

## Reflecting on men

Intense interest in the psychology of the father shows that we have reached an extremely interesting point in the evolution of our culture's consciousness concerning *men*. Perhaps for the first time, a category called 'men' can be said to exist, bringing with it a burgeoning 'men's movement'. In the past, it has been men who defined all the other categories that there might be; men themselves were simply part of the intellectual furniture. Now, men are looked at in the ways in which they, historically, have looked at everything else. Men are the object of scrutiny, the object of analysis, the object of dissection on many levels. It is revealing that, hitherto, the only field in which men have been looked at like this has been criminology.

While a monolith called 'men' may not truly exist, there can be little doubt that a crisis exists within masculinity and for men.<sup>1</sup> Differing definitions of masculinity, differing paths to achieve that state, and differing conceptions of what might be done to facilitate the emergence of so-called 'true' masculinity presently coexist in conditions of extreme competitiveness and intense mutual suspicion. Each view of masculinity seeks to knock out the other views and, as a pluralist, I am neither surprised nor dismayed at this state of affairs. However, if, as seems possible, one particular perspective manages to direct people's attention away from the fact that alternative perspectives exist, then that is not a positive thing at all. In this chapter, I try to recover the diversity that resides in 'men', 'masculinity' and the 'men's movement' – without having recourse to the kind of synthesis that would itself constitute a special kind of violent hegemony.

My personal interest in the father needs to be looked at against the particular Western cultural backdrop I have been describing. So, too, does my exploration of male psychology in general, which has led to the setting up of a male psychology workshop under the auspices of the Society of Analytical Psychology in London. This group of around twenty men is

composed of analysts and psychotherapists and I have found participation in the group to be emotionally enhancing and intellectually productive. I am in favor of a period in which men work on certain problems in settings restricted to men, though I see this as a temporary phase. There is a parallel to be drawn with the early days of the women's movement in which women-only consciousness-raising groups were a widely accepted vehicle.

However, we should be very careful about drawing parallels between what is happening in the field of the study of men and what has happened and is happening in feminism. On the one hand, there are some striking similarities – and I have mentioned the perceived need for single-sex groups and workshops. Moreover, there are some marked similarities between the social anthropology of the women's movement and what is becoming called the men's movement. For example, there is the intellectual dispute between the essentialists (archetypalists) and those who take a social, constructivist and cultural approach to sexual difference.<sup>2</sup> These disputes lead to patterns of leadership and discipleship – whether sought or unsought – and the resultant schisms are also common to both the women's and men's movements. On the other hand – and this is something that should not be forgotten by men who participate in the men's movement – men and women do *not* start in the same or even similar places. By every political, social and economic indicator most men are in the driver's seat (but not all, if one considers the socioeconomic positions of black men or disabled men or homeless men). Therefore, too much concentration on the vulnerable, sobbing little boy within each powerful man, coupled with too little concentration on the oppressive economic inequality that is bound up with gender division, will lead only to a self-deceiving outcome. (We will return to the connections between men, 'the patriarchy', and capitalism later in the chapter.)

Nowadays men are being seen as 'the problem'.<sup>3</sup> This new stance reverses the trend of centuries in medicine, religion and art in which women – the other sex, the second sex, the dark sex – have been the problem men have set themselves to solve. Men are depicted these days as sexually abusing, domestically violent, planet-despoiling creatures. There is little doubt that the point is a valid one. But, at the same time, a completely different set of images of men has arisen, at least in Western countries. One image of men, called the 'new man', is dramatically different. This is a breed of men who support the rights of women and children and who are ecologically aware and non-violent. From a psychological perspective, we are faced with a split in the cultural image of men. Theory tells us that splits within the unconscious come about

when something or someone causes unbearable anxiety. Perhaps our current preoccupation with men is sensed on a collective level as potentially so upsetting to the existing social order that we are afflicted with an anxiety that foments the split between the bad old man and the good new man – between macho-man and the SNAG (the sensitive new age guy). In the previous chapter we saw how a particular version of this split affected discussions of the ‘good-enough father’ and I argued for an acceptance of a state of affairs in which the stuff of the good father and the stuff of the bad father are taken as the same stuff. Similarly, new men and old men are made out of the same stuff.

The split in the image of men exists not only as a social reality in which there are two or more different kinds of men. The splits also exist within any man living in a culture that seems to support these different kinds of men. The personal and collective dimensions of psychic and social reality are intertwined. Therefore, there are really no averages, which means that the neat divisions we are making into new man and old man do not work. While nearly all attempts to categorize men fail for one reason or another, ironically the impulse to categorize men remains. From a pluralistic point of view, it is important that we do not attempt to mute the competition between the various subdivisions of the category of ‘men’. I argue explicitly that it is valuable that there should be a diversity of competing models of masculinity and that men should expose themselves to as many differing models as they can.

In my workshops on fathers and on men, I ask people to do an exercise. I describe a rating scale running from 0 to 10 that represents the continuum from ‘old man’ to ‘new man’. Old man counts as 0 and new man counts as 10. If the participant is a man, he is asked to place himself on this scale. If the participant is a woman (not all workshops are restricted to men), then she is asked to score the most significant man in her life on the scale. Somewhat naively, I thought this would be a straightforward exercise and we would just zip around the room with people saying, 6, 1, 2, 5, 8 and so on. But it did not happen like that.

Many people insisted on giving multiple answers. A man would say that he saw himself as a 2 and a 9. Sometimes, this would be expressed more precisely: ‘When I’m with a woman, I’m more likely to be a 9, at the new man end, but when I’m with men I find myself a 2 or a 3, right at the old man end.’ There was also a good deal of resistance to doing the exercise and there would be queries about whether the father could be counted as a significant man! (Generally, heterosexual women have scored their husbands or partners. Lesbian women have scored their fathers.)

At one particular workshop, the discussion preceding the exercise went

on for longer than usual as participants rigorously disputed the paradigm. When it came to one man’s turn to score himself he said, ‘Look, I’m absolutely fed up with all this farting around. Before we started, I thought I was a 9 but right now I’m a 2!’

One man said, ‘I would say I’m a 2. I consider myself traditional but I’m trying to modify myself.’ This response is typical; the number of people who mentioned words like ‘modify’ or ‘change’ was very high. Some referred to ‘improve’. Another man said, ‘When I thought about it, I thought 5. I think this isn’t out of not wanting to choose, but out of confusion. The struggle, uncertainty and confusion. I don’t want to live out a cultural fantasy.’ I mused on this reply. Which end of the spectrum contained the cultural fantasy? Or was the spectrum itself a cultural fantasy?

