

***“LIVING HISTORY” AS THE
“REAL THING”: A
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
THE MODERN MOUNTAIN
MAN RENDEZVOUS,
RENAISSANCE FAIRS, AND
CIVIL WAR REENACTMENTS***

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To look for ‘deeper’ justifications for the hobby [re-enactments of Civil War battles] would probably be a mistake.

—Richard O’Sullivan

This is the real thing,” asserted a tall, stout male visitor at one Santa Fe Trail Rendezvous, just one of over 1,000 such modern mountain man gatherings staged annually throughout the nation. He believed that rendezvous was an authentic reproduction of the original event. In this essay, cultural criticism, Jungian psychology, and anthropological methods are used to characterize the “real thing,” as a phenomenon of “living history,” or as Andrew Robertshaw labeled “living interpretation.”¹ Among the celebrations that can be categorized as living history are the modern mountain man rendezvous, Revolutionary War reenactments, World War I and II battle reenactments, the Renaissance fair, and Civil War reenactments. Dr. Jay Anderson, an author and participant in living history events,

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defines them as "the simulation of life in another time."² Further clarification comes from David Peterson, who wrote, "People writing and talking about living history largely agree that the term refers to those who appear in historical clothing and do historical work in a historical setting."³

Rendezvours are divided regarding how to describe their orientation to living history. Susan Jennys reports that buckskinners, who approach the rendezvous in "intellectual, research-oriented fashion," can be labeled "reenactors," while those not interested in doing "serious research" can be dubbed "generic buckskinners."⁴ Ken Grissom states, "There is no way today to actually duplicate the hardships that the mountain man faced during the fur trade period."⁵ The five-page section titled "Living History" in his book, *Buckskins and Black Powder*, refers to rendezvous as "family reunion[s]," "shoot[s]," "buckskinner's flea market," and "parties . . . with some of the most considerate drunks in the world."⁶ Thus, how do rendezvous compare with other living history phenomena? What are the differences and similarities among buckskinners, Civil War reenactors, and participants at the Renaissance fair? Why do these celebrations occur at this period of America's history? Richard Handler and William Saxton believe that "authenticity is a dominant value of living history."⁷ They specified that "practitioners want to experience or to convey to others the experience of 'what it felt like to live back then'."⁸ Initially, living history entailed (1) embracing "first person" interpretation or role playing, (2) adopting an authentic appearance, and (3) manipulating the physical setting so that it mirrors the original site where historical events took place.

Behind the search for the authentic lies the quest for the dollar. Traders, "sutlers," and vendors at reenactments, sell to prospective participants everything they need, such as costuming, weaponry, and miscellany—the basics for looking realistic. Therefore, reenactments are moneymaking ventures, held in a nation which is based on capitalism. These pervasive, conspicuous entrepreneurial operations help to keep living history in the present versus the past, as much as any event.

The quest for authenticity is outwardly based on iconographic representation—what a person wears and manipulates. Regarding Civil War reenactments, Rory Turner avers:

The best time to visit the sutler [sic] area [people who construct the material world of the Civil War] is early evening . . . Inside the tents with their hand-painted signs, one finds a variety of objects. Racks are filled with Jefferson shirts, plaid shirts, calico and other fabrics, colorful vests, hoop skirts, ball gowns, granny dresses, bodices, corsets, wool trousers, and coats of both armies [Union and Confederate]. Trays have the classic Civil War-style kepi

hats, wide-brimmed felt hats, bowlers, pewter buttons, wooden buttons, flower buttons, brass insignia, chevrons, boots, leather belts, cartridge boxes and pouches, tarred waterproof bags, suspenders, wooden canteens, fifes, pewter cups and tableware, enamel plates, corn-cob pipes, tobacco, cigars, authentic matches, "French letters," faded brown postcards, parchments, Hardees Manual of the Soldier, books, magazines, quill pens, and genuine beef jerky—each item tidily displayed. Muskets, carbines, pistols, and bayonets dully glisten in a separate section.⁹

Colorful iconography also appears at Renaissance Festivals, where garments made of cotton, leather, and silk are quite noticeable. Too, Renaissance revelers carry weapons and/or wear examples of adornment used during the era of celebration. This paraphernalia is consistent with any individual's costume or presentation. Behind the glamorous costumes are hidden inaccuracies. Do reenactors wear a clean outfit every weekend that the fair is held? Would the public tolerate a more realistic group of performers, as if they looked a little dirty and smelled as though they came from off the streets of faraway towns, situated in the countryside of Europe in the seventeenth century? Carol Deakin comments about the setting, or place of action, at the Seventh Annual Maryland Renaissance Festival held in Columbia as follows:

