

Bly is onto something when he insists that it is necessary for a man, at some stage in his life, to make contact with the “Wild Man” within him if he is to discover and cultivate the fierceness (not aggressiveness) of spirit without which he can never truly be a man at all. Unfortunately, there is scarcely any opportunity in modern life to confront the Wild Man, and parents, teachers, career counselors, employment officers, social workers, cops, the BATF, the FBI, and politicians representing the two major parties offer pointed strictures against Wild Man behavior. What we need, says Bly, echoing Edward Abbey (who didn’t need a men’s movement), is more wilderness.

Last fall the *Casper Star-Tribune* printed some remarks by an employment specialist who had traveled from Denver to Cheyenne to give helpful advice to the young of the Cowboy State. Forget mining, forget ranching, forget timbering, forget roughnecking, the gentleman said or implied. There’s a whole new exciting world out there, but you gotta be smart and resilient in order to survive in it; gotta get that algebra and calculus down; gotta master those computers; gotta learn about the psychology of interpersonal relations, personnel management, the Role of the Corporation in Modern Society, and Making the World Safe for Corporations! Do that, and you got it made! A great career is in store for you in—the 1-800 number!

Put aside for the time being such “practical” (though the word isn’t of course a neologism, it is used like one throughout the American educational system) questions as whether anybody without half a million dollars can set up as a rancher these days or whether two decades from now coal mining will have

become so thoroughly automated that only robots will need apply. The issue is, young people who even a generation or two ago could look forward to active and spacious lives driving cattle and doctoring calves, breaking horses, supplying mountain sheep camps, tripping drill pipe, hauling logs out of the mountains with a team and sled, dynamiting rock formations, shooting grizzly bears and wolves, cutting wood, irrigating crops, putting up hay, tracking rustlers and arresting them, reforesting mountain slopes—all these tasks performed with the wind, soft or biting, in their faces, the warm sun on their hands and shoulders, and God’s good earth under their feet (or their horses’ hooves) where for the men and women of the American West it was and still is meant to be—are now solemnly advised to spend their adult lives planted on their butts in a climatically controlled office on the 20-something floor of a high-rise building in a futuristic Cheyenne or Casper, dressed in the regulation yuppie uniform and plugged into an electronic maze connecting them unmercifully for eight hours a day (45 minutes off for lunch) with America’s 250 million-person consumariat. Is the availability of technological and other baubles worth requiring human beings to immolate their essential humanity in the production and delivery of such trifles? What sort of society expects—in fact requires—its young to seek fulfillment and happiness in devoting their working lives to 1-800? The answer is a crazy society; a sick and degenerate and despiritualized society. A society that has lost all contact with and awareness of the reality of human existence and of the world itself—its meaning, its richness, its purpose. A society that deserves to perish, and indeed has little hope of escaping death.

What Robert Bly and the men’s movement perceive to be lacking in American and indeed contemporary men everywhere is best described as *vitality*, a quality that is being squeezed from the human psyche—but especially perhaps from the *male* human psyche—by the wine-press of Americanism, otherwise known as Modernism. Bly’s mistake, and that of his followers, is to treat the crisis as essentially a psychological one, to be solved first by coming to terms with the inadequacies of one’s father (when were fathers ever adequate?) and then by making an accommodation of sorts with the tyranny of technocratic society in alliance with the corporate state. But the solution is not Jungian psychology fortified by drumming in the woods: it is revolution, never a job for soft, oversensitized, solipsistic men. And what kind of revolution might that be? Probably not—not necessarily anyway—one with guns and prisons and guillotines; more likely a passive rebellion such as the one Wendell Berry in his new book *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community: Eight Essays* (available from Pantheon and a small work of genius, by the way) advocates: a gradual withdrawal of our attentions and activities from the imperial periphery established by corporate industrialism to the locus of our lives, the placed communities in which we live; the refusal to tolerate longer the public concept of existence and the determination to embrace the communitarian one for the purpose of recreating community, without which sanity, independence, freedom, and, therefore, happiness are impossible. We will breed real men again when we will breed real women to match them, and we will have both when we shall have got rid of the obfuscatory infrastructure of an increasingly obscene syphilization whose unspoken intent is to castrate and humiliate every man, wild or soft, who dares to stand in its way.

