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Sacred Land, Sacred View: Navajo Perceptions of the Four Corners Region. By Robert S. McPherson.

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When a narrative is taken out of its original language, then out of the community, then is scattered in print into areas where it is foreign, it cannot be expected to maintain its original intent. The message becomes further eroded when the narrative is interpreted by someone other than those for whom it was designed.

Extracting a narrative from the complete text of all the narratives is like taking a single page from a volume. The page has no beginning and no end, yet the scholar may expect somehow to glean a complete impression. In this instance, then, it is far better to vanish like the silver trout than to seek fulfillment in an academic pursuit involving narrative.

*Retelling/Rereading* is a valuable link between the telling of the original narratives of the natives of the Western Hemisphere and the understanding of Europeans and Euro-Americans. And it does provide some necessary investigation into the time, the events, and the purpose of those narratives. Its deeper value may be that it vividly demonstrates how flexible these narratives are and how quickly they can be tailored to fit various situations—situations that must be viewed in totality. Narratives are not one-dimensional, although they are rendered such when “finalized” in print, which separates the linear from the holistic

I do look forward to studying more of the literary labors of Karl Kroeber. His interpretation of European-based expression is excellent, and I shall pursue that excellence in future literature. But, most of all, I anticipate a time when native scholars will return to their respective communities, glean what is good and true in their own narratives, and publish that material in its proper context of flexibility and meaning.

*Darryl Wilson*

**Sacred Land, Sacred View: Navajo Perceptions of the Four Corners Region.** By Robert S. McPherson. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, Charles Redd Monographs in Western History No. 19, 1992. 152 pages. \$8.95 paper.

This book grew out of Robert McPherson's experiences as a college English instructor at Montezuma Creek, Utah. He learned from his Navajo students and from many interviews with Navajo elders that the Navajo have a very different perception of their geography and environment than Anglos have of theirs. Following the

lead of writers such as Joseph Campbell, Mircea Eliade, Victor Turner, and Claude Levi-Strauss, McPherson holds that these differences in the perceptions of the Navajo people (Diné) are rooted in mythic understandings of how the world works. In his interviews, he heard the all-too-common lament that the old ways are being lost.

Thus, McPherson wrote this book with a dual agenda: first, to help record and preserve Navajo perceptions; second, to make these differing perceptions available to the general public and scholars alike. McPherson portrays Navajo perceptions via a tour through Four Corners sacred geography and a discussion of Navajo views of the Anasazi (an Anglo mispronunciation of a Navajo phrase meaning "ancient enemies" or "ancient strangers"). These two sections of the book on sacred geography and Navajo perception of the Anasazi are divided into seven and eight short chapters, respectively. He draws heavily on personal interviews but cites relevant literature quite often.

Because of McPherson's dual agenda, this book is neither fish nor fowl. It is not a treatise on Navajo religion in the tradition of Gladys Reichard (p. 5), nor is it an exposition on the role of myth in society. It might best be classed as a form of *belles lettres*, except that it is not an exercise for its own sake but seeks to view the world through the eyes of another culture. Since I have concentrated on social structural studies of Native Americans, this book is problematic for me, because it is outside my normal bailiwick.

However, having lived and worked with the Navajo (at Navajo Community College in Many Farms, Arizona, in the early 1970s), I can say that much of what McPherson reports about the Navajo from Monument Valley and neighboring areas rings true. There are problems with the generality of McPherson's findings, even for the Four Corners area, because his account of Navajo beliefs is drawn from anecdotal ethnography combined with information from relevant literature. As noted, an ethnography of folk geography is not McPherson's goal. Rather, he seeks to see the geography of the Four Corners region through Navajo eyes. He succeeds in this, with the standard caveats that (1) there is no one Navajo view of the world; and (2) there are limits to the possibility of seeing the world through the eyes of a culture other than one's own.