Noting anachronisms such as modern glasses on members of a medieval chorus, and modern songbooks, along with many modern shoes among the boots and bare feet, we also looked disapprovingly on the modern crafts and food and the use of 20th century words—photos, calories—within a dialect by two females and one male who worked up a crowd prior to a mud wrestling bout.¹⁰

Although rendezvousers don't like their buckskin and cloth outerwear to be called "costuming," but that's exactly what it is, in terms of their striving for authenticity in all things considered. However, no one can precisely reproduce the iconography of the characters and whose persona, he or she is trying to emulate. Yes, some original clothing of trappers and Native Americans, who lived in early nineteenth century West, have survived in museums until today, and one can make patterns of this outerwear. Yet, anyone who relies on paintings and photographs for samples of accurate images, belonging to either mountain man or Indian iconography, remains several steps away from re-creating reality.

Most important, no modern rendezvouser was alive 180 years ago to witness in person the historical mountain man and his so-termed "artifact" materials. The actual gatherings were held during 1825–1840 at sites in three states—Idaho, Wyoming, and Utah. Rory Turner believes, "The best

re-enactors can do is strive for an iconic identity between their activities and those of the [Civil War] time period."¹¹ Relying on material icons to represent the entire historical personage has other flawed consequences. Writing in *Museum News*, Robert Ronsheim posits, "The material objects of the past do not contain the inner life of the past."¹² David Peterson asserts, "No program or person can precisely re-create the past. Many living-history buffs would disagree. They argue that every detail of their uniform is authentic, from their stocking to the ribbon on their cap. But they miss the point: There is much more to history than meets the eye."¹³

Reducing reenactment to iconography turns reenactors into icons themselves, and essentially robs them of attempts to either illustrate other valued aspects of a historical party's image or the ability to address the complexities of the age in which he or she first appeared. Such complexities involve describing historical patterns, including how social, economic, and political forces shaped the life of the person being imitated. Still, the quest for authenticity is not only based on the "exaltation of the body" (a "carnavalesque" feature, the embodiment of which is held annually during ceremonies at Mardi Gras in New Orleans, Louisiana and Mobile, Alabama) as well as ritualized objects and identities, but the coalescence of great streams of thought and feeling: purification and the sacred; the search for paradise; the quest for renewal; and primitive religion, a type of ritual worship which has nothing to do with sectarianism.

Consistent with the carnivalesque, the body is adorned at Renaissance fairs, Civil War reenactments, and at rendezvous. Elaborate means are undertaken to put together a historically accurate costume, thus, providing any participant with an "otherness," "figurative identity," "play identity," or "ritual identity." At one Colorado Renaissance fair, people adopted such roles as "The Wizard," "Heather the Potatoe Wench," "Ronin the Fool," "Ian the Healer," "Sister Odessa Farthingale," and "King Henry the Eighth." Ritualizing identities help serve to establish what is sacred—or set apart for worship—at these events, and helps to "purify" the performers (actors/actresses), who seek release from the contamination and corruption of the everyday world and impersonal technology. As Rory Turner explains, "cultural nostalgia for what was perceived as a 'kinder, gentler' more wholesome time seems to be at the heart of many people's affinity for reenacting and living history."¹⁴ Robert Ronsheim believes that "community, togetherness, love, and granola" are some features that contribute to the yearning for living history programs.¹⁵

Ritual objects and ritual identities are part of the entire ritualized space-time environments or "possible worlds"—to borrow a phrase from Keir Elam—that exist in living history celebrations.¹⁶ As occurs in carnival,

locations are reserved for ritual space. These areas identify where the sacralization of objects, identities, and behaviors takes place. At Colorado's Renaissance fair, ritual space was defined as the "kingdom"—an enclosed setting wherein "shoppes" of all kinds existed, and where food and materials were sold. At one shoppe, a person was selling fur hats and leather goods that could have been marketed at rendezvous.

In the interactive environment of the Renaissance fair, one could ride—for a price—in a swing fashioned from the belly of a wooden dragon. A place about the size of a football field was set aside for jousting and other sports, involving horses and their riders. Also, ritual action involved storytelling, demonstrations, comedic routines, juggling, singing, and making music. Activities, such as knife throwing and "star throws"—using metal, star-shaped objects—were reminiscent of the knife and tomahawk throwing that transpires at rendezvous. Rory Turner describes the effects of having a ritual identity, during a Civil War reenactment:

