

GLORIA FLAHERTY

# Shamanism and the Eighteenth Century



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## **SHAMANISM AND THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

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**SHAMANISM**

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**AND THE  
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

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*Gloria Flaherty*

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**Harold Jantz**

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## *Preface*

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THE NEED to cope with the mysteries of birth, life, and death is endemic to all peoples in all cultures. In the primordial past, there were men and women who were singled out to help their fellows overcome the difficulties of existence in a world fraught with terrifying, cataclysmic events. Those shamans represented the integration of social forces that allowed the particular society to function properly. They cured illness when they could, and they soothed both patient and family when they could not. Their efforts on behalf of individuals resulted in the kind of communal well-being that produced continuity. They were revered by the members of their tribes, who thought they knew how to control awesome mysteries by interceding with the spirits that populated the universe.

The phenomenon of shamanism manages to persist today in various altered forms that are not always easily accessible to the average person. Sometimes even highly trained specialists have difficulty recognizing the degree of purity or decline in available shamanic vestiges. Nevertheless, the study of shamanism is currently being conducted in many diverse fields. Scientists, especially those in ethnopharmacology and psychoneuroimmunology, fields that have developed rapidly during the last few years, seek out shamanic healing practices involving herbs and other substances. Students of biofeedback write extensively on the role of imagery in maintaining as well as regaining health, while psychiatrists explore the psychological ramifications of belief in so-called wonder cures. The number of dissertations in anthropology alone is staggering, for again and again someone professing to be a shaman appears in a South American, Amerindian, Siberian, Near Eastern, or African tribe.

Shamanism also continues to receive attention from humanists. Literary specialists seek the origins of the basic genres in its rituals, and historians of art look at the cave paintings of Lascaux and Trois Frères in comparable ways. Musicologists concentrate on the instruments and performance techniques employed so as to engage and manipulate the emotions of entire audiences. Biblical scholars produce similar kinds of thought-provoking studies.

The manner in which shamanism is generally treated today might lead one to think that the phenomenon came to light only in the middle of the twentieth century, with the renewed interest in drugs, sex, and the occult. Shamanism, however, has fascinated people since

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Western culture began. That fascination has manifested itself in different ways at different times. That which is now called the New Age seems to be a version of something that has regularly recurred. The vocabulary and syntax may change, but the basic structure remains constant.

The focus of my research has been the European encounter with various forms of shamanism. Early travel accounts and ethnographic writings have often been plundered for their descriptions of shamanism, but the reception of that phenomenon has not been documented historically for the most important age of European exploration and colonization. The first part of this book provides that documentation. The second part treats the concurrent assimilation of such information into the European intellectual and artistic mainstream.

Many people aided me in bringing this project to fruition. There was the long line of students at Bryn Mawr College and the University of Illinois who not only bore with me but also helped stimulate my research over the years as this book was germinating and growing. There were colleagues who challenged the avenues I pursued, thereby pointing me to still other questions in need of answers. Their skepticism led me to the discoveries that make up this book. And there were many librarians who provided invaluable assistance. I am especially grateful to those at the Newberry Library, the University of Chicago, the University of Illinois, Bryn Mawr College, the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek in Göttingen, and the Zentralbibliothek der deutschen Klassik in Weimar. I should also like to recognize the efforts of the many pages in this country and abroad who invariably filled my book requests with speed and good cheer.

The need for a history of shamanism began to dawn on me as I was doing research on Goethe and theater while in the Federal Republic of Germany on a Fulbright Senior Research Award. The first part of this book was made possible through the magnanimous assistance of the Institute for the Humanities of the University of Illinois. The confidence these organizations had in me came at a crucial juncture in my career and was exceedingly important for my work.

Among the numerous people to whom I am indebted, three stand out. My special thanks go to Mamie Gray, our departmental executive secretary, who gave tirelessly of her energy and generously of her patience in order to initiate me into the wizardry of the computer. Without the endless encouragement of my mother, Jean Flaherty, this book would not have been possible. She provided much practical advice, and as always throughout my life, she bolstered my spirits and helped

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me keep the faith during the most trying times. My greatest debt is to Harold Jantz, to whose memory this book is dedicated. He taught me to read literature in spite of myself. He instilled in me a love for eighteenth-century studies. And he motivated me to follow my own scholarly instincts, even when they contradicted his.