As a rule, rural people tend to have a much stronger sense of place than urban people, whether they are thoroughly modern Indiana farmers (where I live now) or "traditional" Navajo in Monument Valley. This comes from a life lived in one place, close to the land. A major difference, though, between rural Indiana

farmers and the Navajo McPherson describes is that, for these Navajo, the sense of place includes an explanation of origins, order in the universe, and a deep sense of identity. McPherson tries to convey this sense of place.

At first, the book seems like a pastiche or collage of vignettes culled from interviews, teaching experiences, correspondence, and readings assembled in two problematically related sections. But, as the reader gains perspective, a larger coherence emerges—an experience paralleling a shift from a close to a distant view of an impressionist painting. One begins to develop a sense of how Navajo view their own landscape. The connection between the sections on geography and the Anasazi is found in the ways the Navajo discuss both with McPherson. Navajo do not have concepts like *Anasazi culture* or *Anasazi society* but stories that describe how such-and-such event occurred at a specific place at a specified time. The event may have occurred in “real” time, that is, in what the Navajo call the fifth world, or it may have occurred in “sacred” time, that is, in one of the worlds preceding the present fifth world.

Readers familiar with phenomenological approaches to culture such as those of Alfred Schutz or Harold Garfinkel or with discussions of deconstructionism will be troubled by McPherson’s naive assumption that it is possible to portray the worldview of another culture. Clearly, McPherson assumes it is possible. However, he does not provide an explicit self-critical assessment of the sources and degrees of distortion in his account of a Navajo worldview. This failure is only obliquely addressed by extensive use of direct quotes from conversations with Navajo. Yet, even having a Navajo interpret and comment on the texts of these conversations would not alleviate the problem. A “traditional” Navajo would not write such a book in the first place. (I place *traditional* in quotes because the referent for that term is historically problematic, but the label does carry shared meaning for Navajo and others who live with them.) A review is not the place to resolve the dilemmas of intersubjectivity, but the problem does lurk in the background of any attempt to evaluate this book.

My standard of evaluation, as noted above, is that the book does not contradict my own experiences nor the experiences of those people with whom I have discussed such matters at various times. This, to me, is the source of its strength. How truly representative it is of “the Navajo view,” or even “a Navajo view,” will remain problematic. Still, the book has potential for classroom use. Most students cannot go to live among the Navajo for an extended

period of time, but reading *Sacred Land, Sacred View* can provide some sense of how the Navajo view and experience their world. For all of us who teach, this is one of the most difficult ideas to convey. McPherson does this well, making this a valuable addition to the voluminous writings on the Navajo. This is not the final word, or even a definitive treatise. But in McPherson's own words, it is a "useful" (p. 5) contribution.

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**Schmick's Mahican Dictionary.** Edited by Carl Masthay. Philadelphia: Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society no. 197, 1991. 188 pages. \$30.00 cloth.

The Mahican people inhabited an area in what is now eastern New York State, southwestern Vermont, western Massachusetts, and northwestern Connecticut, stretching from Lake Champlain south along the Hudson River to Dutchess County. They spoke an Eastern Algonquian language (not to be confused with Mohegan, a dialect of a different language spoken in eastern Connecticut). The Mahican language is known primarily from material recorded at two missions established during the eighteenth century, one by Baptists at Stockbridge in the Berkshires, the other by Moravians at Shecomeco in Dutchess County. Both of these communities were linguistically heterogeneous, composed of speakers of several different dialects. Both communities were forced to move westward a number of times. The language was last spoken in the 1930s in Wisconsin.

Documentation of the language, like that of many Eastern Algonquian languages, is unfortunately sparse. Stockbridge Mahican is represented by translations of liturgical materials, some vocabulary, a text, and grammatical notes by Jonathan Edwards from 1788 (*Observations on the Language of the Muhhekaneew Indians*). Moravian Mahican is attested primarily in manuscripts from the Moravian mission, now in the Moravian archives in Herrnhut, Germany, in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and in the Houghton Library at Harvard. Fortunately, Carl Masthay has made accessible a significant body of material from these archives. His earlier work, *Mahican Language Hymns, Biblical Prose, and Vocabularies from Moravian Sources, with 11 Mohawk Hymns* (St. Louis,