I experienced a "time warp" when I participated in the re-enactment of [General George Edward] Pickett's Charge [Battle of Gettysburg, 3 July 1863]. I marched abreast of more than a hundred men up the long green field in the hot June sun, the first row sent to the slaughter [three-fourth's of Pickett's men were killed in the actual battle]. It was hard to think clearly about anything in the tumult, until I lay dead and still on the ground and the lines pushed for-ward and past me. Later I thought, "So that's what it was like." There is a kind of knowledge that can only be gained by living through something. No one can ever experience exactly the same thing, but the transient perfection of the Civil War world in reenacting allows participants to occasionally be in the same position as those who fought long ago. For re-enactors "time warps" are deeply valued experiences, but they are fleeting and certainly not all that re-enacting is about.¹⁷

The ritualized space-time environment is so strikingly different from anything in modern society as to make it a world in reverse, wherein authenticity is linked with exotica. Imagine how unusual it is to see Renaissance fairs, based on events that took place 500–600 years ago. Similarly, Civil War reenactments and rendezvous are founded on happenings that occurred between 180 and 200 years previously. The original events are now archaic, and stories about them have been passed down from generation to generation, and recounted in volumes of history books and works of literature.

Regarding Civil War reenactments, historically significant battles are also turned into exotic engagements, which once took thousands of lives, but are continuously staged with carnivalesque fanfare. In trying to replicate the

"real thing," enthusiasts have reshaped the original circumstances into something believable in several respects. However, Charles LaRocca titled his short piece about living history, "Civil War Reenactments—'A Real and Complete Image'."¹⁸ Yet, Rory Turner explains that Civil War reenactors, "Have created a bloodless war, a war within which they can have a good time and learn something about themselves. The pain, violence, and misery of war have been extracted leaving camaraderie, exhilaration, and a certain beauty."¹⁹

There is nothing pretty about war, and glorification of its "certain beauty" has led to countless deaths on the actual battlefield, as well as unimaginable suffering on and off the field of battle for millennia. "Bloodless battles," therefore, only serve to legitimize war through the medium of the carnivalesque. Cynthia Harriman differs, by writing, "Reenactors do not do this [Civil] War reenactments to glorify war but to honor peace, valor, and patriotism."²⁰ But Janet Wolff asserts, "the excesses and reversals of the carnivalesque often operate to reaffirm the status quo, providing licensed but limited occasions for transgressions which are guaranteed to be neutralized."²¹

Authenticity, say Handler and Saxton, is also linked in living history with narrativity or "emplotted lives":

We suggest that living historians seek to re-experience history because they expect thereby to gain access to lives and experiences characterized by the wholeness that historical narratives can provide. Living history thus overlooks the fact that the people presented in historical narratives would not have experienced their lives as coherent stories, nor the times in which they lived as unified historical eras, periods, or epochs Thus the life of the past is seen to possess an authenticity that we find impossible to experience in the present.²²

These narrative accounts entail telling "stories" about how icons, such as clothing and gear, are made. Too, such stories include a reenactor's recollection of previous living history experiences—ceremonies and celebrations. Handler and Saxton report that, "emplotted reenactment is an ideal that permeates the activities and objectives of those charged with producing living history."²³

Telling and retelling stories about every part of the reenactment experience, and engaging in narrativity, are a big part of creating a "better past," regardless of the historical realm involved. Handler and Saxton offer complex explanations, describing narrativity as a means to forge a "romantic coherence to a world perhaps as fragmented as ours."²⁴ Multiple variables influence storytelling, narrativity, and the relationship between reenactor and reenactment, the connection between the two being at the center of our discussion. What Handler and Saxton don't discuss (and is not a purpose of their fine article to do so) is

how storytelling is part of the sacred environment at reenactments. Telling such tales amounts to passing along “sacred stories,” which were told by reenactor/gospelers. These ritual stories often contain guiding principles for the reenactor and relate to participants as much as to the cultural archetypes, which they worship. Such storytelling, then, is a way to mythologize any event’s activities and mysticize archetypal personae.

“Sacred time” also governs the space-time environment of reenactments. One no longer lives in chronological time here, but in what Eliade would term “Primordial Time”—the kind of time the scholar said, “When the event first took place.”²⁵ The form of Primordial Time that exists at reenactments is dictated by ritual and governed by nature itself, since weather conditions, the landscape, and the flow of humanity alter linear time and bring a certain “timelessness” to these events. In a culture driven by the clock and overbearing time constraints, this timelessness frees people from social conventions and rigid behaviors, and allows them to “blow off steam.” Also, Primordial Time dictates the psychoreligious environment that takes place at rendezvous and at reenactments, where beliefs are codified, morality is safeguarded, and even eating becomes a form of religious experience.