## **SHAMANISM AND THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

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## Introduction

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SHAMANISM is an ever-changing phenomenon that has been considered quite exotic, if not quixotic, throughout all history. In most cultures the world over, there are women as well as men who exhibit both the need and the ability to induce in themselves the kinds of experiences that take them to the brink of permanent madness or death. Those experiences include depersonalization and fragmentation, in addition to feelings of weightlessness, ascensionism or flying, and bilocation. There are as many words for these practitioners as there are tribes supporting such practices. In some areas of the globe, such a practitioner would be referred to as a *kam*, *bö*, *angekok*, *ojun*, or *tadyb*, while in others, he or she would be known as a *piayé*, *curandero*, wizard, soothsayer, faith healer, or shaman.<sup>1</sup> Despite the potentially painful “crashing” during subsequent reentry into everyday reality, shamans are supposed to be able to relate their experiences in ways that somehow touch the members of their tribes and do them some good.

Shamans are said to prognosticate through their visions, to manipulate and bend the future through their communications with the spirit world, and to provide catharsis through ecstatic rites grounded in drugs, alcohol, or the stimulations to the inner ear that come from jumping, running, or frenetic dancing to loud music and fluctuating lights within an enclosed space. Great shamans are masters of ventriloquism and legerdemain. They understand about speaking in tongues or voices, about laying on hands, and about diverting a subject’s attention. They instinctively know when and how to employ music, dance, costume, and all the other components of theatrical performance.

Such practitioners and their followers have aroused the curiosity of intellectuals at least since the fifth century B.C., when Herodotus recounted the death-defying feats of the Scythian soothsaying poets Aristeas and Abaris. Herodotus also reported on the delight the Scythians took in sweat baths and in the long, deep inhalation of burning hemp.<sup>2</sup> Classical scholars throughout the ages have not only continued to study Herodotus, but they have also pointed out numerous other “shamanic” practices of antiquity. Some scholars have attributed the rise of the late Hellenistic novel to the trances of shamans, while others have seen in those trances the origins of theater and fairy tales. Still others have believed shamans responsible for the very creation of Greek mythology.<sup>3</sup>

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Reports about shamans still practicing in remote parts of the world received increasing attention during the 1940s and 1950s when the social sciences were rapidly coming into their own as disciplines. The two names that stood out then and continue to stand out are those of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Mircea Eliade. While the latter analyzed those reports in order to interpret the shaman as an archaic religious ecstatic, the former compared shamans to modern psychiatrists, stressing their salutary effects for given audiences. Lévi-Strauss elaborated:

The modern version of shamanistic technique called psychoanalysis thus derives its specific characteristics from the fact that in industrial civilization there is no longer any room for mythical time, except within man himself. From this observation, psychoanalysis can draw confirmation of its validity, as well as hope of strengthening its theoretical foundations and understanding better the reasons for its effectiveness, by comparing its methods and goals with those of its precursors, the shamans and sorcerers.<sup>4</sup>

With the 1960s, interest in shamanism took on another guise. Poets such as Jerome Rothenberg, who edited the anthology *Technicians of the Sacred*, asserted that it was precisely the new Western interest in the oral, tribal cultures of the Third World that had been responsible for such a massive popular return to intuition and instinct. Rothenberg went on to claim that the Beat poets, along with Rainer Maria Rilke, Arthur Rimbaud, and the various generations of Dadaists, with their attempts to combine words, music, dance, and event, all represented “neoshamanisms.”<sup>5</sup> In explaining the manipulation of the creative imagination, Rothenberg wrote:

Our ideas of poetry—including, significantly, our idea of the poet—began to look back *consciously* to the early and late shamans of those other worlds: not as a title to be seized but as a model for the shaping of meanings and intensities through language. As the reflection of our yearning to create a meaningful ritual life—a life lived at the level of poetry—that looking-back related to the emergence of a new poetry and art rooted in performance and in the oldest, most universal of human traditions.<sup>6</sup>

Artists who created multimedia events, such as Joseph Beuys, were also adapting shamanism to their purposes around this time. Beuys was rescued by Tatars when his Luftwaffe aircraft was shot down during World War II. Those people used fat and felt to induce healing, so Beuys adapted the like as his early sculpting materials. He went on to experiment with using sound, especially music, as an equally valid me-