Another man said, ‘When you first put the question, I thought 8 or 9. I’m the youngest of three sons and my father was a “disappeared alcoholic”. Now I’m in a household where I’m the chief breadwinner, doing all the outside chores. I’m focused on my business. I see myself as slipping back to 6 and falling.’ A man said, ‘I raised my first son for three months. Now I’m by myself. I was resentful at her breastfeeding. I couldn’t wait for it to stop and ease her out. I still have some of that. As a doctor, I work with women, helping with births, etc. I think I’m 2 and 9.’

Many women tended to mock the exercise but – and here the analyst in me speaks – what they actually said is extremely revealing. One woman said, ‘I think he’s a 2, but *he* thinks he’s an 8.’ Another said, ‘I’ve been married for thirty-three years. My husband started as a 3 and after bringing up the children, which was terribly important to him, I would think he’s a 4.’ Still another: ‘Well, if you push the 1 to 5 to one side and the 5 to 10 to the other side, he’s in the abyss.’

I liked the exercise precisely because it is so flawed. It raises the question of whether things have changed in the ways suggested by the images of the new man. Think of the contemporary use in advertisements for baby and child products: Images of a young, attentive, involved father bathing the baby, frolicking on the beach, offering a spoon of food. This handsome, curly-haired male is offered as a new role model. Often, he is naked or stripped to the waist. Then we discover something interesting about his torso – not just that he has no breasts, but that, very often, he has no chest hair either. He is an all-loving, paternal androgyne. Some social scientists would argue that he is a lie as well. From a behavioral standpoint, they say, nothing has changed. Men do not do housework or look after children – and the existence of a few pockets of progressive and well-heeled masculinity should not blind us to that more pervasive reality.

Yet it is clear that *something* is in the process of changing. Without disparaging the view from social science, I think there is a psychological dimension to be considered here that is very difficult to measure which I want to call an 'aspirational atmosphere'. Men may not live up to the rhetoric of their developing ideals, but the tension between the empiricism of the social scientist and the cultural intuition of the depth psychologist needs to be maintained and I want to try to keep both of these competing viewpoints alive.

A social science viewpoint supports the idea that it is very difficult to present a comprehensive and consensual categorization of men. Thinking about maleness and about its cultural extension, masculinity, one has to accept the ineffable plurality of the term 'men'. As I said, there is no monolith that one can address. There is an acute need to achieve a balance between identity and difference as these concepts apply to men.

In some ways and in some respects, there are issues and problems that affect all men alike. So there is an identity here. But in some ways and in some respects there are problems to which men respond quite differently. Difference and identity coexist. The great difficulty, when theorizing about men, is whether to generalize or not. If one issues a general statement, one is firmly in the identity camp. If one issues a statement colored by particularity, one is in the difference camp. I think that this tension, too, has to be lived with. There is an identity of interests, concerns and psychology that affects all men. There is also an immense diversity of interests, concerns and psychologies based, *au fond*, on the plurality of sexuality itself. There is, therefore, an acute need to achieve a balance between identity and difference as these concepts apply to men.<sup>4</sup>

Today, for whatever reason, it seems that nobody talks about masculinity save in relation to notions of change. Even those who seek a timeless definition of the 'archetypal' masculine do so in reaction to the idea that men are changing or have changed and in sorrow that an immutable version of traditional masculinity has been lost. Although I have stated on many occasions that I am utterly in disagreement with the idea that there are archetypal patterns of masculinity and femininity that are potentially available, at differing levels of consciousness, to persons of either sex, I have been interested to note that many accounts of female development include the *changing* nature of her so-called 'masculine' side (animus, in Jungian jargon). The titles of the massive array of books on male psychology and masculinity show this same preoccupation with change, even if the change is said to be of a retrospective kind, meaning cultural change in the direction of what has been the case, as shown, for instance, in Greek myths or Christian symbolism. An example of this is the subtitle

to Robert Hopcke's book *Men's Dreams, Men's Healing*. The subtitle says 'A psychotherapist explores a new view of masculinity through Jungian dreamwork'.<sup>5</sup> Books that are most definitely not written from an archetypal perspective show the same tendency. For example, Lynne Segal's authoritative overview has as a subtitle 'Changing masculinities, changing men'.<sup>6</sup> Even a rather conservative psychoanalytic text is entitled *Toward a New Psychology of Men*.<sup>7</sup>

*En passant*, I want to say something about the explosion of books on men's issues. I have noted nearly one hundred books on men in English since 1985 and no doubt there are many more that I have not seen. Almost every publisher has rushed to get in on this act. Some reviewers have wondered whether it might not be that these books are going to be read primarily by women. Although I understand the point that is being made about male resistance to self-reflection and to change, I would prefer to get a different implication out of this publishing phenomenon. If men are on the move at some level, then, given that they control the sources of economic and political power, including the production of ideology and representations of sexual difference, the factoring in of male political power to the idea of male change could be decisive. In other words, we could be confronted with a social movement as significant as feminism, but with possession of all the resources from which feminism has been excluded.

## THE MEN'S MOVEMENT

I want to move on now to discuss the contemporary men's movement and I am going to carry out a dissection of it. I am conscious of the limitations of such an approach because the various subdivisions ultimately overlap. However, unless we try to clarify what is meant by the 'men's movement', it will be difficult to proceed, and we may not realize how multifaceted the men's movement is, or has become. I have been able to identify at least four overlapping aspects of the men's movement. We can call these the *experiential*, the *sociopolitical*, the *mythopoetic*, and the *gay men's* movements. Readers who are familiar with the field are unlikely to find this a particularly radical or disturbing division; I hope such readers will appreciate my intention to begin from diversity rather than from a false and repressive unity.

The *experiential* subdivision of the men's movement operates in an overtly therapeutic mode. Advertisements of groups for men offer the chance to experience feelings and the opportunity for participants to connect up with the small boy-child within themselves. The group offers

a chance to cry, a chance to hug, a chance to confess, and so forth. The missing baby boy – big boys don't cry – is often a part of a man's experience of conventional psychotherapy. So, although sometimes the experiential men's movement does not formally operate as therapy, it certainly operates in a therapeutic style. The weakness of the therapeutically- and experientially-oriented aspect of the men's movement is that it may rest content with superficial persona changes. It is significant that, these days, one encounters mockery about hugging. Hugging not long ago became the symbol of a certain kind of man-to-man relating, and, in its true form, it was once very threatening because it upset our ideas about what heterosexual masculinity is. Nowadays, the practice of indiscriminate hugging has degenerated into a ritual cliché, suggesting that experiential work on male issues can operate only on a behavioral level, so that participants end up merely by producing a different form of socially approved behavior. The remaining virtue of the experiential men's movement has to do with the re-evaluation of relations to women and to the mother and a good deal of work on new and more nurturing models of fathering may also be considered as part of the experiential men's movement.

