so intrinsically valuable. In mythopoetic settings, men confront the deep fears that they have of other men, the pain that other men have caused them, the wounds they carry of that fear and hurt. To counter men's fears of other men is to counter *homophobia*, literally the fear of other men. I take homophobia—this generalized fear of other men, in addition to its more limited definition of fears of homosexuality and homosexuals—to be one of the animating conditions of American manhood.<sup>4</sup> And the mythopoetic men's movement is an explicitly counter-homophobic project, breaking down the isolation that men feel and encouraging men to express their needs for intimacy with other men. This is very valuable work, indeed, which has recently been broadened to include work explicitly drawn around race and sexuality. "Hate between men comes from cutting ourselves off from each other," wrote the great Viennese philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. "Because we don't want anyone else to look inside us, since it's not such a pretty sight in there."<sup>5</sup>

If emotional expression is the good news, then inadequate political contextualization is the bad news. It's possible that, by ignoring the social aspects of power and privilege, mythopoets have made the hard emotional expression a bit easier, but also somewhat less effective once one returns from the woods. Mythopoets don't seem to want to analyze those connections of privilege and pain, nor work through them so that the inappropriate explosions of rage—at mothers, for example—can be better directed at a structure of inequality that constrained their mothers from finding their own way in the world, that confined them to their homes and families as the only source of fulfillment and nourishment.

It is possible that a lot of men do feel significant rage at their mothers (and their fathers as well, for that matter). And it is possible that expression of that rage is a central part of virtually any therapy that employs psychoanalytic insight, and it is a vital part of some group work. But it is not sufficient to generate a causal analysis; mother-blame is not social theory. Social theory requires context. If you imprison someone, why blame the prisoner for acting like a prisoner and making herself feel at home in the prison? Why

not go after those who built the prisons in the first place? The key may be under the mother's pillow, in Bly's retelling of the story, but the mother's bed may be a prison of its own.

Another reason I think that the mythopoeists can take on these less pretty scenes is that they also know how to have fun. Not one of the mythopoeists talked about this, but it seemed very significant in their work, perhaps even fundamental. All those mediagenic activities—the drumming and dancing and sweat lodges and crying and hugging—let's face it, those men's retreats are really fun. They're a lot more fun than conferences, sales calls, department meetings, and legal teleconferences. For many of us, the demands of manhood—the workplace and family responsibilities—place a damper on our ability to whoop it up now and then. (For many of us, I suspect, that carefully demarcated and rule-bound arena of sexuality becomes the only arena in which we feel like we let go at all.) For many men, being a man is a drag (both as a performance and as a bummer). And the mythopoeists encourage men to cut loose.

I wouldn't go so far as to make a political sensibility out of it; in fact, as my essay with Michael Kaufman argues, such a politics is inevitably regressive. Childhood is a place of fantasy retreat, not the world in which one lives. All these evocations of kings and gods in myth and legend have a ring of infantile omnipotence to them, a celebration of power unfettered by parental admonition. For grown-ups, play must be connected to work, and celebration and joy must be tied to a politics of change. Sure, there must be dancing at the revolution, as Emma Goldman said, but there has to be a revolution for the dancing to be meaningful.

Is the goal of the movement to make men feel better about themselves as men? However worthy that might appear, such a goal would leave intact the existing aggregate power relations that constituted our gendered experiences in the first place. In other words, a movement that would simply encourage men to feel better about themselves as men, without linking such feelings to the social inequalities based on class, race, sexuality, and gender, would ultimately serve to reinforce that inequality. Call it sexism with a happy face.

The alternative cannot be antisexism with a constant frown. I may be uneasy about men who want to be kings, warriors, or even knights-errant, but I'm also uneasy about a profeminist political sensibility that seems to take out all the spontaneity, joy, and fun in gathering together. Profeminist men often take comfort in the fact that we deal, as we say, with the "hard stuff"—homophobia, sexism, and racism, and their attendant violence, abuse, and rape.

That can't be all. I remember once hearing Andrea Dworkin calling herself "a feminist, not the fun kind." I admire Andrea's work enormously, but that is not my path. I'd like to be "a profeminist man, the kind who can have fun." I believe joylessness impoverishes our work—it makes us ineffectual, dour, and incapable of moving people—just as making fun the goal of one's life depoliticizes and impoverishes that life.

