

BOOK REVIEWS

SUPERNATURAL PRACTICES

Ojibwa Religion and the Midéwiwin

By Ruth Landes. Pp. viii + 250. (University of Wisconsin Press: Madison, Milwaukee and London, 1968). 66s. 6d.

It is a truism that every society has a philosophical system or supernatural rationale for dealing with the areas of uncertainty in life. Few Indian groups have had more written about their system of religion and belief than the Ojibwa, an Algonkian speaking people on both sides of the Great Lakes and spreading westwards to the prairies. There is the classic case of the Guardian Spirit ethic, a people whose world was filled with spirit forces and whose existence depended on gaining power over these forces, both benign and malevolent. The relevance of the Guardian Spirit was shown in a person's attempt to draw to himself one of the powers by means of his vision quest. Throughout life a personally gained spirit would guide and support him through all kinds of adversity. For those unsuccessful in gaining a vision there were specialists who, for a fee, would help the supplicant gain power, or at least cure his illness or misfortune. In this well ordered system there was explanation and satisfaction for success or failure in addition to a theatre for rivalry and pseudo political influence to be played out by the more gifted or ambitious.

Some of this religious world emerged from the writings of the fur trader, J. Long, in the 1770s, through Henry Schoolcraft early in the nineteenth century, Peter Jones and J. G. Kohl in 1860, and culminating for the historical period in 1891 in Hoffman's account of the Grand Medicine Society or Midéwiwin. The latter, which was practised by some Ojibwa groups, was the ultimate in social ritual and drama in which a number of skilled specialists grouped together to cure the sick and to initiate apprentices into various degrees of the society.

This book contains material chiefly about the Midéwiwin, its origin tales, its ritual and its organization. It was collected between 1932 and 1935 from two informants, Will Rogers of Cass Lake, Minnesota, and Maggie Wilson of Emo, Ontario. As new material it is important, especially coming from the noted Ojibwa scholar.

At the same time, the way in which the material is presented raises several questions. In talking of the past, the informants may be rather nostalgic about their days of power. Consequently, a preoccupation with malevolent sorcery may be overstressed. Contemporary fieldwork indicates that while people talked freely about sorcery, rarely would anyone admit to anything but benevolent magic. An overweening focus on evil doing by sorcery accords with the lonely life of the trappers which Landes has always maintained. But other writers deny this individualism or "atomism" in Ojibwa society. Landes's reference to recent demography in Rogers's study fails to recognize that even these people were not isolated in their winter trapping. Here a small but organized group cooperated, sharing and help being a *sine qua non*.

Moreover, it is difficult to understand how the author could have ignored the large and significant work of Hallowell. In the area of Ojibwa philosophy, psychology, magic and religion, Hallowell's publications have made this ethnic group a textbook case. Yet she refers to only one of his studies, that of the role of conjuring.

Finally, with largely autobiographical reminiscence the concept of authorship is changing. Such studies as Radin's *Crashing Thunder* (1926), Ford's *Smoke From Their Fires*

(1941), and Simmons's *Sun Chief* (1942), the anthropologist claimed authorship. More recently, perhaps under the influence of the search for identity by ethnic groups, *Sammy Louis* was collected and edited by W. E. Sayres, and *I, Nuligak* was edited and translated by M. Metayer. Perhaps too, therefore, this descriptive study of Ojibwa supernatural practices should have been by Will Rogers and Maggie Wilson, edited or collected by Ruth Landes.

R. W. DUNNING

AGGRESSIVE MAN

Human Aggression

By Anthony Storr. Pp. 127. (Allen Lane, The Penguin Press: London, 1968.) 25s.

DR STORR propounds the very tenable thesis that aggression is instinctive in us, and though it may be aggravated by frustration, it is not simply the product of the latter, as some psychoanalysts claim. He rightly differentiates the useful drive to overcome obstacles, both physical and psychological, which man possesses, from activity inspired by hatred and what Gibbon calls "the deplorable desire to injure".

Storr reviews the literature of aggression in animals, and their behaviour in regard to territory, which certainly has persisted in man. This was strongly borne out by the rally to the colours in 1939 by those who had suffered so badly in the depression of the thirties, who might well have felt indifferent as to what befell their country. Yet, as we have seen so often since, the slogan "workers of the world unite" has never replaced the call of patriotism.

When Storr gets onto clinical matters it is harder to agree with him to the same extent as in his other chapters. Thus his explanation of schizophrenia in particular, though also in cyclic depressions—in terms almost only of early rejection and frustration—is not convincing, although one does not belittle the importance of these factors. One can believe that they produce the introverted shy "schizoid" type, but the confusion of acute schizophrenia and the disjointed thinking is so like what is seen in toxic and drug induced states, and the waxy rigidity of catatonia so like what a cerebral tumour can produce, that an organic explanation will surely ultimately emerge. Indeed, in some known organic states, for example, GPI, a typical schizophrenic picture may present, all of which would point to psychological factors determining the content of the psychosis; but other factors are more likely the actual causes of the breakdown.

Returning to the main theme, in the last chapter on ways of reducing hostility, Storr once again gives a balanced and realistic analysis of where we stand. He starts off by modestly disclaiming psychiatric infallibility, observing that psychiatrists "are apt to proffer advice in fields of human activity where they all are no more than inexperienced amateurs". This reads in pleasant contrast to a letter in the *Lancet* before the War in which the signatories commenced with the portentous statement that "we as psychiatrists deplore war", and then continued to outline quite unrealistic "psychological" schemes for preventing it!

As Storr brings out, one of the tragedies of modern war is that decent individuals can perform the most dreadful acts because they are done at a distance. Such behaviour is, of course, not truly aggressive, but a calculated act; hence reducing man's aggressiveness, as some urge, would not truly meet this situation.

Storr has produced a clear and succinct review of his subject. He writes with an attractive simplicity of style and freedom from jargon which so often bedevils psychiatric writings, and he includes an occasional very nice turn of sardonic phrase. The book can be warmly commended.

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