The second subdivision of the men's movement that I want to discuss, the *sociopolitical* men's movement, is informed by the notion that men are sexist and oppressive. The overt aim of this particular aspect of the men's movement is to make an alliance with feminism. Men can learn from feminism, and should work toward the betterment of social and economic conditions for women, based on an attempt to achieve cooperative and non-hierarchical ways of relating and believing. The sociopolitical men's movement is growing in size in nearly all the Western countries, most dramatically in the United States where there are now over four hundred men's studies courses. But that field is also growing in Europe with extraordinary rapidity. I can illustrate what I have indicated as the main features of the sociopolitical men's movement by quoting extracts from a statement drawn up at the end of a conference organized in 1988 by the British Sociological Association with the title *Men, Masculinities and Social Theory*. This document was a position statement drawn up by the organizers of the conference, which was attended by many of the men who are prominent in the sociopolitical aspect of the men's movement in Britain.<sup>8</sup>

'First, we see it as necessary for men to support the development of feminist scholarship in general, and women's studies in particular. . . . Second, we consider the proper focus for men interested and concerned about gender and gender politics is men, ourselves.' This means that men,

save where they have to for academic reasons, should not write about women. Men should write about men, and they should study men. Men have no right to write about women. 'Thirdly, there is no parity between women's studies and the critique of men. While we see women's studies as being by women, of women, and for women, the critique of men is by both women and men.' Women may write about men but men should not write about women. 'Fourthly, men's critique of men, ourselves, needs to be developed in the light of feminism. This critique needs to be anti-sexist, anti-patriarchal, pro-feminist, and gay affirmative. . . . Fifthly, the underlying task of the critique of men is to change men, ourselves, and other men.' Here again we see the preoccupation with change that I mentioned earlier. 'Lastly, we see it as crucial to attend also to the longer-term implications of men studying men.' Among these is the suggestion that if there is research money for studies in gender research, men should refrain from applying for it. This restriction is explicitly stated.

While I have an enormous amount of sympathy with the goals of the sociopolitical men's movement, I do wonder whether this is not a sort of counterphobic or overdetermined kind of response. Each of these propositions basically boils down to a conclusion based upon an awareness of the asymmetry of men/women relations regarding power. Now there certainly is an asymmetry, but whether or not that asymmetry can best be addressed by these kinds of strategies seems to me to be highly problematic. I have to confess I was amazed when I first read this statement, which comes at the end of an excellent book. But the need for action in the face of gendered inequality is surely pressing just now and the sociopolitical men's movement meets the need. For example, men might begin actively to seek out boys and adolescents in need of mentoring and nurturing. They may become active in the pursuit of fathers' rights while, at the same time, working toward the amelioration of the inequalities that afflict women, especially concerning financial support for single-parent families. Behavior connected with the care of children is surely critical here, as I indicated in the preceding chapters. The sociopolitical men's movement can link up with the experiential men's movement to play a part in the redefining of fatherhood that is a necessity for any re-evaluation of masculinity. This might mean deliberate attempts to discredit certain kinds of utterance and act performed by men, leading, for example, to the challenging of the social supremacy of conventional 'male' values.

The material about the sociopolitical subdivision of the men's movement, especially the relation to feminism, makes a very useful link to the third aspect of the men's movement I want to write about – the *mythopoetic* men's movement. Here, I intend to focus on the work of

Robert Bly, the best-known of a number of leaders of the mythopoetic men's movement.

Bly has identified a malaise in young and early middle-aged American men, especially white middle-class men, a kind of shame for their male identity. This shame has been exacerbated by the rise in feminism and the futility of the Vietnam War. As a result, men either turn into wet beansprout-eating wimps, what he calls 'soft males' – or they turn into dry corporate automata. *Iron John* is Bly's book, which has sold over half a million copies in the United States.<sup>9</sup> *Iron John* is based on a Grimm's fairy tale about the discovery of a hairy man at the bottom of a lake in a swampy, chaotic landscape. In the story the hairy man, Iron John, becomes the mentor of the king's son and supports him in a series of adventures in which he undertakes certain tasks, meets psychologically significant people, and gets married.

Bly's concern is that men have lost contact with their primal Dionysian hairy selves. They no longer know how to achieve that ancient Arthurian maleness through which it is possible to be tough, decisive, and at the same time to love poetry, bird-song, and each other without eliciting peer-group sniggers. Our view of what it means to be grown up, Bly argues, has become banal, naive, and corrupted by crass advertising. Bly regrets the disappearance in the West of extrafamilial Iron John instructors, and the loss of initiation rituals which would enhance the mystique of masculinity. Although Bly writes in a passionate and full-blown style, there is a good deal of tough and coherent argument in his book and I do not agree with those who seek to take the entire work as if it were a poem. Even if it were a poem, the assumptions and outcomes of *Iron John* may still be chewed upon.

The fact that I dwell on Bly's position shows how important I think it to be, even if I profoundly disagree with him. At one stage, before Bly visited Britain to promote his book, I had intended to launch a very savage critique of Bly's work. However, I was horrified at the British reviews of the book, most of which simply laughed at it. And I think this really does need to be discussed: Why did so many reviews ridicule the book? The *Guardian* review claimed that he'd unwittingly written a comic masterpiece on the level of *Diary of a Nobody*. He was compared to the Boy Scouts, to the born-again Baptists; his poetry was mocked. One reviewer said 'Bly's toupée is not the cure for men's problems'. It really was amazing to me how much mockery there was. Even on television, the first question Bly was asked concerned how he felt about the ridicule of his work. Faced with this kind of reaction, it was impossible merely to

criticize – though I am conscious that, in the United States, Bly has received a fair degree of adulation.

I do agree with Bly that there has been a disastrous demythologization or desacralization of culture. The knock-on effects of the decline of religion have been disastrous for men and their conceptions of masculinity. So I also agree that, for many men on the personal level, there are male wounds to be healed. On the political level, however, I am disgusted (and I think Bly is too) at the oppressive social institutions we see today, and the ways in which all of us are implicated in perverse power relating.

Bly's solutions to these crises are highly problematic. He seems to favor father-son bonding of an old type, male mentoring done by men who are not the father, and much more open relating between men. He seeks to create male initiatory structures leading to contact with the wild man within. Large-scale experimental workshops, involving drumming, chanting, dancing, and nakedness, are the vehicle for this sacred reconnection. It should be noted that Bly has disowned the so-called 'warrior weekends', when men go off into the woods to get in touch with some kind of primal aggression within them.

