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cated against their will should not be questioned. Some other solution must be sought. Whatever animosities may exist between the Hopi and the Navajo—asserted by some authorities, denied by others—the ultimate culprit is the federal government, which used its authority to mandate the relocation.

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**Imagine Ourselves Richly: Mythic Narratives of North American Indians.** By Christopher Vecsey. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1988. 304 pages. \$22.95 Cloth.

“The popular Western mind to this day equates myth with falsehood, stupidly believed and foolishly studied” (p. 8).

*Mythology* is not an accurate term to identify the oral lessons of the original nations of the Americas. In this daring attempt to explain to academia the almost unexplainable, Vecsey has established that the legends and dreams of the original people are very much intact and are singing and dancing today. He accurately points out that the native “myth” is not a myth but a narrative, a *lesson*—laced with continuous truths in balanced combinations.

The *lessons* are oral teachings designed to identify to the people their proper role in existence, and to explain that all of life is designed to mingle together, just as the reds of the rainbow whisper to lavender and the greens, with a breath, sheen to gold.

Perusing this rich and exploring labor, and enjoying the depth and breadth of the book, one discovers that the terms *American*, *Indian* and *Native American* are as misleading as *myth*. Just five hundred years ago there were no *Indians* or *Americans*.

As native people study this brief encounter with the Europeans, we discover that the invading forces felt a need to change not only the earth and the elements of earth, but the way native people thought. They distorted the teachings of life’s purpose by altering the original thoughts and original languages, replacing them with foreign attitudes.

Europeans traditionally have erased native thoughts and replaced them with “civilized” ideas. They change the native

languages which are permeated with connections to all of the elements of nature, substituting for them language and thought that is alien to this entire hemisphere.

Although it is not perfectly accurate, the Greek term *autochthonous* is a good description of the original native people: *autochthon*, "one sprung from the land itself," and *autochthonic*, "native to a particular place; aboriginal; indigenous" (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 1979, p. 89).

In his first chapter, "Mythography," Vecsey, ". . . a historian with a special interest in American Indians and their religions," wrestles with the meaning of the word *myth*. With superb balance, he approaches this difficult dilemma softly—like the mountain lion that silently studies its prey and moves ever so softly but ever so surely. "To the primitives who tell their myths, the world is alive and personal; each tree and star and cloud possesses an animating soul, and thus in their myths primitives represent natural entities as if they were persons with wills, abilities, and feelings" (p. 10).

His defense of the Boaz concept, that myths are stories designed to reflect the needs of the communal society, and the Levi-Strauss view, which dares to move mythology from a made-up story into the realm of philosophy, is both brilliant and accurate. It is proper today to pursue this avenue. Perhaps the autochthonous beings now polished in the mannerisms of academia will investigate this vast arena with a fresh concept and from the thousand angles not yet attempted.

*Imagine Ourselves Richly* reaches out softly and touches a taut string fastened to the spirit dwelling deep within the natives, a cord attached to the heart of the universe. In that touch, music has been created, a music that is delicately wrapped around "knowing"—a knowing that the spirit is as much a part of the stars as it is part of the earth.

Most certainly Vecsey has discovered how difficult it is to reason with members of a society who look upon all that is autochthonous with disdain. Those academics hurry back to the safety of their learned masses and, casting a single backwards glance, hiss, "Myth!"

In a lesson of my A-juma/Atsuge people of northeastern California, there is a telling of how the earth and the universe were made long ago by Quon (Silver Grey Fox), from a song and a dance. There also is an explanation of how Jamol (Old Coyote)

managed to escort some willing human elements out of balance. The jealousies of Jamol began when he realized that he had only the power to change and not the power to create—that the power to create was vested in Quon alone. Ever since this time of origin there have been two kinds of inhabitants of this world: those who create, and those who change the creation—for the worse.

There was nothing, simply a void. Then there were two voices in this void, that of *Quon* and that of *Jamol*.

*Quon* decided that they would make something—something that they could see in the void, something shiny. After arguments and debates with *Jamol*, *Quon* began to sing a little song. It took a million years of singing. Finally, a mist appeared in the distance and all that is now known began to appear. . . .

It is within the Jamol thought process that some people attempt to change everything. Herein we are able to understand how the Western European has been able to classify all that he/she fails to understand as myth. By labeling that which appears incomprehensible to them as myth, Euro-Americans are able simply to progress. They feel no responsibility to turn and view the cultural destruction they have scattered across the silver mornings of the native people.

Vecsey is to be commended for the labor, the need, and the dream that has produced *Imagine Ourselves Richly*. To walk boldly into the arena of myth, an area that Western European thought has declared to be merely the imaginings of heathens, and to seek truth is commendable. But to reach into the heart of a wretched history wherein nobody accepts responsibility for the cultural and ecological abuses and to seize that emptiness by the strings of its ill intention takes, above all else, courage.

In supporting his theories of the myth and explaining how inseparable it is from the psyche of the original natives (and how necessary to the well-being of the tribe and nation these communal lessons are), Vecsey has selected a variety of episodes from native experiences. He has attempted to make contact with that great power that stirs the universe.

The Hopi have sent messengers from their kivas out to tell the story of their emergence and their spiritual migration to their sacred homeland. This legend—a precious telling of a special and

reverent people—now is a part of the fabric of world history. In chapter 2, Vecsey employs this story to identify the depth of reasoning behind the spirituality of the entire nation and its relations to the nations surrounding it.