## Memo to a Men’s Movement Recruit

by Katherine McAlpine

Its escapades make women  
giggle among our chums—  
“Lester? Imagine *him* in  
war paint and whacking drums!”—

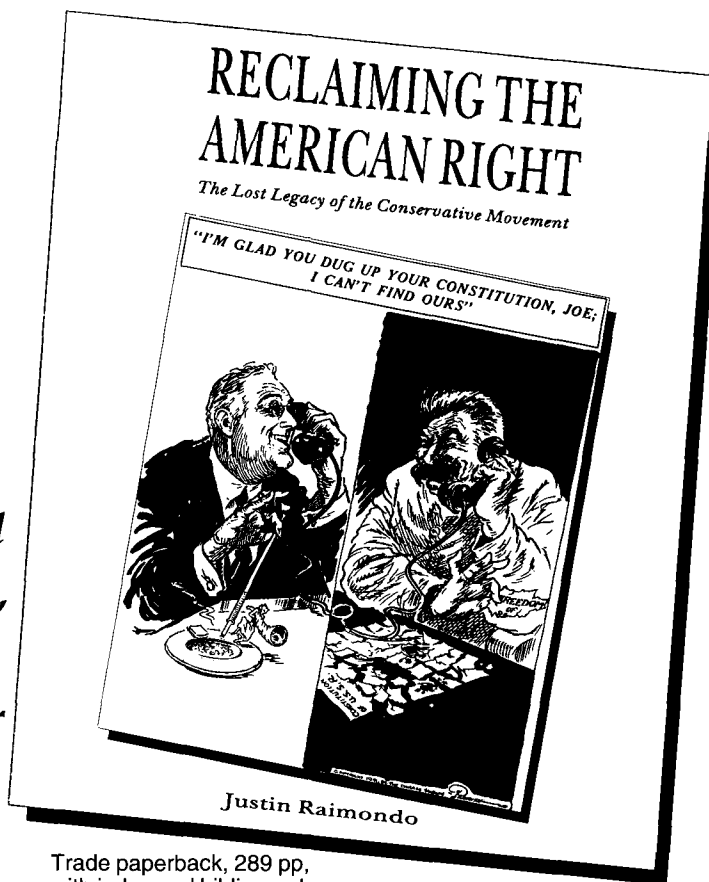
then laugh ourselves half sick  
at the peculiar notion  
that you have to hold a stick  
to talk about emotions.

Sure, sometimes feminism  
has gone too far. But still, you’re  
only extending the schism  
by acting even sillier.

So put the breech-clout away  
and leave those Levis on.  
You’re sweet, but I may say  
you ain’t no Iron John.

