

Review of the Arts

Journey to Ixtlan

Books

Journey to Ixtlan
Carlos Castaneda
Simon & Schuster, Inc. 1972

Outwardly, I was aggressive and cocky, but within I was indecisive and unsure of myself. I was always making excuses for myself. Don Juan once accused me of being a professional child because I was so full of self-pity. I felt like a leaf in the wind. Like most intellectuals, my back was against the wall. I had no place to go. I couldn't see any way of life that really excited me. I thought all I could do was make a mature adjustment to a life of boredom or find ever more complex forms of entertainment such as the use of psychedelics and pot and sexual adventures. All of this was exaggerated by my habit of introspection. I was always looking within and talking to myself. . . . Don Juan turned my eyes outward and taught me how to see the magnificence of the world and how to accumulate personal power.

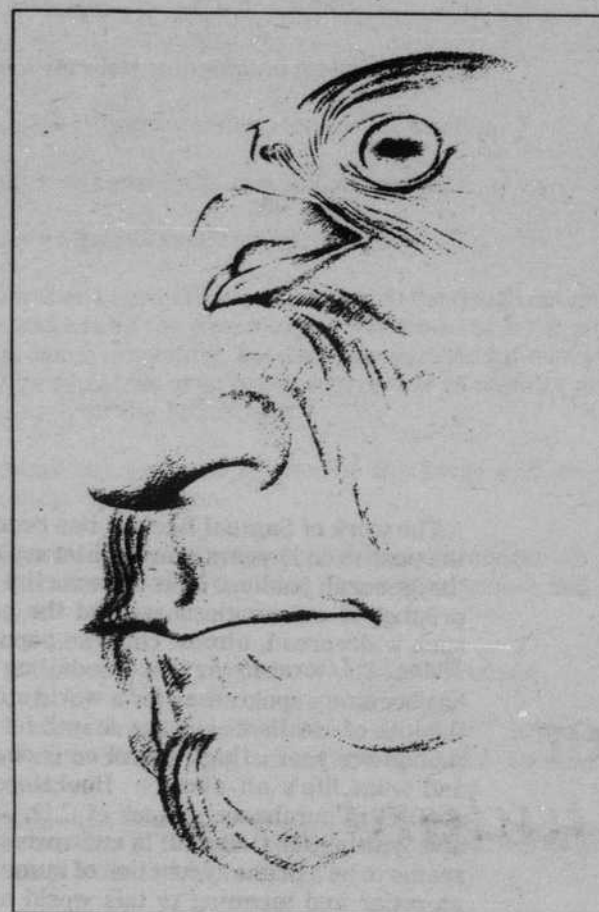
I don't think there is any other way to live if one wants to be exuberant.

—Carlos Castaneda in an interview (*Psychology Today*, December)

Carlos Castaneda recently published *Journey to Ixtlan*, the third volume in a series dealing with his apprenticeship to a Yaqui sorcerer. *The Teachings of Don Juan*, his initial work, became an underground classic primarily because of the interest generated by his frequent references to psychotropic plants. However, as the nature of the knowledge of his benefactor, Don Juan, became apparent to him, Castaneda de-emphasized these drugs and placed proper significance on the way of life that was being passed on to him.

Don Juan's basic premise is that our view of reality is invalid. It is not so much distorted, as it is incomplete, and our error is only amplified by our certainty that we are correct. In order to demonstrate this to Castaneda, Don Juan, over a period of eleven years, slowly undermined his perception of reality with an alternative reality in direct conflict with the established one. The purpose of this was to "stop the world," to disrupt Castaneda's faith in his perception of the world, and allow him to see its deficiencies. If eleven years seems to be a great deal of time for such a task, then consider the amount of time and energy that went into establishing his perceptual patterns originally. Castaneda contends that the "proper" descriptions are given to us at every opportunity after our birth and these lessons end only when we are capable of seeing all new experiences in terms of the old ones. To break this cycle without driving Castaneda to insanity, Don Juan employed a unique system of teaching involving power, metaphor, and decisive action.

Castaneda explains further



My old way was to leave everything pending and never to decide anything. To me decisions were ugly. It seemed unfair for a sensitive man to have to decide. One day Don Juan asked me: "Do you think you and I are equals?" I was a university student and an intellectual and he was an old Indian but I condescended and said: "Of course we are equals." He said: "I don't think we are. I am a hunter and a warrior and you are a pimp. I am ready to sum up my life at any moment. Your feeble world of indecision and sadness is not equal to mine."

Don Juan sees the world as an extraordinary place with far too many things to understand in a single lifetime. A "man of knowledge" knows that life is very short so he assumes the attitude of a warrior. Castaneda was forced to implement radical changes in his life in order to achieve this status. He had to be impeccable in all of his acts by first planning them and then performing them to perfection. Once an act was carried out, Castaneda had to assume full responsibility for it but at the same time abandon himself to the fate of his decision. There is no time to waste pondering past regrets because death may tap you at any time and a "warrior" must leave nothing unfinished when he dies.

Death is given a great deal of emphasis in Don Juan's lessons. It is always in a metaphorical sense, "just over your left shoulder," and perhaps only a few men in the world are truly aware of their impending fate. People live carelessly, making mistakes as though there

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