

In Reply

NORMAN NEWTON

In answer to Marjorie Mitchell's unprofessionally intemperate review of my book, *Fire in the Raven's Nest*, I feel I should point out a high degree of irresponsibility in dealing with the factual and verifiable material in the book, as well as wanton misrepresentations of unambiguous statements on my part.

I never refer to meaningless Haida rituals performed for tourists; I don't see how any knowledgeable person could. Of the two pages she refers to in this context (pp. 47 and 94) the first refers to a Kwakiutl version of the Hamatsa ceremony, and p. 94 contains no references to rituals of any kind.

Moral shock is in no way indicated by her quotation from p. 101, which refers to the inevitable boredom of small-village life. Since the book is the first I know of to pay adequate tribute to the high intellectual level of the Haida picture of the universe, it could hardly be called condescending. Nor am I a liberal, as even a cursory glance over my other books would have showed her; I find "liberalism," as a social attitude, repellent. The statement that I deny the regenerative elements in Haida society is belied by the very title and epigraph of the book and by a great number of comments within it.

If Miss Mitchell has been properly schooled she should not need "a chart of the heavens" and "some explanatory diagrams" for what is a simple astronomical argument on the farmer's almanac level. I would be perfectly willing to explain my method at length if you or some other journal would grant me space. I did not do so in the book because, while the argument is not scientifically complex, it demands much more corroborative material than a lay reader (and even "scholars" such as Miss Mitchell, it seems) would tolerate.

I am not being unfair to the "lay reader" (whom I do not assume to be an idiot) in expecting him "to sort out Tsimshian and Athapascan themes from Haida ones," especially since I make it very clear which is which. I would have thought this an elementary prerequisite to under-

standing the cultures of the area. This is an astonishing statement from a professional scholar.

There is a dumbfounding provinciality in Miss Mitchell's use of the word "temerity" in referring to my "claiming that (my) analysis is based, in part, upon Lévi-Strauss's *Mythologiques*. Why temerity? I gather Miss Mitchell's attitude towards these books is one of abject awe. Presumably they were written to be understood and used. I do not say that I have "based" my argument on these or on any other books, but that "I have analysed (the myths) in accordance with some of (their) principles" (p. 4), another matter entirely. Is Miss Mitchell not aware that the other book I refer to, *Hamlet's Mill*, represents a point of view quite different from that of Lévi-Strauss? I happen to think Lévi-Strauss's is wildly out in some respects, dead on in others; hence "*some of (their) principles.*" One can have great respect for a scholar without being his disciple.

The book has been read by several Haida, Nishka and Gitksan friends and acquaintances. None has found errors of fact; most have approved or praised the book in varying degrees.

Finally, the style of organisation of the book is perfectly clear to a literate person, and particularly to a reader of twentieth-century poetry. If Miss Mitchell failed to understand it, she is not doing her reputation any good by admitting it.

I write you this letter because I feel that I have the right to reply publicly to such a gross misrepresentation of my book.