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**Reconsidering the Siblings:
A critical study of Robert Bly's *The Sibling Society***

Benet Davetian

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Sociology and Anthropology

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
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c Benet Davetian, 1998



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Abstract
Reconsidering the Siblings
A Critical Study of Robert Bly's *The Sibling Society*

Benet Davetian

Reconsidering the Siblings attempts to investigate the nature of moral panics by testing *The Sibling Society*, a work written by a prominent American literary critic, Robert Bly. In his work Robert Bly suggests that America is in deep crisis and that a return to vertical associations and relationships will help reclaim the positive aspects of the American heritage. In this thesis, I analyze some of the premises used by Bly in his arguments and suggest that America's social problems are not as much the result of moral turpitude but the logical consequences of a courageous experiment in democratic culture. Through an analysis of the American educational system, the media, the family, and the corporate culture, I attempt to show that America's early Puritan roots and the manner in which it broke from its European heritage led to a culture in which "irony" became a vehicle via which Americans tried to deal with the tensions which arose when rapid change and development eclipsed the firm moral positions of early Americans.

Through a historical analysis of American education, media and the American family, I show that America's present social problems are representative of a continuing problematic: how to define what is "good" and "evil" in a society which has chosen to transcend the limitations of religious dogma. In my conclusion, I suggest that sociology pay particular attention to the emotional realities of children and adults and build a sociology of the emotions which treats the individual as an embodied agent whose needs should not be denied due to collective mores. Included in the work is data accumulated during psychotherapy sessions in which clients have reported that deprivation in childhood has led to the accumulation of "pain" which has affected their adult life. The data offered suggests that the "reliving" and "expression" of that pain in a controlled setting has beneficial effects which free the individual to lead a positive and violence-free life. Basing myself on this data, I conclude that social theories which do not take such "pain" into account risk misinterpreting the nature of social action and the emotional motivations which lie at the root of social problems.

At the theoretical level, I suggest that the anatomy of moral panics is directly tied to a culture's esteem of itself and the emotional status of its individual members. I suggest that the method of "deconstruction" is a useful research tool, for it permits the comparison of differing explanations and unites historical as well as psychological considerations. A central point of the thesis is that moral panics often negate historical understanding and discount the important role played by "unintended consequences" in the construction of social reality.

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1

INTRODUCTION

I have chosen to focus this study on the culture of the United States of America, even though I am based in Canada, for two principal reasons: First, one who has stood inside a forest and seen its trees close-up and then left the forest and stood outside of it sees the whole of the forest at least as well as one standing inside it. This applies specially in époques when there is considerable social tension and where the analyst--because h/she shares the same environment as h/her subjects--risks becoming prone to the same anxieties experienced by h/her subjects. The writer in exile may have as much insight to offer as the writer in residence. Second, social commentary on America is an important topic; in a world where media is leading to a creolization of local customs, an understanding of that which occurs in America---a nation leading in the economic and technological area---is of importance to those nations which are trading with America and being influenced by its social projects. Of equal importance to the non-American observer is an understanding of key époques in America's past and their possible effects on its contemporary social reality. Understanding why a given "belief" in contemporary America may have its genesis in a past which is particularly American may help non-Americans evaluate whether they wish to adopt that same belief even though they themselves do not possess the same historical motivation. Equally, from an American as well as global point of view, it is beneficial to sift through the American "experience" in order to distill from it those aspects of the American "cultural experiment" which have continued to provide many other nations with inspiration and hope.

On a theoretical level, the topic which provides this thesis with its through-line is the topic of "moral panics," a term coined by Stanley Cohen (1972). Implicit in a "moral panic" is the worry that a given culture is losing its strength and its ability to survive. In societies where there are extensive networks of mass communication, the spread of moral panics can occur in short periods of time.

Moral worry, when practiced in moderate doses, has a beneficial side to it: it promotes democratic discussion and increases the potential for socially positive change. In fact, moral worry has been present in nearly every époque in history; it is the foundation of human self-examination and a particular characteristic of what Hofstadter has called the need of Americans to be "the most self-critical, at least the most anxious self-conscious people in the world, forever concerned about the inadequacy of something or other" (1963: vii).

At the level of extreme moral worry, however, there appear certain conditions and effects which might outweigh the beneficial outcomes of intense self-examination. So, an awareness of both the advantages and disadvantages of self-critique help us avoid facile generalizations in critique which have no real connection to the evolutionary or functional needs of a given culture.

Moral “panics” (as opposed to healthy worries) develop when a given percentage of the population begins feeling that “things cannot continue as they are,” and that, without quick and extensive change, the well-being of the culture will be jeopardized. Certain conditions must prevail for such generalized fear to occur. A culture in which the majority of citizens feel satisfied with their life would not be troubled with moral uncertainty. The culture might not be the best that it could be; yet the satisfaction of its citizens would exclude the kind of public debates which would lead to a generalized dissatisfaction. A troubled mind is a prerequisite for moral dread. The thought held in the mind and the emotion elicited by that thought can be justified or unjustified. If the thought is justified, then the moral dread has positive functional properties and may actually lead to revised customs which are of short-term and long-term profit to the culture. But if the dread is unjustified and is the result of a faulty analysis of the social or the laying of blame on one social reality to compensate for another, then the actions which emerge from that dread can be expected to be either socially ineffective or deleterious.

“Moral panics,” therefore, should be evaluated from a multiplicity of points of view. Do they reflect the authentic feelings of the majority of the population, or are they “manufactured” by a group seeking to further its interests regardless of the functional needs of the culture? Do they follow a period of generalized anxiety and/or humiliation (as during the *époque* immediately preceding the appearance of the Nazi party in Germany) and might they be based on the compounding of past grievances rather than actual present social problems? Are they generalized moral dreads that cross over various social boundaries and classes or are they endemic to a specific part of the population while remaining meaningless and archaic to another? Such questions reveal that what is one person’s dread may be another’s contentment. The end measure of a moral crisis and the actions which follow in its wake is whether the dread is useful in the long run or not.

The anatomy of a “moral panic” is precise and predictable. It is based on a process of logic which includes the following progression of thought: First, a series of social problems are attributed to a specific set of circumstances. Then, it is concluded that were the circumstances to be eliminated the social problems would also be eradicated. What is not adequately considered in this paradigm is that circumstances and problems can coexist and be not wholly causative in regards to one another. A classical example of this is the

manner in which absent fathers have been connected to the circumstances of industrialization. The placement of the father in a work station outside the home has been attributed as the principal cause of modern family problems. Yet, what has not been considered has been whether the family problems truly followed in the wake of industrialization or whether industrialization itself led to an increase in awareness which then made society begin noticing problems which it had previously ignored. For all practical purposes, the father may have been spiritually absent long before the invention of the first machine.

The assignation of "cause" to a reality is at the root of a moral panic. And the antidote to such panic is the investigation of alternative causes. Of course, the undoing of a "moral panic" may itself lead to faulty explanations, for the same logic of cause-effect is used in both instances. But while this exercise does not necessarily lead to certainty, it does make us pause when faced with the "certainties" of those offering up specific and confident plans of social action in times of intense social unrest. The searching for alternate explanations, therefore, is a method of resisting authoritarian impulses, within others as well as within ourselves. A by-product of this type of analysis is increased historical understanding and a healthy resistance towards explanations which gloss over the autobiographies of the topics being "explained."

Hofstadter (1996: 36) has shown how a culture incurs risks of falling into the demagogic impulse when uncertainty is accompanied by a strong need for social stability. He writes that the demagogue acquires credibility because h/she includes in h/her arguments some points which are so evident that no one would need or care to refute them. But then the demagogue makes a quantum leap forward and points out an individual or group to be blamed. Usually, whether stated explicitly or implied implicitly, the denunciation is couched in language which labels the feared subject as "evil."

Now there are specific emotions which accompany "moral panics." Charles Horton Cooley has written with considerable precision regarding the universal emotions of "pride" and "shame" and how they figure prominently in many individual and collective reactions to reality (1956). Cooley has demonstrated through his study of children that a person attempts to manipulate h/her social environment in such a way as to increase feelings of "pride" and decrease feelings of "shame." These two emotions lie at the root of the socialization process and, without them, a parent's ability to direct h/her child away from a given behavior and towards another would be sorely limited. A person's need for self-esteem is a powerful need which a person delivers into the keeping of those persons with whom h/she comes in contact. Collectives are prone to the same needs for self-esteem as

are individuals. In times, when cultural self-esteem is low, the possibility of a moral panic is particularly strong.

Yet, the opposite of a moral panic, the unbridled open-mindedness and acceptance of whatever is existent in a culture, has its own dangers also. The price of ambition is security and this security can sometimes require moral compromises. Richard Rorty, writing on ethnocentrism, states that the obsessive need to avoid any ethnocentric feeling leads to the loss of our “capacity for moral indignation” and our “capacity to feel contempt.” Rorty suggests that in becoming so concerned with suspending judgment “we have become so open-minded that our brains have fallen out” (1991: 203). So, on one hand, moral panics lead to the taking on of “selves” and “attitudes” which are not justified by reality, while, on the other hand, unbridled “open-mindedness” can lead to a loss of sense of selfhood and a parallel loss of moral focus.

* * *

The work I have chosen to examine in this thesis provides me with the opportunity of testing some of the above concepts. It is a work written by a prominent American. It offers disturbing conclusions regarding what is on-going in the American cultural landscape.

Robert Bly begins his new book, *The Sibling Society*, with: “At the close of the twentieth century, adults have regressed toward adolescence while adolescents refuse to become adults. Where have all the grown ups gone?”

His first book of non-fiction, *Iron John*, about fathers and sons, was number one on *The New York Times* bestseller list for ten weeks and continued to remain on the list for more than a year.

The Sibling Society, also a best-seller, is about America’s move from a paternal culture to a culture of what Bly terms “half-adults.” It is an urgent call for a reevaluation of the American family, the American corporate system, and American media. Although Bly is neither a sociologist or anthropologist, he possesses an extensive and illustrious background in the humanities, literature and history. He is known as one of America’s leading poets and mythologists and has been awarded the prestigious American National Book Award.

The central point of Bly’s book, as alluded to in its title, is that America has become a society of siblings---a society in which children do not wish to become adults and adults themselves remain stuck in a state of partial adulthood.

Bly identifies four major causes for what he considers America’s loss of interest in “growing up.” He cites the continuing disintegration of American families, the failure of the education system to produce a literate generation possessing an active love of knowledge,

the advent and widespread use of television as a marketing and “socializing” tool, and the triumph of a capitalist ethic which manipulates all the above to its advantage.

His assessment of contemporary American culture is indeed a bleak one. The *New Age Journal* comments, “A learned and fiercely opinionated volume that leaves us with much to chew on.” The *New Republic* says, “Once his leading observation has lodged itself in your mind, the evidence to confirm it is everywhere.” And The *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* writes, “...ought to be inspired reading for anyone generous enough to desire adulthood in a society compelled by virtual reality.”

Throughout his book Bly pleads for a cultural vision that would reclaim American youth from the media and business interests which he believe have appropriated them. Insisting that a culture cannot lose respect for its cultural heritage without losing its coherence, he argues for a transformed conjunction between the youth and the adults/elders of the culture.

Bly’s treatment of the subject deserves a careful reading by sociologists and anthropologists. It is in a way ironic that such a mainstream work in social thought should come from outside the social sciences. Sociologists and anthropologists may wish to use Bly’s arguments as a starting point in a more comprehensive analytical work. Although he is neither a sociologist or anthropologist, Bly uses his eclectic academic background to argue with lucidity if not consistent methodological ardor. One cannot help but be affected by what Bly says, for he is voicing what many have observed. Yet, there is a causative line of logic in Bly’s work which needs careful scrutiny. The assignation of causes in this work permits its author to offer up solutions. And if one agrees with the premises of his argument, one is left feeling disconcerted enough to be vulnerable to the phenomenon of moral panic” described above. It is the possibility of such vulnerability and the openness this creates in us to be friendly towards total solutions which motivates me to reconsider Bly’s work in detail and question my own moral worry. It so happens that during my first reading of the book, I said to myself: “This man has put into words many of my own thoughts.” Yet, as I re-read the book, I realized that I needed to question my own position and test it with a more thorough analysis of the problems described by Bly. So, in a way, this thesis is a conscious deconstruction of my own position (and bias) as well as an investigation of the meaning of Bly’s contentions.

2

WAITING TO GROW UP

The subject of Bly's work is families and the culture in which they are located and with which they maintain an interactively influential relationship. It is, therefore, reasonable to classify his recent book not only as a general commentary on adult culture, but, also, as a contribution to youth studies, for Bly speaks at length of the "plight" of American children and youth.

While Bly condemns sociologists for wasting their time with critical theory issues that do not assess the devastation of the cultural landscape---a criticism which is sometimes but not always justified---I will, nevertheless, go through our field's habit of placing the subject "in context" of existing literature. Such a review will help me remember, during subsequent sections of this work, that youth, and adults for that matter, are not passive recipients of "culture" but active forces whose historical as well as contemporary autobiographies play a central role in the structuration of society.

The view extended by youth as "incomplete" and, by extension, vulnerable agents, is nothing new. Western developmental anthropology, psychology, and sociology have traditionally held that youth is a developmental stage in life, a transient period connecting pre-pubescence to adulthood. Such a paradigm sees youth as extensions of an adult society which has created them but has yet to bestow them with full membership. In the absence of the kind of initiation rites practiced by more traditional societies there are no clear indications in western culture as to when young people turn into adults. Reliance on legal indicators such as the legal age for drinking and voting or the legal age for gainful full-time employment are no longer authentic indicators of initiation into adulthood. While such marks along the life-path signify the civil rights of youth to participate in adult activities they do not help define whether a given individual has consciously passed into a "state" which now makes him "think" and "feel" like an adult. Neither do these superficial marks indicate *what* it is to "feel" and "think" like an "adult." The developmental theory is based on the assumption that adults become "adults" at some point of their lives. The notion of "adult," however, is as much a legal category as it is an essential one. The category becomes even more subject to alteration when we consider that in societies of rapid technical change the "technical competencies" associated with adulthood are no longer subject to age-grades but the ability to acquire relevant and up-to-date knowledge. Similarly, emotional maturity is not only the result of amount of life experience but the manner in which available experience is dealt with. In societies of rapid change, adaptability is as important as seniority.

So the study of a culture and the role played in it by its youth is a complicated matter, not easily subject to reductionism. In fact, many of our misconceptions of youth have originated from the manner in which youth studies themselves have been designed and conducted. As Helena Wulff (1995) points out, the earliest youth studies were intended to investigate specific “problems” experienced by youth within the context of a society administered by adults. Youth culture was not seen by social analysts as a culture that was complete in itself and worthy of being integrally studied. In many cases, researchers chose youth studies as a stepping stone in their careers and did not spend enough time with their topics to produce longitudinal studies capable of investigating general youth culture in an in-depth manner. There certainly existed very few cross-cultural studies.

Many of the studies of the 1950’s and early 1960’s, for example, were what A. Cohen has termed manifestations of “moral panic” (1985). They were investigations of isolated instances of unrest or deviance, dramatized and magnified into generalized views of youth. Such “moral panics” clouded the adult population’s vision of its own youth and did little to show what it meant to be a young person in an adult world. If anything, such exaggerations served to create distrust between adults and their own teenage children. This tendency to “demonize” youth “unrest” may have had its roots in the fact that adults in societies of slow change were used to having their children grow up to become very much the way they themselves had been. It is not surprising, therefore, that the appearance in the mid-twentieth century of icons such as James Dean and Marlon Brando became significant sources of insecurity for an adult society habituated to conformity and manageable technical change.

As for the studies that were done in the mid-60’s and 70’s, many of them were conducted in an academic environment substantially influenced by neo-Marxist theory. This ideological interest led to studies which viewed youth as objects and extensions of class conflict. It was a viewpoint which reinforced prevailing traditional tendencies to label youth as components of adult culture rather than as *agents* capable of self-determination. Much of the work done by Dick Hebdige (1979) and leading researchers of the Birmingham School in England was motivated by the Marxist paradigm. Hebdige’s studies sought to investigate class and power *through* the study of youth rather than studying youth for their own sake. Even Margaret Mead’s seminal study of youth in Samoa ([1929] 1961) was motivated by her a-priori worry concerning American youth and what she considered their “conflicted” adolescence. Her analysis of Samoan youth is affected by this preoccupation with her own conclusions regarding the problems of American youth (Davetian, 1995).

More recent studies by Vered Amit-Talai (1995), Marc Shade-Poulsen (1993), Allison James (1995), and Virginia Caputo (1995) have departed from such limiting views

of youth and sought to *recognize* and *understand* youth by studying them within the context of their own peer groups. These studies do not seek to present a homogenized---nor idealized---view of culture, but investigate what, according to Caputo, are “anthropology’s silent others.” Their writings confirm Maria Montessori’s (1971) passionate argument against the treatment of children as “half-persons.”

The studies of Amit-Talai, Shade-Poulsen, James, and Caputo are refreshing because they remain open to locally-produced meanings and question the a-priori position of determinism. They are ethnographies of youth activity as well as investigations of how agency and habitat are interconnected. On a theoretical level, they echo Sigmund Bauman’s (1992) contention that agency is closely connected to habitat and that a given group will use whatever is useful to it in its surroundings and form its identity in consequence.

Now this should not lead us to the blanket assumption that youth cannot be influenced to become “passive” in their relationship with culture. The degree to which an individual actively contributes to culture-creation is dependent on many factors, including economic circumstances, social networks, and precedents set by the individual’s own family.

A parallel problem in youth studies has been the manner in which adulthood itself has been viewed. With the exception of Erickson (1980) and Maslow (1954) who considered adulthood as only one in a series of passage or cycles of a life-span, many theorists of the self have considered adulthood as an end-point along a hierarchy of time. It is as if a person lived h/her childhood and youth as an incomplete being and then suddenly became “complete” upon “turning into” what culture considers an “adult.” Childhood and youth are thus seen mostly as pathways rather than as specific points in the life-cycle, each as important as the other. Even the Freudian model, despite some of its ground-breaking insights, has furthered the notion of the adult as the “outcome” of the child and adolescent. The Freudian analytical practice of attempting to relate nearly all adult problems back to a subconscious mind developed during childhood and adolescence is based on the premise that the various “personality layers” of a person are interconnected and interactive. Such a causal model does not make sufficient allowances for the development of paradoxical and novel reactions during a given stage of life. Neither does it recognize the strong influence of new social environments encountered by adults long after the passages of their childhood and adolescence. As a result of this causal paradigm, the Freudian theory of behavior limits the power of the subject to interact with h/her habitat and produce new forms of the self that are not scripted by previous experience (Freud, 1930).

This vision of adulthood as a *fait-accompl*i and of childhood as an incomplete transient process is more commonly found in societies where convention is strong and

where the survival of the culture depends on transmission of knowledge without major modifications. It is suitable for societies where a process of "initiation" marks the boundaries between youth and adulthood. The adult who possesses the moral and technical knowledge needed for the survival of the culture is considered a fixed and privileged agent; the youth is seen as the apprentice of a privileged group known as "the adults" or "elders." A young person, in such a "stable" culture, aspires to arrive at where the adults are and eventually take over their responsibilities. H/she receives frequent glimpses of h/her future by using adults as a reference. By knowing where h/she is headed h/she does not discover other possible directions. H/her self-esteem as a person is based on h/her successful adoption of the prescribed adult role. In such societies young children are often adding a few months to their age, wanting to appear older than they really are---they do not shy away from being "big people" and see adulthood as their way out into the world. This is particularly applicable to children living in cultures where there is strong and unrelenting parental supervision and discipline (coincidentally common in cultures which forbid sexuality prior to marriage).

Cultures with high rates of change, however, cannot be viewed in the above manner. Nor can they depend on the same orderly transition between youth and adulthood. In such cultures there is a larger gap between the life world of a youth and h/her adult counterpart. In many instances the future adult behavior of a youth will be substantially different from that of the adults who seek to socialize h/her, simply because the culture's techniques for societal maintenance will have changed considerably by the time the youth becomes an adult. For decades now American youth have been regarded as the world's most rebellious youth---it is interesting, meanwhile, to note that America has also experienced a phenomenal rate of social and technical change during that same period.

Caputo, Amit-Talai and Shade-Poulson venture into uncharted territory and attempt to demonstrate that youth often use social pathways which are not in every instance shared by adults nor readily apparent to them. They suggest that social pathways used by youth can, in certain instances, be quite self-sufficient. Through these particular social pathways, youth develop the ability to participate in the creation of their own culture and, in the process, also develop the means of appropriating certain aspects of adult culture to create hybrid forms particular to their own needs and personalities. An important observation made by these researchers is that many of the cultural products of youthful sensibilities may not be noticed or understood by adults at the time of their occurrence---they may, nevertheless, have immediate and continuing effects on adult society.

Arguing against a vision of the passive "in process" child, Caputo (1995) suggests that youth has a "present" which stands beyond the biologically-determined developmental

connection between youth and adulthood. She argues for a “discursive” framework focused on the subjective authenticity of children and adolescents as beings who are capable of producing their own meanings. Amit-Talai’s study of students attending the Royal Haven School of Montreal demonstrates that---notwithstanding a host of adult institutional restrictions which sought to limit their access to one another---the students managed to “bridge” their institutional and private identities to create networks of intimacy which acted as a “resistance to the discontinuities regularly imposed [by adults] on peer relations” (1995:160). Schade-Poulson’s study of “rai” music amongst Algerian youth (1995) similarly argues for the ability of youth to surpass established boundaries and create meanings particular to their own realities. His analysis of rai music shows how a traditional form of singing is now used by Algerian youth to represent emerging gender, work and political issues.

Now it might be argued that cultures given to transmitting conventions as intact as possible from one generation to the next may not respond well to the idea that youth possess distinct cultural agency of their own. Undoubtedly, the youth of some convention-bound societies have less freedom to affirm identities different from those of their elders, since conformity is a necessary staple in the preservation of existing customs. Yet, there is increasing evidence that, in a globalized world where customs and mores are becoming “creolized,” youth are beginning to acquire a voice that is of their own. In many countries, youth serve to affirm tradition but also act as safeguards that limit traditions from becoming unproductively rigid and authoritarian. It is important, therefore, that we move away from the monochromatic bi-polar notions of youth culture as a culture of rebellion or mindless acquiescence.

What the above studies of youth indicate is that there can be no a-priori, facile generalization of youth culture. A given culture of young persons, be they children or adolescents, is best examined according to the circumstances of locality. The types of behavior and attitudes which youth will adopt will not only be a reflection of the social world in which they have grown up but also a determinant of the social world they inhabit, a world which has a complex history in which intentions and consequences are not always compatible. This openness to the notion of interactivity, however, should not move us to discount or consider eternally negotiable those “needs” of children and youth which remain universal across boundaries of language and territory.

A SOCIETY OF SIBLINGS

Bly's thesis in *The Sibling Society* (1996) rests on a few propositions:

1. The educational and family institutions of America have failed the present generation of youth; 2. Youth are prolonging their adolescence and are not motivated to grow up into adulthood; 3. The adults themselves are stuck in their own half-completed and lingering adolescence; 4. The culture as a whole has deteriorated due to a corporate and media alliance which has sought to infantilise the population and keep it in a mode of uncritical consumerist need.

Although Bly is not a sociologist or anthropologist, he does have an impressive training in the classics, literature and the humanities---it would be an error for sociologists and anthropologists to by-pass his work. Rather, it is fitting that we examine his work from two points of view: that of his own background in the humanities, mythology and literary criticism, and also from a point of view which combines sociological analysis, anthropological insight and historical understanding.

Robert Bly begins the Introduction of his run-away best-seller, with these disheartening words:

It's the worst of times; it's the best of times. That's how we feel as we navigate from a parental society, now discredited, to a society in which impulse is given its way. People don't bother to grow up and we are all fish swimming in a tank of half-adults (vii).

This is a strong and disturbing statement coming from someone credible who seems to have meditated long and hard over the American cultural landscape. Throughout his book, Bly makes points that merit serious consideration, but he makes these points using a set of theoretical assumptions which also require careful evaluation. For example, in the short selection quoted above, Bly makes five assumptions: 1. That we did at some point live in a society that could have legitimately have been considered "parental," 2. That a "parental" society, by its very nature, leads to full and responsible adulthood, 3. That the "parental society" we possessed has actually been "discredited," 4. That we are surrendering to "impulse" and doing so far more than we would if we had a "parental" society, and, finally, 5. That the majority of our citizens, be they of legal adult age or under, are only half-adults. Bly uses the word "sibling" not to denote blood relations but to refer to the infantilization of personality.

Bly's position in *The Sibling Culture* rejoins a growing dismay in many American circles over what has happened to American youth culture and western culture in general. It is also a position taken by in many Conservative circles where the American liberal political

agenda is regarded with disdain. It is interesting to note that a reading of Bly's book by various individuals who are politically active in various political factions would elicit a different set of reactions. So Bly's book should be placed in a political as well as moral context. Although he does not align himself with the political right or left, he does espouse ideals and solutions which would appeal more to the more conservative shades of the American political spectrum.

Yet, there is a general malaise in America which most political factions would agree on. And because of this it is tempting to remain with the irrefutable parts of Bly's argument and neglect those portions of it that are logically and contextually problematic.

The Sibling Society addresses three areas of social life: 1. The family and the relationships which young men and women maintain with themselves and their families, 2. The relationships between families and the economy, of which corporations are integral and substantially-influential members, and 3. The culture as it exists within a media-dominated environment and its effects on youth and families.

Bly is a mythologist. By consequence, both of his recent books of non-fiction include mythological stories which are embedded in the text to help convey his points and add a metaphorical dimension to his argument. In *The Sibling Society* he begins by retelling the story of Jack and the Beanstalk. Two antithetical forces are represented in the story: Jack, who seems to be a decent fellow, and the giant, whose only thought seems to be to destroy Jack and everything he and his mother hold dear---Jack's father is not around; Jack's mother is his principal care-taker. Through a series of dangerous and nearly disastrous encounters with the giant, Jack manages to steal a pot of gold from the giant and makes his way back down the beanstalk and to the safety of his mother's home. The "pot of gold" is not to be taken literally but as a symbol of Jack's recovered courage and self-esteem.

Bly uses this story to allude to "forces" that are ever present and which pose a danger to the family and its members, especially when the father is absent. This interpretation, however, may not be readily apparent to a child to whom the story is read. Bly, however, writing to an adult audience, follows the code of mythologists and reminds us that fairy tales are complex allegories regarding the human condition. He asks us to consider the metaphorical meaning of Jack and the Beanstalk and heed its cloaked warning.

He suggests that the *giant* in the classic story represents the "aggressive animal base, the dark, instinctive substructure, which is older than our ego, that dark ground that is implacably reborn with every child" (16). According to Bly, we arrive as infants in the world carrying with us a "rough, selfish, pre-social animal ground" that is subject to either positive or negative influence (16).

Bly defends this Jungian model of human nature by citing scientific discoveries regarding the structure and function of the human brain. He refers to the work of neurologists who have determined that the human brain consists of various “layers,” proceeding from the lower visceral arousal system up to the neo-cortical regions which negotiate symbolic and moral thought. He agrees with the findings of neurologists who assert that the neo-cortex is the socialized part of the brain and that it acts as a censor which controls and regulates strong aggressive impulses emanating from the lower centers. According to Bly, Jack would be in serious trouble with the giant were he to lose the integrity of his neo-cortical functions, for the giant is already within Jack and is the manifestation of the strong visceral drives which lie at the deeper level of Jack’s brain. These drives Bly equates with the notion of the “id” developed by Freud (18).

He suggests that contemporary American youth may be losing their battle with the Giant: “We don’t know how to steal ‘gold’ back from the Giant. As a people, we have no idea what to do about greed in general, nor the Giant, nor the television that eats more and more of our lives each day, nor the increasing hunger for new goods that children and adults feel...As a culture, we still don’t know how to steal from the Giant; we allow the Giant to continue stealing from us” (42).

Bly categorically states that, regardless of our conviction that human culture made a quantum leap forward due to the Enlightenment, the original “substructure” of our dark side has changed little over two thousand years of Christianity. It lies buried within us and can emerge on moment’s notice (20).

It is important to take note of Bly’s paradigm of brain structure (and his resulting view of human nature) because he proceeds from this point on to speak of the dangers which threaten an individual whose neo-cortex has not received the stimulation, feed-in and support it requires to construct values which regulate (and dominate) the forces emanating from the lower visceral centers. He writes, “our effort here is to put clearly the odds that our ‘I’ or neo-cortex faces when it tries to wrest governship of the human organism away from the Alarm System and the Feeding, Sexuality, and Ferocity System well rooted in our archaic brains” (22).

He foresees the objection that could be made regarding this paradigm. He writes, “Some readers may object that too much is being read into the beanstalk tale.” He answers that if we are to discount this explanation, “then we must find and name that secret road that has led American society in such a brief time from a moderately disciplined, moderately respectful culture to a culture in which twelve-year-olds shoot each other, Calvin Klein uses children for sexually implicit advertisements, and we overeat, and remain in a state of materialist violence. If anyone has a better explanation, I will be glad to hear it” (28).

When grouped together the problems Bly describes seem to have no beginning or end...it would seem as if the corruption of American culture is so deep and complete as to render the culture almost irredeemable. It might even seem to some as if some dark force had taken over the culture and was directing it towards some sinister end.

Bly's writing is compelling. He has the knack for placing an allegoric story within his text and then linking the story's possible metaphorical meaning to the logic of his narrative. This talent for marrying the mythological meaning of human experience to contemporary social reality tends to "help" the reader suspend his sense of disbelief more than he might were the text to be entirely non-fictional.

Setting aside the nearly half-dozen expertly told stories which animate the text one is left with the following distillation of Bly's essay on American culture:

The industrial revolution dealt a heavy blow to fatherhood by removing the father from the home and placing him in the factory. This weakening of the family was furthered in the latter part of the twentieth century through the drafting of the mother into the workplace. A high divorce rate and a rising rate of single parenthood were additional blows to the family, leaving an indelible mark on youth. Television moved in to fill the vacuum, taking the role of baby-sitter and extra-curricular socializer. Consequently, many children grew up at the mercy of advertisers who did not hesitate to foster a non-critical view of consumer culture. As a result, the youth have remained in a childlike state of prolonged adolescence.

This prolonged adolescence was aggravated by a steadily diminishing daily contact between youth and parent(s), and an educational system which failed to transmit adequate reading, writing and analytical skills, let alone the historical, literary, philosophical and ethical tradition of the culture (the canon). This failure in education and socialization has been in great part caused by anti-patriarchal, anti-hierarchical, pro-feminist sentiment which has led to the devaluation of classical knowledge and struck a terrible blow to love of knowledge in itself. The combined effect of absent parents and grandparents, a superficial and incoherent educational system lacking in meaning, and a corporate world lacking in social conscience has produced a generation of youth which is uninspired, confused, depressed, ungrateful, incapable of coherence, and unmotivated to grow into adulthood.

Sociologists and cultural studies specialists have compounded the problem by rationalizing the "new" society rather than critiquing its premises and its continuing lowering of standards. The only way out of the wholesale break-down of meaning and community will require adults and elders to reestablish contact with youth and create new social meanings based on a redefinition of responsible adulthood.

*

One wonders what a young person would feel reading Bly's text. Would the text help increase that person's confidence in life and his ability to live it? Furthermore, would it act as an inspiration or would it serve to sadden its reader? One suspects the text would elicit both reactions. One cannot help feel inspired by Bly's sincere caring while also being profoundly saddened by his courageous exposition of America's social problems.

But being inspired and feeling saddened cannot move us to conclude that Bly's argument is completely accurate. There is truth to The New Republic's commentary on Bly's book: "Once his leading observation has lodged itself in your mind, the evidence to confirm it is everywhere." But the identification of realities already suspected by us to exist and the explanation of their causes are two separate things. Equally problematic is the attempt to speculate on what would help improve these realities.

One thing struck me during my third reading of Bly's text. His argument is based on two underlying premises: 1) Human nature needs be controlled and directed; otherwise, the human personality will be submerged by destructive forces innate to the species. Bly believes in some primordial destructive force which is ever-lurking in the human psyche, waiting for the right circumstances to manifest itself. The notion of a person able to create himself or herself regardless of past experience is fairly absent in Bly's work. Even when he refers to a son who excels professionally and morally beyond the limits of his father he suggests that this excellence is an effort on the son's part to compensate for his father's deficiencies. 2) The second premise is built on the notion that childhood and youth are incomplete states which require transformation into adulthood. Bly delineates childhood/youth from adulthood and argues that a society of "siblings" cannot possess the moral or creative force required to respond to reality in socially-constructive ways.

Bly's approach is to point to specific problems and amalgamate them into a total picture which depicts American culture as a culture in deep trouble. His arguments do not refer to what might be morally preferable, but to the very survival of the culture. It is inevitable for the concerned reader to feel a certain "moral panic" while meditating over what Bly says. When grouped together the problems he describes seem to have no beginning or end...it would seem as if the corruption of American culture is so deep and complete as to render the culture almost irredeemable. It might even seem to some as if some dark force had taken over the culture and was directing it towards some sinister end.

Yet, the "amalgamation" of social problems into a "unified" picture has a "geodesic" effect which clouds understanding. In such "geodesic" paradigms, the principles of architecture are used in the construction of social thought and structure without the realization that behavior and physical matter follow different principles. In a physical structure, the parts of the structure can be examined separately and then put aside during an

examination of the whole of the structure, for the whole has an identity which surpasses the limitations and specificity of its individual parts. Thus, in theory, a strong bridge could be built with simple match sticks, if there were enough of them placed in such a manner as to create adequate resistance to pressure. Examining a single match stick would not provide much information regarding the bridge.

Social analysis, however, cannot consist of observations of present reality and then the combination of those realities into one larger picture which attempts to represent the "state of society." Such an amalgamation misses the fact that each of the problems being observed may have causes rooted in different historical and moral precedents. Equally, one social problem may have its causes located (and sometimes hidden) in a few different and perhaps unrelated precedents. If we add to this the phenomenon of "unintended consequences" so aptly described by Giddens (1990), we see that our understanding of culture is often based on the images we have woven out of our assumption that what we are observing is the "logical" outcome of "strengths" or "weaknesses" in the culture. "Categorical" approaches to reality which weave a narrative out of observed social facts may be comforting in the short run, but problematic when it comes to devising solutions which are relevant. There is a certain "lumping together" involved in the search for moral and behavioral certainty. But the search for certainty in an époque of multiplicity does not help us discover a culture's "through-line" or "autobiography." Nor does it help us realize that there may be parallel co-existent cultural autobiographies present.

My own analysis of the problems identified by Bly takes a slightly different approach from the categorical one. I attempt to proceed from the premise that the human being, if left to h/her own devices, would construct a fairly satisfactory culture capable of meeting the basic requirements for survival. Such a premise moves one to ask, "If things are the way they are, might there be a rational reason for it?" In other words, might a reality which seems totally non-functional in the present have a genesis in an époque where a certain set of mores or custom were considered functional, and might have actually been, quite conducive to cultural survival, if not to individual fulfillment? One asks this question not to normalize and rationalize a social problem which, if seen otherwise, would move us to indignation and action. Our purpose, rather, is to prevent, when unnecessary, the kind of "moral panic" or "indignation" which seems to lead to policies which create more problems than they resolve. Such an approach provides us with insurance against the dangers of "over-reaction" as well as "under-reaction." And it helps us locate which parts of a culture are "reactive" to a previous époque and which parts are constructs appropriate to the époque.

Thus, in every social problem there is the opportunity for filtering out what is non-productive and maintaining and reinforcing that which is beneficial. To appreciate this type of social analysis---and, thereby, avoid throwing out the baby with the dirty water of the washbasin---we have to suspend our tendency to define things in terms of “good” and “bad” and begin searching for the “hidden meanings” of things. Such attention to the semiotic realities of a given situation naturally requires that attention be given to the historical background of a given social symbol. We need to understand what a thing was in the past to understand how it came to be what it is in the present. My approach, therefore, does refer back to history whenever such reference is appropriate.

There are four areas in American culture to which Bly brings our attention: American education, American families, American media, and American mercantile life. I will address each separately and attempt to weave a through-line which helps explain the cultural malaise to which Bly refers.

Now when Euro-American literary critics such as Bly speak of “American culture” they are more often than not referring to the “white-Euro-American” culture which was in place prior to the more recent pluralism of the United States. Reading his book one is tempted to ask “whose culture” we are speaking of when we mention “American culture.” Are we speaking of the English-American culture, the black culture, the Hispanic-American culture, or the combined effects of these? In considering this multiplicity of ever-shifting boundaries, I define for the purposes of this work the word “culture” as meaning the culture of the dominant group. By “dominant” I mean that group which possesses the largest population and which possesses the most administrative seats in government, education and media. So when I speak of “America” I follow Bly’s own paradigm. America, here, is seen as that country which hundreds of years ago separated from the British monarchy and established itself as a separate nation into which it later received non-English immigrants who were then required to adapt to the culture put in place by the original settlers. The “melting-pot” notion of American culture refers to the fact that for many years America operated on the notion that new-comers were required and encouraged to adopt the values and practices of the dominant white-Euro-American culture. While these immigrant groups had great influence on the culture which was in place, their influence did not run parallel to the American market-place but within its parameters.

Now the argument could be made that one cannot discuss American culture as a totality, that there are too many different ethnic and ideological segments involved. This argument would be partially true. Yes, there are a multiplicity of ways of being American. But there is only one America. So I will attempt to navigate within the framework of the “ideal type” used by Bly while noting those instances when generalizations are problematic.

4

RECONSIDERING THE SIBLING SOCIETY

The [individual] with the clear head...frees himself from all fantastic "ideas" and looks life in the face...Instinctively, as do the shipwrecked, he looks round for something to which to cling, and that tragic, ruthless glance, absolutely sincere, because it is a question of his salvation, will cause him to bring order into the chaos of his life. These are the only genuine ideas: the ideas of the shipwrecked.

Ortego y Gasset

Revolt of the Masses (1932: 57)

EDUCATION AND MEDIA

Bly regrets the move away from "vertical thought" and warns that the loss of a solid educational tradition has led to a devitalized culture which is having terrible difficulty recovering its intellectual and moral life. He predicts that such recovery may take as long as seven generations to complete. He quotes Joseph Chilton Pearce who has written that intelligence is an evolutionary project requiring the latest generation to build upon a bank of knowledge established by previous generations. For Pearce, civilization is dependent on a gradual and sequential accumulation of knowledge (1992). Pearce, here, is not alluding to scientific or economic knowledge as much as he is to the humanities. He and Bly both echo the rising complaint in conservative and humanist circles regarding the denigration of the Western canon. As far as Bly is concerned, America has created an impoverished culture which has unwittingly "colonized" itself and lost respect for its "heritage."

Bly addresses three major issues which affect education: 1) a growing rate of illiteracy; 2) a tendency on the part of the new academicians to deconstruct the intellectual heritage of Western culture and neglect its established canon; 3) an insidious role played by the media in keeping youth in a state of "perpetual adolescence."

Literacy: Who's teaching it and why isn't it working?

Bly blames television for America's growing problems in literacy. He claims that the medium of television is responsible for putting youth in an "alpha state which rules out active thinking or learning" (142). Bly quotes Pearce, only 30% of schoolchildren remain "undamaged" and able to learn. He cannot imagine how an individual can become intelligent if he does not have access to the "verbal bath" provided by a literate adult society.

Yet, the literacy program itself needs to be reviewed. A literate population does not easily lose its literary competency once it has acquired it and no amount of television-watching can undo the basics of grammar once they have been learned.

The error we make is to conclude that literacy problems are a relatively recent problem. James Squire, writing in 1972, had already sounded the alarm in response to revised literacy programs which modified the standing methods of literacy instruction: “Free public education has made us a nation with one of the highest literacy rates and has been a major factor in the development of our standards of living. Yet one-fifth of our adult population failed to complete the eighth grade and one-seventh did not complete high school. About 15 percent of American adults read at fourth-grade level or below, and another 25 percent are not up to sixth-grade standards. Inadequacies in oral and written expression are a major source of difficulty in the industrial world” (1972: 535-44). Ruddell and Williams concurred with Squire: “We pay lip service to catchy phrases such as ‘the right to read’ at the same time as we retain policies that have produced an adult population 40 percent of which have reached the reading-language achievement level of a twelve-year-old child, and then we are amazed that these individuals fail to meet the job requirements of a technological society” (1972: 2).

Yet America’s problems with literacy date even prior to the 70’s. Long before the first student protests in Berkeley, America was laying the foundation for a literacy program which would one day produce the unintended consequence of literacy dysfunction. It was precisely some of the attempts to modernize the writing and reading program which gave rise to many aspects of the present crisis.

Until the publication of Noah Webster’s *The American Spelling Book (Blue-Back Speller)* in 1783, reading and writing were taught with a strong emphasis on “letter name knowledge.” It was expected that knowing a letter of the alphabet would, when combined with the spelling of words, lead to a verbal repertoire sufficient to serve the person in later constructions and expressions of meaning. Most readings were taken from the “moral” writings of early American writers. The teaching of literacy was, therefore, considered an opportunity for the teaching of American morality (Smith: 1965: 69). Those fortunate enough to attend school and complete their secondary education managed to graduate able to write simple communications, if not complicated text.

In 1837, a new series of readers were published offering instructors printed materials for dealing with different levels of reading. The McGuffey’s graded readers were an outcome of the German-Pestalozzian movement which called for the development of the student’s mind through the use of graded exercises. The McGuffey’s readers contained many more pictures than did the earlier materials. This was also the first instance when new words were repeated within varying sentences in order to demonstrate variations in use. This “recognition” method of teaching would later become a major method in the teaching of literacy in America. The content of these early readers continued to emphasize moral and

patriotic texts, with those used for upper grades including selections from literary works. The program involved much memorization and recital. Handwriting was practiced, but little composition was assigned (Smith, 1965: 82). Many towns in America had one-room schoolrooms, so a given teacher was responsible for the first six or eight grades. So, the arrival of graded readers permitted a teacher to supervise students working at different levels within the same schoolroom, but the considerable amount of grading involved in the correction of work written at various grade levels kept composition assignments at a minimum.

The graded readers were used with relatively little change until the 1920's when the Dalton Plan appeared, stressing "flexibility" through "individual contracts" established between pupils and teachers. Silent reading became in vogue. The student was tested for comprehension through multiple choice tests and teachers were instructed to use the student's life experience as part of the curriculum. This approach differed radically from earlier rote-learning systems. It was based on a growing belief that a child-centered curriculum would lead to more effective "language growth." The followers of John Dewey championed this approach and developed techniques for oral dramatizations of material hitherto confined to printed text. While previously a word was learned for its own sake and restricted to the printed page, it was now included in unit activities and learned as part of the unit (Crosby, 1964: 12). Concurrently, testing of text comprehension was done through multiple choice questions which required very little writing on the part of the student. This made grading easier in large classrooms, but robbed the student of the opportunity of practicing h/her writing.

Perhaps the most radical change in the teaching of literacy came with the advent of the "i/t/a" system. This involved a change in the way in which the printed word was presented to children. This system introduced "altered orthography," permitting children to write words as they sounded rather than according to their original spelling: "litl" stood in for "little" and "hous" for "house." These teaching materials, authored by Mazurkiewicz and Tanyzer, attempted to increase the vocabulary load of children by allowing for a certain measure of "freedom" in the pre-school program (1964). Quantity began overshadowing accuracy.

This experimentation in literacy instruction became bolder with the introduction of the *Words in Color* program by Learning Materials Incorporated (1962). Letters or groups of letters representing a phoneme were assigned their own color code. Thus, the "a" in "able" and the "eigh" in "weigh" were assigned the same color because they sounded the same. This instruction through the use of phonetics moved the emphasis away from letter name recognition, stressing instead a visual and auditory process. The new "phonics"

system depended on the displaying of twenty-one wall charts showing the color-coded letter combinations. Colored chalk was provided to teachers for use on the blackboard (Gattengo, 1962). The “phonics” system continues to be at the center of a heated debate in the educational system (Time, October 27, 1997).

This introduction of what was termed “controlled correspondences” had its advantages as well as drawbacks. On one hand, this phonetic approach permitted the understanding of “regularity” within the language. But on the other hand it did not achieve the increased “decoding independence” hoped for by the authors of these “progressive” systems. The use of various colors within a single word stimulated the mind of the child to consider the word according to separate codes. And one wonders if this did not decrease the student’s ability to memorize the spelling of the word as a total unit. In addition, the marrying of oral story context to sentence structure led to a decrease in the understanding of grammatical rules. It was assumed that the connection between oral and written communications could not be made without the extensive use of pictograms. This caused children to become habituated to seeing pictorial representations of the words which they learned. The word was translated into image and then reprojected into the student’s mind. The laws of grammar became secondary to the meaning of words and the images they conjured. The wider aspect of idea and paragraph became replaced with the concretism of word and phrase. Thus, students learned words but did not necessarily develop the facility to use them in coherent sentences nor read through long narratives while developing the ability to distill the meanings of the narratives. This emphasis on word-recognition rather than sentence construction harkened back to the classical English notion that a large vocabulary was synonymous to an advanced level of literacy.

One other thing acted as a common denominator in many of the learning programs developed after the 1960’s. It was assumed that a lesson had to be interesting in order to stimulate the student’s active participation. This was the outcome of an emergent ideology which sought to defend the individual against the excesses of an educational system which had been authoritarian and which had insisted on the following of a rigid non-negotiable curriculum which originated outside the student’s own experience.

The “vertical” structure of the education of the 1800’s, including rote memorization and recital, was replaced by a “horizontal” structure in which students were encouraged to relate to each other’s experience as much as they did to the “heritage” and “moral content” being presented to them as part of the curriculum. This set the stage for a gradual movement away from “canon” in the earlier phases of a student’s educational years.

Learning became more inclusive of the individual and less a vehicle for the transmission of official moral scripture. While in previous époques, reading and writing

had been taught through the presentation of classical text, the contemporary world of the student now became a major focus of the literacy curriculum. While a student in 1879 had been encouraged to write an essay on the behavior proper to the moral laws of the culture or the meaning of the Declaration of Independence, the student of 1979 was invited to express h/her "opinion" on a variety of contemporary social issues. Reference to existing knowledge was balanced, and sometimes overwhelmed, by reference to personal feeling and the rights of the individual (as opposed to the imperatives of the collective). "Expressiveness" became the jealous hand-maiden of logical and grammatically-correct inquiry.

Bly maintains that this "horizontal" has dangerously diminished our ability to appreciate and admire works taken from the heritage of our culture. He suggests that the "sibling" society will eventually have no regard for any opinions other than those emanating from its own age group (1997: viii). Yet, he does not consider this "horizontally" in terms of America's traditional preference for knowledge which emanates from the contemporary experience of the majority. The adoption of a democratic political system automatically brings with it a certain openness to the here-and-now.

What gets pushed to the background in many critiques of America's literacy problems, including Bly's own writing, is the fact that literacy is dependent on two things: The first is a solid basic knowledge of the language's grammar and how that grammar can be applied to construct sentences which, when put together, create passages which have meaning. The second is the ability and opportunity to participate in verbal communication with others which allows the mind to practice the art of presenting an argument from beginning through to end. The acquisition of these two abilities have little to do with the ideology of the culture. They have to do with whether the required program is applied assiduously or not and whether or not the context of the educational program encourages critical thought.

Nor will we come closer to understanding the actual problems of our university students if we make the categorical statement that we have become an illiterate society. The notion of illiteracy carries with it unpleasant associations of low intelligence. An assiduous study of papers written in upper secondary schools and universities, however, will show the following: students are able to think specific thoughts, yet they have difficulty organizing those thoughts into coherent arguments. I myself worked as a teaching assistant in four university courses in 1996. I read approximately 400 term papers and exams. I knew many of the students and had spoken with them regarding issues contained in the course content. I found that they were quite insightful and able to quickly switch streams while talking. At times, they would be thinking so fast that they would communicate half a

thought and then start another one, perhaps hoping that what was left unsaid would nevertheless be understood.

This same incongruence between speed of thought and speed of communications was observable in their written work. When they did attempt to communicate an idea from start to finish in written form they were slowed down by their lack of grammatical proficiency. I believe that for most students who have such difficulties, their problems with the written word had less to do with their level of intelligence (or the ability of their brain to function) but has everything to do with the manner in which they were taught to use the English language in the first place. For example, few know how to use words which connect sentences to one another with effectiveness. This creates much hesitation and breaks in continuity in written and spoken communications. What students at the secondary and university level need is not courses which attempt to teach writing from beginning to end, but courses which build on previous knowledge while offering remedial tools which help them write simple coherent sentences. Rarely are complicated tenses or difficult sentence construction needed in modern day-to-day English. What needs to be taught is not complexity but simplicity.

Ironically enough, the language used on television could be an effective model for literacy courses. The talk is concise, delivered in brief sentences that have a beginning middle and end. Yet the models used in most writing courses are taken from complicated literature texts which leave students feeling overwhelmed and discouraged. I observed during sixteen years of residency in the Middle East that many youth (and adults) there learned English by reading Time magazine, Reader's Digest and John Steinbeck. They managed to do so because these texts had simple, concise sentences and were interesting. Our secondary students might benefit from similar reading diets and be spared the old-world diction of a Herman Melville or a Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Moreover, and ironically so, university composition courses---taught precisely by the same people in English literature who are busy arguing endlessly over the English Canon---have had a dismal effect on the ability of students to write coherent term papers. Linda Brodkey, formerly of the University of Texas at Austin, describes the problem at her own university with pitiless insight: "Every year, about 3,000 relatively inexperienced students take expository writing classes from relatively inexperienced graduate student teachers who...prefer to teach literature---which they are studying---rather than writing---which they are not." It is surprising why teachers trained in the teaching of English as a second language (TESL)---who, incidentally, have nothing to do with literature---are used to teach foreigners but not the English-speaking population itself. It is the TESL teachers who are the experts in the techniques necessary for teaching a useful and relevant grammar-

--yet our secondary school and university writing courses are still in the hands of literature graduates most of whom not once encounter the subject of grammar in their BA courses. To put the blame for this faulty organization entirely on television, lazy students and absent parents is to miss the point altogether.

Television can decrease a person's interest in the printed word. When regularly watched for hours on end, it might speed up the mind so that coherence is lost in face to face speech. But it is incapable of undoing a literacy which the person possesses in parallel to h/her television-watching habits. If many Americans have trouble with the printed word it is not because of television but because of a faulty educational system which has always put "getting along with others" in the forefront and intellectual development in the background. Any family which insists to their children that they spend thirty minutes a day reading, in addition to doing their regular schoolwork, will have literate children.

Recently, a recurring debate has been relaunched in the schools of America, between proponents of the "phonics" system and the "whole language system." While some schools gravitate towards one technique at the expense of the other, the emerging view is that a "balanced" approach is best. Phonics help a student develop facility in recognizing the sounds which constitute the construction of a word, but, if applied for too long, diminish the student's ability to read a text skillfully and use personal rules of reading which foresee the appearance of certain words based on preceding ones. Proponents of the whole-language system risk leaving behind many students from poor backgrounds who do not live in print-rich environments and who need to first learn the basics of "seeing and saying" words" (Colins, 1997: 56-59). Word recognition or comprehension of narrative text? To attempt to choose one over the other is to miss the point of reading. Both are needed in equal measures and American schools will probably adopt a mixture of both methods once the rhetoric of the leading proponents of each method is quieted.

The American Curriculum

For all their bragging and their hypersensitivity, Americans are, if not the most self-critical, at least the most anxious self-conscious people in the world, forever concerned about the inadequacy of something or other--- their national morality, their national culture, their national purpose.

Richard Hofstadter

Anti-Intellectualism in America (vii)

One of Bly's principal complaints is that the American educational system has lost its classical, liberal curriculum and been overwhelmed by a utilitarian, job-oriented menu of courses which does not foster critical thought (1996: 45-46). He calls attention to a generalized "ingratitude" towards established culture and the "canon" (the accumulated literary and historical heritage of the West). He associates this decline in cultural continuity

or “commonalty” to an ideology which began with the Marxist notion that property was evil. Bly suggests that the popularity of Marxism in the sixties and seventies helped sow the idea that our cultural ancestors were “either stupid or collaborators” with the injustice of the system. He claims this has led to an academic climate in which many works are discounted and devalued before they are even examined by the student body.

Bly suggests we reverse this process and learn to distinguish between a “clean fight with a dead thinker---a fight in which one names his or her main ideas, quotes sentences, offers thought-out arguments, and elaborates the criticisms as bravely as the original offerings were elaborated---and the ungrateful way” in which some thinkers are dismissed even before being examined (160).

He equates this type of summary deconstruction to the methods used by imperial powers to colonize a foreign culture. “When colonial administrators take over a tribal society, their first task is to prove to the indigenous people that nothing in their culture works...Tribes were ordered to give up their drums, their sun dances, their sweat lodges, and other rituals, that is, to dismantle all their vertical arrangements” (161).

He offers the disturbing proposition that “we are the first culture in history to colonize itself” (184). He writes, “Our society has been damaged not only by acquisitive capitalism, but also by an idiotic distrust of all ideas, religions, and literature handed down to us by elders and ancestors. Many siblings are convinced that they have received nothing of value from anyone.”

According to Bly, the real hero and heroine are dying in American culture because of this massive deconstruction of our literary and historical heritage. He suggests that many are even actually holding idealism in contempt. The American resistance to patriarchy, and its pretensions of power and superiority, has led to a resistance to the notion of superiority in being and thinking. He writes, “No matter whether we as readers belong to the Left or the Right, no matter whether we as thinkers rejoice in the fall of communism or grieve that certain great socialist ideas were never really tried, no matter whether we are happy or sad about the Red Guard, we have to grieve that we have left contemporary students with their power of admiration basically in ruins. If Generation X is passive or uninventive, it is because their ability to admire has been taken away” (162).

He asks, “How did we move from the Optimistic, companionable, food-passing youngsters gathered on that field at Woodstock to the self-doubting, dark-hearted, turned-in, death-praising, indifferent, wised-up, deconstructionist audience that now attends a ‘grunge’ music concert? That is the question we need to answer” (7).

Yet, the call for a critical faculty in all students is an ideal which has never been achieved by any educational system in the world. Were it not so, we would not be dealing

with the same social problems that have continued to tease us since the dawn of history. I mention this not to devalue or relativize our idealism but to caution against the notion that we are about to disappear as a viable civilization.

The fact that we are less formal than our predecessors and more ironic should not decrease our respect for the breadth and depth of America's on-going intellectual debates. The discussion regarding whether teachers should teach existing knowledge or produce new knowledge would not take place in an intellectually devitalized nation---we would be content to tinker unobtrusively with existing knowledge.

