

1972

So Much Is Not Spoken

Robert Bly

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No response to this, and yet, paradoxically, Bly suggests a response, or at least a way of understanding it. The horribly catalogued violence against human and vegetable nature can be seen in a more distant sense as a natural aspect of the apocalyptic evolutionary change described in more positive terms in the final pages of *Light*. One voice in "Teeth Mother," looking for solace, suggests of the violence of "the Marine battalion," "This happens when the seasons change/ this happens when the leaves begin to drop from the trees too early." Bly undercuts the suggestion of solace, but the comparison remains. Vietnam, in some sense the death of American dreams, is not an end but a transition, in which the teeth mother necessarily appears as an aspect of the ecstatic mother.

Now the whole nation starts to whirl

. . . .
pigs rush toward the cliff,
the waters underneath part: in one ocean luminous globes
float up (in them hairy and ecstatic rock musicians)—
in the other, the teeth mother, naked at last.

The balance, and the sense of cycles evolving, provide no cure to present agony. Bly knows it is the false transcendence of agony, with its attendant repression, which distorts human consciousness in the first place. But the vision of evolution enables Bly to sustain his paradoxical suspension of despair and mystic hope, his sense of death as life. Perhaps that paradox will always defy resolution, but in his latest poetry Bly continues to offer hope for evolution into a state of consciousness in which despair can be replaced by that grief which attends the natural movement of life, which is not inconsistent with joy. At the end of a recent poem read at Antioch, Bly suggests, through paradox now expressed with a clear simplicity, that the conflict between the father and the mother may be resolved by that consciousness now being born.

More of the fathers are dying each day,
It's time for the sons.
Bits of darkness are gathering around the sons,
The darkness appears as flakes of light.

SO MUCH IS NOT SPOKEN

Oh yes, I love you, book of my confessions,
when the swallowed begins to rise from the earth again,
and the deep hungers
from the wells. So much is still inside me—like cows eating
in a collapsed strawpile all winter to get out.
Everything we need now is buried,
it's far back into the mountain,
it's under the water guarded by women.

These lines themselves are sunk to the waist in the dusk under
the odorous cedars,
each rain will only drive them deeper,
they will leave a faint glow in the dead leaves.
You too are weeping in the low shade of the pine branches,
you feel yourself about to be buried too,
you are a ghost stag shaking his antlers in the herony light,
what is beneath us will be triumphant
in the cool air made fragrant by owlfeathers.

I am only half-risen.
I see how carefully I covered my tracks as I wrote,
how well I have brushed over the past with my tail.
I enter rooms full of photographs of the dead.
My hair stands up
as a badger crosses my path in the moonlight.

I see faces looking at me in the shallow waters
where I have thrown them down.
Mother and father pushed into the dark.
That shows how close I am to the dust that fills the cracks on the ocean floor,
how much I love to fly in the rain,
how much I love to see the jellyfish pulsing at the cold borders of the
universe.

I have piled up people like dead flies between the storm windows and the
kitchen pane.
I stand at the edges of the light, howling to come in!
So much is not spoken! And yet
all at once I follow the wind through open holes in the blood . . .
So much ecstasy . . .
long evenings when the leopard leaps up to the stars,
and in an instant we understand all the rocks in the world.

And I am there, prowling like a limp-footed bull outside the circle
of the fire,
praying, meditating,
full of energy, like a white horse, saddled, alone on the unused fields.

A consciousness is hovering under the mind's feet,
climbing at times up on a shoelace!
It is a willow that knows of water under the earth.
I am a father who dips as he passes over underground rivers,
who can feel his children through all distance and time!