

At the conference I will keep to my time, but to overcome the oddness of reading aloud a paper already available, I've written out a fuller version of its two parts: Girard and Serres as crosscurrents in each other's writings, and putting Robert Bly's poetry in the stream with them. Although the second part, even longer than the first, solves the problem of those unfamiliar with Bly's poetry by fully introducing him, when I think of someone trying to decide whether to read all this I am sadly reminded of the reply the young and unfamous and impoverished James Joyce made, when a publisher asked him to find a generous sponsor to cover heavy costs for his first book: 'no one admires me so much as that.'

"The natural world is a spiritual house": A Girardian/Serresian Hypothesis for Robert Bly's Poetry

Our conference theme is so specific and enabling that I place it here to keep what I have to say in good order: *How is human "nature" related to the "natural" world according to the mimetic theory? Can the mimetic theory contribute to the study and appreciation of religions for which nature is the manifestation of the sacred?* My essay is divided in two parts. First, a mapping of remarkable and amiable crosscurrents through the work of René Girard and Michel Serres, and then placing the American poet Robert Bly in the stream with them.

If all a man does is to watch from the shore,
Then he doesn't have to worry about the current.
But if affection has put us into the stream,

Then we have to agree to where the water goes.

Robert Bly, from "When William Stafford Died"

I. *Frères amis*, not Enemies: Serres Between Prigogine and Girard

Of course we have René Girard and Michel Serres with us, in person, but they have been presiding over our thinking for a long time. Before anything else, an inaugurating memory of the Stanford Conference on Disorder and Order in the Human Sciences in 1981, an all-world collection of Nobel Prize winners and luminaries organized principally by René Girard and Jean Pierre Dupuy, but bearing the unmistakable stamp of Michel Serres's aspirations for passages between the sciences.¹ Ilya Prigogine had just finished lecturing on turbulence theory and dissipative structures. Serres reminded the audience of the etymology of turbulence in *turba*, the crowd, which levitated Girard and half-a-dozen others into a torrent of spirited exchange.

In addition to his strategic interventions throughout, Serres's paper "Dream" was the last word of the conference. It is worth noting that the delegates Serres tied into a communicative knot were themselves voyagers between disciplines. To link up Girard and Prigogine is to connect work which is already ambitious of connections across the sciences, but in the case of Prigogine and Girard, it is work not already connected to each other. And it is here that we can identify Serres's ambitiousness: no one else could risk his itinerary, no one else could achieve his level of success at bridging the sciences. If we were to go further into the dynamics of conferencing, we might identify Serres's human effectiveness in working with others (despite his

avowed abhorrence of "debate"), but it would be better to underline his success in injecting that bold comradeship in his writing.

Intellectuals as independent as Henri Atlan, Francisco Varela, Edgar Morin, Paul Watzlawick, Cornelius Castoriadis, Heinz Von Foerster and Kenneth Arrow were not likely to become mere ephebes of the Girardian or any other paradigm. (Nor has discipleship for anyone ever been part of Serres's mission). But an appropriate measure for Serres's effectiveness at the conference and his travels between the sciences is the idea of a *hypothesis* common to his work and to Girard's: not a theory already finished, not a proof which repeats the already known, a hypothesis is rather a proposal of some likeliness which negotiates the greatest possible risk of failure with the greatest possible gain.²

Serres's interventions at Stanford can stand for his writing, given over to his readers with the stylistic freshness of the engineer's inspired invention of special tools unique to the task which any *bricoleur* can only dream about. Yet it would be wrong to suggest that Serres had just cooked up the connection in *turba* between Girard's model for disorder breeding order and turbulence theory in the physical sciences, for it is written into his work of the late seventies. Further, it is just what is needed to connect up (at least) Prigogine and Girard from the same period. As a way of surveying Serres's work at the conference and his lifelong travels between the sciences it may be appropriate to reinvolve that historical moment in the work of Serres and Girard.

Leading up to the conference in 1981, Serres had published *La Naissance de la physique dans le texte de Lucrèce. Fleuves et turbulences* (1977), *Hermès IV. La Distribution* (1977), *Hèrmes V. Le Passage du Nord-Ouest* (1980), *Le Parasite* (1980); *Genèse* (1982) and *Rome*

(1983) would soon follow. A special issue of *Critique* in 1979 was devoted to Michel Serres, where both Girard and Ilya Prigogine/Isabelle Stengers place Serres's work³ Further, Johns Hopkins University Press brought out *Hermes. Literature Science and Philosophy* (selections from his work up until that time) and *The Parasite* in 1982.

Girard had published *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* in 1978, which expanded *La violence et la sacré* (1972) as prodigiously as *La violence* had expanded the remarkable book on the novel *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (1963). Girard would spend the next twenty years elaborating and detailing this summa, but this process would begin with the appearance of *Le bouc émissaire* in 1982, just after the conference.

Ilya Prigogine's Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1977 was awarded for his work on dissipative structures. Prigogine has tirelessly spoken up on the global implications for science and technology, yet it is *La Nouvelle Alliance*, co-authored with Isabelle Stengers in 1979, which articulated for a generation the fundamental changes in scientific knowledge and method.

As we review Serres's titles for this period, we see the important shift in method and style which has divided his readers, a division that Bruno Latour usefully characterizes as commentary and creation⁴. Serres explained to Latour that he was himself transformed by the modern transformation of scientific knowledge and method which he encountered early in his academic studies. His earliest work follows a common paradigm. Art (and language itself, by means of etymology, which links the earliest conceptualizations in language with the latest, especially in French) is given a new credit and a new distinction by suggesting the way some works anticipate and participate in this new scientific knowledge.

Serres is not exercising any fashionable structuralist neo-primitivism, insisting that everything we know is already in Lucretius--his reasoning here, at least, is simple. Art sees, hears, feels. The greatest masters of the human sensorium cannot help but observe beyond and beside the conventions of knowledge, the pieties of their own time. Their care in recording what they found to be true has a quasi-theoretical potential. Lucretius, La Fontaine, Zola, Turner, Verlaine are delivered from two opposed camps who could agree solely in the way they trivialize cultural knowledge: either these artists are rejected as irrelevant because they are trapped in an outmoded world view of reality or, worse still, they are kept, encased by their admirers in a false transcendence that frees them from ever commenting on a mundane reality. Serres's path is elsewhere.

The strength or answerability of this earliest period in Serres's writing is that (as he himself argues) even the old-fashioned *explication de texte* will verify that his hypothesis for Lucretius or Leibnitz is stronger because it accounts for more of their work, in detail and in general.

However, when we come to *The Parasite* we see the results of a development already signaled in the *Hermes* series. The balance has shifted from the more comfortable world of philosophy as textual commentary and textual verification (the purification of error) to philosophy as poetic creation. There are no doubt many reasons for this shift; no single reason could ever account for it. Yet a more careful consideration of this work around the time of the Stanford conference may give us another way of estimating this fundamental shift in Serres's writing.

In *La Naissance de la physique dans le texte de Lucrece* (1977), Serres had already deployed the etymology of *turba*, standing for the chaotic and unassimilable quality of reality irreducible to cause and effect, and *turbo* for the apparently random brownian motions which nevertheless can be conceptualized twice, in the strict figures of Lucretius's poetic language, and in the advanced physics of dissipative structures.⁵ A theory of turbulence is what Lucretius shares with contemporary physics, and Serres ultimately plots out from the poem as well a radically different science and social order.

Serres gives the reader a global reading of Lucretius which unites his science and religion, superior to the readings which outmode him by tying him to a dismissable science and pagan religion, and gives the reader as well the expansive delight of feeling one more intelligent and subtle writer has been added to one's intellectual life. The whole demonstration in *La naissance de la physique* still gives pleasure by its elegance, briefness, and verifiability.

Across the book Serres has developed Lucretius's distinction between a science of Mars and a science of Venus, into a distinction between a violent and nonviolent social order, the enabling or disabling social context in which all knowledge resides. In the section entitled "Conditions culterelles. Violence et contrat: Science et religion" Serres argues that Lucretius's poem calls the change between these two social orders which propose two different knowledges or sciences, the *foedus* or *foedera fati* and a new *foedera naturae*.

This is the *foedus fati*, what physics understands as a law; things are that way. It is also the legal statute in the sense of dominant legislation: they wish things to be that way.

Mars chose this sort of physics, the science of the fall and of silence. And here again is

the plague. It is always the same sequence of events: an epidemic becomes pandemic in proportions, if not to say a pandemonium; violence never stops, streaming the length of the thalweg; the atoms fall endlessly; reason repeats indefinitely. Buboes, weapons, miasmas, causes: it is always the same law, in which the effect repeats the cause in exactly the same way. ⁶

The new *foedera naturae* breaks this chain of plague and causality.

The angle of inclination cures the plague, breaks the chain of violence, interrupts the reign of the same, invents the new reason and the new law, *foedera naturae*, gives birth to nature as it really is. The minimal angle of turbulence produces the first spirals here and there. It is literally revolution. Or it is the first evolution toward something else other than the same. Turbulence perturbs the chain, troubling the flow of the identical as Venus had troubled Mars. (100)

In the natural world successive marshaled waves are always broken sooner or later by rock or eddy, spawning a turbulence and a new order that Lucretius's poem can reverence and contemporary physics theorize, but the starkness of the choice between the "Heracleitan physics of war" and "the physics of vortices, of sweetness, and of smiling voluptuousness"(100) means it is not a question of which physics anyone would choose, but how to make the choice possible.

For Serres, the promise in Lucretius's physics was put aside in classical science. Serres reminds us that Bacon felt that man should serve nature, but Descartes would rather master it.

The *foedera* or contract with nature was redefined as the relation of master to slave. The role for science that society determines cannot change scientific truth, but it conditions the manner in which science is learned and deployed. "The presence of Mars or Venus determines the shape of the realm of knowledge" (107).

Yet the theorizing of that loss is forecast in Lucretius as well. The *foedera fati*, the "blood contract" (109), is embodied in the sacrifice of Iphigenia which opens *De Rerum Natura*. Sacrifice temporarily solves the immediate problem of internal disorder and conflict in the community by polarising everyone against one, but itself becomes another problem.