What is occurring in the American educational institution is nothing short of a re-examination of the many concepts which have held humanity in bondage over four thousand years of history. What Bly and other critics call the "deconstruction" or "colonization" of American culture is, actually, a self-appraisal...one which dares dismantle without any guarantee that the pieces will be able to be put back together again. This in itself is an act of moral courage, not cultural irresponsibility. Bly's contention that America is the first culture to have colonized itself is highly debatable. What he fails to mention is that colonization not only involves the denigration of a culture's tradition but the use of "tradition" (convention) itself---that of the colonizer---to control and limit the courage and creativity of the colonized. One could just as easily argue, as I will in later sections, that, for a very long time, America colonized the spirit of its people with an obsessive respect for patriarchal traditions which limited its most adventurous and creative members of their freedom and dignity. Where is this new self-colonization of which Bly speaks? Is it not as much a self-exploration, perhaps even a de-colonization?

If American education is imperfect, it is due to two laudable realities, universality and pluralism, which bring with them their own set of problems. William Graham Sumner explains in his seminal work, *Folkways* ([1906] 1960), that, in addition to transmitting the current mores of a culture, the purpose of a democratic educational system is not just to provide everyone with a chance to increase their competence as members of the culture, but to also uncover individuals of genius. Sumner states that one cannot predict whether a given child will grow into an individual capable of innovative action. As a result, all children are put into school so that, with time, those capable of achieving greatness may do so. A universal system of education, therefore, has a dual function: to give the majority an adequate grounding in knowledge that will help them become productive members of society while also providing a minority the opportunity of discovering particularly excellent talents. It cannot be avoided that one group's level of interest (and ability) be frustrated by that of another group.

The elimination of this public system would take us back to the days of aristocratic privilege. In some measure, this “segregation” is already happening with the proliferation of high-priced schools which guarantee a more assiduous curriculum. This segregation is further completed by the ghettoization of low-income African-American and Hispanic groups in neighborhoods uninhabited by whites. The identity and curricular competence of a “neighborhood” school changes from one neighborhood to another. So it is difficult to speak of a general “American” curriculum.

Now, those who categorically criticize America’s public schools without concurrently noting the opportunities they offer to those who come from underprivileged backgrounds fail to give the American democratic system the credit it deserves. Placing at the top of the list in international competitions is not a valid measure of a country’s *overall* educational accomplishments. True education is not simply the ability of a select few to score high in science and mathematics, the principal subjects in which Asian students excel. It also involves the ability to think critically and to participate in philosophical debates which go to the heart of current social issues. While American students trail in technical excellence, they score high in the area of cultural critique and political emancipation. They have replaced rote learning with personal insight. Now this has its advantages as well as disadvantages, but it does not mean that we have an uneducated youth; technically undereducated, perhaps, but not uneducated; the distinction is an important one.

A second factor is America’s increasingly multi-cultural landscape. Schools which find themselves in the crossroads of neighborhoods with varying ethnic populations are catering to children from a wide variety of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. These children, although they share the same classrooms, do not possess equal opportunities in life. The ten-year-old from Connecticut who has been fortunate enough to receive music lessons and a variety of educational gifts may respond quite differently to the curriculum than a ten-year-old who comes from a neighborhood where poverty, violence and street-gangs are a constant distraction. The first child trusts that assiduous application in schoolwork will lead to rewards. If h/she cannot one day find a job based on h/her own search, some well-to-do contact of the family might help; the second student has absolutely no guarantee that, even if h/she succeeds in transcending deprivation and doing well in school, that h/she will ever have the chance of achieving a professional status. Paul Willis’s study of how young boys from families of low socio-economic status resist the school curriculum by establishing an in-school “counter-culture” is indicative of the insidious role played by socio-economic deprivation in the learning process (1977).

Pluralism, therefore, brings into the educational system individuals with varying socio-economic backgrounds, motivations and goals. It further allows those of varying

ethnic backgrounds to use the educational system to experiment with and rediscover their roots.

While this multiplicity of identities (and identity politics) problematizes a curriculum which would seek to present a standardized “canon,” it allows for the diversity of viewpoints out of which a democracy is built. The search for individual vertical meaning ironically weakens a collective vertical ideological standard. And it is unavoidable that it be so.

Considering the above two factors, as well as the existence of wildly fluctuating standards between public and private schools, it would be an error to assume that there can easily be such a thing as a “standard” curriculum in American schools. Even if there were, the socio-economic and ethnic composition of a particular school’s student body would have a salient effect on how much of a given subject is taught. It is already common practice for teachers to select portions of the text they find useful and ignoring those they find “unnecessary.” I myself observed this during my own university studies.

It might be unproductive, therefore, to concentrate our attention on the “damage” caused by the American educational debate while missing the meaning of the issues underlying that debate. As I will argue in a later section entitled “The Culture of Irony,” the debate includes a fundamental struggle between “belief” and “disbelief.” The discussion of curriculum is more than a discussion of what should be studied and what should be left out. It is about relativism and multiculturalism, about whether life is governed by one central truth or a variety of conflicting truths (Jacoby: 1994). While the debate problematizes the application of a homogenous curriculum it permits a long over-due reappraisal of the premises underlying long-standing ideologies and dogmas.

Bly is not alone in mourning the loss of a classical, liberal curriculum. William Bennett's 1984 report on humanities education in America, entitled "To Reclaim a Legacy," argued that the classical texts of Western civilization were being criticized and sometimes replaced by texts of lesser quality and questionable importance. He warned that a legacy was being irretrievably lost along with timeless truths/values that needed to be transmitted intact from one generation to another (cited in Scott, 1991: 34). Lynne V. Cheney's report in 1988 to the NEH similarly attacked the "politicizing" of the humanities. Cheney maintained that teaching should consist of the transmission of knowledge rather than its creation. Her report recommended that research be diminished in favor of actual teaching based on a coherent standard curriculum (cited in Scott, 1991: 34).

Lee Daniels voices the concern that the universities have become political arenas rather than centers of real learning. Writing for *Change*, a journal of the New York Times, he asks: "Have the nation's colleges and universities been overrun by Marxist- and

totalitarian-minded faculty, 'tenured radicals' who, with like-minded students as their shock troops, have imposed a regime of 'political correctness' on the unfettered discourse that reigned within their boundaries just a short, happy time ago? Have these 'thought police' jettisoned the free inquiry after Truth that once informed the collegiate curriculum in favor of courses indoctrinating students with seditious ideas? Have they intimidated the free thinker of higher education into silence?" (cited in Scott, 1991: 34).

Phillips calls the change in the curriculum an "ideological cleansing...anti-capitalist, pro-third world, pro-minority, and anti-Western cultural and political interests" (Phillips, 1993 : 671-672). Brustein even suggests that those leading the changes in curriculum may be mindless of the culture that exists outside Academic circles: "The noisy majority in the arts and the universities may be successfully pushing guilt buttons, but the much larger silent majority in the factories and on the farms is either suffering compassion fatigue or preparing a violent backlash" (Brustein, 1993: 533). Delbanco, also mourning the fragmentation of Western culture, suggests that "...the culture at large has all but lost its legitimacy---even as the market and common energies that make it an object of contempt to many academics have invaded and been welcomed into the universities" (Delbanco, 1993: 539).

Basic to the notion of a "revised" curriculum is a "transformationist" view of education. Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren, Miami University professors, were quoted by Martin (1991: 639-640) as saying that education should be liberated from "what Michel Foucault called a 'regime of truth' and should become a form of cultural politics." Giroux and McLaren maintain that teachers should assume a transformative role and universities should take upon themselves the role of "reconstructing and transforming" the dominance of the status quo culture (640). Richard Ohmann, professor of English at Wesleyan University, concurs; he suggests that the purpose of faculty should be to teach with revolution in mind (Martin, 1991: 639). University of Delaware professor Margaret Anderson writes that "curriculum change is understood as part of the political transformation of women's role in society" (cited in Martin, 639). And Princeton historian, Joan Wallach Scott asks the question which now confronts most North American academicians: "What counts as knowledge? Who gets to define what counts as knowledge?" (Scott, 1991: 30).

Proponents of a revised curriculum claim that much of what has been taught in the university has been the product of a white supremacist ideology, cloaking its power interests with claims of universal, scientific rationality. Remaining unimpressed with notions of "objectivity," they believe that a "liberal education" is an impossible concept, especially when left in the hands of a dominant civilization. Speaking out against the

supposed sanctity of the Canon, Scott states, "To read their accounts of 'tradition,' one would not know that it is largely invented, always contested, and what has counted as tradition has changed from generation to generation. Canons are...not timeless and unique repositories of human truths" (32).

Many educators who would accept the label of "post-modernists" disagree with the contention that minorities and their diverse needs have taken to attacking Western civilization and its representatives out of vengeance. They claim that the new voices that have appeared on campuses are precisely those voices which were long kept silent by the canons of a dominant civilization constructed to represent the interests of its dominant majority. These new voices on campus speak out now in order to make known repressed identities and correct stereotypic representations. Scott believes that the supporters of classical texts are only arguing for a maintenance of the status quo: "Rarely is the historical inhospitality of universities to various minorities mentioned...In the current controversies, the publicists have substituted 'tradition' (the embodiment of taste, culture, and cumulative wisdom) for the white male privilege they so deeply desire and want to protect" (32).

Regardless of their differences, both sides of the debate proceed from the premise that American education has traditionally followed a classical liberal curriculum. One side argues for its maintenance while the other argues for its deconstruction. To read some of the critiques one would think that America's movement away from a classical program is of recent origin. This view does not take into account some key events in American history.

In reality, shortly after its founding, the American educational system began moving away from the European classical educational tradition. When the University of California opened in 1879 with a handful of students and professors, Greek, Latin and a slew of classical subjects were required for admission. Yet by the early 1900's most American universities had dropped Greek and Latin as prerequisites for admission.

Contemporary critics of the classical curriculum have criticized it for lacking in "patriotism" and "professionalism." Supporters have argued that the curriculum's validity lies in the fact that it transcends national identities and cultures. Ironically, these countervailing claims were already being presented as far back as the 1600's. What occurred in America had already begun in Europe.

In 1697, Jonathan Swift wrote a biting satirical work---*The Battle of the Books*---in which he berated the vanity of writers who sought to establish Truth with a capital T (Ehrenpreis, 1962: 226-37). His satire of classical works did not acknowledge the fact that it was a rediscovery of the classics which had helped Europe disentangle itself from the intellectual paralysis of medieval times. The Renaissance might not have been born had it

not been for a disengagement from the theological writings of the Middle Ages and a return to classical studies.

One of the major criticisms subsequently directed at the classics was that they hindered the development of nationalism. Konrad H. Jarausch quotes Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck who stated that “contemporary and recent history” must be included in the German curriculum so that “state power” can fortify and protect individual and family rights (1982: 218).

America itself joined the Western debate regarding the classics with its own critique of classical literature. President James A. Garfield, a former teacher of Greek and Latin, remained convinced that had American students possessed less knowledge of the classics and more of American government and history the civil war would never have occurred. Garfield argued against a program heavily devoted to ancient Europe: “I have recently examined the catalogue of a leading New England college, in which the geography and history of Greece and Rome are required to be studied five terms; but neither the history nor the geography of the United States is named in the college course, or required as a condition of admission” (Hinsdale, 1882: 289-90). In an address before the Literary Societies of the Eclectic Institute, he further stated, “Our educational forces are so wielded as to teach our children to admire most that which is foreign and fabulous and dead” (300-301). His call seemed to have been heard being that by the mid-twentieth century Americans knew very little of that which was foreign, be it dead or alive.

Benjamin Roth, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, called the study of Greek and Latin as “seditious” and contrary to the spirit of American democracy. “While Greek and Latin are the only avenues to science, education will always be confined to a few people. It is only by rendering knowledge universal, that a republican form of government can be preserved in our country” (1806: 25).

Thomas Jefferson, Francis Wayland and Charles W. Elliot worked with singular resolve to decrease the dominant role of the classics. It was Jefferson who decided that the University of Virginia would adopt a curriculum giving students a choice of which courses they would study. Wayland managed to convince Brown University to reconsider whether it was useful for students to put seven years of effort into studying the classics when few of them would ever need either Greek or Latin upon leaving college (cited in Bronson, 1914: 111-113). The Morrill Act, or Land Grant Act, passed following the end of the civil war, contributed to the further demise of the classical curriculum. The Act provided funds for colleges which agreed to offer courses in agricultural and mechanical science. This had the immediate effect of shifting the emphasis of the curriculum onto science and modern

languages. Cornell University, for example, was founded on the promise that any student could find instruction in any language (Douf, 1952: 288).

Although Harvard initially resisted Garfield's call for an "Americanized" curriculum, it was its own chancellor, Charles W. Elliot, who eventually did the most for establishing an American "elective" study program. Elliot observed with irony that although American universities required knowledge of Greek and Latin they "made no demand upon candidates for admission in regard to knowledge of English..." (cited in Nielson, 1926: 43-44). He also considered the classics as authoritarian and found it shameful that Harvard's program had become little more than a study of Greek and Latin grammar. Directly due to Elliot's efforts, by 1899 there were virtually no required courses in Harvard and a student was free to take only one subject, or, if h/she preferred, an eclectic program consisting of various courses. By the end of the 19th century, admissions requirements fluctuated so wildly from one university to another that the Scholastic Aptitude Test was developed to provide some equitable standard of measurement for admission to university.

Since then, the frequent use of the word "curriculum" has fostered the impression that a university education consists of a series of "set" courses. This may have been the case in the 18th and 19th century. Today, however, curriculum no longer refers to a "set" program but to a "series" of courses from which the student picks individual courses to construct a personalized program. Contemporary champions of a liberal curriculum, such as Harold Bloom, Robert Bly and Glenn C. Khoury, fail to recognize that there hasn't been a set curriculum in American universities for over ten decades. Even when minority studies are added to the curriculum, the student can select "equivalent" courses which satisfy h/her area of study. A 120-credit Bachelor's degree contains a core major requirement of 45 credits, leaving 75 credits or 62.5% of the total program as "elective." And, even within the major, there are electives, so the number of courses that are not negotiable are very few indeed. It would seem that American educators have become shy when it comes to asserting a specific program of study and sticking to it regardless of whether a student finds it "enjoyable" at all times.

Moreover, not many courses in the humanities and social sciences are taught in a standardized format from one year to the next. The titles of university courses give little indication of the actual content of the courses. While the titles are descriptive, the contents are often subject to the ideological preference of the teachers. How the course is taught will more often than not depend not only on the teacher's appreciation of knowledge, but also on h/her ideas (and prejudices) regarding what is relevant and useful.

In addition, while primary and secondary school programs use free textbooks which are handed in at the end of the year and used again next year, university programs

require books to be purchased privately by the student, leaving the professor free to decide which books will be used. The curriculum remains open to change from one year to the next, being that various professors teaching the same course choose differing texts.

Conservatives criticize this “academic freedom,” citing it as a *carte blanche* for “subversive” teachers who would advance their own ideologies at the expense of a coherent curriculum. What they fail to mention is that an absence of such freedom would be the stuff out of which authoritarian systems are made. A fluctuating course content might be the lesser of two evils.

Certain subjects, however, have remained fairly standard. Amongst them are English composition, history, and English literature. And it is in the areas of history and English literature where the debate over the “western Canon” is most heated. If history is to be taught, what needs to be included and excluded? How much of history is a fabrication? What is to be done with the history of minority groups which have suffered patriarchal domination, conquest, and colonialism? What is to be done with works written by women, previously not included in the curriculum? Which writers should be studied and should a writer be eliminated because h/her vision no longer reflects that of the “new society”?

The questions seem quite relevant. But for most students who did not live through the curriculums which were current in the 50’s and 60’s they are arbitrary ones. In fact, most complete their university studies without ever taking a course on Western Civilization. Most of those who do take a course in history take it in local history or an area which coincides with their own ethnic interests. In fact, the debate regarding the canon is concentrated in disciplines which rely on a large body of theoretical work (i.e. literary criticism, communications, anthropology, sociology, history). For the majority of students studying science, medicine, engineering and commerce these debates may appear as the musings of idle minds. Certainly, for the tax-paying plumbers, carpenters, electricians and truck-drivers who ensure the maintenance of the American infrastructure, such endless hair-splitting may even appear as a cruel waste of public funds. But we need to ask ourselves if this re-appraisal is not only healthy but necessary for a democracy to survive and extricate itself from systemic abuses.

Utilitarianism notwithstanding, there have been serious attempts to return to programs based on “great ideas.” Leo Strauss, reacting against what conservatives called the “smorgasbord approach” to education, developed a teaching seminar at the University of Chicago, turning out a group of brilliant students completely versed in political theory. Yet, Strauss, as is often the case with classicists, despised any popularization of knowledge and did not prepare his students to enter public office. Few of his students ended up applying their knowledge in the concrete world of political action (Bloom, 1974:

372, 387). Allan Bloom, under the influence of his teacher Strauss, then suggested a solution to the dilemma of the Canon: "Of course, the only serious solution is...the good old Great Books approach, in which a liberal education means reading certain generally recognized classical texts" (Bloom, 1987: 344). Bloom's "Great Books" approach met with considerable criticism. He was accused of promoting an encyclopedic approach to knowledge which lacked depth as well as a narrative line. Certainly, the *Great Books* series of the Encyclopedia Britannica did not succeed in providing readers any more than a few superficial pages on each classical thinker.

The struggle over curriculum is more than a struggle over whether the classical writers should be included or not. It includes discussions regarding such issues as the patriarchal eclipsing of women's rights, the colonial abuse of certain nations and "ethnic" groups, and the role of capitalism in family dysfunction and cultural breakdown. Bly agrees that each of these areas are important, yet he worries that the American curriculum has become incoherent because of the deconstruction of existing "knowledge." The two concerns are not compatible. Deconstruction involves the careful examination of text and history to locate those points at which some of the above abuses occur. It necessitates a certain break in the "narrative line," for various areas of contention are being separated from one another and examined individually. Such "segmentation" of interest and knowledge cannot be avoided and is a natural by-product of such deconstruction. Nor can we avoid the fervor and radicalism which accompanies such cultural re-appraisal. Balzac wrote, "*Il faut reculer pour mieux sauter*" ("one must pull back in order to jump better"). He might have meant that a culture must sometimes literally stop advancing in order to define from where it has come and where it may be headed. Bly, nevertheless, fears that this slow-down may result in a permanent arrest of development.

Nowhere is the quarrel between tradition and rebellion more impassioned than in the field of English literature and literary criticism. One almost has the impression that the topics which concern English professors are representative of all academic departments. This is far from the truth. Anthropology and sociology long ago confronted the issues of cultural relativity, family dysfunction and gender. The work done in applied social science, psychology and clinical therapy would make some of the complicated theoretical tomes written by literary critics appear grossly ungrounded. What is interesting is that American academia has submitted to concepts appearing from a discipline which has a strong rate of literacy but a relatively low level of sociological ardor. Bly writes with lucid prose and no one can doubt the sincerity of his mission nor the validity of many of his concerns. What needs be questioned, however, is the analytical thoroughness of his thesis.

The “Canon” regarding which academics argue in hundreds of articles written in conservative and liberal journals has a lot to do with the teaching of English literature. The extent to which teachers and students of English literature have argued over what books should be included and excluded in the programs offered by English departments would astound the average American. For most underprivileged Americans, blacks as well as whites, who suffer in inadequate university programs, the issue of the Canon means nothing. They have read neither William Shakespeare nor Henry Miller. What means more to them is whether their degree will secure them work.

The discussion of whether Hawthorne should be left in or removed from the university curriculum rings hollow to someone studying political science. Equally, the obsession with gender roles takes very little of the attention of those working late into the night in computer programming laboratories. Both are topics which pre-occupy English departments who seem to be at the vanguard of a ruthless self-critique which concentrates on gender and sexuality at the exclusion of many other topics of world-wide importance. As always, America’s long-standing conflict with sexuality is being replayed in the current cultural wars. In the process, most students of English literature continue remaining deprived of thinkers who operated in systems outside that of literature written in the British Commonwealth and America. Octavia Paz’s Nobel-prize winning poem *Terra del Sol* manages to capture in 589 lines an entire universe of time and memory, of erotic love and of art and writing. It goes eons beyond the quasi-gothic, self-absorption which provincializes much of post-modern English fiction. The overwhelming majority of English literature students have never read Tolstoy, Proust, Gide or Sartre or any of the Latin American writers, Paz included. They continue operating within a discipline which claims to address the “universal” condition of humankind without referring to its existing and emerging literary work. Just as in the 40’s and 50’s Americans remained singularly oblivious to world geography while considering themselves the most advanced people on earth, they now remain ignorant of those map-makers of the human soul who operate outside their borders. Were America a secondary world power, this in-breeding might be ignored as inconsequential. But its being the world’s leading technical culture gives one cause for worry, for its tendency to project its own priorities and pathologies on the rest of the world is not only dangerous but a source of world-wide concern.

Yet, the American population’s hunger for fiction which goes beyond the boundaries of the self and the province is intense. A book of fiction I wrote during my last year as an undergraduate student was published and won a prize established by Canadian writer, Mordecai Richler, as the best book written in Quebec in 1996. Previously to that I had completed a 36-credit minor in creative writing. This literary success allowed me to

conduct some research while talking to literature professors and individuals connected with book publishing and retailing. What struck me the most was the quasi cruel exclusion of worthy American writers from the university curriculum. Two Canadian universities invited me to lecture on my book which was set in Somalia, Rwanda, Bosnia, France, Turkish-Armenia, Russia and Quebec.

I was astounded by the hunger of the students for literature which had contemporary political and social relevance. They had read everything about the potato famine in Ireland but knew little of the literature that had emerged out of the crisis in the former Yugoslavia. Students were subjected to the most detailed and pedantic analysis of texts written prior to the 19th century, but when it came to contemporary American writers there was little representation in the program. The writings of sixteenth century poets seemed more important than those of writers such as John Steinbeck who had catalogued the contemporary American soul in a series of books which had justifiably earned him the Nobel Prize. For these students and professors who reveled in discussing Camille Paglia's latest attacks on conventional feminism (as opposed to post-feminist feminism), Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, John Carver, John Updike, Henry Miller, Anais Nin, Norman Mailer, Scott Fitzgerald, Jertzsy Kosinski...they were simply not part of their every day lives. Yet, books by these same authors were being bought by the general public as fast as they appeared in used book shops. In fact, the mere mention of these names brought sneers from certain literature professors.

One writer was accused of being a misogynist, another of being homophobic, another of being anti-semitic, another of being a neurotic (Davetian, 1994). It sufficed that a small part of the writer's mind or life be at odds with current social mores for the whole writer to be put out to pasture. Bly renders service to his own discipline by reminding us that works from all ideological schools are subject to criticism as well as compliment and that anything which is rejected in toto, whether it comes from the "center" or the "edge," is done so at our own cultural peril.

In a survey of university students (Davetian, 1994), I discovered that the highest rate of "political correctness" was found not in the social sciences but in the English and Fine Arts programs. Ironically enough, two departments populated in the majority by white students of English Protestant background, were more involved in the radical redefinition of what is politically acceptable in a pluralist university than those from minority groups registered in other departments. The two topics which seemed to pre-occupy these students the most---much more than women's rights, ethnic minority rights and environmental issues---were "gay/lesbian rights" and "gender issues." During my study, I found that the essays and fiction written by English literature students often dealt with themes of

“victimhood” and, more often than not, included implicit as well as outright attacks on masculinity (1994b). Bly refers to “feminist men” as men who harbor a strong aggression towards males. This was evident in this particular study. The men seemed to write of “male” chauvinism more than did the women in the program.

Thus, books written by men and women who lived as artists and asked profound questions regarding the human condition have been subjected to a minute political examination bordering on a witch-hunt. It is as if “sexuality” and “gender” have become the last frontier for North American literature. The following two examples are taken from my experiences in Canada, but I am sure similar scenes are occurring in America. In one course in English Composition at Concordia University, a teacher had trouble lecturing on a story written by Jonathan Swift. The class swiftly rejected the writer because he had included scenes of women being beaten by their husbands, as if the recording of a culture’s history by an artist is indicative of his or her personal moral preferences. Not one of these dissenting students took the time to investigate Swift’s radically anti-patriarchal personality; his *Gulliver’s Travels* is one of the finest existing parodies of the stupidities of male-dominated territorial politics. In another course, three students launched a passionate protest when a fourth walked in with a copy of a book by Henry Miller. The protesting students berated the student with the Miller book for reading a “sexist male chauvinist pig.” This censorship is not purely the result of emotionalism; it is a tactic designed to extinguish and eliminate “undesirable” thinkers (1994b).

Suggestions that English literature departments begin including programs in World Literature in which works in translation are freely studied have also met with strong resistance. It would seem that what interests many literature students is not the study of universal values and issues embedded in the works of writers from all continents, but the study of their own psychological identity. The suggestion that the study of literature should include the literature of the world meets with typical colonial reserve. As for literature that catalogs the suffering of the oppressed, it is often dismissed as “historical journalism lacking in literary merit.” Meanwhile, other countries continue to study American literature in translation, demonstrating in their admiration of the foreign a wisdom which America itself might do well to develop.

At the root of this continuing debate between proponents of a liberal Canon and those who prefer a curriculum addressing current social issues is a struggle between relativism and objectivism. Those who oppose the liberal “relativistic” approach claim that relativism paralyses a person’s ability to exercise passionate judgment. For them, the relativist response, “It all depends,” if repeated too often, means little else than intellectual abdication. Relativists, on the other hand, charge that “objectivists” have for too long

advanced their political agendas under the cloak of “scientific” investigations which seek to silence alternative viewpoints through the tactical presentation of data which supports the supposedly “essential” nature of a given subject or topic (Foucault, 1961; Miller, 1993; McGowan, 1991).

The irony of this is that when we examine the debate surrounding the American curriculum both the relativists and objectivists accuse one another of dogmatism. The dogma of the relativists lies in their refusal to consider any kind of conclusion which would put the stamp of essentialism on a social fact. It is as if they fear any categorical statement which might falsify other statements. Their dogma lies in their continuous opposition to statements designed to establish normative closure. The dogma of their opponents lies in their refusal to consider that opposing truths can co-exist while sharing the same cultural milieu.

An intellectual environment, however, in which there is a generalized absence of overtly strong opinions is not proof that no such opinions exist. Bly’s assertion that America has abandoned the search for meaning is a problematic proposition. Ambivalence at the level of grand theory is simply the insurance policy which academics and students have purchased in order to prevent a re-occurrence of the gross abuses of dogma which have characterized our 4,000 years of history. When Bly speaks of the great “leveling” in American education, he may not realize that this “leveling” is the result of a long struggle for “equality.” The majority of American youth may be perfectly capable of telling basic right from basic wrong. Only an ingeniously-designed general social survey of youth would provide a definitive answer. So we might wish to consider the possibility that our youth (as well as our adults) are hesitant to admit to any “traditional” (i.e. established) concept of “wrong” which might seek to dominate and denigrate its object of study. Most often, when conservatives criticize liberals and relativists for not “believing in anything” they are insisting that what they themselves believe in should be believed by the majority. When they speak of “values” they are more often speaking of a set of values which they already have in mind.

The search for a broad “standard” is itself a search for power and influence. Rare is the individual who will argue for a standard which is counter to his or her own interests. Where liberalism and relativism fall into trouble is when they become mechanical and habitual positions. The step from relativism to totalitarianism is a small one. All it takes for the bridge to be gapped is for one individual to categorically deny---without giving the benefit of a hearing to a countervailing argument---the possibility that one idea may be better than another. A tragic situation develops then when this same individual begins feeling contempt for those who will not agree with h/her dogma that all intellectual and

moral positions have equal validity. By negating the position of another and by refusing to relativize h/her own position, this individual renders inoperative h/her belief in the relativity of value and action. By the same token, the anti-relativist diminishes the credibility of h/her argument by categorically rejecting the notion that two opinions or explanations can co-exist and adequately explain the same reality. Through such refusal, the objectivist (or absolutist) denies the scientific fact that various variables can co-exist and be mutually interactive.

Yet, even more ironic than the relativist's slide into dogma is the classicist's assumption that relativism is a recent phenomenon and a sign of a deteriorating culture. Paul Hazard, in his seminal work, *The European Mind 1680-1715*, reminds us that it was travel to unknown lands as far back as the 1600's which gave rise to the notion that differing and even conflicting cultures could have equal validity (1935: 10-11). The theory of "relative value" existed long before Einstein developed his "theory of relativity." If anything is a modern development it is the notion of "pluralism," a concept quite different from relativism, for while relativism observes two realities in relation to one another pluralism simply accepts the co-existence of conflicting positions without necessarily examining the validity or benefit of each.

Bly refers to the Enlightenment as a high point in western civilization. It is true that the Enlightenment argued for relativism when it came to religious tolerance. And it is also true that Enlightenment philosophers did not subscribe to a "nothing works" philosophy but sought to channel human energy towards positive outcomes. Yet, there was a specific and historical purpose to the arguments put forth by the philosophers and scientists of the Enlightenment, a purpose that went beyond generous sentiment. The Enlightenment philosophers sought to wrench control away from a Church which had kept science and philosophy hostage with its conception of an "original sin" which held humankind in a state of perpetual guilt. These philosophers sought to promote a relationship between humankind and God which gave humankind the option of moving back into divine grace. Put briefly, the Enlightenment thinkers had the *political* task of neutralizing the rigidity of the "original sin" concept so that they could substitute it with their own thinking. They were hardly relativists in the general sense. On the contrary, they championed specific and absolute values: freedom, truth and justice, according to their own notions of these words. Yet, they did not specify whose freedom, whose truth, and whose justice was in question (Westby, 1990: 17-50).

In his 1689 "Letter on Toleration," John Locke accused religious non-tolerance for most of the conflicts and wars that had plagued the Christian world. But Locke also held unshakable beliefs about the nature of knowledge and its firm grounding in the specific

experiences of the senses. He would have been hard-put to argue with equal ardor for two empirical realities which contradicted one another. While he argued against categorization and personification of processes which were symbolic he, simultaneously, spoke out against excessive skepticism and favored coherence in science as well as philosophy (cited in Westby, 1990: 56-57).

The notion that American education is being stifled by relativism is, therefore, an oversimplification. What we are seeing in the American curriculum is a rising demand and respect for “pluralism.” This is semantically worlds apart from relativism. Pure relativism would state that one culture is as good as another. Pluralism does not attempt to make comments regarding cultures but seeks to legislate their coexistence under a system of equal rights (Taylor, 1994). While relativism is a philosophical topic, pluralism is a politico-legal one.

It is not the first time that this debate is occurring nor will it be the last. Bly is not the first to have berated contemporary media and the contemporary curriculum. Ironically enough, thousands of years ago, Plato---one of the classical writers whom Bly would have us read---mounted an argument against poetry and drama and counseled that they should be banned from all respectable cities (cited in Synnott, 1993). Had Plato succeeded and had we adopted his philosophy, brilliant poets and thinkers such as Bly and Bloom might have remained undiscovered.

I mention Plato in order to argue against Bly’s tendency to present categorical conclusions and also to provide an applied example of the “deconstructionist” method which Bly blames for the dismantling of the “American” heritage. What I have done in the above brief passage is to put together two elements (Bly’s argument for the classics and Plato’s rant against the fine arts) to show the incongruence of arguments that categorically venerate the classics and point to them as a way of reclaiming our human heritage. I have shown that even in the classics there are moments of profound darkness; they certainly were written during époques when ritual sacrifice, capital execution, the subjugation of women and slavery were common practices undertaken with singular insouciance. It is perfectly reasonable that we remain wary of the “biographies” of authors and époques when studying text.

Bly suggests that if we do such deconstruction often enough there will be nothing left to believe in. His caution is based on the hypothesis that the human being does not possess a core of insight which remains free of social construction. His point of view is evolutionary. It is also based on the idea that concentrating on “technically relevant” education will rob the student of moral values which would, otherwise, be communicated through the inclusion of classical texts. I will suggest in subsequent chapters that

“deconstruction” is a symptom of a democracy and a manifestation of a “culture of irony” which is there for specific and, possibly even, functional reasons. This ironic stance has not robbed American students of their interest in education but made them singularly bored with a smorgasbord program which does not focus on a particular area which is deemed “relevant” by the students.

Much progress, however, is being made in the direction of creating educational programs which are relevant to the needs of the époque. Outside Albuquerque, New Mexico, a new program has been instituted in the Rio Rancho High School. The program is called the “Pathfinder Course.” It is modeled after similar ones started in Florida and Illinois. The town was experiencing a 28% drop-out rate in 1994. It did an extensive research of institutions in other states and found that students were bored in programs lacking focus. So the Rio Rancho High School was opened in August 1997 with a new enrollment of 2,050 students. The school organized its program in five “academies,” each connected to the real work world. Humanities, science, fine arts, and business and technology were separate areas of concentration. Each department was intensely active with local employers who offered feedback, guidance, and internships.

The Rio Rancho program encouraged and asked students to concentrate on the “relevance” of what they were learning. Students were required to prepare portfolios which listed in detail what they wanted to do as a career and what would be required to achieve their goals. This approach helped render “specific” and “realistic” the notion of career and placed it in context of the marketplace. Students were weaned away from simply stating romantically what they wanted “to be” but were guided to research and experience what they would have “to do” in order to become a given professional. They were also asked to research the “opportunity cost” of various careers. One of the questions on which they meditated was how to reconcile the need to be with their future families with the demanding schedules of certain professions such as law or long-distance truck-driving (Hornblower 1997: 64-66).

The above program was inspired by *Breaking Ranks*, the 1996 high-school-reform report published by the Carnegie Institute and the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Its principal objective was to provide an interactive environment which is demanding yet also attention-sustaining. This is accomplished by relating courses---a demanding list which surpasses the requirements of the State schools---to the real world. To date, students seem to be responding very well at Rio Rancho.

The connecting of “intellect” and “action” is what appeals to American students, and, probably, students anywhere in the world. In a society which has become governed by technology, specific immediate knowledge becomes of primary importance. In the early

eighties many myths circulated about how Americans were opting for a “liberal arts” education. What was not specified here was that those opting for the soft social sciences and literature were predominately Anglo-Saxon. The ethnics were opting for practical programs leading to specific careers. The trend is towards schools capable of producing workers who are able to stay current with the needs of the labor market. It is nice to know Aristotle and to spend hours trying to locate where and how he speaks arrogantly of the female sex, but what keeps the electricity on and the water safe in a town are the technicians. And when a woman decides to defy sexual harassment in the workplace she does not call on Socrates or Hawthorne or Camille Paglia, but on a competent lawyer.

American students are aware of the pragmatism of the market and respond quite well when they feel that they are faced with teachers who care about where they will end up in life. For such teachers and their students, Shakespeare is a brilliant, shining light in the history of human achievement. But then so is Intel’s computer chip and Elvis Presley’s haunting voice.

Television: The New Mythology

*I have a BA from the University of Chicago in Political Philosophy.
Did my thesis on The Divine Comedy. I have an MA and Ph.D. from
Northwestern. I read the great books of the Western World. I love television.
Robert Thompson on 60 Minutes*

One of Bly’s strongest criticisms of American culture is directed at American television. He is not alone in denigrating television. While the world was praising America for developing one of the world’s few remaining miracles, American cultural analysts were hard at work trying to discover the “corruptive” and “degenerative” nature of the medium. On that point, Marshall McLuhan was right. Americans do tend to popularize whatever communications technology is most current while regarding it as trash (1962). They then turn to the technology that was upstaged by the appearance of the new medium and elevate it to the level of art. Before television, the radio was considered the “vulgar” medium. Once Ed Sullivan began broadcasting his weekly Sunday TV programs, radio became the medium for “serious,” “artistic,” work.

But television cannot be seen in isolation. It must be analyzed in relation to film with which it is virtually synonymous. Any study of television should include a conscious understanding of how film was introduced in the United States and the enormous influence which the Eastern-European developers of Hollywood had on the mainstream American culture which was in place prior to their arrival. The desire to re-invent themselves became embedded in their reinvention of America on film. Film, therefore, was the opportunity for the “outsider” to Americanize h/herself. The tradition of changing an actor’s name for the screen originated from the effort of the early film-makers to become “American.” It was in

this assimilative environment that the romantic idea of America as a land of opportunity was developed. The “opportunity” to which film-makers referred not only to the chances offered to the original settlers, but those offered to the immigrant who wished a place in the American dream of financial and cultural safety.

Film came to represent the attempt of its founders to reconcile personal spiritual identity with the secular identity of the mainstream. Consequently, it became a medium of “hyper-adaptability.” It is not surprising, therefore, that film became the daily journal of popular social change. It championed conventional American ethics as well as representing the positive role of the anti-hero or outsider. Television inherited this through-line. It also became a medium in which a secular society was promoted and elevated to the level of ideal. The same idolatrous elevation of movie “stars” (an interesting choice of word which connects actors to heavenly bodies) was adopted by the television medium.

It has become contemporary intellectual currency to denigrate television and blame it for many of our social ills. Some cultural critics, including Bly, have even suggested that television has permanently damaged the brains of youth. Other critics connect America’s moral incertitude to its seduction by the hedonistic values of the richest members of the television and film industries. Even the President of the United States, Bill Clinton, found it necessary to maintain a courteous and sympathetic relationships with the stars of Hollywood before asking them for a personal and national favor: to ensure that television and film content increase projections of values supporting the sanctity of family values and decrease depictions of gratuitous violence.

Blanket criticisms of television, such as Bly’s, are based not only on the certainty that television is a wasteland but also on the notion that youth and adults do not have adequate enough cultural agency to sift through what is presented to them on television. The underlying fear is that Americans---in the absence of “protection” from media influences---cannot construct a functional cultural identity which remains free from the dramatic fantasy land of television. Parallel to this hypothesis is the belief that the content of television has become detrimental to personal and collective welfare. The idea that violence on TV automatically breeds violence in the viewer is an example of the quasi-supernatural powers ascribed to this medium. Critics who adopt these contentions do not consider enough the possibility that Americans may possess two identities: one “virtual,” based on the dramatic depictions of television, and, another, “actual,” based on the realities of day-to-day life in the real American marketplace. The question which needs be asked is the following: for a person earning enough to pay h/her basic needs which scenario of American life will have more relevance, the lives depicted on soap opera where hallway armchairs are upwards of \$5,000 each or the life which the person knows h/she is living in

the here-and-now at h/her specific address? Television may distract but can it replace an actual life with an imagined one?

The Coming of Age of American Viewers

To understand how contemporary Americans relate to television, we need to understand the historical background of the present generation of youth, for their socialization and viewing habits may be different from that of previous generations. These are not the children of the adult American generation of the 40's but the heirs of a massive movement of social disobedience and reform which began in the 60's. Not only may their viewing habits be different from those of their parents and grand-parents but they also may hold to different social values *prior* to approaching the television screen. The automatic criticism that youth are being "morally" appropriated by television discounts the moral influence which youth receive from their own parents from birth onwards.

In fact, what we refer to as "western youth culture" in academic circles really came of age when America began undergoing rapid industrial change. Conformity to established ways of doing things could no longer be rationalized by the elders---not when so many inventions which the elders had mastered over a long period of time were suddenly being made obsolete. The industrial revolution introduced breaks in continuity in the methods of production and established the ground work for a subsequent "distancing" between elders and their off-spring. It was through "differentiation" that American youth became seen as a distinct group with customs and mores of their own.

Such breaks in "technical continuity" (as well as in America's notions of democratic family structure) are at the root of the American "generation gap." if there truly is such a thing. The gap is not only a moral but a technical one. The technical gap came into being with the advent of rapid industrialization. With increasing industrialization, the elders were left with a greatly diminished role in the transmission of technical information. A mother may have customarily taught her daughter how to make gooseberry jam, but she now became keenly aware that she was suddenly competing with the packaged jams of large scale manufacturers. The teacher of a trade was no longer the father-artisan but the stranger who had invented the industrial machine which both father and son now used in their factory work. With the advent of technology and mass production the role of the parent became increasingly confined to the transmission of moral values. With the arrival of television, the family underwent a further transformation. A given moral position transmitted from parent to child could now be contradicted and upstaged by values embedded in the television programs.

For the first part of the twentieth century, however, the cultural authority of the elders remained relatively intact. While the sons and daughters may have known how to

repair a car carburetor better than their elders, the elders still managed to claim authority over the central values which motivated activity in the United States. America was committed to capitalism and the idea that a free market provided the best opportunities to its citizens. And the youth continued to consider these values as legitimate. They had no great reason to contest it. America was still on the path of post-war growth and its new technologies were only confirming the value of the American work ethic which had done well for Americans through the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Additionally, America was establishing itself as a world power and its rising belief in its "military superiority" was as appealing to its youth as it was to its elders. The majority of the young did not turn to other cultures for inspiration---being American was considered the "best" thing to be. And becoming a grown up and enjoying the social prestige enjoyed by adults was the main goal of a young person.

The majority of American youth did not question the founding values of the mainstream American culture, not as far as mercantilism was concerned. They had no great motivation to do so because technology had yet not been associated in the minds of youth with environmental or personal damage. The mainstream culture was predominantly Protestant. America possessed a reputation with itself (if not always with reality) for being a straight-forward, open, hard-working culture. It was only later that the notion of "hard work" and "expansion" became linked with social and environmental problems. While the American Left, impressed with the changes it had witnessed in the Soviet Union, continued to maintain that capitalism had corruptive influences on society, it had received a sound warning during the McCarthy era of the 50's. The majority of American youth were faithful to the notions of private property and the freedoms guaranteed by the American constitution. Their patriotism helped support and reproduce America's established social and political values. *Being* "American" remained a popular ideal. Immigrants continued to wish to "integrate" into the American life-style and found it not impossible to do so because a tacit acceptance of the supremacy of mercantile and professional ability, rather than cultural background (for whites at least), was the official standard.

The late 50's and 60's, however, saw a dramatic change in attitude. The seeds of this new discourse were planted in the late 50's. Michael Ventura (cited in Robert Bly, 1996: 3) has said that at some time in 1956, on the night when Elvis Presley took the stage and began moving his pelvis to the music on the Tommy Dorsey Show, all the parents in the United States lost their children. Ventura's insight is note-worthy, although incomplete. The advent of pop music in the late 50's and early 60's did serve to mobilize an entire generation to begin moving away from parental dominance and the vertical authority of hierarchy and tradition. Yet, simple pelvic gyrations---while they might have served to

awaken sexual life energies kept repressed by a hard-working culture which had never distinguished itself for sensuous expression---cannot by and of themselves be credited with this change. Taken alone, the liberation of sexual energy would not have been sufficient to unleash the considerable social changes which followed the appearance of these “pop” personalities. An emerging intellectual reevaluation was on going.

Popular music was the medium. But something else was the message. The pop groups were made up of young individuals who were at the avant garde; they were beginning to express that which was germinating in the rest of the youth population. If they had not been, their lyrics would have had no coherence for their contemporaries. Pop music did not steal away America’s youth. Rather, it represented it. Youth were not just influenced by the media---they also helped create it.

Pop stars arrived with perfect timing when American (and European) youth held something in their hearts which needed expressing. The tearful screams of appreciation during pop concerts were not as much manifestations of generalized crowd hysteria but expressions of surprise, approval and pleasure. Members of the audience were thrilled that their own feelings---perhaps hitherto denied---were being exteriorized and represented in the lyrics and melodies of the songs. There was an underlying hunger. This was a new experience in a culture where intense emotions had been kept private and where many sons still shook hands with their fathers and called them “sir.” This new music provided an avenue for expression which stood outside the social norms and it quickly became an industry whose profits equaled the gross national product of some small countries.

Yet, though the commerce of music was appropriated by existing adult institutions, the substance of it was not. There was a certain irony in the fact that the same capitalist institutions against which the pop stars railed were the ones which produced their records and profited from them. In so doing, they provided a voice and place for alternative lifestyles and ideologies; business learned to give people what they wanted, and, in so doing, opened up avenues for ideologies and lifestyles which would begin contesting the American business ethic. This was the beginning of the commercialization of a “culture of irony.” But what is important to realize here is that organized business did not create the type of music it published in order to “change” the mentality of youth. In the interests of profit, it gave in to the demands and realities of the market, even though that segment of the market sang happy tunes damning the abuses of capitalism. Capitalism commercialized rebellion and disbelief but it did not author them.

The ensuing youth unrest of the 60’s, bolstered by the appearance of political lyrics in music, was connected to a host of factors, including escalating disagreement between the young and the old concerning politics, the movement from the industrial to the electronic

age, and the increasing need to transcend the life-denying conservatism of a Puritan pleasure-denying Christian-Hebraic ethic. Youth turned against their parents with a singular and unprecedented ferociousness.

Influenced by some of the films of the forties and fifties which advanced visions of male-female relations that stressed the importance of “romantic love,” a notion originally created in Europe by the twelfth-century troubadours of France (LeGoff, 1980), American youth arrived at the conclusion that it was their turn to experiment with new styles of living and bring American culture “up-to-date.” They moved up from their roles as “apprentices” and became “prime movers” of culture, taking on functions hitherto reserved for adults. The dictum “don’t trust anyone above thirty” was not as much a symptom of social autism as it was an expression of the need to maintain ownership of a distinct socio-cultural project. Ironically enough, this new social ethic was as intolerant of “convention” as “convention” itself had been of change.

The expression “do your own thing,” for example, was not the irresponsible utterance of the antisocial personality but a confirmation of the fact that it was important to follow personal values which transcended the expedient values of a nation increasingly obsessed with material consumption at the expense of gentler, more personal values. In a manner, the youth protests of the 60’s, although directed at specific injustices, were also, on a more general level, a negation of conformity, at least to the values of the preceding generation. A certain portion of American youth had caught on to the fact that America had achieved the materialistic components of the American Dream but that there was something still wrong in the American family and in the American political system. Both were extremely “collectivist” and bound to convention.

Now it must be recognized that for a very large segment of American youth this “new consciousness” meant little. In fact, they regarded the new youth movements of their peers as subversive and continued to follow the socio-economic standards of their own parents. For these youth, the movements of the sixties left little impression outside of perhaps encouraging them to adopt a more liberal and hedonistic attitude. Richard Flacks’ findings during that époque indicate that the values of American youth were not significantly different from those of their parents. The values and beliefs of the parents of a given youth seemed to coincide with h/her own position in the 60’s. Flacks writes: “Whereas nonactivists and their parents tend to express conventional orientations toward achievement, material success, sexual morality and religion, the activists and their parents tend to place greater stress on involvement in intellectual and esthetic pursuits, humanitarian concerns, opportunity for self-expression, and tend to de-emphasize or positively disvalue

personal achievement, conventional morality and conventional religiosity” (cited in Moore, 1969: 46).

Unlike Flacks’ reassuring explanation, Allen J. Moore’s analysis identified the youth of the 1960’s as a very particular generation. His analysis of this generation and the parents who fathered and mothered them is worth considering:

There is another factor which dispels the similarity myth. Adult society is an older generation that is also restless and no longer clear or constant in its beliefs and values. We must remember that the parents of today’s young adults were the first to experience fully the loss of tradition and the rise of humanism. Not only has this forced a change in the form and content of young adult rebellion, but it has tended to unite the generations around concerns related to the completion of the humanizing process.

In previous generations young adult rebellion took the form of frivolous activities, such as swallowing goldfish, panty-raids, and sitting on flagpoles. The purpose of most youthful rebellion was to get attention or to playfully provoke adults. In fact, rebellion seldom became more serious than the expected *every-generation* crusade on behalf of free love. Although the present generation can be very fun-loving and playful, their rebellion tends to be deeply serious, and is directed not so much toward parents or authority figures as against the basic structures of society. For the most part they have selected those concerns which are already big issues for the larger society and have succeeded in turning some low-key social debates into explosive issues. In a society that has been in the habit of expecting playful pranks from its young people, it was a surprise when young adults took up the big causes of education, politics, and international affairs (49).

What became known as the “hippie revolution” was a concentrated effort by pockets of American (and European) youth to create meanings which not only transcended but differed from those of their own significant adults as well as the mainstream American culture. Deviation from the norm was no longer a markedly minority activity but an ideal held to by increasing numbers of North American and European youth. The deviation was substantial enough to create the notion of “different lifestyles.” Normal and abnormal became relative values depending on the moral/political allegiance of the diagnostician. The “hippie” movement, notwithstanding its claim of being a movement of love, was an organized power struggle which succeeded in making its ideologies felt in every American institution. The culture war referred to by contemporary social analysts really began in the 1960’s. While the radicals of the movement were certainly not the majority of youth, their ideas had an effect on mainstream youth, changing the face of contemporary America.

The role of power-politics in the construction of normalcy and mores has been explained in the writings of thinkers such as Foucault (1964). It is interesting to note that a large number of radical intellectuals appeared in France and America during the 60’s and early 70’s. Their resistance to authority as an entity legitimized by its own power rather than by primordial identity was quite different from the youth rebellions which had

occurred in the “roaring twenties.” The rebellions of that époque were about living and having fun. They contained resistance to adult mores but did not ground such resistance in a widespread intellectual movement. The rebellion of the sixties, on the other hand, was a rebellion against the “consciousness” and “value-system” of the older generation and possessed important intellectual properties. Put simply, America’s youth had suddenly realized that, for all its wealth and power, America was lacking in simple human decency and love. The “love” generation was, in effect, a love-sick generation. It was a rare instance during which the youth of a nation tried to appeal to its elders to loosen the rigid bonds of convention and let in some humor, tenderness, and sensuality. Sadly enough, what they got were the bayonets of the American National Guard.

The violence which met their call for peace and equity moved young people to question why and how America had allowed itself to become the pawn of a government that would send its youth to an unjust war without the blink of an eye. They also questioned how Americans had accepted to have themselves appropriated by rigid corporations that demanded loyalty to the corporation above loyalty to the self and family. Nor were these youth impressed with the ecologies of their own families. While divorce rates were lower than they would be in the 80’s and 90’s, many of these youth had witnessed parents living together during the 40’s and 50’s without much emotional complicity. They had experienced first-hand the contradiction of the father who appropriates to himself the powers of patriarchal decision-making without simultaneously delivering the nurturing of fatherhood. More than one youth was intensely and uncomfortably aware that when father said he was working late at the office he was out drinking with his friends or in the arms of another woman. Moreover, they were painfully aware that their mothers accepted the behavior of their fathers and stood by them not necessarily out of conviction but out of fear and financial dependence. There was a growing---and justified---cynicism directed at the “grown-up” world.

The movements of the sixties and seventies, consequently, not only sought sensual expression but also attempted to create philosophical meanings which challenged established American ideals while also promoting those which had been neglected. At the very least, the youth tried to call attention to the fact that the American ideals had not been held to faithfully by American business, government, and family. One of the most salient observations of American youth was that their parents were very “uptight.” This word served to locate and identify a pleasure-denying Puritan ethic which had held Americans hostage since their earliest history. “Uptight” also came to mean “insincere” or “unreal.” The picture of Jimi Hendrix playing the American national anthem at the Woodstock Festival, using his guitar strings to imitate the sounds of machine gun fire, was an eloquent

symbol of the disappointment felt by America's youth in its own government's betrayal of the American ideals of freedom and justice.

One could, therefore, say that these youth were not fighting against American ideals as much as they were bringing attention to their corruption. What mattered to them was whether something was "real" or "bullshit." The exclamation "that's unreal" was heard repeatedly in the daily interaction of youth. So was the exclamation "right!"...sometimes delivered with amused disbelief in the face of propaganda, while other times thrown up with enthusiastic approval when still another betrayal of the "system" was revealed. The impeachment of President Richard Nixon was the final straw in this tragic-comic period. It could not do anything but create a culture in which "irony" was the main currency of discourse. Oddly, enough, this "irony," which the early Puritans would have found heretical, was motivated by a contemporary search for purity. It is interesting that terms referring back to the Roman-Palestinian conflicts of 2,000 years previous were used in the terminology of this new generation. There were frequent comparisons between the "hippies" and the "early Christians" and many hippies took to calling the representatives of the establishment as "the Romans."

Some analysts have attributed these discords to the effects of Marxist ideology. Their facile analysis harkens back to the McCarthyian "moral panic" which swept over the United States in the 50's. Such laying of blame oversimplifies the meaning of the époque and denies what American youth tried to tell their elders. What they espoused was not the elimination of capitalism but an end to the wholesale sell-out of the human spirit to mercantile interests. The film *The Graduate* was an excellent popular representation of the dilemma faced by this generation suspended between the collectivist "we" of their forefathers and the surfacing and long-denied imperatives of the "me." The central character in the film was faced with the choice of corrupting his values and losing his idealism by entering a profession which did not interest him at all but which pleased his parents. He refused to do so in the end and managed to convince the girl he loved to join him in a life quite different from that lived by the parents of either. Other films which represented the moral and political mood of America's youth included *Little Big Man*, *Midnight Cowboy*, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Each featured a hero fighting a corrupt system which no longer had room or time for compassion or common-sense. Hollywood struck a nearly-mortal blow to the self-satisfied, conservative side of colonial America.

During the nineties there have been efforts to belittle the movements of the 60's and 70's, perhaps because many of the youth of the sixties grew into adults who were less than perfect parents and who agreed to participate with alarming ease in the financial scams which they so passionately criticized during their youth. Also, because members of the new

generation of youth of the 90's seek to liberate themselves from the larger-than-life shadow of the 1960's and establish a cultural language and value which they can claim to be their own creation and contribution. But discounting the movement as it existed at the time it occurred and demonizing its proponents as "naive" does not serve us to understand culture then nor now. In fact, many of the original "hippies" went on to work in fields which promoted human rights and they passed the torch of this new social awareness to the present ecologically-conscious generation of youth. There is a positive through-line which has survived.

The self-centered "discourtesy" to which writers such as Bly refer did not originate with "Generation X" but with the American youth of the 60's and 70-'s. Unable to comfortably live the imitative life, they turned to self-examination and self-creation. The "me" generation of the sixties was not simply the result of narcissism but a complex movement which sought to recover a sense of self, community, and cooperation. The media of that time were surprised that the Woodstock Festival managed to include 200,000 participants without there occurring major incidents of violence, but peace was a driving motive in the minds of those who attended. In fact, anyone who understood the social psychology of the "hippie" movement would have been able to predict the peaceful denouement of the event. The lack of violence was in itself a potent political statement alluding subtly to the fact that a similar number of adults drunk on alcohol would have been unable to remain non-violent. The event was a blow to the lifestyles of the mothers and fathers.

The advances made in psychology and psychotherapy during this same époque were also given to flying in the face of the "system." Were it not for the pioneering work done by thinkers such as Laing (cited in Collier, 1977) and Janov (1970), who argued for the rights of the mentally ill and the validity of anger and pain as reactions to the social, we might still be dealing with mental illness as we used to with leprosy.