I have many disagreements with Bly, and not a few worries about his work. But I want to stress that I am not worried by the activities and practices of the men's movement – the weekend workshops, the wilderness retreats, the encounter group techniques, and so on. These encounter group practices seem to me to be completely consistent with the ideas of the men's movement. One reason for my not condemning the practices of the mythopoetic men's movement is that it would surely be a case of beams and motes. As someone whose main activity involves sitting, often in silence, while someone lies on a couch from which they can't see me, doing this three times a week or more, for three years or more, encouraging that person to say whatever comes into his or her head, who am I to call Bly's practices weird? Those who critique the mythopoetic men's movement from the point of view of its practices are barking up the wrong tree. Analysis itself, and psychiatry, which are the most kosher kinds of mental health practices, are often utterly bizarre when viewed without pre-existing assumptions.

I want to divide my critique of the mythopoetic men's movement into five parts. First, I want to address certain delusions of sexual difference. Second, I will discover the relationship of men and politics. Third, I will explore questions of nostalgia, responsibility and initiation. Fourth, I will present some views on idealization and religion. And fifth, legitimizing the problem.

## DELUSIONS OF SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

At this stage of the contemporary debate over gender, the focus seems to be on the question of essentialism – whether or not there are innate, universal, unchanging sex-based psychologies. Opposing essentialism is the view that masculinity and femininity are constructed culturally, significantly influenced by socioeconomic pressures, and capable of being understood from a historical perspective as highly mutable. The point here is not which side one takes. The point is that this debate has been foreclosed and prematurely settled within the mythopoetic men's movement, and this is largely due to Bly's writings. I feel it is important to resist any attempt to settle the many questions associated with essentialism.

Bly's ideas about sexual difference need to be questioned. He makes far too sharp a delineation – it's almost a biological difference – between the psychologies and roles of men and women. He underestimates the importance of social and cultural influences, and ignores everything to do with Lacan, feminist theory and social psychology. To justify his argument, Bly depends on what seems to me, as an analytical psychologist, to be a totally out of date, inadequate and reified understanding of the theory of archetypes. In this approach, myths are taken reductively, which limits their usefulness in understanding social and cultural change. For example, Bly does not recognize that if, as he acknowledges, things have changed for men between the 1950s and today, this speaks of something other than archetypes. It speaks of an accelerating cultural process.

Modern archetypal theory is not as archeological or architectural as the version deployed by Bly. There are very real conceptual problems with ideas that depend upon there being a 'bottom' to the psyche – especially when it is a 'male psyche'. Bly writes:

The upper fifty feet or so of water in the male soul is, as we all know, very roiled and turbid these days. So many roles that men have depended on for hundreds of years have dissolved or vanished. Certain activities, such as hunting and pirating, no one wants him to do any more. The Industrial Revolution has separated man from nature and from his family. The only jobs he can get are liable to harm the earth and the atmosphere; in general he doesn't know whether to be ashamed of being a man or not. And yet the structure at the bottom of the male psyche is still as firm as it was twenty thousand years ago. A contemporary man simply has very little help in getting down to it.<sup>10</sup>

A further delusion of sexual difference has to do with the differing roles that Robert Bly ascribes to mother and father. I am familiar with a vast

range of literature on mothering and fathering. But I do not think I have ever met such a sharp distinction as Bly's between what it is that mothers do and what it is that fathers do. Nor do I think I have met an account of mothering and fathering that puts the anatomical sex of the person doing the parenting in such a prominent position. This is extremely problematic. It is also extremely important politically, when one thinks of the theory of the underclass, in which those brought up in single-parent families are given very pessimistic social and psychological prognoses. As I said in Chapters 6 and 7, in my work with single-parent families, I concluded that there are no inevitable psychological problems associated with single parenthood. The main thing single parents and their families suffer from is lack of money.

Bly's personal reasons for writing his book and undertaking his quest are very interesting. I had thought (and had been told) that it was to do with his own father. Indeed, though his avowed interest is in male mentors other than the father, it is notable how frequently his text returns to emotional difficulties connected to the father. Clearly, I share Bly's preoccupation with the father, and I have no problem with the idea that Bly's background, with an overclose relationship with his mother and a cold relationship with an alcoholic father, contributed to his ideas; this kind of connection always exists in psychological theory-making. But then I found material in interviews about his own problems in being a father that I felt I could not ignore. In an interview, Bly said: 'Daughters just seemed to raise themselves. Sons needed a lot of guidance and I had no notion of what to do. I got kind of curious about what a real man is.' On British television Bly said that 'it was sweet and simple to raise daughters'.<sup>11</sup> Now, given what we know about life in the family, I find this an extraordinary basis for Bly's project: That it was sweet and simple to raise daughters. I have a daughter, and I don't think it's sweet and simple . . .

Re-reading *Iron John*, it is clear that Bly's agenda for the father-daughter relationship is confined to improving her potential to be a partner for a man. There is no awareness of the daughter as a person with a destiny outside the home – in the social, political or economic worlds. When the daughter who stops at home becomes a mother, it is hardly surprising that she becomes a mother from whom a son must escape. As I noted with reference to psychoanalysis in Chapter 7, the idea that a mother might want her son to leave home, in a psychological as well as a behavioral sense, is not entertained.

Thinking about the relations between women and men today, James Hillman, who has associated himself with Robert Bly, said the following:

In America, the rise of women coincided with the murders of Jack Kennedy and Martin Luther King, the disheartenment of the Vietnam war, followed by the Reagan years of greed, pretence, and manipulation, and a profound loss of trust in the institutions to which men devote their working days. . . . The men who had given up their soul to media values, and their spirit to corporate aggression, and their sexual values to jogging and Jaguars, of course they fall prey to strong women.<sup>12</sup>

*Of course they fall prey to strong women.* Of course! Prey? Strong women? Naughtily, perhaps, I would like to ask who are these men who have sold their soul to media values? Poets and psychologists like power as much as anyone. Hillman's attitude to feminism may be discerned in his prepublication blurb for a book on the goddess as demonstrating a 'feminism that is not ideological'.<sup>13</sup>

Mentioning Hillman leads to a discussion of the ideological role of analytical (i.e. Jungian) psychology in relation to what I have been calling Bly's delusions of sexual difference. I want openly to dissociate myself from seductive and simplistic conceptions of male (or female) development that involve precise numbers of archetypes, usually four, or precise numbers of the stages in growth in the male psyche,<sup>14</sup> or, as I saw in a pamphlet advertising a book, accounts of male development that invite the reader to score himself for mythopoetic heroism! The way in which Jungian psychology has been hijacked by the mythopoetic movement is a disaster that stifles its progressive potentials. Some analysts have not only been hijacked, but are also in the grip of what is called the 'Stockholm Syndrome'. In Stockholm some people were taken hostage in a bank raid and began to identify with the people who had taken them hostage – rather like what may have happened to Patty Hearst in the United States.