The problem at hand consists in stemming a series of murders without another assassination. For that solution is only temporary until a new crisis, a new squall, or a new epidemic erupts and the whole process is repeated. Nothing is new under the bloodied sun of history. The plague reappears in an Athens bestrewn with cadavers. The scapegoats too must be saved by putting a stop to the series of sacrifices. From this comes the reversal: he who speaks and thereby gives rise to a new history does not place the sins of the world on the shoulders of another; of his own volition, he takes upon himself the thunderous roars of the heavens, the fire that has been set at the world's gates, the wrath of Jupiter. Spontaneously, he accepts the dangerous position that is determined by his knowledge of the laws of the universe and of human mechanisms. Faced with these horrible menaces, he goes forward unarmed. To take on oneself alone the fire of the heavens and not to foist unleashed violence on the first passerby, the virgin Iphigenia, to go forward unarmed, straight ahead, lucidly deciphering what is happening, is to

proceed in a fashion opposed to the world's religions and contrary to the terrifying constitution of the sacred. But this conduct can only be practiced if one knows the laws of constitution and if one is a master of justice. Epicurus is a god outside of all the gods, the new god of another history who has examined all the archaic traditions and turned against them. He abolishes the sacred by fulfilling it. The atheistic Epicureans were not wrong to venerate the founder of this science as a god. And through his courageous gesture, heroic above the call of heroism, Epicurus lets Venus be born above the troubled waters. That is to say, the *foedus*, love, and friendship; the contract of nature, *foedera naturae*. It is finally definitive, and the gods are no longer in the world, since an end to the ancient repetition of the sacrificial crisis has intervened, a cessation which is the basis of Epicurean wisdom. (109-110)

In a kind of sidebar to his own construing, Serres concludes this long and eloquent paragraph:

"This is, I believe, the solution that René Girard would have given to the whole question, a solution parallel to my own". ("C'est la solution qu'aurait, je crois, donnée René Girard à l'ensemble de la question. Elle est parallèle à la mienne")⁷ Serres brings in Girard suddenly in a manner so remarkable that it is worth discussing at length.

Once we have been alerted to Girard's sympathetic presence, we can see him just off the page throughout *La naissance de la physique*). In theory it is not difficult to isolate the Girardian model. *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (1963) proposed that novels told the truth of human behavior: desire is mediated, copied from others. Copying the desire of another (while pretending not to) leads to conflict between subject and model, often exacerbated to a point

where a mutual fascination-obsession of subject and model excluded the contested object of desire.

La violence et la sacré (1972) found this mimetic rivalry covertly everywhere in myth and ritual, and Girard expanded the theory to provide a genetic model for all cultural forms. Primitive myth and ritual address everything that effect humans which they cannot control but above all, violence. The scapegoat mechanism, which is behind every ritual, is the formalization of the wearing out of spontaneous violence. In the undifferentiated melee of break-away violence, everyone is fighting with everyone else. But whoever wins or survives their immediate conflict must "take sides" with an adjoining conflict, or become the object of someone else's decision. This line of development produces eventually, and at great cost, a final solution: everyone left against the last antagonist.

Beyond the primitive bonds sufficiently explained by ethological models of dominance patterns in herds and packs, the size of the group depends on its ability to recall this solution with the least number of victims. The best score is all against one. Humans have no doubt made other attempts at social cohesion, but the near universal presence of sacrificial rite and prohibition in every human culture suggests that scapegoat effects alone have been the only effective form of cultural survival.

The victim is sacred because s/he is blamed for everything that has gone wrong, but also, once the scapegoat is expelled, s/he is credited with the peace that follows. Rite and prohibition resemble each other all over the world because scapegoat effects seem to have been the only successful solution to the problem of human conflict. Rite and prohibition are nevertheless somewhat different all over the world because human groups interpret, in fact, misinterpret the scapegoat mechanism. (In fact, if they interpret it correctly, recognizing the arbitrary nature of the scapegoat, they lose it). Societies think out, rationalize what they

believe, what they must do to keep the peace. Some societies emphasize the beneficial effect of their victim. (Girard boldly derives the kingship system from this effect). Other societies emphasize the malignant nature of the scapegoat. Perhaps the judicial system develops from this emphasis, as Wolfgang Palaver has recently suggested.⁸ Necessarily, the sacrificial mechanism deteriorates into crisis over time.⁹ Societies which cannot agree on who to blame, who find themselves disunited despite rite and prohibition, multiply their victims in search of the right (efficacious) one. They find a new unity or disintegration.

After 1972, beginning in interviews,¹⁰ Girard began considering the relation of "texts of persecution" to *l'écriture judéo-chrétienne*. Medieval texts of persecution which blamed witches or Jews for everything that went wrong were unknowingly driven by a scapegoat mechanism invisible to the author, but a text (above all, The Gospels) which consciously sided with victims, elaborated the truth of scapegoating. Over time, the Christian revelation of a perfectly innocent victim has marked all the other persecuted as not uniquely guilty of what they are accused. The revelation of scapegoating as a principle divests humanity of the only method it has devised up until now to control human violence (through violence). Humans are left with only one solution to the problem become apocalyptic: make peace without any violence or destroy themselves.

Serres's emphasis on Lucretius's veneration of Epicurus as innocent, and tying Lucretius to the possibility of a new science shows that Serres has followed out Girard's development of the model in the journals in the early seventies, before its elaboration in *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* in 1978. But where does Girard's "solution" begin in *La naissance de la physique*? Where did Serres's solution disappear? Are they somehow both present, in parallel position? Serres has written up his thinking in such a comradely way that it's not possible to "decide", to surgically separate these twins, no matter

how carefully the reader walks back from this place in the text. Serres is well-known as the "troubador of knowledge," so it is better to invoke the troubador custom of including a friend's poem among your own, best to follow out Serres by securing our hold on the problem to which this is a solution.

Serres has been situating science as unconditional but conditioned: entropy will always increase in a closed system, but individual societies will deploy their science according to different values.

Lucretius speaks of eponymous heroes; Descartes and Bacon speak in abstract principles, but these principles sparkle with metaphors; we speak as historians. The question, however, remains the same in all three languages, bearing on the very conditions of possibility of science. What can be said about nature: is she an enemy or a slave, an adversary or partner in a contract that Lucretius would have made with Venus? (105)

To prepare ourselves for Girard's response in their theoretical *renga*,¹¹ (later, we will add Bly) we can identify the cultural variables or languages as myth (the term we use for what others believe or say), and the unconditional as the truth of human knowledge and behavior no matter where and how it is said.

In "Rite, travail, science" published in the issue of *Critique* devoted to Michel Serres, Girard begins with Serres's idea from *Feux et signaux de brume: Zola* that myth and knowledge are intermixed in science, that knowledge is present in myth.

Serres affirme, répétons-le, que *le myth--le rite--reste dense dans le savoir, et réciproquement*. C'est la première partie de cette proposition qui est toujours illustrée dans les régions supérieures de la science, celles que nous visitons avec Michel Serres, touristes souvent effarés, toujours émerveillés. Les régions inférieures n'ont pas les mêmes prestiges mais c'est vers elles qu'il faut se porter pour illustrer la seconde partie de la proposition, le *et réciproquement*. Où commence la complicité réciproque entre le savoir et le mythico-rituel?

Il en est ainsi parce que les comportements officiellement reconnus et étiquetés comme religieux sont pré-sélectionnés en vertu de leur inefficacité même. Toujours préalable à toute analyse, la définition du religieux comme superstition ou superstructurelle commande à notre insu le découpage des données culturelles. Nous ne reconnaissons comme essentiellement rituelles, en d'autres termes; que les conduites qui n'ont pas abouti et ne peuvent jamais aboutir à une technique perçue par nous comme utile, à un savoir qui serait véritablement savoir. (24-25)

Girard humorously acknowledges the extent to which Serres's command of scientific knowledge exceeds his own, but still manages to address Serres's special subject, the "two cultures" problem, from the common side: the unanimous negligence of myth's capacity for generating knowledge. Moderns recognise rite in the ritualistic, by which we mean empty, repetitive, compulsive. Seasonal and funerary rites cannot change anything, of course, but tell us a good deal about ritual itself. All forms of change in primitive society are monitored by ritual and prohibition. Anything which resembles the decomposition of the social order is seen as a sacred sign of an impending crisis.

Thus Girard brings the discussion back to the central problem of cultural crisis. Ritual would restore order through disorder by pushing through disorder to its conclusion as quickly and completely as possible. The decomposition of the dead is pushed through by fire or interment. Girard strictly satisfies the series indicated in his title ("Rite, Travail, Science") by linking the ritual processing of the dead to food processing. Lingering rituals surrounding the sciences of fermentation (wine, cheese, bread), the presence of which we ignore because these practices embody real knowledge, suggest that such homely industries (like the more well-established vocations of hunting and smithwork) are brought to fruition by the ritual process.

Il faut rapprocher les comportements dont la nature rituelle nous semble douteuse, parce qu'ils aboutissent à de vrais techniques et à un véritable savoir, des comportements dont la nature rituelle nous paraît indubitable; parce qu'ils ne mènent à rien. C'est ce que j'ai essayé de faire dans *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*. Nous ne voulons pas reconnaître dans la conduite religieuse des Aïnous; à l'égard de leurs ours, un comportement analogue à celui qui a visiblement entraîné, chez peuples de pasteurs, la domestication de certaines espèces animales. Les résultats positifs nous dissimulent l'origine rituelle de notre viande de boucherie. (26-27)

There can be only one choice between the idea that primitive groups bred and trained sheep, cattle, dogs, fowl knowing somehow that their efforts would bear fruit hundreds of years later, or that these animals were subjects of ritual practice whose management ultimately produced as a fortunate byproduct domesticated animals useful for labor or food (and produced as well the knowledge that some sacrificial animals, like bears, couldn't be domesticated).

Thus, reading Serres has allowed Girard to elaborate further a position initially established at Levi-Strauss's expense in *La violence*, that myth can sometimes produce knowledge. Girard upended Levi-Strauss's statement that sometimes myths "take the biological facts into account"¹² by suggesting that myth is usually prior to such a biological "fact" as paternity. In fact, prohibitions regulating sexual relations alone are capable of creating the conditions which limit sexual behavior sufficiently to make the observation of these "facts" possible.

Girard's self-deprecating modesty as he imagines himself a tourist in Serres's native habitat of scientific theory perhaps marks a difficult problem for Serres's agenda for voyaging between the sciences of nature and man. The great majority of his readers are closer to Girard in their own modest knowledge of scientific theory than Serres. And who is listening on the other side?

In "La dynamique, de Leibniz à Lucrèce,"¹³ Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers address with irreversible clarity the issue of style in scientific theory, which becomes their means of focusing on Serres's contribution to the understanding of science as it is practiced in society. Serres is credited with disturbing the easy and too-familiar dismissal of "classical" physics by the moderns. Prigogine/Stengers locate the ultimate model of one recurring style in the history of science in Leibniz's monads, where all processes are reversible, including the relation of the local to the global. They see that Serres has located in Lucretius the birth of the physics which must accommodate the irreversible (dissipative structures) as well as the reversible, in the science of mastery over nature.