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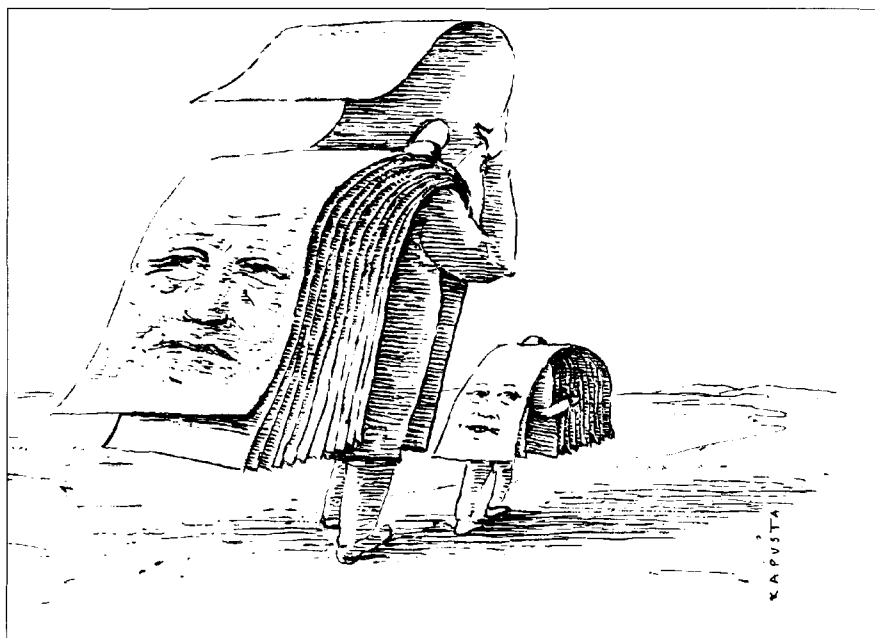
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# My Old Man

by Thomas Fleming



“Sometimes it’s hard to be a woman.” God knows, Tammy Wynette had hard times to complain of, but if being a woman is difficult at the end of the millennium, becoming a man has always been hard. Increasingly, as I look at males of my own age, to say nothing of “guys” in their teens and 20’s, the whole thing seems impossible. The entire century looks like one long adolescent male whine, from Alec Waugh’s *The Loom of Youth* to J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* to Richard Farina’s *Been Down So Long it Looks Like Up to Me* to the feeble whimperings of Jay McInerney and the other quasia-male members of the bratpack. In retrospect, it is easy to admire Hemingway for his virility, but as my own father pointed out to me very early in my reading career, real men do not talk about being real men any more than saints think of themselves as saintly. The real thing is always unconscious of itself; the genuine article is always naive.

My father was a hard man to emulate: a great shot, a legendary fisherman, a man who could be as dangerous with his fists as he was abusive with his tongue. I have inherited the tongue as well as his taste for whiskey. One or the other is sure to kill me.

From everything I have heard of my father as a young man, he was as much the playboy as the hero of one of his favorite plays. A brilliant student, he got himself expelled from school, mostly for insolence. But for all his early days as a roistering merchant seaman, he had a puritanical streak when it came to women, and a Catholic regard for modesty and honesty. And yet, he refused to set foot in the Church of his ancestors until my mother converted to Catholicism in order to drag him in. Of course, his favorite drinking companion was a two-fisted monsignor who, even in the 1960’s, would expel improperly at-

tired women from church.

His intellectual hero was Mencken, whom he knew slightly in his youth. Accused of prejudice, he would inevitably paraphrase the master: “Take away a man’s prejudices, and what is there left?” Whatever side of the political divide he happened to be on, my father would be at the barricade he had erected between himself and the forces of darkness. Like so many men who see the world in terms of black and white, he saw everything in red down to some time in the 40’s. Despite a defective heart, he volunteered repeatedly for the marine corps during World War II but ultimately had to content himself with being a merchant officer on convoy ships. The inability to shoot back must have driven him half crazy, and it is sure that one disastrous trip, on which his ship leaked so much oil it was expelled from the convoy, triggered the ulcers that were to torment him the rest of his life.

Whether it was over German music or American politics, the old man was never known to pass up a good fight. As a red organizer for the National Maritime Union, he was there when Joe Curran was axed in the back; indeed, he was beaten to the ground trying to protect the NMU leader. As time went on, he mellowed considerably, becoming a kind of conservative in politics and accommodating, to the point of deference, to my mother. One of the last pieces of advice I received was that I should not always try to have the last word with a woman, especially with a woman I was married to.

I suppose I inherited my horror of marital infidelity and divorce from my father. A man is only as good as his word, he would say, and if he breaks that word he is nothing. It had nothing to do with what the priests taught. A man who cheated on his wife made himself a cheat in his own eyes. My moth-