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dium for sculpture. As Beuys himself explained, "When I appear as a kind of shamanistic figure, or allude to it, I do it to stress my belief in other priorities and the need to come up with a completely different plan for working with substances. For instance, in places like universities, where everyone speaks so rationally, it is necessary for a kind of enchanter to appear."<sup>7</sup> Many of the drawings Beuys entitled *Shaman* were contained in an exhibition sponsored by London's renowned Victoria and Albert Museum, which also brought out an impressive catalogue of them in 1983. Some of those drawings were studies for so-called shamanic happenings, the most startling of which must have been *Coyote*. It constituted the three days Beuys spent in the carefully delimited space of a New York art gallery together with a live coyote, a cane, much straw, fifty copies of the *Wall Street Journal*, a triangle, and a tape-recording of chaotic turbine sounds. Wrapped in an enormous felt blanket and wearing the trilby hat he insisted was shamanic, he was carried in and out on a stretcher and transported to and fro in an ambulance.<sup>8</sup>

By the mid-1970s, French intellectuals had so often invoked the word "shaman" in their debates as to make it a kind of theoretical buzzword. Roland Barthes, focusing on the subject of voice in "The Death of the Author," for example, had written that "in primitive societies, narrative is never undertaken by a person, but by a mediator, a shaman or speaker, whose 'performance' may be admired (that is, his mastery of the narrative code), but not his 'genius.'"<sup>9</sup> Barthes did not, however, detail what he understood or meant by that still rather elusive word "shaman."

Jacques Derrida, like so many of his compatriots searching for answers, went back to ancient as well as eighteenth-century texts to explain the essence of performance, among other things. His conclusion was that Plato "is bent on presenting writing as an occult, and therefore suspect power. Just like painting, to which he will later compare it, and like optical illusions and the techniques of *mimesis* in general. His mistrust of the mantic and magic, of sorcerers and casters of spells is well attested."<sup>10</sup> The role of Socrates as a *pharmakeus*—sorcerer, magician, shaman—was apparently definitively illustrated for Derrida by the passage in the *Symposium* where comparison is made to the shamanic power of Marsyas, the flute-playing satyr.<sup>11</sup> The section in Plato where Socrates is addressed by Alcibiades is worth quoting at length:

And are you not a flute-player? That you are, and a far more wonderful performer than Marsyas. For he indeed with instruments charmed the souls of men by the power of his breath, as the performers of his music do still: for the melodies of Olympus are derived from the teaching of Mar-

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syas, and these, whether they are played by a great master or by a miserable flute-girl, have a power which no others have; they alone possess the soul and reveal the wants of those who have needs of gods and mysteries, because they are inspired. But you produce the same effect with the voice, and do not require the flute: that is the difference between you and him. When we hear any other speaker, even a very good one, his words produce absolutely no effect upon us in comparison, whereas the very fragments of you and your words, even at second-hand, and however imperfectly repeated, amaze and possess the souls of every man, woman, and child who comes within hearing of them. And if I were not afraid that you would think me drunk, I would have sworn as well as spoken to the influence which they have always had and still have over me. For my heart leaps within me more than that of any Corybantian reveller, and my eyes rain tears when I hear them. And I observe that many others are affected in the same way.<sup>12</sup>

More recently, the Milwaukee Center for Twentieth-Century Studies has developed “shaman” into a shibboleth for its program. There the word became intimately tied to postmodernism, a concept purportedly derived from Arnold Toynbee and given currency by Ihab Hassan. Michel Benamou has gone so far as to contend that performance, if not shamanism itself, is “the unifying mode of the postmodern.”<sup>13</sup> Neither Toynbee, nor Hassan, nor Benamou has, however, shown any historical accountability for the use of that vocabulary. Not one of them has offered a precise explanation of just what is meant, within which context. The result is that we are left with nothing but confusion.<sup>14</sup>

As these lengthy introductory remarks indicate, the word “shaman” has come to mean many things to many people. Disentangling the multitude of often contradictory strands without diminishing or destroying any of them has been a far larger job than I originally suspected. Since the word is associated with the beginning, I started my disentanglement efforts with it and proceeded from there. Until well after the middle of the eighteenth century, the shaman was being described with the words *giocolare* in Italian, *jongleur* in French, *Gaukler* in German, and *wizard* in English, the last of which is presumably stem-related to the preceding.<sup>15</sup> Of all the many words in many languages and dialects designating the phenomenon, the one that came from the Sanskrit (*śramana/śrama*) and was transmitted through the Siberian Tungus to early explorers is the one that happened to become the generic term before the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>16</sup> Those explorers were mostly native Germans, were trained in Germany, or acknowledged German as the up-and-coming language of scientific dis-

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course. From 1714 on, England was ruled by the German-speaking Hanoverians, whose support of exploration and research led to many cross-Channel cooperative ventures. As a result, the nouns *der Schaman*, *die Schamanka*, and *das Schamanentum* were in use during the eighteenth century; the verb was *schamanen*.