All laminar flows can become unstable past a certain threshold of velocity, and that was known just as the productive nature of organized forms, of bifurcating evolution,

of what we call dissipative structures, was known. One must ask how an abstraction of this knowledge could have been made to describe the world in order, subject to a universal law. We already know one answer given by Serres. Classical science is a science of engineers who knew, of course, that their flows were never perfectly laminar, but who made the theory of laminar flow perfectly controllable and directable, the only flow for which knowing is controlling. (154)

In *Critique* Prigogine/Stengers praise the force of Serres the commentator, who upends the designation "classical" in the history of science's "style". Girard also approves of Serres's insistence that there is myth in science, and adds to the flames by emphasizing the more provocative tag to this formula, "*et reciproquement*".

If Girard and Prigogine/Stengers speak from different places on Serres's itinerary, they praise the same style, in the same "style". It is clear that Girard enjoys the way that Serres upends the relation of myth to science, and it is clear that Prigogine/Stengers take pleasure in this upending as well.

Thus Leibniz was unequivocally a "pre-Newtonian." This is a condemnation, moreover, that is sufficiently justified by his rejection of the principles of inertia and of interaction at a distance--in short, of Newtonian physics. In the face of this condemnation, we can make three remarks.

In the first place, one might well ask, solely based on the facts, whether it is not the history of physics that has "missed" Leibniz. (139)

Girard's most moving defense of modern culture is identifying it as the period where "victims have rights." Yet the last stage of the decomposition of sacrificial practices (accusing others of that which they are not uniquely guilty) can be delayed by one last round of accusing each other of scapegoating, righteously defending the innocent. Here the age of suspicion in philosophy and the sign of the Paraclete in Girard are one. 'But O woe unto those who missed Leibniz.' This modernist style of upending the status quo common to Girard and Prigogine/Stengers is not different from the designation of "classical" to physics, to demonstrate at once the obsolescence of the subject, and the modernity of the speaker.

At the conference at Stanford two years later, both Girard and Prigogine stay "on message". "Disorder and Order in Mythology" and "Order Out of Chaos" can easily be sorted to their proper authors. Girard and Prigogine speak *ex cathedra* on the topics they own, but Serres delivers in "Dream" what was to be the last word of the conference as poetry, not commentary. It is now time to suggest why.

When René Girard asked me to be the last speaker, I did not view this as an unexpected honor, but as the painful duty of becoming the functionary of synthesis. How can one express the synthesis of diverse discourses, each of which already contained or expressed, in its own genre, a synthesis? How could I express it? For the moment I have not answered this question. I have therefore chosen to narrate the synthesis in a language that will abstain from using any technical vocabulary. In other words, instead of accumulating the languages of the mathematician, the physicist, the biologist, the sociologist, the historian of religions, etc., I will try to be none of these. Instead of more: less; instead of addition: a subtraction; instead of the full: the empty. I

will speak, then, as naively as possible, and I have resolved to speak as if in a dream.

(225)

Although this is perhaps the most polite way to charm such a potent gathering,¹⁴ Serres's disingenuous explanation won't account for other examples in this period of what moves forward in his ensemble of writing practices to become his dominant *style*. When Serres puts aside demonstrations which turn the tables he develops another consequence of his early contribution to communication theory first introduced in the late sixties, the exclusion of noise or the third person that guarantees transmission, communication.¹⁵ The motive of the new model of poetry rather than commentary becomes 'How might one communicate without excluding someone, how might one speak to all?'

"Dream" is a parable, which speaks approvingly of the Tower of Babel as a sign of the localness of order amidst a larger disorder, order proceeding from disorder, sometimes.

One organism speaks instead of taking refuge in the redundant order of instinct; facing the gusts of circumstances, it spreads out everywhere and has an unstable history. The amount of sound and fury would also speak the flexibility, power, and sophistication of a given technology: there is very little noise in a lever, some more in a clock, and the topography of a motor is already designed in relation to the chaos of the boiler or cylinder. The distance that separates the mechanical and the living worlds is a distance that consists of contingencies, of handling unrelated multiplicities, of flexible functioning when there is turbulence, of returning to a state of equilibrium, in unpredictable ways, after an accident. This amount of sound and fury would also speak the refined progress of science, the open politeness of a civilization or the sublimity of

a work of art. It would show, finally and above all, the simple happiness of living together within such a city, the subtle pleasure of inventing, in plurality, one's behavior, one's language, one's own singular work and private existence, one's very body.

"Dream", along with *Le parasite*, mark Serres's turning away from demonstration to creation. Serres subsequently spends more time writing philosophy, not about it. Instead of a conflict over the best hypothesis for the philosophical work discussed, Serres establishes a working relation within philosophy by imitating it, positively.

One of the best examples of the positive reciprocity in his lifelong sharing of ideas is with Girard. *Rome. Le livre des fondations* (1983) is certainly his most Girardian work, as he retells the myths of (sacrificial) origin surrounding Rome. He "likens" his work to Girard's, more than he demonstrates the scapegoat hypothesis. He does not tediously quote Girard, but shares his ideas with him. In return Girard's book of this period, *Le bouc émissaire* (1982) thanks Serres openly for showing him the same passages in Pliny which Girard then uses to establish his reading.

The differences between the two books is instructive. Girard has never been more precise in patiently answering any conceivable objection to his hypothesis, as he carefully builds his argument step by step. Yet Girard's characterization of his own generation of intellectuals (in his discussions with Michel Treguer) is instructive.

Si vous voulez dire par là que j'ai toute la combativité des intellectuels de ma génération, je vous l'accord volontiers. Et mes défauts personnels; je l'ai déjà suggéré, donnent à certains de mes propos des résonances plus dures qu'il ne serait souhaitable et, de façon générale, nuisent à mon efficacité.¹⁶

The respective *styles* of Girard and Serres are very different, yet they agree on the competitive and combative character of the intellectual climate of the second half of the twentieth century. We would learn much from a full-scale demonstration of their intellectual amity over thirty years,¹⁷ set against these dominant intellectual *styles* of enmity.

In earnest of such a project, we might conclude in suggesting that Serres's formulation of *le tiers exclu* in the late sixties needs to be set in relation to Girard's early model of triangular desire, which suggests an emerging relation between rivals that excludes their amorous object in *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (1963). At the conclusion, we would profit from considering the remarkable serenity of *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair* (1999), where Girard detaches his model from "deterministic traces,"¹⁸ as the Girardian reflection of the equanimous *style* of Michel Serres.

II. Robert Bly: Poet in the Thalweg

Robert Bly was born on 23 December, 1926, in Lac Qui Parle, Minnesota, to Jacob T. Bly and Alice Aws Bly, becoming the younger brother and sole sibling to James Bly, born in 1924. Bly's father was born in Illinois, in Alto, Lee County, as was *his* father, Johannis Olai. The patriarch of the Blys in America was Jacob Pedersen Bleje who, together with his younger twin siblings, Helje and Else, emigrated to America from Norway in 1855.

Patronymics, not surnames, were the custom in Norway until the middle of the nineteenth century. Jacob was Peder's son; Jacob's father, Peder, was Helje's son or Heljessen. It was also the custom to add the name of the locality or farm (gard) where the person lived or came from to the end of the name. The "surname" Bleje registered on the passport Jacob Pedersen was issued in Bergen on 1 May, 1855, designates the farm in Kindservig, Hordaland, where he was born on 1 June 1830. All Blejes, even from the same farm (gard) in Norway, are not necessarily blood relations, or even related through marriage. Jacob Pedersen Bleje's own father, Peder Heljessen, was born at another farm, Aga, in the same district. What is remarkable, given Bly's early interest in the matriarchy, is that this nominative mark of the Norwegian nature he favors comes through the mother. Bleie gard (farm) is where his great-great-grandmother Guri Johannesdatter was born and lived. Peder Heljesen (Aga) married into Bleie.

Jacob Pedersen Bleje's wife, Torborg Olsdatter, came to the US from Norway in 1857, perhaps also from Bleje gard; she lived to be 87. She was living in Illinois with her son Johannis Olai, Bly's grandfather, according to the 1900 census, but she remained behind with her married daughter Guri Maakestad in Illinois when Olai moved to Minnesota where Jacob T. Bly, Robert's father was born in 1903. Over time

Bleje had become Blye in Illinois, soon wearing away to Bly, becoming indistinguishable from the English/Irish nominative form, as in Captain Bly. Robert Bly's relation to Norway is closer through Alice Bly, Robert's mother, who was a first-generation American. Her parents Anthon and Martha Aws (phonetically appropriate for Aas or Ås, but not an easy name to answer to in America) were both born in Norway.

Bly was educated locally in the rural area of Lac qui Parle, Minnesota, in a school so small that in some years the Bly boys were the only children. After graduating from high school, Bly enlisted in the Navy just before the war ended. He served for two years, but was never posted outside the US. He began university in 1946 at St. Olaf, the pre-eminent school for midwest Scandinavians, but transferred to Harvard, where he became literary editor of *The Harvard Advocate*. He graduated magna cum laude and delivered the class poem. After a period of living in New York on his own, he went to the Iowa Writers Conference, receiving his MFA from the University of Iowa in 1956. The manuscript of his poetry collection for his MA Thesis at Iowa ("Steps Towards Poverty and Death"), and a subsequent collection of poems entitled "Poems for the Ascension of J.P. Morgan" have never been published, although some of the poems appeared in his first two books, and he has given more of them in his *Selected Poems* (1986) and *Eating the Honey of Words* (1999).

During this period he married Carolyn McLean whom he had met while at Harvard; they moved to Minnesota, living on a farm (but not farming) and raising their children: Mary, Bridget, Noah, Micah. After a Fulbright spent in Norway (he visited Bleje gard during this time), he returned to Minnesota where he has remained, never allowing himself to take up a permanent position in a university, keeping himself on his writing and public appearances. Robert and Carolyn divorced in 1979; Bly remarried to Ruth Ray in 1980.

Bly's published work has passed through several stages, yet he continues to do remarkable work in all of them. An early midwestern pastoral poetry predominates in his first published book, *Silence in the Snowy Fields*, which led at once to translation and the war resistance poetry in the Sixties. He created a literary journal, called the *Fifties*, which became the *Sixties*, and continued for one issue of the *Seventies*. While some of his editorials seem callow and silly now, the production of selected translations and anthologies derived from their premises justify everything they contain.

After the political engagements of the Vietnam Era, there is a return in Bly's published work to pastoral poetry, which is a nature poetry in the double sense of an attention to a rural environment and an interest in advanced human psychology fed by both orthodox and unorthodox psychological interest. In particular, Bly has immersed himself in those psychologies which emphasize a common nature for all living things to inherit, to grow. Bly followed his interest in personal psychology with what could be called loosely "collective psychology." In particular, Bly made a long study of matriarchal culture. This was followed, in turn, with an advocacy for the renewal of what one must call, despite a century of hostile characterization, patriarchal or Father culture.