Before I first expressed these views in public, I telephoned several analyst colleagues in the United States, male and female, and told them what I was going to do. 'Thank God!' was the usual reply, and 'I'd like to do it myself but I'm too frightened.' The idea that male and female Jungian analysts across the United States are frightened to protest about certain features of the mythopoetic men's movement and the ways in which it has hijacked their discipline is really very worrying indeed.

## MEN AND POLITICS

Bly makes interesting use of myth and fairytale. But we need to ask: Who

controls these myths politically? Myths are not politically neutral. Who decides which myth is the one to use? My friend and colleague in England, Peter Tatham, has written a quite different kind of book about masculinity.<sup>15</sup> Without succumbing to mythopoetic reductionism, Tatham tells us that his preferred model is Daedalus, the master craftsman and a profoundly anti-heroic figure, able to inspire a plethora of paths to masculinity. Bly's uncritical, mythopoetic use of myth and fairytale fails to disguise a conservative and reactionary element in the mythopoetic men's movement, which has at its heart a backlash against feminism and an uncritical reverence for the nuclear family that harkens back to fundamentalist religions.<sup>16</sup> This acceptance of the benevolence of the nuclear family seems to me to be all the more questionable in view of what we (including Bly) know about men and child sexual (and other) abuse of children of either sex. Bly seems uninterested in discussions of the psychic reality/social reality dynamic as it takes place in the nuclear family. He makes no attempt to remedy the wrongs of the nuclear family; there is no understanding of the nuclear family as a *source* of oppression. The idea seems to be: Get the family working really well, as it used to, with clear-cut divisions between what fathers do and what mothers do, based on clear-cut ('archetypal') divisions between male and female psychology. Then everything will improve. My view is completely different. I believe it is the transgressive styles of family organization – the so-called marginal or deviant lifestyles – that need to be affirmed and put at the center of this debate. What we learn about child-parent relating, for example, by listening to two lesbians bringing up a son together, is far more important than clichés about restoring the father's authority within the family, or achieving the recovery of distinctions between spheres of interest and influence within the family.

There is a further problem about old-style, chauvinistic family men, who are most certainly still the heads of families. As John Rowan, a leading British advocate of the mythopoetic men's movement, but by no means an unquestioning associate of Bly's, has written:

For [men] who have been down into the pool of femininity, the wild man is valuable as a corrective, or further step. For men who have never done the feminine bit at all, who are unreconstructed male chauvinists, the wild man is simply an invitation to be even more aggressive. This is a real danger.<sup>17</sup>

My last point about men, politics, and the mythopoetic men's movement concerns initiation rites. Male initiation rites do separate the men from the boys. But equally, or even more important, they separate the men from the

women. The separation of men from women, the bifurcation around gender, the drawing of a line in the sand, and the compulsory inscription of identity on either side of that line according to anatomy – these actually lie at the heart of oppressive social organization.

### NOSTALGIA, RESPONSIBILITY AND INITIATION

Bly bases his argument on an appeal to ancient cultures and traditions, as if these, too, were politically neutral. But, just as myths are not politically neutral, it is not politically neutral to look at ancient cultures, or indeed to fairytales, for solutions to current problems. If we give in to the nostalgic pull for a return to tradition, we end up returning to the very problems that got us to where we are now. *Might it not be better to try to proceed without a cultural model for a while?* Turning to other cultures, turning to other epochs of our own culture, denies present-day men's responsibility for the world as it is. What is more, looking backward severs us from the possibility of there being positive images of men and of fathers in the world in which we live now. The unquestioned assumption that life-enhancing fathers can only be found outside our own world and time reinforces the impression that fathers in our culture can only be negative, castrating, inhibited and so forth. I would not suggest that my own project that attempts to explore the vicissitudes of erotic and aggressive playback between parents and children provides a comprehensive answer either, but there is the advantage of retaining a critical and psychological outlook on the political landscape.

The nostalgia that has swept America – half a million books – and Germany – four books on male psychology in the top twenty non-fiction books – is a longing for a past in which men and women each knew their place. The mythopoetic movement gives men latitude to claim that they have nothing to do with the oppressions of the patriarchy. Calling it a 'puerarchy' (as some do) settles absolutely nothing.<sup>18</sup> Nothing to worry about! Real men are not patriarchs, so there's nothing to discuss.

It is disingenuous to divorce 'men' from 'the patriarchy'. Those who attempt to do so argue that the patriarchy is a relatively new form of socioeconomic and political organization. It is claimed that the patriarchy was preceded by a matriarchy, which was often as cruel and controlling as any patriarchy, being not at all soft, sensitive and 'feminine'. The point is, anthropological generalizations like these are wheeled out to serve projects based on either the denigration or idealization of women. Of course men have no monopoly on the ruthless misuse of power! The fact that this is so points up the absurdity of running away from today's world

in which men do have power *and* a power complex whereas women have only the complex. Those in the men's movement who look to classical Jungian psychology to provide a theoretical underpinning for what they do and feel will be as disappointed as those in the women's movement were to find that Jungian psychology can often be ahistorical, essentialist, confused between contemporary description and eternal definition, and profoundly conservative. But then again, maybe the present-day North American mythopoetic men's movement wants to be profoundly conservative.

*Could* we begin to think about the possibility of our existing without a clear-cut model of masculinity, or what it means to be a man? Allowing ourselves to exist in a temporary but creative vacuum might allow a new, antitotalitarian position to emerge. The totalitarian state of mind is one which is orderly, fixed, frightened of subtlety, and unable to tolerate contradiction, complexity, and ambiguity. The nostalgia, the yearning that infuses the mythopoetic men's movement is for this orderly world in which men and women have their place. And this is a totalitarian longing.

Looking for a return to ever-stronger initiatory structures all too often collapses into a search for an eternal culture in which traditions and behaviors are clear-cut and everybody knows their place. Today, maybe for the first time in history, we have the exciting (and risky) possibilities that await us in the absence of initiation structures. Perhaps the manly thing to do nowadays is to try to live without the guidance and structures that defined manliness in the past. My suspicion is that initiation, as defined by Bly, could be yet another goal for a 'Top Dog' or 'Top Gun' to pursue – or purchase. Such men will never (and can never) challenge the system that promoted them to the top of the tree.