Additionally, the youth of that époque sought to mount a resistance against the increasingly worrisome environmental and human abuses of the capitalist system, a system which had done little to address the issues of ecology, women's rights, and civil rights. Compounding these multiple concerns was America's participation in a brutal war in Vietnam, a war whose rational purpose eluded many Americans. It was a difficult generation in which to come of age and history may record the 60's and 70's as a major époque in western history. It will be certainly noted that the originality, quality and longevity of the films and books created during this era of civil disobedience were considerable. In a manner of speaking, during the 60's and 70's, many Americans turned away from the value of the America of the 50's. In so doing, they created a new set of

social parameters which continue to resonate today in every aspect of American life, including the medium of television.

In fact, it was during the 60's that the sitcom came of age and began taking on the role of "social commentary." While previous comedies such as *I Love Lucy* and *The Jack Benny Show* had concentrated on good-humored expositions of the "foibles" of human nature, the sitcoms which began appearing in the 60's took on the task of not only entertaining through comedy but making commentaries on current social problems. They edged in the direction of "satire" and opened up the way for a more thoughtful and critical genre of comedy. While prior to this television had supported the image of America as a wholesome and desirable place to live, these later sitcoms took to satirizing the American Dream and showing its short-comings. One of the most radical programmes was *Archie Bunker* which featured a young "turned-on" married couple living with the husband's bigoted father and retiring mother. The program did more to challenge the "patriotic/militaristic, anti-liberal" establishment than any other sit-com of the époque. Poor Archie Bunker could never do anything right. He fought the liberalization of his family and tried to keep his wife under his grip, but America moved past him.

When the show was first aired, CBS broadcast a disclaimer warning viewers that they might be offended. CBS knew little about the public's mood. *Archie Bunker* became the most popular program on television.

* * *

Twenty-five years after the night when the American President went on television to announce that America was abandoning its Vietnam project, we are faced with a medium which has expanded into nearly every home by virtue of a cable network which gives viewers a mind-boggling choice of stations. In practice, a given home could contain over a hundred and forty TV sets, each tuned to a different channel. Jerzsy Kosinski's book, *Being There* (1971), later made into a poignantly funny film starring Peter Sellers, demonstrated the pervasive influence of television and how it could be conceivable that someone might receive h/her entire conception of life from the television set. Kosinski later wrote in a series of essays entitled *Passing Through* (1980) that he felt that America had lost its literacy and degraded its intellectual product because of a culture which valued easy entertainment and the quest for money at the exclusion of all else.

Since Kosinski's writings, other cultural critics have similarly mourned the damage supposedly done by television. This distaste for the medium has been an a priori-position adopted by many academicians and intellectuals who habitually regard the intellectual capacities of the masses as dubious and their vulnerability to manipulation unlimited. Adorno and Horkheimer (1973) not only criticized the role played by the media in the

supposed subjugation of the human spirit, but made their point by writing their texts in such a way as to befuddle someone raised on simple sentences and a steady diet of “easy” visual images.

More recently, Joseph Chilton Pearce (1992) has written, “Nature’s imperative is, again, that no intelligence unfolds without a stimulus from a developed form of that intelligence.” Pearce believes that the evolution of human intelligence has come to a virtual end. According to him, only 30% of schoolchildren remain “undamaged” and able to learn. He does not, however, offer any data on what percentage of pre-television youth were similarly handicapped. It is easy to forget that in the early twentieth-century, a very great part of the American population was involved in labor which did not require much reading or writing. If anything, America’s level of overall minimal literacy has increased. Pearce’s image of a developing child is a three-year-old sitting in front of a TV set with its thumb in its mouth. His pessimism is based on the limited vocabulary used on television. He believes that an individual cannot become intelligent if he does not have access to the “verbal bath” provided by a literate adult society. His views build on the theory that perception and conceptualization are dependent on precise vocabularies which provide a person with the ability to distinguish between nuances which might otherwise remain unexpressed. For such theorists, saying “I’m down” is not sufficiently clear expression and can lead to emotional confusion in the speaker; for them, it is important that the person know and be capable of distinguishing the difference between being “melancholic” and “heart-broken.” However, they do not discuss adequately enough why this “verbal bath” is not part of the school curriculum, or, if it is, why it isn’t working.

Bly similarly claims that language deprivation can result in arrested brain development. He observes that the vocabulary adults use at home is becoming restricted, just as has already happened on television. Moreover, as far as Bly is concerned, the medium of television is responsible for putting youth in an “alpha state which rules out active thinking or learning” (1996: 142).

Bly questions how an entire generation could have been delivered into the hands of a medium which weakens literacy and critical thought. He writes, “Latchkey children are television children. One out of six primary-age children and two out of five grade-school children arrive home after school to an empty house. Mothers struggle to do everything in this age of absent grandparents, absent uncles and aunts, absent or emotionally absent fathers, collapsed schools, but the realities are not encouraging...In the old paternal society, fathers automatically put their jobs ahead of talking with children. Mothers are now doing the same. The time that mothers spend in conversation with their children is falling rapidly” (136-137). The New York Times reported in January 1995 that mothers, working

or not, were spending no more than an average of ten minutes per day talking with children. The article, however, did not mention that families had less children than before and multiple children might have increased the figure quoted. Meanwhile, the article reported that in 1995, American children were spending about one-third of their waking hours watching television.

According to Bly, a disturbingly large proportion of primary and secondary students are actively resisting learning, in great part because of the influences of television. He suggests that if a given lesson is not fun or requires difficult work many of the students reject the lesson. Bly has little faith in the ability of youth to catch up with the learning they have missed during their childhood; he sees the educational problems of American youth as a by-product of the popular culture to which they have become addicted. He predicts a “drop in coherence all across the board” and foresees a lengthy recovery period, if any (139).

According to Bly, the real hero and heroine are dying in American culture because of this massive deconstruction of America’s literary and historical heritage. This heritage is the accumulated wisdom of hundreds of years of contributions by a variety of settlers arriving from a variety of cultures. Although Bly often refers to the English canon, he is also a mythologist who quotes liberally from myths originating in various countries. So it is safe to presume that, when speaking of American culture, he is speaking of the America which is composed of the multiple-influences of multiple ethnic inputs.

He suggests that many even actually hold the accumulated idealism of this past in contempt. “If Generation X is passive or uninventive, it is because their ability to admire has been taken away” (162). And here Bly makes a point worth considering carefully. He states that, for many youth, the beloved role model has become the TV and film icon; fame has become more important than real accomplishment. The easy cuts and mixes of the television program have replaced carefully considered thought.

Yet, critiques such as the ones made by Bly and Pearce fail to analyze the active role of television in the construction of value. Those who dismiss television as a device which obliterates literacy while manipulating its viewers into docility follow Marshall McLuhan’s claim that “the medium is the message” and that the medium itself is capable of altering the sensorium of its viewers (1964). McLuhan, in retrospect, might very well be proven wrong. The medium is not the message. Only a message can be a message; structure and content are different entities, just as the mouth can never speak without the mind that animates it. The medium is simply the channel through which the message travels. Those, like McLuhan, who treat television as almost a living entity with a will of its own are relating to it as an animated object, perhaps because of the fact that it is a screen framing

animated images. They would never refer to the printed text in the same way. They mistake the life-forms contained in the images shown on TV for the device itself.

The “power” of television, however, lies not only in its format but also in the material which is broadcast. When rock stars began appearing in televised concerts media analysts, following McLuhan’s lead, predicted that music on radio would be a thing of the past and that record sales would plummet. No such thing occurred. The appearance of each new media technology only serves to refine existing ones. It does not eliminate them. On one point McLuhan was right: what does change is which of the media is considered the mass medium. A hundred years ago, newspapers were considered the mass medium. That function was then transferred onto radio and then onto television. The messages did not change. The mediums did. So, while it may appear that television is blasting away at set themes, a closer analysis will show that it is simply re-stating them through a new technological format. Humanity’s stories are not being abandoned, but being re-evaluated and re-transmitted to a much broader audience.

Moreover, critics such as Bly who blame the media for siding with corporate interests, do not give journalists the credit they deserve for the popular investigative journalism which has served to inform Americans of the marketing devices used to manipulate them as a people. Had it not been for the excellent investigative journalism developed by American and European television, the medium might have become a vehicle for authoritarian rule as it did in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba and other countries where the free speech of journalists has been prohibited. The bringing down of President Nixon through the investigative reports of Bob Woodward of the Washington Post and the dissemination of those reports through parallel coverage on the CBS, NBC and ABC television networks could not have occurred in a country where tele-broadcast facilities are kept under the control of a ruling regime. I myself was arrested in 1972 in communist Yugoslavia as a suspected spy when I was found parked outside a national tele-communications center. The police assumed that the letters which I and a friend were writing in our car were “coded reports.” Our mistaking the telecommunications center for the post office cost us dearly. Such a scene would have never occurred outside the building housing NBC-TV in New York.

Yet, critics of television side-step the issue of media democratization and suggest that enormous quantities of television have damaged the minds of youth and problematized the survival of the printed word. The thousands of educational programs which have come on the air-waves through the spread of cable TV are not mentioned. Neither do such critics ask the crucial question: Regardless of how much television is watched, how is it that after between 12 and 16 years of schooling some individuals would be so disadvantaged when it

comes to the use of the printed---and in some cases, the spoken---word? Why is it that literacy during the early 60's was higher even though people watched a considerable amount of television? Children's early morning programming was already in existence in the 1950's and American children were already using TV to occupy themselves while their parents slept. Why is it then that this previous generation was more literate than the ensuing "latchkey" generation?

The number of texts which an individual encounters by the time h/she graduates from high school is considerable. Yet, the quality of English used in answers to essay-type questions in examinations, even at the university level, is near abysmal. And most American students know of their handicap and prefer exams which are built around the pre-fabricated answers of the multiple-choice question format. Why, after years of textual experience, do students find it so hard to express themselves in writing? To ask this question with cynicism or anger is to eliminate any chance of arriving at a plausible conclusion; the cynicism or anger wrongly pre-supposes that we are suddenly saddled with a generation of youth that is mentally deficient or morally lacking.

Nor can we answer these questions by saying that the students are endemically lazy and refuse to put in the required work. We have observed cases of students who are not particularly industrious but who speak, read and write quite fluently. We must not confuse the "absence of anything to say" which applies to the student who has not done h/her homework with the "inability to say what one knows."

What is more productive than the cliché of berating the system for its incompetence is to note that most students who are having difficulty writing are having difficulty expressing what is in their minds. They are able to think of concepts but unable to concretize them in a written text. Their power of comprehending a text and answering multiple choice questions built around that text surpasses their ability to represent the text in their own words. During my two years as an MA student I spent much time observing and talking with undergraduate students whom I counseled. We spoke often about the task of planning and writing a coherent term paper. Many of these students reported to me that they visualized their thoughts in their minds as images but could not verbalize what they saw. It is as if the "inner voice" referred to in literature and psychology has, for some individuals, been transformed into an "inner screen." Thought has become visceral and is not necessarily connected to organized, linear thought. Yet, education has not taken note of this transformation nor responded adequately to it. University classrooms are equipped with TV screens but the screens remain lifeless most of the time.

Bly attempts to argue that television is the enemy of brain-development. He explains that reading a text requires a complex cooperative process between the visual

cortex, the forebrain and the midbrain while viewing moving images involves passive participation from the midbrain alone. Yet, his analysis is neurologically unsound.

A sentence such as “a red horse jumped through a ring of fire” triggers a series of transfers of information between the various brain centers. The words are picked up by the visual cortex which then refers them to the forebrain for processing; the forebrain then elicits the appropriate mental images from the midbrain. In a series of seminal studies which still serve as an industry standards, Yakovlel (1972) showed the complex interaction between various brain centers helps develop the ability of each of the centers. According to Bly, however, television viewing does not involve similar complex brain activity because, according to him, the midbrain produces the image without requiring the participation of the neocortex (Bly, 1996: 186). Bly misses the point that the translation of the “meaning” of a television image into a verbal concept involves the exact same brain activity, except in reverse. The picture is processed through the midbrain which sends to the forebrain the needed message to elicit the words which identify that which is being seen. Were there not to be such a translation of picture to “word-symbol,” a person would see the images without comprehending what was being seen and would, consequently, not grasp the meaning of the story being told. The images would be internalized as random events. A scene of a red horse jumping through a ring of fire would be only a visual blur if the brain did not produce the meanings of “ring of fire,” “jumping through,” “red,” and “horse.” In fact, the reassembly within the brain of an image which is transmitted over a screen whose functioning depends on a series of electronic signals or lines, which when taken on their own have little visual coherence, is a minor miracle of the brain. Not only must the brain process a verbal definition of what is being seen on screen, it must initially transmit the hundreds of lines of information on the screen to the visual cortex and reassemble them there as a coherent image (McLuhan, 1964). The notion, therefore, that television renders the brain lazy and passive is one which has not been neurologically proven. There are many other variables which are involved in a person’s “interest” in the written text and the rich and complex intellectual heritage of a culture; principal amongst those variable is the degree to which a culture values intellectual accomplishment. There is, therefore, a risk involved in the demonization of a particular communications medium. If the medium is made to look offensive enough then the viewer is given the benefit of the doubt and it is assumed that were the medium not there that the viewer’s intellectual orientation would be better. That, of course, is an assumption.

Joseph Chilton Pearce sounds an alarm similar to the one sounded by Bly. He writes, “The average child in the United States sees six thousand hours of television by their fifth year...Television floods the infant-child brain with images at the very time his or

her brain is supposed to learn to make images from within...Failing to develop imagery means having no imagination” (cited in Bly, 186). Pierce also fails to recognize that such early exposure to a world of images is precisely what helps the young child develop an acute imagination filled with a large bank of visual images. A young child watching five hours of television per day is acquiring a bank of visual information which surpasses that acquired by the children of any preceding generation. We might worry that the child is not receiving enough direct contact with the natural environment, but we cannot categorically state that the child’s ability to “image-ine” is being limited.

The idea, therefore, that television on its own can remove from a person his/her ability to be a literate person requires a leap in logic. It shifts attention away from the real problem. It is a little like observing a farmhand who never drinks milk but who takes the sheep out to pasture every day...and then stating that proximity to sheep takes away a person’s desire for milk. Television is a visual medium and uses the information-processing parts of the brain differently than does the written word. But the medium itself does not prevent literacy. What, more than anything else, prevents literacy is time not spent reading, or reading taught erroneously.

Admittedly, television may create a certain boredom in relation to the printed word. Why read a book and then put the words together to form an image in our minds when we can receive the image ready-made on the television screen? Equally, why read the news in a newspaper when you can watch the gist of it on 40 different channels? But all this does not answer our original question: Although television may decrease the taste for the printed word within a mass population, why do students have such a hard time writing and reading? Why have the schools not taught them properly, considering that they have had the students on their premises for upwards of thirty hours per week?

Whenever there is talk of the “crisis” in American education the “tube” is blamed. This deflects attention away from our increasing under-evaluation of education. Teacher salaries and school resources are grossly under-funded. Classrooms are overcrowded and a given school has little accountability. The literacy program itself needs re-evaluation.

Ironically enough, if America wanted to improve its educational system, the use of video technology would be a very effective tool for doing so. But resistance to the educational use of television remains formidable. Marie Winn, writing in *The Plug-in Drug* (1985), states that “For most teachers, assigning TV viewing for homework is not a maneuver taken lightly to slough off on their duties; it is an act of sheer desperation.” What Winn means is that teachers no longer feel that students are interested in conventional teaching. She does not recognize that using television as a teaching device should not be an act of desperation but an act of moving away from monochromatic teaching methods and

using all available dynamic resources. To brand individuals who have trouble with the written word as “illiterate” is to not recognize a parallel growing “tele-literacy.” It is to imply that we are dealing with a “dumbed-down” population.

David Bianculli, in his book, *Teeliteracy* (1992), asks a thought-provoking question: “Are Shakespeare’s plays considered literature when performed, or only when read? Is *Death of a Salesman* a work of literature only in printed playbook, or does Arthur Miller’s remain literature when the words are spoken aloud by performers? Is a poem any less artistic or meaningful when read loud?” (149). Alexander Nehamas, a philosopher, writes, “The television audience is highly literate (more literate about its medium than many high-culture audiences are about theirs) and makes essential use of its literacy in its appreciation of individual episodes or whole series. Its enjoyment, therefore, is both active and comparative” (cited in Bianculli, 178). In addition, the use of taped books which some people listen to while driving or doing other things helps extend our definition of “literary” activity.

Moreover, television is able to broadcast film versions of literary works which otherwise would never reach the public at large. Joshua Meyrowitz, who usually argues against the acceptance of television as a “literate” medium, concedes that “Even the biggest best-sellers reach only a fraction of the audience that will watch a similar program on television. It took fifty years to sell 21 million copies of *Gone With the Wind*, but about 55 million people watched the first half of the movie on television in a *single evening*...The television program *Roots* was watched, in part or whole, by approximately 130 million people in only eight days. Even with the help of the television-spurred sales, fewer than 5 million copies of *Roots* sold in eight years” (cited in Bianculli, 153).

It is common for literary critics to point to television’s negative characteristics. There has always been a competitive tension between practitioners of the written word and those of the image. The most common critiques of television cite as damning evidence the violence, the manipulative advertising, and the use of the media for consensus-building in national and international affairs.

But what goes unmentioned in many of the criticisms is that television has a wealth of programming that is not only educational but also morally useful. Documentary programs, sitcoms with positive moral themes favoring the continuance of family and friendships, and adaptations of literary works are only some of the ways in which television creates a more informed and conscious populace. The amount of knowledge available to the discriminating viewer in a given day is astounding. In the end, television is a mirror of culture and will include depictions and personifications of “good” as well as “evil.” What we need is not less television but more lessons in discriminate viewing. Mark

Dawidziak writes in *The Colombo Phile*, “If you’re not aware of the fact that you can assemble a very healthy diet from television, for you *and* for your children, then you are misusing the appliance just as you would misuse a refrigerator if you had nothing but junk in it” (cited in Bianculli, 158).

Jane Healy, however, author of *Endangered Minds: Why Our Children Don’t Think* (cited in Bianculli), doubts that television can have an educational effect. In a scathing criticism of the pre-school children’s program *Sesame Street*, she writes, “It’s truly amazing that everyone seems to have bought the notion that the program will teach kids to read, despite the fact that the habits of mind necessary to be a good reader are exactly what *Sesame Street* doesn’t teach” (cited in Singer and Singer, 1990).

Psychologists Jerome L. and Dorothy G. Singer agree with Healy, stating that *Sesame Street* created a disorientation in children that led to a shortened attention span, a lack of reflective thought and an expectation of rapid change in the broader environment (1990). Neil Postman, author of *Amusing Ourselves to Death* warns that a preponderance of make-believe programs such as *Sesame Street* will render it impossible for children to be interested in the real world; he suggests that children are becoming too dependent on entertainment as an integral part of the learning process and are finding it difficult to become interested in material which is straight-forward information (1985).

This generalized devaluation of television as a worthwhile cultural product is to be found on both ends of the political spectrum. Intellectuals habitually distrust mass media, often leaving out mention of their positive effects. Bly criticizes *Sesame Street* for its rapid pace, but fails to mention that this same program was instrumental in bringing real-life issues to the attention of children, issues such as death, divorce, pluralism and tolerance. Neither he nor the critics mentioned above cite the empirical studies which compared children who had watched *Sesame Street* with those who had not. These studies found that, after six weeks of watching *Sesame Street*, those children were considerably more adept at recognizing letters, associating sounds with letters and correctly identifying geometrical shapes (Charren & Hulsizer, 1990).

Robert J. Thompson responds to the criticism that TV takes away from a person’s time “to do other things” by questioning why this charge is made only in regards to television. Thompson asks why this charge is not made when a student spends long hours practicing an instrument or a sport? He suggests that television is itself a comprehensive source of learning and encourages academics to investigate the medium’s ability to actually increase a person’s interest in subjects never encountered before. He explains that seeing a television dramatization of a book, for example, can send viewers to the book itself, for television’s greatest strength lies in its ability to *excite* interest. Sam Clemens (cited in

Bianculli, 1992) reports that after the dramatized version of Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* was broadcast the sales of Twain's book increased by fifty percent; there were also increases in the sales of his other titles.

It would require a separate volume to list and discuss the many television programs which have presented literary works, entertained but created interest in the written word. And it would require yet another volume to present a comprehensive contextual analysis of the many programmes which have used humor and tragedy to communicate precisely those messages which literature and philosophy have tried to communicate throughout history. The pool of stories which are in humanity's possession and which can be told is relatively small. It is said that there are only 26 possible plots in the human imagination and that they are re-told continuously. I myself have tested this theory and spent years examining literary works and films, in order to find a twenty-seventh plot. I have not succeeded in finding the twenty-seventh story. The bad man comes to his senses...the good person falls into evil...the wealthy man loses all his riches to discover love...the poor man gives up a deep love to become rich....these are some of the 26 plots which reoccur throughout history. So, the same moral message can be communicated in an episode of *Cheers* as it was in Shakespeare's *Much To Do About Nothing*. What is important is the meaning of what is being broadcast, not just its language or format. Moral values are transmitted through meanings not complexity of vocabulary.

For example, Bly singles out the sit-com series *Roseanne* for being a particularly blatant example of how "sibling discourtesy" is promoted. I watched twelve episodes of the program and came to the following conclusion after doing a content analysis which took into careful consideration the plots, the dialogue and the denouement of each episode. I found the following themes being strongly portrayed in these twelve episodes:

1. With friends it is wiser to be kind than selfish. (Roseanne's daughter tries to have her "cake and eat it too" with a close friend and experiences a painful fallout which teaches her that greed in friendship leads to loss);
2. Marriage is a worthwhile institution. (Roseanne and her husband separate and then realize that honest communication far surpasses the expediency of leaving the battlefield of conflict);
3. Faithfulness in a relationship is the best policy. (Roseanne's daughter acquires a second boyfriend but learns that it is not right to keep two men waiting until she decides which one to eliminate);
4. Greed in financial dealings will have a negative rebound effect on a person. (Refrigerators are constantly delivered to the restaurant where Roseanne is working. A mix-up in the ordering department of the refrigeration company has made the company deliver a series of units instead of the single unit ordered. Roseanne and her friend get the idea of selling the remaining refrigerators and pocketing the money just to teach the company a lesson. But in

the end, they do not); 5. In times of distress, it is beneficial to “pull oneself up by the bootstraps” and be positive in outlook; 6. It is all right for a newly-married couple who have a newborn and are experiencing hard times to turn to their parents for help and even shelter. (Roseanne’s daughter, gets married and has a baby. She wants to stay with her parents but is afraid to ask. Meanwhile, Roseanne is afraid to offer. It eventually comes out that both needed each other and the girl, her husband and her baby move in until they are able to solve their financial difficulties).

The following general themes run through most of the *Roseanne* episodes: The contact a couple has after the kids are safely in bed can be a quiet and rejuvenating experience; It is good for a marriage for each partner to tease the other and keep the other from becoming authoritative; In a world of broken families, we need to come together and do our best with what we have; In a world of downsized corporations, Americans are doing their heroic best to make ends meet; Humor is a good way of managing stress in a family; It is okay to cry when one is in pain.

The above themes are extremely conducive to the continuance of the family as well as an increase in intimacy between its members. Even so, Bly’s complaint about sibling discourtesy and competitiveness should be taken seriously, for it gives us the opportunity to understand a phenomenon particular to democracies. It is true that the children on *Roseanne* often exhibit sibling rivalry and downright selfishness. But what is interesting is that when all is said and done, they remain intimate with one another and very involved in each other’s lives. The producers have taken the phenomenon of a “culture of irony” and dealt with it. Rather than denying its existence, they have picked up where dysfunctional families stop and presented a picture of a family which, although it appears as if it is in chaos much of the time, is healing itself. *Roseanne*, in the perfect sense of the word, fulfills the ancient function of the “morality tale,” for the “morality tale” always presents a set of characters who are in an “evil” or “socially unacceptable” situation but who, through circumstance or insight, end up living a “good” life.

What needs be understood is that the sibling discourtesy depicted on television is not a corruptive influence as much as it is a *consequence* of American democracy in the late 20th century. Alexis deToqueville, in his seminal work, *Democracy in America* ([1848] 1994), explains, with an uncanny talent for predicting future American society, that open sibling rivalry is a symptom of democracy, an institution which exposes that which remained hidden in less democratic cultures. In aristocracies, where inheritance was determined by age and gender, siblings remained courteous with one another in order not to upset the hierarchy which assured them their line of succession. The eldest took care of the interests of the others as long as they maintained decorum with one another and him or her.

Yet, this courtesy was not necessarily genuine and did not lead to greater intimacy within the family. The democratic culture, however, no longer has recourse to the vertical hierarchies and inheritance patterns of aristocratic cultures. Siblings are released to become more competitive, for the opportunities for advancement are suddenly equally available to all. This individualism also permits a freer expression of hostility as well as love. So what we may be witnessing in our contemporary culture is how the human being behaves when released from some of the constraints of vertical associations which prescribe standard modes of behavior.

This gradual and increasing liberalization can be seen in the films which emerged from Hollywood during the twentieth century. A review of Hollywood films from the 1930's on shows a marked change in the representation of children and youth from the 1950's on. In nearly every film prior to the 1950's the child or minor relates to the adults in a very courteous, deferential way. There is rarely a hint that there is a conflict between the child/minor and the parent. During the 1950's, however, we see the appearance of the teenage rebel, first as a rebel within the community and then as a person experiencing conflicts within the family. The fierce youth revolts of the 1960's had a certain history to them. The revolts of the 60's could not have easily happened during the Victorian era because the youth of that era did not possess in sufficiently large numbers the confidence to say "No" to their parents. What some consider the "collapse" of "courtesy" is in many instances really nothing more than the collapse of "forced respect."

Television, therefore, should be contextualized in relation to the democratization of American culture. What television has done is to show people of all socio-economic levels what is occurring in their society and in other societies. Even a homeless person passing a shop selling televisions is exposed to scenes which help render aware. As for the claim that the moral stories of the culture are being lost due to a medium that prefers to excite and entertain, a crucial factor is not being taken into consideration by proponents of such claims. The human mind cannot for long participate in something that it considers useless. One cannot excite or entertain without a plot. And plots, whether we like it or not, tend to bring along with them moral meanings. For there to be coherence to a cultural product, it must have an identity which makes it stand apart from empty space. For that identity to exist, the product must have a beginning, a middle and an end. We cannot forever count on television's sensationalism nor continue to insist that the public has no discernment and never will.

There are a variety of useful values which are being actively represented on television. While the programmes do not censor or deny the problems faced by Americans, they point to ways in which these problems can be solved. The values they point to are the

“usual” ones: honesty, loyalty, courage and perseverance. So while one may have the impression that these situation comedies are distracting viewers from more serious topics, they are actually connecting viewers to important issues which affect their lives. Sit-coms, therefore, are therapeutic in a certain sense precisely because of their social relevance. They cater to different age-groups and address their varying concerns.

In a content analysis which I did of episodes from four programs (*Cheers*, *Mad About You*, *Seinfeld*, and *Fraser*) I discovered that each episode was promoting a value which did not differ substantially from the values of America in the 50's. While the episodes admitted family dysfunctions and portrayed a rushed, materialistic society, the “moral” of the episodes promoted: faithfulness in marriage, honesty between parents and children, fairness in friendship, loyalty in friendship. The four programs air between the hours of 5 and 7 and are watched by adults as well as youth.

There are other sitcoms which have distinguished themselves as warm and human portrayals of the “situations” lived by most Americans. The limitation of space prevents a methodical analysis of each of them. One worth remembering, however, is *The Cosby Show*. For many years, Bill Cosby provided a humorous and uplifting look at the art of parenthood and the lovable wiles of children. More than any other program, *The Cosby Show* communicated to parents that the paradoxical situations they faced with their children and teenagers were not pathologies but signs of the times. By using generous doses of irony, the program provided an *example* of how parents could turn stress into humor and manage their parenthood without traumatizing their children. Love, comedy, and eleventh-hour compassion were the values presented by the show and they were done so with admirable commitment.

Recent regulations passed by the U.S. government have also helped improved the quality of children' programming. Broadcast stations are now required to air three hours of educational and informational programming for children every week. James Collins, writing for *Time* magazine regarding the new television for children (Time, November 24, 1997: 57) states: “...the new shows attempt to foster the social, moral and cognitive development of their viewers. Each episode usually imparts a specific lesson, whether it be about friendship or lying or sibling rivalry or the risk of going down the drain with the bath water.”

In addition, the suggestion by Bly (1996) and Pierce (1992) that television hypnotizes and prevents conscious assimilation of the insights presented to the viewer is an argument without support. The same kind of “hypnotic concentration” is involved in reading an engrossing book. In fact, many people who call one another after a program to discuss the content on the program---a frequent occurrence with certain sitcoms that have a

“cult” following---demonstrate that they maintain a very conscious relationship with the material they are watching. Television is hypnotic, but the assumption that the mind becomes non-functional in a concentrated (or hypnotic) state is simply bad faith in the ability of the human to function on many levels at once. Bly’s suggestion that the permanent “alpha state” of television ruins the imagination is also erroneous. Studies show that the exact opposite is true. The Alpha brain-wave state is the state most conducive to visualization and imaginative thinking (Silva, 1970).

Television has broadened the human mind. It has given individuals instant sensory mobility to places where they cannot go physically. But to expect the medium to solve problems which come from the family or the educational system or the economic/political order is to put too much weight on television’s ability to solve long-standing social problems and absolve its viewers of personal accountability.

Now the argument could be made that television, by showing situations of dysfunctionality, helps normalize such dysfunctionality in the eyes of the viewer. Some families who have succeeded in raising children who are not unreasonably egotistical or discourteous might say that programmes showing discourteous families coming to terms with themselves might teach their own children that “discourtesy” is trendy. That argument is a cogent one. Yet, such families who require no “media therapy” might wish to record those programmes that are educational and show it to their children during hours reserved for media studies. But one still wonders if it is not damaging to the child to keep h/her separated from the goings-on of the “village square.”

Robert Bly has written as part of his scathing critique of contemporary American society, “Why would we want to treat our nation with its shocking past so differently from the way we have learned to treat ourselves? We have to swallow all the dark truths about the Conquistadors and Puritans, the enslaving and murdering of powerless people, and still preserve the common story, so that we do not lose touch with whatever good there was in our ancestors and with that part of our soul” (257). Bly does not favor television, yet his eloquent manifesto seems to describe very much what television is doing: preserving the common stories, while also showing us scenes from the darker side of human society.

Television and film have become symbols of democracy in America. While some of the content on the medium may disturb some viewers, the fact remains that it is a popular representation of the population. It is contemporary and, for the most part, prefers to espouse “change” rather than the “vertical” stability of which Bly speaks. And there is a good logical reason for that. Democracy has a way of weakening vertical associations and liberating horizontal relationships. An understanding of democracy and its effects is crucial if we are to understand the family, the moral ecology of the culture, and the role played by irony in every aspect of American life.

5

THE DEMOCRATIC SPIRIT IN AMERICA

One of Bly's principal criticisms of contemporary American culture is that it has lost its respect for the serious intellectual work and values which emanate from "vertical association." He makes this point repeatedly in his discussions of the education system, the media and the family. Yet, he does not consider enough why there has been such a build-up of resistance against vertical relationships and the role played by democracy in the equation. Neither does he provide a review of America's long-standing relationship with intellectualism. Yet, an understanding of the background of the present liberal-democratic society is important if we are to avoid arriving at a "moral panic" which denigrates our culture at the expense of insight.

Were it not for democracy American society might have a more specific set of values and standards. We might then be ruled by the type of hierarchical protocols which governed the aristocracies of Europe prior to the French Revolution. "Obedience" would eclipse "popular representation." While there would be a more clearly-delineated rules of morality, there would also be a lack of free representation. Critics who seek "urgent" solutions to our social problems do not recognize enough the difficulties involved when various interests of society come into conflict with one another due to structural as well as ideological reasons. The proliferation of such interests in modern times is not as indicative of the creation of new phenomenon as it is indicative of phenomena which might have been kept suppressed before while being released into public consciousness due to a liberalization of culture. Women's dissatisfaction with a patriarchal society did not "appear" in the twentieth century. It simply found a way of manifesting itself. So a comparison of the present to the past must also include speculations on what parts of the present were kept suppressed in the past. Without such speculation we risk concluding that the past was better or worse than it actually might have been.

Alexis deTocqueville has written what still stands as one of the most penetrating studies of American democratic society and the importance of taking its characteristics into consideration when studying human behavior. First published in the 1800's, following the Frenchman's journey through the American states, *Democracy in America* provides a thorough and original analysis of how America traded great ideas for a generalized notion of equality. DeTocqueville explains that "general ideas permit human minds to pass judgment quickly on a great number of things; but the conceptions they convey are always incomplete, and what is gained in extent is always lost in exactitude" ([1884] 1994: 437). DeTocqueville favored America's break from the stultifying aristocracies of Europe. But he noted the unfortunate consequences of America's movement toward mass representation:

“In ages of equality,” he wrote, “all men are independent of each other, isolated and weak. One finds no man whose will permanently directs the actions of the crowd” (439).

Such an equalization of standards (and power) also had an effect on the individual’s relationship to the collective. The existence of a generalized standard which applied to all drove individuals to look for a personal truth which would serve to provide them with an identity which was personal. Individualism could not have existed in a society where there was no democratic sentiment. Self-interest was and remains an effective defense against the leveling effects of democracy. The confirmation of a general system of “rights” concurrently liberated the individual’s right to self-determination. This self-seeking within a social environment of “equality of conditions” also produced a more “gentle” set of social mores (550-575). But this gentleness and accompanying judicial leniency did not in any way hold back the individual’s motivation to succeed based on h/her own strengths.

What Bly terms “sibling rivalry” is, in reality, a consequence of the increased social mobility permitted by democracy. DeTocqueville explains that “when all men are irrevocably marshaled in an aristocratic society according to their profession, property, and birth, the members of each class think of themselves as children of the same family, feeling a constant sense of sympathy for one another, such as never to be found to the same degree among the citizens of a democracy. But the same feeling toward one another does not exist between the several classes” (561).

The present American cultural landscape is hampered, according to Bly, by a pervasive “competitiveness” which in many instances leads to “meanness” and lack of “community feeling and compassion between strangers.” But this is not as much due to the triumph of any capitalistic ethic but to the liberation of the individual’s right to transcend the class into which h/she is born (a difficult notion in aristocracies governed by rigid rules of descent). If it were only the result of mercantilism, the same symptoms would be found in societies where there is wealth comparable to that found in America. This is not the case, however. Wealthy nations such as Saudia Arabia have managed to maintain their vertical associations and values through a system not unlike the old European aristocracies.

Ayn Rand, in her *Atlas Shrugged* (1954), goes far enough to suggest that self-seeking is a sign of an advanced civilization. For Rand, the movement away from authority ascribed to birth and towards accomplishment determined only by individual effort indicates that America has undertaken the “heroic” and “romantic” project of individual and national self-actualization. “Rational selfishness,” for Rand, is the sign of a sophisticated civilization that has transcended the self-constricting limits of imposed authority. That it hasn’t discovered a generalized inter-personal ethic may not be as indicative of its permanent demise as it is of its impending passage into a new and more effective moral

structure. One must remain with the hope that it will succeed in completing the passage while recognizing what can happen if the passage is not completed.

The point to be realized is that the dysfunctionality of which Bly speaks may very well be unavoidable and a price to be paid for eventual, long-term emancipation. According to DeTocqueville the generalized acceptance of “individual rights” automatically leads to a “leveling” of the cultural landscape. DeTocqueville explains that the movement away from the serfdoms of the middle ages liberated men to seek their own identity and calling while increasing their identification with the realities of other citizens: “When the chroniclers of the Middle Ages, who were all by birth or assimilation aristocrats, relate to the tragic death of a noble, there is no end to their grief; but they mention all in a breath and without wincing [the noblemen’s] massacres and tortures of the common people...As they did not form a clear idea of the suffering of the common people...as they did not form a clear idea of the suffering of the poor, they took but a feeble interest in their fate” (562). On the other hand, “in democratic ages men rarely sacrifice themselves for another, but they show a general compassion for all the human race. One never sees them inflict pointless suffering and they are glad to relieve the sorrows of others when they can do so without much trouble to themselves” (564).

This paradox between the class-bound loyalty of the citizen of an aristocracy and the self-interest of the citizen of a democracy runs throughout Tocqueville’s analysis of America’s family and economic institutions. While the serf was bound by two-way ties of loyalty to his landlord (and by extension to the identity of his own group), the modern democrat is bound first and foremost to his own life as it stands as a replication of the public life of all.

So the “sibling rivalry” which Bly considers a sign of a disintegrating culture may actually be the outcome of a democratic social climate in which there are no strong attachments between individuals, but where there exists, instead, a continuing social and economic competition facilitated by the fact that personal worth is no longer exclusively measured by established social position. In as much as each individual is free from class and aristocratic rank h/she becomes freed to seek and establish h/herself at a level that is most advantageous to h/her. The establishment of personal identity becomes a responsibility of the individual rather than the group or community. And government adapts to this new ecology by concerning itself with the bureaucratic functions of society without unduly interfering in the more spiritual and moral aspects of life.

Equally affected by democracy is the reality of vertical authority. DeTocqueville explains that “...when conditions are almost equal, men are continuously changing places...Those who give the orders are no more permanent than those who obey” (576).

Moreover, “the master considers the contract the sole source of his power, and the servant thinks it the sole reason for his obedience. There is no dispute between them about their reciprocal position; each easily sees what is his and keeps to it” (577). This is very different from the way in which relations are handled in aristocratic societies. In countries where permanent inequalities are seen as the “natural” order of things, the master has no difficulty obtaining from his servants a relatively immediate obedience. His servants accept him not only in his capacity as master, but also as a representative of the class of masters which they hold in high regard. In a way, the veneration of the master helps the servant define the boundaries of h/her own group and establish a secure and fixed self-identity. In a democratic and contractual society, however, “obedience” loses its moral or traditional basis. If it is present it is only because of the contract.

Closely related to a society’s view of “obedience” is its view of “courtesy.” A review of the family at different époques in history shows that sibling courtesy is strongest during époques when conformity is highest and the opinion of the other quite important. Other-directed cultures have a tendency to raise children with strictness and prepare them to comply with the mores of the culture (Sumner, 1960[1906]). The British Victorians as well as the French were known for raising children who were courteous to all adults; parents accomplished this automatic uncritical obedience by limiting the spontaneity of their children and replacing it with a grim attention to notions of “how a child *should* behave.” The emotions of the child were of no consequence in this type of child-raising. In fact, a child had little status.

The movement away from the aristocratic mentality, on the other hand, tends to eliminate clear boundaries in social relations. Writes DeTocqueville, “The code being uncertain, to contravene is no longer a crime in the eyes even of those who do know it. So the substance of behavior comes to count for more than the form, and men grow less polite but are also less quarrelsome” (568).

DeTocqueville had the talent of not only observing the social landscape which had appeared in 19th century America but of being able to discern the long-range effects of America’s democratic customs on the fabric of the social interactions of its citizens. Although he traveled through America long before the advent of the 1920’s and the liberalization which swept the nation during that and subsequent decades, he foresaw that American democracy would lead to social relations very different from those of aristocratic Europe. Considering the British and how they differed from the Americans, he wrote that Americans seemed friendlier towards strangers than were the English. He ascribed this difference to the class structure of Britain, explaining that “Aristocratic pride still being a very strong force with the English, and the boundaries of aristocracy having become

doubtful, each man is constantly afraid lest advantage be taken of his familiarity. Not being able to judge at first sight the social position of the people he meets, he prudently avoids contact with them. He is afraid that some slight service rendered may draw him into an unsuitable friendship. He dreads civility and is as much anxious to avoid the demonstrative gratitude of a stranger as his hostility” (566).

Americans, on the other hand, not being separated by clearly-defined boundaries of class and birth-rank, were freer to be friendly with one another. DeTocqueville notes that the difference between the English and the British exists despite the fact they share “religion, language, and possibly mores....It seems fair to assert that English reserve is due much more to the constitution of the country than of the citizen” (567).

DeTocqueville also realized the price that America had paid for the establishment of a democratic society which tended to disassociate itself from the accumulated intellectual heritage of Europe. He wrote, “The moral authority of the majority is partly based on the notion that there is more enlightenment and wisdom in a numerous assembly than in a single man” (247). This collectivization had profound effects on individual thought. “In America the majority has enclosed thought within a formidable fence. A writer is free inside that area, but woe to the man who goes beyond it” (255). DeTocqueville observes with irony how a man who goes against the current is put to death in authoritarian regimes, while in a democracy he is simply shunned; one system kills the body, the other the spirit. Mark Twain, Henry Miller, D.H. Lawrence and Alexander Solzhenitsyn might have agreed with his observation. DeTocqueville felt that literary genius could not exist without freedom of the spirit and he was careful to point out that “there was no freedom of spirit in America” precisely due to the democratic collectivization of consciousness (256). He observed that America in his time lacked strong leaders due to the “ever-increasing despotism of the American majority” (257). And striking a blow at our proverbial belief in the sanctity of intellectual activity, he wrote, “In America there are neither noblemen nor men of letters, and the people distrust the latter” (261). “[Americans] have abolished the troublesome privileges of some of their fellows, but they come up against the competition of all...When men are more or less equal and following the same path, it is very difficult for any of them to walk faster and get beyond the uniform crowd surrounding and hemming them in” (537).

This fear of the intellectual is part and parcel of the American ethic. The fifties which saw a rise in the appreciation of contemporary music and the liberation of sexuality did not include an equally enthusiastic embracing of the written word. Then and now it is not reading which disinterests the North American but thinking about the issues which would be embedded in a text. Richard Hofstadter, in *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*,

attributes this distrust of the thinking mind to America's re-occurring attraction to primitivism:

Primitivism has displayed itself in some quarters as a quest for the spirit of primitive Christianity, but also as a demand to recover the powers of 'nature' in man...But in it there is a persistent preference for the 'wisdom' of intuition, which is deemed to be natural and God-given, over rationality, which is cultivated and artificial...

All this is hardly surprising: America was settled by men and women who repudiated European civilization for its oppressiveness or decadence, among other reasons, and who found the most striking thing on the American strand nor in the rude social forms that were taking shape here but in the world of nature and of savages. The escape from civilization to Arcadia, from Europe to nature, was perpetuated in repeated escapes from the East to the West, from the settled world to the frontier. Again and again the American mind turned fretfully against the encroachments of organized society, which were felt to be an effort to reimpose what had once been thrown off; for civilization, though it could hardly be repudiated in its entirety, was still believed to have something pernicious about it. If evangelism and primitivism helped to plant anti-intellectualism at the roots of American consciousness, a business society assured that it would remain in the foreground of American thinking. Since the time of DeTocqueville it has become a commonplace among students of America that business activism has provided an overwhelming counter-poise to reflection in this country. DeTocqueville saw that the life of constant action and decision which was entailed by the democratic and businesslike character of American life put a premium upon rough and ready habits of mind, quick decision, and the prompt seizure of opportunities---and that all this activity was not propitious for deliberation, elaboration, or precision in thought.

Again and again, but particularly in recent years, it has been noticed that intellect in America is resented as a kind of excellence, as a claim to distinction, as a challenge to egalitarianism, as a quality which almost certainly deprives a man or woman of the common touch. The phenomenon is most impressive in education itself. American education is the only educational system in the world vital segments of which have fallen into the hands of people who joyfully and militantly proclaim their hostility to intellect and their eagerness to identify with children who show the least intellectual promise (Hofstadter, 1963: 48-50).

Hofstadter's theory regarding America's uneasy relationship with the intellect remains as worthy of attention today as it was when he first presented it in the 1960's when a sizeable part of the youth culture was opting for self-expression over reasoned debate. Democracy, together with the opening up of the public school system to students of various socio-economic-classes, created a certain egalitarianism which was held in as much esteem as individual excellence. "High intellect" in America became considered as an exception to the norm, even in academic circles. The appellation of "nerd," together with its connotations of social incompetence, is proof of this continuing malaise with the individual who sets the life of the mind above h/her social contacts. On the other hand, the "regular American guy," raised in some supposedly "wholesome" American way, was adept at knowing the most intricate details regarding baseball and football teams but remained

singularly suspicious of anyone who would dare set a new standard of thought. In many other cultures, the “nerd” would have been respected as an example to be followed. But in America h/she was treated with derision and pity.

The determination to preserve a democratic majority consensus, the spread of a collectivist culture which favored action as much as it did rational thought, and a public education system which attempted to adapt itself to a standard which was achievable by all contributed to a lowering of intellectual standard. While those who would have remained illiterate in aristocratic societies managed to acquire a decent education which permitted them to transcend the limitations of their families of birth, certain others were held back from achieving their highest potential. America increased the general education of the mass while holding back the men and women of exceptional intellect. Whether this trade-off was worthwhile or not will remain for history to determine. One thing is certain. The present generation of American youth is motivated to succeed in life, but few of them have been raised with the notion that the achievement of a logical and profound thought process is a valuable end in itself. Expediency overshadows depth.

DeTocqueville helps reassure us that this lack of idealism is not a sign of any defect or moral truculence, as much as it is the result of the democratic process and the manner in which Americans came to see one another in the wake of equality: “When ranks are almost equal among a people, as all men think and feel in nearly the same manner, each instantaneously can judge the feelings of all the others, he just casts a rapid glance at himself and that is enough” (565). DeTocqueville also suggests that America’s lack of a strong and specific idealism is not as much the result of moral truculence but the consequence of a wide-spread egalitarianism compounded by an exaggerated faith in utilitarianism: “Everyone living in democratic times contracts, more or less, the mental habits of the industrial and trading classes; their thoughts take a serious turn, calculating and realistic; they gladly turn away from the ideal to pursue some visible and approachable aim which seems the natural and necessary objects of their desires. Equality does not by this destroy the imagination, but clips its wings and only lets it fly touching the ground” (598).

Thus, DeTocqueville suggests that the movement away from an ideal intellectual life and toward a utilitarian/competitive one is not as much an indication of cultural degeneration as it is of a culture forced to make choices. Often, these choices entail some transitional measures. As an example, he discusses how revolutions bring with them transient uncertainties in the spheres of private and public morality. While they initially bring freedom from tyranny, they demand, in return, a period of political and moral uncertainty. He points out that France’s revolution and the social upheavals brought in its

wake shook up the very fabric of public virtue even though the Revolution itself was meant to end corruption. "...all revolutions, whatever their aim or means, have always at first produced such results. Even those which in the end imposed stricter moral standards began by relaxing them" (599). America's journey to its present "open" society began with a revolutionary break with European aristocratic society. This break affected "vertical" structures. Unwilling to take all their cues from their British fathers and fore-fathers, the new Americans turned to each other for guidance. Democracies, by their very nature, tend to promote such horizontal relationships. Knowledge created by one's contemporaries becomes as valued, if not more so, than knowledge transmitted through tradition or blood line. This constant recreating of "know-how" has been at the root of the American experience. Contrary to Bly's assertions, it is not a recent outcome of social illness but what has made America a self-renewing culture.

Throughout DeTocqueville's work one gets glimpses of how both aristocracies and democracies are blessed with positive as well as problematic characteristics. It seems that a given positive function of a social structure is often acquired at the expense of some other positive function. The outcome of a system can vary radically with the original intentions of its founders. When that outcome achieves a critical mass which eclipses the good values which were originally intended, the system then becomes subject to major revision. Deconstruction is a tool of such revision. The original intentions and the outcomes are deconstructed and separated from one another so that a new system may be constructed. Unfortunately, in many cases, the original intentions and outcomes are confused and the outcomes used to lay blame on the intentions and discredit them. Bly and other critics who object to the widespread "disrespect" of precedence which is endemic in fully-developed democratic societies gloss over the functional origins of such disrespect and neglect its historical location. Yet, they wisely caution against a wholesale rejection of precedent.

The education of the majority, for example, entails a certain neglect of the elite. Similarly, the movement away from hierarchy entails a simultaneous movement away from ritual and its clearly-defined social mannerisms. The putting forward of one quality, such as egalitarianism, includes the putting away of another quality, such as distinction and finesse. This putting away into the background of one characteristic at the expense of another creates a compression of the denied characteristic and sows the seeds of its future outbreak. What is being suggested here, in DeTocqueville's research as well as my own, is that there is a rebound effect in cases where one ideology is chosen over another. That ideology (or quality) which is repressed will require an eventual opportunity for "outbreak," in order to balance out the exaggerations of formerly-chosen ideology.

Commenting on America's exaggerated commitment to material comfort,

DeTocqueville explains that Americans compensate for their materialism by being given to “enthusiastic spirituality”: “...they feel imprisoned within limits from which they are apparently not allowed to escape. Once they have broken through these limits, their minds do not know where to settle down, and they often rush without stopping far beyond the bounds of common sense” (535). Decades after he wrote this sentence we find ourselves living in a society where, despite the veneration of the rational utilitarian mind, millions are turning to psychics and new intuitive religions for guidance. Such paradoxical reactions are the safety valves of society. They not only reflect dysfunction but previously denied need.

The general through-line of “democracy” in American culture is, therefore, an important one and should act as a backdrop to studies of contemporary families in America.

6

THE FAMILY IN AMERICA

In oral cultures, tradition is not known as such, even though these cultures are the most traditional of all...The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character."
 Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990: 37-38)

In his previous book, *Iron John* (1990), Bly set out to show the dangers which face sons whose fathers are absent or distant. He argued for paternal presence and initiation, taking adequate care to distinguish "paternalism" from "patriarchy."

Bly picks up his original theme in *The Sibling Society* and attempts to show how far America has deviated from its original paternal culture. He explains that the Puritan family of the 1700's was set up in such a way as to act as a parallel extension of the Puritan State. Both institutions were run by older men. The father was the "Navigator in social waters; he was the Moral Teacher and Spiritual Comforter; he was the Earner, who brought in the income and kept the family alive; he was the Hearer of Distress as well; cares were brought to the mother and then to him. People imagined the Hebraic unit, as if the children were all children of God, and the house a tiny house of Abraham" (31).

Bly locates the subsequent substantial change in families and the role of the father within the heart of the industrial revolution. He explains that with the opening of factories the father was forced to leave his home and go work in workshops where a long work-day cut into the time he previously had available to spend with his family. Consequent to this appropriation of the father by external institutions, the mother became the confidant for the children. By the time the father came home from work the mother had already passed through numerous domestic scenes with her children and managed to settle many of the household's problems. Those issues referred to the father were the few occurrences, if any, which had not already been settled or which required the intervention of a "strong hand." In effect, the father now participated in the life of his family in a second-hand way considering that he was not present during most of the waking hours of his children. Susan Jaster and Maris Vinoski, cited by Bly, agree with Bly's observation. They write, "The transition from the father to the mother as the primary socializer and educator of young children was completed by the nineteenth century" (cited in Blakenhorn, 1995: 237).

The mother's position changed radically again in the early part of the twentieth century. Bly attributes this change to a "selling industry [which] succeeded in inserting itself between the mother and her children. The mother could no longer set the emotional or cultural 'tone' of the house, and pass on the tastes in books or music which her parents had transmitted to her. This 'usurpation' took place so fast that no one could stop it. Most

mothers remain in the house, but they have, like the fathers, the feeling that they are disposable” (33).

Bly cites other reasons for the American family’s powerlessness. He points to the effects of modern psychology on parenting. With the revelation that certain individuals had suffered traumas as children came an entire field of therapy and counseling which sought to instruct the population regarding how older forms of parenting had caused dysfunction in the lives of children. “The sense that one could be responsible for ‘what is wrong’ with one’s children, because of one’s own childhood, produces deep anxiety. Virtually every parent feels it now; but the great mass of parents had not felt this terror until this century” (33).

Bly does not glorify pre-20th century parenthood. He recognizes that many parents of those earlier *époques* were brutal with their children and insisted on total conformity to what the parents (often the patriarch) found valuable. Bly wishes, rather, to point out that there is a certain paralysis in parenthood that is endemic to our *époque*; along with the increased psychological awareness of modern parents has come a generalized burden of guilt and anxiety regarding the job of parenting (34).

According to Bly, along with this confusion has appeared a certain reversal in the roles between parents and their children. He agrees with Geoffrey Gorer who has observed that American parents have a strong desire to be loved, so strong that they would purchase that love by agreeing with their children’s desires even when they know that the immediate gratification of some of those desires may not be good for them in the long run (198).

Bly also suggests that the power yielded by children increased dramatically in the 1950’s and 1960’s when there was a frontal attack on the “Indo-European, Islamic, Hebraic impulse-control system which subscribed to a certain asceticism for the young, postponement of pleasure, hard work, no fooling around” (5). This new “laissez-faire” attitude was compounded in families which had experienced divorce, because, in such families, a child sometimes had additional power with a parent with whom he or she did not live; the parent who was absent was unwilling to use strict discipline and spoil the harmony possible during h/her infrequent meetings with h/her children. The “absent” parent, usually the father, left the bulk of the disciplinary work to the mother.

Bly explains such a loss of a “center” of parental confidence as a primary reason for the departure of fathers from families. He even suggests that “Many mothers would flee, too, if they thought they could” (34).

Ruth Sidel, cited by Bly, links the unique phenomenon of fathers leaving the house with economic realities. She suggests that layoffs which began in the 1970’s continue to

rise at alarming rates, with negative consequences for families. She suggests that the fathers have withdrawn rather than face their own feelings of humiliation. "From 1980 to 1993," writes Sidel, "the Fortune 500 companies shed more than one quarter (4.4 million) of all the jobs they had previously provided. Meanwhile, during this same period, these companies increased their assets by 2.3 times, and their sales by 1.4 times" (1989: 537). Bly adds the following to Sidel's data: "...during the same time the CEO's increased their annual compensation by 1.4 times" (1996: 35). He concludes that this corporate change of heart towards Americans produced transformations that were devastating to both mothers and fathers: in America the rate of absent fathers has increased to 60 percent and still rising in the black neighborhoods and to 35 percent and still rising in the white neighborhoods (37).

Sidel, discussing the plight of African-American communities, cites Elliott Liebow who claims that "the unskilled black man has little chance of obtaining a permanent job that would pay enough to support a family. He eventually becomes resigned to being unable to play the traditional father role, and rather than being faced with his own failure day after day, year after year, he often walks away" (1989: 536). Sidel, however, does not provide comparative data on men from white poor communities in America.

Bly refers to the above developments in the American industrial system to make a salient point which he later takes up when discussing America's economic climate: "The industrial production system began by destroying fatherhood. In England through the form of enclosures, which amounted to abolishment of common pastures, ordered by the courts, that drove men into the factories. The patriarchal system's destruction of fatherhood continues in the United States: here it is free hours that are 'enclosed.' In 1935, the average working man had forty hours a week free, including Saturday and Sunday. By 1990, it was down to seventeen hours. The twenty-three hours of free time a week since 1935 are the very hours in which the father could be a nurturing father, and find some center in himself, and the very hours in which the mother could feel she actually has a husband" (36).