The psychological links connecting reenactor and reenactment have evaded most students of living history. Dr. Anderson said that, “Everyone seems to savor the moment when you actually feel as if you are a part of a particular historical period or event.”²⁶ His remarks indicate there exists “fusion” between event and reenactor, which he or she was experiencing. Handler and Saxton speak of these occasions as “magic moments,” or when things are “really real.”²⁷ Furthermore, these two scholars speak of “magic moments” as “evanescent flashes of consciousness steeped in the reenactor’s recollections of his own experiences or sense of wonder about the experiences of others.”²⁸ These overwhelming emotions and stylized behaviors can be linked with Victor Turner’s concept of flow: “We experience it as a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which we feel in control of our actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment; between stimulus and response; or between past, present, and future.”²⁹

Regarding Civil War reenactments, Rory Turner claims:

They are moments in the life processes of the individuals who create them, moments that are formed by the hopes, fears, desires, and needs of those individuals. They are moments of expectation and dread, moments of charged experience, in which the possibility of transformation is present, where among other things, relationships can be made or broken, identities forged or questioned.³⁰

Immersing oneself in the "eternal now" of any reenactment experience brings with it an emotional high and a feeling of union with the surroundings. Such strong emotions and fusion with the environment produce, in turn, a paradisaical state and primitive process during which one is welcomed, accepted, and anointed as one of the group.

This group identity extends to what Rory Turner calls a "ritual of belonging," where space and action, as well as "eating, working, and talking together," produce a "feeling of community."³¹ Richard O'Sullivan recognized that Civil War reenacting was first of all, "great fun," but secondly, "It is a huge communal activity, an escape, from the nuclear family into a family of thousands, a family brought together for a massive performance in which everyone has a part to play."³²

Psychologically, participating in an experience, where everyone wears the same, or similar, costume is comforting. By wearing common outerwear, individuals can automatically step into a belief system that pervades the organizations that sponsor reenactments. Keeping in mind that individual needs vary from reenactor to reenactor, clothing and other iconography can be used to express inner lives, or, indeed, conceal emotional reality in favor of looking like everyone else. Knowing who one is and knowing one's feelings, and being able to properly assess one's belonging needs, are appropriate ways to determine why one really engages in living history.

The psychology of Civil War reenactments requires particular elucidation because of the heavy emphasis that's placed both on vicarious violence and make-believe human sacrifice. Note that two distinct sides conduct ritualized and polarized warring against each other at Civil War reenactments and at the Renaissance fair, during the Pennsic War, which is held yearly in August in Pennsylvania. Subsequently, does a "war within" exist in the psyches of these participants? Rory Turner explains more about Civil War reenactments:

Union re-enactors can find themselves cursed at when re-enacting in Southern areas, and many Confederate re-enactors explicitly state that it is in memory of the South that they re-enact. During the [Civil War] centennial, the play world of the reenactment threatened to break down into real conflict mirroring the still existing cultural split between North and South. Jay Anderson reports, "A close friend of mine who was fighting in a Pennsylvania unit returned from the battle (the re-enactment of the first Manassas) wary of participating in further re-enactments. Many of the men on both sides, he said, seemed bent on re-fighting the war, and he was afraid that 'some drunken hothead would decide to really let fly with a minnie ball'."³³

This “war within” amounts to deeply imbedded and unresolved conflictual material, and one way to avoid this internal discord—the “shadow” (a Jungian archetype)—is to create an enemy (be it the Blue or the Gray) onto which one can lob unconscious and disturbing feelings. Quotes from Rory Turner, which are used in this essay, attest to how emotional and psychological boundaries are compromised, and feelings are expressed inappropriately at certain living history events.³⁴

Another part of dealing with the “war within” pertains to the imaginary battlefield sacrifice, during which people are supposedly “killed” in action. To find out whether one relishes being symbolically obliterated, or enjoys doing the obliterating, or both, would help to get to the heart of what and who creates any “war within.” David Lowenthal’s words are edifying, as he says, “many remember historical trauma as though past and present were contemporaneous.”³⁵ For some participants, the present is disguised as the past, in the symbolic destruction that occurs during Civil War reenactments. The cultural archetype, which presides over these proceedings, is a devouring divinity—the punishing “father within”—who, in turn, feasts on simmering emotions lying beneath the surface of the psyche.