Actually, there are probably many more initiation structures in contemporary culture than Bly realizes. What about initiations that go on within the family? What about initiations that go on in sexual behavior and in sexual relationships? What about small-scale, non-decorous initiations? We have lost sight of the fact that what look like pale imitations of 'real' initiations – for instance, officers rising up the hierarchy of an institution, becoming a member of an analytical society, getting married – can, if understood and experienced psychologically, be regarded as perfectly initiatory. Why are these small-scale, everyday, non-decorous, non-eternal initiatory structures not hailed as good? This archetypal reductionism is a problem with what I call 'Zürichocentrism'. Zürichocentrism makes it difficult for people with a Jungian outlook to see that there are non-classical models for growth and development and these do not conform to the lineaments of classical myth or fairytale. They exist in their

own, non-decorous right, providing 'mini-rebirths' on an everyday level. Such mini-rebirths involve the inner vision, risk and ordeal that have always characterized initiation.

Haven't there always been complaints about the decline of standards compared to a Golden Age in the past or a Golden Place somewhere else? If we deny other cultures and other epochs anything resembling our own *angst*, then we run the risk of a patronizing racism as we celebrate their so-called 'primitive' virtues. The inherent superiority of the exotic has never been demonstrated and Eurocentric, pseudo-anthropology in Jung's style has surely, by now, been discredited.

To summarize: I am making two frankly contradictory points about men and initiation. First, isn't it exciting that there aren't these structures? And second: There are (if you know how to find them).

In his discussion of initiation, Bly cites the decline of male mentoring. If we take male mentoring absolutely literally, it has to be said that there is a decline; there are, indeed, fewer avenues where older men are sanctioned to help younger men with their development. But do we have to view mentoring so literally? If I look at my own experience, the main mentor I've had has been feminism. I do not only mean females as such. I do not only mean specific theories, books or narratives. The phenomenon of feminism has operated in a mentoring way on me. I am sure I cannot be the only man in that position. I suggest that we need to deliteralize the notion of the mentor.

## IDEALIZATION AND RELIGION

I said earlier that the practices of the mythopoetic men's movement can be compared to therapy. But there may be another analogy to draw. At the core of the mythopoetic men's movement I detect a fantasy of forming a new male religion. In *Iron John*, Marie-Louise von Franz is given a very respectful hearing (which is proof of the fact that a deliteralized mentor is a possibility because von Franz seems to be an acceptable mentor, even though she's a woman). It may be that Bly attended von Franz's lectures in Zürich in the late 1950s or early 1960s. This would partly explain the somewhat dated version of archetypal theory and uncritical acceptance of bourgeois values in Bly's work. Be that as it may, at the end of the book von Franz is quoted as saying that the psyche wants a religious figure, a hairy figure, a 'hairy Christ'. Without realizing it, the movement aspires to becoming a kind of religion – a desire that is inflated and dangerous. As with most religions, there are some fantastic idealizations at work here. For example, the notion that 'displaying' a sword can be detached from

the social reality of male violence urgently needs to be challenged (I will return to this in the next section). Then there is what seems to be a non-credible idealization of male grief:

There is a special figure in men that leads them down into one of their great strengths – the power to grieve. There is a grief in men that has no cause. We can feel it in Bach, Rembrandt, Goya, Homer. I don't mean that women do not feel grief, but a man's grief has a separate tone to it.

I fear the consequences if this idealization of masculinity were to be factored into a religious movement. This is where the danger in the mythopoetic men's movement lies – not in the exercises, the chanting and drumming, or the warrior weekends – but in the fantasy of a male religion with a hairy hypermale Christ at its core.

## LEGITIMIZING THE PROBLEM

What Robert Bly *advocates* unwittingly forms the best *analysis* of how the patriarchy manages to keep everyone enslaved. Let's take his often-quoted assertion that the Wild Man and male violence are not coterminous. This is the very argument that our culture uses when it tells us that our objections to it are excessively personal, or subjective, or caused by our own psychopathology. The world is not deliberately damaging, we are told. Sure, there is a damaging potential but the violence needs to be read as a 'display' (the showing of the sword, not the use of it).

The same kind of pattern can be noted with regard to what Bly says about the Wild Man's sexuality. We are told in *Iron John* that 'The wild man's legendary sexual prowess, combined with the willing attitude of the maidens, produces an attitude of pure wantonness.' Surely this is not an image of male sexuality that needs awakening from sleep. Bly is prescribing the problematic pattern, not, as he intended, suggesting an antidote. The result is to legitimize what exists already, not to change anything.

Bly's legitimation of what exists can be understood more deeply by introducing an important point made by David Tacey in his review of *Iron John*. Tacey argues the point that Bly's version of masculinity is formed from a 'goddess perspective'. I understand Tacey to mean that Bly has got caught in an unconscious feminine identification (and Tacey has confirmed this).<sup>19</sup> On the cover of the paperbacks of the James Bond books there used to be a blurb quoted from a *Time* magazine review from the 1950s or early 1960s, about James Bond himself: 'What every man

would like to be, and every woman would like to have between her sheets.' I think that it may be a case of the Wild Man being not only what every man (including me) might sometimes like to be, but what every man (including me) might sometimes like to have between his sheets. Whether we take a yearning for penetration by the Wild Man on the part of people in the mythopoetic men's movement literally or metaphorically (as symbolizing a form of male initiation), the homosexual cast of the imagery calls into question Bly's unrelenting, revanchist, dogmatic definition of masculinity and the masculine ideal.

### CULTURAL FACTORS

Considering the Bly phenomenon and the mythopoetic men's movement in general, I think there are some specifically American cultural factors to consider. Let's reflect on the following statement:

Megaloid mom worship has got completely out of hand. Our land, subjectively mapped, would have more silver cords and apron strings criss-crossing it than railroads and telephone wires. Mom is everywhere and everything and damned near everybody and from her depends all the rest of the United States. Disguised as good old Mom, dear old Mom, sweet old Mom, your loving Mom, and so on, she is the bride at every funeral and the corpse at every wedding.<sup>20</sup>

It sounds a bit like Hillman or Bly in the 1990s, but this was in fact written by Philip Wylie in 1942 in *Generation of Vipers*, a book which claimed its own inspiration from Jung.