Andrew Kimbrell agrees with Bly. He writes that father's are disappearing as human and legal entities, with about one-third of the childbirth in America occurring out of marriage (1995). Bly criticizes Kathy Pollitt, a columnist with the New York Times, for writing, "Why not have a child of one's own? Children are a joy; many men are not" (cited in Bly: 36).

He also blames the high rate of fatherless families on policies of the American government. He claims that the AFDC's past policy of giving money to single mothers only if there was no man living in the house contributed to fatherlessness. He does not

suggest that this was the outcome of a conspiracy against fathers; rather, he suggests that fatherhood was such a strong part of American culture that it never occurred to anyone that such a phenomenal change would ever be possible (36).

Bly's dismay does not end with absent fathers. He also decries those sociological studies which suggest that the welfare of children is not dependent on the presence of the mother. He quotes Alvin L. Schorr and Phyllis Moen who write, "The presence or absence of both parents per se makes little difference in the adequacy of child-rearing or the socialization of children" (1983: 579). Bly does not elaborate on what exact point Schorr and Moen are trying to make in their seemingly-bizarre statement. But he does allude to a growing tendency in sociology to study the "changing forms of the family" as if the family could continue dismantling and transforming itself and still lay claim to its name.

He cautions that statements such as the one made by Schorr and Moen serve not only to discount fatherhood but also devalue mothers. "Throughout these last four decades, mothers have felt increasingly unvalued, both by the male culture and by some spokeswomen of the women's movement, who could have been their champions; the morale of mothers is low" (Bly, 1996: 37). The devaluation of fatherhood or motherhood has considerable consequence for a society, for, as far as Bly is concerned, both parents are required to form the ideal family.

The most striking reference Bly uses in his argument for a renewed sense of parenthood is a passage he quotes from Michael Ventura who claims that there has occurred a worldwide breakdown in families: "Children born at the end of the Second World War behaved with shocking force in the '60's. Sometime around 1965, family disciplines that had been in force for centuries suddenly dissolved. This didn't happen just in America. It also happened in countries without TV, affluence, rock 'n roll, or racial tensions....Both affluence and poverty are producing basically the same dissolution of families...and nobody knows why" (cited in Bly: 38).

Bly feels that this supposed breakdown in families is a victory for destructive forces. Referring back to the story of "Jack and the Beanstalk," Bly argues for a cultural vision which would recognize and struggle against the presence of the allegoric "giant" who is against life and whose sole purpose is the creation of what Freud called the "culture of the death instinct" (42).

Bly has picked up on something which few sociologists have developed in their studies. He notes that people are looking younger all the time. "Photographs of men and women a hundred years ago---immigrants, for example---show a certain set of the mouth and jaws that says, 'We're adults. There's nothing we can do about it.' By contrast, the face of Marilyn Monroe, of Kevin Costner, or of the ordinary person we see on the street

says, "I'm a child. There's nothing I can do about it" (45). Bly suggests that a comparison of photographs of youth from previous decades and now will show a marked increase in childlike faces. Bly also remarks that many men in their 50's who look 30 do so not only due to the fact that they exercise and eat properly but also because they are having difficulty maturing (45).

Bly interprets this increasingly youthful look as an indication that adolescents are refusing "to accept the larger goals of their elders," or are being deprived of the opportunity of doing so. While he admits that a certain attitude of non-chalance towards the rituals of the adult world is a natural part of adolescence he stresses that people are remaining in their adolescence "long past its normal span."

He locates the genesis of this prolonged adolescence in the culture's emphasis on individualism. Citing the early films of Marlon Brando and James Dean he suggests that the early themes of rebellion embodied in their films became translated through the years into a generalized allergy towards anything that had to do with a common culture possessing collective values. One of the characters played by Brando is asked, "What are you rebelling against?" Answers the character, "What do you have?" (46). Bly, however, does not mention what, barring brain damage, would come over a person to make him adopt such a categorically anti-social position.

Bly notes with dismay that the youth of America are turning their backs on the "common stories which unite the elders, the middle-aged people and the young of a culture." And, according to him, the youth of the 1990's are rejecting the "common stories" without even bothering to read them. He makes the salient observation that in a culture with a short phase of adolescent rebellion, such rejection of the common stories of a culture might do little harm---as adolescents would grow older, they would catch up and integrate the foundations of the culture. But in a culture with an adolescence which often stretches into the early thirties, such a turning away from the literary and philosophical core of the culture can create irreparable long-term damage extending over a few generations. In such a case, a "dumbing-down" process comes into effect, radically altering the consciousness of the culture (45-46).

Bly attributes this generalized rebellion to the rise in "devitalized" parenting. "As parenting becomes less effective, children become more savage and uneasy and less able to feel part of any dignified group. It is natural, then, that they look for respect, and self-respect, from their peers" (48). Bly tempers his thesis by recalling Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* in which Freud suggested that there is a basic strain between the needs of the individual and the civilizing process (edit). He wonders if one of the ways to "outwit" this strain is not to establish a "sibling" society. "When enough people have slid backward

into a sibling state of mind, society can no longer demand difficult and subtle work from its people---because the standards are no longer visible” (48). But he reclaims his original position, adding that there can be no real maturity without a certain measure of austerity and acceptance of reality.

And, Bly reminds that without maturity there can be no effective long-range relationships between men and women. He reports that “women are shocked to learn how many men are helpless, vulnerable, isolated, and deopotentiated by longing. Women, as well, are directed by society to be young, even immature, physically and emotionally. There are women who can offer advice in adulthood, but they are seldom visible” (49). He explains that this immaturity may be due to the childhood experiences of the youth of the 90’s. He cites German analyst Alexander Mitscherlich who has brought attention to the fact that the old love-hate relationship between fathers and sons is disappearing (1969). Mitscherlich does not believe that this is due to increased harmony between men and their sons, but due to the absence of a paternal relationship. Mitscherlich writes that the usual American son’s attitude towards his father is one of “non-respect...which is associated with very little affect indeed” (269).

Bly mourns this lack of intimate contact between father and son: “Sons who have a remote or absent father clearly can receive no modeling on how to deal appropriately with male anger, what it looks like, what it feels like, what it smells like, how to honor it, or let it go, or speak it without hurting someone. Such sons are usually so frightened of anger that they repress it entirely. Others with no better modeling, become violent. Few sons in a city culture learn to fuse instinctive aggression with the pleasure of hard physical work. Few sons now share a toolbox with their father. The son experiences the father only in the world of longing” (Bly, 1996: 51).

He is equally pessimistic about the situation of young women. He writes, “Daughters today often find themselves not with too much mothering but with too little. Some interrupt their movement to adult-hood by their felt need to ask others---other women, older men, lovers---for mothering. Some valiantly try to mother themselves, splitting into a small girl and a mother. Still others become pregnant at fourteen deliberately, hoping to receive some sort of mothering from their child soon to come” (52).

This absence of the father is not without consequences in the son’s relationship with his mother: “Father-hunger is often accompanied by a sense of the son’s increased responsibility for his mother...Sons in the absence of protective adult males appoint themselves to be their mother’s guardian” (67).

The son is turned into a “doorkeeper” who is forced at an early age to cope with duties which normally should not be his. Bly gives the example of the son who is forced to

stand up to a father who is being physically abusive with his wife; or, the son who at once does not wish another man to take his father's place while feeling guilty about his mother's lack of male companionship; or, the son who feels distressed because his mother cannot settle on one lover above the rest. Such early exposure to the absence of the father and an over-load of responsibility towards the mother, makes many young men enter adolescence with a "flatness and hopelessness" which greatly limits their happiness.

He explains that the creation of new meaning is a primordial necessity for the creation of a relationship of "gratitude" with the energies of the cosmos. And mythology, or a respect for the metaphorical, is a way of achieving such meaning. Bly explains that such mythological ambitions for new meaning cannot exist if there are no "elaborate practices or stories" (83). Neither can true initiation occur if a given culture is submerged by a generalized cynicism or a unipolar value system which degrades spiritual striving in the favor of pragmatic mercantilism.

He, therefore, argues for an initiatory experience, free of the constrictions of mercantile expediency: "For grown men, serious change today usually means moving into expressiveness. It means leaving the tightly-controlled, work-dominated, slave like closed-mouthedness that has already destroyed their relationship with their families. It means they must move into expression of feeling, reconnection with nature, reconnection with the feminine, reconnection with the deeper side of masculinity" (84).

Worth noting is that he does not subscribe uncritically to "masculine revival" movements such as the *Promise Keepers*. While he recognizes the value of the *Promise Keepers'* desire to renew male responsibility within the family, he cautions against the movement's reliance on literal patriarchal interpretations of the Bible and its approval of male dominance. He does not believe that years of progress by women can suddenly be undone with the man coming back into the home and saying, "Honey, I'm back. I'm taking over now and I expect you to honor, cherish and obey me."

Neither is he hopeful of any long-lasting solutions coming from the feminist men's movement. Bly feels that while this movement is highly critical of patriarchy and blames men for the state of the world, it contains few males who value "paternalism" enough to be able to mount an effective resistance against corporate and media interests.

He, therefore, criticizes the feminist men's movement for demanding too much perfection and not possessing the patience required to lead the culture through a transitory healing phase. He also notes that being allergic to any notion of male authority, the feminist males would have a hard time teaching younger men the meaning of "vertical thought" and the acceptance of ancestral precedent as a worthwhile heritage.

Although he claims that he doesn't espouse a return to a patriarchal culture, he argues, in the conclusion of his book, for a culture which honors and seeks the active participation of its grandparents.

Bly envisions an initiation system that is mutually constructed by men and women who work together for common ends. His vision, therefore, is neither fully compatible with radical feminism or patriarchy, the old Left or the new Right. As far as Bly is concerned, both ends of the political spectrum find initiation unnecessary to the production of culture. "The left regards initiation as silly, and the right as an impediment to production" (86).

Bly's attempts to apply his vision of initiation to women also. He suggests that a young woman is being devalued by a junk culture which conditions her to repress parts of her personality in order to appear "attractive" to men (111). Such restriction robs the woman of her contradictory side---that side that does not wish to conform and submit to stereotypes of femininity but seeks to be opinionated and wishes to continue possessing its own inner force.

He suggests that daughters would feel more confident to retain the dynamic side of their personality if they had the opportunity to relate to a mother who herself admits to her desires. Although he does not discuss possible initiation for women, he does suggest that a mother who lives out and accepts her desires by living an active life has a better chance of attracting her daughter's interest in her as a role model. He, consequently, mourns the loss of the "motherline" which used to exist due to the active participation of mothers and grandmothers in the lives of daughters.

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A distinction is best made between the term "sibling," the term "childlike," and the term "childish." Bly's use of the word "sibling" refers to an arrested culture in which the opinion of peers counts for more than the knowledge of predecessors. Bly's use of the term also presupposes a lack of competency and excellence in the "sibling" state: "When enough people have slid backward into a sibling state of mind, society can no longer demand difficult and subtle work from its people---because the standards are no longer visible" (48). His conception of a "sibling" is a young man or woman (or older being, for that matter---he includes President Clinton in the category) who simply doesn't want to face "the hassle" of growing up. He does not address the possibility that an adult may have positive "childlike" qualities or a certain youthfulness of spirit.

Bly has observed the children and youth of America, even though he quotes no formal study of his own, and concluded that a new youth culture has appeared which no longer can be understood from the perspectives of precedent generations. He also states

that parents are not taking the time or opportunity to socialize their young in a manner that will be beneficial in the long-run.

Absent fathers, working mothers, father-less young men and father-less young women, absent grand-parents...these all lead Bly to conclude that the American family is in deep crisis.

The Family in Theoretical And Historical Perspective

Theoretical statements carry with them a “regulatory” motivation. The statement, for example, that infants will die if they are not touched (in addition to being fed) simultaneously establishes the “norm” that touch is primordially necessary to the survival of infants (Montagu and Matson, 1979: 112-114). The statement lays claim to knowledge of the fundamental needs of the human being and directs us to act according to that knowledge. It also reveals the theorist’s own autobiography and preference. An individual who does not like to touch infants might not be motivated to do the kind of research necessary to arrive at the above conclusion. If anything, h/she might hope that the opposite of the above might be true. Similarly, any statement about daycare in contemporary society is simultaneously a comment regarding the speaker’s knowledge or preference regarding child-rearing. And a comment about “how nice it would be to return to the traditional family” contains in it the hypothesis that “traditional family” was a good place to be in, that it no longer existed, and that we would want to return into its folds.

This mix between personal preference or interest and theory is to be found in many studies of family, marriage and parenting. A discussion of “family,” regardless of the actual context, is, by necessity, a revelation of the writer’s preconceptions regarding what is a “family” and what would make it “thrive.” It is also a revelation of what that writer feels “should” be the contemporary family (Atkinson, 1990; Stanley, 1992) and what should be the contemporary society, for the state of the family is often used to comment on the state of society (Knowles, 1996). So we enter highly political ground when we speak of family.

Now anthropologists have suggested that a variety of mores and customs, often remarkably contradictory, can be considered as “signs” of a “healthy” family. This does not automatically imply that there are no essential needs in families, but that different cultures have different ways of dealing with those needs. Mead’s seminal studies of the sexuality of children and youth living in Samoa demonstrates that what we consider “normal” and “abnormal” in the American family is the product of years of local development. (Mead [1928] 1961).

Yet, contemporary anthropology has also produced dissenting voices regarding the “cultural relativity theory.” I myself have difficulty continuing to consider myself a cultural

relativist in the pure sense. I cite as reason the fact that the on-going customs of some cultures, such as routine practice of “clitorecdectomy,” can no longer be rationalized in all good conscience. I have come to wonder whether we need accept as “normal” a practice which our experiences and values indicate to us is destructive? In posing this question I know that I am opening the way for a second question: could it be that one culture is more evolved along a continuum of moral progress more than is another one?

Neither may we wish to categorically sympathize with “cultural relativity” when it is applied to our own culture across varying periods of history. The notion that every époque had its own “particular” wisdom robs us of the opportunity of locating that which runs counter to human well-being in a given époque.

Dr. John B. Watson, the founder of Behaviorism, wrote in 1928 the following words which were accepted by many of the “experts” of the time: “There is a sensible way of treating children. Treat them as though they were young adults. Dress them, bathe them with care and circumspection. Let your behavior always be objective and kindly firm. Never hug and kiss them, never let them sit on your lap. If you must, kiss them once on the forehead when they say good night. Shake hands with them in the morning” ([1928] 1972: 81-82).

Reading Dr. Watson’s tract, one might want to pause for a moment of silence in memory of the emotional lives which were ruined as a result of this dim-witted proposition. And recovering from the shock of it, we might wish to realize that no argument can be constructed to rationalize why Dr. Watson’s attitude may have been “functionally appropriate” or “culturally relative” for that period of history. Nothing which leads to individuals who are emotionally stunted and closed-off, as is often the case with adults who are physically neglected as children (Shilling, 1993; Davetian, 1996), can be considered “functionally appropriate” unless, for some reason, the survival of a culture requires the robotization of its citizens. Furthermore, we must decide whether we are talking of the “functioning” of the individual or of society and pick our priorities. Cultural relativists have a weakness in their research: they rarely ask their respondents point-blank questions about whether they are happy or not in their culture and what specific things make them happy. If such questions had been asked in many of the studies of cultures in which there were “extended families,” we might not have ended up assuming that a child had a better time of it in extended rather than nuclear families. Extended families in which there is considerable inter-personal strife (unlike in the TV family, *The Waltons*) are hardly supportive networks for the child. They subject the child to multiple sources of frustration and/or abuse.

In light of this, one re-reads Mead's study of youth in Samoa and wonders why she was not as disturbed by the Samoan custom of keeping young children sitting on the floor for the majority of their waking hours as she was impressed by the harmony of character exhibited by the adolescents of the culture (Mead: [1928] 1961: 20-23, 234-235). While the social outcome of Samoan child-raising seemed admirable, one cannot wonder at what price this harmony was achieved and whether it was authentic harmony or simple submissiveness exhibited by Samoan adolescents in their dealings with one another and their elders. Mead herself describes Samoan's as singularly reticent to show strong feeling; yet she does not analyze sufficiently what caused such emotional reserve. There is every indication in her work that the Samoan child was brow-beaten into submission by a strong network of conventions and age-graded status ascription.

We might also wish to consider the fact that much of what is considered "beneficial" or "destructive" to family life in our own culture is the result of narratives written by "experts." The twentieth-century has seen an explosion of theory regarding what is necessary for the family to thrive. Implicit in this cataloging of familial virtues is the attempt to define what is a good society. Knowles writes that "[the family] operates as a barometer of a more general social malaise. An entire spectrum of social failure and pathology (prostitution, crime, drug abuse, teen pregnancies, and so on) is laid at the family's door, making it one of the most highly socially invested arrangements of our time" (1996: 21). Knowles makes the further point that "family sociology is quite clearly a moral regulatory discourse" (23-30). She brings attention to university textbooks on the sociology of the family which describe various familial issues without seeking to analyze the manner in which the family is regulated by various locusts of power.

The family, therefore, is not an entity which arrives ready-made. It is as much a subject of the forces of history as any other social institution (Foucault, 1977). There were early *époques* in our history when men and women circulated in troupes and women didn't know the identity of the male who fathered their child. The advent of families laying claim to their own children and maintaining a private boundary of land which stood apart from the community was a later development and attached to the introduction of rights of property and inheritance (Sumner, [1906] 1960). So the call for "a return to old family values" does not specify to which family's values we wish to return. It simply supposes that there is an "essential" reality called "the family," that we have a good memory of it in our recent past, and that this "remembered" family is the best of all possible forms.

A merciless examination of the American family from the 17th through the 20th century will trigger a troublesome question: if these *époques* succeeded in producing an "ideal" family why then did the through-line of well-being not survive into the present? The

notion that technology has ruined the family takes our attention away from a fundamental fact: the “dysfunctional” family is a phenomenon that occupies every époque in history. Just as humanity has grappled with the notions of “good” and “evil,” so has it struggled with the dilemma which faces every parent: where to draw the line between nurturing another and remaining true to one’s own needs. The two are not always compatible. Effective parenthood involves a great deal of sacrifice of personal interest. This sacrifice is facilitated in a community where all are making similar sacrifices. But when a community allows what we now term “lifestyles,” the sacrifices required for effective parenthood become problematic because the networks of support are rendered ambivalent due to the lack of a generalized ideology or standard. Today, it is easy to blame absent parenthood for the problems of the family. But this takes attention away from the problems which existed in the past precisely due to parental presence.

Foucault has written extensively regarding power and how it is exercised through a “disciplinary” society. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and in *The History of Sexuality* (1980) Foucault shows that the family is not only a force which disciplines but also a unit which is disciplined from without by educational, religious, and legal institutions. What the family itself terms a “success” may be considered a “failure” by one of these institutions; and out of such conflicts come the realignments which bring various families in step with one another (Knowles, 1996: 34-35).

This intersection between the public/collective and the private/individual is a tense intersection. Whether the former or the latter will have the upper hand depends largely on two factors: the degree of coherence and firmness with which the institutions representing the wider social express their exhortations to the family, and the degree to which the family feels obliged (or rewarded) to heed those exhortations in order to preserve its links with the larger community.

Now the degree to which a family heeds the requirements of the social might depend in great part with just how much the leader(s) of the families possess a place of meaning and status within the central forums of the various institutions which seek to regulate what goes on in families. In traditional aristocratic cultures, the behaviors of families within the aristocracy and within the general peasant population were quite different. Some of the courtesies and elaborate discussions of religious and moral issues which went on in the aristocracies were non-existent in the peasant families. And this is understandable because it was the aristocracy which shared a close communal and social relationship with the Church (LeGoff, 1980, 1981). What was termed “noblesse oblige” was, in effect, a series of obligations imposed on “gentlemen” who were required to resist base temptations and acts of “dishonor” which someone of “lower” class might have been

free to accept without a bad conscience (Sumner [1906] 1960). This same boundary-making was present in the American Puritan culture. A “good” family was expected to be God-fearing and Church-attending. The Sunday service, in fact, was the tool used by the Church to insist on certain patterns of behavior it considered appropriate for its congregation. The smaller the town, the more effective was this socialization, for one could count on one’s neighbors to know one, watch one, and offer corrective advice.

So, in the days of patriarchal culture, the father found it relatively easy and desirable to control the behavior of his family. His face-to-face contact with known patriarchs of the community created vertical associations in which he was able to look up to the elders of the culture (and their ideologies) and to impose their collective norms on the individual members of his family who were located below himself in the communal hierarchy. As for the mother, she accepted her role as the principal “earthly” and “material” representation of what it meant to run a Godly household.

Put simply, without a community of elders and without face-to-face contacts within that community, parents might have very well lost that part of their role as socializer (enforcers) which was dependent on direct approval and feedback from peers and elders. If a parent, in absence of such communal support, remains an effective enforcer it will be by virtue of some strong personal conscience and a personal set of values which need no reinforcement from external sources.

In high modernity, we are faced with the challenge of maintaining standards when there is relatively little generalized “formal” agreement. Moreover, today, a mother who stays at home to raise her children might even be considered a “deviant” by her working sisters. For her to feel validated in her role she will need self-reflective valuation free from external approval. Giddens has suggested that modernity forces such a personal evaluation of personal action and he has also brought attention to the extreme stresses which can be caused by lack of other-generated approval (Giddens, 1990). Similarly, as discussed in a previous chapter, Alexis DeTocqueville explains how democracy, by its very nature, decreases social consensus and leaves the individual to h/her means ([1884] 1994). So when we speak of “family values,” we are entering a very personal and subjective terrain.

Equally, the degree to which a child in a family accepts the values “handed down” by h/her parent(s) will depend to an important extent on whether the larger society is adhering to those values or not. A teenager being asked by her parents not to participate in sexual activity when most other teens freely do so will be sore pressed to take the value handed down to h/her as a social good, barring some miraculous ability on the part of the parent to justify the suggested iconoclasm. The youth might even feel that h/her ability to proceed in life is being “crippled.” The same dismay might be felt by a youth in a

conservative society who is suddenly asked to wear revealing clothing and sleep with a variety of partners.

All this to say that families are integral parts of a society and are governed by that society's historical and ideological realities. The need for association with community entails a certain conformity to community values; the conformity is the price exacted for the association and the association is the reward for compliance. The same rules apply to mainstream cultures as well as sub-cultures. "Cool" was a term invented by teenagers, but its symbolic meaning was not. The same meanings of association and acceptance by peers was imbedded in the Victorian notion of "behavior appropriate to a lady or gentleman."

Cultural critics, therefore, who mourn the demise of "family values" and wish them brought back at all costs overlook the fact that what is at stake here is not the universal concept of family but the manner in which the American family life has been organized around the individuals who are its members. So to mourn the universal demise of the family is to commit an unproductive ethnocentric act. The family is not endangered across the globe. In many countries, industrialized and non-industrialized, there continues a modicum of family sentiment and family life sufficient to maintain population replenishment as well as the fulfillment of the individual's psychological need for association and congregation, if not personal freedom.

The notion, therefore, that families are breaking down because of industrialization is not an explanation that stands up to the scrutiny of cross-cultural studies. Yes, technology and urbanization have created new mobility in developing nations and this mobility has decreased the cohesiveness of extended families (Warkentin, 1994: 317-320). But these diminished family associations are nowhere near the level of disassociation experienced by families in America.

The hand-movements and facial expressions of what we call "Latin" cultures may, therefore, not be cultural constructions but the manner in which the human being might behave if allowed full emotional expression. For one wonders why it is that the only countries in which there is considerable reserve in inter-personal contacts are the countries of the Scandinavian region, Britain, North America and Germany (Synnott, 1993). How is it that "touching" and "animated expression" are world-wide phenomenon? Why did fathers in Spain, India, Iran, France, and Russia openly hug their sons while Americans contented themselves with the hand-shake and the pat on the shoulder? I hope to answer this question as this chapter progresses.

In summary, any discussion of the American family should begin with a set of questions. What is a family? Is there a connection between the continuance of families and the continuance of a given society? What was the early American family like at the time of

the early settlements? How did it change? What made it become what it is was and what it is today? What is a father? What is a mother? What is a child? And what are their respective needs?

The Judeo-Christian Family

It is not my intention to present a biological treatise on courtship or family. Enough damage has been done by physiological anthropology and biological psychology which attempt to show that there are “instinctive” and “innate” patterns to fatherhood and motherhood. Such typologies serve to diminish our capacity and our will to create ourselves in the image of our evolving consciousness. But there is a sobering passage I would like to quote from a book written by William A. Kephart in [1961] 1972, entitled *The Family, Society and the Individual*. Kephart introduces his historical survey of the family by commenting on the parenthood roles played by males and females in the animal world:

In the animal world, few behavioral differences between the sexes are so pronounced as the contrast in roles between mother and father with respect to the protection, care, feeding, and training of the young. Generally, all of these tasks devolve upon the mother animal....in every known mammalian species, primary responsibility for the rearing of the young rests with the female, and in practically all cases she discharges her duties faithfully, often to the point of risking her own life....In contrast to the actions of the female, the male's behavior is most unchivalrous when judged by human standards. It is not so much a question of his abandoning the offspring in time of danger: the fact is that in many species, he himself is a chief source of danger (41-42).

Contemporary analysts of the family who seek to establish equity between men and women when it comes to the burden of parenting may not wish to give credence to the observations of zoologists. And it is to our credit that we are capable of establishing human standards which transcend animal instincts. I simply quote the passage to demonstrate how far we have come from our early beginnings as well as to show that our desire for an equitable society is a particularly contemporary phenomenon. People living in Victorian times might have agreed with the above passage and used it to rationalize human behavior.

Today, we consider ourselves free to create our own realities. We are supposedly a secularized society. Our courts tell us that. Our media tell us that. But there is no escaping the fact that the manner in which relationships between men and women have been organized and the resulting families which have been put into place have been a product of our Judeo-Christian past. Until the late 60's the principal cause for the granting of divorce in Christian societies was limited to adultery or extreme and incontestable cruelty. Non-compatibility and divorce by mutual consent are recent phenomenon. The original Judeo-Christian ethic which governed the structure and continuance of families was very much operative in modern America.

Hebrew Families in Biblical Times were under the direction of a patriarch. The wife or wives (polygyny was allowed under Mosaic law) and children were seen as economic “assets,” so it was usual for families to be numerous and for its various members to participate in the family’s production of goods. Children were raised to be obedient. While the man and women technically had the right to refuse arranged marriages, more often than not they accepted whatever was proposed to them by their parents in order to maintain their economic privileges of heredity. Marriages were normally consummated at an early age, the legal age being considered the onset of puberty, twelve years for the bride and thirteen for the groom. These marriages were sometimes contracted while the prospective marriage partners were still children; the young woman was expected to remain faithful to her future husband.

The Hebrew husband had considerable authority and privilege. He was allowed to divorce his wife as long as he could give a valid reason and put it in writing. And he was given custody of the children if there was a divorce. No similar rights were accorded to the wife. Yet, although the husband had much authority, he was regulated by the opinions of the community. In cases of severe injustice towards wives or children, men were known to be chastised by their community (Cross, 1969: 65-70; Moore, 1972: 84-88). So although the man had considerable “ownership” of his family, he was expected to maintain a just environment and fulfill his role as provider and protector.

The Roman family accorded a similar authority to the father. The *patria potesta* gave the father complete and continuous power over his children and other agnatic descendants. The right to own and sell property was his alone. In fact, he owned any moneys and properties inherited by his children. He was also given the absolute power to punish “transgressions in conduct” by prescribing penalties as severe as banishment, slavery and death. Although the father was obliged to call a council of relatives and friends whenever he wished to inflict punishments and was expected to abide by the advice of such council, his ultimate influence was very great. In certain instances, the man’s authority also extended over his wife through *manus*, an extension of the authority he held over his children. Marriage was considered a very solemn institution in Roman society. The “gods” were called upon to bless and protect the union, making the family a religious unit. The husband, *pater familias*, not only administered the *potestas* but was also the religious leader (or priest) of the household and conducted the family prayers and offering to the gods, *sacra familiaria* (Johnston cited in Moore, 1972: 92-94).

What we know of the Roman family, as depicted in Hollywood Films, dates from the later part of the Roman empire, from the second century B.C. to 400 A.D. when the empire fell. It was during this period that the Roman family underwent radical

transformation and disintegration. Referring to the works of E.S. Turner and Panos D. Bardis, Moore provides a telling account of what happened in Rome prior to the arrival of the Christians whose philosophy of family must have surely been affected by what they witnessed happening in the Roman empire:

The second century B.C. is usually chosen as the starting point, since this was the time of the Punic Wars, a conflict against Carthage which stretched over many decades. With the men on the battlefields for extended periods, Roman women began to achieve a measure of independence. Many husbands never returned from the wars, and the decline in male population furthered the feminist movement. Male domination slowly diminished. Eventually, the practice of *free marriage* arose, that is, one without *manus*. "Accompanying the emancipation of Roman women was an influx of wealth, which increased by leaps and bounds as the Empire expanded. Slave labor became plentiful, and the myriad of household tasks which formerly occupied the wife came to be taken over by slaves. In the larger estates, slaves would run into the hundreds....Even child-rearing, once so highly regarded by parents, was often given over to servants and slaves. "As *manus* became a thing of the past, marriages were more and more entered into for purposes of expediency---for political reasons, for the attainment of wealth and position, or for the improvement of one's social class. Whereas formerly marriage was considered a civic responsibility, it was now looked upon as an instrument of personal gain. And whereas children were once thought of as fulfilling family traditions and sacred obligations, they were now increasingly considered a burden. In short, family loyalties and ideal were breaking down, in spite of the pleas of many of the rulers who saw what was happening. "Inevitably the question came to be, 'Why marry at all?' or 'Why have children?' And in the hedonistic atmosphere of the times, no satisfactory answer could be found. As a result the marriage rate fell. Informal sexual liaisons began to flourish., concubinage increased, mistresses multiplied, and general moral laxness spread....The birth rate fell and childlessness increased to alarming proportions (94-95).

While Turner, Bardis and Moore underline the role played by the new liberties discovered by Roman women prior and during the breakdown of the Roman family, they do not highlight enough the common hedonism shared by Roman men *and* women. In another culture, subscribing to different economic and moral standards, such feminist liberty may have very well led to a strengthening and continuance of the family. The *manus* exercised by Roman males and its abuses may very well have been a leading reason for the cynicism which followed when the authority of the male was lessened. "Irony" and "cynicism" do not appear out of nowhere, but are reactions to long-standing social problems.

The advent of Christianity should be seen in the light of these Roman excesses. Christianity posited that marriage was not there for the simple gratification of sexual desire or the convenience of social and material alliances. Unlike the Hebrews who tolerated polygyny, Christians held that the union between a man and woman was formed for the

purpose of manifesting God's presence within the bosom of a monogamous relationship between two individuals. The concept of one God and one wife were linked together. In fact, what distinguished Christianity was its focus on the individual and h/her relationship within a brother/sister-hood. Christianity, from its very onset, condemned any sexual activity which occurred outside of marriage. Equally, it spoke out against divorce. In Mark 10:11 and Luke 16:18, Jesus of Nazareth speaks out against the dissolution of marriage. Although there is a contradicting passage in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 which shows Jesus citing adultery as cause for divorce, Christianity for many centuries preferred to advance the notion of a relationship which was to be respected until the death of one of the two partners.

So, while Christianity considered marriage a holy institution it came to look upon sex as a necessary evil for procreation. The early Church fathers, again perhaps reacting against the excesses of the upper Roman classes, came to consider sex as the principal reason for the immoralities of their époque. "Because of the hostility on the part of respectable and powerful elements, it was natural that the Christian codes should condemn many practices of their social 'betters' and urge conduct of an opposite character. Thus, there were reactions against easy divorce, 'emancipation' of women, and sexual freedom" (Queen and Habenstein, 1967: 181-182). The Christian code was an extension of the Hebraic sexual code which was in itself highly conservative, placing strict restrictions on pre-marital sex, adultery, homosexuality, and masturbation. The Christians simply added a few more prohibitions, including contraception, abortion, the reading of "lascivious" books, the singing of "wanton" songs, the dancing of sensual dances, mixed bathing, and the wearing of suggestive clothing (199).

And while the early Christians accepted marriage as a highly desirable state for the general population, they venerated those who were able to do without sex and lead a celibate life. Asceticism, or the renouncing of worldly pleasures, eventually became a requirement for Christian clergy, following the legacy left by Paul who, referring to his own celibacy, wrote in I Corinthians 7:1-9: "I would that all men were even as I myself."

The Christians were, in effect, a very collectivist culture. A given action of the individual was measured by its effect on the collective. The early Christians believed that the easing of sexual restrictions would decrease the incentive for marriage. Like the Hebrews, they believed that the prohibition of pre-marital sex was the only way to ensure societal continuance. They had learned their lesson well watching the Romans. While they differed from the Hebrews in many esoteric articles of faith, they remained attached to the Hebrew notion that the best way to make a good wife and husband was to ensure that the procurement of sex outside marriage was problematized.

What should be recognized here is that the early Church fathers, very much including Paul, may have associated the sexual excesses of the Romans with the emancipation of Roman women. Certainly, the early Christians did not include in their doctrine any special provisions for the emancipation of women. God was the Father, Christ was his son, and, as scripture reported it, he had not married...even though Mary of Magdalene seemed to be a strong enough influence in his life to drive Peter into the sin of resentment.

Although the early Church fathers held to very strict notions regarding marriage, the Church did not succeed in appropriating the “sacrament” of marriage until the 13th century. Following the fall of the Roman empire, the Christian ideal of marriage was practiced by Christians but ignored by the Germanic tribes which descended on the empire.

In fact, even during the Middle Ages, though most people married, the actual marriage ceremony was a private event and “self-marriage” was common; the bride and groom simply declared one another married and that was all there was to it. By the 5th century, the Church had managed to convert the Teutonic tribes to Christianity and these tribes had agreed to desist from polygyny and concubinage. Meanwhile, the Church continued to lobby against “self-marriages” and began adding its benediction during ceremonies. It became the custom to hold wedding ceremonies at the entrance of a Church. Then, was added the presence of a clergyman, and, finally, the ceremony was moved inside the Church. By the 13th century the Church had succeeded in controlling marriage. Man and woman no longer pronounced each other married but waited for the clergyman to say: “I now pronounce you man and wife.” The appropriation of marriage by the church was completed at the Council of Trent (1545-1563) when the Church pronounced marriage as a sacrament and ruled that “the marital bonds were not dissoluble for any reason” (Moore, 1972: 106).

Under the feudal system, the Christian remained under the protection of the Church in spirit, but under the direction of the lord of the manor in flesh. Violence was so prevalent during the Middle Ages that families readily associated themselves with estates or manors in order to secure a certain measure of protection. A typical “manorial village” consisted of forty or fifty families. Each family could count on the protection of the lord of the manor in return for rendering services to him and his family. This was, as Schermerhorn explains, an early instant when family became subject to the structured inequality of class. The power of a family was determined by where it found itself in a hierarchy which extended from the lowest serf class, and up through the ranks of freemen, knights, nobles and monarchs (1955:107).

It is in the feudal system where the notion of “family” became subject to the notion of social “position.” And that position was measured by proximity of a given family to the nobility. The family life of landed aristocrats was very different from that of those men, women and children who found themselves in the middle and lower ranks of the fiefdom. Education was of paramount importance to aristocratic families. So was etiquette, a complex collection of customs and procedures including specific rules of conduct and prescribed manners of dress and talk. The words, “courtly,” “courtesy,” and “courtship” are words relating back to the rituals of this period.

An interesting part of the rituals adopted by the aristocratic class was what Clifford Kirkpatrick has called the “exaltation” of the aristocratic “lady.” He reports that while “the medieval right of the first night gave the overlord sex privileges with the bride of a serf” the lady of the overlord became considered as a “glorified” being (1963:109). Although America may be credited with launching the experiment of “romantic love” *within* the institution of marriage, its idealization of love between men and women owes a great part of its origins to the “chivalric” movement of the Middle Ages.

Moore explains how a concept born within the walls of the manorial castle managed to find its way into the lower ranks of the fiefdom: “It was in the twelfth century that the knight came to be obsessed with ideas of undying devotion, bravery, and heroic efforts---all in the service of his chosen lady. On her part, the lady of the castle was not averse to weaving ribbons and fashioning colored plumage to be worn by her knight both in tournaments and in battle. Such glorified interplay between knight and lady came to be idealized by society at large, so in spite of the wholesale plundering and widespread oppression characteristic of the times, there developed the concept of romantic love” (1972: 109). What must be understood here is that Moore is not referring to the knight as the husband of the lady, but as the dashing outsider who arrives in the castle recounting stories of his heroic exploits. Most marriages between aristocrats were, therefore, arranged marriages, planned for the purpose of establishing social status.

What made life bearable in the castle soon became adopted by the general population. LeGoff explains how this new custom of seduction and courtship was spread from village to village by “troubadours” who sang and spoke the praises of this new love, idealized without reference to the bonds of marriage. Romantic love was seen as a “destiny” which could occur (and most often did) parallel to a marriage. The distinguishing mark of this idealized love was its intensity, the loyalty of its two participants, and their readiness to keep the love a secret whenever necessary” (1981). DeTocqueville offers a similar explanation:

Among aristocratic peoples birth and fortune often make a man and a woman such different creatures that they would never be able to unite with

one another. Their passions draw them together, but social conditions and the thoughts that spring from them prevent them from uniting in a permanent and open way. The necessary result of that is a great number of ephemeral and clandestine connections. Nature secretly gets her own back for the restraint imposed by laws ([1884[1994: 595).

So, while early and medieval Church fathers had insisted on strict fidelity within marriage, the feudal overclass managed to override the ascetic notion of a functional marriage and added to it the notion of clandestine romance. Moore suggests that this was the first instance in history when a non-utilitarian attraction between the genders was “institutionalized” (1972: 109). What is interesting to note here is that this went against the teachings of the Church by normalizing sexual activity between a married individual and someone to whom they were not married. With the passing of time, it opened up the way for romantic sexual liaisons between people who were not even married.

The chivalry of the aristocracies of the Middle Ages did not permanently establish romantic love as a *sine qua non* of marriage, being that it was a phenomenon which occurred outside marriage. But, as Moore points out, it did afford men an opportunity to appreciate and understand better the “feminine virtues.” It was a step in the right direction. The “possibility was raised that a gratifying emotional relationship between man and woman could be based on something other than the satisfaction of sexual needs” (111). This would one day lead to the notion that romantic love had to be the principal reason for a marriage’s consummation and continuance. And it would have profound later effects on the rearing of children.

The Renaissance was a key period which permitted the passage from the Middle Ages to the Protestant Reformation. There was a marked change in the status of women during the Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. With the rekindling of interest in literature, architecture, painting, and music---supported by a rising affluence made possible by the guild system---upper and middle class families began valuing education for both their male and female children. While in the Middle Ages, the children of aristocrats had been schooled in talents considered relevant to the roles they would be adopting in the manor (i.e. swordsmanship for boys and weaving for girls), Renaissance culture required women to be socially adept. While she had no rights to property, she was expected to demonstrate a certain cultural refinement appropriate to her class and the époque’s return to classical arts. Marriage remained a social convenience. While the feudal system was no longer dominant, there remained sharp distinctions between classes; marriages continued to be arranged by parents who guarded against inter-class unions; and adultery remained the principal manner in which romantic love was experienced. And, as

during feudal times, adultery on the part of the wife was reprimanded while discounted on the part of the husband.

The Protestant Reformation which followed on the heels of the Renaissance in the sixteenth century is best examined in relation to the social, philosophical and economic intersection of feudal and Renaissance society. While in the Middle Ages the Church had tried to keep a firm hold on the mythologies which inspired daily life---such as a polarized notion of “good” and “evil” applied without subtle distinctions---the Renaissance brought a degree of sophistication which fueled a considerable and concentrated resistance towards Church dogma. A return to the classics of Ancient Greece put the “Manichaen” notion of a polarized “good” and “evil” in question. In doing so, it removed from the Church its unbending authority to act as the singular representative of the “good” and the mystical “exorciser” of “evil.”

The Protestant Reformation of Christianity benefited from the precedents set during the Renaissance and that époque’s return to the creative potential of secular effort. The Reformation began in Germany under the leadership of Martin Luther and then spread to France and Scotland under the leadership of John Calvin and John Knox. The Reformation was, in effect, an extension and expression of a rising secularization which had been facilitated by important discoveries and inventions which included the invention of the printing press and a new science of astronomy which contradicted the cosmology of the Church. These advances in science were accompanied by a growing development of commercialism and a rise in nationalism.

Although Weber ascribes a religious sentiment to the Protestant Reformation, there were important secular interests within the new iconoclasm. For one thing, the Protestants sought to free themselves from the restrictions of a Church which discouraged a free market and preserved the social status attained by certain families in Europe. The sale of indulgences, special considerations given to families who had connections with Rome, and the easy confessional dispensed to the masses did not serve the ideological or practical requirements of Luther and the theologians who followed him.

Luther did not consider the institution of marriage as a sacrament. While he held marriage in high regard, he considered it a civil contract best governed by the State. This transference of marriage out of the hands of the Church and into the hands of the state also paved the way for the legitimization of marriage for members of the Protestant clergy. If marriage was no longer a Church sacrament, then it no longer needed to remain a symbol of piety and clergymen no longer needed to take vows of celibacy. Luther practiced what he preached and married a former nun, Katherine von Bora, with whom he had six children. His union was followed by the marriage of a Catholic priest, Ulrich Zwingli, who became

the first Catholic priest to be married in five hundred years (Lewinsohn, cited in Moore, 1972: 114).

Luther's belief that marriage should not be a sacrament did not in any way mean that he disagreed with the established Church's belief that sex was sinful. What he was against was the Church's authority to easily forgive sin. He wished to decrease the Church's authority over the definition of specific cardinal sins and the dispensation of atonement. He replaced the Catholic's enumeration of specific sins requiring specific rituals of atonement with an overall view of human nature as reason enough for admission of a sinful state. He concurred with the Church's doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus and Christ, agreeing that he had to be born of a "virgin" in order to be the Son of God. By accepting this notion, Luther accepted the notion that mankind was imperfect and sinful right after the moment of birth, just by virtue of the fact that each person was born from the body of a woman who had experienced coitus.

A distinction should be made between Martin Luther and John Calvin who led the Puritan movement. The two men were not of identical temperament. Luther had no great quarrel with earthly pleasures and encouraged festivals and dancing. It was Calvin, and the Puritans who adopted his beliefs, who "rebelled against communal entertainment" and came to believe that all 'worldly pleasures' had potential evil connotations (115).

Work became a central standard by which a person's virtue was judged. Schermerhorn explains that "since Puritanism was a merchant and money-making culture with a sense of religious mission, it placed primary emphasis on the activity of the man engaged in business, and allowed less and less time for the arts of love, which were as superfluous as the other arts. This naturally reduced courtship to a secondary place and heightened the importance of bargaining for an economically successful marriage" (cited in Moore: 115-116).

And being that the man's "work" was considered the highest calling, the woman was assigned the role of "serving" her husband. Luther, Calvin and Knox, all believed very strongly that the husband should be the dominating force of the household. Wallace Notestein wrote the following description of *The English Woman* circa 1580-1650:

Silence in women was esteemed a great virtue by poets, playwrights, and biographers...Women were constantly praised for their good housekeeping...a woman had to be thrifty, a virtue not overlooked by the makers of epitaphs, to keep children and servants under control, to provide clear and sweet linen, and to be ready at all times for guests....For nothing were they more extolled than for obedience to their lords and for the patience that went with obedience. Biographers liked to expatiate on this virtue in wives, and clergymen in funeral sermons alluded to it, perhaps with a glance towards a certain pew. Mothers instructed their daughters in the duty and set an example to them....But in no way was their subordination more evident than in their want of influence...Too fearful

they were of their lords and masters to venture upon disagreement. When Lady Harley wished her husband to do something she would ask her son at Oxford to raise the question with his father... (1955: 77-81).

The Protestant Reformation, the Puritan movement which emerged from it, and the subordination of women to the patriarchal dominance of the male carried over into America and had a very strong influence on the family in America.

The Judeo-Christian Family in the New World

The early American family was subject to both the conventions and beliefs which its members imported from Europe. It was also affected by the limits, as well as opportunities, of the landscape of the new world. While the early settlers believed in the Puritan tradition of the male's dominance in all matters pertaining to the family, a shortage of women in the new colonies allowed women to obtain advantages which they would not have possessed in the old world. Dowries were made obsolete and women acquired the right to choose a husband for themselves. Moreover, following the violence and disorder experienced in the all-male Jamestown settlement, women became highly regarded as stabilizing forces, for it was observed that their presence in a community helped establish order and decorum. In addition, due to the fact that so many of the early settlers died from disease and other hardships, women were seen as front-line participants who stood alongside their men and children while facing the dangers of early colonial life (Wertenbaker, 1927: 280-290).

Wertenbaker describes how the early settlers had to content themselves with digging hovels in embankments; some slept in tents, others in caves. Untrained in woodsmanship and hunting it took them a while before they learned how to use the trees to build log houses and, this too, not until the arrival of the Scandinavians who were adept at woodworking. The typical colonial log house was neither spacious nor well-lit. Windows were kept small in order to keep the harsh weather at bay. The house was heated by a central fireplace. Most of the household's activity took place in that one room. So it is not difficult to imagine how the behavior of each family member was kept under close check by other members sharing the same close quarters---especially, by the father who fulfilled the role of economic and spiritual administrator.

Children were considered economic assets in this pre-dominantly agricultural culture. Girls helped their mothers in household tasks---which often required ingenious improvisation in a harsh environment---while boys worked alongside their fathers in the fields. Naturally, large families were considered desirable and a given family's self-sufficiency and prosperity depended on the number of cooperative working children and the availability of farm equipment (Moore, 1972: 129-130).

Early colonial life in the South developed along different lines. The South was blessed with a rich soil which favored the planting of tobacco and cotton. And, slavery provided the Southerners with a steady supply of free labor. As result of a milder climate and a steady flow of free labor, there emerged an aristocracy of landed gentry which exercised considerable power and economic influence.

Courtship during the colonial period, in the south as well as the north, was a functional pre-requisite to marriage. Parental approval was required and the potential bride and groom were expected to maintain complete celibacy prior to the marriage. Wertebaker explains that most young couples could have hardly had amorous adventures together even if they desired it, for group activity and chaperonage were very intense (1927: 180-190). The New England colonists were the strictest regarding premarital practices. While they did not categorically stand against humor and laughter, their sense of responsibility, order and industriousness made them singularly intolerant of any behavior which might have trivialized the ethic of hard work or distracted attention away from it. So while the Puritans did not categorically object to the notion of love they considered it a permissible part of the marriage union. Love was a duty but not a sufficient pre-condition for marriage (Morgan cited in Moore, 1972: 134). In the South, where romantic love was integrated into notions of chivalry, the woman was idealized as the "object" of a lover's attention while being expected to affirm her chastity by "protesting" all advances made towards her (Morgan, cited in Moore: 135).

Colonial America was dominated by males. Women and children were considered part of the world of the male and were subject to decisions made by all-male councils of elders. Affection between a husband and wife in public was forbidden. Among the upper classes which were literate, wives very rarely addressed their husbands by the their first names. Again, there was a difference between the manner in which Southern and Northern women were viewed. In the South where there continued to be a shortage of females, the Southern woman was held in high regard. The Southern male considered himself a "protector" as well as a "ruler." The status of the woman was also higher than in the North because she held authority over the female slaves who did her housework. The Puritans of New England, however, continued to assign to the male the role of provider and spiritual director (Benson, cited in Moore: 143). Needless to say, in view of the religious ethic of these early settlers, their long-standing Christian lack of ease with sexuality, and the authority of the patriarch, family life was serious and somber.

Children had considerable economic value and mortality rates were quite high due to diphtheria and a variety of illnesses which were beyond the influence of home remedies. So a child who was "lazy" was not easily suffered. The submission of the child to the ethic

of work was of paramount importance. Children were required to address their parents as “sir,” “mam” or “esteemed parent.” Nor were they pampered when it came to education. Girls and boys received training in the crafts which they needed to know to be functional members of the household. Yet, many, especially amongst the girls, remained illiterate. It was not until the post-revolutionary period that free coeducational schools and colleges were established. Thus, children of the early Puritans were socialized through vocational training provided at home, religious indoctrination provided at Church, and a continuous supervision of behavior monitored by the Puritan community at large.

Edmund Morgan, in his seminal work, *Puritan Family*, writes this account of the lifeworld of the Puritan child:

These, then, were the Puritan assumptions: children were ignorant and children were evil, but their ignorance could be enlightened and their evil restrained, provided the effort was made soon enough. The pious parent was faced with two tasks, instruction and discipline. He had to fill his children’s minds with knowledge and he had to make them apply their knowledge in right action.

There was no question of developing the child’s personality, of drawing out or nourishing any inherent qualities which he might possess, for no child could by nature possess any desirable qualities. He had to receive all good from outside himself, from education---and ultimately from the Holy Spirit.

The process of instruction was one of ‘infusing,’ or ‘instilling’ or ‘dropping’ the waters of knowledge into an empty receptacle. The problem of discipline was to make an evil-natured but at least partly rational animal act against his nature and according to his reason (1966: 97).

The colonists were, therefore, less interested in developing the child’s personality as they were in acquiring h/her compliance to notions of hard work, and respect for authority, community and God. They began with the a-priori notion that a child had to be kept at arm’s length and have the anti-social driven out of h/her. There might have been very little regard for the child’s own personality and needs. The term “personality” was not even an existence then. In a society where kissing in public was considered a criminal offense, we need not wonder whether the Puritans were what Synnott has termed a “contact” culture (1993). Rarely is touching, physical affection and the notion of free and unconditional love mentioned in the Puritan writings. Sexuality, amongst youth as well as adults, was also of secondary importance. In rare cases where individuals were caught participating in extra-marital sexual union, punishment was swift and public, with shunning and legal penalties being the norm rather than the exception. Prostitution was practically non-existent and continued to remain so until the development of large cities.

Moore’s analysis of documents dating from the colonial period reveal that “the two problems most seriously regarded by the colonists were premarital coitus and adultery” (1972: 147). The Puritan convention of “pre-marital” nuptial agreements created a

troublesome dilemma for potential marriage partners: it exposed them to the possibility of being sexually attracted to one another prior to the marriage while forbidding them to act upon their desires. Court records dating from that period are not precise enough to allow any conclusions to be drawn regarding the extent to which the norms of celibacy before marriage were adhered to. One thing, however, is known: the penalties imposed on “fornicators” was severe:

Twenty-one out of forty-three single women, and eight out of thirteen single men, are sentenced to stripes [lashes of the whip] alone, nineteen of them receiving each from fifteen to forty lashes...out of twenty married couples punished for prenuptial misconduct, fifteen are given the choice of fines or stripes, three are merely fined; and in no instance is whipping alone the penalty decreed (Howard cited in Moore: 149).

The “Scarlet Letter” of which the novelist Hawthorne wrote was a method of skin branding used to identify adulterers. In the hierarchy of punishments, it stood midway between the punishment of stripes [lashes of the whip] and the sentence of death. Howard (cited in Moore: 149-150) quotes from the Acts and Laws of the State of Connecticut around 1700:

Whosoever shall commit adultery with a Married Woman or one Betrothed to another Man, both of them shall be severely Punished, by Whipping on the naked Body, and Stigmatized or Burnt on the forehead with the Letter A, on a hot Iron.

What is interesting about the Puritans was that they insisted on following the letter of the Christian sexual ethic while, concomitantly, removing the “relief” offered during the Middle Ages by the custom of “courtly love.” A couple were locked into the Puritan marriage with little chance of escape if their own union proved unsatisfactory. Records show that divorce rates were quite minimal. In Massachusetts, between 1761-1786, there were an average of three divorces per year (Howard, cited in Moore: 152). Not only did the Puritans succeed in devaluing and discounting the importance of sexuality and romantic love, they succeeded in controlling the sexual rights of their population. While in the Catholic confessional, a person could confess to a transgression and receive comfort and forgiveness, that same person in Puritan society was forced to keep silent in order to preserve h/her standing in the community as well as the safety of h/her physical person.

So when we speak of the American family, we need take into consideration its somber and joyless beginning. For, as I will argue later, the severity and extent of the Puritan repression of the body made it impossible for the culture to continue adhering to the original Puritan ethic without suffering nervous collapse. Anthropologists and sociologists are aware that for societal survival certain restrictions have to be imposed on individual desire. A person able to have ten lovers at once may not be motivated to marry and may not accept the responsibility of parenthood. What we are realizing also, however, is that a

society can write its own death-sentence by not permitting sufficient authenticity on the individual level.

The history of the American family of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reveals a marked change in the family in America, a change which could very reasonably be called revolutionary. While the Puritan family was an exaggerated expression of the standing Judeo-Christian sexuality-denying, patriarchal family, the family which appeared in the wake of American urbanization and industrialization had never occurred before in Western history.

Much has been said about how industrialization removed the father from the home and took him to a place of employment in which he was no longer with his wife and children for most of the working day. This explanation has been used to suggest that this “disconnection” led to a fatherhood which stood “damaged” in comparison to that of previous *époques* (Bly, 1996). Not enough is said, however, of the gains made by women in the nineteenth and twentieth century and what effects these gains had on the family and on parenthood. It was not simply the physical presence of the father which was diminished, but the role of the patriarch, the *manus*, the protector and teacher. Very conceivably, the male could have continued to exert authority in the household when he came home from work. What had changed as much as the numbers of hours he spent in the home was the status of the woman with whom he shared the house.

The “industrialization” explanation for social change relies too heavily on the notion of material circumstance preceding the human agency of thought. Weber’s work has suggested, instead, that industrialization was made possible by a rationalization process which permitted the development of the kind of massive bureaucracies required for the establishment of work facilities employing large numbers of workers. For Weber, rationalization precedes industrialization (Weber, 1966).

If anything, industrialization showed women that they could decrease their dependence on the male for their survival. Up to the late nineteenth century married women had very few legal rights: they were not allowed to exercise legal control over their own property, had no access to education upon demand, were not permitted to vote. The factory system which boomed in the nineteenth century played an important role in releasing women to demand what they had previously restrained themselves from demanding. They proved themselves as excellent workers capable of earning income outside the household. The “women’s rights movement” held its first large convention in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York. Those attending the convention demanded four fundamental rights: 1) The freeing of a married woman’s property from the control of her husband, 2) The establishment of the married woman as a legal category, 3) The right to enter higher

education, 4) Full rights in the political process. There was opposition to their demands and it was not until 1920 that women were accorded suffrage via an Amendment to the Constitution.

