

the Iowa Writers' Workshop, he married Carol McLean, a writer he had met at Harvard. (They were divorced in 1979, and he is now married to Ruth Ray, a Jungian analyst.)

In 1955 Robert and Carol Bly "went to hide out at the farm" on the edge of the Lutfisk Capital of the World. Lutfisk is a Norwegian dried fish, an item of sentimental immigrant nostalgia and distinctly an acquired taste. Madison has a large metal sculpture of the lutfisk beside the main road into town. (Another artistic item in town: a wooden sculpture with a sign that says INDIAN DONE BY LOCAL CHAIN-SAW ARTIST.)

Bly published his first book of poetry, *Silence in the Snowy Fields*, in 1962. "The land was flat and boring," he says. "That was my whole problem in writing poems about that country. I called it *Silence in the Snowy Fields* because at least it was a little more interesting with snow on it."

Bly may not be alive to certain absurdities in the men's movement that others see. Ask him about the drumming, for example, which strikes some as a silly, self-conscious attempt at manly authenticity, almost a satire of the hairy chested, and he pours forth a thoughtful but technical answer: "The drum honors the body as opposed to the mind, and that is helpful. It heats up the space where we are." As a spiritual showman (shaman), Bly seeks to produce certain effects. He is good at them. He could not begin to see the men's movement, and his place in it, as a depthless happening in the goofy circus of America. It is odd that Bly is not more put off by the earnest vulgarity of the enterprise.

Perhaps the men's movement is a very American exercise anyway: it has that quality of Americans' making fools

of themselves in brave pop quests for salvation that may be descendants of the religious revivals that used to sweep across the landscape every generation or so in the 18th and 19th centuries. The men's movement belongs as well to the habits of the '60s baby boomers, who tend to perceive their problems and seek their solutions as a tribe.

A Bly theme lies there. The boomers are a culture of siblings. Their fathers are all dead. The '60s taught that the authority of fathers (Lyndon Johnson, the Pentagon, the university, every institution) was defunct. The boomers functioned as siblings without fathers. Is it the case that now, like Bly, they are looking for the vanished father in themselves?

Something in American men is distinctly boyish—a quality that can be charming or repellent, depending. Unlike men from other cultures, they sometimes seem to be struggling every day to make the transition from boyhood to manhood. George Bush constantly enacts, within the course of a single crisis (the gulf war, for example), the drama of his own growing up: a period of passivity and confusion is fol-

lowed by a mobilization of manhood. Blowing up Iraq, Bly thinks, was the product of all the wrong male qualities—aggressiveness addicted to high-octane power that goes foraging elsewhere in the world for a mission while its own house is rotting away.

The kingly man is a public man, even if he is a poet. Shakespeare used to adorn the British £20 note. Perhaps, I suggest jokingly, Bly's face will one day be on the \$20 bill. "I hate being a pop figure," he winces. But he has made the transition from private trauma to public stage. His testimony in effect now begins, "I come from a dysfunctional country." ■

"The drum honors the body as opposed to the mind, and that is helpful. It heats up the space where we are."