

Michael Harner's reply to Robert Bly's Jan. 22, 1978 review of *The Second Ring Of Power* in the New York Times Book Review. Published May 7, 1978.

To the Editor,

While it was flattering to be referred to as a "genuine researcher" whose work is a source of Carlos Castaneda's data by Robert Bly in his review of "The Second Ring Of Power" (Jan. 22), I must lodge a protest in the interest of accuracy and fairness to Castaneda and his readers. Mr. Bly makes the mistake, as do others, such as Richard de Mille in "Castaneda's Journey," who are not really knowledgeable about shamanism, of assuming that similarities between Castaneda's material and that published by others is due to plagiarism by Castaneda. They apparently are unaware that remarkable parallels exist in shamanic belief and practice throughout the primitive world. I am thoroughly conversant with Castaneda's publications; I have known him for a decade and a half; and I am not familiar with any evidence that he has borrowed material from my works.

It is unfortunate that the persons chosen to review Castaneda's books are not really experts on shamanism. Whatever Castaneda's faults, he is one of the very few Westerners who have ever been able to communicate the nature of the shamanic experience. In this sense he conveys a deep truth, although his specific details can often be justifiably questioned. Who is the more significant conveyer of truth, Castaneda or a plodding ethnographer who gets [garbled] second-hand details right, but who never has had a shamanic experience and misses the spirit of shamanism?

Finally, the current attacks on Castaneda often smack of ethnocentrism. I could hardly believe my eyes (speaking of a separate reality) when Bly rejected the possibility that we could help our own personal development by learning from "cultures more primitive than ours" and preached instead, "only by reaching to the work of a more highly articulated culture can your interior energy come forth." Christian missionaries have been saying more or less the same thing in the Upper Amazon jungle for decades. The Indians there still don't believe it, and neither do I. What elitist Victorian hogwash!

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