Along with these changes came remarkable changes in courtship customs. By the mid-nineteenth century, parental permission was not absolutely necessary prior to the beginning of courtship; the *precontract* had also been set aside. The decrease in parental authority in connection with the selection of a mate permitted men and women to choose their partners as a consequence of love as much as a consequence of other factors, even though one can be sure that young women and men had difficulty disagreeing with their parents' wishes.

The liberalization of choice of marriage partner, however, did not in any considerable way increase the sexual freedom of potential marriage partners. The nineteenth century was marked by an acute promotion of the woman as an "object" embodying "purity." Women were put onto a pedestal and presented as morally and spiritually superior to men. It was assumed that the woman was born with a sense of purity and social conscience while the male was born with the instinct to act as protector. The male was also charged with protecting the purity of the female, from his own impulses as well as those of other men. Chaperones were ever present at social functions. Men and women attended these functions together but under strict rules of "propriety" which discouraged amorous public physical contact. A young woman was expected to remain a lady and this meant maintaining a certain reserve even in situations which involved her fiancée.

The image of the "cold," "sensuality-hating" Victorian woman is a carry-over of this idealization of female purity. Female clothing during this époque was conservative and did not reveal more of the woman's anatomy than absolutely necessary. Moore states aptly, "...her body was not only concealed, it was made almost impregnable: it was a fortress with outworks of crinoline and an inner citadel protected by a tightly laced corset through which ran strips of bone or steel. The perfect young lady was one who moved and dressed in a manner that would not reveal the existence of her body" (1972: 271).

It is certain that the abundant use of layers of clothing superimposed over one another was motivated by that époque's belief that the male had a "natural" propensity towards promiscuous behavior and that any encouragement from the female would trigger such behavior. Predictably, there were rules preventing men and women from going swimming together. Sex prior to marriage was considered a betrayal of the "good name" of the woman and any woman who let herself "be taken" prior to marriage risked losing her "good reputation" forever. But a double standard operated during this époque...young men were considered to have uncontrollable sexual urges and prostitution was tolerated in the

larger cities as long as it remained discreet. It was believed that the men who frequented prostitutes did not do so by lowering their esteem of women in general, for they could visit “fallen women” for release while continuing to idealize their lady-like fiancées.

It was industrialization itself which caused this sudden preoccupation with the woman as the core of the family. With the dissolution of the family as an economic unit in which various members worked inside the house or farm, the family lost its economic reason for existing. If both men and women could work, then the only reason for maintaining a family was to make and raise children. Yet, for this to happen, one of the partners had to take over the responsibility of being the daily guardian of the children. Since it was the woman who stayed home, it was she who took over the continuing management of the children. So along with the glorification of feminine purity came an idealization of motherhood.

The above glorification of the woman as an important purveyor of familial and social values was also a reaction towards the feminism of the turn of the century which was now being blamed for the low birth rate in industrialized countries. The feminists, however, not wishing to be branded as being anti-family, organized campaigns encouraging wives to have children.

What should be recognized is that the Victorian family of which we speak was the Victorian upper and middle class family. The lower-class poor in the Victorian era acted as the servants of these proper people. Their relationship with one another and with their children was quite different from those of their employers. They continued to live in abysmal poverty and their relationship with their children was subject to the stress and violence of poverty. The child of the Victorian under-class was very much an economic reality. The proof of this is the preponderance of child labor in factories of that period.

The stiff reserved lady-role of the Victorian woman was challenged by the women of the roaring twenties. The youth of that époque constituted what should be considered America’s first “teenage rebels.” The “modern” young woman now began smoking in public, using words which men used, listening to bold jokes, dancing the new suggestive dances such as the “Charleston” and the “Black Bottom,” and wearing clothing (and make-up) which shook off the tight corsets and layered dresses that had been the signature of the Victorian “lady.” Hems were shortened and dresses no longer required meters upon meters of material.

New employment opportunities in the service sector also afforded many women the opportunity of earning modest livings as secretaries, typists, and clerks. This lessened dependence on the male as the principal bread-winner and gave women the option of having a period of “freedom” and “carelessness” prior to settling on a marriage partner.

So there was a marked change in the behavior of the female during the 1920's and 1930's:

As women discarded the more indirect methods of attraction---flattery, feminine mannerisms, an air of dependence---a frontal approach soon came to prevail. Sweaters, low-cut dresses, and miniskirts were utilized, as were high heels and stockings. Hats were removed. Shorts were abbreviated, and bikinis came into their own. Make-up became a self-styled art, with lipstick, powder, rouge, eye shadow, mascara, perfume, facial creams, and nail polish the outward symbols of the new femininity (273).

While women had previously been asked to restrict their courtship activity to people they intended to marry, they were now asked to be "good sports" and accept "dates" which were not all connected to prospective marriage. What facilitated this reversal was the effects of industrialization and new concepts which appeared regarding child-rearing. Parents were advised by "experts" to set aside the "rod" and be more permissive with their children. They agreed to do so not wishing to harm their offspring's psychological functioning. Undoubtedly, the writings of Freud played a large part in the emerging theories on child-rearing and helped bury the Victorian ethic and the liberalization of sexuality.

World War II also had a strong impact on the role of women in society. The War placed women in positions of work and influence which they had not occupied before. Many of them took the place of men who had gone off to war. This period of massive social mobilization also permitted the women to get out more on their own. Certainly the films of Hollywood showing such a female star having a drink on her own in a bar encouraged women to follow the standards being normalized on screen. This entry into the labor force and on the social scene of millions of women who had hitherto never held a job also served to increase the general level of confidence of women and moved them away from the nineteenth century belief that women were too weak of constitution to address matters which men had handled for centuries.

The late 40's and 50's changed the face of America forever. A rising demand for consumer products and a work force ready to build a comfortable standard of life launched America on what has been its period of largest growth. Indeed the appearance of appliances designed to facilitate the role of the homemaker, who no longer had the help of former servants who were now engaged in factory work, went a long way in addressing the long-standing question which many women had been asking themselves since receiving their voting rights: "Do I really want to be locked up in a house being a housewife?" Many women went into the work force and tried to manage both workplace and home electric blender. But many more stayed at home, attempting to fulfill the ideal that was being presented to them by television, a medium which acted to entertain them as well as introduce products designed to make their housework easier. The home became a place of

reception and consumption rather than a place of “production.” In a manner, the town hall of Puritan times moved into the living room through the medium of television.

As for men in the post-war period they traded the work of their fathers for the opportunity to belong to the newly emerging sales and managerial classes. The “organization man” of the fifties was a highly group-oriented, conformist person who not only took his job at heart but evaluated his life in terms of how the corporate leaders graded his loyalty and performance. This necessitated a substantial participation in activities not directly related to work but to the establishment of group and peer solidarity. Many company men stopped off together for after-work drinks and did not consider this delay deleterious to their home life. It was simply what the other guys did and the organization man’s principal objective was to be accepted as “a regular guy like all the other guys.” The pay-off for such conformity was considerable: many organization men could count on pension packages from the corporations whom they served.

There was another major change in America which affected contacts between members of families. While prior to industrialization, the home had been the focal point of entertainment, a variety of external diversions now served to split the family up into units of smaller activity. A man and woman with three children could conceivably see very little of their children during a given week because the children now had a variety of external activities to occupy them. Hollywood also did its share to locate the focus of excitement outside the home. When one wanted distraction one went to the movies. The movies, of course, were not only a distraction; they were a dynamic representation of what America was and what it could be. There was simply no comparison possible between the power of the movies and the power of the clergy in the pulpits. The clergy were straw men and they fell quickly. If Greta Garbo wanted to change from one dress to another in front of a complete stranger she did so; her producers didn’t give much second thought to what the Churches thought.

In 1950, America contained 6 percent of the world’s population while producing and consuming more than one-third of the world’s goods and services. An exploding consumer demand which had been suppressed during the war, plus the build-up of a military complex determined to keep the threat of Soviet supremacy at bay, assured Americans of employment. The arrival of credit cards and personal credit further facilitated the buying of goods and services which otherwise might not have been bought at the time they were. In 1946 there were less than 17,000 television sets in America. Two years later, a quarter of a million sets were being installed *every month*. By 1953, two-thirds of families in America owned a TV set (Harris, 1992: 135).

Television and the movies became the principal tools by which Americans replayed to themselves the meanings they held in common. They were also tools used by enterprising members of the population to entice the population into buying and consuming the goods and services which were flooding the market. Many critics have blamed television for “creating” consumer demand. Such criticisms, although they have a certain validity, overlook two important truths: 1) A population which has suffered deprivation during a war will celebrate the sudden availability of goods and services which follows the war; Americans, like Europeans, were very open to consumption...they didn’t need to be manipulated into it; and 2) The initial offerings of the media had to do with “convenient” and “work-saving” goods and services; the women who welcomed these products and services no longer had servants in their houses and wanted to manage their housework with as little effort as possible; the products offered them were ingenious ones designed to free them from the hard work of previous generations. There is a quantum difference between washing clothes by hand and using a washing machine. No manipulation was needed here. The products made sense.

It was later, when films and television programs had helped express new “mores” and “standards,” that TV advertising began manipulating the viewer into feeling that there was a connection between certain styles of being and social acceptability. Yet there was nothing new in this manipulation. The same setting of mores had occurred in previous generations. Television simply replaced the village square and the broadcasts stood in for the gossip and norm-setting word of mouth of previous époques. The American “housewife” became the flip side of the American “organization man.” Both operated with considerable conformity based on the collective notion that America had managed to become the best of all cultures. It was a sentiment similar to the one held by the Puritans.

Of course, there were large segments of the population which remained alienated from the new prosperity. In 1953, only 1.6 percent of the population owned ninety percent of corporate bonds. By 1968, nearly 30 million lived below the poverty line (135). Regardless of these depressing statistics, America did manage to expand the economic and political influence of its middle class. It also had to face social problems which had been neglected during this period of rising prosperity.

While the 50’s were marked by a conformity which was based on a pursuit of material comfort, the 60’s were a period of considerable social reflection by certain, if not all, parts of the population. Opinion is divided on whether the 60’s and early 70’s benefited America or propelled it into decay and irresponsibility. The label of “the Me generation” has since then been used as an indictment of those in that époque who sought self-realization and identity at the expense of material reality. Such facile disassociation with the issues of

that époque does not serve our understanding of what permitted and facilitated our present “culture of discontent.” Many of the realities experienced today by families in America are connected to the events of those two earlier decades. Economics, psychological factors, and long-ignored social realities intersected to create a powerful époque which changed America and moved it away from its Puritan and Victorian heritage.

The “normalization” of sexual activity was affected by four factors which occurred in chronological order: 1) A general loss of respect on the part of certain youth for the moral (and repressive) concepts advanced by their parents, 2) The wide-spread use of the automobile which permitted an ambulatory salon for social and sexual encounters that could now occur far from the critical eyes of parents, relatives, friends and neighbors, 3) The invention and availability of fairly effective birth-control methods, 4) The effects of women’s emancipation, for it was argued that if women had a right to education, the vote, and control over property, why then could they not also possess the same sexual freedom as men did?

Harris also explains that a principal factor facilitating the liberal mentality which led to the human rights movements of the 60’s was the transformation of American culture into a white-collar, service economy. By 1960, over one half of the jobs were held in sectors not directly involved in factory work (1992: 186). Americans were increasingly involved in work which involved tests of their personal identity and which went beyond simple subservience to a machine on a factory floor. Many of the criticisms of capitalism launched by some of the youth of the period were criticisms of the faceless bureaucracy which had appropriated the “organization man.”

Yet, the movements of the 60’s were permitted by the affluence of the preceding years. A culture does not question itself until its stomach is well-fed. It also does not question itself unless parts of life in that culture are unsatisfactory. Theodore Roszak (cited in Harris, 1992:194) called this reappraisal the “subversion of the scientific world view.” And his analysis is quite deft, because many of the radical youth of that time categorically refused to submit to the “rationalism” of technology. They demanded an evaluation of “consequences” as well as immediate benefits.

Robert Townsend’s book of 1970, *Up The Organization*, was a guerrilla guide for corporate workers who wished to advance in the corporate world without delivering their dignity and morals into the care of what Townsend called the “owners.” The fact that this advice came from the man who led a struggling rent-a-car company, Avis, to the Number 2 position in the industry made some of his criticisms of the American corporation’s treatment of its workers heard at the highest corporate levels. Certain corporations heeded his advice and began treating their employees as “associates,” while others continued

treating white collar workers as if they were factory workers who were dead-bored with their work and in need of relentless and authoritarian supervision.

The economy was also at a point where it could not easily continue growing at its former pace. The reconstruction of Japan and Europe was also complete and the opportunities for expanded trade limited. Harris (1992) suggests that the youth unrest of the 60's was motivated not only by social issues but anxiety in the future of work. A consequence of this economic slowdown was an increase in leisure time. It is very possible that the workers of the 50's were too busy building and developing to stop and wonder what would be the environmental and human consequences of their limitless expansion. The 60's allowed the "breather" necessary for such socio-economic re-evaluation.

The "culture of discontent" which we ascribe to our own époque has many roots in the 60's. For there was widespread discontent with the way America had submitted to a capitalist ethic which had bureaucratized many American institutions and frozen them in rigid ways of thinking. The rise of "youthful liberalism" was the resistance to the conservative imperatives of the established system. Herbert Marcuse stated that, being that blue-collar workers had been appropriated by capitalism, youth were the only agents left for social change and rebellion.

His explanations had demographic validity---by the mid-60's, a full half of the American population was under 35 years of age. A survey showed that 80 percent of the under 35's were searching for a lifestyle different from that of their parents and grandparents (Harris, 1992: 194).

What Bly calls "vertical association" (1996) was being sorely tested and rejected, for it was felt that vertical association was precisely the cultural device used for the maintenance of existing mores and the prohibition of new ones. Many of these youth rejected such vertical reverence because they wanted to develop mores which differed from those of the Puritans, Victorians and the corporate Americans of the 1950's.

John Harris of the London School of Economics writes an apt summary of the nature of this social revolution:

Troubled by the prospects of a world that seemed increasingly bureaucratized and technologically driven, a new generation of young people rose to challenge entrenched institutions and the whole way of thinking on which the premise of Western consumer culture and meritocracy rested. Their protest against the establishment and its institutions and their evaluation of the value systems and symbols of authority which had prevailed in the West since the 18th century, had been foreshadowed by the so-called sexual revolution of the 1920's, and in America in particular also by a fervent critique of materialism....The icon-breaking counterculture of the young rejected the bourgeois catechism of the Protestant ethic, fostering a rebellion against almost every aspect of traditional patterns of deference. (Harris, 1992: 194).

What is interesting to note is that this youth unrest was not restricted to America but swept, in varying degrees of intensity, through the entire Western world. Even youth in the Middle East and Asia felt a bond of solidarity with the Western youth, for they also knew the meaning of living under the authority of “traditional patterns of deference” which no longer suited the requirements of modern urban life. The slogans “peace” and “love” became synonymous with “freedom.”

There were six distinct behavioral types within the movement. Although a given person could belong to more than one motivational category, the actions which emerged from these six streams of motivation were quite distinct. I term these six types: the “communal type,” the “anti-capitalist/anti-corporate type,” the “social equity type,” the “self-explorative” type, the “drop-out type” and the “convention-preserving” type.

The “communal type” sought identity in communal settings and attempted to experiment with an economic system which contradicted the capitalist ethic. The communes and attempts to return to the “land” emerged from this mentality. Many who committed themselves to these communes sought liberation from the isolation of industrial life, sought natural ways of harnessing energy without bringing harm to the environment, and revised ways of living in relationships and raising children. The experiments in group sexuality and group marriage could be included in this category.

The “anti-capitalist/anti-corporate” type was actively involved in investigating and exposing the amoral and immoral aspects of capitalism. There was a distinct categorization of economic action as “good” or “evil.” These activists were interested in exposing the “consequences” of a given corporate decision. Their philosophy revolved around the belief that both the “means” and “ends” of a given economic action should be taken into consideration. Members of this group operated within and without corporations. Those operating within were to be found in advertising agencies and communications and publishing. They clashed with conservative management because they espoused new ways of approaching problems; resistance to their neo-Marxist ideas was intense, for they refused to take profit as the only consideration and often tried to include social and humanitarian projects in the business plans they prepared. The conservative managements which attempted to stave off their reforms considered these “corporate guerrillas,” with much good reason, as “subversives” who sought to undermine the pragmatic capitalist ethic.

The “social equity” type was active in issues relating to racial discrimination, women’s rights to equality, and the complaints of ethnic and minority groups, including the poor. They operated from the premise that America had for a long time promised equality and emancipation to its citizens and that it was time that such be delivered to the population.

They were found working for non-profit activism groups and were influential in the passing of many legislative acts which had profound influence on later decades.

The “self-exploration” type might have or might not have belonged to one of the above groups during the initial phases of the movement. But at some point, this type chose individual exploration as a principal concern. This type has been remembered as the “Me” generation because of its intensive striving after hedonistic and self-actualization needs. The new age philosophy of “self” and many of the psychological theories which emerged during this period were connected to the needs and strivings of this group. Experimentation with drugs, although shared by the above-mentioned groups, was specific to this type. So was involvement in spiritual schools and eastern meditation techniques. A very important contribution made by this type was the difficult art of self-analysis. Many of these youth went head to head with their families to complain about the way they had been raised. Their principal complaint was that the American family as it had existed during the 50’s had neglected the gentler needs for the love and freedom of its offspring. The humanism which emerged during subsequent decades in child-rearing was a direct product of this group’s use of self to investigate the larger social implications and consequences of deprivation of parental love. Such youth also questioned the American marriage institution and those marriages which followed double sexual standards.

The “drop-out” type was not necessarily interested in authentic self-discovery. For many of these youth, long hair, an unkempt appearance, and lax hygiene symbolized their determination to escape the work-dominated, supposedly love-less environment of their parents. To be dirty, to be stoned on drugs, to be a school drop-out were all “cool” modes of “resistance” against the establishment for these youth who had no quarrel with being called “flower children.” As noted in retrospect many suffered not as much from the system as their own paralysis of action; they were sometimes as unmotivated to act on their own behalf as they were to act on behalf of the established system. Depression and melancholy was frequent in this group.

The “convention-preserving” type of youth was opposed to many of the above agendas even though h/she may have experimented with drugs. This type attempted to remain loyal to the values of h/her parents. Often, the children of parents holding to politics of the right, they lobbied on campuses against the left and the “flower children.” Some of the most painful breaks between parents and teens of the period occurred when a son or daughter who had held to the values of a pro-corporate, pro-military parents suddenly discovered that the parent lacked integrity in personal dealings. Many analysts do not include members of this group in the youth movement because they were the antithesis of what the youth movement was about. But their inclusion is important because they were the

resistance and many of the corporate attitudes which survived through that époque did so because of this group's on-going support of the capitalist ethic. In a manner of speaking, they held the capitalist fort and later welcomed back into the fold those members of the youth movement who were tired of their idealism and wished a piece of the capitalist reward.

When seen in the above context the varying motivations of the youth movement of the 60's and 70's can be seen as touching on many dimensions of public life: the economy, the institution, the environment, the media, the family, sexuality, and the self. Nothing of such far-reaching socio-economic dimension had ever been attempted before in America. Analyst who do not recognize the intensity and wide influence of this movement lose track of an important historical link in the American experience.

At the root of this youth movement was a recognition that there were needs held by a human being which needed to be fulfilled regardless of the economic or religious system set in place. These were the children of fathers who had spent long hours at work trying to "fit in" to the prescribed life of the "organization man," and mothers who had accepted their role as "home-maker" without seeking other avenues of personal fulfillment. The children had come second to the corporation and the government and they now turned with fierce determination against both those institutions to the bewilderment of their parents who could not bring themselves to understand their own role in the creation of this culture of discontent.

The époque will be remembered as one during which many social inequities which had remained neglected in America were finally brought to public attention and appropriate legislation passed for their relief. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson were instrumental in pushing through the reforms necessary to bring in Medicare, access to primary and secondary schooling for the poor, the law against racial discrimination of 1964 which gave African-Americans their long-denied right to access to public places and voting rights, and significant advances in welfare benefits for mothers and children.

The "deconstructionism" to which Bly refers had its roots in the 60's and 70's. One of the consequences of the époque, and a cruel one at that, was the epidemic belief that the old were obsolescent and had nothing useful to offer the new generation. The simple mention of "tradition" was enough to elicit contempt and derision. There was no doubt that this was a reactive generation. And what they were reacting to was centuries of bodily repression, artificial standards of decorum, and a near hypocritical pretension at family harmony when no such thing existed as an automatism. Had such harmony existed, we would have had a generation of youth content with their lives. The old reacted with understandable worry and urged a return to "old-fashioned morals and customs," a call

which further alienated many youth because it proved that their discontent was not being properly heard or understood. Many gave up even trying to communicate with their parents anymore. In increasing numbers, youth disappeared and stopped calling or visiting their parents and grandparents. Nor were educational establishments spared these conflicts; in many American universities faculty were divided on whether the demands of students should be considered or not. The sit-ins at Berkeley University soon spread to every other university.

There were many changes during this period which were to have profound effects on the future of families in America. Women began experimenting with their sexuality and, with the help of the pill, which became available in the early 60's, no longer considered marriage as the only place for sexual union. The increasing popularity of abortion helped remove fears of pregnancy and increased the willingness of men and women to have sexual encounters which a few centuries ago would have earned them lashes or the branded letter "A" on their foreheads. Drugs also helped lower inhibitions and affected sexuality. The "one-night stand" was a euphemism which came to age during this époque.

In the 1960's and 1970's the youth of America took back what had been denied since the advent of the early Christian Church. They took back the right of individuals to have sex with one another by mutual consent outside the confines of marriage. It was a revolutionary thing in the Christian world and history will record it as such. If there have been any abuses since this singular act of self-assertion they have been in direct proportion to preceding repression.

Sexuality and a person's rights to "controlling" her own bodily functions was the most important issue championed by the radical feminists of that époque. The right to use contraception and the right to abortion were presented as a woman's free right. Even the Vatican was unsuccessful in contradicting these demands; Italy legalized abortion in 1978.

The new sexual rights of women combined with their increasing participation in the labor force to produced a radical change in America. Women began approaching work as a career rather than as just a source of family income. Many women who normally would not have had to work because their husbands earned substantial incomes decided to join the work force in search of personal satisfaction and financial independence.

This all had profound influences on the family. Women began moving away from their central role as wives and mothers, or, at least, added on other roles to these. New sexual freedoms allowed casual liaisons and cohabitation, decreasing the number of people who still believed in marriage as a life-long contract. Women's added financial independence also made them more forthcoming in expressing dissatisfactions which they may have hitherto kept silent because of their economic dependence on their husbands.

Divorce and separation reached near-epidemic proportions in the early 70's. The single-parent family emerged as a family unit--- by 1980, 21.4 percent of families in America had one parent living with one or more children (Harris, 1992: 197).

There was also a marked change in the way "love" was seen within the context of marriage. Increasingly, married people saw "love" not as a moral duty within marriage but as an on-going "emotion" which needed to be kept intense if the marriage was to be considered a success. Many couples who divorced did so not because there were instances of acute abuse, but because they were "no longer in love with one another," or because "they had grown in different directions and didn't have much in common anymore." In many instances, a man and a woman, once they cohabited with each other, began realizing that they "wanted different things" and had "different interests" which were irreconcilable. In époques when women did not work and had no career interests outside the home such divergences were less common; the woman accepted her husband's interests as her own out of necessity if not by choice. Now, a harmonization of mentalities and interests was sought for and a husband's success outside the home was no longer a guarantee of marital success. Many women were no longer satisfied to "live through" their husbands.

For the majority of the American population, this move towards sexual freedom did not lead to unbridled promiscuity. One must make allowances and compensate for the impressions created by media which seek to "highlight" social trends within certain groups without necessarily representing data regarding the percentage of the total population participating in such trends. A given film may have shown a single woman doing the single bars and going home with a different man every time, but the general population continued with a more conservative agenda: while individuals tried to live up to the new standard of the "Sensual man" and the "Sensual woman" they continued to believe that sex outside marriage was not acceptable.

What did occur during the 60's and 70's and also the early 80's, prior to the arrival of AIDS and other previously-unknown sexually-transmitted-diseases, was that single (and married) men suddenly had the opportunity to have sex outside their marriages. With so many women in the work force and a fair number in the social circuits of bars there developed a facility of contact which many men were not able to resist or chose not to resist. Statistics do not adequately reveal the secret liaisons which men entertained with women who were not their wives. As for the women who participated in these liaisons, a lowered respect for "marriage for life" and an increased need for "authentic feeling relationships" which did not require "commitment" permitted them to participate without feeling that they were breaking some primordial taboo. It became more permissible to rationalize the emerging sexuality as a search for a "suitable partner." In time, "experts"

would advise women never to marry the first men with whom they made love and to experiment so that when they did marry they would be certain that they were sexually compatible with their husband. During this same time, the issue of the woman's "orgasm" became a much-discussed subject: it seemed that many women were not experiencing orgasm in their sexual relationships. One of feminism's main contentions was how a woman could develop the self-affirmation required to permit satisfactory sexual relations.

Needless to say, many women who had been remaining in marriages which had grown wrong initiated separation and, ultimately, asked for divorce. Divorce laws were changed to reflect a "non-adversary" approach. The "no-fault" divorce of 1970, established in California, was the "first law in the Western world to abolish completely any requirement of fault as the basis of marital dissolution" (Weitzman and Dixon, 1994: 223). This law had profound effects on the rights of each party within the marriage. On one hand it gave either party the right to terminate the marriage contract. On the other hand, it took away from both parties the right to expect reciprocal justice. Previously, a woman, who was innocent in a divorce in which the husband had committed adultery, was automatically awarded alimony. Property awards were also connected to the establishment of fault. The new laws determined financial settlement according to questions of "equity, equality and economic need rather than on either fault or sex-based role assignments" (224).

There was no longer any legal guarantee that if a spouse behaved correctly in a marriage that the marriage would continue indefinitely. The issues which now determined whether a marriage would be considered satisfactory were not limited to the absence of abusive treatment or the readiness to contribute adequately to the family's economic survival, but included such psychological considerations as whether the partner was "capable of showing feeling and accepting intimacy."

The new divorce laws also created an ecology of divorced singles who dated one another but who were careful about "falling back" into a marriage. Cohabitation became a safety valve replacing many legal marriages. While in the 1950's and early 1960's corporate men had believed that a wife (preferably attractive) was an essential requirement for being trusted and promoted up the corporate ladder, many single men now questioned the wisdom of early marriage. Bachelorhood and corporate advancement were no longer mutually exclusive. In fact, in corporations requiring over-time work, the bachelors were at an advantage because they could make work their principal activity. Married women were certainly not an asset because they could become pregnant and ask for pregnancy leave.

The new economic status won by women, however, did not afford the kind of economic rewards and stability enjoyed by males. Many single mothers experienced downward mobility upon separating, and, for many, employment was erratic. The

psychological effects of such radical changes in income included depression and despair (Arendell, 1994: 230-232). One of the women interviewed by Arendell stated the plight of women such as herself quite succinctly:

I think about money a great deal. It's amazing. I used to get so bored by people who could only talk about money. Now it's all I think about. It's a perpetual thought, how to get money---not to invest, or to save, but just to live. The interesting thing is that you develop a poverty mentality. That intrigues me. I would never have thought that could happen. But if I had money, several times in the last year I would have fought what was happening to me in a way I no longer think of fighting. You tend to accept what's coming because there's so much you *have* to accept (237).

Arendell's research reveals that economic hardship was not the only hardship.

Following extensive interviews of single mothers, she writes,

But the need to cut costs---on food, clothing, and activities for the children---was not the only source of pain. Most of the mothers reported that their parenting approaches changed and that their emotions became more volatile, and even unstable, in periods of great financial stress. Mothers who went to work full-time resented the inevitable loss of involvement in their children's lives (239).

An important factor which was not sufficiently addressed in early studies of single-parent households was the psychological welfare of the children. The deconstruction of patriarchal families revealed a plethora of abuses, including sexual abuse, violence and alcohol and drug abuse. But the psychological effects of living with one parent instead of two were not fully apparent in the early stages of the above-mentioned transformation. And this was understandable considering that the mother had always been the principal emotional caretaker of the children.

So, on one hand, the dissolution of marriage on grounds of incompatibility helped socialize children and youth to integrate the "ideal" that "romantic love" was a necessary element of a marriage union and that this was equally important to previously-held notions of "moral loyalty" and "economic solidarity." It socialized youth to realize that a given individual, especially a woman, needed not accept an abusive marriage. Yet, on the other hand, it also taught them that a union should "just happen" and "be cool" and that divorce would always be available should things go wrong. They were not allowed to observe two individuals working hard to transcend personal and economic difficulties to keep a marriage together. This view of marriage as a "ready to wear" convenience that could be discarded whenever problematic surely weakened the status of marriage just as the new economic freedoms acquired by women weakened the status of the woman who preferred to remain a home-maker. What it did was create a culture in which "loyalty in spite of distress" lost some of its value. Much of the detachment to which Bly eludes under the heading of a selfish society may actually be connected to this newly-emergent culture of single parents and serial monogamists.

The single-parent family also put great stresses on the amount of "time" which the parent could have with h/her children. Not every parent forced to work at a job and then see to the myriad details involved in housekeeping and tending after children can be expected to have enough free time as well as psychological predisposition to provide h/her children with extended periods of conversation, love and physical touch.

In summary, five factors intersected to bring about a renewed conception of family: 1) The demise of aristocracy and the rise of democracy, 2) The demise of conventional society which considered marriage a social convenience rather than a vehicle for spiritual union between a man and a woman, 3) The rise of a strict Victorian ethic in Europe which drove all sensual pleasures underground and the subsequent American rebellion against that ethic, 4) The political and sexual revolution of the 60's and its reverberating effects on single and married individuals, and, 5) Economic developments which allowed women to make their own living.

The first two developments were a direct result of America's break with European society. The last three were connected with America's break with its own post-revolutionary Puritan society.

The demise of aristocracy had a profound influence on the ecology of the family. The father was no longer the representative of the social and economic hierarchy which ruled his family; power was transferred directly to the democratic state which dealt directly with each family member. Sibling relations were also transformed by the democratic establishment of equitable inheritance laws which spread inheritance fairly evenly between children rather than concentrating it in the hands of an eldest son. This sharing of inheritance released younger members of the family, especially women, to be more self-assertive and self-seeking.

But perhaps the greatest change brought on by the transition from aristocracy to democracy was a change in the institution of marriage. Marriage was no longer seen as a contract of convenience governed by a far-reaching participation in the selection of mates by the fathers and mothers of the prospective bride and groom. While in Europe marriages among the wealthy were contracted for the principal purpose of bringing two families together and enhancing their social and political rapport, democratic America opted for a certain measure of freedom for the bride and groom. The notion of marriage for the sake of love was born in the democratic society. It was America which, through its Hollywood films, suggested to the world that romantic love between a man and a woman was not only possible but to be desired as the principal reason for a union.

This had a strong effect on the mores of the family. In Europe, love had been seen as an ideal which could rarely be held within the bosom of a marriage. Many men and

women who married one another did so for practical reasons which had little to do with what they felt for one another. They were ready to stay in a loveless marriage and raise children. When romantic love was desired by spouses it was found through clandestine relationships. Many members of the aristocracy kept mistresses and lovers parallel to their marriages, sometimes in full view of their own spouses (Sumner, 1960[1906]). Romantic love was seen as an exciting and fulfilling experience but not one to be automatically expected within the bosom of a family.

In Democratic societies, however, laws of equality eliminate the rigid class distinctions which prohibit a man and woman from marrying the person of their choice. Sexual activity outside marriage, indulged in aristocratic societies with impunity---being that the marriage itself contained little sacred meaning---becomes restricted and prohibited in those democratic societies which permit a free choice of marriage partners. The freedom with which people of varying backgrounds can become married with one another thus problematizes the individual who seeks to have and give love without being ready to marry. As DeTocqueville observes astutely, it is difficult for a man to convince a woman of his love for her if he is simultaneously stating that he will not marry her when he and she know he is perfectly free to do so ([1884] 1994: 595). It is also difficult for that same man to rationalize adultery after a marriage---for if the marriage was contracted out of love, why was adultery necessary?

Such a shift from utilitarian aristocratic marriages to emotionally-charged democratic marriages radically changed relationships between men and women. Marriage for the sake of love illegitimized clandestine loves which were formerly permitted to run parallel to arranged marriages. Thus, paradoxically enough, the movement away from aristocratic formality and towards democratic tolerance introduced a stricter morality within families. Critics who speak nostalgically of “traditional” society would profit from realizing that the democratic experiment with romantic love within marriage has been one of the most courageous experiments in human history. Our high divorce rates are not due to lack of goodwill as much as they are due to our refusal to remain within marriages which either deprive us of love or limit our growth as persons. This self-interest is a twentieth-century phenomenon. As societies become more affluent and women are able to earn their own livings, the tolerance for adultery, neglect and abuse within relationships decreases with an accompanying increase in divorce rates. The desire for a lasting love within marriages also and the tolerance of consecutive or serial marriages predisposes marriage partners to be impatient with irritants which might otherwise be borne as a natural part of a “once-in-a-lifetime” marriage.

This separation of the utilitarian and romantic aspects of marriage was further compounded by a rising rebellion in the 50's and 60's against the Puritan Protestant and Catholic suppression of the sexuality. Sexuality was no longer seen as a means towards the end of procreation of life but as an end in itself. The enjoyment of sex for its own sake was in part due to the efforts of Mrs. Margaret Sanger in the 50's to develop a relatively safe birth-control pill that would prevent pregnancy. Thrown into jail on eight different occasions, Mrs. Sanger emerged triumphant when she convinced scientist Bernard Asbell to investigate Gregory Pinner's early experiments in the late 30's and refine them into a contraceptive which became known as "the pill." What drove Mrs. Sanger was the agony of women who were saddled with families that were too large and beyond control. She and her colleagues might have been surprised if they had gotten a glimpse of the sexual activity which would be unleashed by their original intention (Biography Channel, January 1998).

The interesting thing that should be noted here is that the emphasis placed on romantic love within a marriage problematizes the keeping together of a marriage for "the sake of the children." The deeper through-line of democratic unions is the adult's need for self-fulfillment. For example, if sexuality can exist in a marriage for its own sake and remain free from the issue of procreation, then the marriage itself can become seen as a private affair between two individuals who have (or do not have) children in parallel to their personal relationship. Thus, they can terminate their relationship while continuing to recognize the existence of the children. The relationship and the participants' need for a loving bond chronologically precedes their desire to have children. Now in a society where loveless marriages are tolerated couples will stay together because they consider the creation and maintenance of a family as the principal reason for their union. Decades ago, when women could hardly earn their own living, they remained in loveless marriages, rationalizing that they remained loyal to the family for the sake of the children. But since women were integrated into the work-force the "sake of the children" has taken a back seat to the "sake of the adults" who compose the marriage. And there has been no dearth of psychologists willing to testify that a child is happier outside a loveless marriage than within it.

And here lies the problem with many studies which espouse a return to "traditional family values." Those who think this means returning to a family in which there is a loving father and mother and doting grandparents and uncles and aunts and playful cousins may welcome the idea. But this is like wishing things were the way we wish them to be.

The contemporary individual, be h/she male, female, infant, child, or youth would not want to go back to any of the family structures described above if they were to be forced to accept that family precisely the way it operated in its époque and submit to its

mores and customs. The infant would refuse if it only h/she knew that the chances of its avoiding death before its third birth date in Puritan culture were very little. The child would be mortified returning to a turn of the century sweat shop where it would have to work on loud, hot, steam-belching machines and then sleep on the shop of the factory floor. Nor would h/she want to return to the America of 1940 where 10% of children did not even live with their parents. Certainly, h/she would not want to return to Victorian times when a tantrum or an expression of discourtesy would earn h/her a good canning on the backside.

Nor would our fatherless boy want to stand alongside a father teaching him carpentry who would impatiently denigrate him at every turn when he would make a costly mistake due to inexperience. He might prefer seeing his divorced Dad in 1998 once every two weekends. As for teenagers, who were not even considered a social group until the 1920's and 1940's, to what époque of "vertical association" could they return which would permit such a free investigation of the social and informational worlds afforded by the contemporary school system? Might they exchange the supposed evil that waits around the corridors of the internet for the highway robber who necessitated many Victorians carrying revolvers in their waistcoats and skirts?

And the children on welfare, would they prefer to return to Victorian times and sleep on the floor in a drafty kitchen rarely visited by the lady of the house but scrubbed endlessly by their own disheveled mothers? We do not ask similar questions of African-Americans in relation to returning to the "benevolent extended" genteel plantation families of the South, for such a question would be a cruel reminder of the evil injustice suffered by their ancestors.

The point here is that our media conception of family, of ideal family, is a composite picture. Our writers have taken the best from all époques and put them together into fantasy depictions such as the *Waltons*. This makes for good fiction, but not good history. We have taken the bush fireplace from the days of the frontier (leaving out the raids by the Amer-Indians and the carrying off of mother), added a few extra rooms to the original log cabin which kept entire families in one room under the watchful eyes of the Puritan elder, borrowed the rolling gardens of Victorian upper classes (minus the squalor of the families living in hovels during the industrial turn-over), and added a dash of the strong protective father who would risk his life for his children and a pinch of the mother willing to sacrifice all personal interest for the health and well-being of her children, while brimming over with motherly joy and love without even the aid of a therapist.

Such a family has never existed. And Bly tries to appeal to our nostalgia for this phantom family by extolling the virtues of vertical associations. He does not mention that precisely in 1964 when youth were sincerely trying to discover their bodies and getting

them to feel again after centuries of self-abnegation that the grandparents were looking on with dispassion and shaking their heads, preferring to think back nostalgically to the times when a woman wore a fortress of material to cover her body. These children, who are now the parents of the 27-year-olds might just as soon not bother their aged parents and leave them in peace. In any case, the entire case for the role of grand-parents in post-conventional societies has always been exaggerated. Surveys of children show that they rarely consider grand-parents as “significant” people in their lives unless the grandparents live close by and have a “functional” role in the families of their grandchildren (Cherlin and Furstenberg Jr., 1986: 168-169). It would seem that without continual involvement in the daily running of their children’s and grandchildren’s households, the grandparents lose their ability to affect moral behavior and become relegated to a ceremonial status.

The above review of some of the conditions which have affected families in America do not exclude the necessity of discussing the individual members of those family. While families are social institutions, the individuals who live in them are personal agents and must be regarded as individuals, regardless of the pretensions or imperatives of the social system.

The Myth of Motherhood

One of the greatest injustices committed against women and children has been the propagation of the myth of perfect motherhood. It was assumed that because women were naturally able to give birth to a child, that they were inevitably equipped (and obligated) to be good mothers. This removed from the woman the freedom to admit that she was not made for child-rearing. And, most importantly, it removed from the woman the responsibility of ensuring that if she did have a child she knew what she was getting into and was ready to do whatever was necessary to fulfill her child’s needs. The same expectations were left unexamined as far as the father’s role went.

In conventional, pre-technological societies the rearing of a given child was shared between the mother and her kin (Mead, [1928] 1961). Knowledge of an infant’s physical functions and the stages of life between birth and early childhood were therefore transferred from one generation to another. The plenitude of children in a given household also afforded a young girl the opportunity to observe infants and young children before having a child of her own. So the motherhood “instinct” was not an innate talent as much as it was a learned one.

In modern times, many mothers give birth to a child not knowing what to expect after they return home from the hospital, or, they count on the printed words of “child experts” who, over the last hundred years, have guilelessly changed their expert opinions whenever they have felt like it. Rendering this whole process more ironic has been the fact

that many of these “pediatrician” experts were men. It was odd that it was men who were giving mothers advice on how to mother their children and then telling them that motherhood was an innate characteristic. Even in the act of motherhood the woman was treated as a being who required the reasoning and informed mind of the male if she were not to botch things up. So while Dr. Watson told the mother not to hug her child, Dr. Spock arrived to tell her that it was okay to do so, while someone else arrived and told her to lay her child asleep on its belly, and then another arrived to announce that belly-sleeps were responsible for 50% of sudden crib-deaths. Is it any wonder that mothers who try to raise their children by the book are so uncertain and so worried about doing the wrong thing?

Yet, the fact that a woman would need to go to a book to “know” how to treat her child is an indication that the woman is not in contact with her “feelings.” I am not speaking here of medical advice regarding specific ailments; that certainly must come from a professional source or experienced kin. I am speaking about matters such as discipline, hugging, kissing, touching. A mother who must go to a book for advice on these basic things is a mother who as a child was raised by parents who did not fulfill her needs. Were her needs fulfilled properly, she would grow into a feeling person capable of understanding the language of her child and responding to it.

Some women were in contact with their own wisdom and followed some of the advice given them by “experts” with great reticence. Many women have reported feeling very uneasy watching their infants struggling while placed on their stomachs in bed (Miles, 1994: 39). Undoubtedly, also, many mothers were uneasy to follow Dr. Watson’s advice at the turn of the century and avoid kissing their children. Still more must have gone nearly mad listening to their babies cry inconsolably when they followed Truby King’s advice that infant’s should be fed according to the clock and left to “cry it out” at all other times (cited in Miles, 1994: 37).

What we have learned within the smaller nuclear family is that there is much more to raising a child than giving birth to it. Our consciousness of children’s needs has come about precisely because smaller family size has put parents face to face with their children. If anything, we are more aware of the needs of children than before. Bly’s accusation that parents have “turned their backs” on children is unfounded.

Bly’s error is to assume that good-will on its own will lead to effective parenting. Yet, wanting a “baby of one’s own” (like a car of one’s own or a house of one’s own or a suit of one’s own) is no guarantee that we will be able to cope with what that child will need over the next twenty years. One of the disservices done to the family has been the propagation of the notion that a woman and man are automatically qualified to be decent

parents even when they are not instructed by reliable sources and unaware of the difficulties which accompany raising children.

Another disservice has been the modern conception of “bonding.” The number of books which appeared in the 1960’s and 1970’s warning mothers that if they did not “bond” properly with their children that the children would suffer grave consequences created an unnecessary anxiety in mothers. While the child’s needs towards the mother together with a relaxed receptive mother who observed and learned from her child were all that were required for this bonding to take place, these complicated texts tried to turn motherhood into a Cartesian science and robbed the mother of the spontaneity needed to exhibit authentic emotion towards her children. This blocking of the authentic was as damaging to the child as would have been any thoughtlessness or error on the mother’s part.

The political aspect of the bonding issue was embedded in the exhortation that the woman stay at home in order to complete and reinforce the bonding with her child. It was assumed that the mother was and could be the only caretaker of the young child. Diane Eyer, a psychologist with the University of Pennsylvania, argues that the entire bonding issue was a “scientific fiction” (1994). Eyer argues that a child is formed by a multiplicity of influences including fathers, other family members, siblings, schools, media, food, neighbors and neighborhoods. Rather than empower the mother to realize that all her child’s problems could not possibly emanate from her own behavior, bonding theories helped paralyze the mother’s own innate judgment. Ironically, by pushing the “innate” qualities of motherhood these theorists succeeded in discounting that part of motherhood which had to be learned and negotiated with the child’s participation.

What marked mothers from the years 1950 to the present was an exaggerated concern over their “role” as a mother. Rather than being simply a person with a child and relating to their child based on that simple dialogue of love, they attempted to “play” the role of a good mother. And the exact way in which this role was acted out depended on the mothering they themselves had received, on their social class and on their particular life circumstances, economics not being one of the lesser ones. The “modern,” “liberal” attitude became a mental attitude even when the individual’s feelings suggested non-liberal reactions.

At no time was this need for appropriate advice more apparent than in the late 40’s and early 50’s when American mothers responded with massive enthusiasm to Dr. Benjamin Spock’s book, *Baby and Child Care* (1946). This book has become the second best-selling book in America, surpassed only by The Bible (Maier, 1998: 106). Dr. Spock contradicted the cold, detached advice of previous experts such as Watson. After years of

work at a pediatric facility, Spock concluded that mothers were being given the wrong advice and that the “detached” method of mothering was creating countless emotional difficulties in children.

What is interesting to note is that American mothers responded enthusiastically to his liberal advice. This indicates that America (its women at least) was ready to turn its back on the Puritan/Victorian/Cartesian brutally detached attitudes of child-rearing. Spock and his followers constitute one of the most important events which occurred in the twentieth century. Later in the 1970’s Spock was attacked by feminists for having written a “sexist” book which did not sufficiently point to changes needed in the relationships between men and women. Spock responded in his 1976 edition by not only encouraging fathers to share equally in the process of child-raising but pointing to the injustices suffered by the female child due to gender-based child-raising. He wrote, “The subordination of women is brought about by countless acts beginning in early childhood” (cited in Maier, 1998: 106). He advised parents not to create sexual stereotypes by praising girls for their appearance and boys for their achievements.

Dr. Spock’s own personal life was a bit of a tragedy. While he knew in his mind what made sense in child-rearing, he himself was not able to give to his children what they needed. Years after the publication of his books, when his name had become a household world, he and his family entered therapy. During these sessions, Spock, upon hearing the complaints of his own sons, answered, “I never saw physical affection, clear-cut affection between father and son...My father loved me, and I was sure of that, and he did some kind things. But as far as physical affection is concerned...I’m trying to think if my father kissed me, or the rest of the children on any particular occasion, but I don’t remember it” (106).

So while the male community withdrew into the endless work ethic of the “organization era” it sent in its experts to advise its wives on what to do with the baby. Lucky for their families, one of those experts, Benjamin Spock, possessed the mental presence to contradict previous patriarchal notions that a child was a machine which could “function” adequately if left to “cry it out.”

What was, however, not acknowledged by these armies of experts and talk show hosts was that a mother could very easily transmit to her own children the emotional instability, deprivation and abuse which she herself had experienced in her childhood. The whole notion of “dysfunctional” parents is now based on this dawning realization that many of the mothers and fathers who have given birth to children are not emotionally qualified to be parents and do not hold themselves accountable for the emotional damage they are causing their children. They do not avoid accountability because of any innate lack

of goodwill, but due to a much more bland reason: they don't realize that they are hurting their children.

I do not for a moment suggest that the damage caused to children in previous époques was any less than it is today. I actually believe that this is just about as humane as we have ever been in history. I would rather see a child sitting in front of the TV while h/her mother or father does work at the dining table than send that child to the Amazon forest village of Korogu which uses the crocodile as a metaphorical symbol for the initiation of its young men or "warriors." The initiation begins with the construction of a house where the "ceremonies" are to take place. The object of the initiation is to make hundreds of cuts with a knife along the shoulders, back, upper arms and chest of the boy to be initiated so that when the wounds heal the boy's skin resembles that of a crocodile hide.

At one initiation, shown on CBS-TV on October 17, 1997, a dozen initiates were taken through the ceremony. An elaborate spirit house was built, secretly, during the night, in imitation of female crocodiles who dig their nests in the banks during the night in order to prepare where they will lay their eggs next morning. The chief during this initiation, Chief Gabriel, was in charge of ensuring that the laws of tradition were strictly observed. All preparations had to be made in the night and the cutting ceremony itself was to be conducted prior to daybreak.

The initiates were prepared for the "ordeal" that was to follow during a tribal dance in which they were lined up and required to walk through the dancers and musicians while men carrying bamboo whips hit them on their backs. The reason for the whippings were not explained, but one speculates that they were designed to numb the body a little to prepare it for what was to follow. The dance seemed to lighten the mood of anxious relatives who sat a distance away from the proceedings.

The women and children who had come to wish the initiated well and pray for their safe return---initiates had died in the past due to cutting blades that were duller than the ones used now--left the compound and the elders retired to the Mystic House to pass the initiates through their ordeal. The camera followed one initiate in particular, a 16-year-old boy named Hubert. Hubert reported that he welcomed the initiation because his uncle and father have the marks/welts on their bodies and now he would have the marks too and would be recognized as one of the tribe. Another man who was going through the ordeal reported that he was doing it in order to be identified as a member of the tribe; as things stood, when people saw him going from village to village, the absence of the marks created confusion regarding his identity.

The ordeal began with the laying of the initiate on the ground. An elder began cutting into the flesh, making deep cuts and scratches that drew blood and left the flesh

open. When the flesh “heals” a welt remains resembling the bumps on the backs of crocodiles. His chest and the front of his arms done, Hubert was very pale and trembling. The elder turned him on his stomach and began working on his back and shoulders, digging the knife into the flesh and withdrawing it to leave the flesh open.

Later, the dozen initiates were led, stumbling, dazed, to a resting and recuperating area. It was daylight and the villagers had gathered to applaud and celebrate the safe passage of the youth through their ordeal.

It was interesting to note the face of the men as they prepared to go through the ordeal carried one expression: restrained fear. Hubert, when he was shown after the ceremony, had taken on the serious face of a man much older than his seventeen years. This look of precocious adulthood has been seen on the faces of the street kids in Brazil, in the poor who work the quarries of Buenos Aires and Peru, the street children of Bombay, and the child-workers of the early immigrants who arrived in New York at the turn of the century to whom Bly refers with approval. Bly identifies this look as the look of the youth who realizes that h/she is living reality and that h/she has responsibilities in life. I define it as the look of someone whose youth has been driven out of him or her by pain. It should hardly to be considered the look of a normal “adult.” It is not surprising that such initiations often put an end to a youthful mentality. What is surprising is that after decades of arguing for the rights of minorities, learned men and women would witness such brutal exterminations of the youthful spirit and call them “initiations.”

Yet, we have something to learn from the elder who yields the knife. He sincerely believes that the ceremony is a worthwhile one and that he is cutting into the flesh of the youth for the youth’s own good. Were we to approach him and suggest that the markings on the body be replaced by a simple cloth headband which initiates could wear to identify their status, he will shake his head and argue with us that the pain is necessary for the “man” in the youth to emerge. And if we were to show him photos of our youth, he might, just as Bly has, comment that they look too young, that they seem stuck in their childhood.

Now the question arises: Why would a mother or a father repeat the mistakes of his or her own parents? Why does that elder in the Amazon cut into the flesh of a youth when his own flesh screamed with the pain of it when he was a youth? Why would he or she not follow a different approach?

The Myth of Fatherhood

This gentleness of democratic manners is such that even the partisans of aristocracy are attracted to it, and when they have tasted it for some time, they are not at all tempted to return to the cold and respectful formalities of the aristocratic family. They gladly keep the family habits of democracy, provided they can reject its social state and laws. But these things hold together, and one cannot enjoy the one without putting up with the others
Alexis DeTocqueville, *Democracy in America* (589).

Bly draws attention to the fact that the “father” has lost his importance in American society. He blames the industrial revolution for removing the male from his household and putting him in factories and offices where he was separated from his family during long hours of work. He also feels that the confusion of “patriarchy” with “masculinity” has made men retreat from being effective fathers.

DeTocqueville, however, presents an antecedent interpretation of the disconnection between fathers and sons in America:

In America the family, if one takes the word in its Roman and aristocratic sense, no longer exists. One only finds scattered traces thereof in the first years following the birth of children. The father then does, without opposition, exercise the domestic dictatorship which his son’s weakness makes necessary and which is justified by both their weakness and his unquestionable superiority.

But as soon as the young American begins to approach man’s estate, the reins of filial obedience are daily slackened. Master of his thoughts, he soon becomes responsible for his own behavior. In America there is in truth no adolescence. At the close of boyhood he is a man and begins to trace out his own path...The same habits and principles which lead the former to grasp at independence dispose the latter to consider its enjoyment as an incontestable right (585).

DeTocqueville’s analysis suggests that the father’s proximity to his son (notice that there is no mention of the daughter) is affected by the degree to which the father is entrusted with legal authority over the son and the degree to which the father himself aspires to independence. Fatherhood seems to be as much a “function” as it is a “sentiment.” There seems to be a radical difference in the manner in which populations are governed in aristocracies and democracies. In aristocracies, authority is exercised vertically, with each man controlling the man located one rung down the chain of authority. The father is not just a parent but an administrator of the social and political order. Aristocracies control the son through the father (586). The father not only has a right as a parent but as one to whom a political duty has been given by society. He is not only the nurturer but the enforcer, the *patria potestas*, holding ultimate moral authority over the family.

In democracies, however, authority is centralized within the government. The influence of the law extends from the central government to each of its citizens. The father is no longer urgently needed as an intermediary (586, 241). Equality before the law permits this lessening of the father’s role as an enforcer. Whether he then takes on a role as a nurturer or not is a wholly different matter and to be argued according to a separate standard of “sentiment.”

Bly discusses the “sentimental” aspect without giving due attention to the socio-legal aspects of fatherhood. He regrets that the primordial anger between fathers and sons has been replaced by a “lack of affect.” He equates the lack of anger as a sign of the father’s neglect of the son and the son’s loss of hope in ever having a true link to the father. It is interesting that he considers anger as an outcome of intimacy rather than the result of frustration. Yet the lack of anger may be particularly due to the decrease in the legal and economic authority of the father. The son no longer needs to stave off the father’s unbending authority and needs not develop the kind of anger which is connected with such a struggle.

Bly also misses the variations in sibling relations in aristocratic and democratic societies. Relationships between siblings are also radically different in the two systems. In aristocracies, the children are not equal to one another. Status and privilege are dependent on age and gender. “In the aristocratic family the eldest son, who will inherit most of the property and almost all the rights, becomes the chief and to a certain extent the master of his brothers. Greatness and power are his; for them there is mediocrity and dependence” (588). DeTocqueville specifies, however, that the eldest in an aristocracy is also saddled with the responsibility of providing wealth for the younger members. And the younger members try and assist the eldest in this undertaking. Siblings in an aristocratic society need to remain cooperative with one another even though their hearts may not be in harmony (588).

Families in democracies operate differently. Siblings are considered equal to one another and, therefore, independent of one another. One child might be favored over another, but the children are, legally speaking, equal. Inheritance is divided fairly equally between them, thereby freeing them to relate to one another according to their feelings for one another rather than according to any need to keep the peace with the eldest heir (589).

What is most valuable about DeTocqueville’s insight is his understanding of how behavior born of free choice is far more authentic in the long run than that born of functional necessity: “If a certain way of thinking or feeling is the result of a particular conditions of life, when the conditions change, nothing is left. Thus law may make a very close link between two citizens; if the law is repealed, they separate. Nothing could have been tighter than the bond uniting lord and vassal in the feudal world. Now those two men no longer know each other. The fear, gratitude, and affection which once joined them have vanished. One cannot find a trace of them. But it is not like that with feelings natural to man. Whenever a law attempts to shape such feelings in any particular way, it almost always weakens them. By trying to add something, it almost always takes something away, and they are always stronger if left to themselves” (589).

