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## Review of *Going Native or Going Naive? White Shamanism and the Neo-Noble Savage* By Dagmar Wernitznig

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*Going Native or Going Naïve? White Shamanism and the Neo-Noble Savage.* By Dagmar Wernitznig. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003. xxxix + 103 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$28.00 paper.

In this slim volume, Wernitznig addresses the New Age phenomenon of "white shamanism"—the appropriation of Native American traditions by white self-help gurus who draw heavily on Plains Indian lore, with a sprinkling of everything from Buddhism to Celtic mythology for good measure.

Wernitznig distinguishes between "white shamans" and "plastic medicine men." Unlike the latter, white shamans do not claim Indian identity. Instead, popular writers like Lynn Andrews, Marie Herbert, and Michael Bromley claim to have been instructed by Indian mentors. They advocate "easy-fix" enlightenment through painless, pleasant initiations, such as Herbert's *Healing Quest*, which involved "spending three days in a comfortable tepee with a portable toilet, being waited upon by Speaks the Truth and Looks for Woman, two subservient Indians." In spite of his discredited status in academia, the legacy of Carlos Castaneda is clearly a potent force here. Like Castaneda's "teacher" Don Juan, most of the supposed Indian spiritual guides are shadowy figures at best. Wernitznig justifiably assumes most never existed.

White shamanism is a provocative phenomenon that deserves serious treatment. This book, unfortunately, fails to provide it. Wernitznig's discussion is disappointingly brief

and dependent almost entirely on secondary sources. After offering a short history of white shamanism, she covers important points superficially, offering chapters of three to five pages on such potentially engaging topics as "instant enlightenment," "new age environmentalism," and "female shamanism," the last touching on the relationship between feminism and the New Age movement. Each barely scratches the surface, offering little new. There is some analysis of the white shamans' writings, but nothing at all about their audience.

The most fatal flaw, however, is the book's impenetrable and confusing prose. Wernitznig clearly needs a good editor to help convey her ideas. Unfortunately, University Press of America, which essentially accepts camera-ready manuscripts for quick publication, serves her poorly. The text is characterized by tortured syntax and baffling word choices. Many sentences read like literal translations that desperately need editorial attention: "The trajectory of noble/ignoble dichotomies represents a prelusive compendium for white shaman maladaptations of Indianness, which, then, are further particularized by primitivist neologisms." Such sentences abound, detracting significantly from the author's arguments. Wernitznig's topic is fascinating; I hope she will be able to offer a more effective presentation elsewhere.

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