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Flight of the Seventh Moon: The Teaching of the Shields. By Lynn V. Andrews.

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a personal signature. By exploring the relationships between cultural convention and individual expression—and by tracing the artistic activities and research that have made the revival of Northwest Coast Indian art possible—*The Legacy* will greatly interest and benefit artists and researchers from a broad range of cultures.

Victoria Wyatt  
Alaska State Historical Library

**Flight of the Seventh Moon: The Teaching of the Shields.** By Lynn V. Andrews. New York: Harper and Row, 1984. 203 pp. \$13.95 Cloth \$6.95 Paper.

*Flight of the Seventh Moon* is the sequel to Lynn V. Andrews' first book, *Medicine Woman*, and it continues the story of her experiences as an apprentice to Agnes Whistling Elk, a Cree medicine woman who lives near Crowley, Manitoba (apparently a fictional town; Andrews says that hers "is a true story," but that "some of the names and places have been changed . . . to protect the privacy of these involved"). Agnes, according to Andrews, "initiated me into my womanliness and selfhood. Through a series of visions and ceremonies, she took me around a circle of learning, and gave me a working mandala, a shield that I can carry in my everyday life" (pp. xi-xii).

Even this brief description suggests the book's major literary progenitors. Its subtitle alludes to *Seven Arrows* (1972), by Hymeyohsts Storm, Andrews' friend and advisor who appears in both of her books. *Seven Arrows* explains the teachings of a medicine society, the Brotherhood of the Shields, which flourished among the Plains tribes in the nineteenth century. The female-oriented teachings of Andrews' Sisterhood of the Shields complement the male-oriented teachings of *Seven Arrows*.

The second major influence apparent in *Flight* is Carlos Castaneda. In *The Teachings of Don Juan* (1968) and its successors, Castaneda describes his apprenticeship to a Yaqui medicine man and reveals the secrets of his teacher's path to the acquisition of medicine power through hallucinatory experiences. Andrews never mentions using hallucinogens, but in other respects she

does for Agnes Whistling Elk and female medicine power what Castenada did for Don Juan and male medicine power.

When viewed in this way, as a supplement to the works of Storm and Castenada, *Flight of the Seventh Moon* can best be described as a spiritual autobiography, and it is as such that it must be judged—not as a psychological study of a woman's search for identity, self-worth, and belonging; not as a feminist tract pointing the way to female self-sufficiency; not as an allegory of the battle between the forces of light and darkness for control of the human soul; and not as an anthropological investigation of Native American shamanistic ritual and belief. Although all of these elements are present in the book, they are overshadowed by Agnes' attempts to teach Lynn to be a medicine woman, a woman "capable of seeing and knowing and piercing through all the layers of illusion" (p. 9).

The term "spiritual autobiography" implies certain conventions. For example, one expects to find a chronicle of the author's spiritual development, but Lynn (for convenience and clarity, "Lynn" will refer to the character in the book, "Andrews" to the author) is just as dependent and fearful at the end of the book as she was when she first apprenticed herself to Agnes some four or five years before the events described in *Flight*. Even though she has gained some knowledge and some power, she is not significantly wiser or better for it.

Closely related to this lack of spiritual development is a second major weakness. In any autobiography, the author's personality is a crucial factor in determining our reaction, but in *Flight* Lynn's personality is not sufficiently strong or interesting to hold our attention. She is eclipsed by Agnes and Ruby Plenty Chiefs, another medicine woman who sometimes assists Agnes. These two strong women constitute potential centers of interest, but we never really get to understand them because we see them only through Lynn's uncomprehending eyes.

In addition, we expect to find in a spiritual autobiography some culminating moment of illumination, some wisdom or vision in which we too can participate. The climactic scene of this book, the one from which it takes its title, occurs after Lynn, under Agnes' tutelage, has completed her task of constructing the four shields which, taken together, constitute "the ultimate medicine wheel, the map from my outer to my inner being" (p. 195). Agnes then takes Lynn to a sacred spot on a mountain. After

Agnes departs, Lynn begins to concentrate on the symbolic meanings of her four shields. Suddenly she hears an incredible cracking noise, the sky seems to be filled with flashing colored lights, the ground turns hot and begins to undulate, and a great gust of wind lifts the shields into the air. Lynn loses consciousness. "The next thing I knew, it was dawn. I was laying [sic] flat on my back. . . . My shields were gone" (p. 196).

Agnes explains to Lynn that it was the flying sky shields that took her shields, and that what she saw is called the Flight of the Seventh Moon. Because Lynn had the power to call them, though she was not conscious of doing so, the sky beings came down to honor her. Andrews now suggests that the flying shields are actually flying saucers (p. 197). Agnes tells Lynn that long ago the medicine wheels were in outer space and had every power but one—they couldn't touch. So they decided to come down and enter human bodies so that they can touch: "when the medicine wheel comes down it is called conception. . . . At death the medicine wheel retruns to outer space and the earthbound body returns to mother earth" (p. 197). Thus, according to Agnes' teachings, medicine wheels are not only flying saucers but also human souls.