That “shaman” gained acceptance as the generic term so long ago should not really be surprising, since enlightenment, like power, has always had two meanings. Both enlightenment and power have long been sought on various planes and in many ways. As male-dominated scientific professionalism burgeoned—something Michel Foucault has pointed out—whatever was rationally inexplicable, such as the power associated with the herbal knowledge of the wise women, the witches or shamankas, was condemned.<sup>17</sup> It did not, however, disappear. It remained operative, yet went underground, and it provoked continuing research and reflection.

My immediate objective is to discuss how shamanism was reported by observers and perceived by the public, and how it became assimilated into the intellectual mainstream during the eighteenth century. I do so with a still greater purpose in mind. I should like to corroborate the work of those colleagues who have cast doubts on the basic assumptions, periodicity, and value of what has been long called the *siècle des lumières*, the *Aufklärung*, or the Enlightenment. The eighteenth century was too deeply involved with the occult to have us continue to associate it exclusively with rationalism, humanism, scientific determinism, and classicism. Manifestations of irrationalism, supernaturalism, organicism, and romanticism appeared uninterrupted throughout.<sup>18</sup> It was precisely the tension between those who limited themselves to enlightenment of a purely rational sort and those who included serious consideration of what was derogatorily called the night-side of nature that informed the very way in which Western European knowledge was advanced. That relentless tension helped revolutionize human thought, and affected the shape the world was to take.

Emphasis shifted to inductive methods with an insistence on first-hand observation, objective analysis, and mathematical measurement. That shift in itself, however, produced the kind of intellectual attitude that encouraged inquiry about whether the superstitions of the present might not turn out to be the scientific data of the future. While many eighteenth-century intellectuals upheld mechanistic approaches to nature, others staunchly worked at developing the old-fashioned organic ones, sometimes even mentioning historical figures like Paracelsus and his curiosity about the teachings of the wise women. As Thomas S. Kuhn argued in 1962 in *The Structure of Scientific Revolu-*



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tions, alternative approaches to science are never ignored simply because a consensus-formed paradigm delimits what are considered the normal bounds of investigation: "Discovery commences with the awareness of anomaly, i.e., with the recognition that nature has somehow violated the paradigm-induced expectations that govern normal science."<sup>19</sup> Scientific revolutions occur, according to Kuhn, when the paradigm has been deserted and the science it defines is no longer practiced. Then a new paradigm emerges to take its place. The history of science does not evolve linearly, he contends, because such changes have been reversed and could be reversed again. The main example he gives is Albert Einstein's explanation of gravitational attractions, which "has returned science to a set of canons and problems that are, in this particular respect, more like those of Newton's predecessors than of his successors."<sup>20</sup>

Those who continued to probe the anomalies and espouse holistic approaches in the eighteenth century might not have convinced the contemporary scientific establishment of the veracity of their findings, but they did help keep alive age-old questions about the relationship of the mind and the body. They pursued many other unfashionable topics as well. They recognized the whole globe, with all its inhabitants, natural resources, and potential for investment as well as political power, as a rich source of knowledge. The conquistadores, travelers, and missionaries of past centuries were supplanted in the eighteenth century by botanists, zoologists, topographers, geographers, geologists, engineers, physicians, apothecaries, linguists, ethnographers, anthropologists, historians of religion, and a fair share of adventurers. As a result of what they continued to uncover, old disciplines changed radically, and new ones emerged rapidly.<sup>21</sup>

Funding for expeditions was generally available, though certain international contacts, in addition to excellent credentials, were necessary. The solitary explorers as well as the large teams depended on European financial support. There was money from religious orders, such as the Capuchins and the Society of Jesus; there were grants from the British Association for Promoting the Study of Africa; and there were the munificent coffers of the Russians, especially Catherine the Great, who wanted to gain information about a vast realm that sorely needed consolidating if it were ever to be exploited.<sup>22</sup>

As was to be expected, such support, whether in the form of references or hard cash, came with certain strings attached. Those strings often limited the dissemination of findings, if not the actual freedom of inquiry. The "Instructions of Her Imperial Majesty" to one expedition outlined not only the topics to be treated but also the means of treatment. Catherine wanted to know specific things about the inhabi-

tants of her empire, so she ordered the explorers to "observe their dispositions and different corporeal qualifications; their government, manners, industry, ceremonies, and superstitions, religious or profane; their traditions, education, and manner of treating their women; useful plants, medicines, and dyes; food, and manner of preparing it; habitations, utensils, carriages, and vessels; manner of life and economy." She also wanted to know how they hunted, made war, and domesticated animals. But all that was not sufficient. The empress ordered the expedition to collect tribute by using psychology and bribes rather than out-and-out force. The explorers were to abstain from manslaughter as much as possible since, she thought, friendly, humane tactics would not only keep the natives quiet, but would "make them incline to trade, to be industrious in hunting."<sup>23</sup>