Here is a further quote about Mom:

From dawn until late at night she finds her happiness in doing for her children. The house belongs to them. It must be 'just so'. The meals on the minute, hot and tempting. . . . Everything is in its proper place. Mom knows where it is. . . . Anything the children need or want, Mom will cheerfully get for them. It is the perfect home. . . . Failing to find a comparable peaceful haven in the outside world it is quite likely that one or more of the brood will remain or return to the happy home, forever enwombed.<sup>21</sup>

This was actually written in 1952, and the writer was the Psychiatric Adviser to the Surgeon General of the Army and Navy of the United States of America. He goes on to say that mothers are guilty of emasculating the nation's soldiers. It is vital to note that the fear of male softness and female domination as undermining cultural health and efficiency is a long-

standing trend in the United States. Bly's work must surely be assessed against this background.

### THE GAY MEN'S MOVEMENT, HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE FUTURE FOR MEN

My perception of the mythopoetic men's movement is that it displays a longstanding cultural fear of what is felt to be effeminacy. For example, permission for men to cry is sanctioned by the reassurance that these will be 'real men's tears', not the tears of someone 'soppy' (to use an English epithet). But, at the same time, the mythopoetic men's movement expresses the desire of its adherents to be loved by a male figure such as Iron John or the Wild Man or the hairy Christ. We have already discussed the fear of effeminacy within the mythopoetic men's movement in terms of delusions of sexual difference that accentuate separation of function between male and female parents and foster a nostalgic yearning for a much more settled epoch in which men and, especially, women know their places. It is therefore time to discuss male homosexuality, for fear of homosexuality is what drives fear of becoming effeminate.

Homosexuality is in and of itself non-pathological. This is what studies of the evolution of depth psychological theorizing of homosexuality teaches us. Although in the last decade homosexuality has been declared non-pathological, many theories still abound that are little more than dressed-up prejudices, reflecting current preoccupations and underlying attitudes.<sup>22</sup> We also know that the category of 'the homosexual' is a relatively recent one, constructed toward the end of the last century by doctors and also by homosexual emancipators who were keen to demonstrate the existence of 'homosexuals'.<sup>23</sup> We have learned that homosexuality has been the means by which our culture has sought to regulate sexual and other behavior.<sup>24</sup> Specifically, the dominant culture has employed fear and loathing of homosexuality so that men as a group will be tied in to the role of provider in the family. The pay-off for men has been access to social and political power – though groups of working-class men, or black men, or disabled men would certainly dispute that they possess effective political power. We have to take care when generalizing about men. Nevertheless, when considering today's crisis within masculinity, the role of the category of 'homosexual' cannot be underestimated.

A fantasy about homosexuality is still being used to define what is 'really' masculine. In this sense, homosexuality is tagged as effeminate or even as feminine. A homosexual man is therefore a feminine man (maybe

even the ultimate 'soft man'). This is a formulation that goes back to Freud and Jung. In Freud's understanding of male homosexuality, a man identifies with his mother and so takes himself, or someone standing for himself, as a sexual object. Homosexuality as a form of narcissistic love. But according to Freud, sometimes the identification with mother is so intense that the boy fantasizes himself to be a woman and seeks someone standing in for the father as a sexual object to be receptively embraced.<sup>25</sup> In Jung's understanding of male homosexuality, similarly, the man identifies with his anima, meaning the internal contrasexual (i.e. feminine) element within himself.<sup>26</sup>

Both Freud and Jung have collapsed sexual object choice into sexual identity. Choosing a man to love does not necessarily mean that a man who does so does it as a sort of woman. The homosexual man is usually sure that he is a man and it does not help to understand him to adduce an interior perspective in which it is claimed, and sometimes 'proved', that he is unconsciously a woman. And, since not only homosexual men can sense themselves unconsciously to be women, this fantasy may be taken as a general feature of the bisexual or bivalent nature of male sexuality, whether it appears in a homosexual or a heterosexual man.<sup>27</sup>

In spite of its strictures against Freud, the mythopoetic men's movement has inherited his conflation of sexual object choice and sexual identity, just as Jung did. 'Feminine' traits are rejected by the movement, not just because they spell mother domination or the triumph of feminism, but because they undermine approved masculine identity (including approved mythopoetic masculine identity) and hence, according to this logic, might lead to the worst thing of all: homosexuality. In sum, the mythopoetic men's movement has become fatally infected with a general version of Freudian speculation and prejudice about homosexuality that is these days being challenged even from within psychoanalysis. It is an example of the way that the work of Bly and his followers has foreclosed on questions of what is meant by masculinity. The enormous diversity within the term 'men', and the enormous diversity within the men's movement itself, are lost when one profile or set of characteristics achieves dominance. Bly's hegemonic sexuality replaces earlier hegemonies of sexuality. Particular aspects of masculinity become subordinate, marginal, deviant, problematic according to whatever hegemony holds sway.

Men certainly need to learn from other men and, in particular, the so-called straight community needs to learn from the gay community. The way in which the gay community has responded to the reality of AIDS, particularly at a time when the illness was thought to be a problem only

for homosexuals, offers practical and inspiring models for different variants of masculinity – love between men as a kind of political praxis. Notice the paradox: The group of men regarded by psychoanalysis and Western culture generally as the least 'manly' have become the pioneers, the frontiersmen, the leaders in forging the way through a huge and terrifying territory. In the gay community, one can see novel and original attempts to set up non-hierarchical forms of organization based on love of and between men. There are therefore some links to be made between the gay community and the sociopolitical subdivision of the men's movement. The existence of a thriving gay community undermines a social system that deploys heterosexism to maintain control of women. In family organization and social provision, we see the various connections between heterosexism and male power. Cultural representations of women play a significant role in this. Living a life into which homosexuality has been integrated is in itself a challenge to marriage, the nuclear family and capitalistic social organization. These ideas point up the paucity of any approach to homosexuality that eschews either the psychological or sociopolitical aspects. Indeed, homosexuality is, *par excellence*, the arena in which the personal can be discovered to be political and the political to be personal.

In the previous chapters, I tried to challenge the heterosexist framework within which discussions about family psychology are usually conducted. For instance, I argued that there is no reason to believe lesbians bringing up children will be likely to do a bad job, and that there may be a homosexual primal scene. Indeed, my clinical experience, through a practice in which many patients come from a conventional nuclear family, forbids me even to suggest that the old-style nuclear family ever did a good job. Moreover, it is certainly difficult to theorize around the topic of homosexuality without addressing numerous personal, intellectual and professional issues.