But there is more to come. Agnes next takes Lynn out into the forest where they come upon a whole clearing full of medicine shields—forty-four to be exact. Among them Lynn sees her own north shield, which of course had disappeared along with the others during the night on the mountain. As the fog lifts, Lynn sees that, in addition to Agnes, now standing beside her own shield, she is surrounded by a circle of forty-two other women of varying ages, mostly over fifty, not all of them Indians, each also standing in front of her shield (p. 202). Together these women constitute the Sisterhood of the Shields, into which Lynn is now being accepted. "With tears of inexplicable joy I realized that something within me recognized each and every woman. . . . What I saw in their faces was completeness. Each of them was a realized and loving woman, an enlightened woman. They were my sisterhood. I had found my circle" (p. 203).

Inevitably, questions arise, questions which are not put to rest even by the attempts to gain credence through the chummy presence of Hyemeyohsts Storm, the fine illustrations done by none other than N. Scott Momaday, and the dedication to Twila Nitsch Yehwehnode and Paula Gunn Allen. However, the most

pertinent questions are not those about the book's authenticity but rather those about its ability to hold our interest and to make us feel that we have gained something worthwhile from it.

With regard to the first of these questions, since *Flight* lacks significant spiritual development and an engaging central personality, it must depend more heavily than is usual in a spiritual autobiography on suspense and plot development if it is to succeed in holding our interest. Andrews' chief device for generating suspense is the threat posed to Lynn by her arch-enemy Red Dog, a white man and former Catholic priest who has become a powerful and dangerous shaman. However, this plot line is exploited only sporadically, and when the expected confrontation does come, it is curiously thin and anti-climactic. Other potential sources of tension and interest—the unpredictability and unreliability of Lynn's two teachers, Agnes and Ruby, for instance—likewise remain under-exploited. Ultimately, the book rests almost entirely upon the interest which the author is able to elicit from its "teachings," as distinguished from its narrative.

Relevant to the teachings are two major and related motifs. The first involves Lynn's development of her feminine spirituality and the second the specific teachings of the shields. Feminists will be disappointed in Andrews' handling of the first, for neither does it include an analysis of woman's plight nor does it provide much guidance to a woman seeking to develop her womanhood. However, the specific teachings of the shields, and the experiences, ceremonies, and exercises which Agnes and Ruby devise to inculcate them, do generate some interest but are incapable of carrying the book on their own. Many of the teachings lead to paranormal experiences, as when Lynn collapses in a gas station restroom, slipping into another lifetime in which she finds herself enclosed in a kiva into which a large rattlesnake has been lowered as part of an ancient initiation ritual (pp. 108-09). On another occasion Agnes, an old woman, becomes a child while simultaneously Lynn is transformed into an old woman (pp. 146-47). Agnes is also able to transform herself into a bear, then a lynx, then back to Agnes again in rapid succession (pp. 154-55). The reader wonders what teachings can possibly be drawn from such bizarre experiences, and the connection between the teachings and the paranormal experiences too often seems arbitrary or strained. For example, Agnes explains the meaning of her transformations into animals in this way: "Think

about how you change when you are in love. . . . When you say, 'I love you,' you are saying, 'I transform you.' But since you alone can transform no one, what you are really saying is, 'I transform myself and my vision' " (p. 156). There is perhaps a superficial connection between Agnes transforming herself into animals and the lover's transformation of herself, but, on the other hand, the context of love is totally absent from Agnes' animal transformations, making the teaching strained and arbitrary.

For the reader who persists, there are in *Flight of the Seventh Moon* occasions of insight, but only those readers who come to it predisposed to the paranormal are likely to feel that the rewards justify the effort. To such readers, the further question of the authenticity of the experiences, rituals, and teachings will scarcely matter, just as it does not really matter to the devotees of Storm and Castenada.

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**Star Quilt.** By Roberta Hill Whiteman. Minneapolis: Holy Cow! Press, 1984. 81 pp. \$6.95 Paper.

Like most, I imagine, I first encountered the poetry of (then) Roberta Hill in the pages of *Carriers of the Dream Wheel*. It was evident then that there was great power in Roberta Hill's vision; a supple, muscular grace sinewed her lines. The early judgment was that this was a poet to be reckoned with. That was ten years ago. A few poems appeared in the intervening years, but little else. When the Modern Language Association met in Los Angeles a few years back, I attended a reading of prominent women poets where I was introduced to Roberta Hill Whiteman. Like me she had come to hear these poets read, but after the reading it was clear, to me at least, that her seven- and eight-year-old poems were the equal of those being so prominently displayed that night, and that Roberta Hill Whiteman's achievement would have been just as publicly recognized except for the fact that she had not published a book. When in the course of conversation that evening she mentioned that her book had been accepted for publication and was coming out in a year or so, anticipation be-