Nearly every analyst of American families, regardless of h/her ideological orientation, agrees that there are tremendous stresses on the contemporary family in America due to the father's nebulous role. Some, such as Janov (1970), Miller (1991) and Miles (1994) look on the problems faced by parents sympathetically, if critically, while some others such as Bly hold to the position that the fathers are to blame for the "nihilism" and "flatness" of our present generation of youth. Rather than providing a thorough analysis of the reason for such failure, Bly quotes the *Jack and the Beanstalk Tale* (1994) to make the point that there are dark forces lurking in the human mind which will surface if the mind is not well-directed. By consequence, his argument is heavily weighted on the moral-philosophical and not focused enough on the emotional and economic. And although one knows that Bly's intention is positive and progressive, having stared long enough into the built-in inequities of families in all époques and in all places, one is moved to react allergically to any notion of a return to a "traditional family."

My own angle of vision is based on the idea that human behavior is established along a reactive continuum. Theoretically, this is the psychoanalytical viewpoint in which effects are investigated in order to get back to their causes and, through such inter-connective insight, to arrive at appropriate healing processes. If a given behavior is non-productive in the here and now it should be analyzed in terms of the antecedent events and emotions experienced by the authors of the behavior. Proceeding from the premise that a being is born innocent and not guilty---contrary to what the early Christian Church would have had us believe---any behavior it develops in life is directly connected to the parental and social influences to which it is submitted, within and without the family. And by extension, the behavior of those who socialize and raise that individual is in turn a product of those who have socialized them.

Consequently, I do not subscribe to Bly's ahistorical notion that things would be fine if we could only return to our old vertical associations while putting a restraining order on patriarchal excess. The social problems to which Bly alludes are too deep and too broad for nostalgic remedies. Only an understanding of the malady and its central actors will lead to a culture in which the mind and the body are equal partners and where no systemic or narcissistic needs are permitted to cause irreparable damage on the individual and societal levels.

Patriarchal excess, furthermore, should be seen in terms of dominant-submissive group psychology. Let us put aside the gender issue for a moment. The fact exists that men for a very long time have enjoyed a privileged status in society. They have had more moral authority, more economic reward, less housekeeping and direct child-rearing responsibilities than women. Despite rhetoric in favor of equal rights, men are not about to

give up all their privileges. Even a man who agrees with the new notions of shared child-rearing may find himself not practicing what he preaches. William J. Goode explains that a “sociology of superordinates” reveals that men resist change because of two salient factors: 1) They don’t feel guilty for having privileges because they know it was not their own generation which created the patriarchal system of male dominance, 2) Not being aware of the myriad little advantages they possess, they come to think of them as rewards received for intellectual and physical superiority (1994: 141-142). Goode reminds us that groups which have dominance always seek to find rational reasons for their dominance to avoid feeling that the privileges they receive are awarded by an unjust system and, therefore, meaningless. An example of such rationalization of power occurred in colonial England when the British seriously entertained the notion that their world dominance was due to “eugenic” qualities.

The notion of a “softened” male, yet to be demonstrated historically, is, therefore, an unproductive notion. A male who does not claim authority and dominance will not necessarily be a better mate or father. Passivity can be as unproductive as aggressivity. What is required is a new social standard that is represented morally as well as structurally.

What caused trauma to children in previous époques as well as this one was not the “characteristic” of masculinity but the mentalities (ideologies) of many males. The pre-Victorian and Victorian male’s conception of the family was that women and children were inferior beings who could not and would not reason properly if left free to do so. The man did not guide his family as much as he attempted to mold it, either through the firm and forceful transmission of value or through the silent but chilling looks of disapproval directed at behavior he wished extinguished. What was faulty was not the behavior of the male but the mindset which energized the behavior. Attitude and specific behavior follow on the heels of more general concepts and philosophies.

The ascendancy of the woman in society counteracted this authority on the part of the male. It blocked the authoritarian impulse to a certain degree and used legal channels, such as no-fault divorce, to ensure its diminution. But it did not help answer what it is to be a good father.

Similarly, a legal acceptance of the woman’s need for a career and for economic stability will not explain what it is to be a good mother. If the answer is to be a truthful one, it must come from the experiences of the child and not the prerogatives of the mother and father. And proceeding from the point of view of the child, we must also examine the mother and the father as the children that they were.

The Puritan and Victorian époques were marked by families which sought to subordinate the needs of their children to the economic and social mores of the community

(as in Puritan times)---the presentation of self in a collectivist culture focuses more attention on the social acceptability of the parents and much less priority on the needs of the children. Our own époque has been marked by a movement which sought to give every individual the right to be himself or herself and rediscover the joys of youth without considering the price that would be paid for this “youthfulness” by the succeeding generation. In fact, at no time in America’s history has there been a massive and total evaluation of the child as an *imperative* of the culture. All adults have ever done is try to second-guess the needs of a child. What has remained forgotten is that “motherhood” and “fatherhood” should be instructed by the child. So the question of what is a “good” “father” or “mother” cannot be answered without the parallel question: “What is a ‘child’ and what does it take to give it a good life?”

Discussions of male-female relationships, therefore, do not always lead to an improved understanding of the child. The two topics are separate issues and, as I shall try and demonstrate, there are important conflicts of interest which can only be addressed by an assiduous and broad social project. It should not surprise or impress us that the Victorians and preceding generations were so able to discipline their children; friendliness and playful lovingness was not a prerogative of the Victorian parent. The parent-child relationship was infinitely more categorical than its modern counterpart. If parents today vacillate when it comes to preventing their children from participating in elements of popular culture which they find objectionable, it is not automatically because of their “lack of moral confidence” but to their worry of losing the intimate contact they have with their children. The Victorians did not have this problem because they did not expect or encourage their children to be openly loving with them; courtesy replaced affection, in the upper classes at least.

Even so, while we have come a long way since the exhortations of Dr. John Watson who urged mothers not to kiss or hug their babies, we have yet to arrive at a point where we can integrate our discussions of gender, equality, and adult male and female identity with the realities of a child. In this, we share the same tendency as our ancestors to place the adult before the child. The *patria potestias* of ancient Rome has been transformed into a *patria-matria-corporata potestias* in which father, mother and corporation come together to decide the fate of the child. While we may think that we have come a long way, we cannot avoid recognizing that we still subject the child to the whims of the époque in which we find ourselves. Just as some sent their children off like unfeeling bundles to the tutelage of boarding schools, some now place their infants in the hands of day-care centers, or leave them to arrive home to an empty house.

The father is a broader category than the mother. While the mother has usually been seen in terms of direct child-raising and nurturing, the father has been used as a symbol of many things including moral direction, stability, prosperity, safety from harm emanating from outside the home, education, and many other benefits not directly connected to the giving of warmth and love within the household. The nurturing side of fatherhood has, therefore, been sorely neglected.

The absence of a clear idea of what it is to be a nurturing father has been compounded by changes in the role of the father as provider. Jessie Bernard (1981: 1-12) provides an insightful analysis of how fathers came to “defect” from the good-provider role and the psychological effects of this on the men. Bernard reminds us that the entire notion of a “good provider,” a carry-over from Biblical images of God as the primal Provider, applies in societies where the wife does not have to enter the labor force. She also calculates that the role of “provider” also has its advantages at a time when a man’s wife did not work: he owned and controlled the assets of the family. But most importantly of all, the “good provider” was given one singular advantage: he did not have to be an expressive individual. Women, when they chose men to marry did not as much take into account the man’s gentleness, expressively in the area of feelings, but whether he was “reliable” and a “good husband” (i.e. a good provider). Emotional involvement in the family was not a formal part of the husband’s duties. And, here, a distinction should be made between “emotional involvement” and “moral involvement.” Dr. Spock was a perfect example of the morally present but emotionally reserved father. While he “knew” what the right thing to do was when it came to raising children, he did not know how to show affection to the satisfaction of his children.

So the good provider spent the majority of his time at his work. It is no wonder that men in the 1970’s and 1980’s had such a hard time understanding why women were suddenly dissatisfied with their marriages. The American male defined his male identity by virtue of his ability to earn a living for his family. The roles of husband, father, sensual lover, member of the community became subordinated to work. So a hard-working male had trouble understanding what all the feminist fuss was about.

Demos (cited in Bernard, 1981) speaks of “hobos” or “tramps” as men who rejected the role of good provider and preferred to wander around, working for their minimal survival needs. They left behind their wives and families into the care of social workers. So the good providers should also be seen in light of those who objected to the role and chose to remain or become alone. This awareness of contradictory points of view protects us from concluding that the good provider role is a primordial reality for the male.

It certainly was not in the days of food gathering when women did clearly more work than the men.

But what has been most damaging to the family has been the man who initially accepts the role of father and provider (partially or completely) but who then abandons the family or stays in the family while doing little to contribute to its economic and psychological well-being. Such men have existed throughout history. They are not a product of television. They are the men for whom the Ten Commandments were written, the same ones who pillaged and raped while in war, the men who will sit in a bar for hours on end in front of a baseball game but feel claustrophobic if their sons ask them to play in the yard with them. They are men possessing a special make-up. Bly's men's movements meetings have helped men find an intellectual and emotional voice, but it remains to be seen whether this will lead to the harmonization of the genders or their further separation into two camps.

Bernard's insights into the semiotics of women entering the labor force is extremely useful. She suggests that women's entry into the work force is taking the family back to those days when it was an economic unit, with both husband and wife contributing to the production of goods and services of benefit to the family. Contrary to popular notions that the family has lost its "economic" center, Bernard's thesis suggests that there is occurring a new re-organization which is bringing the family back into alignment with its pre-industrial characteristics (Bernard, 1981). This is a soft announcement that the family is slowly being abandoned to come up with its own survival tactics, as it did in more ancient époques.

Yet the acceptance of a revised notion of male responsibility within the family is not simply something to be negotiated between a man and a woman. Those influences which the institutions of society bring to bear on male and female subjects are of primary importance. Will schools, for example, begin encouraging (or even requesting) that the father be involved in meetings with teachers? Will community services ask that fathers be more involved in anti-drug, anti-violence programs? And will corporations develop human resources expectations which do not insist that the father abandon his family in favor of the corporation's interests? But the biggest question of all is can men be expected to be affirmative if our fear of patriarchy makes us reject their masculinity and their aggressive impulses. It takes "a man" to confront a drug dealer and make it stick with him that if he ever sells his son any more drugs....

The Challenge of Childhood

Nathaniel Branden, a world-renowned therapist operating out of Los Angeles, impressed me one day with a question he asked a couple with whom he was speaking during a seminar attended by over a hundred couples. He turned to the man and said, "If

you love your wife, how can you find time to go to work?" The man was overworking and Branden succeeded in waking him up to the reality that love was as important as profit. The man burst into tears and hugged his wife. I could not help feeling that the man had not been happy following his usual work schedule. Today, the same question could be asked of career woman. And, as for the children....well, they are rarely consulted.

It is interesting to note how so many sociological texts mention that the concept of "childhood" is a relatively recent phenomenon. The notion comes from Philip Aries, who in 1962 published a book called *Centuries of Childhood*, in which he claimed that the entire notion of childhood did not even exist in medieval society (1962). This claim has led some theorists to conclude that "childhood" and our conceptions of what it means to be a child are "constructs." What is not equally stressed is that what has been "constructed" since medieval ages has been a "discovery" of that which was "denied" during and before medieval times. A central interest in theories which seek to deny any essential reality called childhood is the desire to simultaneously deny the notion of "innate" feelings of "motherhood." One proceeds through this highly politicized area conscious of the underlying interests.

Aries's analysis shows that children's clothing did not exist until the eighteenth century. Prior to that children were dressed like adults; the clothing was simply of a smaller size (50-57). There was even a marked absence of the family as a social unit. Aries's analysis of art reveals a "scarcity of interior and family scenes" prior to the sixteenth century" (405). Much of pre-sixteenth century art depicts crowd scenes, stressing the importance of public social contact. It is with the seventeenth and eighteenth century that we see the introduction of individual and family portraits.

This absence of the family as a "concept" is related to two factors: the public life of the child, and the predominance of public social contact of the adults. The education of children in societies where trades were passed from one generation to another was concentrated around the phenomenon of "apprenticeship." The acquisition of such apprenticeship often meant that the child would be given away to another family who was best prepared to teach the child the trade he needed to learn. Bly's contention that in previous *époques* sons and fathers worked alongside one another is not totally correct. In many cases, children lived away from their parents in the service of other families (366). This severance from the family began around the age of seven (369). It was only with the replacement of apprenticeship with formal schooling in schools that parents and their children began developing closer bonds with each other. There was still a physical separation between parents and children because of the small number of schools available: most children had to be sent to boarding school. But the supervision of this schooling

brought parents into a “supervisory” and “nurturing” relationship with their children, or, at least, more so than they had been before. This nurturing was expressed in the seventeenth century when parents worked with city officials to increase the number of schools available and eliminate the need for children to be boarded (370).

This at least applied to those families which could afford schooling for their children. For the majority of families, apprenticeship away from home continued to be the child’s main education. For those families who could afford schooling, the child gradually became a tool for the family’s social standing. Parents were concerned that their children should not grow up to humiliate them “with their ignorance and behavior” (402). This same pre-occupation with the education (and health) of the child, a relatively new phenomenon, coincided with a decrease in the social networks of the father and mother and an increasing privatization of the family. As Aries explains, it was not the individualism of parents which created the family but the restriction of such (403). Through the restraining of the number of social contacts which the father and mother entertained with friends, servants and clients, the parents turned back in to the family and developed increased intimacy with their children. It was during the late eighteenth century when the law of *primogeniture* (the awarding of inheritance to one favored son at the exclusion of other children) was banished (403). This was a tacit admission of the individual value of a given child and the necessity that h/she be treated equally to h/her siblings. A consequence of this equality was a softening of attitude between the parent and h/her child. Aries quotes Villele who wrote to Polignac on October 31st, 1824: “Out of twenty well-to-do families, there is scarcely one which uses the power to favor the eldest or some other child. The bonds of subordination have been loosened everywhere to such an extent that in the family, the father considers himself obliged to humor his children” (403).

So the notion of the child and the parent, coupled together in some affectionate bond is a recent phenomenon as far as European and American history is concerned. It was education which brought the child back from apprenticeship and into the household. And it required a further hundred years for the notion of “adolescence” to be created. While many societies have rites of passage or initiation which transport an individual from childhood to adulthood, it was industrialization which created the category of “adolescence,” a phase between childhood and adulthood, known not only by its formal physical attributes, but by its social meaning (Skolnick, 1994: 65-66).

Adolescence was the transient phase, a phase which permitted the individual to be free from the responsibilities of adulthood but not quite permitted the full play of childhood. It was, in effect, the freeing of the child from child-labor which permitted the development of massive secondary education bringing a group of youngsters together and

created a miniature model of adult society. The American “high school” was the testing ground for later adult life. It was at once an educational as well as social organism. And by offering a co-educational system, the school allowed young men and women to develop a culture which in some respects was distinct from those of children as well as parents.

Skolnick enumerates some of the difficulties faced by this new social group:

The changed family situations of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-youth also helped make this life stage more psychologically problematic. Along with the increasing array of options to choose from, rapid social change was making one generation’s experience increasingly different from that of the next. Among the immigrants who were flooding into the country at around the time adolescence was emerging, the generation gap was particularly acute....Further, the structure and emotional atmosphere of middle-class family life was changing also, creating a more intimate and emotionally intense family life (66).

Aries and Skolnick both attempt to show that industrialization did *not* weaken parent-child relations. On the contrary, industrialization and the release of children and youth from work at an early age helped intensify parent-child relations. Children stayed in the family house longer before departing to establish their own households and they also, by virtue of the fact that families were now smaller in size, received more attention than children and youth of previous époques.

Skolnick suggests that adolescence is life-stage in which conflict is increased by the very nature of the American economic system.

Ironically, then, the institutions that had developed to organize and control a problematic age ended by heightened adolescent self-awareness, isolating youth from the rest of society, and creating a youth culture, making the transition to adulthood still more problematic and risky...As it became part of the social structure of modern society, adolescence also became an important stage of the individual’s biography---an indeterminate period of being neither child nor adult that created its own problems (67).

One wonders, therefore, if the problems experienced by adolescents and their families are not unavoidable in some measure, given that adolescents are prevented from doing adult work while being asked to maintain an identity different from that of children and adults. Skolnick suggests that this can only create a “struggle for self” which compounds the “risk of increasing numbers of mixed-up, rebellious youth” (67). She does not, however, explain why different cohorts of teens have exhibited different rates of “confusion” and “rebellion.” Her explanation does not sufficiently take into account that the rate of social change has a direct bearing on the intensity of the conflict between teenagers and their parents. Also influential is the nature of the adult world which the adolescent is invited to enter at the end of this period of social and economic suspension. If that world offers opportunity for economic and moral growth then there is no reason to suppose that

the adolescent will delay entry into adulthood. But when conditions are unfavorable, the adolescent does what any intelligent being would: h/she withdraws and waits.

What Bly and other critics of youth culture do not realize is that adolescence is not just a phase, but a quality of being. The same search for identity which troubles an adolescent can and does occur in adulthood, especially in times when society undergoes considerable change during the adult years of a person's life. Prolonged adolescence is, therefore, not simply a prolonged absence of responsibility but prolonged and continuous struggle with identity and meaning. What conventionally characterized an adult was a sense of "moral completion," some "fixity" which could be relied upon. That "fixity" has been lost due to a shifting economic landscape and technological advances which require an accelerated adaptation to change.

Yet, the above analysis is also deficient in the sense that it is assumed that a child who is content with h/her childhood will suddenly arrive in adolescence and suddenly begins feeling troubled. This premise is based on the assumption that the troubles felt by adolescents are wholly connected to the nature of adolescence and not to the existing psychology of the individual arriving in adolescence.

There is enough data existent, however, which suggests that a shaky and troublesome adolescence is simply an extension of problems that are antecedent to it. And it is perhaps useful when faced with a troubled adolescent to see through the facade and speculate on the child within the adolescent and h/her accumulated experience with the adult world.

Many discussions of parenthood are also based on the premise that many parents are conscious and aware of how they felt as children. But that is not the way the human organism functions. We are not given to remembering the deepest of our childhood pain and we defend ourselves from feeling that pain by rationalizing it: We may have been beaten as children, but we have the ability to tell ourselves that we had a good childhood. And we help extend and solidify this illusion by transmitting to our children the same regime transmitted to us. Through this regularity we feel that there is a continuum of good sense when it comes to parenting (Janov, 1970; Miles, 1994; Miller, 1990). In effect, our lack of self-criticism as parents is connected to our lack of confrontation of our own childhood.

Now a parent does not need to be outrightly abusive to hurt h/her children. The same hurt can be transmitted in very subtle ways. Neglect, being distant when a child is talking to us, pushing a child to achieve as a pre-condition for approval, not touching the child enough with warmth and love, not spending enough time discussing the child's daily

life and the moral problems it faces...all these are causes enough for a child to grow with up harboring feelings of inadequacy, lowered self-esteem, sadness, loneliness and anger.

Alice Miller in *The Drama of Being a Child* (1987) questions whether adults realize the extent to which a child can feel lonely and deserted as a result of innocuous neglect. Miller suggests that many mothers who damage their children are narcissistic and need someone whom they can feel is theirs and theirs alone to control and mold. Such mothers do not hear the complaints of their children nor are they always able to feel their children's disappointment and hurt. They rationalize to themselves that because they are giving attention to their children that they are good mothers, forgetting to review their own childhood to see what they thought and felt regarding the stance adopted by their own mothers. Such mothers and fathers are not as concerned with maintaining a consistent parent-child relationship as they are in avoiding annoyances. They get along with the child as long as the child does not complain. When the child does show signs of dissatisfaction, they are quick to repress the child's expression through one means or another, sometimes resorting to violence, other times resorting to inappropriate distraction devices.

Arthur Janov (1970) quotes clients in therapy who confirm Miller's contention, presented twenty years later, that there are subtle ways to hurt a child. In *The Primal Scream* (1970), Janov documents a therapy process which helps an adult release the pain built up due to childhood trauma. While Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Reich wrote extensively about "emotion" and the "defensive personalities" which arise out of repression they stopped one step short of discovering the full extent of a person's feeling self and the consequences of its suppression. Janov provided the missing link.

What occurred in the late 1960's in the office of this American family therapist provides a wealth of insight into the body, the anatomy of emotions and the wider social which is the habitat of thinking/feeling individuals. While conducting one of his regular talk-therapy groups one night, Janov was listening to one of his clients describe how he had been impressed by an off-Broadway play in which the actors walked around the stage dressed in diapers, calling to their "mommies and daddies." Janov asked the young man to do the same and call out to his mother and father. The young man demurred at first, but then agreed. He called out "mommy!" "daddy!" In *The Primal Scream* (1970) Janov describes what occurred next to the young man whom for the purposes of anonymity he calls Danny:

I asked him to call out, "Mommy! Daddy!" Danny refused, saying that he couldn't see the sense in such a childish act, and, frankly, neither, could I. But I persisted, and finally, he gave in. As he began, he became noticeably upset. Suddenly he was writing on the floor in agony. His breathing was rapid, spasmodic; "Mommy! Daddy!" came out of his mouth almost involuntarily in loud screeches....The entire episode lasted only a

few minutes, and neither Danny nor I had any idea what had happened. All he could say afterward was: "I made it! I don't know what, but I can *feel!*" (9-10)

This first experience with Danny bewildered Janov. He did not understand the wails or why they had suddenly appeared and overwhelmed his client. The client was a fully-functioning professional, with no history of mental illness. While Freud's work had included "abreaction" (the release of feeling) as a part of the therapy process it had mainly been based on an analytical dialogue between the analyst and the client. There was no instance in Freud's work in which a fully functional adult was suddenly given expressing an emotion intense and voluminous enough to appear without precedent. Janov listened to the tape of the session for several months trying to make sense of it.

One day, several months later, Janov had a chance to learn more about what had happened with his first client:

A thirty-year-old man, whom I shall call Gary Hillard, was relating with great feeling how his parents had always criticized him, had never loved him, and had generally messed up his life. I urged him to call out for them; he demurred. He 'knew' that they didn't love him, so what was the point? I asked him to indulge my whim. Half-heartedly, he started calling for Mommy and Daddy. Soon I noticed he was breathing faster and deeper. His calling turned into an involuntary act that led to writhing, near-convulsions, and finally to a scream.

Both of us were shocked. What I had believed was an accident, an idiosyncratic reaction of one patient, had just been repeated in almost identical fashion. Afterwards, when he quieted down, Gary was flooded with insights. He told me that his whole life seemed to have suddenly fallen into place. This ordinarily unsophisticated man began transforming himself in front of my eyes into what was virtually another human being. He became alert; his sensorium opened up; he seemed to understand himself (10).

Janov tried slight modifications of his approaches with his other clients. Each time the same results occurred. Out of this initial discovery, he developed a process of clinical psychotherapy based on the process of helping a client remember and regain access to feelings which h/she may have kept suppressed. This process differed radically from conventional psychoanalysis and behavior modification therapy. Instead of being asked to embark on an analytical conversation with a therapist, the client was encouraged to feel h/her emotions authentically, without the jargon of analysis or the ideation of various psychological schools.

The therapist's main function was to help the client avoid the usual defense mechanisms of rationalization, sublimation, reaction-formation and projection. This was accomplished through two methods: 1) Encouraging the client to fully live through and express an event in the present which was upsetting or painful, 2) Helping the client remember scenes from the past which held an emotional charge, and 3) Encouraging the

client to move away from those of h/her behaviors which h/she knew normally decreased h/her levels of tension and discontent (i.e. over-eating, over-drinking, tobacco-use, drug-use and any use of other substances capable of altering consciousness). And, in the early stage of therapy, the client was also asked to refrain from distracting h/herself with excessive television viewing and reading and replace that with an inner meditation on h/her life in the past. Overall, the client was encouraged to “stay” with h/her tension and allow it to build. Janov discovered that tension was the surface “armor” which the body produced in order to keep feelings from emerging into consciousness. He realized by “blocking” usual tension-relieving outlets, he could put his client in a position where the tension and its underlying bio-energetic meaning had to be faced and felt.

In effect, what Janov succeeded in doing was to create an environment in which individuals could experience “gradual” and “safe” release of such feelings. By doing this, he was able to give back a person h/her ability to feel without dysfunctional consequences.

The reliving of suppressed emotions and the remembering of the events connected to these emotions seemed to help Janov’s clients acquire the insights they needed to understand and transform their behavior in the present. No transfer of knowledge or insight was needed from the therapist. The therapist’s role was limited to helping the client dismantle defenses h/she had built over the years and bring the natural forces of h/her own system back into play. The client was encouraged to wait for h/her own feeling expression to provide him with authentic insight (1978). Often, clients remarked after feeling something from their past, “Now I know why I’ve always been afraid [or unable] to....” It seemed as if feeling the past liberated the person from the effects of the past while helping h/her identify the nature and reason for a comportment in the present. The therapist’s main function during this process of self-discovery was to make suppression more difficult by encouraging the direct expression of feeling and discouraging the process of rationalization. Whenever a client discussed a problem, he was encouraged to discover and feel any emotions that might lie below the surface of the problem being presented. Analysis designed to make the client “accept” h/her emotions and no psychological “rewards” were offered for their suppression. Breathing was sometimes used to increase bodily feeling.

In the ensuing years, I had the opportunity of learning more about this phenomenon which Janov called “primal pain” (1970). I received training from therapists who had been trained by Janov and opened my own practice. The conclusions below are based on 1) Direct experience with over 7,000 sessions in my own private practice in Montreal, 1978 to 1992. 2) Reports from Janov’s own clients. 3) Studies done at Janov’s Institute by Janov and his staff neurologist, Michael Holden, and 4) Data which was previously available in the neuro-sciences but not adequately quoted by psychologists and social psychologists.

The data suggests that a person's psycho-logical and emotional state is not only determined by present-day social reality but by reactions dating back to early socialization as well as the historical realities of the times in which the individual has been socialized. It seems that emotions are "stored" within the body when suppressed and continue to affect "personality." The reactions of a person carrying such a load of built-up emotion are not only physical but also ideational. Being emotional (physical), they involve every sense of the body. Having an effect on the "ideational" life of the person, they involve mental processes.

The data suggests the following: 1. The socialization process can produce joyous individuals or individuals who carry a burden of emotional pain within them. This emotional pain results from childhood and is caused by the unfulfillment of the child's needs. It also results from the accumulation of subsequent disappointments. It has a strong effect on the body and the subject's later use of that body. It also has an effect on the person's thoughts and attitudes. A person whose defenses are mobilized to keep pain out of consciousness must by necessity alter h/her consciousness in order to make it less aware of bodily reality. 2. When this reaction of pain is left unfelt or unexpressed there is a build up of pain that affects and propels later adult behavior. 3. The existence of such correlation between pain registered in childhood and later adult behavior suggests that what we observe in the social is as often a reflection of emotional limitation as much as it is of creative expression. After all, the adult who is affected by build-up of pain dating back to childhood functions in the public sphere and contributes behavior tainted by this past pain. Therefore, the social is at once the sower and reaper of its own rewards or problems and the individual is its agent. The child grows into the adult, and the adult delivers back to the social the consequences of h/her socialization, be those consequences positive or troublesome ones. The links between body and the world beyond its boundaries are, therefore, formidable and any social theory which attempts to study time, place, identity and boundary without taking into account the "inner boundaries" of the body leaves much unsaid.

Janov's ground-breaking work suggests that, while the identity of a culture can be a social construct that is malleable and subject to change and negotiation via the adoption of policy and "theory" emerging from periodic interests, the psycho-social needs of the child-individual, as represented within the psycho-neurological make-up of the Self, are readily observable across lines of class and culture. Janov's clients came from a variety of countries. Some arrived with translators. Yet all their reports were consistent with one another. They pointed to a primacy of needs which the child feels, regardless of the culture in which he/she is being raised. All humans abhor feelings of shame and enjoy feelings of

pride (Cooley, 1956). Any failure to fulfill these needs leads to a multiplicity of social problems that continue to pull the social away from the equilibrium it seeks or else propels it into further inappropriate and compensatory adjustments which prove fruitless in the long run. In cultures where convention and custom is strong and homogeneity of behavior is pervasive, the expression of this pain can remain suppressed. Cultures, however, which undergo change and in which a multiplicity of lifestyles and viewpoints are permitted allow liberational instances where the person shows h/her inner turmoil. There is, therefore, little evidence that contemporary Americans are in more emotional turmoil than ever before. What is true is that more of it is being shown and expressed.

Janov describes the feeling process as an “undoing process” (1970). The defenses adopted by the adult when h/she was a child are gradually undone and the feelings underlying them expressed. The notion of defense formation is already established in the literature. Freud, Reich, Maslow and Rogers have written extensively regarding processes of rationalization, reaction-formation, and projection. Yet, their writings have suggested that these defenses are ideational constructs. Janov’s discoveries suggest that defenses are not only ideational (mental) but also physiological (bodily). Neuro-chemical processes are enlisted in a defense system which uses the neurological pathways of the brain and body to “reroute” pain and keep it out of consciousness (Janov and Holden, 1978). This stored pain has been measured by Holden (1978). It manifests itself through elevated pulse, core body temperature, preponderance of Beta brain wave activity, and elevated blood pressure. It is also present as a precipitating factor in a host of psychosomatic difficulties such as head-aches, migraines, ulcers, angina, and other illnesses now considered “stress-related” illnesses by modern medicine.

The mind, for its part, is also a powerful agent of repression. Janov explains that the brain possesses infinite resources for processing experience and re-symbolizing the true meanings of the experience. For example, a seven year old girl may approach her father and ask him to hug her. He may turn away and she may, not wishing to feel his disinterest, “resymbolize” the experience by telling herself that “Daddy is too busy to give me a hug.” This new ideation will immediately establish a “mis-meaning” which mis-leads the mind’s conceptual centers and instructs it to counteract the rising pain of the body with a reassuring rationalization which instructs the body to take the pain and reroute it out of consciousness. The pain, however, does not evaporate. The load of emotion is driven into the body and stored there as tension. And periodically, this inner pressure will burst out in emotional eruptions or, worse yet, psychosomatic symptoms.

The therapy process reverses this process of “gating.” It would seem that the brain is able to send signals to the same defense system used to block pain from awareness, and

to instruct it to gradually release what was hitherto suppressed out of awareness. Three factors permit this reversal: 1. The decision of the person to “let go” and allow h/her inner self to feel and speak. 2. A build-up of suffering that creates a psychological and physical motivation and readiness to give up the “struggle” not to feel that which had previously been suppressed. 3. A weakening of the defense system by a built-up of pain, depressing the person down closer to h/her pain and bringing the pain up closer to consciousness. Such a weakening of the defense system can be caused by increased social stress. The statement, “I know I am unhappy” is, therefore, the first step towards *feeling* that one is.

Janov’s findings deserve consideration because: 1) He did not set out to find what he did and was not propelled by a hypothetical or theoretical interest, and 2) The concept of emotional pain has been around ever since the first recorded history of the human race but has never been formally and paradigmatically linked to childhood. Much of the literature of the world presents a poetic conception of pain, presenting it as one of the “mysteries” of the heart. Miller has reached similar conclusions (Miller, 1987, 1990).

Janov and his clients went into uncharted territory and took great risks. What they discovered was that those things which had hurt them as children had left an indelible “imprint” on them. Remembering how what they had needed had not been fulfilled, they were able to describe what for them were the basic and non-negotiable needs of their childhood. Amazingly enough, the needs described by scores of different individuals undergoing therapy without meeting one another are identical.

Our knowledge of what is normal and conducive to personal happiness, therefore, is best constructed in this reverse manner. By considering the accounts of people who lacked happiness we arrive at a preliminary understanding of what it takes for a person to grow up normally. *Normal* here may best be defined as what the individual states is conducive to h/her well-being rather than what society considers the norm. Thus, in addition to considering the world of the mind (social discourse) we consider the world of the body (personal feeling).

Individuals who have experienced their pain report that at the root of the pain is unfulfilled “need” (Janov, 1970; Janov and Holden, 1978). “Need,” here, is defined as a psycho-biological process which propels the individual towards certain objects or interactive qualities which the individual perceives as beneficial and life-giving. It is different from “want” which can entail moving towards things that are not life-giving (i.e. a person may *need* health but reach for something h/she *wants* which may be damaging to h/her health). One could, in effect, say that when a person’s needs are not fulfilled, h/she is left wanting. A given need that arises in childhood can be replayed and re-represented in adult life. A child may need love from a parent, and then the adult whom that child later

becomes may need love from a mate or h/her own children. Were each need to be fulfilled in its proper time frame there would be no difficulty. Emotional reactions in the present would not carry with them a “valence” which surpasses the requirements of the situation. Being left by a girl-friend would not feel catastrophic, nor would it push the person into a nervous breakdown. Where behavioral problems arise is when an unfulfilled need from childhood surfaces into the adult’s life and becomes mixed in with the adult’s needs in the here-and-now. In such a case, the adult may find h/herself expecting things and responses from the external world that are impossible for these responses can be given only by a parent. Many individuals, therefore, who struggle for satisfaction in their lives are doomed in an a-priori manner to continue suffering from discontent because even when the object of affection is attained the person is left with the original “primal” feeling of fulfillment.

Now there are many ways in which a person’s needs can remain unfulfilled during childhood. And the profound dissatisfaction which results from such deprivation can be observed in highly developed technological societies as well as in less developed nations. Janov reports having received individuals in his therapy institute from virtually every continent. It seems that, although cultures may be different, the socialization methods used by each culture can have a positive as well as hurtful side. The various expressions of cultures may be relative to one another, but the needs of a child are universal. The toddler in Moose Jaw raises her arms asking to be held just as the toddler in Zimbabwe. The need for love is biological. The infant arrives in the world carrying that need with h/her.

The needs of a child are not many. Proceeding from what therapy clients have recounted they are few, but precise: 1. To be received into the world at birth with care, tenderness, warmth and love, 2. To not be separated from the mother (who has been the child’s universe during nine months) right after birth but be allowed time to get used to this strange phenomenon called life, 3. To be given physical warmth during infancy, fed when hungry, and protected from the elements, and to receive enough stimulation but not so much that it overloads the infant’s highly sensitive nervous system, 4. To be loved for being alive, for being h/herself. To feel wanted and not be treated as a prize or trophy that is loved as long it performs but rejected or ignored when it doesn’t, 5. To be allowed to grow at h/her own pace, 6. To be allowed to express h/her feelings, thoughts and ideas without having to censure h/herself just by virtue of the fact that h/she is a child, 7. To live free of violence and corporal punishment and any other occurrence that plants a deep fear and hurt in h/her, 8. To be encouraged to develop h/her physical and intellectual abilities and to be supported to do same, 9. To be allowed to make mistakes and learn from them, 10. To be allowed to participate in peer activity, 11. To be allowed to choose h/her own

profession without undue pressure, 12. To live in a world that makes sense, where there is a certain consistency between what is asked of h/her and the rewards offered back.

Need is a bio-psycho-social absolute of nature. *How* it is fulfilled is a construction of the social. Whether recognition is given to a male child in order to train him to be what is considered “manly” or to be gender-free is not the issue here. What is at issue is the universal need for love, support and recognition which lie at the root of the child’s *acceptance* of the socialization process. These needs cannot be willed away or eliminated, for political, social or economic reasons. They are the language of the body. They can be appropriated and re-represented, but they cannot be eliminated. They exist independently of a person’s willpower or philosophical beliefs. Need simply exists within our system, whether we remain conscious of it or not. The manner in which these needs are expressed and symbolized may vary from culture to culture. Yet, what remains constant is the individual’s need to feel that, within the symbols of h/her culture, The testimonies of individuals who have made a journey back into their emotions show that an individual who discovers an unfulfilled need within h/herself might very well have lived all h/her life unaware of its existence and even gone to great lengths to pretend of its non-existence. Once an emotion and the need that lies at the root of it are negated, so is lost the conscious realization of that need’s existence. Yet, when a person remembers back to the day the need was suppressed out of an effort to avoid the pain of its unfulfillment, the person realizes the inner betrayal that has occurred.

Pain is registered within the system when a basic need goes unfulfilled. The best a child can do to make h/her deprivation bearable is to defend against that pain and put it out of consciousness. Actually, the phrase “out of mind, out of sight” is a misleading one because it implies that forgetting an emotion may actually lead to its disappearance. The physiological research quoted later in this paper demonstrates that repressed emotions do not disappear. They cannot be willed out of our system, only driven underground. They continue to exist outside our awareness, yet exert an influence on our body, our nervous system and our behavior.

A child’s pain and its manifestations in later adult life come from the many ways in which h/she is not allowed to be h/her real natural self: when h/she is left to cry h/herself to sleep in the crib, exhausted by h/her own terror of abandonment...when h/she is asked to talk and walk before h/she feels ready to do so...when h/she is asked to show slavish gratitude for a life which should be h/her natural debt-free birthright...when h/she receives no reward for the good that is in him but continual admonitions of what needs changing in h/her.

The overwhelming majority of individuals whom Janov and I encountered in therapy had one principal complaint: they did not feel *adequately* loved by their parents. Here it must be recognized that what creates a feeling in a child is the child's perception and interpretation of the situation and not the intention of the parent. A parent may love h/her child but find it difficult to show physical affection. If the child needs the physical affection, the lack of it will be interpreted by him as lack of interest on the adult's part. The child will feel unloved even though the adult feels love for the child but has difficulty showing it.

So whether the lack of love is due to outright willful neglect or emotional withdrawal on the part of the parent, or cultural mores, the deprivation felt by the child is registered nevertheless. Cultural mores can help someone stay unconscious of the betrayal of h/her needs, but it cannot eradicate nor re-script those needs. Regardless of the reasons for a given pain, the ensuing effect brings with it a sense of deprivation on the part of the child, a resulting lack of self-esteem, and a troubled emotional state that now requires the child to use h/her energy to adapt to surroundings without feeling what these surroundings are doing to h/her feeling self. When movement towards h/her objects of affection is repeatedly met with responses that frustrate h/her, h/she subsequently avoids the frustration by no longer moving towards what is needed. Thus, the body and its reality is falsified.

Now to study the habits of a falsified body is to remain stuck with the study of secondary symptoms. To study suicide, for example, as did Durkheim, and accept it as an act which can attract anyone provided there are adequate levels of "anomie" in society is to neglect the primary pain which would wear a person down to such an extent that h/she would not be able to cope with "anomie." Durkheim failed to ask a question which any good multi-variate analyst would have asked: how was it that certain individuals undergoing high levels of anomie killed themselves while others did not? Was there an antecedent factor? Why a person is obsessed with the latest fashion, therefore, may be less instructive than what the person would feel if dressed in plain jeans for a few weeks running. The former consideration would address a portion of the person's "second nature" while the latter question would seek knowledge of the person's feelings on a primal level.

And substitute gratification is a cultural habit of developed materially-prosperous societies. Such substitution mirrors a substitution process adopted by the individual in early childhood. When a particular need is completely blocked, then the child remains unaware of it and adopts a character that manages to get by without the direct expression or satisfaction of that need. But if the need surfaces in h/her consciousness, h/she then has three options: 1) To direct the need again towards the object of affection and risk rejection, or 2) To redirect the need to a substitute object of affection, or, 3) To become withdrawn

and keep a lid on the need through denial, thereby rerouting the energy of the need into psychosomatic pressure and tension.

The first mode of adaptation leads to further frustration because the object of affection does not respond in the needed way. The only reaction available to the child here is feeling the pain of h/her unfulfillment. Most children are too fragile to give in to such devastating insights. They adopt other measures of coping. The second mode of adaptation, on the other hand, allows the child to pretend that the need h/she is feeling is really connected to the substitute h/she has chosen. Needing a father who is caring, h/she moves away from h/her father and approaches a friendly uncle or teacher. H/she learns how to “act out” (i.e. symbolize and displace) with substitute parent figures. And as h/she grows into an adult, h/she remains a prisoner of h/her own symbolic behavior. Adults with whom h/she could otherwise maintain relationships based on democratic equality suddenly take on emotional significance for h/her beyond the emotional charge contained in the actual exchange. Objects become symbols carrying with them potentials for gratification; thus, needing admiration from a parent, the person may go into deep debt buying a flashy car to impress bystanders, confusing the here-and-now with h/her past. In fact, much of the promises of the modern consumer society are psychological as much as they are material. The offer of ultimate happiness keeps millions buying what they don’t truly need. The “greed” of consumer society is not greed but displaced need. The third mode of adaptation puts tremendous pressure on the person’s physiological functions because the feelings are not being exteriorized and no move is being made towards the external world. The only outlet, in such a case, lies in psychosomatic illness.

The behavioral mechanism that permits individuals to remain unconscious of the genesis of their needs is this process of transference and symbolization. By projecting onto one another feelings and needs originating from childhood adults successfully avoid conscious realization of the real meanings of their needs. They do not “connect” their needs to their original source but seek interpretation by referring to present reality. This *disconnection* permits the person to avoid acknowledging the source of h/her discontent by identifying h/her innate discontent with sources existing in the present. Here, the mind becomes enlisted in keeping the truth of the body suppressed, for the truths of the body are “time-specific.”

An example of this disconnection of time frames is found in the person who continuously finds uncaring mates and then pleads with them for love and understanding, not realizing that the emotion propelling h/her into these situations comes from childhood. The real object of affection being pursued is placed somewhere else in the person’s childhood. The person is not seeking as much to find a caring person but seeking to

successfully change an uncaring person into a caring one. The script is ancient, the setting is current. What is regrettable is that children are born from this struggle and remain secondary subjects, subservient to the psychological dramas played out by their parents.

The implications of the above discoveries are profound and wide-reaching. Particularly, they help shed light on the issues of violence and criminality, as well as gender. Bly and many other cultural analysts bemoan the rise in violent crime in America. They quote statistics which show that youth are getting into trouble at an earlier age than before and that the incidence of suicide and murder is higher than before. What we have discovered through dealing with thousands of individuals who have undergone the process of “feeling” therapy is that the complex behaviors observed in criminals and violent youth, barring organic brain syndrome, have a very simple origins: feelings of lack of love and self-esteem. The expression of the pain connected with the unfulfillment of those needs eradicates the violence. So the suggestion that portrayals of violence on the media “create” violent behavior presents a less than complete picture.

In addition, it was discovered that the expression of pain emanating from childhood and adolescence somehow freed the subjects from rigid gender roles. Men seemed much more sensitive to women’s needs and women seemed no longer to harbor lingering anger towards men. I can honestly say that I have not observed any egalitarian relationship as effective as those formed between two individual who have each felt their pain. And I have seen couples who could barely get along with another arrives at the above point six months into therapy.

Alice Miller (cited in Miles, 1995) provides considerable insight into our culture of violence (and defense). Her statement coincides with the data I have presented regarding childhood pain and contradicts Bly’s (1996) primordialist assertion that when there is parental absence a host of “dark” forces invade the mind and heart of the child. Miller writes:

In my view a child who harbors no pent-up rage will show no interest in brutal and sadistic TV programs. However, brutal programs are avidly absorbed by children who have never been able to defend themselves against overt or subtle tormenting at home or who for other reasons, can never articulate their feelings---for example, to spare a threatened parent. So they can satisfy their secret longings for revenge by identifying with what they see on TV. These children already carry within them the seeds of their own destructiveness. Whether or not this destructiveness will erupt depends largely on whether life offers them more than violence: in other words, whether witnesses willing them will cross their path. What is important to understand is that the child learns cruelty not by watching TV but always suffering and repressing (185).

In previous époques, where notions of original sin were prevalent, anti-social behavior was termed the “work of the devil” or the product of some innate evil human

nature. Bly implies as much when he speaks of the “aggressive animal base, the dark, instinctive substructure, which is older than our ego, that dark ground that is implacably reborn with every child” and the “rough, selfish, pre-social animal ground” (16). But in a society which has learned that “human nature” is subject to environmental influence and that changes in the environment can cause radical changes in human comportment, the easy laying of blame on the child becomes another rationalization process designed to remove accountability from the parent.

What I propose is that we consider the blame-free possibility that if some of our children are messed up it is because we were messed up ourselves. This explains why I am not at all encouraged by Bly’s suggestion that the grandparents delay their retirements and come back to help turn America’s siblings into adults. What Bly does not realize is that grandparents play a central role in cultures which value elders. But in a culture in which “Old” is considered “Obsolete,” the grandparent can no longer count on a measure of immortality through the works and lives of h/her descendants. The motivation for intense involvement decreases because of this detachment; the detachment is a consequence not an a-prior moral decision.

Far more productive would be intergenerational workshops where parents and their children meet together to openly discuss what felt wrong in their respective childhoods. What we need from our grandparents are not homilies and denials but admissions that they were, in the end, imperfect human beings and helped transmit from one generation to another this tag-game of pain-transmission which has been on-going for thousands of years. But prior to seeking such admission we should meet with our own children and repair the short-term damage. The status of men or women are topics parallel to this central issue of the human being’s need to feel loved.

The notion that we have become a society of individuals who like to consider themselves victims and that we are quick to complain and blame is a denial of the validity of the pain and frustration which individuals carry within them and the healing properties of self-expression. One of the healthiest things which has happened to America has been the open avowal of this pain. It has been infinitely more productive than the Victorian habit of “keeping up appearances.” For in avowal there is an element of self-affirmation and an extension of the democratic ethic. The individual who suffered pain at least achieves authenticity by stating that h/she is in pain. Such statements have also permitted parents to reexamine the position they took towards their children and to also reconsider how they themselves felt regarding their own childhood.

Again, one is reminded of DeTocqueville’s wisdom on the value of authenticity, a quality particular to democracies. On the U.S. TV Show *Sixty Minutes* Barbara Streisand

admitted her mother's coldness and lack of love. She remarked to millions of viewers, "She never said to me, 'You're smart, you're pretty, you could do what you want.' I would say to my mother, 'Why don't you ever give me any compliments?' She would say, 'I don't want you to get a swelled head.'" Streisand's own career has been one long struggle to gain recognition and admiration. It were as if the unsettled business of childhood were a central motivating factor in her work.

But outright neglect is not the sole cause of childhood trauma. Miles reminds that "to make an emotional orphan of her child, a mother need not be cold, neglectful or violent. All it takes is the inability to feel for her child, as a child, and to put those needs first" (1994: 47). Miles's commentary on what it takes to be an effective mother is worth reading carefully, while keeping in mind that Miles, previous to writing her book, had written various works of feminist fiction and non-fiction:

Being there...

This activity or quality, something that the mothers of the past seemed to manage without even thinking about it, in the full contemporary sense of the phrase is proving the hardest thing to do. The central female character in Nora Ephron's film *This Is My Life* observes that if children have to choose between their mother being happy out of town or suicidal in the next room, they'll take suicidal. "As far as kids are concerned there is only being there and not being there," comments Ephron. "We can't delude ourselves that it's better for them if we work." (47-48).

Miles and Ephron's implicit rejection of the working parent is problematic. Even considering this from the point of view of children's long-term interest, it would seem that children who live with motivated and professionally active adults learn to have confidence to do the same. What is perhaps needed is a balance and a restriction of how much a parent can work. Miles's approach to motherhood is interesting, nevertheless, for it is headlong in its acceptance of that which is. It is true that children prefer their parents to be with them. It is true that they prefer their parents to get along and not get divorced. Regardless of how many studies designed to show that a child prefers to be with one parent than two fighting parents, a simple yes or no questionnaire given to children will reveal that yes, they prefer having two parents, ideally two parents who love one another. Now, of course, once a divorce is final, the single parent may demonstrate to the child more love and attention than the child received within the problematic marriage; the child may then actually prefer this new arrangement to the old one. But the ideal is still a two-parent family in which the child is faced daily with the two beings who participated in h/her creation. We should not turn away from this concept just because we wish to normalize the compromises we have been forced to accept as a result of our search for individual liberation. Anyone who disagrees with this statement is welcome to replicate the one-question questionnaire and publish its results.

We have spent many years focusing on how children have “coped” with the consequences of adults action over which they have no influence or control. We have congratulated our children’s “resilience” to such a point that we are beginning to believe our own rationalizations and creating another “custom” to add to the long list of “customs” of humanity which serve only to degrade its true potential. Divorce has become a “custom” in a society which has valued romantic love and bought into the ideal of the conflict-free relationship of the 1950’s to such an extent that the slightest perturbation sends partners running for cover. Partners sign marriage contracts outlining the terms of a potential future divorce even before being married.

Miles’s critique is designed to make two conjunctive points: 1) That we should stop glorifying motherhood and making women feel that it is the only worthwhile thing to which they can aspire, 2) Do not have children unless we know the requirements of children and are ready to meet them. Yet, there is another point which needs careful analysis and which Miles neglects. She mentions that some women have no business being mothers and will do a terrible job of it if they do have children while remaining unconscious of their own disconnection with their emotions. This is a sensible if controversial position. Both Janov (1970) and Miles (1994) agree that the mothering instinct is a fiction and that motherhood emerges from the expressions of the “needs” of the child. Successful motherhood does require a maturity and insight that will permit the mother to fulfill the needs of her child in a non-confrontative, non-competitive way. But there is another area which requires the qualification of emotional maturity and that it the area of union with someone of the opposite sex. Some men and women are not only not ready for children they are not even ready for one another.

I myself cannot understand why a given woman (or man) should be discouraged from being a parent for reasons of immaturity and then be encouraged to engage in a romantic relationship. The same “self-centeredness” and “narcissism” which can perturb a parent-child relationship can take the sails out of an adult relationship. What I have noticed over and over again in adults who have consulted me is that the same adult who has trouble parenting also has trouble living a satisfying adult loving relationship. It would seem that what a person has missed in childhood will be represented within the dynamic of an adult relationship. Now, of course, this cannot be stated categorically, for there are many people who transcend their pain to establish satisfactory relationships with their partners and children. But for just as many others, if not more, cohabitation means entering a metaphoric place where the ancient lost battles of childhood are revived and fought with singular lack of insight and adaptability. The children who are born within the ecology of such a relationship are sorely disadvantaged. What I am suggesting is that children grown

into adults who are hardened by the defenses they built in order to survive the pain of childhood and then attempt to live adult relationships and bear children using their habitual “defensive self.” How love and tenderness can be expected to flow unimpeded in such a “hardened” culture is beyond understanding; yet, social studies continue to measure the actions of individuals and groups without paying equal attention to the emotions being shown (and hidden).

Miles adds an apt footnote to her thesis on motherhood, “...the degradation of mothers and of the children they produce is implicit in the assumption that every woman can do it, every woman should do it, and all they need are their ‘natural maternal instincts’ along with the regular doses of ‘expert’ advice. Surely we can now admit that for motherhood as for life, each individual needs choice, empowerment and control. How much of each does a woman really have?” (50). The same paragraph could also be written about fathers.

In the beginning of this discussion I suggested that we not assume that the relative modernity of the category of childhood lead us to the assumption that the child has developed needs during modernity which it did not possess before. Suffering is not époque specific. What is specific to our own époque is our conception of childhood and parenthood and the incertitude of control and discipline in the family.

Control, Discipline and Incertitude

The incertitude plaguing many families in America has to do with a variety of factors: the emotional immaturity of the parents (i.e. the fact that they are still harboring emotions pre-dating the present), the desire on the part of many parents to avoid the errors made by their own parents and previous generation of parents, the absence of ready-made dogmas about child-rearing, guilt regarding errors they have already made with their children, contradictory influences from media and educators, conflicts of interests in families where parents do not wish to lose their competitiveness in the market and do not wish to decrease their career satisfaction, and, economic factors which influence all members of the family.

The horrors committed in the name of “parenting” in previous époques is amply documented. Lloyd de Mause’s *The History of Childhood: The Untold Story of Child Abuse* (1991) includes a catalogue of abuse which would make the hair of the most jaded mental-health practitioner stand on end. Aries’s *Centuries of Childhood* (1962) also provides an analytical listing of the many ways in which the needs of children have been perverted in the name of “culture” and “religion.”

Much of this abuse has been committed because these cultures believed that children were the repository of the old evil described in religious texts. It was believed that unless

the child was “broken” into shape, h/she would become a grotesque and troublesome being spelling the end of civil society. With the secularization of society and the movement away from notions of primordial evil, parenthood has experienced a certain “humanization.” Although child abuse (sexual and non-sexual) remains a disturbing reality--- notwithstanding efforts of the False Memory Syndrome Association to discredit the recovered memories of incest survivors---most parents do not resort to brutal tactics to obtain compliance from their children.

Bly complains that television is destroying the minds of youth. He cites violent programs as proof of this betrayal. What remains disturbing is the reticence of some parents to affirm their parenthood and forbid the viewing of this kind of material. Parents are pressured by their children’s desire to be “like all other children.” It is difficult to prohibit a certain film when the rest of the class in which a child finds h/herself is viewing it and treating it as an important symbol of group identity. The child’s plaintiff response is “I’ll be the only one in class who hasn’t seen the film!” And the parent’s anemic response is to give in to this “collectivization” of h/her child and abdicate h/her right to be a principal agent in h/her child’s socialization. Rather than trusting h/her feelings, such a parent goes against h/her better judgment. Of course, this incertitude does not help the child appreciate the parent more; in fact, the child loses respect for the parent, picking up on the fact that the parent does not have confidence and consistency of judgment. Moreover, the child learns that the will of the majority is all that matters. So what may be at work here is not as much the parent’s need to be loved (as stated by Geoffrey Gover, cited by Bly, 1996) but the parent’s own belief in conformity, h/her own as well as that of h/her child. It takes a person willing to be individualistic to a fault to resist collective (popular) culture.

Sadly enough, also, most parents are too busy to risk creating a major disturbance by refusing their child something. In many families the entire notion of “reward” has been abandoned. In such families, a child receives that which is taught to h/her by the media as being h/her “right,” regardless of whether h/she shows adequate courtesy, commitment to education and moral worth. Children of such undemanding parents grow up feeling that the world owes them everything and that they owe the world little in return. They are not given the opportunity of learning how certain behaviors bring certain responses from the environment while other behaviors bring other types of responses. The child grows up without being able to control life by controlling h/her own attitude to it. Later on, when faced with failure, h/her first reaction is not self-critique but excuse-making.

The roots of parental incertitude are, therefore, not only familial but also cultural. Some of the difficulties parents face when it comes to disciplining their children is directly connected to the social networks in which their children circulate. Our present culture in

which the “child” and the “youth” are spot-lighted dates back to the 1950’s when “childhood” and “teenagehood” were considered stages for the development of “social competence.” It was then that America elevated adolescence to the status of a mini-adult society. In effect, contrary to Bly’s assertion, America speeded up the growing up of its population by allowing youth between 13 and 17 to engage in dating and erotic activity. The educational experience became an experience with a dual function: to absorb information, but also to learn how to live romantic relationships and friendships. The exchanging of “rings” by adolescents who went “out” with each other in the 50’s and 60’s was, in effect, a rehearsal for eventual marriage.