The instructions the king of France gave to Jean François de La Pérouse were similar, yet much more detailed. In addition to prescribing the exact longitudes and latitudes the voyage was to take, those instructions specifically ordered the gathering of intelligence about the presence of the Russians, British, Spanish, and Portuguese in the areas traversed. Each of the two frigates was to keep double journals about such matters as well as about the natural surroundings and their inhabitants. Native ability to assimilate European customs and methods of agriculture was to be noted, since the ultimate goal was a mercantile one: control of raw materials and, eventually, manufacturing. The natives were also viewed as potential consumers, so their clothing as well as arms and other artifacts were to be collected, labeled, classified, and catalogued. The draftsmen onboard were to make drawings to facilitate general comprehension of the observers' scientific descriptions.

The royal instructions incorporated questions posed by the medical and scientific societies as well. Native bodies were to be examined carefully, and their parts, especially the forehead and the forearm, were to be measured. The pulse rate was to be compared with that of Europeans, as was "the age of puberty in both sexes, the menstrual flux, pregnancy, child-bearing, suckling, proportion of males and females."<sup>24</sup> Everything influencing disease, health, and healing was to be noted. Of special interest was the *materia medica* available to the natives. Examinations were to include both tasting and smelling. As far as the application of such substances was concerned, the instructions read: "Observe the remedies used in warm countries to counteract peculiar disorders, and even describe the superstitious processes which are frequently the only medicine of barbarous nations."<sup>25</sup>

Many eighteenth-century scientists complained bitterly about the assumptions that underlay the explorations. Some, like George For-

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ster, thought of European mercantilism as science gone awry. It seemed to him an all-too-literal application of what Francis Bacon had written about taming, shaping, and subduing Mother Nature, as, for example the passage in which Bacon stated, "I am come in very truth leading to you Nature with all her children to bind her to your service and make her your slave."<sup>26</sup> This protest against the patriarchal, totalitarian thrust of science in the Enlightenment persisted into the twentieth century, when Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno wrote "The Concept of Enlightenment." They also blamed Bacon for encouraging the development of a method for learning, from nature itself, how to use it in order to dominate it as well as other men.<sup>27</sup>

The eighteenth-century writers who contributed to the persistence of such protest were open to the study of theoretical inconsistencies and irregularities because their scientific attitude was different. So too were the methods they had learned to apply. They had, in many cases, received their academic training—usually in classical philology, history, and medicine—at the university considered politically safe enough to become the repository for, among others, artifacts from the South Seas expedition of Capt. James Cook. The University of Göttingen, founded in the middle of the eighteenth century by the Hanoverians, the royal house of England, seems to have had the reputation of imbuing its students with reverence for Mother Nature as well as with intellectual curiosity and scientific know-how.<sup>28</sup>

Those men who set out to explore this planet, from the frozen Arctic and arid Siberian wilderness to the variegated continents of the New World, and then on to the warm South Pacific islands and hot African deserts, did the job they were sent out to do. They submitted measurements. In most instances, copious sketches and illustrations accompanied their maps and diagrams.<sup>29</sup> They also sent back artifacts—costumes, weapons, utensils, musical instruments—as well as seeds and specimens of the fungi, herbs, and other plants indigenous to the particular geographical place. Equally important were the lengthy descriptions and reports of matters pertaining to the life-style of the native inhabitants with whom the explorers had contact.

Most eighteenth-century observations of shamanism were written from the point of view of the interested yet disbelieving Western European. They almost all follow the same pattern. The observers sought out matters as outlined in their formal instructions, and they subjected those matters to what they believed were empirical tests and rational analyses. Sometimes, hearsay of varying levels of trustworthiness was included. Whether treating shamans in Siberia, Lapland, Greenland, or the Americas, the reports attempted to come to terms with the ritual of the healing or soothsaying séance. They treated its

theatricality by mentioning both its acoustical and its visual aspects. The shaman's costume, with its symbolic spangles, teeth, and feathers, was stressed as much as the tambourine, with which the shaman was said to fly to the various levels of the heavens in order to recapture lost souls or gain victory over evil spirits. Greatest attention was usually given to the trance state: not only to attaining it and recovering from it, but especially to its genuineness. Again and again, the reports contained phrases like "dead to the world," "as if dead," and "paroxysm of unconsciousness and powerlessness." Those who lived in an age that feared apparent death—*Scheintod*, that condition in which the body's vital signs are negligible or seem nonexistent—could hardly begin to conceive of such an imbalanced mind-body relationship.