Bly is perhaps the most charismatic American poet of the twentieth century. Fans and detractors can at least agree that he drives people crazy. A proper bibliography will probably never be achieved. He changes his poems often, often on stage, remembering or forgetting to write the changes down, and has left behind limited run publications in nearly every place he has read and performed over the last fifty years.

Robert Bly, like Gerard Manly Hopkins, is the kind of nature poet who emphasizes what needs underlining in every generation. For poets such as Wordsworth, Frost, or W.S. Merwin, who seem to gather up a generation's relation to the natural world, poetry is not primarily reactionary, a lament for simple rural values

displaced by urban decadence. It is not primarily the depraved city that gives the countryside such pedagogical point and purpose, in opposition or polarity, for the nature poet. Nature poets have theories of nature, especially human nature. For Bly, humans have at least one nature, almost certainly several of them, as his reading of Jacob Boehme taught him. Thus for nature poets like Bly, Nature means more than environment. Nature poets are always involved in the complication that their nature is also a human inheritance, the nature of nature; the environment (that kindred nature) does not write on a blanketed slate, a *tabula rasa*.

Silence in the Snowy Fields (1962), Bly's first published book, has justly been praised for making midwest landscapes into nature poetry. He is surprisingly candid (for a nature poet) in admitting that a familiarity with landscapes will often come through what can be seen through a windshield. The roads are public, but the land is owned. You can't cross the country, you must follow the road. Several poems see what there is from the car, happily: the first poem, "Three Kinds of Pleasures," notes how the "dark telephone polls/One by one lift themselves out of the fence line/And slowly leap out of the grey sky." This perceptual experience common to any passenger is lifted into a sense of companionship and greeting issued from the world outside the car.

But Bly does not beautify or monumentalize. In "Hunting Pheasants in a Cornfield" he makes a single willow tree in a cornfield a fit place for meditation and return, thinking how it would draw "a young animal ready to turn home in the dusk." It is the tree's common centripetal effect on living bodies that draws him.

This first book also introduces a more surprising and durable fascination with the sea. Although Bly's residence in Boston and New York as a young man would give him somewhat better access to the ocean than lake-festooned Minnesota, environment is no answer as to why he is preoccupied with the sea. Heredity doesn't give an answer to that preoccupation either, although Bly himself would probably like

that. Even though many Norwegians doubled as sailors in the nineteenth century to earn income (Norway is 3% arable), Bly's ancestors in Norway and Illinois were solely farmers.

Bly's fascination with the sea is not escapist like Joseph Conrad's or Harry Martinson (a Swedish poet Bly has translated), an alternative way of living and seeing; often it gives him a long view, back to the time when the midwest prairies were seascapes. But Bly's interest is more often immediate, not archaeological, like Peter Robinson's painstaking surveys of The Aran Isles.

A title that draws the immediate attention of the reader of *Silence in the Snowy Fields* is "Where We Must Look for Help." The poem follows the deluvian deliverance story found in the epic of Gilgamesh, not the Bible, but finds its point in counterpoint with the Bible's imagery. First the dove returns, having found no resting place. But nesting in the eaves of the ark is not failure, for it "shall magnify the tiger's bed;/Give the dove peace". Bly echoes Blake and the Bible here, although this arrangement of peaceful relations among the ark animals is apocryphal.

Neither the epic of Gilgamesh nor the Bible qualify as strong nature poetry. A straight modernization of the birds from both Flood narratives would make them little more than coal miner's parakeets: their loss is human gain. In Bly's poem there is no defeat or disgrace implied in returning, there is still a space left, and a welcome recognizing not just mutual tolerance but gifts exchanged among the animals. "Give the dove peace." The magnanimity of that blessing of peace and comfort to a fellow creature is pure nature poetry, pure Bly.

It is not the swallow, the second émigré, but the one who follows after, the crow, the "spider-colored crow" who shall find "new mud to walk upon." (It is possible that Bly is renaturing the crow as seen in Ted Hughes's poetry, who signifies a cruelty of imagination and effect in nature only humans could credit). Already in his poetry we have Bly's recognizable configuration of detailed observation of nature, the

incentive to grow the human consciousness (in the title), and the delighted invoking of alternative traditions.

Beyond his brief to translate Scandinavian poetry while on a Fulbright in Norway in 1957, Bly read Pablo Neruda, Juan Jimenez, and Georg Trakl in the library at Oslo, which would lead to his program of a poetry of adventurous association of images, "leaping poetry." "Remembering in Oslo The Old Picture of the Magna Carta" celebrates leaping back and forth between centers of perdurable activity: the picture's fat king sitting under a tree is also "a girl in a house dress, pushing open a window," and if Robert Bly is still somehow shocking grain as he did as a boy in Minnesota, his great-grandfather (Jakob Pedersen Bleie) "steps on his ship" in Bergen.

Is a nature poet also a political poet? In particular, how does a nature poet resist war? Bly accepted the National Book Award for *The Light Around the Body* (1967); at the ceremony he handed the money over to a representative of the draft resistance movement. He also founded "American Writers Against the Vietnam War" with David Ray in 1967, and gave countless readings at antiwar rallies in the Sixties and Seventies. But how does the *poetry* of a nature poet resist war?

The easy simultaneity of human experience in nature is sharply politicized and historicized in "After the Industrial Revolution Everything Happens At Once," the first poem of section III, The Vietnam War, in *The Light Around the Body*. The poem's vigilant familiarity with flashpoints of contention between American populism and a centralized government shows the traces of the book manuscript "Poems for the Ascension of J.P. Morgan," and verifies Bly's claim that he did not become political suddenly because of the Vietnam War. The poem lines up the combatants on each opposing side, popular resistance contesting the field with topdown authoritarianism: the whisky boys, Cripple Creek, Coxey's army at once against Henry Ford asserting that "History is Bunk," Henry Cabot Lodge talking of sugar cane in Cuba, and

President Wilson's assurance that what is good for General Motors is good for the country.

The successive poems in this section fiercely oppose the warmakers. "Asian Peace Offers Rejected without Publication" unforgettably sees the Cabinet like bombs clinging to the underside of a plane's wings, juxtaposed to the second stanza of "Lost angels huddled on a night branch." Something inside us is "Like a ghost train in the Rockies/About to be buried in snow!" Although the whisky boys or Coxey's army did not win their battles, they are given credit for sufficient critical mass; but it is the complicity, not the opposition, that characterises "us" in relation to the Vietnam War.

"Counting Small-Boned Bodies" speaks in the voice of an administrator dreaming aloud that daily kills could be made small enough to be arranged like hunting trophies directly on his desk, or fitted "...into a finger-ring, for a keepsake forever." "As the Asian War Begins," "At A March Against the Vietnam War" point directly to "Hatred of Men with Black Hair" as one dark motive of American history since the Puritans.

"Everything happens at once," everything happens everywhere. "Driving through Minnesota during the Hanoi Bombings" quickly marks the change from such poems in *Silence in the Snowy Fields*. There is barely time to register the "lakes just turning green" before the recognition of the omnipresence of our gaiety and the "terror just before death" of Vietnamese casualties. Those few instants of terror "become crystals,/Particles/The grass cannot dissolve." The voice of the poem feels that only by going far away from Minnesota could he atone for the sufferings of the "stringy-chested/And the small rice-fed ones,/Quivering in the helicopter like wild animals,/Shot in the chest, waiting to be questioned." Yet, by the terms of everything happening at once and everywhere since the Industrial Revolution, one cannot atone by exiling oneself for Vietnamese suffering, one cannot displace to somewhere else the plague of crystals that rains down on the pastoral landscapes of Minnesota.

It was Bly's intention to keep his base in Minnesota, and to insist on connections between the midwest and the global, between the human and natural world, with a poetry leaping between everywhere and everytime. Although Bly's literary journal has appeared irregularly since the fifties, during the sixties there began a steady outpouring of anthologies such as *Forty Poems Touching on Recent American History*, *A Poetry Reading Against the Vietnam War*, as well as selected translations of poets who leap back and forth between nature and politics: Cesar Vallejo, Juan Ramon Jimenez, above all Pablo Neruda.

The Sixties Press published *Twenty Poems of Pablo Neruda* in 1966, just after Neruda gave his famous poetry reading in New York, where Bly, James Wright, Clayton Eshleman and other poets who had translated Neruda shared the stage uneasily with this beloved figure. The volume concludes with an interview Bly did with Neruda the day after the reading. The introduction remarks that in Neruda's early poetry, "the outer world is seen with such clarity, and with such a sense of suffering, that the later development of political poetry does not come as a surprise" (11).

Bly's translation of "Ode to Salt" ("Oda A La Sal"), one of Neruda's poems from his later *Odas Elementales*, suggests the resonance a modern nature poet can achieve in simple language: "el gusto funde en cada/sazonado manjar tu oceanía/ así la mínima,/la minúscula/ola del salero/nos enseña/no sólo su doméstica blancura,/sino el sabor central del infinito." Bly translates these lines as "taste recognizes/the ocean in each salted morsel,/and therefore the smallest,/the tiniest/wave of the shaker/brings home to us/not only your domestic whiteness/but the inward flavor of the infinite" (100-101).

Neruda catches the sound and sight of the salt shaker promising the taste and smell of the ocean. The gathering process which brings salt to us is not chastened or evaluated: Bly's phrase "domestic whiteness" is nice. Perhaps Bly chooses "flavor" instead of "savour" to get the consonantal repetition of "f" with infinite, to replace

Neruda's repetition of "s" with "sino." If "morsel" strikes a false note in American English for "manjar," "inward" for "central" intensifies the identification of the human and natural worlds; "inward" is a key word for Bly.

It wasn't just books that left from Madison Minnesota. Readers who know nothing else of Bly will have heard or read of his poetry readings in the sixties and seventies, especially the anti-war readings which he organized with David Ray. "The Teeth Mother Naked At Last," Bly's most influential antiwar poem, exists in three different contexts: first, a live version which changed repeatedly during performances. Bly has said that the poem was first composed orally.

Bly found it difficult to describe Neruda's powerful effect on a live audience, and it would seem impossible to recreate Bly's electrifying effect on his audiences. Yet John Unterecker, who was himself a poet and a noted Yeats scholar at Columbia University, and thus unlikely to be easily impressed by someone his own age from Minnesota, described Bly's presence in answering a question at an anti-war reading at the University of Maryland, about whether Bly's poetry would be worth anything when the war was over.