Another angle exists wherein Civil War reenactors actually come together to heal, however unconsciously, some deep felt opposites in their lives, by staging simulated warfare between modern Union and Confederate forces. This process can be termed “the reconciliation of opposites,” whereby splits within the psyche are mended by coming into contact with symbolically contrary entities. If we extend Jung’s notion of pairs of opposites to include the split between the Blue and the Gray, as a metaphoric example of divisiveness within individuals, he wrote that opposites exist in an undifferentiated way:

Alternation, or the experience of being at the mercy of now one and then the other of a pair of opposites is the hallmark of an awakening consciousness. When the tension becomes intolerable, a solution must be discovered and the only viable relief is to be found in a reconciliation of the two at a different and more satisfactory level.³⁶

To what further extent is personal conflict addressed by participating in these elaborate ceremonies? One video advertisement appearing in *Civil War Times Illustrated* provided a clue. The advertisement reads, “Now you can relive those fierce moments that changed America forever.”³⁷ (The advertisement promotes a video production, which depicts the reenactment of the Battle of Chickamauga, September 19–20, 1863. The battle, involving 125,000 soldiers,

took place near Chickamauga Creek in northern Georgia, about 12 miles south of Chattanooga, Tennessee. There were a total of over 35,000 casualties.) Depending on the reenactor, "those fierce moments" have already occurred in their lives, and they're acting out such episodes through vicarious violence and simulated human sacrifice. With dark impulses disguised as ritual, mock religious (not sectarian) sacrifice has replaced real human and animal sacrifice. Regarding primitive cultures, Mircea Eliade remarks, "Human sacrifices or animal sacrifices are only a solemn commemoration of the primordial murder (the murdered divinity)." ³⁸ Throughout history, psychoreligious events have celebrated previous and/or present, gods and goddesses; the result is myth. Eliade states that, "The foremost function of myth is to reveal the exemplary models for all human rites and all significant human activities—diet or marriage, work or education, art or wisdom." ³⁹

At the center of reenactment or rendezvous ceremonies, then, are mythic deities or heroes, who are symbolically worshipped and paid homage by the pilgrimaging participants. For instance, among the living history divinities in Civil War reenactments are Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, Ulysses S. Grant, William Sherman, J.E.B. Stuart, and Jefferson Davis, among many other well-known figures. In Jungian terms, these are really "inner figures that personify the larger self." ⁴⁰ Moreover, reenactors feel "reborn as a 'larger personality'" by participating in living history. ⁴¹

As another example, people equate themselves with trapper Jedediah Strong Smith, termed the "greatest mountain man" by certain historians, by taking his name or trying to emulate him, while taking part in rendezvous. There once existed a rendezvous named after him that took place in the Pacific Northwest. At the Renaissance fair, people assume various identities, including Queen Anne Boleyn, but obviously not staging the way that she died. Yet, remember the "magic moments" and "time warps"—the gripping trance-like states, which are experienced by reenactors? These semitrance states involve the identification (consciously or unconsciously) with a cult god, deity, or archetype, which leads to a transformation in feeling that produces a sense of power and renewal.

The reenactor's quest for authenticity arises in regard to the process of identification with such figureheads. Marian Woodman writes, "the projection of the perfect was once on god." ⁴² New Age thinking, changes in secular beliefs, and the quest for the supernatural have helped to demythologize the God of sectarianism, and in living history the projection of the perfect is now onto the gods that are memorialized in each realm of reenactment and rendezvous. These gods, then, are the living history divinities and archetypes

that pilgrimaging reenactors and rendezvusers are worshipping and trying to please. Accordingly, such cultural gods demand perfectionism in relation to iconography (costuming), formalized mannerisms and behaviors, and “first person” imitation, all categories of which are tributes to these archetypal gods.

Striving for perfection has a foundation in renewal, a concept tied to the search for paradise, or the quest for beginnings. On the one hand, these beginnings can involve the act of starting all over, using the basics of existence in the time frame being celebrated. On the other hand, there exists a symbolic destruction or abolishment of the present via practices that prohibit present-day iconography from being allowed at primitive rendezvous or other types of gatherings. Meanwhile, reenactors are supposed to behave as historical characters as though they were plucked from a storehouse of historical beings. The result is that modern space and time are vanquished, and one can renew oneself if he or she is perfectionistic enough in the face of the “eternal,” or relevant living history divinities.

Renewal, as a regeneration of the self, is also tied to a search for living history spirituality. In today’s world, there exists an absence of (nonsectarian) spirituality, even though millions flock to churches on Sunday, and sizable audiences once witnessed former televangelists, such as Jimmy Swaggert, who sold religion every Sunday. Millions more people are trying to address an emptiness in themselves, or a lack of spiritual focus in their lives. For some reenactors, rendezvusers, and visitors, the three realms of celebration mentioned in this essay constitute play, togetherness, spontaneity, and a form of intimacy, which promotes a feeling of well-being and connectedness with other humans—that approaches a welcome and needed spirituality. This overt or covert recognition of spirituality often gets overlooked amidst the many interpretations given living history events.