Such reports from the field were quickly published, sometimes in installments as soon as they arrived in Europe, and other times simultaneously in two or three languages. Their reception clearly evidences what new historicists consider the imaginative contribution of successive interpreters, each one based on its predecessor in such a way as to develop a chain of interrelated texts forming a particular view of reality.<sup>30</sup> The image of an extended filtration process would, however, be preferable to that of a chain in order to describe what was operative among the texts I uncovered concerning shamanism. The information they contained was picked up by eighteenth-century scholars, mostly comfortably ensconced academicians, who analyzed it and shared it with other colleagues, who thereupon filtered it and passed on what they considered important to yet other colleagues. Those colleagues then read those filtrations in order to provide their interpretations to the European reading public, which never seemed bored by news about the other parts of the world: Alaska, Siberia, China, India, Arabia, Turkey, Guiana, Louisiana, and so on. The next filtration—or what some might call "cribbing"—came from the compilers of dictionaries and encyclopedias. Then there was still further filtering by the popularizers, who often exploited the enormous market for folio-sized picture books or for children's books. Of course, there were also many of those who have been identified as travel liars.<sup>31</sup> The genealogy of their cribbings or lies will probably always remain hard to trace.

Whatever the level of scientific objectivity or truth, the average literate eighteenth-century European rarely failed to hear about the latest publications dealing with travel, exploration, geography, and ethnography. Such publications were the talk of the cafés, the themes of articles in the moral weeklies, the sources for the latest dress fashions, and the subjects of new operas. They also became the topics of works by bishops as well known as Richard Hurd and by thinkers as

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famous as Montesquieu and Voltaire. They formed the basis for formal university lectures by philosophy faculty members as renowned as Immanuel Kant. They were even the means whereby a physician-dramatist of the stature of Friedrich Schiller inadvertently caused the students at the University of Jena to rise up and riot in support of the study of universal history. Other dramatists were also smitten with travel reports, as were many novelists, composers, people of the theater, and critical theorists. One essayist who brought out a handbook for prospective voyagers agreed that the proliferation of travel literature had become comparable to a contagion of epidemic proportions.<sup>32</sup>

Although there were many matters about the "other" parts of the world that interested eighteenth-century Europeans, the seemingly ubiquitous phenomenon of shamanism, with its self-induced cure for a self-induced fit, thoroughly captured their attention, their interest, and, above all, their imaginations. They were absolutely fascinated by tales of explorers who had had to acclimate themselves to the languages and customs of the inhabitants whose lands they were measuring and mapping. Those explorers were known to be at the mercy of strange aboriginal people and their inexplicably effective means of healing and solving problems. The mockery that might have initially existed ceased as soon as European lives were saved. The reports that the survivors sent back to Europe, often a mixture of bravado and truth, served to whet the appetites of their contemporaries, who persisted in demanding yet more information.

The emergent publishing industry recognized a profitable market and managed to keep it well supplied. In addition to the works dealing with current exploration, science, and anthropology, there were many compilations and reissues of older travel accounts. Books unearthing purportedly historical information about other cultures were published as well.<sup>33</sup> Some authors assumed the poses of detectives whose aim was to reconstruct the past by finding clues in the available literature.<sup>34</sup> Others depicted the scholarly pursuit of the truth about shamanism as an adventure into the unknown otherness, and they tried to convey their own sense of peril or excitement to their readers.<sup>35</sup>

There were as many books speculating about origins, especially of the American Indians and their medicine men, as there were those proclaiming the arrival of a new time of intellectual liberty that permitted public discussion of matters once forbidden to all but a select few.<sup>36</sup> Geographies almost always included mention of seemingly outlandish local mores. Other books capitalized on the growing interest in exoticism among readers with long accounts of shamanic practices involving drugs, convulsions, and urine baths. Such books even became

the subject of plays, the most notable being the one by August Friedrich Ferdinand von Kotzebue about Mauritius Augustus de Benyowsky.<sup>37</sup> The market was virtually overrun with books encouraging Europeans themselves to go exploring, or better yet, to enjoy such adventures vicariously through reading.<sup>38</sup> One booster even vindicated Russia as a remarkably hospitable land where travel was not only cheap but comfortable.<sup>39</sup>

