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JOURNAL OF THE HISTORY OF SEXUALITY

VOLUME 6   NUMBER 3   JANUARY 1996

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Book Reviews


*Queer Spirits*, edited by Will Roscoe, should not have been published in its present form. It needs radical editing. It exemplifies Harry Hay's theories about third-gender, "two-spirit," Native American berdaches and their shamanistic counterparts around the world. Unlike Walter Williams and Ramón Gutiérrez, Hay and Roscoe believe berdaches to be endowed like Arthur Evan's witches (*Witchcraft: The Gay Counterculture* [Boston: Fag Rag, 1977]) with psychic powers. While some of the overly long quotes in this work—a sort of anthology and personal memoir at the same time—are edifying, they are strung together without any apparent rhyme or reason in an almost psychedelic fashion. The excerpts have been published previously, and the highly personal comments that link them are unscholarly. Logic and proof are not the writer's strong points, but Roscoe is truly moving when speaking of friends' deaths of AIDS.

This work is a product of "progressive politics," with less academic rigor than Roscoe's well-received *The Zuni Man-Woman* (about the most famous Indian berdache) and his *Living the Spirits: A Gay American Indian Anthology* (New York: St. Martin's, 1989). Roscoe's *Queer Spirits* overflows with consciousness-raising and West Coast eccentricity. He tries hard-to-find archetypes and echoes from around the world for what Hay sensed among Native American berdaches. He relies on intuition and feelings—like the Radical Fairies, whom Hay founded years ago.
after being hounded out of the Mattachine Society for being a communist. While concentrating on cross-dressing, gender-bending shamans, Roscoe recognizes two other types of homosexuals—pederasts and heroic same-age "twins" like Achilles and Patroclus: "I distinguished the paths of the Queen, the Divine Twins, and Initiation" (p. 256). Whatever happened to the promiscuous male gay: the clone? Ultimately, the work is dependent on C. G. Jung and on J. J. Bachofen (Myth, Religion and Mother Right: Selected Writings of Johanna Jakob Bachofen [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967]). These counterculture relativistic theories—that "there are neither civilized nor primitive, inferior nor superior, simple nor advanced societies—only different ones" (The Zuni Man-Woman [Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992], p. xiii), as Roscoe himself states—are more politically correct than scientific.

I cannot understand how Roscoe, as author and editor, chose or ordered the selections. The author rambles from ancient Greece to modern Borneo, linking the selections together by references to his own social and sexual experiences. The bits and pieces remind me of TV sound bites rather than scholarly analysis. His idea of proof is naive: "The very existence of gay-related myths and archetypes is proof of an independent basis for gay personality" (p. 4). His juxtaposition of The Ugly Duckling and the Mahabharata is jarring. He fails to recognize standards by which to rank literature and art and gives equal time to the most primitive of societies and the grossest pornography, as in the raunchy excerpt from "Blue Light." He draws on material from every continent and from many ages but fails to make it add up.

The book may cause "veils and gossamers" to vanish from the initiated and empower those sensitive souls who "get it." But I have never before read such unverified assertions published by a press that pretends to academic respectability. Roscoe's attempt to analyze (and often even to translate) works from Gilgamesh, through Plato and Rumi, to Quentin Crisp and James Thurber reveal a lack of respect for his own limits and for the scholarship of others. He feels that he is in contact with other queer spirits—freed from ordinary rules of logic by spiritual insights. Citations of secondary works are also idiosyncratic.

Among Roscoe's heroes are the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence; a street hustler from the Castro who showed him around when at age twenty, on moving to San Francisco, he became sexually active; and various shamans that he learned about here and there. So incoherent as this work is, it might well fit into the drug culture of the 1970s, to which the author periodically refers as the matrix of his self-realization: "Queens sitting in the middle of the dance floor holding their spinning heads, giggling on MDA, LSD, quacks, perks, barbs, val-yums, preludins, crys-
or being a communistic-shamanic, pederastic and he- lped distinguished the n" (p. 256). What- one? Ultimately, the "Myth, Religion
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tal meth, black beauties, mesc, coke, tuinals, talwins, dust, Quaaludes, Quaaludes, Quaaludes — sex, grabbing, rubbing, sex-looking, sex-feeling — longing, crying, hysterical laughter, birth and death of all forms of human contact, now, here, all on one tribal, pounding dance floor for thousands, bathed in all-brain encompassing disco beats like great pounding waves and all eye-filling lights, initiates we surrender our senses to the disco temple—it's a scene: the scene::1978::San Francisco" (p. 292). In short, the book is just too, too much.

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Many current analyses of gender and sexuality from the disciplinary area defined as men's studies both begin and end with claims of a victimization unequal to but like that of women, pointing to a similar oppression of men by patriarchal social and symbolic systems. Ultimately, these claims fail to be convincing because they beg the question, Who generates social and symbolic systems, and who historically has benefited the most from them? Howard Eilberg-Schwartz—in a deft combination of feminist and gender criticism, psychoanalytic theory (relying on Freud and to some extent Lacan), and cultural anthropology—avoids crying victim in his novel and startling approach to "ancient" (biblical and rabbinic) Judaism. Addressing the problem of gendered monotheism in Israel, he contends that a male father deity does indeed work to "legitimate masculinity" but proves actually to "render the meaning of masculinity unstable" (p. 2). In his view, males do benefit from their close association with a male God, but because of the aggressive heterosexuality of Israelite religion, with its emphasis on male procreative power, the only being who can both desire and be desired by God is female. This cultural assumption creates a homoerotic dilemma that is resolved in part "by symbolically displacing male tensions and contradictions onto women" (p. 20).

Eilberg-Schwartz also discusses extensively the complex series of questions that Jewish and, to a lesser degree Christian, monotheism raises: Why is it so impossible to think about God as a sexual being? Why, if God is not sexed or sexual (yet is assumed to be one, and male), are human beings created in God's image, being two, each having a different