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Author

Thompson, Nile

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Ravensong: A Natural and Fabulous History of Ravens and Crows. By Catherine Feher-Elston. Flagstaff, Arizona: Northland Publishing Company, 1991. 208 pages. \$16.95 paper.

The subjects of *Ravensong* are the members of the *Corvus* family of birds, namely ravens and crows, and the central focus of the book is the roles these birds play in Native American societies. Anticipating the presentation, I looked forward to holistic descriptions of how these corvids are/were viewed and treated in a cross-section of Indian societies. In retrospect, I suppose what I anticipated was an anthropological treatment of the topic.

I expected to see a variety of cultural perspectives on the birds such as I encountered among the Twana of the Hood Canal region of Washington State. Both Raven and Crow appear in numerous Twana stories of the period prior to the coming of humans. Many implements of Crow were altered by the Transformer to form other natural features. "Crow's shells" (the keyhole limpet [*Diodoro aspera*]) and "crow's feet" are basketry designs. The Twana observed flocks of crows in order to locate patches of ripe blackberries. Another type of berry was not eaten by the Twana because it was considered to be "crow food." The Twana related the crow and the raven taxonomically. However, they also made two connections to other birds that would be unacceptable in today's scientific community. The red-winged blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*) was mistakenly regarded as a young crow, while the mudhen (*Fulica americana*) was viewed as a seasonal manifestation of the crow.

What I found in *Ravensong* was not a scholarly book, but a popular account. Feher-Elston frames the discussion poorly within numerous (often very interesting) personal accounts and presentations about animal behavior and cultures worldwide. In addition to myths, she extensively covers corvids in the realm of Native American religion.

Although seven myths are presented, there is no discussion of methodology. I cannot help but feel that the author had a hand in the wording of the myths. For example, consider the sentence, "Raven-boy continued to cajole and one by one, he accumulated the other boxes" (p. 22). There are few references within the text, and no footnotes. The closest to what I had imagined I would find is the singular section dealing with the Hopi. Another interesting section deals with the potential legal problems that might befall someone in aiding an injured bird.

The above criticisms are easy to discount, if one can take seriously pronouncements such as, "Crows may or may not speak and understand human words . . ." (p. 129). Maybe my problems with such statements are the result of my disappointed hopes for the book. However, there are flaws in the volume that should not be overlooked. Within what could be termed a composite of Native American and New Age culture, Feher-Elston juxtaposes Indians with whites, engaging in stereotyping, lumping, and romanticizing. The Indians appear to be living in mythological times, using magic and being guided through their existence. Whites, however, live in the present time, work with science, and function with love and understanding in their lives.

A number of exaggerations caused me concern, such as, "The indigenous peoples of North America integrated *all aspects* of nature into their daily lives" (p. 57, emphasis added). Another frequent error is that Feher-Elston references all Indians by concepts not common to all Indian cultures. For example, she often refers to Indians as "Raven's children" or "children of the Great Mother Earth." To the author's credit, there is a disclaimer buried late in the work: "While the crow and the raven are respected by most North American tribes, they do not play the same roles in all Indian societies" (p. 174).

The battle of colonialism in the New World receives an interesting interpretation here. Feher-Elston views it as a confrontation between those who are close to raven and crow (i. e., the Indians) and those whose relationship to them is in the remote past (i. e., the Euro-Americans). If the book were not about corvids, the battle presumably could have been viewed as being between those who sail on ships and those who do not, or those with hard-soled shoes and those with soft-soled or no shoes.

There may be an audience that appreciates this publication. It does provide a picture of an individual's growth in knowledge while coming to grips with how to analyze a topic, but it is certainly not on the same level as Levi-Strauss's anthropological work *Tristes Tropiques* or Bruce Brown's journalistic work *Mountain in the Clouds: A Search for the Wild Salmon*. What Feher-Elston's work can do is to serve as a point of departure for serious research on the position of corvids across cultural boundaries in indigenous North America.

Nile Thompson

Dushuyay Research, Seattle, Washington