As the eighteenth century wore on, more and more pedagogical travelogues appeared.<sup>40</sup> The ones designed principally to bring moral edification often singled out what would have made the shaman a terrifying figure to young, impressionable readers, presumably so they would choose to behave in such a way as to demonstrate gratitude for their Christian religion and their enlightened European upbringing.<sup>41</sup> Those narrating the grueling existence of Europeans in captivity in foreign lands could be equally frightening for adults. The debunking that went on about native practices encouraged publication of a number of exposés about European magic and enthusiasm, which invariably included comment about fraudulence elsewhere in the world.<sup>42</sup>

Expensive, deluxe books that comprised beautifully illustrated, though not always accurate, descriptions of aboriginal peoples provided news about clothing as well as evidence of physiognomic differences.<sup>43</sup> They stimulated their readers' imaginations by focusing on the accoutrements as well as the activities of the shaman. Albums of portraits and collections picturing costumes and rituals remained in high regard among readers for years to come.<sup>44</sup> Thus, information about shamanism—whether fact or fiction—became all-pervasive and extraordinarily intense in the eighteenth century.

While some Europeans continued to ridicule what they considered puerile trickery and ignoble credulity, others began taking shamanistic practices very seriously. Shamanism seemed to them to epitomize a grand confluence of ageless human activities the world over. As Lester S. King recently wrote in *The Philosophy of Medicine: The Early Eighteenth Century*, "The relations of magic, animism, mysticism, and advanced religious thought, and the stages of naive, mature, and sophisticated science are all intertwined."<sup>45</sup> Intellectuals of all pursuits and persuasions studied and discussed shamanism. Theologians and philosophers investigated not only its relationship to superstition and the history of religion, but more importantly, its relationship to enthusiasm and the kind of spirit possession that necessitated exorcism, all of which were experiencing a resurgence.<sup>46</sup> Physicians studied shamanism to learn how the imagination might be used to alleviate pain or at least make it tolerable. They also hoped to discover explanations for psychopharmacological matters, especially about the smoking of

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some kinds of plant substances and the drinking of a brew concocted from certain mushrooms. Comparisons to somnambulists, charmers, and miracle workers were frequently made, as were references to lunatics. Eighteenth-century ethnographers and anthropologists regarded shamanism as possibly representing one of the major links that connected the inhabitants of Asia and America across what was soon to be named the Bering Strait.

Classical archaeologists and philologists, whose work went far beyond that of Johann Joachim Winckelmann, could not refrain from thinking about the many ways shamanism, as practiced by aborigines alive in the eighteenth-century world, conformed to various Greco-Roman mysteries. They recalled information about remotest antiquity and its frenzied, lewd revelers. Epimenides and his long sleep could not be forgotten, nor could Orpheus and the belief in the transmigration of souls. Pythagoras and his trip to Hades, where he saw Homer and Hesiod doing penance, also had to be considered.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, eighteenth-century musicians related their reading about shamanism to what they knew of oriental music, specifically Turkish music, and how it was applied to whip soldiers into battle-ready frenzy. Sometimes, the legendary assassins and Near Eastern gardens of sexual delights were mentioned.

Aestheticians as well as students of literature and theater also profited from the steady stream of information about shamans. An increasing number began to think more often in terms of the creative personality, the human imagination, and the arts of performance, on which so much in shamanism seemed to hinge. They contemplated the implications of daring and brinksmanship. They recalled Plato's Ion and actors getting carried away by their roles. They reconsidered the recently rediscovered Longinus, the emotional transport he thought the sublime produced, and the shamanic examples he cited to support his thesis. Or they concentrated on the legacy of the recent past, reviewing the magical worlds created by Ariosto, Spenser, and Shakespeare. Among critical theorists, focus shifted from the work of art to the person or persons who made that work come alive. The genius did not persuade the people in his audience with rational arguments. He somehow mysteriously transmitted his creative trance to them so as to transport them out of ordinary, everyday reality into other cosmic regions, where they themselves could experience the profound mysteries of birth, life, death, and regeneration.