The chapter entitled "The Ojibwa Creation Myth" shows the extremely close relationship between the animal kingdom and the realm of nature-man. This section explains beautifully the spiritual ties the original people have with all of life, and how the killing of an animal for food should be an act of bravery on the part of the hunter and the hunted. Vecsey relates an episode where balance and ceremony are made real by song, and the agony of death and destruction are, within the confines of the universe, neutralized and made healthy.

In chapter 4, "The Story and Structure of the Iroquois Confederacy," Vecsey has captured the essence of the need to create this great union. This study should be expanded and should become required daily reading for the members of the United States Supreme Court. Frequent perusal of this story would give to these august, legal associates a deeper sense of foundation, velocity, direction, and destination.

Deganawida and Handsome Lake are alive and move through their nations, concerned and caring. They hurry to save their people from injuring themselves, and they hastily create defenses for their nations against invasion. This is not a myth at all, but a dream that emerged from need and love to full physical and spiritual presence.

The ceremony that was the life of Phillip Deere is portrayed in this book with deep respect. Whether a single sweat ceremony or a thousand make a person an authority on the subject is irrelevant to this expressive and tender look into the life of a person who received instructions from a place in time and space that most of us shall never experience. Phillip was a powerful person with a powerful dream that he lived and practiced.

That Phillip was charismatic is a given. As a spiritual leader he walked a stony path, pursuing what he perceived as correct. Also, he walked carefully upon the double-edged sword of politics. He maintained his spiritual balance through many conflicts and shared that balance with all who possessed a healthy curiosity.

In the chapter "The Navajo Heroic," Vecsey quotes Wither- spoon: "In a powerful, dangerous universe, the Navajos conceive

of themselves as superior beings belonging to the same linguistic category as the gods themselves . . ." (p. 126). In this chapter he explains how the "truth" was presented as a gift to these proud and purposeful people when time met the dawn and life began everywhere instantly. The reader yearns for more—a reality that will produce honor and pride, a display of dignity that will show the beautiful, singing spirit of the Navajos.

In this book, we are permitted a peek into the peyote ceremony. It is like looking into a bubble that we cannot enter. The contents can be viewed, but they cannot be touched or handled. No amount of research can provide a satisfactory explanation for this ceremony; the spirit of peyote must communicate directly to the spirit of the participant. There is no way of "seeing" peyote other than to experience it with the life force.

The larger society generally views the peyote ceremony as a drug-induced escape from the inferior position that native peoples have found ourselves in recently. The idea that peyote is the foundation for a form of cult worship is an ignorant stretch of imagination. To address peyote, the spirit must be in a state of reverence and honor. To take peyote for the sake of some type of hallucination is to be dishonorable. Such behavior damages the participants and their families. Vecsey's research into the "Narratives of Peyote's Origins" is remarkable and academically sound. These stories of the origin of peyote help the reader gain a better understanding of the term *religion* and the purpose for ritual.

Peyote comes to the people in a time of peril, a time of need and distress. To some, it is a savior, a guide, and a healer. To organized Christianity, it is a diabolic, mind-altering substance that leads its users to insanity and evil. Vecsey challenges this view and that of many academics who see peyote as nothing more than an illegal drug. While secondhand research cannot reveal the complete purpose of peyote and the desired effects of the ceremony, Vecsey's description gives a clearer idea of the power of this medicine.

The magic of *Imagine Ourselves Richly* invites the reader to pursue this volume with deliberate intention and not to be afraid, finally, of entering the realm of "knowing." It remains yet in the future of academia to discover the moment when the delicate element of allegory is separated from mythology. Both of these elements must be intensely scrutinized by the autochthonous

people of academia who have solid contact with their natural spirit. For it may be that both allegory and mythology are inadequate for explaining the lifestyle of a people who are, like a star or a robin, born into a situation of spiritual responses to a spiritual episode—a people who need only to sing and dance in order to be in balance with all the powers of the universe.

*Imagine Ourselves Richly* is a remarkable research effort (complete with thirty-two pages of bibliography and references). It reaches into the darkness of academia, locates a shadow, and brings it forth and identifies it as allegory. It reaches again into the darkness, locates a mythology, and, holding that myth up to the sunlight, identifies it as such. Then it reaches into the evening and brings forth a handful of stars and says to the world, "This is a star. That is an allegory. That other, myth."

Perhaps Vecsey has introduced the time for a new event—for those of us in academia who are original to this hemisphere to cease employing the word *myth* when we communicate the lessons and legends of our origin and our life, our survival and our peace. Perhaps we should function with the language that was given to each of our nations when Quon sang and danced and there appeared a beautiful place to dwell where dreams could be real: earth. Earth, that beautiful but injured little place where original natives can still *Imagine Ourselves Richly*.

(There is no date for this occurrence, but there is a time: when the warrior-spirits of the native nations rise up together to think the beautiful thoughts that produce rainbow dreams, sing sweetly with the breath of dawn and look across the good land with brother Sun's strength as a guide to our understanding.)

Darryl Wilson

**Gods Among Us: American Indian Masks.** Edited by Ross Coates, with illustrations by Sarah Moore and Manley Dahkoshay. San Diego: San Diego State University Publications in American Indian Studies, 1989. 116 pages. \$14.95 Paper.

*Gods Among Us* is an anthology of essays that address the tradition of mask making and use among several different American Indian cultures. The Great Plains, the Makah, the eastern