Reenactments and rendezvous are not only places of renewal, but are also celebrations of the dead, since the living history icons and heroes are no longer alive. In fact, living history is an attempt to immortalize divine historical beings, and keep their lives and times current in celebrants’ minds. Indeed, venerating the past, as though there were a threat to its survival is, unconsciously, an area on which to focus for pilgrims. Take their cultural deities away, and there would only be a much more fragmented past; only mementos, souvenirs, relics, artifacts, or keepsakes would be left. Yes, rendezvusers and reenactors reinvent the past, as every generation does, but more precisely in living history events, worshipful archetypes are reborn and venerated, as other mythmakers—Celts, Romans, Egyptians, Africans, Mayans—did for centuries.

Alan Olson writes that the question most often asked about myth is what is myth about? The most common answer may be "stories about the gods."⁴³ In the realms of living history, a combination of deistic icons, who rule [in physical absentia] the proceedings, are celebrated, using a much-practiced gospel, which is orchestrated vigorously by pilgrimaging host-priests/priestesses. These leaders use rituals to organize the gospel, which is based on perfection, paradise, and renewal.

Such goals highly influence the male/female rendezvous and any reenactor's notion of masculinity/femininity. Rory Turner discusses men, motives, and Civil War reenactments:

For some it is a political statement, for others an affirmation of cultural identity, a complex and intriguing game, an opportunity to go camping and get drunk with friends, an alternative to a dreary existence, a "thing" to do in a social set, or a fascinating window on a world they know from books and photographs but have never participated in as an experienced reality What appealed to me [regarding the camps] . . . ? The smell and the color of hay. Horses snorting in the quiet early morning as one returns from the call of nature. Somewhere, continuously, the sound of fifes and drums, etching into the mind. The sound of belts, bags, and guns being unbuckled, taken off and the feel after they are off, of unencumbered movement. Being very dirty but knowing you will be clean again. A country dark nighttime lit by the flame and embers of campfires or the cheery light of oil lanterns. Playing a game of poker on an original period chest with authentic old cards and real money. The smell of smoke⁴⁴

Romance, sensuality, earthiness, tactility, camaraderie, patriotism, and weapons worship draw men and women to reenactments and rendezvous. In a larger perspective, living history engagements are primary arenas for men, and masculinity, like everything else, is ritualized at these events. At reenactments, prescribed rituals such as marching to and from the battlefield, engaging in telling stories, and playing dead in the scene of action, all place men under physical and emotional stress. Embracing these rituals is akin to experiencing the military boot camp the second time around. Therefore, traditional masculine ideals—power, dominance, strength, invulnerability, and toughness—rank highest among the male characteristics, which must be developed in order to accept, enjoy, or tolerate these experiences.

Ritual identities are the outgrowth of this programmatic masculinity, which is gender-specific (women are not usually allowed on battlefields during Civil War reenactments) and based on power symbols. Although men may participate in dance activities in the evenings after the primary dances of death

on the battlefields, placing oneself under siege and facing ritual and symbolic death are the manly things to do at Civil War celebrations. Undergoing these hardships, and calling it excitement or fun with the boys, is a tough form of renewal and personal regeneration. Cultural deities of disorder and destruction—stern, harsh, punishing, unforgiving, ruthless, and competitive—and which strip men of their humanity, are at work here.

Some nurturing divinities—gods of plenty and gods of nature—are also present, which permit men and women to develop and showcase their creativity. As evidenced in all types of rendezvous and reenactment, considerable pride and talent lay behind the construction of costuming, weaponry, and other paraphernalia. The glassblower at the Renaissance fair is a consummate artisan. Many veteran reenactors with his skill level have put considerable time and energy into maintaining the image of a historical personage for years. In this area—where creative archetypes reside—lies the healing spirit of living history.

The contrasts, which occur between rendezvous and the two reenactment realms, happen on a graduated scale, rather than appearing as outright differences. For instance, all realms highlight costuming, but only rendezvous congeners generally dress in the heads and hides of wild beasts. However, at the Renaissance fair, one might see a person playing a role as a satyr and costumed in animal skins. Some people might take considerable exception to the author's consideration of any rendezvous as a reenactment, except those gatherings clearly labeled as such. In fact, describing any rendezvous as a reenactment is using the term loosely because partying—ritualized feasting, drinking, and sex—usually takes precedence over anything else.