Bly's answer drew an ovation. He wasn't writing for unborn generations, he said; he was writing for the living who needed to see the corruption around them, the destruction their indifference permitted. The future would have to take care of itself; he was writing for us, now, here, and against the slaughter of Asian villagers that American bombs, American defoliants, and strafing American planes and pilots were responsible for. The statement itself was an extemporaneous poem and the cheers that followed it were deafening. Later that night, at a reading before an even larger crowd, Bly's poetry with its big rhetoric and fresh, improvisational tone brought more than five thousand people to their feet while syntax, sound, and statement combined to take on a force that seemed powerful and clean as light. (xviii-xvix)

"The Teeth Mother Naked At Last" was first published as a book in Kenneth Rexroth's famous City Lights Series. If the press of the premier publisher of "beat poetry" seems an unlikely venue, there was mutual admiration between Rexroth and Bly. Bly credited Rexroth as one of his progenitors in nature poetry (the connection between Rexroth's translations of Japanese and Chinese nature poets and *Silence in the Snowy Fields* is unmistakable), and Rexroth thought Bly's "wide grasp of experience, an octave or more in each hand, is not just a sign of energy, it is a cause of responsibility. This is what gives the poems their moral impact."

Finally, "Teeth Mother Naked At Last" is in the center of *Sleepers Joining Hands* (1973), Bly's third major volume of poems. Poems of great inwardness lead up to and away from this public tour de force, reprising many of Bly's concerns from the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies. Each successive reading of the poems in the book will discover more instances of subtle and intricate inter-relation between poems and states of consciousness. The volume begins with "Six Winter Privacy Poems." In the fourth poem, "Sitting Alone," we read "There is a solitude like black mud!/Sitting in this darkness singing,/I can't tell if this joy/is from the body, or the soul, or a third place."

Jacob Boehme taught him that there were two bodies, but Bly is not doctrinaire about the precise number of levels, streams, or lives humans live in. If this be joy, part of the terrible pain conveyed by "The Teeth Mother Naked At Last" is that, again, everything can happen at once, everywhere. "Artillery shells explode. Napalm canisters roll end over end./800 steel pellets fly through the vegetable walls./The six-hour infant puts his fists instinctively to his eyes to keep out the light./But the room explodes,/the children explode./Blood leaps on the vegetable walls." (19)

Bly mocks the quiescence of naturalism: "Don't cry at that—/Do you cry at the wind pouring out of Canada?" The poem also carries somewhat cryptically Bly's early

ideas about American history, at this point still locked in manuscripts from the fifties he hadn't yet published: "Hamilton saw all this in detail."

Lest we ever forget, the poem invokes the most horrific photograph ever taken, of a young Vietnamese scorched by napalm, running naked towards the camera.

If one of those children came toward me with both hands
in the air, fire rising along both elbows,

I would suddenly go back to my animal brain,

I would drop on all fours, screaming,

my vocal chords would turn blue, so would yours,

it would be two days before I could play with my own children again. (25)

The revelation of the teeth mother naked at last ends the poem, and Part I of the book.

The middle part develops Bly's reading in mother culture and father culture, which explains some of the imagery of the "The Teeth Mother Naked At Last." His prose narrative derives from Johann Bachofen and Erich Neumann, that father consciousness is a reaction away from a prior mother consciousness, but that father consciousness has gone so far that it has lost touch with the mother, and wants to return. Bly distances himself from the sentiment that the matriarchy is good because the patriarchy is bad. That is patriarchal thinking. From Neumann Bly argues that mother consciousness, like father consciousness, is fourfold; half of the force fields are deadly to human consciousness. The teeth mother is the spiritual influence that makes America long to die, to return. If much of the evidence for matriarchal rule has been discounted by more recent scholarship for Bly (as well as early modern feminism), it is not hard to grant a minimalist version of matriarchal consciousness, that for early human cultures everywhere, motherhood was intelligible as a powerful concept and a spectacle prior to fatherhood.

Part III is "Sleepers Joining Hands," a difficult long poem, whose ambition is to grow beyond the conditions depicted in the earlier poems in the book, to recover

winter privacy which means, as the beginning of the book shows, to recover the presence of others who are at once inside and outside, different from the audience imagined by his prophetic poems. It carries the imagery of growing consciousness that Bly uses throughout his work of this period: the road, the work you must do on yourself; the shadow, or what you deny in yourself, perhaps projecting it onto others, such as the brother; the repressed feminine, the woman inside the man. Prophecy frustrates this work: "I am on the road, the next instant in the ditch, face down in the earth,/wasting energy talking to idiots." (63) But the poet is more critical of himself: "What I have written is not good enough./ Who does it help?/I am ashamed sitting on the edge of my bed" (63). True to this self-criticism, these poems were heavily revised for *Selected Poems* (1986).

In "An Extra Joyful Chorus For Those Who Have Read This Far," the last section of the poem, one recognizes, in an exuberant defiance akin to Blake and Yeats, the prophetic certainty that all mammals who dream in solitude and silence can achieve their work on themselves: "The panther rejoices in the gathering dark./Hands rush toward each other through miles of space./All the sleepers in the world join hands." Bly would not be ignorant of the long tradition of the panther as verbal sign of "all beasts" (Greek pan-th_r), but it is as if these lines release Rilke's caged "Der Panther," whose "der Glieder angespannte Stille" turn inwards. [Bly later translates Rilke's lines wonderfully, as "the tightened silence of the shoulders," (138-139)].

How did a consciousness so weighed with grief regenerate? Bly is fond of the story of Rilke's regeneration, effected by following Rodin's advice that Rilke look steadily at things. Over time, this discipline brought into being the wonderful seeing poems of *Das Buch der Bilder*. Bly's own story ("My Three-Year Old Daughter Brings Me A Gift") is homelier: his prose poems began because his daughter Mary brought him a caterpillar to look at.

The larger re-edition of *The Morning Glory* (1975) explains the title from Basho: "When we first sense that a pine tree really doesn't need us, that it has a physical life and a moral life and a spiritual life that is complete without us, we feel alienated and depressed. The second time we feel it, we feel joyful. As Basho says in his wonderful poem: The morning glory—/another thing/that will never be my friend" (1). The settings of these poems are all over the world, including "Walking in the Hardanger Vidda" after rain has thinly flooded the grass. "When I bend closer, the little motes of light disappear, and I can see the ecstatic earthbed, the brown blades of grass left from last year, like ruins of things we never did. And a few green blades of grass entirely underwater, joy of the man who has lived." (64)

In the seventies prose poems bear some of the weight of Bly's continuing attention to nature, together with translations and anthologies for Beacon Press mostly regathered from Bly's own press. Translation does not distract from the nature poetry he was beginning to write again for *This Tree Will Be Here For A Thousand Years* (1979), and his important anthology *New of the Universe* (1980), dedicated to Kenneth Rexroth, for the Sierra Club.

As an anthologist Bly loves to surprise the reader with nature poetry from poets we think of as urban. In *Friends, You Drank Some Darkness* (1975), a Seventies Press (1970) gathering of poems from Harry Martinson, Gunnar Ekelöf, and Tomas Tranströmer, he identifies Ekelöf as an urban poet, but gives "Svanen" ("The Swan") which ends "Det bor en friskhet djupt i mig/som ingen kan frånkänna mig/ej ens jag själv—." Bly translates this as "A freshness lives deep in me/which no one can take from me/not even I myself." Bly makes the threat more elementary, where frånkänna suggests more literally "discredit" rather than dispossess.

In the preface entitled "Two Presences," Bly tells the reader that *This Tree Will Be Here For A Thousand Years* forms one book with *Silence in the Snowy Fields*, gathering the nature poetry he has been writing continuously since that time. The two

bodies Boehme taught him to know now resemble "two separate energies: my own consciousness, which is insecure, anxious, massive, earthbound, persistent, cunning, hopeful; and a second consciousness which is none of these things. The second consciousness has a melancholy tone, the tear inside the stone, what Lucretius calls 'the tears of things,' an energy circling downward, felt often in autumn, or moving slowly around apple trees or stars." (9-10) The work of this book is to make poems that are fit habitations for both presences. "Passing An Orchard By Train" doesn't attempt to bear the weight of Lucretius's stone: "We cannot bear disaster, like/the rocks—/swaying nakedly/in open fields." (38) If the stone seems adamant, we are not. Like apples, one bruise and we go to the bad. But we believe in healing our bruises as well. To the man walking down the aisle of the train, Bly thinks to tell him that he forgives him, that he wants his forgiveness.

Bly is perhaps too attracted to what he calls "tiny" poems (as in his anthology *The Sea and the Honeycomb. A Book of Tiny Poems*) to ever commit to writing the great nature epic, such as Lucretius's *de rerum natura*, but *News of the Universe* (1980) has global ambitions. It is one of those moments in Bly's career, like his war poetry in the sixties and *Iron John* in the nineties, where his public role suddenly expands. The idea for the anthology may be traced back to an early essay dated 1966, "The Dead World and the Live World," where he argues not for a nature poetry but rather "a poetry that goes deep into the human being, much deeper than the ego, and at the same time is aware of trees and angels." (*American Poetry*, 238). Bly argues, following Georg Groddeck, the early twentieth century German psychologist, that poets like Goethe carry "Gott-natur", which senses that all things are alive. Poets with Gott-natur bring this spirit into a work of art. Groddeck says that poets like Goethe bring us "news of the universe" ("den Dichter als Kunder des Weltalls") [p. 50, *Schriften zur literatur und kunst* (Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1964)]

News of the Universe is an important book for understanding Bly as a nature poet, giving us his sense of one of the traditions enabling his own writing as well as his peers. If it is an anthology which he edits, with less than 1 out of ten poems by Bly, nevertheless more than one-third of the poems included are his translations of other poets. Six parts divide this anthology of world poetry, moving forward from "The Old Position," where the natural world is empty of consciousness (Pope and Milton), towards different protocols for relating human innerness and outerness to other living things.

"The Attack on the Old Position" is carried by European romanticism: Goethe, Hölderin, and Novalis in German, Gerard de Nerval and Alfred de Vigny in French, and Blake, Wordsworth and others in English. Bly's discussion and translations of the German poets serves several functions: he elaborates poetry's speaking up for nature, against the tide of Descartes and rationalism; he gives honor to the masters of his master, Rilke; he suggest why these poets are responsible for the richer tradition of psychological speculation in Germany so important to his own work (a tradition which he calls, loosely, "associative thinking"): Freud, Jung, Neumann had these wonderful poets to read when they were young.

Hölderin and Novalis have held their position as avant garde poets, but Goethe has become too famous and respectable—in poetry readings Bly calls him 'the greatest unread poet in the world.' Bly restores such well-known poems as "Der Erlkönig" and "Mignon" to the status of foundational writing. His translation of the last stanza of "Selige Sehnsucht" shows how he grants equal strength to personal growth and nature in romantic poetry: "Und so lang du das nicht hast,/Dieses: Stirb unde werde!/Bist du nur ein trüber Gast/Auf der dunklen Erde." ["And so long as you haven't experienced/ this: to die and so to grow,/you are only a troubled guest/on the dark earth" (70)].