The reception of shamanism in Western Europe has not been given historical treatment for many reasons, the most troublesome being not only its complexity but also the partisanship it engenders. For some, the very subject contradicts the tenets of rationalism and should not be

broached at all.<sup>48</sup> Others strongly disagree. Those scholars who believe something more profound is involved are, however, often ridiculed for their concern about matters that do not fall within the boundaries of what Kuhn would call normal scientific inquiry.<sup>49</sup> Still others prefer to relegate the study of shamanism to the domains of anthropology or religion. Furthermore, shamanism has not been deemed a subject worthy of history because it has often been viewed as existing only in cultures the West believed antedated its own invention of history. The possibility that something so closely associated with primitive stages of human development might have had a lingering effect on Western arts and sciences is difficult for many to entertain. Questions about the trustworthiness of observations, eyewitness accounts, documents, and sources add as much to the complexity as do the degrees of change from archaic purity to civilized decline that shamanism has undergone over the centuries in various areas of the world.<sup>50</sup> The influence of contacts with more advanced cultures also remains exceedingly difficult to calculate.

Since this book inaugurates attempts to view the reception of shamanism within the historical context of Western Europe, it seemed advisable to present the diverse materials I uncovered in as straightforward and pragmatic a manner as possible. Therefore, two parts are necessary. The first provides a chronological exposition that attempts to reconstruct the historical stages in which that information was gathered and made public.<sup>51</sup> It lets the successive texts show how shamanism entered the European consciousness generation by generation as something foreign, yet increasingly familiar.

Part 1 identifies the reporters on the subject and then locates them in a particular theological, economic, or scientific context. Once their general orientation has been established, I focus on the intellectual background and training responsible for their approach to what would have been, for them, the new and the unknown. I discuss the texts they read in preparation for their work, as well as those they cited as authorities, in order to gauge how the perception of shamanic otherness was evolving into certain thought patterns, ranging from the diabolic to the exotic and eventually the artistic. As a result, we see how observations in the field were informed by the reading of earlier texts, which were then, in turn, incorporated into the new publications. As the filtration process continued, those texts invariably converged with others in the minds of early writers who produced interpretations without doing any fieldwork at all.

Throughout the first part, I give attention to the problems that enlightened science had in dealing with the various vestiges of shamanism—that is, some scientists' inability to come to terms with what Kuhn



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considered the anomaly that challenges the paradigms of normal science. As more and more assumptions, sometimes even unacknowledged ones, were called into question, the framework for discussion about shamanism broadened, and shifts in methodology occurred. Those shifts brought still other perceptions with them conditioned by the expanding study of European mythology and folklore as well as Renaissance Neoplatonism and magic. Increasingly, shamanism interested physicians who sought viable remedies for their patients rather than logical, scientific explanations for their peers.

Part 2 of this book was only made possible by part 1, which unearthed and clarified enough documents to support the contention that information about shamanism was so widely available that it could, indeed, be simultaneously assimilated. Here I take as examples Denis Diderot, Johann Gottfried Herder, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who, each in his own way, absorbed material from the shamanic discussion that was raging and used what he took to give shape to his own special field of endeavor.

The initial reason I chose to concentrate on these four major figures was the relationship between the philosophes in Paris and the German courts. As my research progressed, a rather intricate web of interrelationships emerged. The news Diderot and Friedrich Melchior Grimm wrote about in the *Correspondance littéraire* circulated from Gotha to Weimar and then to St. Petersburg, and also on to intellectual circles in university towns like Göttingen. Herder, who became personally acquainted with Diderot in the 1770s, was very interested in the latter's stopover in Germany during his journey to Russia. Many of Diderot's ideas and suspicions were shared by Johann Georg Zimmermann, friend of Catherine the Great and physician to George III, Frederick the Great, and the Goethe family. All were attracted by the seemingly limitless artistic capabilities of Mozart. Grimm, who remained well connected to France, Russia, and the German lands throughout his life, even tried to facilitate Mozart's career at various junctures.

My concluding chapter concentrates on Goethe's *Faust* because it brings together ideas on knowledge and power, in the occult as well as the enlightened sense. The new reading I suggest is based on viewing the figure of Faust in both the first and second parts of the Goethean drama as another, more advanced stage in the evolution of the shaman. He is no longer the magician whom earlier European folklore damned because he sold his soul to the devil in order to gain knowledge about the forces controlling nature. Goethe's Faust may have the many flaws of a human being, but he is the best scholar-scientist-

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healer-artist-ruler the advanced culture of the West can offer. He epitomizes for the modern world the kind of civilizing influence Orpheus represented for the ancient world. Goethe's masterpiece is the ultimate creative appropriation of the information about shamanism that had inundated the West in the eighteenth century.