The ability to have fun is made possible, I believe, by the ability to forgive. And I believe that we profeminist men express far too little forgiveness—of ourselves and of other men. Don't misunderstand: there is a big difference between forgiveness and the defensive resistance one hears from those loud and angry purveyors of men's rights who line up with the Rush Limbaughs or Warren Farrells. Defensive resistance comes from a refusal to take responsibility when others act implicitly in our name—when some men, for example, commit acts of racist, sexist, or homophobic violence. Defensive resistance is part of our privilege of pretending not to know, a deliberate deafness, a willed numbness to the pains of others, in part because the only sound we hear is our own voice. Defensive resistance is that voice that runs away screaming "don't blame me."

Forgiveness, by contrast, requires acknowledgment. Forgiveness depends upon acknowledging how privilege shields us from that pain, and then brings it to consciousness. Forgiveness requires that we feel their pain, commit to their struggle to overcome the conditions that cause it, and acknowledge the ways in which our privilege made it invisible for so long. Forgiveness is not about forgetting; it is about remembering in such a deep way that we integrate our knowledge into a commitment to act in new and different ways.

Feminism is about forgiveness. Sure, feminism is about outrage at injustice and compassion for the survivors of that injustice. Feminism is about stopping the violence and empowering women. But feminism is also about forgiveness—at least in theory. Feminism asks us to *re*theorize past behaviors in a new light, to rethink our own lives in new ways. Feminism challenges men to hold their lives up to the light of women's experiences of our actions, rather than our intentions, however honorable or dishonorable those intentions may have been. Feminism allows us to rename our actions, so that, for example, what we might once have called "dating etiquette" or simple "dating"—that incessant trying to score, the ignoring of what she wants, the willful inability to hear her "no" as meaning "no," and all that cajoling and coercing and pleading—is now to be understood as date rape, or at least attempted date rape. Feminism allows us to rename what we used to call

“office behavior” and “flirting” or “picking up students” as sexual harassment.

Feminism naturally demands that such re-visioning of our past be accompanied by an ethical acknowledgment of our behaviors’ effects on women, an analysis of the social and personal origins of such actions, and a political commitment to learning new ways of relating to women and men in everyday life, as well as joining a struggle to implement that new vision in the public sphere. What kind of feminism would it be that allowed, demanded, encouraged such retheorizing and transformation, but then did not forgive the past? And what kind of profeminist men’s politics can be so unforgiving of our brothers?

Mythopoetic men often forgive without revisioning; profeminist men sometimes revision without forgiveness. We need both. Mythopoeists show us how to break down the barriers that isolate us from one another, that keep us from finding a voice with which we can challenge other men. And they show us how to learn to embrace other men with compassion, tenderness, and love. Profeminist men bring into view the privilege that provides an invisible but indelible structure to our lives and the lives of others, and challenges us to act ethically and politically to create a world of sexual equality and gender justice. Mythopoeist gatherings give profeminists a glimpse of compassionate manhood; profeminists tell mythopoeists to bring that vision back from the woods—into their homes, their workplaces, the streets. Mythopoeists seek to learn how to love; profeminists want to use that love to transform the world.

Perhaps James Baldwin, himself no stranger to feelings of marginalization and powerlessness, outlined this project best in his powerful indictment of racism, *The Fire Next Time*. “We, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it.”<sup>6</sup> This work will have made a modest contribution to that project if it can inspire a dialogue of compassionate challenge, of nourishing debate, of loving engagement.

## NOTES

1. Plato, “The Apologia,” in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 8.

2. See Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See the Correspondences Through Work in Women’s Studies” (avail-

able for \$4.00 from Petty McIntosh, Associate Director, Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA 02181).

3. See, for example, his *The Myth of Male Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).

4. This is a point that I develop at length theoretically in "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity," in *Theorizing Masculinities*, ed. H. Brod and M. Kaufman (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1994); and historically in *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

5. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 46.

6. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Dell, 1962), 21.

# Contributors

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