Once again, an urban poet is brought over convincingly to the other side. Bly's translation of Baudelaire's "Correspondences" included among the European romantics releases the French poet from the clichéd portrayal from which even French readers cannot protect him, of a morbid and embittered poet maudit, poisoned and baffled by corrosive urban pleasures. Four words into the poem, Bly's genius for translation is unmistakable. "Natur est un temple," is rendered as "The natural world is a spiritual house." Very few translators avoid the mistake of translating "temple" for temple, which fails either as a contentious tribalism for a house of worship, or an empty classicism. More importantly, Bly avoids 'nature' for "natur," avoiding the false note of self-regarding piety in contemporary English.

Bly's commitment to associative thinking and his feel for correspondences means that he will give Baudelaire a home in a living English, the American English that Bly lives in, not some empty crib that employs as many English words that look like French words as possible. Bly renders Baudelaire's insistence on the *regards familiers* of trees that are at once pillars, and symbols that live together like a forest, as a spiritual experience in this world.

As the echoes of great bells coming from a long way off
become entangled in a deep and profound association,
a merging as huge as night, or as huge as clear light,
odors and colors and sounds all mean—each other.

Through including him with Goethe and the German tradition, by showing how this poem can leap into another living language, Bly globalises Baudelaire.

Parts Three and Four are "Poems of Twofold Consciousness," from early and late 20C. Three poems each by Frost and Robinson Jeffers, two poems by Wallace Stevens, single poems by D. H. Lawrence, Hart Crane, William Carlos Williams, Marguerite Young profile the generation of English writers who directly precede Bly's own generation. Bly includes many of his translations of the Spanish poets among the

early moderns: Jimenez, Neruda, Machado. One would expect Lorca's casida (qesida) poems, a form Lorca borrowed from the Andalusian shepherds, but Bly gives Lorca's "New York" poem as well, which begins "Beneath all the statistics/there is a drop of duck's blood./Beneath all the columns/there is a drop of a sailor's blood./Beneath all the totals, a river of warm blood."

Bly begins the section for poets after 1945 with the title poem from Kenneth Rexroth's 1950 volume, *The Signature of All Things*, identifying Rexroth as a strong and positive influence for two-fold consciousness on Gary Snyder, Robert Creeley, James Wright. It is possible that Rexroth's poetry led Bly to Boehme's book by the same title. The last two sections of the anthology derive from the major work of Bly. A few of his translations of Rilke are included in the section entitled "The Object Poem," which demonstrates the ability to see something out there, separate from us. Here Bly includes his own well-known prose poem "The Dead Seal at McClure's Beach," which describes the imperfect deference and distance a beachwalker gives to an oilstained seal dying on the beach. The imperfection and awkwardness are necessary: Bly does not pretend to share the seal's pain, but he *can* sense that the seal doesn't want to be watched while he dies.

"Leaving the House," the sixth section, is almost entirely world literature, not modern, as if the ultimate aim for the anthology is to bring back Gott-natur into new world writing. Included in this section are Bly's translations of Rumi and Mirabai or rather "versions," a term he uses to class work on a poem from a language he doesn't know. These poets become increasingly important to Bly.

Sierra Club Books also published Bly's translation of Tomas Tranströmer's *Sannensbarriären* (1972) as *Truth Barriers* in 1980, as if Bly's argument for a different kind of nature poetry had taken hold there. Tranströmer began writing while a practicing psychologist in Stockholm, publishing poetry in one of the most elaborate literary cultures in the world, but even "Schubertiana" verifies Bly's discovery of Gott-

natur in city poets. The poem begins with New York 's evening city lights appearing like "a spiral galaxy seen from the side." But the poet knows that in such a large gathering of human beings some person somewhere is listening to Schubert. The imagined comfort of Gott-natur is palpable:

The five instruments play. I go home through warm
 woods where the earth is springy under my feet,
 curl up like someone still unborn, sleep, roll on so
 weightlessly into the future, suddenly understand
 that plants are thinking. (21)

De fem stråkarna spelar. Jag går hem genom ljumma skogar med
 marken fjädrande under mig
 kryper ihop som en ofödd, somnar, rullar viktlös in i framtiden,
 känner plötsligt att växterna har tankar. (47)

Bly has translated Tranströmer throughout his career, in his magazine, in *Twenty Poems of Tomas Tranströmer* in 1970, including him in *Friends, You Drank Some Darkness* in 1975, and most recently *The Half-Finished Heaven* (2001).

In *The Eight Stages of Translation* (1983) Bly reflects on his experience of translation over thirty years. Bly chooses a poem from Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* as his setpiece. It is a significant choice that underlines Bly's commitment to nature poetry. Rilke's sonnet XXI represents nature's transformation in springtime as a young girl who has won a school prize for memorising poems. Bly preserves Rilke's overriding of the common modern presupposition that nature is natural, unstudied, by invoking the German tradition of Rudolph Steiner and others who insist that earth has a living consciousness, and thus grows in knowledge "gradually as a child does" (18). This is the meaning of the poem. The rest of the essay is given to showing how

translation must find a voice for this poem in American English, by which Bly means making it sound (to an American ear) like someone believes what they are saying.

If *Sleepers Joining Hands* tracked America passively drifting back to the mother culture without the necessary spiritual discipline, Bly initiates the American turn to father culture himself. There is already an important prose poem in *This Body Is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood* from 1978, "Finding the Father," which begins "This body offers to carry us for nothing, as the ocean carries logs. So then it wails with its great knots of neurotic energy, lifting small craft at night." The body leads to the father, through the rainy streets, to the dark house. "When you light the lamp you will see him. He sits there behind the door... the eyebrows so heavy, the forehead so light... lonely in his whole body, waiting for you." "Finding the Father" is seen within the context of nature study, meditation. By changes in position too gradual to see as one reads through these poems in sequence, until one riffles the pages from front to back, a snail (drawn by Gendron Jensen on facing pages) turns the mouth of its shell from left to right, page by page, as if addressing an audience, in company with the body addressed continuously in these poems.

Bly's commitment to masculine consciousness is deepened by a collateral commitment to nature poetry. The mysterious sensation of the body leading to the father is best understood through another one of the key poems of *This Body Is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood*, "The Origin of the Praise of God," which dedicates itself to Lewis Thomas and his *Lives of the Cell*. In the poem protozoic colonies knit all living things into an ecstatic intimacy: "The sunlight lays itself down before the protozoa,/the night opens itself out behind it,/and inside its own energy it lives!/So the space between two people diminishes, it grows less and less, no one to weep, they merge at last."(35)

The essays from Thomas's book appeared in *The New England Journal of Medicine* from 1971-1973. In 1977 Harper & Row can claim confidently that Bly has immersed

himself in "the new research on protozoa colonies." But now? The spiritual quality and durability of the attention rendered to nature by poets in the Goethe-Hölderin-Novalis tradition is remarkable. Bly revises his work as remorselessly as science does, but surely the end of the poem cannot be improved: "From the dance of the cells praise sentences raise to the throat of the man praying and singing alone in his room. He lets his arms climb above his head, and says, "Now do you still say you cannot choose the Road?"

The body is a spiritual house (not the only one), and the recovery of the father and masculine consciousness, a steady theme growing now in Bly's writing, issuing most famously in *Iron John*, is never separate from the natural world. *The Man in the Black Coat Turns* (1981) devotes several poems to these issues. If Lucretius hears the tears of things (*lacrima rerum*), Bly will now hear "The Grief of Men." His aunt Bertha died in childbirth, attempted against doctor's orders. Her husband "throws himself against the wall./Men come to hold him down./My father is there,/sits by the bed long night after night." (34) Several poems attempt a nearness to the father: "The Prodigal Son" imagines the son immemorially longing to go home: "When he folds his hands, his knees on corncobs,/he sees the smoke of ships/floating off the isles of Tyre and Sidon,/and father beyond father beyond father." (7) The smoke of ships tells us that sons still (in the time of diesel engines) long to be blessed by the father, since the foundation of the world. Other poems, like "My Father's Wedding 1924," see this human pain in the natural house:I saw/a log, or branch,/long, bent, ragged, bark gone./I felt lonely for my father when I saw it./It was the log/That lay near my uncle's old milk wagon." (48)

As a father himself in "For My Son Noah, Ten Years Old," Bly imagines himself divested of rage, sitting with his son at a table "with small tea carefully poured./So we pass our time together, calm and delighted." (6) Equally, it is males who may be fathers who return or do not return, like the man in the black coat who gives the book

its title, or one of Bly's masters, in "Mourning Pablo Neruda". The modesty of Bly's version of Neruda's "elemental ode" masks its origin in Pindar's First Olympic, which Bly in an unpublished letter to the author thirty years ago has identified as one of the "leaping poets" he was interested in early on. Pindar's poem begins "water is 'most excellent' (ariston)." Pindar's job was to argue that Hieron of Syracuse has won an eternal glory in the Olympiad which exceeds all other contests as water's excellence exceeds all other natural elements. But Bly's ode is sober, beginning: "Water is practical,/especially in/August." He thinks first of the faucet water he will take to the young willow trees, then the jar of water he will take in his car to his cabin where he writes. As he imagines the jar of water quivering, as he drives "through a landscape of granite quarries," the association he has always made of Neruda's poetry descending into deep water rises:

For the dead remain inside
us, as water
remains
inside granite—
hardly at all—
for their job is to
go
away,
and not come back,
even when we ask them (12)

Neruda is another poet in the thalweg. Water balances the sensation of nearness and intimacy with the natural world, the protazoic dance with the Lucretian *lacra rerum*.

Is a nature poet a good lover? What does this have to do with the grief of men? *Loving a Woman in Two Worlds* (1985) signals by the title that Bly still follows Goethe to the higher lovemaking ("zu höherer Begattung") called for in "Selige Sehnsucht," in

the two worlds of inner and outer declared by Boehme to be our parallel homes. In "A Third Body" a man and a woman sit near each other; their breaths feed "someone who we do not know,/someone we know of, whom we have never seen." (19) If we remember Bly's winter privacy poems, we recognise that the poet's experience of the two worlds is now shared with a woman. "The Roots" makes the surprising connection that the male knows grief not solely from other men, but from loving a woman.

The love of woman is the knowing of grief.

There are no limits to grief. The loving man
simmers his porcupine stew. Among the tim-
ber growing on earth grief finds roots.

Bly calls these small poems *ramages*, eighty-something syllable compositions which depend on a vowel to set the key, musically. This one is set in the key of "ur."