Whatever the size and quality of rendezvous are, one factor that serves to align this realm, especially with Civil War reenactments, is the degree to which male rendezvousers, in particular, fit into a warrior mold. Moreover, the warrior persona is part of all realms. This role is given the most credibility in Civil War reenactments because of the emphasis that this realm of living history places on mock warring and war culture. Although mock warring takes place at the Pennsic War, most Renaissance fairs are composed of fanfare, frivolity, and food—elements not exclusively pertaining to the warrior code. (“Pensic” is a combined term that was put together by using “Penn” from Pennsylvania and “Punic,” from the “Punic Wars”; such wars were fought between Rome and Carthage in 264–146 BC.)

The shadow side of the warrior is revealed by the existence of the “splitting” process, wherein opponents in Civil War reenactments are symbolically divided into good guys and bad guys (Union vs. Confederate, or vice versa). Unlike the

Jungian concept, heretofore mentioned as "alternation," this splitting often creates a ruthless edge in men, who lose—in whole or in part—care-giving qualities such as nurturance and compassion. Moreover, American men are socialized and institutionalized not only to be often ruthless to others, but to be ruthless to themselves, by undergoing excruciating hardships (without speaking up in defense of themselves), not expressing emotions, accepting abuses (especially in the workplace), and engaging in violent forms of play.

In the middle of the warrior scale is the male rendezvouser, who wants to demonstrate that he can be aggressive, strong, and courageous. Yet, the warrior's shadow side at rendezvous emerges, when activities based around power, control, competitiveness, and sadism are made without evident in weapons display, weapons competition, and ultimately weapons worship.

In summarizing this essay, living history is as much about the present in the life of the reenactor and rendezvouser than about any historical past. This juxtaposition of past and present is manifested in psychoreligious, ancient "cultism," that is, congeners from various classes of society form separate tribes or congregations of devout followers and participants. As free flowing as their activities appear to be during reenactments and rendezvous, the ceremonial events in each realm are highly ritualized and structured activities that allow for some spontaneity. While these events are in progress, historically based divinities are consciously or unconsciously revered by a worshipful population, who often travel long distances to reach any place of veneration, or site of indulgence. This particular place is the site of the sacred, and everything available is set aside to worship, and in one way or another, the cultural gods, among whom are mountain man Jedediah Strong Smith, Confederate leader Jefferson Davis, and any Renaissance King or Queen.

Purification or cleansing of oneself is performed through rituals that produce transformation or "magic moments," which relate to objects, identities, ceremonies, performances, and activities—all part of the mythicoreligious space-time environment. More specifically, objects, such as weaponry, became powerful religious implements, symbolic of what constitute holy icons. Naturally, mock war, when weaponry is displayed and used, is a holy activity. Other goals include redemption, that is, freeing one from the "sins" and distresses of a modern world, while connecting with the cultural gods of history through consecrative behaviors, such as first-person interpretation and ceremonies of many kinds, participants embrace the much-honored quest for authenticity or perfectionistic devotion.

Thus, living history is linked, on the one hand, to nonsectarian, tribal religion and the carnivalesque; on the other hand, living history is a cluster

of concepts—the search for paradise, the production of “beginnings,” and the concept of renewal—all tied to millenarianism, the belief in a coming sacred world, based on ritualistic “founded places,” scores of intertwining rituals, and belief in a combination of cultural archetypes. Among many things that can be attributed to the carnivalesque, is the “reversal of the ordinary” (the past displacing the present), ceremonial spectacle, the festive atmosphere at reenactments and rendezvous, and subliminal themes. Among such threads are the questioning of political authority via behaviors and modes of presentation, viewed during each realm of experience.

The brand of millenarianism that characterizes living history is not so revolutionary in design at the moment that it requires people to sever themselves altogether from modern society for extended periods of time. If some form of millenarianism existence—an ideal society—populated by reenactors and rendezvousers, is eventually an outgrowth of living history, such a movement will take place over a lengthy number of years if living history stays intact as a cultural phenomenon. Even though participants from the three realms of living history (discussed in this essay) may go to more than one happening yearly, there is not a nationwide concerted effort to organize all the actors and actresses into one group—if that is possible. As an example of what could happen, one might go to a location and witness events taking place in simultaneity among all three realms. Even without such a collusion of realms, participation in rendezvous or reenactment means people have found their own form of paradise, located their own kinds of “beginnings,” and reached their own levels of renewal.

Combine nonsectarian, tribal religion, a millenarian ethic, and the carnivalesque, and the result is that a number of myths, supported by iconic imagery, pervade each realm and the whole universe of living history. The belief that the past can be re-created largely with images and with fidelity is a myth. There exist too many deterrents standing in the way of participants trying to make the past come alive faithfully. One deterrent is time itself, which erodes perceptions of the original events, even as they occurred. Such events become even more obscure over the years, much like the tide ever so slowly washes away the mightiest rocky bulwark, protecting any beach.