But it does not follow that there is nothing useful depth psychologists can do concerning homosexuality, although I am sure that any search for the precise supposed psychosocial or psychobiological causes of homosexuality is a futile endeavor. It is clear from the immense efforts of the past seventy-five years that a list of etiological factors that would command agreement is a vain hope. Inevitably, the etiological project is utterly implicated in a *psychopathological* project. Neutral exploration of the causes of homosexuality cannot presently take place, at least not within depth psychology. Instead, analysts – gay and straight alike – should try to find out as much as possible about the emotional life and experience of those people whom we should perhaps stop calling

'homosexuals'. On the basis of what is discovered, new theories can be worked out and, in addition, our ideas about heterosexuality will undoubtedly be illuminated and challenged. Nor do I think it is enough to lump homosexuals and heterosexuals together, as Robert Bly does, when he asserts that 'the mythology as I see it does not make a big distinction between homosexual and heterosexual men'.<sup>28</sup> It is another highly revealing example of his sad foreclosing of expressive diversity within masculinity and for men.

### MEN, THE MEN'S MOVEMENT, AND WOMEN

Not everything I have written about male homosexuality applies to lesbianism. Lesbians are twice-oppressed – as women, and then as women who have deviated from a norm prescribed for them. As men, male homosexuals seem more able to reap the rewards of participation in capitalistic organization than female homosexuals. More generally, it is by no means clear that the many and varied changes that the men's movement seeks are changes that will have a positive impact on women. In particular, the mythopoetic men's movement, and the model of male development laid out in *Iron John*, do not seem to have much to say about the psychological relations between women and men. We have seen how the mother is stigmatized, and the king's daughter in *Iron John*, whom the protagonist marries, is strictly a cipher. Perhaps the sociopolitical men's movement has gone too far the other way, doing nothing to discourage a taunt (and this is a quote of a criticism of me made at a meeting) that 'they have bowed the knee to the women'. The experiential men's movement seems to be saying that it has nothing at all to do with male violence, sexual abuse, planetary rape and so forth because its members are 'feeling men'. One goal of the men's movement is to try to make men feel 'good' about being men. I must say that I cannot see why one has to feel good about being a man; I feel ambivalent about it.

Concern with sexual harassment has brought the power imbalance between males and females to the fore. So too has the discussion within psychotherapy and other professions about ethical abuses, mostly perpetrated by male professionals against their largely female clientele. It is now clear that it takes acts of consciousness and legislation to try to create a climate in which professional, educational and health matters are not muddled up with sexual and even social contact. A consensus seems to be emerging in which it is agreed that different kinds of relationship often do not belong together. For example, a doctoral student should not be the object of sexual advances by her supervisor because, if a sexual

relationship developed, it would lead to the existence in parallel of two incompatible relationships. If the two people truly want to pursue a personal relationship, then steps must be taken by the institution concerned to make it possible for the professional relationship to be taken up by another supervisor without damage to the career of any party. If an analyst and patient find that they do indeed want and seem likely to pursue the kind of relationship that is incompatible with their analytic work and the analyst's professional ethics, the analyst must make it clear that the patient should terminate the analysis and consult another analyst, even to discuss whom to see next. Some would advocate that there should then be a substantial period of time (a 'cooling-off period') in which the two people do not have contact with one another so that the patient can discover whether he or she does in fact want to pursue a personal relationship with his or her analyst. The analyst, too, needs time to explore his or her feelings. A period of one year has been suggested. Others argue that the procedure I have outlined is unsatisfactory; once a professional relationship has been established, then no other kind of relationship, such as a sexual relationship, is ever permissible and is always unethical. In either perspective, analytic institutions need to develop procedures to facilitate transfers of patients whose treatments have foundered on this dilemma that can be used in a non-judgmental and therapeutically sound way.

There are some who think that behavioral issues like these, rooted perhaps in the nature of human exchanges, are not important when compared to the major matter of the economic imbalance between men and women. Throughout this book, I have been indicating that I agree that this imbalance is the central background feature to all contemporary discussion of relations between men and women. But I also agree with those who, in a frankly ethical tradition, feel that personal integrity demands that the individual man or woman try to take action in accordance with his or her ideals, even when this feels an almost impossible task. Perhaps the ideal of a partnership between women and men in pursuit of social justice and universal emancipation can never be achieved unless the ethical level is addressed alongside the economic/political and the individual/psychological levels of injustice and alienation. My own work on the father's body as a potential and actual locus for sociopolitical and ethical transformations, and on the primal scene as representative of political and moral processes within the person, is a step in this direction. Similarly, this chapter on men is intended to address these various levels at once. Let me state in closing, therefore, that the ideal of an ethical partnership between women and men in pursuit of

social justice and universal political emancipation is one that I share. Such a partnership cannot be an easy-going one. Women and men are bound to fight and the personal fight cannot be divorced from the continuing political fight. Moreover, men and women share, to varying degrees according to sex, class, race *and* individual circumstances, in a kind of complicity with the grotesque oversimplification and cruelties of patriarchy. But women and men can also share in a rejection of any unified definition of what constitutes 'women' or 'men' and join in a politically significant celebration of the plenitude of meanings inscribed in these words.

## The political person

### PERSON-AS-CONTINGENT

In the previous chapters, I think it was confirmed that, in order to make a contribution to political analysis, depth psychology must face the problem that it is not possible to depict a person divorced from his or her cultural, social, gender, ethnic and, above all, economic and ecological contexts. Psychic reality and sociopolitical reality conjoin.

The general point about the *contingency of the person* – that, being embedded in an environment, we are socially constructed beings – has led to the realization that there is very little that is definitely fixed in the human sciences (no single conception of human nature), no fundamental and determining level in the psychological sphere (no agreement on what is given or constitutional in personality), no insulated gender essence (what used to be called masculine or feminine characteristics).<sup>1</sup> Although this perspective, which (following Richard Rorty) we can call in shorthand *person-as-contingent*,<sup>2</sup> is the dominant one in *fin-de-siècle* social science, its counter-intuitive stress on mutability and relativity means that it is still an ideology of and for intellectuals, swimming in a hostile, populist humanistic sea that favors an epistemology of the fixed, the constitutional and the essential. Neither the wider world nor conventional depth psychology, especially psychodynamics, accept that such things as human nature, constitutional personality, and 'true' men or women do not exist. The advantage of contingency theory is that it recognizes that we cannot in principle distinguish between the constructed nature of our intelligible world and the independent structure of the natural world. Person-as-contingent remains a radical perspective which, save for Lacanian psychoanalysis, has seemed inherently hostile to depth psychology. But even Lacanian theorizing is uncomfortable with the full implications of contingency, having translated or, possibly, distorted the notion of contingency into something fixed, constitutional and essential. As Teresa