Any reader's attitude, whether negative, skeptical, or positive, about Bly's role in the male consciousness movement would be invoked by the first title in the table of contents, "Fifty Males Sitting Together," but surprised, perhaps relieved, by the poem which appears under this title. This poem does not rehearse a sweaty public purgation. The poet is by himself, returning back to the lakeside cabin from walking in the woods. The hills cast a "coffin-like band" of shadow on the far water, a "massive/masculine shadow,/fifty males sitting together/in hall or crowded room,/lifting something indistinct/up into the resonating night." (3) The poem as printed in *Loving A Woman In Two Worlds* has been heavily and significantly revised from *The Man In The Black Coat Turns*; it will be revised again for *Eating the Honey of Words* (1999). In the earlier version it is more immediately personal—it is the speaker himself who stands at the edge of the water, noticing the water is kept calm by the reeds near the shore, "relaxed, private." The three versions must be read patiently, but across all versions the natural world depicts the same contrast between community and solitude

for the anxious male. Perhaps revision itself adds to the portrayal of anxiousness, not being at rest.

Selected Poems (1986) does not merely select, recapitulate Bly's career. The first two parts are made up from two collections never published, written before *Silence in the Snowy Fields* was published in 1962. The rest of the selections are identified as from his published books, but there are many poems which have undergone significant revision.

In 1987 Bly published his selection of Thoreau, which mingles the poetry and prose to argue for Thoreau's commitment to nature poetry and *The Winged Life*. In 1988 *A Little Book on the Human Shadow* appeared, edited by William Booth, one of many attempts to capture in book form the charismatic combination of personal and committed poetry, psychological and sociological commentary of Bly's public appearances. The first chapter "Problems in the Ark" (based on a videotape from 1971, but revised by Bly for the book) uses a discussion of the early poem "Where We Must Look For Help" to insist that we must investigate the dark side of our personal and national experience, we must be helped by the crow, not the dove or the swallow.

Bly's public presence has made him a natural subject of several documentaries charting the men's movement, especially Bill Moyers's *A Gathering of Men* for PBS in 1990. The nineties inaugurate the wider influence of Bly's prose: *American Poetry: Wildness and Domesticity* is an important collection (and of course revision) of previously published essays. Anyone interested in Bly's conception of how nature poetry places itself among other kinds of poetry, will read the important essays "Looking For Dragon Smoke," "Poetry and the Three Brains," "Form and Society in the Poem," "The Dead World and the Live World," "Intense States Of Consciousness," and "Leaping Up into Political Poetry."

Iron John (1990) was number one on *The New York Times* nonfiction bestseller list for ten weeks, remaining on the list itself for more than a year. Bly has expressed his indebtedness to Jung and Neumann many times, but *Iron John* distances itself from the mechanical typing of nature into symbols of the masculine and feminine. The sea is not the eternal feminine; to see it as a symbol of the human unconscious is to forfeit the knowledge of both worlds, outer and inner, land and water. Bly insists that myth gives us as well earth gods who are masculine, sky gods who are feminine. As always, Bly insists on nature as something alive, out there, something it is necessary for humans to know in order to grow. "Human beings invented the word 'consciousness' to describe their own particular sentience, but nature's awareness is not exactly intelligence nor sentience, nor consciousness, nor awareness. It falls between all the words." (52)

But in 1992 Bly admits that the prose poem cannot encounter otherness objectively. In a preface to *What Have I Ever Lost by Dying* (1992), which collects many of his best prose poems, he explains that he wrote the earliest of them believing that the writer "could describe an object or a creature without claiming it.... I no longer think that is possible." The common feelings such as anger sensed by the poet in the natural house are probably human aggressions and rages, although it may also be true that the sturgeon had such rages long before humans appeared (xv).

Yet this collection of prose poems is still dedicated (like *The Morning Glory*) to his daughter Mary who helped him to see his way to the prose poem, and the title, taken from the last line of Bly's version of a Rumi poem which begins the book, is not despairing of some form of natural community as it anticipates the poems which follow. In the Rumi version there are three movements of two lines each, each faithful to a common pattern: "I lived for hundreds of thousands of years as a mineral,/And then I died and was reborn as a plant." The second and third movements follow his

rebirth from plant to animal, from animal to human being. It ends fiercely, magnificently undaunted: "What have I ever lost by dying?"(1)

As always, Bly revises what he has written, even the experience which gave him the lead to all these prose poems. "My Three-Year Old Daughter Brings Me A Gift" now becomes "A Caterpillar My Daughter Brought To Me," and the last line which looks so intently at the caterpillar changes from " Now he rears, looking for another world" to "He rears on my hand, looking for another world." Almost certainly this revision means that Bly compensates for "the hunger of our desires and disappointments" which draw the things of this world into ourselves, by placing more carefully the relation between caterpillar and the hands of the daughter and the father. As Bly now remembers, his daughter asked him to look at it, she didn't make him a gift of what wasn't theirs.

Meditations On The Insatiable Soul (1994) gathers new work from the previous nine years. Bly mourns James Wright as he mourned Neruda, as a nature poet. He sees Wright as a tree fallen into the river:

If all a man does is to watch from the shore,
Then he doesn't have to worry about the current.
But if affection has put us in the stream,
Then we have to agree to where the water goes. (17)

If a poetry is to connect ecology to individual and collective psychology, to ethics and politics as the knowledge of the two bodies, then it must take up everything at once driven by what Virginia Woolf called "the unseizable force," what the Sufis call *nafs*, what Bly now calls "the insatiable soul." Bly denounces this soul, this "Great Lord of Desirousness" which rules America in the time of the Columbine High School massacres in Colorado.

Let the love between men and women be ground up
And fed to the talk shows! Let every female breast

Be photographed! Let the fathers be hated! Let the sons be hated!

Let twelve-year-olds kill the twelve-year-olds!

The title poem is paired with one other poem in Part Three of the book. "Anger Against Children" is in the Whitmanesque manner of "The Teeth Mother Naked At Last" now directed to what America is doing to its own children. What has provoked this infuriated calling-out? Bly names the crimes, such as the parents who leave their children deep in the Oregon forest. "When the children/Open the lunchbox, there are stones inside, and a note saying, 'Do your own thing.'" (58). The poem ends "The time of manifest destiny is over, the time of grief has come."

As a nature poet Bly is well beyond any simple delight in parallels between swarms of protozoa and Americans at whatever they are doing. Michel Serres has suggested that Lucretius was a naturalist for the future. He foreknew that physical turbulence (as it is understood by the contemporary physics of dissipative structures) behaved like the human crowd, the *turba* which momentarily organises or mob-ilises around a victim. Now Bly has again entered the sombre spirit of the *lacrima rerum* as he recognises what he calls the "sibling society" (a society without vertical deference) destroying our families: "Our vision of the family as an ecological system remains now at about the same level as our vision of the natural system in the nineteenth century, when no one really understood the way all elements in a long-growth forest, for example, depend on each other." (SS, 37)

As always, the prophetic voice is answered by the introspective voice, giving now the sense of a spiritual turning. "Question on the Los Gatos Hills" reviews his lifelong practice of calling the "ponderable" things signifying Gott-natur into his poems: "Eucalyptus-smelling/Sea-fogged hills....Boulders,rangy/Minnesota grass." He now asks why he always hesitates to call to God? If the natural world is a spiritual house, then the nature poet must continue the road indicated by Gott-natur. He cannot excuse himself from continuing by "hesitating" at the spectacle of natural things. His

answer for hesitating comes from the memory of sitting behind the barn as a little boy, certain of never being heard. Having asked himself, and remembered, he can now set himself back on the Road he has prematurely departed: "You are no/Longer a boy./Let the sound come/Out of the mouth." Five poems follow, each of which emphasize the spiritual discipline of resisting the insatiable soul by "not caring," entitled successively "How [David, the Saint, Jonah, Vincentine, Mirabai] Did Not Care."

Morning Poems (1997) attempt to intervene in Bly's endless revisions at the front end of the creative process by completing a new poem each morning. In one sense, Bly defers in a comradely way to the lamented William Stafford's forty-year practice of writing a poem every morning. We see the fruits of this new discipline of letting go in this book, but where the discipline (not just the practice) comes from is not clear until we reach the next-to-last poem which matches the dedication in the front of the book, "For Ruth": "...I've learned/ From you this new way of letting a poem be." Yet *Eating the Honey of Words* (1999) 'ruthlessly' revises books as well as poems by using previous book titles to indicate periods of work. *Silence in the Snowy Fields*, which was published in 1962, is now dated 1958-1978, meaning that this section draws from all the poems written in the manner of that book, not just the poems published in 1962 under that name.

From *This Body Is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood*, "The Origin of the Praise of God" now becomes "The Lover's Body As A Community of Protozoa," and the last two sentences now read: "From the cells, praise sentences begin to rise to the man and woman singing in the room. A voice says: "Now do you still remain ungrateful? Do you still say there is no road?" (147) Revision has given a stronger answer to the question of how the nature poet writes love poetry. In this new version, the poet does not sing in noble loneliness. Both man and woman sing praise, both are then

addressed by the voice, both as the lover's body are therefore challenged to regain the road.

Verticalness below and above perhaps must now encounter first the father who has died. *Eating the Honey of Words* adds to "Morning Poems (1993-1997)" more father poems. "Words the Dreamer Spoke to My Father in Maine" begins with sleepers awakened by ocean light, reminding him of how dark his Minnesota is, and how he longs for its dark homeliness. He then remembers the dark scene he dreamt, in a machine shop, with dark tools, with his father. In his dream he asks what he never *had* asked, that his father look him in the eyes when they talk. If the shop windows in his dream blear the light, nevertheless the dream and the awakening tell him that the outside light speaks of "ocean light, bone light, Labrador light, prairie light."

It's the same light that glints off swords, and shines

From Idaho rivers some days, and from the thin

Face just before death. I say to my father,

"We could be there if we lift our eyes." (250)

This gathering of images from nature poetry, psychological consideration and spiritual summoning is "the winged life" Bly sees in his beloved Thoreau.

The Night Abraham Looked to the Stars (2001) emphasizes the verticality of Gott-natur. If Norwegian born Jacob Pedersen Bleie and his American born grandson namesake are Robert Bly's first fathers, the first beings for Bly to encounter vertically, up or down, it is in Abraham's commitment to the stars that go down that Bly recognises his primordial father. Abraham is the father of a very big family, and the ghazal (descended from the qesida) as a form honors him.

As Seamus Heaney says, English had no rights on the lyric, and Urdu has no rights on the poetic form Bly uses, the ghazal, found as well in Arabic, Marathi, and English. Bly has always seen himself as committed to the night. He knows that his spiritual house is earth, yet he yearns for the stars. Most poets who take up non-western

religions present themselves as advocates and masters, excluding us. Bly is different. It is not Abraham's special relationship with God in The Koran that touches Bly, but Abraham's mistaking the rising (and falling) stars for a god, the primordial human conception which makes myth, ritual, and nature poetry.

We are faithful companions to the unfaithful stars.