The addition of a social component which required considerable mental and emotional energy decreased the amount of time a youth would have available for education. And it served to complicate and problematize the parent’s role in negotiating actions and behaviors that went beyond the home and beyond the time spent in classrooms.

In order for parents to reestablish mutual respect with their children, they may need to let go of techniques used in previous époques. We have already seen the damage done when a child is forced into respect through the application of fear-provoking sanctions. What is required more than “vertical” association is “horizontal” communication between two generations: parents and their children. For such horizontal communication to happen with any kind of effective results parents must drop their pretensions of infallibility and turn their backs on the long-standing Puritan and Victorian ethic and admit to their children that adulthood and childhood are interactive realities which are mutually dependent for their wisdom. The child has as much to teach the adult as the adult has to teach the child. The child is the adult’s assurance that ideology will not take over emotion, just as the adult is the child’s safety mechanism against a life dominated by impulse. We have possessed a vertical accumulation of knowledge for thousands of years and it hasn’t changed the fact that we continue to have difficulties raising children who love their parents without reserve and who are also capable of caring for strangers enough not to engage in harmful interpersonal and economic tactics.

An error made by the youth of the 1920’s and 1940’s and 1960’s who subsequently fathered and mothered children was not to tell their children how they had felt with their own childhood. The cohort of the 1920’s might have had horror stories to recount about what it meant to be in a Victorian family. These stories might have released them from the pressure of making excuses for their parents and passing on the same suffering. Equally, it might have liberated the cohort of the 1940’s from reproducing the mythological Victorian family in the bosom of the prosperous 1950’s. And the 1960’s cohort would have done well to explain to its children and adolescents what were the

profound issues of the 60's and how the more sensible ones could continue to be honored by succeeding generations. Most members of the 60's generation never had in mind video games featuring "enhanced graphic" representation of semi-naked actresses being tortured, mutilated and bled to death (New Trap by Sega Corporation, cited in Miles, 1994: 179).

Admittedly, in some families such a reconciliation is near impossible. In such families, children have learnt at some point in their lives that their own survival depends on maintaining very distant, cold and even hostile relationships with their parents. To ask a woman of thirty who was repeatedly raped by her father between the ages of two and twelve to "honor" her father is to expect a messianic capacity for forgiveness.

Miles suggests that "All wrongs to children must spring from the inability to remember what it was to be a child" (103). Perhaps Jesus of Nazareth had this in mind when he refused to blame people even when they crucified him, pronouncing instead, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do." There may be more scientific understanding in this statement of how the human brain denies painful memory and the violence which follows in the wake of denial. In view of this natural propensity to forget that which is painful, it is sometimes unreasonable to ask an individual to become conscious overnight. It is certainly non-productive to blame an entire culture.

The admission of pain on the part of the parent is a useful requisite for the opening up of real and intimate contact. A parent who negates h/her own pain, for whatever reason, including the notion of "protecting" children from hard truths, cannot expect openness from h/her children. The tight-lipped stance of the parent will become that of h/her children. Putting on a "brave" face may have been the solution *par excellence* for the early settlers who were faced with life-threatening situations on a daily basis. But it may no longer be a functional solution to human situations anymore and may be one of the legacies of Calvinism which are best dismantled and done with.

What Bly and other "moral" critiques of American (and other) cultures do not recognize is that most parents, even when they are being abusive, are convinced that they are doing the "right" thing. The human being may be incapable of outrightly admitting that he or she is being actually "evil." The realization might actually lead to madness. It is, therefore, not surprising that many parents who mistreat their children do so with singular self-righteousness. Nor should it surprise us that reversing this lack of self-critique will entail the separation of the individual from the comforts of social "mores" and "customs." For there is nothing which renders a person more complacent than the knowledge that what h/she is doing with his life is "legitimate" and "healthy" because the majority of others are doing the same. Yet, as Miles explains, "from the moment we come together as male and female to make a family, what we create is not simply a unit, but a system, a series of

connections to our own past and to that of our parents, which together can form a more powerful and deadening imperative than we can ever imagine in advance" (1994: 106). Bly's favored "vertical associations" are problematic to say the least when considered in light of this chain-reaction described so aptly by Miles.

Regardless of what difficulties are involved in the establishment of a parenthood that is époque-relevant, it should be remembered that children are inherently cooperative individuals. Their need for love predisposes them to want to please their parents. There is no irony in their emotions, not as long as they are not influenced and pushed away from their authentic natures by a society given to ironic pronouncements. Consistency is possible on the part of parents wishing to withdraw enough from the customs of their culture long enough to meditate on which of these customs they wish to permit in their homes. A parent who is ready to suffer the "inconvenience" of increased involvement in h/her children's lives will find the strength necessary for a re-establishment (or establishment) of family values that are acceptable within the structure of a democratic family.

A parent, also, who is ready to question h/her own chasing after an endless list of material comforts in the name of "the children" may discover that what children value the most is "time" spent with their parents. The greedy desire for an endless panoply of toys and games and cars is what settles in when the child's basic need for love is replaced with consolations. But this "pacifier" approach to parenting leads to little long-range benefits. Children will teach the most naive parent about what it takes to be a good parent if only the parent trusts the child from the onset and listens and watches carefully. The principal lesson the parent will learn is that the child does not want control over h/her parents and, if questioned, might even advise the parent to stop fearing direct discussions. Another lesson the child will teach the parent is that h/she is perfectly aware of when the parent is truly listening to h/her and when h/she is only pretending to.

What needs be reversed is the notion that children are the property and responsibility of the school system and the social system promoted by the state and the media. Until a child attains legal majority status, it is the parent's right and responsibility to participate in and influence public as well as private discourse. This is clearly my own bias and there are those who might wish to argue that democracy excludes the rights of a parent to actively control the viewing habits of h/her child. As I was writing this sentence in Montreal (April 5, 1989), the Canadian public broadcast system, the CBC, was broadcasting a special report on its *The Passionate Eye* program, showing a man and his partner talking of the man's job as a heterosexual prostitute. The female clients of the man are also being interviewed on the program and they have only praise for his prowess as an anonymous sexual partner. It is ten in the evening. It is Sunday night.

There was a time when Sunday was considered a day of rest, a day when people suspended corruption in favor of reflection. This no longer seems to be the case. As a parent I consider the broadcast necessary for it describes reality, even though the cheerful tone of the interviewer makes one wonder what standard is being suggested. But the scheduling of the broadcast at a time when youngsters are still awake is a negation of a parent's right to insist on a culture that is progressive. As a parent I wrote a letter to the newspapers and wrote a protest to the program. It took me one hour to do this and I am a quick letter-writer. It might have taken longer. But to not put in the time required to assert the fact that one is still here and one is not about to abdicate serves to direct society in the direction one would wish it to go. It also serves to decrease the tension one feels when one knows what one wishes to say and do but keeps one's silence. This is clearly my own personal reaction to this particular broadcast; I mention here only to make the point that it might be beneficial for parents to be more forthcoming with their opinions on popular culture. We might even see, contrary to what Bly and many media critics claim, that the average American is quite at ease with what h/her children are watching.

But for such an interaction of opinion and sentiment to occur between parents, children and the wider social, the parties involved must agree that those forces which endangers their mutual cultural project truly need to be addressed and eliminated. And, whether proponents of democracy like it or not, there is a common hindrance which needs to be exposed and identified. And that common social problem is none other than the American corporate ethic and its singular and growing disrespect for the family. This problem is not the result of conspiracy as much as it is the result of the thoughtlessness of a group which is dominant and does not wish to lose its privileges in the name of "social conscience." What I am talking about here is not some sinister anti-family plan, but a simple and narcissistic obsession with "results," "competitiveness," and "profit" which, if allowed to continue unchallenged, will ultimately not only weaken the family in America but also undo decades of progress in corporate sensibility.

Economics and the Contemporary Family

The recent attention given to women's emancipation has been sorely needed. But it has also taken attention away from the terrible injustices men suffered at the hands of a corporate system that used them to build its multi-national operations and then discarded them when the same owners of those electronically-transferable corporations were ready to board planes to distant markets. The fact that many American corporations have used technology to replace middle managers with competent women workers at a fraction of the salary they formerly paid the men may have encouraged career-minded women in the short run. But the fact remains that both men and women were sorely manipulated in the process.

We may not agree with Karl Marx's facile theory of "historical determinism," but we cannot in all good conscience turn away from his assertion that capitalism has a way of victimizing men *as well as* women (Marx, [1885, 1894] 1967). Perhaps it suits the owners of the new economic order that Marx be forgotten. Indeed, he is rarely quoted in academic circles even though Marxists notions appear regularly in empirical and theoretical works under new names.

Miles (1994) makes the incontestable point that "There is no human problem that is not made easier by money. There is no human misery that is not made worse by poverty" (87). My own experience with individuals discussing their psychological difficulties confirm this. At every turn, poverty and job insecurity were precipitating factors in family stress. And, equally, insecurity emanating from within the family has a negative effect on performance at work.

Bly does not address the actual bottom-line income of family when discussing families riddled with social problems. He cites industrialization as the precipitating factor which took the father out of the home and threw the family in disarray.

My own dissenting view is that it was not only industrialization which diminished the role of the father in society. It was also the way in which the father was used to build industries which were later abandoned or cut down in size in favor of foreign production. The manner in which the worker was treated had a great part on creating feelings of "pride" or "shame."

This was the throw-away generation of fathers, circa 1970-1998; managers reduced to accepting any job. White collar workers buying into the myth that cottage industries would make them a living and then plunging their life savings into private businesses which were swallowed up by corporations. The lucky ones, such as the ones who fell to Sam Waldman's empire, were then hired as "associates," a new word for floor clerks. The first few became millionaires when the company's stock rose to record heights, but the majority continued to be reduced back to the status of "workers."

America's betrayal of the people who gave their lives to the manifestation of the Protestant ethic of work was not spearheaded by the hedonism of the 1960's but by the corporate shifts of the 1980's and 1990's. Today, many rich Americans do not even bother starting job-creating businesses. They make their money on the telephone, instructing their brokers on what pieces of paper to buy and what to sell.

Conceivably, therefore, we could have a return to the old aristocracies in which the rich do business with one another, and the poor, in return for a minimal measure of security, serve the rich. We will then have, for all functional purposes, returned to the old feudal arrangements. We are not far from it. Contract employment is a return to the

journeymen of old who went from place to place seeking work, leaving their families for long periods of time, sometimes disappearing never to come back. Social studies calmly announce the demise of the middle class, but rare has been the sociologist who has methodically and passionately produced an empirical work detailing the damage done to men, women, families and children. Nor has an interviewer yet asked leading corporate executives what they think of the loneliness of children stuck with parents who overwork in the interests of the corporation's "bottom-line."

The entire notion that human society has to be governed by the economic rules of the "market" is a total denial of human issues which are not economic but moral and spiritual. Nothing guarantees that the free pursuit of profit will develop the technologies required to solve human problems. Without a moral foundation and guiding (and limiting) principles, technology will simply make inequity that much more easy to impose.

Another salient question which requires asking is: How can the top executives of corporations care about American families and the amount of time workers with children spend at work when the executives themselves got to where they got to by working sixteen hour days? Japan is a perfect example of this abuse of the work ethic. Japanese women are the principal tutors and socializers of their children; Japanese men work such long hours that if they don't fall asleep on the trains bringing them home from work they surely will do shortly after walking in the front door. Now on the surface this may appear as if Japanese men are working hard right up to the point when they arrive home. This is not the case, however. For some reasons it has become a custom for workers and executives to go out together for drinks and food in the evening prior to returning to work. This is presented by most analysts in the name of Japan's singular "group corporate spirit." One wonders, however, if many of the men do not find such outings very much to their liking, even if their children grow up hardly knowing who their fathers are.

So it is useless to speak of fathers and mothers and children within this ecology of betrayal and wholesale economic sell-out. The truth of it, as Bly states, is that many American corporate executives are more interested in Philippine computer programmers than they are with the children of their own compatriots. As Bly quotes aptly in his book, the president of NCR Corporation told *The New York Times*: "I was asked the other day about United States competitiveness and I replied that I don't think about it at all" (1996: 156). Bly comes close to locating a major source of dysfunction in families in America, yet the word "corporation" does not even appear in the index of his book. He believes that families can actually establish emotional harmony even though the corporations that employ them have more interests in common with markets twenty thousands miles away.

The American pragmatic business ethic of profit at all costs is extolling a great cost from American families. Yet the corporation does not feel responsible. The amount of manufacturing that was lost as a result of free trade was enormous. Trade figures imply that these losses have been made up by exports. Yet what is not explained is that \$1,000,000 of high-tech export employs perhaps a handful of people to produce the high-tech equipment, whereas the same \$1,000,000 of sales within America, say in the clothing industry, would have created jobs for hundreds of people. America's current production is not labor intensive. It imports labor intensive products and exports those products not requiring a large work force. The net result, notwithstanding "encouraging" unemployment figures, is a net loss in decent jobs.

This leaves the American worker in a quandary. He or she is expected to purchase goods imported from overseas but finds it difficult to purchase same because he or she has no adequate income nor the kind of job security required for free consumer spending. What is not addressed is the question, "Why not produce our own products and sell them at higher prices, being that we will have decent work and be able to afford the prices?" Germany showed the world that it could produce high-quality products and pay high salaries as well as excellent employee benefits.

The low unemployment figures reveal little, for many of the jobs that have been created are low-paying service jobs which require little education. It must be realized that the moment a person is on a job, even if it be a part-time job, h/she is no longer considered unemployed. H/she may have to exist on pasta and sardines, as did the immigrants who came over in the early 1900's, but h/she will be considered employed and part of America's booming economy. How Americans allowed their jobs to be eradicated leaves one to wonder about just how strong was the American nationalistic spirit. What made Americans--and indeed what sense of irony and fatalism was involved in this submissive behavior---accept to work at Detroit auto plants while themselves buying Japanese-made cars? And how were they talked into the notion that a free trade environment would be to their benefit?

When Great Britain colonized India and other nations, the colonization was of great benefit to the rich who traded in the spices and goods which came back from colonies. The colonization also benefited civil servants and military personnel who were involved in overseas and Britain-to-overseas administrative work. But it left the lower classes of England singularly without benefit. For them, it was industrialization which produced their living, not Great Britain's projects in the colonies. Even the cloth-makers of Manchester lost much of their livelihood when India, under the leadership of Gandhi, refused to buy British cloth and began making its own. The present American world trade (read colonization) is a similar phenomenon. Some people are becoming very wealthy because of

it, but for the American who was working to help make Chryslers and Fords, there is little reward but the stress, the loss of self-esteem and the worry of making a living in an increasingly-bizarre economic landscape whose corporate owners have acquired a purpose of their own.

An entire generation was displaced due to the advent of industrialization. Millions more were displaced when they emigrated to America in the 1900's. But they knew something better might be waiting for them and they abandoned their pasts and homes in favor of that hope. They accepted to work, adult and child, in the twelve-hour shifts of the factories owned by the captains of industry who continue to roll-over their profits in myriad of markets. But the present economic climate does not offer such hope to those who lost their positions with American companies, nor can it make the descendants of the original factory workers feel that their parents and grandparents and great-grandparents did not toil in vain.

All this does not create the kind of peace of mind which permits men and women to lead sane family lives and be attentive to their children. At a time when men and women are struggling to resolve gender problems emanating from years of patriarchy (much of it corporate) and children need attention as never before due to preceding high rates of family dysfunction and divorce, the American corporation has adopted a laissez-faire attitude and forgets that America was built through the intimate and dynamic intersection between corporation, family and community.

The question which occurs to me and which I believe deserves further research is just how honorable were committed Puritans in their own business dealings. How is it that the notion of "honor" in business is a rarity today? This is America's dilemma. Peter F. Drucker predicted this dilemma in *The New Society* (1950) and urged corporations to develop a social conscience concretized by social projects. Drucker asked whether a corporation could do business by strict codes of honor or not?

These are all difficult questions for the business person who has not committed h/herself to doing business with as much honor as possible. The business person who thinks of nothing but the bottom line will often betray important considerations along the way in order not to disturb his profit.

A corporate culture which operates on such premises of "expediency" does not easily suffer those analysts who would urge the adoption of socially positive business practices which have long-term ecological sense. Deregulation only encourages corporate executives to feel even more justified in making whatever decisions are of benefit to their companies and investors. It is then that the "bottom line" looms over a culture and controls many of its institutions. The case against the tobacco companies is a perfect example. Had

there been no government intervention, the tobacco executives would have continued advertising their products openly and would have never admitted to any wrong-doing. I myself worked as a marketing director of a major tobacco company in Canada in the early 1970's. The owner had two cartons of cigarettes delivered to us each week. He did not like it when we would smoke a lighter brand and demanded that the executives smoke the company brand. Meanwhile, he and the three top executives of the company did not smoke and spoke of the suffering public with great cynicism. Such men do not reform on their own without legislation.

What is as worrisome as the economic fallout is the psychological one. The corporation, in periods of rapid technological advancement, acts as an example to the rest of the population. It shows that population what is needed to succeed in the world of work. Just as the Japanese "samurais" were the experts regarding war, so are corporations experts regarding the world of work. In an extended way, the corporation is the model of the family. It is the macrological representation of the family. When it turns its back on its workers, it sends a signal to the workers that the family, the micrological shadow of the corporation, is of no importance. During the 50's many corporate presidents were leaders in the espousal of "family values" and insisted that their executives maintain functional families. The new politico-legal order secularizes the corporation and removes its normative power much in the same way it removed the leadership powers of the church.

Analysts who blame parents for the problems of youth, forgive corporations a little too quickly and a little too easily for the havoc they have unleashed. They also neglect to analyze the role played by modified and reconstituted families in the prohibition of a homogenized standard. The work place has not adapted itself to altered family forms. Neither is the notion of "take-home work" or "home-based self-employment" a consolation. The parent who works from the home needs as much "disconnection" from the needs of the child in order to get h/her work done as does the parent who is placed in a commercial work place.

Until recently, the American corporation bestowed on its employees a certain moral status and responsibility. Middle managers acted as surrogate elders or parents with their staff and this through-line of security and guidance extended down into the family of the staff through the workers who were heads of families. When corporations eliminated many of their middle managers, they, in effect, dealt a blow to the parental line of descent. This "down-sizing" was not only economical but was also a "down-grading" of the social power held by the men and women of the corporation. In a way, by severing their relationship of allegiance with the head of the households, corporations communicated to those same households that the old agreement of the corporation as a "kind god-father" was terminated.

At a time when most of the basic amenities and household goods have been acquired and a time when the middle class is in retreat, it is surprising that government and corporations do not realize that the only alternative for America is for it to go all the way and become a corporate society, with corporations also participating in non-profit projects designed to heal the damage done by years of neglect and rising social problems.

American youth are intensely aware that no security can be expected in this downsized culture where the bottom-line swallows up entire biographies. Can such youth be then expected to take the heritage of its culture seriously? Can they be blamed when they yawn without shame when the name of Roosevelt or Shakespeare is brought up in class? Perhaps they know that they live in a world which these two men would have found pitifully inadapted to communal survival. Bly glosses over the corporate issue and returns to blaming the grandparents, the parents and the children themselves. But the social has psychological elements which are economically affected. How a culture considers itself is directly dependent on how its citizens feel within its economic climate. If the nation provides its citizens with feelings of pride and esteem then it can count on their continual cooperation. But if shame and discouragement and abandonment are what one feels while looking for a career in America then not much should be expected of fathers, mothers, sons and daughters, let alone grandparents.

Americans have heroically tried to shoulder the massive dislocations caused by corporate policies of late. That they have done so rather than turning to social unrest of a violent nature attests to their belief in the ultimate goodness of American creativity. It may also attest to their passivity.

The Puritans may have launched the American business ethic with honorable intentions. But these intentions were much easier to practice in rural areas where people knew one another. A businessman could not cheat interminably without the community reacting. In urban centers the rules change dramatically. The man who may separate you from your money without offering a just return may not even know you. In his mind you are an "object" that is part of his "business objective." The only value you have is whether you can bring him closer to his business objective or not. Unfortunately many objectives chosen by corporations have little to do with creating positive learning and research environments and everything to do with posting large profits that please existing shareholders and attract new ones. But in a society where demographics are changing and where a smaller active buying market is emerging, these corporate objectives can be met only through cutting costs and raising prices.

It comes down to a question which only an idealist would ask: Is it moral for a corporation to participate in a profitable project when it knows that the consequences will

be deleterious to the social? The question pits pragmatism against idealism, highlighting an important issue facing America.

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There is a phenomenon which occurs in school yards across the world which goes largely unchecked. The phenomenon is that of the “bully” who secures unearned benefits for himself or herself by intimidating other children. Often, the children who are intimidated have moral qualms and standards than does the bully. They refuse (or are not able) to meet the bully on h/her own terms and, consequently, fall into a submissive position. With time, the bully solidifies h/her position and h/her confidence increases, making contestation of h/her position that much more difficult. But no one is charged with the task of interfering to give the bully his or her just due. His or her victims are abandoned to sort it out amongst themselves in the mistaken notion that this will help them become ready for the rough and tumble of adult life. So is the egotistical socially-unconscious personality created. It is a recreation of the original drama which separated the aristocrats from their servants: the aristocrats were willing and able to risk dying in order to attain the upper hand; those who ended up being their servants were not and chose to capitulate instead.

The seeds of the self-centered corporation are sown in the school yard; a population socialized not to condone or promote ruthless behavior will produce considerably less psychopathic individuals who are willing to lie to themselves as well as others about the short and long-term effects on others of their own aspirations. The greedy individual exhibits a certain insouciance towards others---in a world where the bottom line rules insouciance becomes rationalized as a survival tactic. In such cases, even honorable and communally-conscious individuals are put in the impossible task of choosing between the welfare of others and their own demise. The code of the bully becomes the social standard and is then called “good hard business sense.” Companies “take over” one another with no second thought of the people who fall through the cracks of their mergers. The rule of force becomes legitimized in the “rough and tumble” of adult life. Large businesses merge (read “gang up”) to reduce costs and make operations impossible for smaller entrepreneurs.

Individuals caught up in such impossible conflicts cannot do otherwise but develop an ironic stance towards life and society. The ancient law of justice is no longer reliable nor consistent in such environments. Disbelief becomes endemic. In ancient times, there was a clear demarcation between those who ruled and owned and those who served and remained poor; this left both sides with a certain feeling that the world was a reliable and predictable place. But the society of opportunity and mobility removes these certainties while also retaining the ancient characteristics of greed and domination. What becomes uncertain is

who will be dominated at any given specific moment. At the height of the depression of the 1930's very wealthy people became penniless overnight as their stocks went down to zero value. For some, the surprise was unbearable and they threw themselves out of the windows of the corporations which they had built and controlled. In our own époque, the uncertainty of paper investments has created a class of share-holders who insist on greater returns on their investment without considering that continual pressure on the corporation to produce "extra-ordinary" profits creates a bottom-line mentality which treats human labor with hostility. It also creates a competitive spirit amongst workers that strikes at the very essence of cooperative co-existence.

Many corporations have, unintentionally of course, taken "murder" and applied it metaphorically in the market-place. They speak of "killing" the competition. This is radically different from the merchant mentality of previous époques where various merchants shared territories in order not to come into outright conflict with another. Even the crime syndicates had the good sense to habitually try and consult with one another in order to minimize territorial disputes and gang wars. But many contemporary corporations have become corporatized to such an extent that they not only turn against the people they dominate but against one another. In doing so, they reproduce the ancient battles for power which plagued ancient monarchies.

Can a society which has memories of precedent époques during which a moral debt was laid down which now requires analysis, deconstruction and reconstruction also shoulder the burden of contemporary incertitude without reverting to irony? Can it be anything but a culture of disbelief? And can a background of social irony create anything but incertitude in families?"

7

A CULTURE OF IRONY

The many Indian gurus who settled down on America in the 60's and 70's learned their lesson well: In a society given to seeking "success" the philosophies and meditation methods of a society given to rationalizing and explaining poverty will be interpreted according to the values of the receiving society. While Indian fakirs meditated in order to achieve union with the cosmos, many American "new age" practitioners adapted those same techniques of deep meditation to "visualize" riches and direct the mind to achieving specific goals. In India, spirituality was connected to a certain attitude of "acceptance." In America it also took on the quality of "optimism."

The same rules of "locality" apply to a word such as "irony." Irony in a culture where there is a general authentic love of God will be seen as a diabolic trait. But in a culture where religion has been abused and used to override the wisdom of the heart in the favor of the expediencies of dogma, the resistance of irony may be legitimately considered an expression of a striving for authenticity. Bly criticizes Americans for feeling that "nothing works." Perhaps it would be more productive to consider the possibility that maybe not much is working and that the dark mood of many Americans is something realistic and positive and might even lead to useful change.

What I am suggesting is that our cultural landscape of discontent did not appear out of nowhere. It was not born of a sudden dysfunctional break with rationality. Nor was it completely the result of industrialization. Moreover, rock and roll and drugs did not make American what it is today. Many aspects of our present cultural problems are remotely, yet powerfully, connected to American society as it existed long before the apex of the industrial revolution.

Certainly, mourning the state of our culture does not help explain how we came to be the people we are. And it is not useful to turn our backs on our history and assume that the original intentions of our predecessors were altogether evil or altogether good. Feminist anger has served its purpose and led us to a place where we can afford to analyze in a more detached politically neutral manner. Anthony Giddens has already written with great insight on how the consequences of a given social structure can be quite unpredictable---at times, the best of intentions lead to results which surprise and disappoint (1990). So, it is important that we keep a level head while analyzing the genesis of that which may have led to our despair. Such level-headedness frees social analysis from undue pessimism...as well as mindless optimism.

In earlier sections of this work, I mentioned that an important task of my analysis would be a review of the advent of a "culture of irony" and the role of irony in

contemporary America. This “ironic” age, in which a Bosnian holocaust leaves most Americans indifferent, whereas the sale of a pop singer’s tribute song to the memory of a jet-setting princess elicits enthusiastic (and tearful) response, is the outcome of two intersecting forces which have been at work since the signing of the Declaration of Independence. One has been the rise of a democratic society differing significantly from the aristocratic societies of Europe. The other has been a gradual but steady movement away from thousands of years of patriarchal certainty. The intersection of these two processes has brought about a “culture of irony” in which the meaning of “good” and “evil” themselves are put into question. Moreover, the intersection of these two forces has been facilitated by the fact that America had for long been ruled by a Protestant ethic of work and moral comportment which, oddly enough, despite its abnegation of sensuality, contained the seeds of a paradoxical obsession with “desire,” an unspoken obsession which would “rebound” and bring into actuality the worst fears of the original Puritans: a society in which many individuals enjoyed and accepted sex outside the institution of marriage.

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“How did it come that men dominated women?” asks a student in a university course entitled “Sociology of Gender.”

The lecturer, a woman in her early 40’s, glances at the student and replies with an edge to her voice, “I don’t have a clue.” She raises her eyebrows expectantly, as if to say, “Okay? Can we get on with it now?”

The student, a male, presses on, “But there must have been some moment when both men and women were forced to divide labor and end up with an unfair division. Doesn’t anthropology have an answer to this?”

“Do *you* have an answer?” replies the lecturer, visibly impatient with the student’s insistent questioning.

“No, but I wonder if physical strength had anything to do with it. Maybe the men became hunters because of their physical strength. Maybe it suited both genders.”

“Well. we’re not hunting anymore, so what difference does it make?” shoots back the lecturer.

“Don’t you feel it’s important to know how a thing originates?”

The lecture tenses up visibly, and turns to another student who has her hand raised.

A half hour later, the lecturer assigns a term-paper. She says that she does not want a research paper but an essay. She wants ideas on how sexism can be eliminated. She suggests a useful exercise might be to re-write a fairy-tale and remove all sexist references from it. She advises the students to be particularly alert to such sexist devices as “romantic love,” and “women portrayed as needing the love of a man to be happy.”

This particular course in the “sociology of gender” is more an exercise in influencing the ideological consciousness of students than it is a thorough investigation of how it is that men and women came to be at odds with each other and their own sexuality. What matters to the lecturer is “change.” As can be seen from the dialogue, historical understanding is of lesser importance. Even less important seems to be semiotic analysis. It were as if the lecturer was worried that any research into the earliest origins of the problems being studied might lead to a rationalization of those same problems and a consequent argument favoring their continuance. When the student asks why the term paper should have no references to previous literature published about the topic, the lecturer answers with an ironic smile, “Because those research papers are written by men.”

One floor up, the same course is being taught by another professor who diligently analyzes every historical development that might have been a factor in the sad state of affairs that developed between men and women in America in the 80’s and 90’s. Yet, at no time does the professor encourage discussion of how the situation may be reversed. When a student raises her arm and asks whether all this cold-blooded analysis is not leading to the normalization of the situation, the professor shrugs and says, “We are sociologists, not messiahs.”

In another sociology course, this one on “Classical Social Theory,” the lecturer begins lecturing on Herbert Spencer, an English sociologist who lived during the Victorian era. He is three minutes into a brilliant lecture when a woman in her thirties raises her arm and says, “I don’t think we should be studying Spencer. I read some of the assigned readings and Spencer wrote that women should be in charge of raising children in the family because men lack a social instinct. He’s just arguing for the subjugation of women. I don’t see why we’re wasting our time with him.”

The lecturer attempts to explain that Spencer was observing his own époque and reaching conclusions based on the data available to him. He explains that Spencer did possess, in spite of the faultiness of some of his conclusions, useful insights into the structure of the social. The woman stands up from her chair, shakes her head and says with determination, “If you’re going to teach this kind of crap, I’m out of here.”

The lecturer hesitates for a moment and then turns to the rest of the class and says with a resigned voice, “Well, what do you want to do? Do we go through Spencer or put him aside?” The class remains silent. He moves on to Max Weber.

In a seminar in the creative department of the same university, a participant in an advanced prose writing seminar walks into class one day with a copy of Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer*. A few members of the class take note of the book and begin laughing

derisively. One of them addresses the student with the book and says, “You shouldn’t bring this junk into class.”

“He was a misogynist,” offers the other student.

The student tries valiantly again: “Miller loved women. He just couldn’t let go and trust them.”

“Miller was a woman-hater,” adds another student. “How can you read his crap?”

The student tries to explain that a book should be read without regard to the political positions of the writer: “I’m not sure I want to miss out on what Miller was offering just because some of what he was offering was “not cool.” The others withdraw into silence. The student falls silent too and then puts the Miller book out of view in his schoolbag.

The student complains to the instructor of the course and asks him to intervene and put a stop to the abuse. The instructor refuses. He tells the student in a written memorandum that the male character in Miller’s books comes off as a hero and that this is not an age for “heroes” but an “age of irony.”

The professor is perfectly right. This is not the age for heroes; the instructor’s description of contemporary America is accurate, if not altogether inspiring.

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The above scenarios sound uncomfortably like the inquisitory dialogues of the middle ages. One might be tempted to mourn how we have lost our love for truth with a capital “T” and are only interested in summary explanations. Evidently, in the above scenarios, ideological and political positions overshadow a truly disinterested and just search for truth. One has the impression that the participants have arrived in the academic setting with an a-priori agenda tainted by previous disappointments and limited by the fear of what might happen if judgment were to be suspended in favor of maintaining openness to various points of view (Davetian, 1994). But then has it ever been any different? Foucault has eloquently argued for the fact that what we consider “custom” is a construct of intersecting power interests (1978).

But fear of summary reactions should not make us blind to the psychological and historical processes operative in the above scenarios. What we need ask is what has occurred to make the participants in these dialogues so skeptical of open dialogue? Some refer to this contemporary tight-lipped “correctness” as a return to the mentality of the middle ages. But our contemporary “inquisitory” mood has a motivational base quite different from that which existed during the middle ages and other époques during which “convention” was applied with force and without regard for the creative impulses of individuals. Our present “ideological and political correctness” is quite contrary to the dogmas of previous époques. It does not attempt to enforce convention, but, rather,

questions its sanity. It does not enforce belief as much as it tries to discourage it. And the tool used in this suspicious reevaluation of heritage is “irony.”

Antithetical to the conventional conformist spirit, “irony” is a powerful psychological tool, quite different from “cynicism” and “disbelief.” The cynic is one who has taken a categorical position vis-a-vis reality. H/she disbelieves because h/she chooses not to be in a position of vulnerability when faced with an issue which may or may not be true and reliable. Lacking the information required to feel certain regarding a moral issue, he/she chooses “disbelief” and adopts “suspicion” as an automatic defense to protect h/herself from what Sartre termed the “agony of trust.” The cynic views reality from a categorical rather than case-specific position; h/her reactions are, consequently, prototypic rather than governed by a discipline of reason; there is a preference for imagining the worst before all the information is taken into account. The cynic does not lack faith as much as h/she refuses to consider that faith may be justified in certain instances. H/she has effectively transformed the Hebraic/Christian dictum, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” into “Do unto yourself before they do it unto you.”

The “ironic” individual, however, is on the softer side of cynicism. H/she has most probably at some point trusted the unknown and been deceived by it. A situation of lost trust has led to a “wisened” attitude. The “ironic” individual seems to have a wry sadness about h/her. It were as if h/she were continuing to co-exist with the reality which had deceived h/her in the past but now adopting an attitude which says, “I’ve been burned by you before so I am listening to you while remembering that you are not to be trusted.”

The ironic individual, therefore, uses irony to keep the object of h/her affections at arms length while continuing to share with it a common social space. In a manner of speaking, the “ironic” individual is more friendly with reality than is the cynic or outright skeptic. Most times, h/she is downright hilarious with h/her well-timed one-liners which politely strike at the heart of the “righteous believer.”

Whether this courtesy of humor comes from genuine humanism or an inability or unwillingness to express built-up anger, the ironist is more tolerant of the object of h/her affections than would be the cynic. While the cynic may turn away from the unknown with distaste or derision, the “ironic” individual adopts a more passive stance. H/she continues to hang around the desired object while maintaining a fear of intimacy with the object of desire. This ambivalence excludes outright hostility, or, at least, masks it and prevents its expression. In fact, expressed hostility is the one emotional reaction which would immediately put an end to a position of “irony,” just as irony in the extreme can explode into hostility. In a manner of speaking, “irony” could be considered a form of “soft-core”

hostility. It is anger turned bitter-sweet, murderous disappointment transformed into a lack of affect which devitalizes both the subject and object of desire.

A problematic consequence of “irony” is the prevention of serious commitment. The ironic divorcee has trouble embarking whole-heartedly in a second marriage. But h/she does not withdraw from the topic of marriage. A former attitude of belief and commitment turns into a mild “mockery” of the institution. This mockery has a functional purpose. As Soren Kierkegard wrote years before “irony” became a cultural epidemic, “the salient feature of irony is the subjective freedom that at all times it has in its power the possibility of a beginning and is not handicapped by earlier situations. There is something seductive about all beginnings, because the subject is still free, and this is the freedom which the ironist craves” (1992[1841] : 248, 253). “Irony,” therefore, is not as much a rejection of the external for its own sake but is an attempt to preserve the internal from the dominance of the external. It is a weapon brought out from the arsenal of human psychological responses, mostly in times of change, when convention is still in the hands of governing interests.

What is problematic about “irony” is that, when applied to the extreme, it leads to a pervasive hesitancy to proclaim any belief which might require confident and absolute action. In its purest form irony would even be a hindrance to revolution, for it would deconstruct the revolutionary fervor prior to its active expression. In our present culture of irony, many suffer from a collective fear of loosening their liberal privilege to have things their way if they criticize the ways of others. By consequence, we choose co-existence in a climate of moral neutrality. Having suffered from mainstream definitions of what it is to be “normal,” we turn against the notion of normalcy and divest it of legitimacy and then consider ourselves “tolerant.” This tolerance and the passivity it requires constitutes part, and only part, of our “lack of affect.”

Yet, irony has also a positive side. It is a non-violent form of resistance and leaves enough doors open for dialogue (even if they be half shut to start with) to produce a growing sense of social understanding and harmony.

Regardless of whether this “tolerance” is genuine or reactive, we should give our culture the credit it deserves---only a society determined to become emancipatory dares to empower its citizens with the freedom to worry about whether the habits and ideologies of the majority are life-giving or not. In conventional societies, automatic adherence to mores was not only required but rewarded; at the very least the reward consisted in the acceptance of the individual as a passive member of the tribe. In such cultures, the project of individualism and emancipation was not even recognized as a project that could be worthwhile to the collective. Individual acts of prowess were allowed, but only in so far as

they promoted the well-being of the collective. The hero was tolerated as a savior but not as a revolutionary.

The constraints of convention are demonstrated in Margaret Mead's study, *Coming of Age in Samoa*. Mead's study shows how children who were allowed no great freedom of individual expression were allowed during special occasions to perform wild dances which were extremely self-expressive. These rare occasions served to allow a certain measure of individual style without threatening the established conservatism of the culture (Mead, [1928] 1961). In such conventional societies, one generation automatically reproduced the behavior of a previous one without necessarily having the same emotional understanding of the original meaning or social necessity of the behavior being reproduced. Many of the rituals of such societies eventually became automatisms, devoid of their original meanings; while serving to reinforce group solidarity, they did not necessarily reflect their original purpose. The phrase "well, that's the way it's always been done" is a classic example of the conservative spirit which prefers repetition to innovation. It is an automatism. In eight years as an advertising consultant in the mid-70's I was never once able to get a coherent answer to a question of mine: "Why can't we do it differently just because you've been doing it in one way for all these years?" Most often the answer I received from the executives who hired us writers was, "Ah, you writers, you always want to change things."

There are many such automatisms in our own époque. For example, what began as a purposeful---and necessary---attack on the abuses of the patriarchal system has now been reduced in some quarters into a "fashionable" attack on masculinity. This "second-hand irony" has been documented by Lionel Trilling. Observing his students in the 1960's, Trilling termed some of their behavior as "the socialization of the anti-social, or the acculturation of the anti-cultural, or the legitimization of the subversive" (1965: 26).

Awareness of such automatisms, however, should not lead us to discount irony in itself. It certainly should not discourage us from studying its various layers of meaning and their connection to historical precedent.

The ironist possesses a world-weariness, a disconnection with the glib self-righteousness of those who haven't been stung by the object of their moral affections. Some American writers such as Ernest Hemingway, John Fitzgerald, Norman Mailer and Truman Capote made their careers developing the ironic genre and its moral minimalism.

One of the most penetrating portraits of irony was Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby*, in which a wealthy man throws a party just for the sake of inviting a woman he has idolized for years. But as the party progresses, he begins noticing the shallowness of his guests and becomes increasingly alienated and withdrawn. While he sought to find

himself in another well-beloved person at the beginning of the party, he realizes, as the party progresses, that his own completion arrives when he comes to a bitter-sweet acceptance of the great gulf of meaning which lies between his own intentions and emotions and the motivations of those who have accepted his invitation. The novel is a portrait of American loneliness and how this emotion became transformed from one of “longing” to one of “resignation” and then to one of “ironic reflection” (Fitzgerald, 1953)

Norman Mailer paints a similarly penetrating portrait of the detachment which accompanies irony: “...if our collective condition is to live with instant death by atomic war, relatively quick death by the State as *L'univers concentrationnaire*, [itals. mine] or with a slow death by conformity with every creative and rebellious instinct stifled...why then the only life-giving answer is to accept the terms of death, to live with death as immediate danger, to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on that uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self” (1960: 104, 305). For Mailer, the position of detachment of the rootless individual is the sine-qua-non of the ironic stance. Like in Camus's *L'etranger*, at the root of the ironic vision of life lies an alienation and a curious pre-occupation with the external world as a strange place to which one is not intimately connected.

Bly picks up on this detachment when he writes, “In this new sibling society built on the ruins of the society of readers, few grieve. If we could grieve---over Iphigenia, who died for the sake of the winds, over the wisdom gone because of Internet highways, and the damage to children's brains because of television; over grandparents lost through inattention and parents lost because of our great disappointment---then we could, by this descent, find a way out of the flatness of our current culture” (1996: 192-193). Rightly so, he brings attention to the fact that many who do not grieve do not even know that they might have good reason for grieving. Yes, many are unaware of the history of their culture. But would they grieve if they were to become aware of it? Would their reaction be the one prescribed by Bly?

The acceptance of deprivation is an automatism rather than the result of considered thought. Many who mourn the docility of our youth miss the point that those of them who do seem so are not docile but resigned, in an automatic way, as have become many adults. And this resignation has rational neuro-psychological causes that precede economic or demographic circumstances. As I have argued in my chapter on the family, there is only so much disappointment and pain an individual can experience before shutting off and believing sincerely that h/she doesn't care anymore. The “wisened” up attitude to which Bly refers may simply be a “hardened” attitude. Or, it simply may be, the lack of a strong and passionate socio-political agenda. The same flatness can be seen in many of the

Hollywood films of the 1950's; remove the eternally optimistic smile from the faces of the stars (who never seem to have a financial care in the world) and the faces would be very little different from the faces which Bly finds so uninspiring. Or, on the other hand, some of the "flatness" may be due to the fact that many youth today find the entire adult capitalistic project misguided and doomed to failure. I myself sometimes get the impression when I talk with youth who are between 20 and 28 that they just don't think the world is going to survive and can't see the point of preparing for a successful life. Others see no possible barrier in the future and are convinced that they can be anything they choose to be. Both extremes of attitude should not be surprising in a society run by depleting resources, short-term economic thinking which prefers short-term profit to long-term development, and government legislative policies which tend not only on a daily but hourly basis.

In spite of all these possible intervening factors, Bly repeatedly alludes to America's "flatness" and lack of real art as a consequence of individual psychology gone wrong. He condemns the culture for having fallen into a generalized disgust with itself "...to feel that nothing can be done, nothing works, that we have screwed up everything so deeply that everything is garbage, the feeling that 'I will never recover from what has been done to me'" (190). Badinter seconds Bly, stating that in this culture of discouragement, "passion is headed for extinction" (1989: 204-206). Badinter does not speculate on how much of this lack of passion may be due to the bureaucratization of American life. The clipped business speech of the administrators has invaded the families; many parents talk to their children the way foremen talked to staff. Organization, security, action, seem to be the principal qualities valued by the functioning American family. Relaxation, conversation, sharing of hopes and disappointments, and love are yet to take their rightful place in the family.

Bly feels that as the parents "regress to become more like children" and "turn their faces away" from their own children, "the young come to believe that they are not welcome, and they respond by deconstructing all the parent's favorite books" (Bly, 1994: 269). Bly presents such "deconstruction" as a reaction *against* the culture of the parents rather than as an active force seeking not only to negate precedents but to create new forms of social life. And this is the problem with the bulk of American conservative thinking. There doesn't seem to exist a methodical understanding of how the rejection of convention and the creation of new values can coexist as part of the same creative social project.

Unlike the French, the Americans have no experience with methodical criticism. And this difference dates back to the differences between the American and French revolutions. The French revolution was a philosophical event which provided the French with a methodical understanding of how the past can be deconstructed and replaced by the

new. America's revolution, however, was an administrative one and consisted of a simple break with precedent---in this case, rule by Britain. There was not a parallel revolution in intellectual values. Any change away from the early colonial influence of Great Britain was seen as positive. The early Americans fought for home rule, while the French fought for the democratization of political and philosophical thought and an accompanying change in social relations. This difference has had profound effects on America's relationship to tradition and change. Change for its own sake---an extension of America's original desire to change its political system away from that of Britain---has become a cultural "good" in America. The deconstruction of precedent is considered an automatic necessity rather than as an art to be practiced carefully *within* a reconstructive project. In such a case, "irony" can become a defense to fill the void left by the absence of philosophical and spiritual ideology. To criticize a person for not believing in a culture which does not know what to believe in anymore is to miss the point. There is a quantum difference between the act of "disbelieving," which entails an active rejection of a given point of view...and the reality of "lacking belief," which refers to the absence of belief.

Bly is conscious that this deconstruction leaves in its wake a cynicism which affects most institutions. Yet, he does not proceed to an analysis of why this generalized lack of respect for precedent exists and what brought it into being. His work, therefore, does not produce a truly multi-dimensional, anthropological understanding of American culture. He does not uncover the "functions" of some of the transitory points which have led to our present malaise. As a result of this omission the reader is left vulnerable to the phenomenon of "moral panic" because h/she is led to believe that our present dysfunctions appeared suddenly and will, with equal suddenness, lead us to our extinction. It does not encourage us to do more disciplined genealogical works.

Democracy and its effects, the revision of notions of evil, and a reevaluation of the sanctity and absolutism of established mores are at the root of the pervasive "irony" in contemporary American culture. And it is this "irony" which plays a considerable role in the American family and its dysfunctions. The "irony" is not an outcome of dysfunction but a preceding influential agent. And it is an outcome of our past, not simply an expression of our contemporary mood. It is a reactive force and requires us to ask: To what are we reacting and what do we hope to accomplish through this reaction?

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America's present "culture of irony" took shape with the passing of the Victorian era. While up to then England and America had lived with the assumption that they were on an irreversible path of cultural evolution, certain developments in anthropology and religion put into question the notion that technical progress equaled advancement in consciousness.

Anthropologists such as Ruth Benedict demonstrated through their studies that the differences between primitive and civilized cultures were not as great as originally believed. This, together with a secularization of culture which redefined sin in terms of personal history rather than in terms of a primordial supernatural force, led to a certain spiritual nihilism which contradicted the previous unquestioning “belief” in the positive “Christian” values of western culture.

What Bly terms “self-colonization” began with the dismantling of the power of the Christian churches. Nietzsche’s famous tract, *The Genealogy of Morals* was representative of this growing disappointment in traditional Church-supported notions of the “good” and the “bad,” and a growing revulsion with the way in which “guilt” had been used as a controlling device in Christian culture. Nietzsche suggested that the concept of “original sin” was a social construct and had nothing essentially primordial about it. He accused the clergy of using the idea to manipulate their flock and obtain their obedience. His thinking would have wide-spread influence in subsequent years.

Hence began what Ann Douglas has aptly called a “discourse of disbelief.” It was a discourse that would eventually leave America with a multiplicity of moral guidelines, while, paradoxically enough, releasing from bondage those creative forces which might conceivably now lead to renewal and transformation. While the Victorians had operated on the facile and generalized notion of “damnation” as the end-result of morally questionable behavior, those who followed them had to abandon the concept of damnation and define reality on a per-diem basis. New concepts of relativity encouraged this loosening of the Victorian moral canon and the adoption of a more “ironic,” yet perhaps more “functionally” appropriate code of conduct.

This movement away from “acquiescence” to convention and towards a “disbelief” of established canon brought with it some considerable risk. George Steiner describes one of the consequences of this secularization project in *Bluebeard’s Castle: Some Notes Towards the Redefinition of Culture*, “The absence of the familiar damned opened a vortex which the modern totalitarian state filled. To have neither Heaven nor Hell is to be intolerably deprived and alone in a world gone flat. Of the two, Hell proved the easier to re-create” (1971:48).

Paul Tillich (1952) and Reinhold Niebuhr (1960, 1952) consider the movement away from the notion of “original sin” as a further manifestation of a culture which believed that it had progressed beyond other cultures. They suggest that America’s detachment from the notion of primordial evil was connected to its belief in the superiority of its own powers of self-creation. It was as much an ethnocentric negating of the universality of the religious impulse as any unavoidable consequence of modernization. Weber fails to mention this

distinction in his comparison of “conventional” and “post-conventional” societies and their relationship to technical development (Weber: 1966); American academicians, influenced by the Weberian paradigm, continue to allow this discrepancy to go unnoticed.

Indeed the movement away from a conception of the universe as an ordered and divinely-designed miracle (or curse) opened the doors to the notion of “accident” or “circumstance” as a cause for human affairs. The new idea that environment influenced human behavior was an outright negation of “original sin.” Although the notion of evil pre-occupied the minds of Americans in the 1930’s and 1940’s there appeared in the mid-40’s an inexorable movement away from the notion of evil as an “invisible” force and its redefinition as a concrete manifestation of human interest. The Nazi movement forced the world to stare into the personification of evil and the heights of banality and bureaucratic detachment which could be attained by a singularly uncompromising regime. For the first time in modern history, there was demonstrable evidence of how good people could suddenly embrace demonic behavior. Successful medical doctors who had worked to save lives were able to make an about face and experiment on live subjects in the Nazi death camps; engineers who had designed bridges and machines whose purpose were the continuation of life were able to provide the technical expertise required for the design of gas chambers and armaments of mass destruction. The appearance of the Nazis dealt a heavy blow to the notions of the Enlightenment. Europe is just beginning to recover from this loss of heart.

A few years later, evil was once again presented as a man-made force through the demonization of Communism during the McCarthy era. Individuals were interrogated by McCarthy to determine if they were “instruments” of the “red evil.” The idea that a person could be an “instrument” rather than “victim” of evil moved away from Kant’s “categorical imperative.” It awakened America to the possibility that what appeared as “good” could possess a motivation which was ultimately destructive. Bly reminds us of this paradox when he quotes the Sufi philosopher, Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh, who states that apparently decent acts can sometimes be motivated by base instincts.

Suffice for now that we consider the proposition that America’s movement towards an “ironic” society was not an automatism but a response to preceding reality. What Bly terms the “self-colonization” of America was not a haphazard act. Beginning with the 50’s a series of key works appeared in America, setting the stage for a re-evaluation of much of what had been taken for granted by “all-American” thinkers. But this reevaluation was preceded by surprise and denial in conservative circles. There were bitter splits between those who sought to expose America’s excesses and those who considered the revisionists as nothing more than traitorous agitators. What some define as “self-colonization” others

consider “self-liberation.” It all depends on how one reacts to the precedent actions of one’s parents and grand-parents.

There were a series of seminal works which brought attention to issues which mainstream Americans had traditionally ignored while believing themselves as near-perfect as possible. Between the early thirties and the late seventies, America experienced one rude shock after another. What had been kept silent became expressed.

The work of sociologists from the Chicago School made visible the plight of the poor and down-trodden to large numbers of Americans who had traditionally held to the belief that America was the best nation in the world. A further shock struck at the heart of America’s faith in its social justice when the predicament of poor black people was specifically exposed in a seminal work written in 1951 by Ralph Ellison. His *Invisible Man* alerted Americans to the gross injustices which had been committed against blacks in plain view of America’s democratic institutions. And those who did not hear of Ellis’s work in the 1950’s certainly saw the television images of the Alabama race riots a few years later and heard Martin Luther King’s passionate appeal to Americans to set skin color aside and build an equitable society.

The civil rights debates were followed by the appearance of a series of controversial works describing the plight of females who had been constricted by socially-determined gender roles. The victims of the American “dream” now seemed to also include a sizable part of the white population. Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* (1962) was a powerful testament to women’s need to affirm their repressed identities, dreams and desires to their husbands and to other men who had a political and economic influence on them. The TV serial *MAUDE* became a soft-core comic depiction of these struggles. It was not unusual for the harried husband, Arnold, to find himself overpowered by a determined wife (Maude) who was in no mood to pretend that her husband was anything more than just a male struggling to hold on to his male image in a house where there was a very self-assertive female. The wife’s very masculine comportment encouraged viewers to reconsider which parts of “femininity” were primordial and which were socially-constructed. This frontal attack on “male” dominance was not restricted to works representing feminine interests. There also appeared a series of works parodying the traditional “male authority figure,” depicting him as a comic figure in his relationships with other men.

Other works followed, rendering what had remained invisible uncomfortably apparent. Ayn Rand’s influential philosophical novels, *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1954) resurfaced in the late 60’s and early 70’s. Rand exposed the fact that some Americans could be as mean, as greedy, and as amoral as citizens of any other

culture. She reminded America that the American Dream of “wholesomeness” was not free from base human impulses. For Rand, technology was a great accomplishment of Western civilization. But she also recognized in *Atlas Shrugged* that, without integrity on the part of its administrators, the mercantile society might just as well be dismantled and then reassembled again under a more rigorous moral standard. Rand’s work championed pure capitalism while condemning mindless consumerism and “other-directed” social behavior. She was naturally against socialism and believed that the rational self-interest of capitalists, if left to its own devices, would create employment for the population. She ushered in an époque of “individual interest” and redefined “selfishness” as a positive human quality which ran counter to the authoritarian spirit. It is interesting to note that when I surveyed three used book stores in 1997 in a large urban center, used copies of her books were in high demand and were being bought by contemporary literate youth.

One event which served to diminish America’s belief in the dedication of its officials was the Prohibition Era. The banning of alcohol sales, championed by a group of suffragettes who did not know the cardinal rule of the human personality (that it is doubly attracted to a thing once it is prohibited) launched many Americans in a hedonistic life-style where the new emerging jazz music, speakeasy and “booze,” acted as a revolt against the left-overs of the Victorian era. Fortunes were made in illegal activity and it was discovered that many officials were “on the take.” It was also the beginning of organized crime in the United States. Americans had a front-row view of how a moral project could be sabotaged by precisely those people who were supposed to benefit from it. This did not do much for the strengthening of “social criterions.” Quite the opposite, it added to America’s growing sense of disbelief.

America was also exposed to a liberational sexuality that went against the Puritan and Victorian privations of previous generations. The notion of virginity as a sine-qua-non of marriage was replaced with a new consciousness of sexuality as a possible and desirable pre-marital reality. Herbert Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* established a renewed appreciation of sexuality and its liberational qualities (1955: 184). Works such as that of Marcuse suggested that sexuality was not only a source of personal pleasure---hitherto repressed outside marriage---but also a political tool that could be used to contest the puritanical nuclear family of the fifties, a family governed by an economic and political system which subjugated personal emotion to collective mercantile goals. Sexuality became a defense against canon and precedent.

There is meaning in the fact that much of the early phases of the “sexual revolution” in America were accompanied by an irreverent and humorous approach to sexuality. The rebellious spirit and the desire to shock were unmistakably present in America’s discovery

of sex. This can be seen in the earliest pornographic films such as *Deep Throat* and *Debbie Does Dallas*, both of which included open sexuality placed in a comic context. What fueled this rebellious spirit was the recognition that what had hitherto been presented as the “good” was contaminated by the moral preferences of specific groups holding specific spiritual or materialistic interests. Many Americans awoke to the fact that previous generations had “betrayed” the realities of their body as much as their spirit. The “me generation” was a reaction against the “live for them but not yourself” generations. It was a return to the self, a return that was overdue and perhaps unavoidable.

Parallel to this rebellion against oppression of individual creativity and need was the realization that the severe patriarchs of the Victorian era were not as beyond reproach as they had pretended to be. The entire idea of the strong, unflappable hero had begun appearing anachronistic even during the Victorian époque. Hayden White, in *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (1973: 232) explains that the rise of irony in the nineteenth century represented a “passage of the age of heroes and of the capacity to believe in heroism.” What we need to meditate on is why any culture would lose faith in the idea of heroism. The first act of a human being is an act of heroism...passing through the birth canal and emerging into fresh air determined to breath is in itself an act requiring courage. There must have been a reason why America lost its adulation for the heroic.

