

Smith, Douglas. *The Best of Both Worlds: The Poetry of Robert Bly*. Thesis (PhD [English]), University of Manitoba. Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI, 1984. (Publication No. NK57636)

Abstract

This study argues that the poetry of Robert Bly has been misclassified under the rubric of “deep image.” Chapter One provides an overview of Bly’s poetics and influences on his work, while attempting to define “image” from Bly’s point of view. Chapter Two examines Bly’s first book, *Silence in the Snowy Fields*, in the light of his poetics, and defines the kind of image that predominates in *Silence* as a transformational image, a designation whose sources include Wallace Stevens, Eric Neumann and Bly himself. Chapter Three examines the transformational image as it operates in Bly’s second book, *The Light Around the Body*. It establishes the political and moral framework for the book by exploring the linguistic and philosophical importance for Bly of the book’s spiritual father, Jacob Boehme.

Chapter Four investigated the transformational image as an inherently political vehicle in *Sleepers Joining Hands*, a book which combines poetry and prose to give psychological reasons for the Vietnam War, and discusses the elements of a successful political poem, using the work elements of a successful political poem, using the work of W. B. Yeats, Pablo Neruda and William Blake as examples of such. Finally, Chapter Four studies the imagery of *Sleepers* as an extension of Bly’s interest in Neumann and Jung and their theories on the feminine, and the repression of the feminine.

Chapter Five discusses Bly’s interest in the prose poem. It examines *The Morning Glory* in the light of Bly’s adaptation of Francis Ponge’s object poems, and *This Body is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood*, as a manifestation of Bly’s conviction that the material universe is alive and has consciousness. The transformational image in both books remains the primary vehicle through which Bly expresses his interest in the feminine and its relationship with grief; and it becomes the means by which his theory of association as a form of content is most effectively put into practice.

This study, then, replaces the inappropriate term “deep image” in Bly criticism with transformational image, since it is a term which more accurately describes the metaphorical and psychological relationship between the inward and outward worlds that colors almost all of Bly’s work.