We are diggers, like badgers; we love to feel

The dirt flying out from behind our hind claws.

And no one can convince us that mud is not

Beautiful. It is our badger soul that thinks so.

In the end, a nature poet ages. As an elder of the natural world and the spiritual house, Bly continues major work describing now how the souls wish to pull away from the body ("It's late... lock the door, let's go" the souls say, laconically, in "Why We Don't Die") but the body wants to stay *here*, offering excuses: "We buried a little iron/Ball under that tree. Let's go get it."

BOOKS: *The Lion's Tale and Eyes: Poems Written Out of Laziness and Silence* (With James Wright and William Duffy.) (Madison, Minn.: The Sixties Press, 1962);
Silence in the Snowy Fields (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1962; London: Cape, 1967);
The Light Around the Body (New York: Harper & Row, 1967);
Chrysanthemums (Menomonie, Wisc.: Ox Head Press, 1967);
Ducks (Menomonie, Wisc. Ox Head Press, 1967);
The Morning Glory: Another Thing That Will Never Be My Friend (San Francisco: Kayak Books, 1969; revised 1970);
The Teeth-Mother Naked At Last (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1970);
Christmas Eve Service at Midnight at St. Michael's (Rushden, Northhamptonshire, U.K.: Sceptre Press, 1972);
Water Under the Earth (Rushden, Northhamptonshire, U.K.: Sceptre Press, 1972);
The Dead Seal Near McClure's Beach (Denver: Straight Creek Journal, 1972; Rushden, Northhamptonshire, U.K.: Sceptre Press, 1973);
Jumping Out of Bed (Barre, Mass.: Barre Publishers, 1973);
Sleepers Joining Hands (New York: Harper & Row, 1973);
The Hockey Poem (Duluth: Knife River Press, 1974);
Old Man Rubbing His Eyes (Greensboro, N.C.: Unicorn Press, 1974);
Point Reye Poems (Half Moon Bay, Calif.: Mudra, 1974);
The Morning Glory (New York: Harper & Row, 1975);
Climbing Up Mount Vision With My Little Boy (Pittsburgh: Slow Loris Press, 1976);
Four Poems (Birmingham, Ala.: Thunder City Press, 1976);
The Loon (Marshall, Minn.: Ox Head Press, 1977);
This Body Is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood (New York: Harper & Row, 1977);
Visiting Emily Dickinson's Grave (Madison, Wisc.: Red Ozier Press, 1979);

- This Tree Will Be Here For a Thousand Years* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979);
- What the Fox Agreed to Do* (Athens, Ohio: Croissant, 1979);
- The Man in the Black Coat Turns* (New York: Dial Press, 1981);
- Out of the Rolling Ocean* (St. Paul, MN: Ally Press, 1984);
- Loving A Woman in Two Worlds* (Garden City: The Dial Press, 1985);
- Selected Poems* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986);
- Iron John* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1990);
- American Poetry: Wildness and Domesticity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990);
- Jumping Out of Bed* (New York: White Pine press, 1990);
- What Have I Ever Lost By Dying?* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992);
- Meditations on the Insatiable Soul* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994);
- The Sibling Society* (Reading Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1996);
- Morning Poems* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997);
- Eating the Honey of Words* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999);
- The Night Abraham Called to the Stars* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001);
- TRANSLATIONS AND EDITIONS: Hans Hvass. *Reptiles and Amphibians of the World* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1960);
- Georg Trakl. *Twenty Poems* (Translations by Bly and James Wright) (Madison, Minn.: The Sixties Press, 1961);
- Selma Lagerlöf. *The Story of Gösta Berling* (New York: New American Library), 1962;
- Knut Hamsun. *Hunger* (New York: Farrar Strauss and Giroux, 1967; London: Duckworth, 1974);
- Twenty Poems of Tomas Tranströmer* (Madison, Minn.: The Seventies Press, 1970);
- Kabir. Versions By Robert Bly* (Northwood Narrow, N.H.: Lillabulero Press, 1971);
- Pablo Neruda and Cesar Vallejo. *Selected Poems* (Translations by Bly, James Wright, and John Knoepfle) (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971);

Miguel Hernandez and Blas de Otero. *Selected Poems* (Translations by Timothy Baland, Bly, Hardie St. Martin, and James Wright) Boston: Beacon Press, 1972);

Basho. *Basho* (San Francisco: Mudra, 1972);

Federico Garcia Lorca and Juan Ramon Jimenez *Selected Poems* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973);

Harry Martinson, Gunnar Ekelof, and Tomas Tranströmer. *Friends, You Drank Some Darkness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975);

Vicente Aleixandre. *Twenty Poems* (Translations by Bly and Lewis Hyde) (Madison, Minn.: The Seventies Press, 1977);

Rolf Jacobsen. *Twenty Poems* (Madison, Minn.: The Seventies Press, 1977);

Kabir. *The Kabir Book: Forty-Five of the Ecstatic Poems of Kabir* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977);

Antonio Machado *I Never Wanted Fame: Ten Poems and Proverbs* (St. Paul: Ally Press, 1979);

Antonio Machado. *Canciones* (West Branch, Iowa: Toothpaste Press, 1980);

Mirabai. *Mirabai Versions by Robert Bly* (New York: Red Ozier press, 1980);

Tomas Tranströmer. *Truth Barriers* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1980);

Rainier Marie Rilke. *Selected Poems* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981);

Rumi. *Night and Sleep* (Versions by Bly and Coleman Barks.) (Cambridge, Mass.: Yellow Moon Press, 1981);

Göran Sonnevi. *The Economy Spinning Faster and Faster* (New York: Sun, 1982);

The Eight Stages of Translation (Boston: Rowan Tree Press, 1983);

Antonio Machado, *Times Alone* (Middleton, CT.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983);

Henry David Thoreau, *The Winged Life: The Poetic Voice Of Henry David Thoreau* (New York: HarperCollins, 1986);

Olav Hauge, *Trusting Your Life to Water and Eternity* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1987);

Issa, *Ten Poems* (Point Reyes Station, CA.: Floating Island Publications, 1992);

Ghalib, *The Lightning Should Have Fallen on Ghalib* (Hopewell, N.J.: Ecco Press, 1999);

Tomas Tranströmer, *The Half-Finished Heaven* (St. Paul, Minn.: The Graywolf Press, 2001);

NOTES

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1. The papers themselves were collected in *Stanford Literary Studies* (volume I: Stanford, 1984); two of the discussions were transcribed, as well as ensuing discussions from some of the papers, which give some sense of the sharpness of exchange.
 2. Serres's most elegant formulation might be: "...drawing the *maximum* number of results from a *minimum* number of suppositions", in Michel Serres with Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, tr. Roxanne Lapidus (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 144. Girard: "To earn the glorious title of scientific... [a hypothesis] must combine the maximum of actual uncertainty with the maximum of potential certainty", in *The Scapegoat*, tr. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 98.
 3. MICHEL SERRES: INTERFERENCES ET TURBULENCES (Janvier 1979 Tome XXXV-
-No. 380); other contributors included Shoshana Felman, Regis Debray, Christiane Fremont, Pierre Pachet, Christiane Rabant, M.A. Sinaceur, Michel Pierssens, and Claude Mouchard.
 4. Michel Serres with Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, tr. Roxanne Lapidus (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995).
 5. Prigogine/Stenger note the *turba/turbo* distinction in "POSTFACE," 153; Girard alludes to it as well in his paper to the Stanford Conference: "Disorder and Order in Mythology," *Disorder and Order* (Stanford: Anma Libri, 1984), p. 86.
 6. *Hermes. Literature, Science, Philosophy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 100.
 7. In *La naissance del la physique* (148), this remarkable comment on Girard appears as the end of a paragraph. In the translation for Hopkins, it appears as a footnote, which somewhat diminishes its remarkable and sudden appearance.
 8. *René Girards mimetische theorie* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2003), 357-363.
 9. W.B. Yeats catches this intellectual intransigence to truth wonderfully in the beginning of "Meru":

Civilisation is hooped together, brought
 Under a rule, under the semblance of peace
 By manifold illusion; but man's life is thought,
 And he, despite his terror, cannot cease
 Ravening through century after century,
 Ravening, raging, and uprooting that he may come
 Into the desolation of reality:

Egypt and Greece, good-bye, and good-bye, Rome!

10. Until the publication of *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1978).

11. The Japanese renga was a sequence of linked poems in which units of two or three lines are written by two or more poets. Any given link must make a poem with that which precedes it. See Charles Tomlinson, *Renga* (New York: George Braziller, 1971).

12. *Violence and the Sacred*, tr. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 223-249.

13. in *Critique* (XXXV, No. 380, Janvier 1979), pp. 35-55. The English translation is slightly different, adjusting to English readers: "POSTFACE: Dynamics from Leibniz to Lucretius", in *Hermes. Literature, Science, Philosophy*, 137-155.

14. In a mock-serious note of jealousy, Heinz Von Forster gave *his* version of what a synthesis would be like, if he had been given the last word. (179)

15. See "Platonic Dialogue" in *Hermes. Literature, Science, Philosophy*, 65-70.

16. *Quand ces choses commencerent* (Paris: arléa, 1994), 177.

17. When one notes Serres's successive academic positions in America (Hopkins, SUNY Buffalo, Stanford), it is hard not to see Girard behind him. *Rome. Les livres des fondations* thanks Girard publically.

Par le livre présent et, si la vie ne m'est pas trop dure, par quelques autres qui suivront, j'adresse mon remerciement à la communauté des historiens qui m'accueillit, voici treize ans, quand la groupe de pression alors au pouvoir m'expulsa de mon vieux paradis: la philosophie. Ce qui me fit la vie dure.

Par le même, je remercie René Girard qui, dans les mêmes circonstances, m'accueillit, quasi réfugié, dans l'hospitalière Amérique, et qui, alors, m'enseigna les idées vraies ici développées. (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1983, p.7)

In return, we have that fine introduction Girard wrote for *Detachment*, which gives the force of his support for Serres's work throughout his career:

When an idea is new it inevitably falls between existing categories and it may go unnoticed for a long time; it may even look irrelevant and silly to "serious" researchers. Michel Serres is not an author for those people whose intellectual life consists in "keeping up with the literature" in one of our constantly shrinking "fields" and in believing that steady progress is being achieved simply because, as the field gets smaller, the objects left in it look larger. (trs. Genevieve James & Raymond Federman. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1989), p. viii.

18. In the introduction to *To Double Business Bound* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) Girard reviews his collection of essays, noting what Burke called "deterministic traces". More than influences, such traces reflect the audiences Girard tried to capture: structuralist, poststructuralist, etc. When Girard presents the mimetic hypothesis in *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair*, he derives it clearly and peaceably from the religious tradition, leaving his skirmishes with contemporary theory behind.