

new book, *Configurations*. Appearing in April in the *New York Times Book Review*, Bly's review upset many Paz fans, including poet Pete Winslow. Obsessed with surrealism and enthralled by Philip Lamantia (a contributor to the *Seventies*, whom Bly also visited in San Francisco), Winslow arranged a meeting with Bly. In his subsequent essay (unpublished, as he died soon after), he is highly critical of Bly's first two books; first because they aren't surrealist enough, second because of Bly's preference for the surrealism of Neruda, Vallejo, and Federico García Lorca over that of Breton and the French, and third because of his recent appraisal of Paz.

Then he turns to "The Teeth Mother," adding, "There is still nothing remotely hip about Bly . . . but there is something about this poem which makes it looser and more free than anything else he has published." Maybe a brief tangent via the writer Norman Mailer's hipster theory (in "The White Negro") will shed some useful light. Mailer says, "One is Hip or one is Square . . . one is a rebel or one conforms," and those are the terms in which Winslow seems to think. But there has to be a gray area; there must have been at least *something* "remotely hip" about Bly. Furthermore, Mailer writes, "to be with it is to have grace, is to be closer to the secrets of that inner unconscious life which will nourish you if you can hear it." Few poets were more "with it" in this way. And finally, "there is not the hipster alive who is not absorbed in his own tumultuous hypotheses." From any angle, this absorption fits Bly to a tee.

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The April itinerary included Tennessee and Texas, then back to New York. That month's *San Francisco Review of Books* was entirely given over to a long interview with Bly. It displays the range of his current favorite "tumultuous hypotheses." He speaks of "the interior animal life" as opposed to "the interior intellectual life," and of using animal imagery, as García Lorca does, "to penetrate down into an evolutionary part of the mind." Bly argues that Whitman was aware of this tradition, and that Snyder, with his attention to the East, was returning to it, and that "an entire generation now is moving in that direction." Meditation is an important factor, with its attention to breath. "After all, breath is the one thing in our body that we have in common with the alligators and all the other creatures. It's the one thing we can't stop. . . . Therefore it has a deeper evolutionary link than any

other thing in our body." He names Lamantia and Robinson Jeffers, among others, as poets with an animal connection. "Surrealism has links . . . not so much to the spiritual, but to the biological evolutionary part of the mind."

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The California furlough was winding down, and he reflected on the broad sand beach near Inverness. "Welcoming a Child in the Limantour Dunes" opens, "Thinking of a child soon to be born, I hunch down among friendly sand grains . . ." The underlying sense of contentment holds to the last: "Something seems to love this planet abandoned here at the edge of the Milky Way, and this child floating inside the Pacific of the womb, near the walls, hearing the breakers roaring." The Blys' second son was born a short time after they left Inverness. But even before that, Bly wrote to Hall in mid-May: "I'm back at work on the farm, happily, gorgeously, privately, broodily. I have many poems from Inverness to copy out—I don't know if they're any good or not. But I think a few are!"

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Inland again, in Minnesota, happily brooding—had Point Reyes made any difference? The prose poem form was more in hand. The war was slowly winding down. He had experienced much and was reoriented, ready to embark on a new phase in his career and personal life. It would be no less wavy than the previous one, but differently so.

"Oceans," by Juan Ramón Jiménez (translated by Bly), is apt:

I have a feeling that my boat  
has struck, down there in the depths,  
against a great thing.  
And nothing  
happens! Nothing . . . Silence . . . Waves . . .  
—Nothing happens? Or has everything happened,  
and are we standing now, quietly, in the new life?

**Mark Gustafson** lives in Minneapolis. His essays have appeared in the *Antioch Review*, *Great River Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Poetry Daily*, *Rain Taxi*, and elsewhere. Red Dragonfly Press (Northfield, Minnesota) has recently published a revised trade edition of *The Odin House Harvest*. He is writing Robert Bly's biography.

## BILL TAYLOR

*El Jay*, 1970  
Oil on Masonite, 21 x 40 in



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