One way to demythologize living history is to accept the fact there exists formidable limitations to re-creating the past. This posture doesn't devalue what participants do; but instead realizes the limits that players at living history events do face. Another way that participants can be mythologists is to fully understand, and reveal at gatherings, that living history

happenings are only a part of a much bigger picture, dealing with historical perspectives and patterns. A third way to demythologize living history is to recognize that reenactments and rendezvous are as much a commentary about participants and the present, as these realms are about staging the past.

Notes

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2. Dr. Jay Anderson quoted in Richard Handler and William Saxton, "Dyssimulation: Reflexivity, Narrative, and the Quest for Authenticity in 'Living History,'" *Cultural Anthropology* 3 (1988): 242.
3. David Peterson, "There is no Living History, There Are no Time Machines," *History News* 43(5) (September/October 1988): 28.
4. Susan Jennys, "The Great Buckskinner Debate," *Harper's Magazine* 286(1714) (March 1993): 23. The original article appeared in the March/April 1992 issue of *Backwoodsman*.
5. Ken Grissom, *Buckskins and Black Powder: A Mountain Man's Guide to Muzzleloading* (Piscataway, NJ: Winchester Press, 1983), p. xiv. See also Sam Falada, *The Complete Black Powder Handbook* (Northfield, IL: DBI Books), pp. 37-40.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 176-180.
7. Handler and Saxton, p. 243.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
9. Rory Turner, "Bloodless Battles: The Civil War Reenacted," *The Drama Review* 34(6) (Winter 1990): 125.
10. Carol Deakin, "Renaissance Fair: Can History Survive the Anachronisms?" *Living History Magazine* 1(2) (Fall 1983): 30.
11. Rory Turner, "The Play of History: Civil War Reenactments and Their Use of the Past," *Folklore Forum* 22(1-2) (1989): 56.
12. Robert Ronsheim, "Is the Past Dead?" *Museum News* 53(3) (November 1974): 17.
13. Peterson, p. 29.
14. Turner, "The Play of History: Civil War Reenactments and Their Use of the Past," p. 57.
15. Ronsheim, p. 16.
16. Keir Elam quoted in Rory Turner, "The Play of History: Civil War Reenactments and Their Use of the Past," p. 55.
17. Turner, "Bloodless Battles: The Civil War Reenacted," p. 126.

18. Charles LaRocca, "Civil War Reenactments—'A Real and Complete Image,'" *Educational Leadership* 50(7) (April 1993): 42–44.
19. Turner, "Bloodless Battles: The Civil War Reenacted," p. 134.
20. Cynthia Loveless Harriman, "The Reenactment Movement in the United States," *United Daughters of the Confederacy Magazine* 53(12) (December 1, 1990): 31.
21. Janet Wolff, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), p. 129.
22. Handlar and Saxton, pp. 250–251.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 252.
24. Rory Turner, "The Play of History: Civil War Reenactments and Their Use of the Past," p. 57. The complete explanation regarding "narrativity" occurs in Handlar and Saxton, pp. 248–252.
25. Wanda Anshen, ed., *Myth and Reality: Mircea Eliade* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 19.
26. Jay Anderson quoted in Handlar and Saxton, "Dyssimulation: Reflexivity, Narrative, and the Quest for Authenticity in 'Living History,'" p. 247.
27. Handlar and Saxton, p. 245.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 256.
29. Victor Turner quoted in Roger D. Abraham, "Toward An Enactment-Centered Theory of Folklore," p. 116 in William R. Bascom, ed., *Frontiers of Folklore* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1972).
30. Turner, "Bloodless Battles: The Civil War Reenacted," p. 131.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
32. Richard O'Sullivan, "Red Badge Revivalists," *History Today* 37 (December 1987): 7.
33. Turner, "The Play of History: Civil War Reenactments and Their Use of the Past," p. 58.
34. Turner, "Bloodless Battles: The Civil War Reenacted," pp. 133–134.
35. David Lowenthal, "Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory," *The Geographical Review* 65(1) (January 1975): 28.
36. Andrew Samuels, Bani Shorter, and Fred Plaut, *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis* (London, UK: Routledge, 1986), p. 102.
37. *Civil War Times Illustrated* (May/June 1993): 7. The obsession with battles is found throughout this magazine and other Civil War publications.
38. Anshen, p. 107.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
40. Samuels, et al., p. 126.

41. Ibid.
42. Marian Woodman, *Addiction to Perfection* (Toronto, CA: Inner City Books, 1982), p. 31.
43. Alan Olson, ed., *Myth, Symbol, and Reality* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1980), p. 76.
44. Turner, "Bloodless Battles: The Civil War Reenacted," p. 130.