Along with the passing of the hero, entered the “anti-hero,” Norman Mailer’s “hipster,” the type who believes in little but navigates within the cultural landscape while using it to h/her advantage and learning only that which is personally relevant and pleasurable (1960).

“Conspiracy” theories and “moral panics” fail to arrive at the reason for this turn-about. The hero was not rejected because people were tired or bored with goodness, but because they picked up on the fact that many of the good works of some “heroes” had been tainted by self-interest and political expediency. The exposition, for example, of General Custer’s last stand and his near-suicidal rejection of advice from his scouts is an apt illustration of the “revisionist” spirit which swept over America in the 60’s and 70’s. The book *Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee*, cataloguing the cruelties committed by the early settlers against the Native population, was another rude jolt which created incertitude in a generation raised on comforting “homilies” regarding the “American way.”

No, the hero in America did not lose favor with the public because of his heroism, but because of his imperfections. The anti-hero was Nietzsche’s superman come to expose the human failings of the hero pretending to be infallible. It is regrettable that authentic heroes were also set aside in this house-cleaning process, but the re-evaluation process was

necessary to rid America of its illusions of impeccable honor. The Great American Salesman who put up billboards across the American landscape and homogenized the land was not a hero, but an individual who lacked artistic discernment and was willing to sacrifice the beauty of the landscape in the service of profit-taking. He was the architect of what Henry Miller aptly called: *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*.

The new hedonism which brazenly turned on America's former Puritanism, therefore, was not simply the result of a mindless search for pleasure on the part of young Americans. It was not an unleashing of primordial orgiastic impulses hitherto kept in check by strict mores. Rather, it was a concentrated attack on the rigidity and lack of integrity of the established "system" and the subtle "father-knows-best" authoritarianism which it claimed as a primordial right.

Huge Hefner who worked a minor revolution in American sexuality questioned the sanity of this rigidity. More than anyone else in the 50's and 60's he and his magazine, *Playboy*, championed a "continentalization" of the American male. While post-modern feminism may, with considerable justification, retrospectively denigrate his soft-core pornography as destructive to feminine liberation, Hefner did, nevertheless, manage to strike at the heart of the American frontier-type mentality by arguing for a sensual and hedonistic lifestyle in which the male was as conscious of the various types of wines and brands of electronic equipment as he was of the latest NFL scores. In effect, Hefner's *Playboy* arrived to fill a vacuum. In an age of increasing upward mobility, the magazine helped the American male "come to terms in an age of affluence and know how to hold himself" (History Channel - 1997). Yet, Hefner himself was a Puritan. He operated his empire on a diet of fried chicken and Pepsi-Cola, was uneasy at all social functions, and hardly maintained the sensuous lifestyle espoused in his magazine. If anything, he was a workaholic in the best tradition of the America of the 50's. He was, in effect, a personification of the Calvinist ethic applied to sexuality. The results of his work, however, were hardly Puritanical. *Playboy* paid the highest fees to writers of fiction and non-fiction, thereby attracting the leading and most controversial writers. From within a soft-core pornographic magazine, which on the average devoted less than ten percent of its print space to photographs of naked women, Hefner launched a political reevaluation of nearly every aspect of American society.

Yet, the elation of the youth of the 60's and 70's was tempered by the further discovery in the 80's, that while a certain part of the population had been working on developing new social values that championed intra-individual respect, another part of it had been busy organizing what one astute cultural critic called, "The Fleecing of America." In keeping with the tradition of "profit at all cost," many became rich overnight selling

manufacturing companies for their real estate value, harnessing the newly available technologies, merging companies and leaving employees jobless.

This development of an “over-class” had profound demoralizing effects on the culture. A sense of irony which had originally developed as a reaction to social issues now became attached to a general disbelief in the equity of the American mercantile system. While up to now, Americans had conceived of the process of becoming rich as a process requiring hard work and the building of businesses, they now witnessed capital-rich individuals investing their capital in stocks rather than in new job-creating ventures. As never before, Americans got a taste of the profound disappointment a person feels when h/she sees that the requirements for success are no longer ambition and hard-work but capital placed in rising foreign markets.

Irony, however, when taken to its extreme, can become a crippling impediment to creative production. Bly is wise to caution Americans that the notion of “nothing works” leaves us impoverished and disheartened. Having categorically come to disbelieve in all that which is past, we lose the capacity to believe at all. And without belief how can there be any standard that is held higher than another? The ironist, in the extreme case, tends to refuse all ideas as ideology. Seeing the interests embedded in an ideology h/she discounts it and, tragically enough, does not bother to ask if the idea has any merit. This negation is a fitting example of how reason can be used irrational when subjected to fear. Fearing falling into subservience the ironist makes an error of logical fallacy. H/she uses the following paradigm: 1. Ideology leads to subservience; 2. Ideologies contain ideas and convictions; 3. Therefore, ideas and convictions lead to subservience. The loss of Reverence to which Paul Ricoeur alludes in his work is the result of this fear of subservience.

Irony, however, in and of itself, cannot produce a viable future. It is effective as an agent which collapses and levels but it cannot lead to the type of positive foundational thinking necessary for the establishment of a new moral and social order that replaces that which has been leveled. It can prepare the way, but a different sentiment must carry the project of reconstruction through. In *The Fountainhead*, the principal character, Howard Roark, speaking for the man of accomplishment, states: “If you can find a man who takes reality seriously, you will have found a great man.” What Rand was trying to convey through Roarke’s categorical statement was that self-deprecating or culture-deprecating humor cannot lead to greatness of thought or accomplishment. A certain Reverence is eventually needed if we are to go beyond self-criticism and arrive at self-creation.

Yet, can such self-creation occur without some criterion of “wrongness?” Richard Rorty in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* suggests that contemporary culture lacks such

a “criterion of wrongness.” He writes, “Once upon a time we felt a need to worship something which lay beyond the visible world. Beginning in the seventeenth century we tried to substitute a love of truth for a love of God, treating the world described by science as a quasi divinity. Beginning at the end of the eighteenth century we tried to substitute a love of ourselves for a love of scientific truth, a worship of our own deep spiritual or poetic nature, treated as one more quasi divinity...[today, we are at a junction] where we no longer worship *anything*, where we treat *nothing* as a quasi divinity, where we treat *everything*---our language, our conscience, our community---as a product of time and chance” (1989: 5-6, 22).

Rorty’s thesis is worth investigating further, for he is pointing to the manner in which America’s conception of “the good” and “the bad” has changed over time and how this has profoundly affected every sector of American culture including the family. Perhaps the settlement of this tense relationship between what is considered “socially good” and “socially evil” will constitute America’s final and most productive debate. It will certainly help explain why, as Bly points out, a disturbing majority of Americans are left with the feeling that “nothing works.” It is not that “nothing works,” but that “nothing is settled yet.”

The Depersonification of Evil in American Culture

Irony has many manifestations and meanings. It can be an expression of fear, incertitude, anger, or creative self-seeking. One thing, however, remains constant in the experiencing and expression of irony: For a person who holds a strong belief in the role of “divine” forces in the management of the world, the expression of irony is reserved for use towards what the person considers counter to the will of the divine force in which h/she believes. Even then, the irony may be considered sinful, for it may be seen as a trivializing of the severity of the transgression brought by the force which opposes the divine. In a culture given to understanding paradox and the chaotic nature of certain human affairs, irony may be acceptable as a humorous outlet in impossible situations which require the faithful to be religious but which also require a “heaven-knows-what” attitude in order that stress be manageable. Poverty-stricken cultures will use such irony to transcend the discouragement of their daily lives while maintaining a belief in the divine, even if that belief must be maintained against all odds. But the irony cannot be directed at the divine in which the belief is invested. Such an act would in itself would constitute a suspension of belief. That is why many religions do not permit confrontation between the person and h/her God and encourage somber and respectful prayer or meditation, while sometimes tolerating folk jokes which caricaturize divine personages.

In a secular society, on the other hand, irony becomes a tool used by free agents in a variety of situations. Two individuals holding opposing interests can turn their personal senses of irony against one another and each feel justified in doing so. In such secular situations, irony is not used to affirm virtue as much as it is used to reject an opposing viewpoint. Being that the position of irony is not used in the defense of an absolute position it is open to *personification*. It becomes the representation of human will, a will freed from obligations towards the divine and allowed to represent human secular interest. In a secular society, the extent of irony expressed by an individual can never totally indicate h/her moral fiber, for irony is used by anyone with a need to affirm a position against another or defend against a position that is being imposed from the outside.

So, irony, when expressed in a secularized society, becomes itself an expression of a citizen's recognition that viewpoint is not essentially absolute but socially constructed and, therefore, continually negotiable. In secularized societies, irony becomes not only confirmation of the lesser role played by a belief in the divine, but the rising belief in a world governed by human interest and the phenomenon of circumstance and chance. A given life is no longer seen as a "destiny" or "fate" but as an "outcome" of action and circumstance. This, as I will try to show, has profound consequences on our notions of "good" and "evil."

Americans have for a long time now referred to themselves as "winners" or "losers." What goes unnoticed in this uncharitable identification of an individual's place within the American mercantile dream is the fact that at some point in its history America let go of the idea of "providence" and embraced the idea of "chance." Success was no longer based on God's will or personal merit but on getting a "lucky break" to top-up one's personal efforts.

Weber has written extensively and eloquently on how the Protestant religious ethic led to a culture of intense mercantile activity (1930). But Weber's analysis makes a quantum leap from the early Puritan community to the later development of bureaucratic capitalism. There were many other events along the way which moved America away from the "upright" community-oriented industriousness of the early Puritans and brought it to its present culture of self-centered entrepreneurship. These developments played a very important role in changing the mentality of Americans and the relationships they maintained with one another and the rest of the world.

The early Puritans were faced with a moral dilemma. It was the same problematic which had traditionally faced the Hebraic-Christian world. While the Rig Veda of the Hindu religion begins with the words, "And then there was light..." the Hebraic-Christian account of creation begins with a sour note. Adam and Eve are created by an all-powerful

God who instructs them not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge in The Garden of Eden. The two siblings ignore God's command and eat the forbidden fruit. Later, when God confronts the disobedient couple, they point to a serpent and blame it for seducing them into disobeying God's work. Here, Christians and Jews are faced with a difficult puzzle. If God was powerful enough to create an entire world with all its species of living beings, how was it that He could not, or chose not to, create a world in which there was no entity capable of influencing Adam and Eve to go against His will? The answer to this puzzle lay in one of two explanations: Either God had planted evil in the world to use it to test and fortify the resolve and goodness of humans, or else, evil was a force external to God's plans and had invaded the world with the express purpose of countering God's goodness. The devil was either God's helper or adversary.

In the Old Testament of the Bible, it is explained that the devil was originally a prince of light and fell in disfavor with God who banished him from Heaven. The devil's actions, thereafter, are depicted as the actions of a slighted subordinate seeking revenge. Yet, the interesting thing about this explanation is that the devil, originally being part of God's creation, may have the ability and possibility of redeeming himself. It would certainly seem that God had for reasons, best known to Himself, decided to spare the devil's life (unless the angels are all immortal and cannot be destroyed even by their creator) and preferred to banish him from Heaven rather than end his existence. For the follower of the Hebraic-Christian tradition this tension between the idea of God as ruler of the entire universe and the idea that even God cannot control everything has profoundly disturbing consequences.

The human community must choose some explanation which allows it to go about its daily life and administer daily justice within the community without falling into ideological chaos. The need for such a functional explanation is further made urgent by the fact that the devil appears in many passages of scripture and under many guises. His presence is not always readily apparent. He is the Lucifer of Isaiah (Isaiah 14:12), the Belial of St. Paul (2 Corinthians 6:15), the Beelzebub in the Gospel of Luke (Luke: 6:15), and the Satan who attempts to corrupt Christ away from his mission by promising him supernatural powers and easy riches (Luke 4:1-13 and Matthew 4:1-11). There is no way of ignoring the representation of evil in the person of this Satan or devil unless one chooses one of two ideological positions: God and the devil do not exist to begin with, or God exists but the devil was a creation of human scripture and is a non-existent entity but a convenient excuse for humanity's refusal to comply with God's commandments. Outside of those two options, one is left having to contend with the above dilemma. And it was left

to the Hebrews and the Christians to adopt the devil as a living personality to be contended with and explained in terms of his birthplace and mission.

This task was further complicated by the fact that the Old Testament described two very different places where souls could occupy following death. One was heaven, the other was hell and purgatory. Heaven is easy to integrate into one's logical mind: it is a place administered by angels and God's chosen favorites. But hell is more problematic. It is a place of punishment and torture reserved by God for erring humans, and it is not administered by angels but by demons who are part of Satan's troupe. The devout person is forced to face the troublesome question: are the demons in hell working for God or the devil, or both? Who signs their paychecks?

One thing which remained clear for Christians, regardless of how they explained the relationship between God and the devil, was the fact that the devil was extremely proud and expressed this pride through an unrelenting conspiracy against goodness and humility. His presence, represented by qualities such as pride, fear, despair, falsehood and avarice, became embodied in a visual representation in the third and fourth centuries. Half-man, half-beast, he was depicted as an entity capable of changing his form to suit the needs of the moment (Russel: 1981). He was, therefore, both a spirit as well as a constantly-changing embodiment of spirit. The only way in which he could be intercepted was through constant vigilance.

This vigilant awareness of the devil as a force to be contended with in daily life reached its zenith during medieval times in Europe. Manichaeism, a heretic movement of the middle ages, advanced the idea that the world was ruled by two equally powerful forces: the force of good represented by God and the force of evil represented by Satan. For the typical medieval man, Manichaeism offered a convenient way to deal with the proverbial problematic of God and the devil---the new paradigm allowed medieval people to categorize all events and deeds according to whether they emanated from God or Satan (Le Goff, [1964] 1981: 160-161). This paradigm made no room for fine nuances in deeds. A thing was either good or evil. Needless to say, this categorical "black and white" conception of life left no room for tolerance. It also created a strong belief in the supernatural and led to a proliferation of magical practices, again classified as "black" or "white," the works of "wizards" or "saints."

The first English Congregationalists who arrived on the shores of Massachusetts Bay brought with them this primordial fear of the devil and the visual representations associated with the devil's persona. But their conception of evil was soon transformed by the realities of the new world. For one, it was vaster than the small polluted spaces of Europe which they had left behind. And while the European landscape was spoiled and

already ravaged by what Europeans held to be the work of the devil, America was virgin territory. Convinced that they had been brought to a corner of the world reserved for them by God, the early settlers stressed the ascendancy of good while cautioning against the dangers of evil. It was easy to relegate the devil to secondary importance because the environment encouraged a vision which was unspoiled by the ravages of centuries of European decay. The Manichaen paradigm, assigning equal strength to God and Satan, was replaced by an ideology of good. The devil was recognized as a threat but only in so far as he was a left-over of the old world.

Thomas Tillam, one of the early settlers, wrote a poem upon his arrival in Massachusetts. It demonstrates this change in attitude:

Methinks, I have the Lambe of God thus speake
 Come my deare little flocke, who for my sake
 Have lefte your Country, dearest friends, and goods
 And hazarded your lives o'th raging floods
 Posses this Country; free from all anoye
 Here I'le bee with you, heare you shall Injoye
 My sabbaths, sacraments, my minestrye
 And ordinances in their puritye
 But yet beware of Satans wyllye baites
 Hee lurkes amongs yow, Cunningly he waits...
 (quoted in Meserole, 1968: 397-398, cited in Delbanco).

While the poem demonstrates an active fear of the devil, it also reveals that the new Puritans were not quite certain what form the devil would take in this new world. Cut off from Europe and its long-standing religious rituals and icons, they could only hope that by remaining loyal to the "good" they would be spared the ravages of evil.

This determination to remain loyal to the good placed a tremendous responsibility on the Puritans of New England. They were keenly aware that they had been born of the original sin of Adam and Eve and had even been sent a messiah who had come and accepted to die to exonerate their sins. They could not easily revert back to the Manichaen conception of good and evil which made a person's life a matter of chance, being that at any given moment the individual could be invaded either by the force of God or Satan. The Puritans could not easily lay the blame on the influence of external forces. While they recognized the devil as an ever-present force, they held that their ultimate business was with God and that the ultimate responsibility for that relationship rested squarely on the shoulders of the human community. They had to remain at the mercy of God's grace, and attempt to earn it without ever knowing whether that grace would be conferred or not. And when things seemed to indicate that God was not sending good fortune their way (as happened often in the harsh climate of the original settlements), they had to consider all setbacks as lessons sent by God to a community that had yet to earn its place in providence. Rarely did they consider the possibility that setbacks which affected entire communities

might be the work of the devil. To have done so would have been to negate Protestant's ideology of "ultimate personal responsibility."

Divested of the "open admissions" of the Church of England---the automatic bestowal of forgiveness and grace to anyone who requested them---the early Puritans had nothing but their conscience and their unwavering belief in God to count on. Luther and Calvin had seen to this. Deprived of automatic acceptance by God, they could only hope for and wait for God to transform their souls and, only then, accept them into His keeping. The early Puritan religion, therefore, was not a religion of initiation but of transformation. It rejected the notion that a community could be built around the principles of rational self-interest. What the Puritan required of himself or herself was a complete transformation of the inner and the outer until they were one and expressive of God's divine plan.

Such transformation required a complete overhaul of the soul. The Puritans did not subscribe to the medieval notion of "cardinal" sins. They were concerned with a soul's existing tendency to sin, rather than the specific acts connected to specific sins which could invade a person without warning. The confessional was impossible for them, because they insisted on a total inner transformation which would eliminate the propensity for sin. It was no good to sin, confess and then start over again on a weekly basis. The sinner was not the victim of specific deficiencies but the victim of an overall deficiency. As Bainton states it, "sins cannot be treated singly because the very nature of man is so perverted that he needs to be drastically remade" (1952: 29). The Puritan could not count on communal salvation through membership in a common church holding privileged access to God. Each person was isolated and alone in his or her quest for salvation. Lineage, association, and common good works were of lesser importance than the individual's relentless struggle to exonerate h/herself from a legacy of sin.

Thus, the traditional "privilege" of grace was torn away from the individual by John Calvin. He stated emphatically that there was no salvation for man, except that which h/she might achieve by h/her own individual efforts. For Calvin, the human being was guilty unless h/she could prove h/herself innocent. He wrote, "First, we must begin with a sense of individual wretchedness, filling us with despondency as if we were spiritually dead. This effect is produced when the original and hereditary depravity of our nature is set before us as the source of all evil..." (cited in Nisbet, 1973: 210). It was a terribly heavy responsibility which Calvin imposed on the individual. While he took away the authority and supremacy of the clergy as they had existed under the Catholic Church, he put the individual under an even greater unbending authority: that of God Himself. The problem for the early Calvinists and the Huguenots and Puritans who followed them was that this

God was unknown and His dictates were not as clear as had been those of the Catholic institutions.

The Puritans were, therefore, as far removed from the Manichaen conception of random visitations of good and evil in the same soul as they were from our modern conception of luck. Representing the Puritan interpretation of unexpected events, the theologian, Thomas Cooper, sermonized that the thing “which seems Chance to us, is as a word of God acquainting us with his will” (quoted in Thomas, 1619: 79; cited in Delbanco: 1994: 75). All events, regardless of their nature, were governed by God’s will. Man participated by adhering to that will but was powerless to influence it. It was not surprising, therefore, that, with time, the Puritans developed a self-righteousness which sometimes bordered on haughtiness. It was ironic that a religion supposedly basing itself on New Testament Biblical text turned Jesus Christ’s saying, “You shall all be as innocent as children” into the belief that children were not to be trusted and had to have the “evil” driven out of them through strict and unrelenting discipline which included corporal punishment. And equally ironic was the fact that another saying of Christ, “I have come to bring a sword between father and son, mother and daughter,” was set aside and replaced with an ethic which strengthened the obligations of obedience of children towards their parents.

Nor was it easy for the Puritan to know what was Godly and Christian and what was not. The pious stance of the church-going citizen counted for little in the end, for Calvin had specified that everyone was guilty coming into the game of life. Satan could just as easily remain in the soul of a church-goer as anyone else. As Weber explained with considerable insight in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, the Puritan, deprived of any guarantee that h/she was doing well in the heavenly realm, had no recourse than to evaluate h/herself in the worldly realm (1930). Did a person keep a clean home? Were the children well-dressed and courteous? Was business taken care of with integrity and diligence? These were the questions which pre-occupied the Puritan who believed that meticulous attention to worldly affairs was the best way of gaining a place in God’s favor. Civil conventions became quite important, for they permitted the evaluation of a person’s worldly behavior. Ironically enough, however, this group of uncompromising and severe followers of God were the first modern individuals, for in their quest for a worldly accounting of behavior they set the stage for the secularization of society which was to follow in the 19th and 20th century.

The notion of sin, thus, changed according to the change in the focus of the Puritan’s attention. While medieval Catholicism had venerated poverty and abstention from ambitious expansion, the Puritan adopted prosperity and industriousness as the highest

good. With the Puritans, two of the cardinal sins of Catholicism became amplified into quasi-Satanic vices: the sin of sloth and the sin of lust. With this, the Puritan transformed the traditional notion of the devil as a proud, ambitious and greedy entity into one which abhorred work and loved pleasure. In effect, the Puritans turned sin on its head to accommodate their civic project. Ironically enough, contemporary business continues to follow the Puritan definition of sin: sloth and a love of pleasure at the expense of productivity are still considered more dangerous characteristics than are pride, ambition and greed.

So, Satan was no longer seen as an avenger but more as a corruptive influence whose main function was to get in the way of a person's transformative experience of the divine. He was more of a nuisance than a worthwhile adversary of God. While Puritan preachers spent the major portion of their sermons identifying the many ways in which the devil could weave his way into human affairs, many of their sermons were civic discourses on issues of debt-payment and upright living in the working community.

In essence, the early Puritans, by rejecting the Manichaeic dualism, fell into a "monism" which placed God as the central actor in human history. Darkness in such a world-view was not seen as a power in itself but a state in which there was the absence of light. God was the light and the darkness was the product of human sloth and unconsciousness. The individual, in such a world-view, was continuously subjected to what Paul Ricoeur calls "the fear of not loving enough" (1967: 45). There was always another hurdle to be crossed, always another corner of the soul to be examined. It is a wonder that the early Puritans did not drive themselves mad with this collective self-critique. They might have relented had they realized the terrible effects this constant St. Augustinian abnegation of the self would have on later generations of Americans and how the explosive irony of those subsequent generations would be a direct response to the legacy of this original pretension at perfection which would survive relatively intact right through the Victorian age.

The early Puritan's piety did not go unchallenged, however. The Enlightenment struck at the heart of the doctrine of original sin and divine pre-determination by affirming the ability of the human being to chart and achieve h/her own destiny. Satan and the concept of evil were, by necessity, pushed to the background, for without the absolute stewardship of God the interference of the devil was obsolete and of no consequence. By making himself in the image of his own conscience, post-Enlightenment man took upon himself the onerous responsibility of remaking the world and doing so with honor. He recognized the existence of God, but also affirmed that the world was God's "machine"

and now delivered into the hands of human caretakers who had a certain responsibility towards the divine but also a counter-balancing role as trustees.

With the arrival of the Enlightenment, a schism developed in American society between those who sought to maintain loyalty to an all-wise God and those who insisted that responsibility for the world rested on “humankind” alone.

Benjamin Franklin, who was renowned for his refusal to blame himself for anything, and whom Bly disparagingly identifies as the original American “sibling,” preferred to use the word “erratum” instead of the word “sin,” affirming a new cosmology of the will: “If the Creature [man] is thus limited in his Actions, being able to do only such things as God would have him to do, and not being able to refuse doing what God would have done; then he can have no such Thing as Liberty, Free-Will or Power to do or refrain an Action” ([1725] 1962). Franklin could not comprehend how a person could believe in a God who made possible certain human traits and then proceeded to punish those who exhibited them. He rejected the notion that a person could be inherently evil and he sought to explain actions through the citing of circumstance. He echoed the Enlightenment belief that a person’s moral character could be molded and influenced through the construction of an appropriate surrounding environment. In effect, Franklin was one of the earliest major American thinkers to “rationalize” human behavior by citing “mitigating circumstances.” He would have felt very at home in contemporary American juvenile courts.

Arguing against Franklin and proponents of the new “rational morality” were thinkers like Jonathan Edwards who believed that an action was to be judged on its own merit with no regard to preceding circumstance (Edwards, [1754] 1957: 350-356). Edwards used the notion of free agency to argue against the evasion of personal responsibility. He affirmed that God might be behind the various events of a person’s life, but what the person made of h/her life and the kind of person h/she became was h/her responsibility and h/her’s alone. Franklin and Edwards could have been transplanted into the 1990’s as political candidates and their debates would have been very similar to the debates of conservatives and liberals. One might have voted against capital punishment, the other in favor of it.

The view of human agency which based itself on “rational morality” led to a theodicy which affirmed that the world was the best of all possible worlds, directed by a rationality which transcended short-term set-backs. This “functional” rationality which took over eighteenth century America left Americans with a far more uncomfortable dilemma than the one they faced when attempting to follow the Puritan ideal of seeking salvation without possessing any clear method for doing so. The notion that the world was governed by a force, human or divine, which made for the best of all possible worlds left the

individual in a situation where h/she had to somehow accept a basic contradiction: the idea of a world headed in a positive, rational direction and the contradictory image of a world beset by evils which remained unexplained. Americans faced what Immanuel Kant explained when he discussed the metaphysical bankruptcy of the eighteenth century theodicies: "...none [theodicies] have managed to justify the moral wisdom at work in the government of the world against the doubts which arise out of your experience of the world" ([1791] 1973: 290). Americans were robbed of the notion of evil and its progenitor, Satan, but were required to continue contending with evil manifestations.

Andrew Delbanco sums up this dilemma in his seminal work, *The Death of Satan*. "In earlier times, descriptions of moral experience had been dominated by a fascinating seducer let loose by God, whose victims, both goaded and guilty, nevertheless felt responsible for themselves. This devil had now entered his death throes. He had once been, along with the God who unleashed him, an immensely powerful symbol for the compatibility of responsibility and predestination---a unity which many people still felt in the depths of their experience, but of which they were no longer able to speak" (1995: 88-89).

Delbanco's erudite study also explains the advent of notions of "chance" in American society. He cites the Civil War as a watershed event which robbed Americans of any facile belief in providence. While the Civil War was originally rationalized by the North as a war against evil---the evil of slavery---it later degenerated into a baffling exposition of how lives were subject to good or bad luck. Delbanco describes how soldiers on both sides developed a cynical attitude towards life in order to make the fear and confusion of dying at the hands of their own countrymen manageable. Gambling became fashionable amongst the troops and bets were laid on everything from the anticipated hour of the start of the battle to the number who would be left dead to long-range forecasts of how long a given soldier might survive (Delbanco, 1995: 143-146). The fact that both the North and South were basically Americans problematized any easy demonization of the opponent. It was not possible to turn this into a religious war in which the other side was considered propelled by the forces of God's opponents, for both sides were Christians. Although ideologues in the North tried to represent southern slavery as the work of evil men, for many, in the North as well as the South, the destruction which they saw all around them became an indication that there was no fixed sense to life and that a given man's life could end momentarily, without the explanation of providential philosophy. It is no wonder then that soldier's began carrying talismans with them, and adopted superstitious practices as a way of managing their lack of influence of events (Delbanco, 1995: 147).

Delbanco continues his analysis into the twentieth century and points out that the arrival of immigrants in the U.S. opened the way for a conception of America as a land of “opportunity.” The notion that a person could build a successful life by grace of a political and economic system which existed independently of divine intervention permitted a further development of belief in “chance” and “luck” as central factors in a given life-path. While many prayed to God for forgiveness, support and guidance, others realized that in entrepreneurial America a person was nowhere without the secular intervention of “lady luck.”

This movement towards “chance” and its accompanying element of risk produced a distancing between God and the individual, for in many *époques* God had been used not only as a source for moral laws but as reassurance that there was some sense to the unpredictability of nature. But the more mankind arrived at “mastering nature,” the more it approached a view of the universe in which the only unpredictable thing was “bad” or “good” luck. While in religious societies a person embarking on a mission was seen off with the good wishes of “May, God go with you,” h/she was now seen off with: “Good luck.”

God’s loss of power in human affairs was directly connected to humankind’s increase in control over nature and human society. The demise of the aristocracies further contributed to this secularization, for after the fall of the king or queen who claimed direct contact with the divine, there came a break in the vertical association between the man or woman on the street and the angels in heaven who supposedly used the monarch to reach the people.

Contemporary American society should be examined in the light of all of the above transformations. America is no longer a culture which categorically and unanimously affirms the existence of God or those forces which might seek to contravene His wishes---at least not officially, even though a large number of Americans continue to believe in God and his (or her) providence. In most quarters, the mere labeling of something as “evil” can draw looks of surprise. A person frequently categorizing things as “good” and “evil” would not be seen as a righteous individual but as a categorically intolerant one. We have traveled far from the early Puritans.

This “depersonalization” of evil has had profound influences on the American family. The heads of a family conventionally governed the behavior of their offspring and peers through reference points of “good” and “bad.” Much of a parent’s authority was accepted without serious debate because the parent was seen as a representative of the divine force which regulated the universe. The parent was the nurturer and the enforcer of divine will. With secularization, the parent was divested of some of his regulatory powers.

H/she could no longer justify a convention or rule by stating: "It is God's will." Some explanations had to be offered and these explanations, being secular ones, were subjected to secular debate. It was through the channel of secularization that children and youth found a voice with which to contest and deconstruct some of the premises put forth by their elders. Removed from under the authority of an ever-watchful and punishing God, youth and adults discovered "self-reflectivity" and took upon themselves the difficult task of navigating through life with a set of eclectic rules and standards.

So when we speak of family, of father, of mother, of children, and of grandparents we should recognize that, except for families which maintain a very active and dialogical relationship between family members who are governed by religious belief, we are faced with familial ties which are freed from a recognition of divine intervention. As Nietzsche said, "If God is dead, then everything becomes possible." Incertitude is the price we pay for the privilege of writing our own Commandments.

Critics such as Bly who mourn the passing of "traditional" society also attempt to be politically current and support the idea of a secular society which operates free from ideologies. But the two concepts are incompatible. A community exists only when there is a common religious or social belief. An amalgamation of individuals does not make for a communal setting. It provides the population necessary for a community but does not automatically guarantee that a communal spirit will form. For such a spirit to form and include the various families which make up a region there must be some common project which is more inclusive than the project of self-gratification. We have already witnessed people living in small neighborhoods but who hardly speak to one another. This is not as much due to a growing population given to anonymity but a population which is left without a common set of beliefs, conventions, and projects. The proliferation of interests and lifestyles has increased individual and group liberties but not contributed to the expansion of the communal feeling. Where local projects have been adopted this communal spirit has returned.

Yet, the modern notions of "chance" and "luck" and the belief in the American individual's ability to forge his financial destiny with a bit of help from "lady luck" have of late been weakened by corporate down-sizing and a slacking economy. Americans have been left with neither "chance" or "luck" as valid explanations of present events, while remaining sorely disabled to return to notions of divine providence and "good" and "evil."

The Puritans "recast" evil by imagining it installed in the person of the citizen. In doing this they decreased the role of the devil as an outside agency. Contemporary America has continued this project and removed notions of evil from the self and replaced these with the notion of "personal history" as an explanation for wrong-doing. An 11-year-old and a

13-year old shoot their classmates with high-powered rifles with complete impunity and the evening's broadcast attempts to explain the behavior by citing the fact that one of the boys had been slighted by a girl and had been feeling very depressed. It does not cite why the other 500,000 13-year-old slighted that same week in America did not similarly go berserk. Yet, thinking Americans are still left with the task of explaining how such things can occur.

8

Summary

I have tried to show in preceding sections that “irony” and the weakening of the traditional Hebraic-Christian “providential” ethic are not random events. They are “consequences” of a chronological through-line of human experience which has proceeded from vertical aristocratic traditions to a horizontal democratic culture. This perilous journey out of the secure cosmology of a universe in the debt of some original sin and into the insecurity of a rational morality subject to continuous and frequent reevaluation has placed Americans in the difficult position of creating a new society while revising the fallacies of preceding ones. This should not move us to panic on a moral level but should imbue us with a certain optimism regarding the possibility of emerging from this époque of incertitude with a stronger and healthier culture.

As I argued in the introduction to this work, “moral panics” occur in époques when “shame” overwhelms “pride.” A culture content with its image of itself would not fall prey to “moral panics” nor the demagoguery that can follow in the wake of a period of incertitude in which anxiety leads individuals to long for “final solutions.”

America has come a long way since its inception. Americans are more sexually and emotionally open than their Puritan ancestors. But their mission has changed little. Americans are still trying to build a society that is free from the authoritarianism of old-world convention but one which is morally integral and just. Exactly as the Puritans tried to go beyond the superficiality of the Catholic Church’s indulgences and arrive at a personal communion with the Divine, we continue to seek to arrive at a society which can be imbued by a moral ethic without reverting back to the theocracy of a priestly council or the patriarchy of a male-dominated family. While the Puritans sought a personal workable contract of self-transformation with God, we now seek a similar contract, except now the significant God is the God in the persons of others and in the persona of our own awareness of ourselves.

Our “culture of irony” and the manner in which we have “depersonalized” notions of evil and the devil are part of this attempt to remain true to universal aspects of ourselves while breaking away from the constrictions of convention-bound society which, if applied in a modern technological context, might lead to considerable social dysfunction. The return to the Victorian family in which children were seen but not heard would be a feeble solution for a culture in which some youth who are just past childhood possess computer skills superior to those possessed by their parents while others carry revolvers. Similarly, to deliver this technologically-advanced society into the hands of a group of elders who lived through the American depression and still carry with them conservative fears that

there might not be enough for everyone if we do not practice caution in all affairs would be like tying up a teenager to a bicycle and asking h/her to pedal a hundred miles to work instead of taking the bus.

We have made a quantum leap forward and some of our grandparents have not kept up with the changing times. When time had come for social and political change, the principal impediments were the grandparents. Let us trace a three-generation family and see what we have as actual working material: Imagine a 29-year-old "sibling" requiring initiation into adulthood by h/her parents and his grandparents. The parent(s) of that youth was(were) born in 1944 and was(were) 24 years old when the child was born in 1968 at the height of the "hippie movement." In 1968, the father was busy trying to reform, usually without success, his own father who was born in 1913 and who is now 84. If our 29-year-old grew up without adequate contact with the grandfather, it is mostly because h/her father and the grandfather at some point had a falling out which excluded intergenerational intimacy. Mobility is not enough of a reason for family disconnections. The generation of the 60's which came of age turned against its parents to create a more liberal America. It would be hypocritical now for those same individuals to turn back to the parents they fought and say, "We need your help to put our son into shape." The grandparents would be sore pressed to know what to do, especially in a culture which now possesses clearly less moral guidelines than did the cultures existent between the 1920's and 1950's. They might say, "Well, when we were parents, this is the way we handled it..." And that would be enough to reawaken the wounds of the 60's generation, because many were not impressed with the way their parents did things or felt things.

In fact what Bly does not recognize is that there have developed twin generations which, when all is said and done, have very much in common. The parents of the 60's who gave birth to our 29 year-old who still lives at home were themselves in a state of transition. They were raised by parents who in turn had been raised at the start of the century within the strict dictates of patriarchal Victorian society. These offspring of the Victorians had a feeling that their childhood hadn't been exactly right and they communicated this by telling their children, "You have it much better off than we did." In a way, they signaled to their children that they could take on a social project and advance with it without being disowned. They themselves did not possess the certainty to make a categorical stand as did their "flower" children, but they at least did not beat the social revolution out of them and learned to accept the notion of sensuality before marriage, the rights of blacks to a fair existence, the rights of women to share in the meaningful work of the community, and the rights of citizens to fight back against corporations spewing poison into the environment.

The foundations for America's horizontal society were laid already in the 40's and 50's by a generation which discovered open enthusiasm and used it to build the world's most advanced technological base. It remained for their children to add the final revisions that would decrease the abuses of previous époques. The children of that revisionist cohort of the 60's and 70's, the "Generation X'ers," are in the position of maintenance workers sent into a garden that has already been planted. They may occupy themselves trimming the trees, worrying about the style of the benches, shifting things from one place to another. But they do not question the soil of the garden because they grew up with the parents who retilled the soil. And that garden was an increasingly democratic place, where a child could at least hope to be heard if not altogether understood or loved. The generation gap of the 90's is not as pronounced as that of the 60's. Both youth and their parents today, for the most part, have less conflict regarding sexual issues than previous parent-youth cohorts; it seems as if the one issue which has bedeviled American culture since its inception and provided it with multiple political platforms is losing its punch. The "lack of affect" to which Bly refers may include this sense of "easiness" which youth possess. They are not faced with the issues which troubled the youth of the 60's and 70's. The absence of a sense of urgency is, therefore, quite understandable.

So our analysis of the American family and the corporate culture which seems to have such an important influence on parental behavior and sibling reactions should take the above facts into account first.

Bly blames modern psychology for having created uncertainty and guilt in late twentieth-century parents. It is as if psychological theories about the needs of children had rendered the parents unsure of themselves. What Bly does not mention is that the parents made the psychologists necessary in the first place. You cannot arrive in the home of a parent who is dealing well with h/her children and maintaining a happy and evolving household and begin lecturing on techniques for "effective" parenthood. The parent would laugh at you and wonder just what it is that you are trying to repair and perhaps even offer you a valium. If there is incertitude it is because previous generations felt too certain of their child-rearing ideologies and undeservedly so. The incertitude has functional properties.

Our present state of discomfort may make us look back longingly and enviously at pre-industrial society or even look across the world at cultures which continue to follow neat proscribed cultural norms, 50 garlands for this, 40 lashes for that and 90 lashes for the other. But such nostalgia will neither help us understand how we came to be where we are nor show us where we can get to.

The explanation which cites industrialization as the principal cause of family breakdown is, therefore, a limited and superficial one. Industrialization is a coincidental and compounding variable rather than a fully causative one. On the theoretical level, this explanation assumes that effective parenthood and family coherence are dependent on the amount of time spent by the father and/or mother in the home. While "time spent with parents" is an important element for a child, there are other factors which are of equal importance. We must give equal attention to the moral identities of the parents while they are in their home and the quality of their contact with their children. Some parents might do well to spend as little time with their children as possible, so irrational and painful is their influence.

Also, to suggest that the removal of the father from the home as a workplace to the factory or office greatly diminished his ability to tend to the emotional needs of his family is to subscribe to limiting ideas about human potential. First, it is to assume that the father, following his "abduction" to the public workplace, did sincerely try and nurture his family when he was at home and that the nurturing was not sufficient. Many men, actually, withdrew to the basement to fiddle with tools and wood, or, worse yet, to bars where they traded adolescent jokes with singular disregard for the loneliness of their children. Second, it is to assume that a person's energy is limited and that all mental and physical resources have been used and proven insufficient. Both explanations presuppose a certain state of equilibrium and normalcy in the parent. It is assumed that the parent is capable of being a good parent but is prevented from doing so by an industrial culture which appropriates the parent's time and energies.

But such presuppositions do not take into account the following contradicting considerations: 1) Many fathers never bothered to nurture their children and left such nurturing to the mother regardless of how many hours they spent in their office; for many, the baseball scores in the newspapers were sufficient reason to tell their sons and daughters, "Daddy is busy now"; 2) Both parents had parents of their own and grew into adults bringing with them either the strengths or limitations that were planted in them as a result of the kind of culture occupied by their own parents.

Analysts who gaze on contemporary youth and blame their parents and call for a return of the grandparents somehow miss the point that there is a continuum of emotional identity between one generation and the next. If a 25-year-old parent is incompetent as a parent, chances are that h/her own parent is not much any better, for the ability and the emotional capacity to be a good parent, is affected by the type of parenting one received. A bitter view of life is impossible for the person who has been loved and supported through life. While intervening social circumstances have a great influence, these influences cannot

completely extinguish a father's or mother's willingness and ability to be a good parent. We rationalize too generously when we point to the external environment and identify it as the prime mover of familial relationships. Such explanations are not sufficiently cognizant of what we have learned from social and psychological studies of the body and of childhood. Another unproductive reductionism occurs when we concentrate our attention completely on the "psyche" of a family as if it were a primordial core of identity unconnected to the economic and socio-political environment.

In the first part of this work I have committed what Bly identifies as the sin of "deconstruction." He explains that this act emanates from the disappointment a person feels with the love received from previous generations. Perhaps some deconstruction projects are acts of vengeance, as Bly suggests. But there is the deconstruction project which comes into play because a higher standard of explanation is desired. One cannot accept Bly's propositions without questioning them because they are at times lacking in historical understanding. One wishes to question and examine them also because uncritical acceptance leads one to the conclusion that there is something reprehensible about the way America has conducted itself in the latter half of the twentieth century. It does not provide enough sympathy for the individuals who have been part of this difficult period of history.

Such summary criticism of the culture does not recognize adequately enough the noble aspects of the American experiment nor the shortcomings of previous generations. Most of all it does not recognize enough the ability of youth to create meanings which transcend the limitations of the environments in which they are placed. If the youth of the sixties could stand against and reverse what had become a stifling sexual and organizational ethic, there is no reason why the youth of this decade and the next will not reach a similar point of self-affirmation.

Benjamin Franklin (Bly's first sibling) may have had a very valid point in stating that he could not understand why people are blamed for being what they are if God is truly governing the world. Franklin's skepticism towards blame-laying reveals an interesting theoretical position, even though this position is not overtly stated in his writings. If the human being cannot be held fully accountable for h/her actions, then there must be some strong causative link between behavior in the present and influence from the environment or from the past. Franklin's position suggests that we are not all free agents who can at will erase the effects exercised on us by the world. It reveals, without arguing for moral abdication, that we can attempt to construct our own social realities, preferably in an atmosphere which is free from guilt and self-loathing, but that we should make some room for set-backs. It is in this spirit which we should meditate on the history of the family in America, the forces that have acted upon it, and the potentials for the future.

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A family is, therefore, both the prime mover of a culture as well as a reflection of its positive accomplishments as well as social problems. Often the social problems and accomplishments are both a product of family sentiment as well as the result of long through-lines of history in which each époque attempts to respond to its own realities as well as legacies, problems, customs, mores and automatisms left-over from previous époques. We are in debt to our pasts as well as excited by our futures.

If we are to arrive at an authentic, if not simplified, understanding of a culture, then these multiple forces must be taken into account and the effects of each measured in view of the effects of the others. The psychology of the individual has innumerable influences on the social processes and historical events which follow from that psychology. Yet, that psychology is dependent on the environments set in place through present policies as well as antecedent customs. Thus, it should not surprise us if we observe members of a culture reacting in the present to a build-up of social pressure which is historical and which may, for all surface appearances, have little remaining connection with the present. Cultures are not altogether docile; they simple require a delay time for reaction.

A case in point of such inter-époque inter-activity is the long journey taken by America to move away from the Puritan and Victorian notions of the family, only to find itself continuing to struggle with the “consequences” of these original cultures.

In academia we see a struggle between social scientists who adhere to the old Enlightenment notion of reason above sentiment, while other social scientists are using sentiment as the ink with which new social policy and theory is written. Similarly, in the area of education for children and youth, we see a convergence of classical and contemporary studies in an uneasy relationship which leaves the American educational system in a continual state of incertitude.

As for the family, it has survived hundreds of years of deprivation, war, work strife and ideological battles to be what it is today: a family in need of a new modus operandi and a renewed social contract between the men and women who constitute its members. The subject of intimacy and love between men and women remains one of the most important issues in America. Sadly enough, it will not be resolved until both genders understand that it is not “femininity” or “masculinity” that is the problem but the authoritative notions of patriarchy and matriarchy and the potential totalitarianism of both, together with their deleterious effects on the children who are the upcoming generations of adults.

We have progressed through societies where children had few rights. Yet we now give children perhaps too much freedom, without asking for enough accountability. Yet, it

is unavoidable that societies which seek to establish functional institutions exaggerate in one direction or another during periods of transition. It should not surprise us, for example, that the youth of the 1960's turned against their parents and affirmed their right to free sexuality; such sexuality had been forbidden during many previous époques and the exaggerations of the 60's and 70's might have very well reflected the repressive exaggerations of previous époques. In many instances, change at the social level is the product of "reaction" to existing norms and, being reactive, such evolutionary forces can be emotional and even sometimes become self-defeating by going over too far in the direction of opposition, to an extent where opposition becomes an automatic reaction rather than a considered opinion.

But exaggeration and a certain "heaviness of heart" which comes from the incertitude unleashed by periods of transition should not make us devalue the changes taking place. Society has a way of finding its even keel as time progresses. Were this not true civilization would have ended long ago.

In this work I have tried to show how religion, economics and individual psychology are intimately tied to one another and mutually influential. Just as a family suffers particular stresses in an uncertain economy, so do economies suffer unproductively when there is painful discourse in families. As I have tried to show, children are the vulnerable agents in this intersection between the material and psychological world and the feelings with which they are brought up will play a central role in setting the tone of the culture's "spirit." A population of individuals who are melancholic cannot produce a joyful nation.

The central point of my analysis has been to suggest that in all époques the functional as well as dysfunctional should be equally accepted as semiotic clues to the deeper meanings of human acts and institutions. Moral panics get in the way of such a balanced and calm view of what is transpiring in a given époque. Such panics lay blame on the visible product of culture without necessarily investigating its invisible components. In such partial analysis, an important theoretical lesson is lost: the lesson that what is functional for one époque, when transformed into a rigid custom, can become destructive in another where different customs are needed.

Industrialization demonstrated to us that we could change customs to accommodate a changing social and urban landscape. And it also offered us the opportunity to realize, once our adaptation was complete, that no social custom, outside of the basic prohibitions against incest, murder and outright theft, needed to be written in stone. This realization lies at the root of much of the changes that have appeared in America in the twentieth century. As I have tried to show in the section on "culture of irony" and the manner in which

proverbial notions of “good” and “evil” have been personified and demystified, we are living in an époque which is on the verge of having once again to define for itself “what is the good life.” America’s pre-occupation with the “moral” rather than the “divine,” barring the arrival of a messiah, will ensure the continuity of a pragmatic philosophy which attempts to outline the shape of a rationally just society without abnegating the rights of groups nor reverting to mystical dogma.

If America does not rise to meet the above challenge it may then slip into a series of scenarios which will leave it diminished, with recovery a long, if not impossible, process. This slide backwards will come principally because our original noble ideas of individualism will have degenerated into unbridled self-interest. And this self-interest will have been allowed to become epidemic due to our original notion of “equal democratic rights.” We will have extended the original notion of “equal rights” in front of the laws of the state to mean “equal rights” without the responsibility of accountability in the production of cultural product. By turning our backs on that which seeks to achieve excellence without partisan limitation we will have rejected the Promethean and chosen to live with a mirthless common denominator which is in the reach of all but also singularly uninspiring to all and particularly demoralizing for the excellent. In such a culture of flatness, no one will have the authority or inspiration or support to set ground-breaking standards. We will have reverted to ages (such as the dark ages) when intelligent people actually feared for their lives and stayed silent while abandoning the public podiums to the most ignorant and most prejudiced. “Popular culture,” while it affords us a democratic environment for the sharing of issues and programs of entertainment which appeal to the widest audience possible, also poses a danger to the continuation of the original American love of excellence in form as well as content.

Such degradation of the culture will occur only if we do not learn the rules of basic logical thinking. There is a phenomenon which I call “parallel fallacy.” It is a typically “childish” way of approaching a given problem. The phenomenon works a little like this: the individual not wanting a given social reality in h/her life, in addition to getting rid of that social reality gets rid of whatever else was co-present in parallel to that social reality at the moment that the aversion was first felt. A fitting example is some feminists’ aversion to masculinity. Because a patriarch is also masculine, such feminists tend to associate masculinity with patriarchy and reach the conclusion that a “soft” (feminized) male will not be a patriarch. This, of course, is wishful thinking. A “soft” male can be as emotionally shut-off, as lazy when it comes to house work and child-rearing, and as uncompromising when it comes to subjugating the woman to the status of a secondary economic worker. He

can accomplish all the above with a blank stare. Masculinity is a “parallel” reality to “patriarchy” and not explanatory of the patriarchal ethic.

Such “parallel fallacy” has become widespread. Many students and even teachers in academic institutions proceed using simplistic and erroneous points of departure. Such summary reductions makes us vulnerable to “total” explanations and “total” solutions. Yet totalitarianism, although it ministers in the short-term to a social incertitude, has profoundly damaging effects.

“Parallel fallacy” emerges from theoretical positions. North American sociology has been split between notions of “functionalism” and notions of “subjective interaction.” The former notion leads to the conclusion that there is some “invisible wisdom” which directs the course of a society even in times of crisis. It is an evolutionary theory. The notion of subjective interaction suggests that reality is constructed and negotiated by social actors. It leads to the conclusion that society is determined by its inhabitants and can be altered at will. The positing of one position against another, however, may be an unproductive association. One does not need to exclude the other. Subjects do interact to construct reality, but they do so under a certain long-standing code of societal survival which ensures that the long-range outcomes of those interactions are not altogether destructive.

A period of crisis, therefore, is also a period of potential renewal. Precisely because of the moral and structural incertitude facing it, America has once again found the opportunity to take a further step in actualizing its democratic ideologies. We should be careful not to construct notions of conspiracy theories to explain away present difficulties but realize that they are occurring in complex times when technology and human labor are coming in conflict with one another. A nation given to summary dictatorial solutions would have arrested the development of our social problems earlier on and would have created perhaps a cleaner but infinitely less free society. Americans do not seem to want such summary solutions and prefer dialogue and representation as channels for conflict resolution. The collapse of authoritarian regimes such as that of the Soviet Union have demonstrated that high modernity and totalitarianism are not functionally compatible.

If such dialogism is to exist and produce positive results Americans will have to accept the family as it is in its present state and forms and then proceed from there to create a workable model of a functional family whose components are those taken from the families of today, not the fictionalized families of yesterday. In this work I have suggested that the child is the prime building block of a society and that we should become more sensitive to the needs and the feelings of the child, not in its role as a “material” extension of our own lives, but as a feeling entity separate from us. It is, in fact, the child who now offers us the opportunity to proceed with a socially reconstructive project. Children resist

change when they are happy with their lives. But when they are not, they are singularly cooperative with adults who attempt to set up environments which take their needs into consideration.

If children could vote at elections and pass legislation we would have a different type of society. Admittedly, there might be an ice cream parlor on every corner and video games may be nationalized and distributed to each home free of charge, but we can be certain that they would pass one legislative law with a respectable majority of votes: a limitation to the number of hours which an individual can work legally in a given five-day week. Children might also express the opinion that, in all parts of the world, adults have operated according to a multiplicity of fallacies which they have formalized as “self-evident” truths. Anthony Cohen, meditating on “self-consciousness” and the relationship between the individual and society, writes:

Whether our fallacies are the consequences of our credulity, of our theoretical prejudices or of the complexities of translation, the consequence has been the same. The societies we have constructed have been overordered, implausibly systematized, bloodlessly regimented by organizational principles; and we therefore have good reason to doubt their veracity” (1994: 109).

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Robert Bly remains convinced that a culture without initiation rites risks losing its moorings. While he sympathizes with the reasons for the feminist movement’s repeated refusals to sanction initiation rites for young men, he disagrees with the sanction itself. He writes, “Some women oppose initiation for young men because they mistakenly think it is always brutal, or it takes away resources that should be given to young women. Even though women have continued to succeed better in civilizing their daughters than men have in civilizing their sons, nevertheless we know that girls’ souls are also dying. Girls are joining gangs; a certain hardness and brutality is appearing; girls are also in prison now for shooting of total strangers. Millions of young women are taking drugs, and their primary pressure to enter drugs and violence comes from unsocialized males” (181).

Bly writes as if disorder and self-destructiveness are particularly male phenomena. He begins his book by arguing for the existence of “life-destructive” forces within the human personality but then gradually changes the existence of this supposedly universal “death-force” to be the creation of “unsocialized males.” What he does not consider is that the emergence of such life-destructive forces is not based on gender but on which gender is socialized to be most receptive to these forces. The child is born innocent and cooperative. Every carnage of history, every world war has been begun and executed by fully-socialized males who were initiated into the “arts” of war. One cannot see how a repetition of the

ancient initiation rites will in any way serve to write a different history for upcoming generations of children.

I suggest that the hardening and brutality to which Bly refers is not an endemic quality of the human race, to be controlled and eradicated through layers of vertical socialization processes, but “reactions” to a series of stimuli which leave the individual feeling that uncooperativeness is a better adaptive response than cooperativeness. Such a sentiment is more a “defense” than it is the real emotional identity of the person. In fact, as the works of Janov (1970 and Miles (1993) and myself have shown, beneath every human defense is a child needing love and affirmation. That core of humanity will remain intact if the family environment permits it and if the wider socio-economic ecology of the culture does not contradict it.

Bly berates contemporary American---and indeed Global culture---for holding its youth in “disdain and contempt.” Yet his own thesis contains a similar misunderstanding of youth, for he adheres so much to the primordialism of the parental instinct that he fails to trust youth to emerge out of their historical experience with useful insights and a knowledge of the world that is equal to that of any other generation. He predicts increasing across-the-board incoherence. Yet, the coherence which Bly seeks is a literate coherence, one which is connected to the use of the written word and usually restricted to well-educated cadres. He refers to thousands of years of accumulated knowledge and the imminent danger of its loss, but does not mention that during those thousands of years a very small percentage of the world’s population were literate or privy to such “accumulated” knowledge. If anything, we now have the best informed mass of population we have ever had. Should the federal and state governments decide to turn most Americans into relatively competent writers and readers they can do so. A small building erected in every neighborhood and offering remedial help would be a good start. So would be turning off every television network one day per week.

In effect, America creates a world of magic and fantasy for its children and then catapults them into a bureaucratized, pragmatic adult world where magic, myth and spirituality are of secondary importance and where self-critique overrides the joy impulse. It infantilizes its children with myriad of Disney characters and then expects these same children to enjoy entering a real world that is more often than not governed by brutal bottom-line thinking. Bly mourns that we are depriving our children of the richness of mythology. Evidence indicates the opposite, however. We are overloading our children with mythology. Whether that myth be a heroic mickey mouse or a bat-human driving some impossibly sophisticated automobile or a reluctant world-traveler chasing after a one-eyed cyclops, the net result is the same: adulthood is a crashing bore in comparison. If

anything, it is the adults who need less heartless pragmatism and more mythology in their lives. And the key to that transformation lies not only in the hands of legislators, parents and children, but, just as importantly, in the hands of those who control the economic policies and activities of the nation.

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