

Critique

Kristin Herzog's journey into the past is a necessary journey for serious students of ethnic and American studies; she establishes the relevance and validity of oral literature which has been relegated to an inferior status by scholars in the western world. The attempt to impose an inferior status on oral literature is rather sinister when one considers the absence of a written literature has been taken to mean an absence of intellectual activity on the part of such people. Not only American Indians but also Africans have suffered a great deal because of the tendency to regard such people as lacking in culture or intellectual achievements. On the contrary, the oral tradition has been the strength of ancient cultures as Kristin Herzog shows and was brought to light in a remarkable way by Alex Haley in his novel *ROOTS*. Alex Haley went back to a living ancient tradition in The Gambia and brought to life and to the attention of the world the richness of an African culture while documenting his personal history. There is, however, a danger that oral tradition might not stand up to critical scientific analysis but this does not mean that it cannot be validated by evidence from other sources supporting it. The main point to be made however is that oral tradition is a legitimate tradition.

Herzog's narrative touches on two universals: the need for people to live on this planet with peace among all and the need for all people to realize that while life is in many ways masculine that the feminine principle in life is equally important. The stories that she draws from to demonstrate the search for peace among American Indian people comes close to our times when we are also searching for peace in a troubled world. It is important, however, to note that in the stories that she narrates, there is a similarity to the Christian ideals and the Christian notion of a redeemer who would free people and bring them all peace. There might be a tendency on the part of some critics to believe that the Christian ideas have been incorporated after the fact into American Indian rituals. This is a temptation that must be resisted. We have to take the stories as they are, giving credit to American Indian people who, after all, like all other people, have only given expression to a universal need for living peacefully. The stories also deal with the timeless struggle between good and evil with good prevailing in the end.

The feminine principle which has come upon us in the western world of late had obviously been understood by ancient cultures long before

it became an element in Euroamerican society. In Chinua Achebe's famous novel, *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo, the hero in the novel who is a strong African warrior and whose greatest weakness in life was that he was afraid he would be called a "woman," is told by his kinsmen in his motherland when he is down in life, that the feminine principle is very important, that is why "mother is called 'supreme.'" The American Indian ritual also clearly demonstrates this principle and it will do us a world of good to take this journey back into time to learn as Kofi Awoonor, a Ghanaian poet, once said, "by reaching for the stars, we stop at the house of the moon."

Ernest Champion
Bowling Green State University

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After a lengthy description of the various facets of Haudosaunee ritual, Kristin Herzog makes some interesting statements on the parallels between our modern day social arguments and those which plagued them centuries ago. The unique feature of Haudosaunee social organization is its systematic balance of power between the sexes. Although it is doubtful that American women who are currently engaged in a struggle for political and social power will achieve quite the same degree of equity, just studying a society in which such a balance was achieved is helpful for those in the process of defining women's goals and objectives.

Herzog's description of the way in which the epic of Dekanawida has survived culturally among the Haudosaunee in spite of assimilation attempts brings to mind a similar phenomenon among Afroamericans. In 1943, the editor of the *American Mercury Magazine* asked the anthropologist and novelist Zora Neale Hurston to write an essay which would give Americans hope during the dark days of World War II. In fulfilling the assignment Hurston chose to discuss one aspect of Afroamerican folklore that had been the secret to black survival since the early days of slavery. The essay, entitled "High John De Conqueror," became part of Hurston's larger mission to alleviate white America's ignorance about Afroamericans, and their myths and rituals.

According to Hurston, High John De Conqueror originated in Africa as "a whisper, a will to hope, a wish to find something worthy of