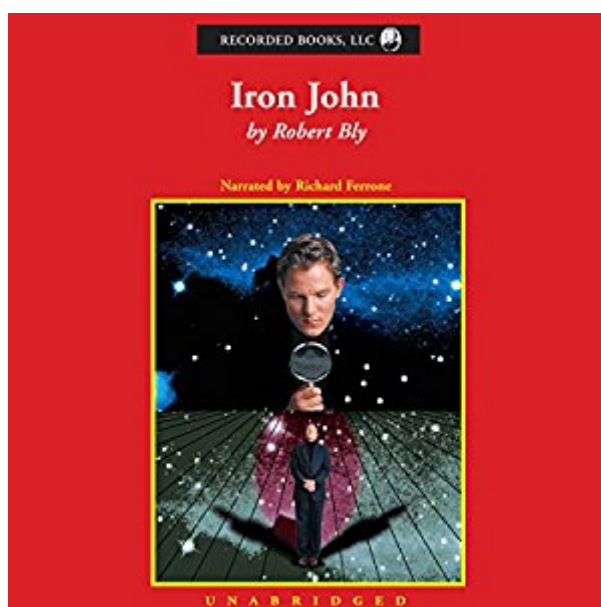


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# Iron John



## Synopsis

In this national best-seller, Robert Bly explores the idea of the missing father in contemporary society. He draws upon a cornucopia of legend and literature - as varied as the poetry of William Blake, Jungian psychology, and Sioux initiation rituals - to encourage men in their pursuit of the "inner warrior."

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

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## Customer Reviews

I am fascinated by some of the other reviews for this book. Some criticize it for being too liberal and kowtowing to feminists. Others claim it's reactionary and a threat to women everywhere. Still others say that they hate books about mythology and so they hate this one, too (this is really weird - it would be like me giving, say, a romance novel a bad review because I don't like the genre). This leads me to the conclusion that, since the book is obviously evoking massive projection and ad hominem attacks, it really does have some incredibly important things to say. Perhaps those on the right are stirred to anger by Bly's impassioned call to restore male depth of emotions. The academic postmodernist/poststructuralist camp, amazingly (and without ever reading the book, obviously) accuses Bly of oppression simply because he states that men are human and suffer, too. This book is still a target of postmodern wrath in universities, but the criticism never focuses on the text but rather on projections surrounding Bly's persona. The book itself (don't read it if you hate poetry and mythology!) contains a skillful blend of old world folklore and Jungian psychology aimed at restoring male modes of feeling in the world. Men who can descend into their wounds are not so dependent on women for nurturance, and thus are far more eager to see a world of powerful,

independent, and connected women and men.

This book has been well summarized and reviewed, but here are a few hints to those considering buying it. (1) This is not a work of academic sociology. Do not come to Iron John for suggestions about social policy for your dissertation or articles. He does not regard professors as intellectuals, but rather puts them in the same category as businessmen or others trapped on soulless career tracks. Creative people are driven from academe quite early, in grad school, and Bly knows it. (2) This is a suggestive, exploratory, poetic attempt to use myth as a form of guidance for people in their real lives. That is, Bly seems more interested in throwing out powerful images and myths concerning men and men's lives and trying to make sense of them within our context of media-saturated consciousness than he is in traditional academic argument. It's an alternative to academic approaches, not in competition with them, and that is partly what makes it so wonderful: we're free to grasp at what interests us and leave what doesn't. Swimming in the questions is a beautiful thing. (3) Bly was an old 60s activist. If you can't bear the thought of someone not being conservative then don't read Bly. If, like me, you're conservative but not Republican, you'll be fine. (4) Having spent ten years in academe before running, screaming, in the opposite direction, I can tell you that Bly is no kow-towing feminist and no victimologist. Anyone who thinks Bly is too feminist needs to be stranded in a Women's Studies department for an afternoon. Then you'll come to him begging forgiveness. Bly is too careful of the feminists, I agree, but they're after him every step of the way trying to shut him up. He's despised by gender fascists, who see him as an advocate of violence against women. For them, a man is merely a potential rapist, end of discussion, and any attempt to portray them otherwise is seen as a pure wish to attack all women and bring harm to them. As for victimology, Bly is not seeing men as victims, alone, but as people who don't fit the above feminist profile everywhere and all the time. There are sick, brutal men, of course, but Bly wants to help men to see that they can be happier and more fulfilled if they dispense with both the feminist cliches and mass-media stud cliches and try to get in touch with something deeper, something with a lineage back into the furthest reaches of history, and something profoundly important to all men. He's very conservative in this way, as am I, and wants to restore some of the virtues of a strong, responsible, mature man whose strength is not a danger to women. Is that so evil? (5) Bly has mean things to say about New Age, contrary to what people seem to think would be the case. He treats New Age as what it is: floating, indecisive, maleable, pleasantries that never really provide a basis for anything. Bly wants grounding for men in myths and initiations that are robust and strong, and New Age is anything but that. (6) Read Bly with his poetic vocation in mind:

poems do not make point-by-point arguments, but rather engage the mind, the senses, the feelings, and leave an impression. That's Iron John all over, and if that leaves you wanting something else, there are Men's Studies departments in the universities who will provide what you want. This is a book for the imagination as well as the mind, and that is why it is very engaging and beautiful.

In this book, Bly attempts to use the fairy tale of 'Iron John' as a metaphor for the initiation of a boy into a responsible man. Once the initiation is complete, after a series of symbolic adventures, a responsible man emerges. In each section of the book, Bly reveals a piece of the story as a stage in the boy's development, often accompanying the tale with mythological, social, and cultural themes. This book is about men, for men. Bly feels men are in trouble, and tries to explain why. He also attempts to give a definition of what a real man is. A real man is one who has the courage and conviction to fight, but also has the compassion and tenderness to feel. Men in our society seem to be too much on one side or the other. We have too many wild, violent, brutal men with no feeling. We also have too many submissive, weak, 'Yes Dear' type of men... He tries to give reasons for this 'downfall', using important themes such as: 1) Young men without responsible, older men in their lives, 2) The industrial revolution separating father from son 3) The elimination our link to nature as a result of the Industrial Revolution, and 4) How the feminist movement, while absolutely necessary, has had an adverse effect of creating a culture which portrays men as complete idiots. I found many passages where I felt Bly was right on the money. I had several revelations and epiphanies while reading this book, things I've always known but never realized. Until now. This is great stuff. A very important book, I believe, and could be used for various purposes such as instruction or counseling. Men everywhere could benefit from reading this, in my opinion..

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